

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Romansisteem Anno 1981 'n Vergelykende studie

Hein Viljoen

Dept Sentrale Publikasies

Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO, 1986

In hierdie vergelykende literatuurondersoek word gepoog om die Suid-Afrikaanse romansisteem gedurende 1981 te rekonstrueer deur 'n vergelyking van 'n roman uit die Afrikaanse (Anna M Louw, *Op die rug van die tier*) die Swart (S Sepamla *A ride on the whirlwind*) en die Engelse (N Gordimer, *July's people*) literatuur, asook deur 'n vergelyking van die resepsie van hierdie romans.

In hoofstuk I word die teoretiese verantwoording gegee wat so onontbeerlik is vir 'n ondersoek van hierdie aard. Die algemene sisteemteorie wat as vertrekpunt gebruik word, word dan op vergelykende wyse met die sisteemopvatting in die literatuurteorie in verband gebring. Dit vorm die raamwerk vir die formulering van die metodologiese model vir die ondersoek. Die model vir die ordening en beskrywing van die data bestaan, in navolging van U Eco en in ooreenstemming met die klassieke driedeling in die semiotiek oor die struktuur van die kode, uit 'n sintaktiese, 'n semantiese en 'n pragmatiese komponent. Hierdie komponente word op hulle beurt weer beskrywe en georden met behulp van verskillende deelteorieë uit die literatuurteorie. Vir die sintaktiese word veral G Genette gebruik, vir die semantiese veral A J Greimas en vir die pragmatiese H van den Berg.

Teen bogenoemde agtergrond en deur gebruikmaking van sekondêre literatuur word in hoofstuk II hipoteses geformuleer oor die aard en relasies binne respektiewelik die Afrikaanse, die Swart en die Engelse romansisteme in Suid-Afrika. In hoofstukke III, IV en V word die geformuleerde hipoteses getoets deur die struktuur van *Op die rug van die tier*, *A ride on the whirlwind* en *July's people* asook die resensies daaroor te analiseer. In hoofstuk VI word die drie sisteme wat gepostuleer is met mekaar vergelyk met behulp van dieselfde driedeling wat gebruik is vir die ontleding van die romans asook van die resensies daaroor. Op grond hiervan word daar tot die slotsom gekom dat nie van 'n oorkoepelende Suid-Afrikaanse romansisteem gepraat kan word nie weens die talle literêre verskille tussen die drie romansisteme. Vervolgens word bepaalde metodologiese probleme wat ondervind is bespreek, gewys op sekere winste en tekortkominge van die sisteemmodel asook aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing gemaak. Aan die einde word 'n nuttige Engelse samevatting gegee van die doelstellinge en vernaamste resultate van die ondersoek.

'n Belangrike verdienste van die studie is die wetenskaplike aanpak daarvan en die daaruit voortvloeiende formulering van die bepaalde metodologiese model wat 'n basis kan wees vir soortgelyke navorsing in die toekoms.

Hierdie werkwyse het die voordeel dat die aansprake wat gemaak word, kontroleerbaar is en toekomstige navorsing op die resultate daarvan kan voortbou deur die model te verfyn of 'n alternatief in die plek daarvan te stel. Die ondersoek is dus 'n belangrike bydrae tot die vakwetenskaplike gesprek oor die versoening tussen teorie en praktyk in die literatuurondersoek.

Waardevolle kritiek word gelewer op bestaande literatuurteorieë wat benut is in die ordening en beskrywing van die sintaktiese, semantiese en pragmatiese komponente van die model. Wat laasgenoemde betref, sou mens egter 'n beter motivering wou sien van waarom sekere literatuurteorieë bo ander verkies is vir die beskrywing van die verskillende komponente van die model. Die tekortkominge van resensies as resepsiedokumente vir 'n sisteemondersoek van die literatuur blyk ook duidelik uit die studie. Die skrywer probeer ook nooit om sekere leemtes van die studie te verberg nie en stel dit gedurig deur selfkritiek en relativering aan die orde. Wat egter hinderlik is, is die skrywer se persoonlike en emosionele voor- en afkeure wat blyk uit stellings soos: "'n (halwe?) nasionale staat soos Nederland" (65); "Coetzee se provinsiesiening spruit uit 'n kulturele minderwaardigheidsgevoel . . . in die taal van Van Wyk Louw, 'n koloniale mentaliteit" (71); "Realisme, ja, maar solank dit ons pas" (271) e.s.m.

Sonder om die waarde en nut van die metodologiese model wat hier voorgestel word te wil ontken, is daar egter vrae soos die volgende wat by 'n mens ontstaan:

Ten spyte van die motivering is daar argumente wat die regverdiging van 1981 as sinchroniese moment problematies maak: ". . . Die historiese verloop kan nie op 'n bepaalde punt gevries word nie. Selfs die navorsing en die beskrywing van 'n sisteem neem tyd in beslag waartydens *die toestand van die sisteem al verander het*. Daarom is dit nodig om in die rekonstruksie te fokus op relasies wat *relatief standhoudend* is en om die moment waarop die deursnit gemaak word *nie te kort te maak nie*. Die literêre sisteem van 'n jaar of *selfs 'n paar jaar* is makliker om te beskryf as die literêre sisteem soos dit op sê die eerste dag in Junie 1981 daar uitgesien het. Die beskrywing van 'n bepaalde toestand van 'n sisteem verg dus ook 'n *sekere historiese perspektief*, 'n diachroniese aanloop" (24; kursivering, M.G.S.). Is die drie gekose romans werklik "verteenwoordigend" genoeg om daaruit afleidings te kan maak oor die "huidige" (sinchroniese) toestand van die sisteem?

1. Is hulle nie dalk anachronisties in die sin dat hulle tot 'n vroeëre romansisteem behoort nie (diachronie)? Is die relasies wat dus geïdentifiseer is, werklik die "relatief standhoudende" relasies van die "huidige" (1981) sisteem? In hierdie opsig dink mens aan die rol wat die leser se beperkende verwagtingshorison speel en ook aan wat J Lotman die estetika van identiteit versus die estetika van opposisie noem.

2. Is die moment waarop die deursnit gemaak is nie in elk geval "te kort" nie, veral omdat slegs drie romans gekies is en dan nog vanuit 'n "sekere" perspektief. Indien 'n ander historiese perspektief gegeld het, sou dieselfde drie romans nie as verteenwoordigend van 'n vroeëre stadium van die romansisteem beskou kon word nie?

Een van die konklusies waartoe Viljoen kom, is dat daar nie gepraat kan word van 'n oorkoepelende Suid-Afrikaanse romansistiem nie weens die talle literêre verskille tussen die Afrikaanse, die Engelse en Swart romansisteme. Hy wyt J M Coetzee se stelling (70) dat die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur in Engels – die periferie – 'n onlosmaaklike deel is van die Anglo-Amerikaanse literatuur – die sentrum – aan Coetzee se foutiewe siening oor die aard van literêre verandering. Hiervoor beroep hy hom op die polisistiemteorie waarvolgens verandering in die sisteem die resultaat is van 'n verplasing van dinge van die periferie na die sentrum en nie soos Coetzee impliseer, vanaf die sentrum na die periferie nie. Dat die kreatiewe impuls van die periferie kom, is nie net die opvatting binne die polisistiemteorie nie, maar ook binne die algemene sisteemteorie. Dit lyk egter hoogs onwaarskynlik dat so 'n geïsoleerde en relatief jong literatuur soos dié in Suid-Afrika – hetsy die Engelse, die Afrikaanse of die Swart subsisteme – ooit werklik die oorsaak kan wees vir 'n verandering van die sentrum of dat dit enige invloed daarop sal kan uitoefen. Hierin gee Viljoen Coetzee gelyk: “Coetzee het in een opsig wel gelyk, en dit is dat dit onwaarskynlik is dat die Anglo-Amerikaanse kultuursentra sommerso na Suid-Afrika sal verskuif; maar weer is dit 'n kwessie van waar mens jou aksent lê. Die Afrikaanse subsistiem het al beter daarin geslaag om 'n eie sentrum te skep, soos Coetzee wel implisiet erken as hy die stryd tussen Afrikaanse skrywers en die establishment van die sewentigerjare beskou as 'n stryd oor wat dit beteken om binne 'n Afrikaanse literêre tradisie te skryf” (71).

Vergelyk mens bv Viljoen se Afrikaanse romansistiem met J. Schramke se moderne romansistiem soos verduidelik in sy werk *Zur Theorie des modernen Romans* (1974), is dit moeilik om met Viljoen saam te stem wanneer hy beweer dat die Afrikaanse subsistiem daarin geslaag het om 'n “eie sentrum” te skep. Dit lyk eerder asof Coetzee, sy “kulturele minderwaardigheidsgevoel” en “koloniale mentaliteit” (71) ten spyte, gelyk het as hy, volgens Viljoen, die volgende mening huldig: “Hy (Coetzee) wil die dinge meer beskeie sien. Nuwe ekspressievorme wat 'n skrywer op die periferie mag ontdek, beskou hy as tweedehands – ‘rediscoveries of the wheel’. Hy gaan selfs so ver om eise om 'n eie Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde af te maak as ‘typically metropolitan yearning for the exotic’. Volgens hom bestaan daar dus nie 'n Suid-Afrikaanse literêre sisteem wat die moeite werd is nie, hoogstens 'n Wes-Europese/Noord Amerikaanse sisteem met die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur op die periferie daarvan” (71).

Viljoen se *Die Suid-Afrikaanse romansistiem anno 1981* is 'n werk wat beslis winste inhou vir die literatuurondersoek in Suid-Afrika. Of hy egter met die gedemonstreerde model 'n geldige sinchroniese beskrywing van 'n romansistiem gemaak het, is myns insiens, bevreemdigend. Dit bly ook misleidend dat 'n hipotese wat deur die ondersoek weêrlê word (die moontlikheid om van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse romansistiem te praat), ongeproblematiseer as titel gebruik word.

Marius Scholtz, Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat

Narrative Discourse

Gérard Genette
 Basil Blackwell
 Oxford, 1986

The name of the French critic Gérard Genette needs no introduction to those interested in the theory and the techniques of narrative fiction. In his early critical writing, the author's concern with a systematic approach to the problems of literary analysis had placed him in his own country, in line with thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov. When first published by Seuil in 1972, under the title of *Figure III. Discourse du récit*, Genette's book was an instant success among devotees of Structuralism and its practices. On the Continent, the book was almost immediately translated for the benefit of native readers and was followed by numerous reprints. That the English-speaking world should have come to it as late as 1980 is perhaps an indication of the diffidence with which Anglo-Saxon critics still view the exuberant and often volatile achievements of their French counterparts. Yet, since its inception, the English version of Genette's book seems to have won the approval of our scholars, as witnessed by the first reprint in paperback of this present edition of *Narrative Discourse*. Given the circumstances, the reader may now look forward to a translation of one of Genette's more recent critical works, which, under the title of *Palimpsestes* (Paris, Seuil, 1982), makes for a comprehensive reading of the relationships between texts.

Genette's adherence to Structuralism, and prior to it, to the teachings of the Russian Formalists, should not act as a deterrent to those who feel that the more recent studies in the field of literary theory have long surpassed these schools of thought. Indications are that, to date, studies on narrative technique (consider for instance S. Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and S. Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*) have not exhausted the demand for practical guidelines in this field nor the need for further insights into the workings of fiction. The findings of Structuralism live on, whether these are used simply to stage a reaction to most of its precepts as in the case of Deconstruction, or are merely integrated within the broader study of systems and the theory of communication as in the case of Semiotics.

In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette's detailed analysis of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, is both exemplary and informative, even to a reader who is not too familiar with Proust's work. If this last statement may leave the serious scholar somewhat disconcerted, it is to be remembered that Genette's book offers itself under particular circumstances. Jonathan Culler in a foreword puts it succinctly:

Given the focus on Proust, our ordinary notions of criticism ask us to choose between two ways of viewing Genette's project: either his real goal is the development of a theory of narrative and Proust's great novel is simply being used as a source of illustrations, or else the theoretical matter is simply a methodological discussion which is justified insofar as it leads to a better under-

standing of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In his preface Genette quite rightly refuses to choose between these alternatives, but this does not mean that his work should be viewed as something of a compromise, neither one nor the other. On the contrary, it is an extreme and unusual example of each genre (p.9).

It is perhaps unfortunate for the Proustian scholar that the English edition leaves out the four initial essays present in the original, one of which, "Metonymy in Proust", by pre-empting the method adopted by the author in his analysis, gives it a broader vision within the dynamics of rhetoric. On the other hand, Genette's erudition, his wide knowledge of European literature as well as of contemporary critical thought, is amply reflected in the examples which serve to illustrate his argument.

Jane E. Lewin, as the translator, has taken great care over Proust's official English translations, admitting to finding it necessary to step in with some of her own work whenever 'Genette's exposition required a strictly literal rendering' (p. 16). Moreover, this scrupulous concern with details gives accuracy to the English of *Narrative Discourse* and ensures that none of Genette's lucid reasoning and elegance of style is lost to the reader. There may be, initially, some difficulties related to the use of neologisms in the text. Coined with Gallic delight and precision by Genette, these terms and concepts are never redundant and offer the very means by which the author makes his finest insights in his analysis of the Proustian text. Further, words such as 'analepsis', 'prolepsis', 'voice' and 'focalization' have long become familiar to the earnest reader of narrative theories. Unlike many of his colleagues, Genette is also self-critical and, in the afterword, he good-humouredly reflects on his own contributions:

...I do not expect "posterity" to retain too large a part of these propositions. This arsenal, like any other, will inevitably be out of date before many years have passed, and all the more quickly the more seriously it is taken, that is, debated, tested, and revised with time (p. 263).

Genette begins his argument by stating that any analysis of narrative discourse constantly implies a study of relationships: between narrative and story; between narrative and narrating; between story and narrating. The categories he adopts are taken, metaphorically, from the grammar of verbs which he reduces to three basic classes, namely, those of *tense*, *mood* and *voice*. Under the heading 'tense', Genette focuses on the relationship between narrative and story in which he reformulates the Formalists' distinction between *fabula* and *sujet* and draws upon the concepts of *order*, *duration* and *frequency*. By taking as a yardstick the linearity of the sequence of events in chronological and causal order, he is able to mark all the deviations, distortions or recurrences taking place between that order and the way in which they appear in narrative discourse.

'Mood', on the other hand, treats modalities and as such determines the way in which a story is told, the angle of vision of the person doing the telling and whether he wishes to tell *more* or to tell *less*. In other words, it deals with the different points of view and the degree of information that is received by

the way in which narrative 'representation' takes place. The two chief modalities of point of view that regulate narrative information are *distance* and *perspective*. Distance involves the concepts of mimesis and diegesis, the difference in discourse between the 'showing' and the 'telling' and the various degrees of mimetic illusion. Perspective deals with the choice of a particular field of vision, and whether the focus of narration is internal or external, fixed or variable. According to Genette (and this is certainly his major contribution in this book to the studies of narrative technique), there has been a great deal of confusion among theoreticians over the question of point of view:

... most of the theoretical works on this subject (which are mainly classifications) suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?* (p. 186)

By refining this concept of point of view, Genette has opened the way to a better understanding of the subtleties of interplay between the restrictions of the field of vision and the degree of autonomy given to the characters in the story.

In his last category, which Genette calls 'voice', emphasis is given to the act of narrating and to establishing the identity of the narrator. Genette begins by defining the narrating instance – the spatio-temporal position occupied by the narrator – and the time that separates it from that in which the events of the story took place. At this point, he makes another sharp observation which, acting as a salutary reminder of the highly artificial nature of fiction, brings a new perspective – one which defies reduction – to the problem of authorial intention:

On the one hand, as we have already noted, critics restrict questions of narrative enunciating to questions of "point of view"; on the other hand they identify the narrating instance with the instance of "writing", the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work: a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narative fiction, where the role of the narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author, and where the supposed narrating situation can be very different from the act of writing (or of dictating) which refers to it (pp. 213-4).

Finally, in identifying the person of the narrator, Genette is not content with traditional definitions such as "first person" or "third person" narrator and shows how these are misleading and reductive particularly in cases where the narrator is a character in his own narrative, or is, in fact, the hero of his own story. Another aspect which impinges upon the role of the narrator is the extra-narrative functions he assumes, which are no longer related to the telling of the story but to his relationship with his own discourse and with the narratee.

Genette's pioneering work, despite his own reservations in the closing section of the book, has not dated. It still offers an indispensable tool for

students of narrative, and remains, at the same time, a highly provocative and complex example of theoretical writing.

Grazia Sumeli Weinberg, University of South Africa

Stylistics and Psychology: Investigations of Foregrounding

Willie van Peer

London: Croom Helm, 1985

Stylistics and Psychology, the latest volume in the Croom Helm Linguistics Series, is a revised version of the author's Lancaster University doctoral thesis, and the work's debt to the British exponents of continental formalism and structuralism is clear. Van Peer sets out to deepen our understanding of foregrounding by presenting us with what he calls "an empirical investigation" of the concept – one which is achieved by the application of a carefully articulated set of tests for measuring the reaction of readers to foregrounded and non-foregrounded sections of six different poems. In the process he provides us with what is surely the most sophisticated account to date of how to determine the psychological effects of the manifestation of Jakobson's "poetic function", but there are real bounds to the extent of his success, which derive from the much-debated difficulty of determining, first, what precisely constitutes *foregrounding* and, secondly, what the contribution of foregrounding is to the overall literary effect of a poem.

Both the strengths and the weaknesses of Van Peer's enterprise should come into sharper focus if we consider briefly each of his chapters in turn.

Chapter 1, "The theory of foregrounding: the state of the art", traces the historical development of the concept of foregrounding, discusses some of its modern elaborations (e.g. Leech's recognition of degrees of foregrounding and the assumption that the impact of foregrounded items is affected by their density and cohesion within the poem) and reports on criticisms of the concept by Culler, Werth, Riffaterre and others. Van Peer acknowledges that Jakobsonian analysis is flawed because it merely displays the foregrounded structures of a poem and provides no indicators as to interpretation or literary value. He sees his own task as that of effecting a kind of marriage between Jakobsonian and Riffatterrean stylistics by "investigating reader responses (as Riffaterre suggests) in relation to particular instances of parallelism to be found in poetry (as Jakobson has shown)" (p. 13). In this way it is hoped that just those instances of foregrounding that have "value" in the context of "the rules of the literary game" can be identified. A pertinent question here relates to just how the author sees these "rules". One of the more problematic aspects of this book is that although the author appears to recognise that pragmatic factors must be considered when we attempt to characterise "literariness", and although he even goes so far as to assert that foregrounding

should “be understood as a pragmatic concept, referring to the dynamic interaction between author, (literary) text and reader” (p. 20), his analysis of foregrounding in his six chosen poems extends only to the phonological, grammatical and semantic levels, with no proper consideration being given to pragmatic features. We shall return to this problem.

In his second chapter, “Design of validation procedures”, Van Peer postulates four response variables in terms of which foregrounded (FG) items within a poem may be distinguished from background (BG) items. These variables and their associated hypotheses are: (a) *memorability* – readers will remember FG items more readily than BG items; (b) *strikingness* – when asked to indicate which passages in a poem are most striking, readers will choose FG passages rather than BG ones; (c) *importance* – when asked to rank passages in terms of their importance in the poem, readers will rank FG passages higher than BG passages; and (d) *discussion value* – readers, when asked to choose passages that they would concentrate on if they were teaching the relevant poem to a class of 17-year olds, will once again tend to select FG passages. The author goes on to discuss a number of variables that could interfere with these four initial hypotheses, such as differences between poetic texts, the extent of the reader’s literary training, his familiarity with the texts chosen and his attitude to poetry. He then describes his test instruments and explains how he will be using them to test his hypotheses and to control the intervening variables identified. The author’s choice of the four response variables is well motivated, and his careful treatment of the problem of the intervening variables is typical of the meticulous attention given to experimental design and validation throughout the book.

Chapter 3 presents the analysis of foregrounding in each of the six chosen poems. As indicated earlier, these analyses are made in terms of three levels of language (phonology, grammar and semantics), and at each level four categories of foregrounding devices are identified (parallelism and three types of deviation). The author has developed an ingenious graphic coding scheme which, when applied to the text of the poem, reflects in its degree of visual busyness the amount and strength of foregrounding postulated in each part of the poem. Thus, for instance, on the assumption that foregrounding at the semantic level is more important than at the grammatical level, semantic devices are blocked, while grammatical ones are merely underlined. The resulting iconicity is very effective, allowing one to gain at a glance an overall impression of the density of foregrounding in the poem, and although the scheme cannot capture the cohesion of foregrounded elements, all of these elements are also presented in an accompanying list. The author is well aware that the validity of his entire thesis – as an account of responses to foregrounding – depends on an objective application of the theory of foregrounding in the analyses, but despite his concern to achieve such an application, the much sought after “objectivity” often appears to reside in the eye of the beholder – or analyst. A few typical problems arise in the analysis of, for example, cummings’ *yes is a pleasant country*. Thus the “growing complexity in lines 8-12 (except 11)” is given as an example of internal deviation at the grammatical level (p. 71). Even if one ignores the fact that the qualification

“except 11” tends to vitiate the logic of the assertion, the question of how to assess the relative “complexity” of the other three lines, in a poem in which syntactic rule violations abound, and to do this in terms of a Jakobsonian foregrounding analysis, is ignored. Sometimes the analysis is simply wrong, such as where “stress on ‘re’ in line 12” is characterised as a phonological deviation (p. 71). Line 12 reads: (*and april’s where we’re*) and it is clearly impossible – even in a rhotic accent such as in cummings’ American English – to speak of stress on *re* here. The *we’re* in this line should be classified as an example of determinate deviation at the grammatical level, given that such contractions do not normally appear in sentence-final position, but no mention is made of this. Implicit reference to the contracted form itself, and presumably to others in the poem, seems intended in the characterisation “tendency towards dialogue, informal and familiar register” (p. 72). Problems in this connection are, firstly, that none of the foregrounding devices that exemplify this “tendency” are listed and, secondly, that these characteristics are described as statistical deviation on the semantic level, whereas they belong strictly speaking to the domain of pragmatics. Although Van Peer does seem to recognise pragmatic deviance as a dimension of foregrounding (e.g. p. 19), in the analyses practically no attempt is made to explicate this dimension. Thus we see also how the existence of brackets in line 12 is classified as an instance of phonological deviation, but the pragmatic implications (concerning the nature of the addresser-addressee relationship in the poem) of this and of the other two instances of bracketing in the poem, i.e. (*my lovely*) and (*not either*) are not considered. As indicated earlier, this lack of attention to pragmatic foregrounding is probably the most serious limitation of Van Peer’s study.

Chapter 4, “The validity of foregrounding”, sets out the empirical findings on each of the hypotheses proposed, appropriate statistical techniques being applied to the raw data. It might be argued that at least some members of Van Peer’s target readership would benefit from more detailed explanation of the different techniques, but this is not an essential requirement. Van Peer’s findings are, in essence, that three of the four main hypotheses, i.e. that there is a correlation between foregrounding and strikingness, importance and discussion value, are valid, and that these correlations apply irrespective of the test subject’s familiarity with the theory of foregrounding, prior literary training or attitude to poetry. Sufficient evidence was not however found for the fourth hypothesis, i.e. that FG passages are more memorable than BG ones. In this chapter the author admits that although the overall statistics for each poem as a whole indicate that the first three hypotheses are valid, there are instances where a more detailed line-by-line analysis reveals exceptions. One of the more telling exceptions derives from the fact that a thematically vital passage, such as “What’s never known is safest in this life” in Thomas’ *Was There a Time* (which in a sense can be said to summarise the theme of the poem), has relatively few FG elements. Because of its thematic significance, however, subjects rate the line very highly on importance and discussion value. This finding lends credence to the view that not all literary effects can be related, even indirectly, to foregrounding – and so it undermines the

Jakobsonian assumption that foregrounding constitutes at least a necessary condition for poetic language. It is a pity that Van Peer does not provide us with other analyses of specific lines. It would be interesting to see, for example, whether the line (*and april's where we're*) was rated more highly along the strikingness, importance and discussion-value dimensions than would have been expected on the basis of the relatively low degree of foregrounding analysed. Such a discrepancy would be an indication that correlations would be higher overall if more attention was paid to analysing foregrounding at the level of pragmatics.

In Chapter 5 ("Further refinements: design of inductive procedures") and Chapter 6 ("Foregrounding in text and reader response") correlations between each type of foregrounding at each of the three levels and reader responses are discussed, as are the results of further tests (including an Osgoodian semantic differential) designed to measure the more affective responses to foregrounding (as opposed to the essentially cognitive values of strikingness, importance and discussion value). It was found that FG passages usually evoked a more positive affective response than BG ones and that the two most modern poems (by Roethke and Thomas), which revealed most deviance, were most highly rated.

Van Peer's final chapter, "General conclusions and outlook", ends by indicating that the "pragmatic analysis of the concept of FG" is a most promising area for work in stylistics (p. 188). As we have seen, the author consistently shies away from pragmatics in his own analyses, but he must be given full credit for recognising that it is into this domain that future research on responses to foregrounding must take us.

To conclude, a few brief remarks on *Stylistics and psychology* as artefact. The author's meticulous attention to the details of research design is not paralleled by the efforts of his proofreaders, and phonetic and statistical symbols are consistently omitted. Also, on pp. 15–16 more than half a page of text is repeated. The binding on my copy is already coming adrift across the entire width of the spine. All in all, one expects a much better finished product from publishers who see fit to ask £25 for a 220-page text.

Hilton Hubbard, University of South Africa

The Kristeva Reader

Edited by Toril Moi.
Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986

The Kristeva Reader invites a swerve into Menippean ambivalence. Is she a dissident *étranger*? Is he a middle-aged academic enjoying an exhilarating slippage into *écriture féminine*? Is he a melancholy marxist from Menlo Park? Such questions may not be entirely fatuous, given the explanatory power of

Kristeva's project and the contemporary desire to set aside the obsessional rhetoric of the humanities.

Julia Kristeva conducts her discourse along the margins of figuration, setting at nought our taste for institutionalized rationality, and aiming her unappeasable rhetoric at the spaces between our desires. Her fundamental project is to produce 'a discourse which always confronts the *impasse* of language ... a discourse which in a final aporetic move dares to think language against itself, and in doing so knowingly situates itself in a place which is, quite literally, untenable' (p.11). Faced with a master vocabulary bereft of joy and buried in the totemic procedures of subjection and abjection, she exposes the dark topography of the sign, where conceptual markers cohere precariously, and where categories break down under the pressure of relentless articulation. By conferring a new legibility on the covert structures of language and society, she uncovers the angry cicatrix that lies hidden in all encounters with the word, the scar of power.

Partly because of the multiplicity of its vantage points, and partly because of the range and variety of its concerns, Kristeva's work makes immense demands on the reader in search of a basic grounding in her theories. Although this meticulously edited *Reader*, the first substantial introduction to Kristeva's work in English, provides an informed context for an appreciation of her heterogeneous encounter with language, the experience of confronting the *impasse* carries with it a dislocating sense of plunging into catachresis, and a disturbing awareness of the interiority of all discourse. Blatantly metaphoric, even metaphysical, Kristeva's *semanalysis* resists the dubious salvation of a reduction into intellectual archetypes, and there is a point at which her hieratic utterances invite a liberating but disturbing impulse towards the unthinkable. Ironically, Kristevian coinages such as 'intertextuality' and 'signifying practice' continue to gain currency in the academic exchange, while her larger theories refuse to coalesce into a univocal, recapitulative, and easily assimilable grammar of predication.

In 'The System and the Speaking Subject' (1973), for example, Kristeva drives a wedge between the linguistic system of the transcendental ego (elaborated in the generative grammar of structuralism), and the ambiguities of a *semanalysis* which pressures the drive-governed basis of signification. Yet *semanalysis* is not presented as a reliable guide to the symbolic. In transgressing the limits of signification, and in marking out the space of discourse, it rehabilitates the signifying process, shifting the system back into the realm of desire:

All functions which suppose a *frontier* (in this case the fissure created by the act of naming and the logico-linguistic synthesis which sets it off) and the transgression of that frontier (the sudden appearance of new signifying chains) are relevant to any account of signifying practice The subject of the practice cannot be the transcendental subject, who lacks the shift, the split in logical unity brought about by language which separates out, within the signifying body the symbolic order from the workings of the libido Identifying the semiotic disposition means in fact identifying the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity

for renewing the order in which he is inescapably caught up; and that capacity is for the *subject*, the capacity for enjoyment. (p.29)

In the course of establishing and transgressing such frontiers, Kristeva places her discourse in the service of the subject of the semiotic metalanguage, forcing him to 'call himself into question' and to 'emerge from the protective shell of the transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his connection with that negativity – drive-governed, but also social, political and historical – which rends and renews the social code' (p.33). Further, by using Bakhtin/Voloshinov's model of literary structure as that which is generated by another structure, she is able to break through the boundaries which separate the word from its complex, constitutive grounding in the imperatives of being, and to examine the interaction of textual surfaces as a 'dialogue among several writings' (p.36). If the sign is not a static cipher but an element of meaning defined in relation to a context of enunciation, then every utterance is a double utterance, a dialogue between presence and absence, *one* and *another*. For this reason, all logical systems based on one-to-one procedures of verification are doomed to failure, and cannot account for the operation and nature of poetic language.

Kristeva's chief semiotic concern is to 'think through' the consequences of such doubleness by tracing the alterity implicit in signification. It is therefore not surprising that her arguments hint at the spectral intuitions by which semiotic enquiry subverts its own ideological gestures, and that her theories return obsessively to a self-reflexive critique. It is as it should be, then, that her semiotic method passes imperceptibly into an articulation of the social and cultural manifestations of the symbolic regime. Thus, in 'About Chinese Women' and 'Women's Time' she explores the way in which the Judeo-Christian tradition determines the 'Western understanding of femininity and sexual difference' (p. 138), while in 'Revolution in Poetic Language' she investigates the processes which constitute figuration as an act of consciousness. In analysing the relation between patriarchal monotheism and the development of the 'Silent Other', in demonstrating that the repression of *jouissance* is designed to ensure that access to the symbolic order is always partrilineal, and in showing that monotheistic societies present the destiny of the individual in terms of an economy of difference and differentiation, she transforms the major Lacanian abstractions into a devastating critique of culture;

Divided from man, made of that very thing which is lacking in him, the biblical woman will be wife, daughter or sister, or all of them at once, but she will rarely have a name. Her function is to assure procreation – the propagation of the race. But she has no direct relation with the law of the community and its political and religious unity: God generally speaks only to men.

(‘About Chinese Women’, p. 140)

Monotheistic unity is sustained by a radical separation of the sexes: indeed, it is this very separation which is its prerequisite. For without this gap between sexes, without this localization of the polymorphic, orgasmic body, desiring and laughing, in the *other* sex, it would have been impossible, in the *symbolic realm*, to

isolate the principle of One Law – the One, Sublimating, Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interests of the community.

(‘About Chinese Women’, p. 141)

If what woman desires is the very opposite of the sublimating Word and paternal legislation, she neither *has* nor *is* that opposite. All that remains for her is to pit herself constantly against that opposite in the very movement by which she desires it, to kill it repeatedly and then suffer endlessly . . . The wish to deny the separation and yet remain within the framework of patrilinear capitalistic society and its monotheistic ideology (even when disguised as humanism) necessarily plunges one back into the petty perversion of fetishism. And we know the role that the pervert, with his invincible belief in the maternal phallus and his obstinate refusal to recognise the existence of the other sex, has been able to play in antisemitism and the totalitarian movements which embrace it. Let us recall the fascist or social-fascist homosexual community (and all homosexual communities for whom there is no ‘other race’), and the fact that it is inevitably flanked by a community of viragos who have forgotten the war of the sexes and identify with the paternal Word or its serpent . . . The solution? To go on waging the war between the two races without respite, without a perverse denial of the abyss that marks sexual difference or a disillusioned mortification of the division.

(‘About Chinese Women’, p. 145)

For Kristeva, disillusionment is always displaced by the energies inherent in the drives of the imaginary. Because the semiotic is inextricably bound up with pre-Oedipal primary processes, ‘the drives which are “energy” charges as well as “psychical” marks’ (p. 93) articulate a nourishing flow of rhythmic pulsions, constituting the ‘heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory’ (p. 13). Consequently, one of her guiding principles is the necessity to preserve the notion of a subject-in-process, in order to focus attention on material, social and logical conditions, not as abstract theses, but as forces which define the self. For this reason, her essays provide a valuation of different modes of ideological, religious and worldly experience, without offering a comfortable compendium of fixed theoretical positions. The true subject of her enquiry is her awareness that there are disturbances in the texture of appearances, concentrations of desire which elude instantaneous elucidation and the guarded deliberations of philosophy. In drawing our attention to the distorting effects of the disciplined errors which limit discourse, she articulates the clandestine operations that define our categories of aesthetic and ethical experience. If there is, for example, a need for a ‘“post-virginal” discourse on maternity’, one which would purge contemporary morality of its ‘excessive spiritualization’ (p.161), there is also a need for an ‘heretical ethics separated from morality, an *herethics* . . . which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable’ (p. 185):

It would seem that the ‘virgin’ attribute for Mary is a translation error, the translator having substituted for the Semitic term that indicates the socio-legal status of a young unmarried woman the Greek word *parthenos*, which on the other hand specifies a physiological and psychological condition: virginity. One

might read into this the Indo-European fascination . . . with the virgin daughter as guardian of paternal power; one might also detect an ambivalent conspiracy, through excessive spiritualization, of the mother-goddess and the underlying matriarchy with which Greek culture and Jewish monotheism kept struggling. The fact remains that Western Christianity has organized that 'translation error', projected its own fantasies into it and produced one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations . . . if a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics amounts to not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language and *jouissance* – in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women. Of women who harbour the desire to reproduce (to have stability). Of women who are available so that our speaking species, which knows it is moral, might withstand death.

(‘Stabat Mater’, pp. 163-85)

It is in the context of such arguments that the positive consequences of Kristeva’s work can best be appreciated. In charging us with the responsibility of *making* our ethical systems, Kristeva converts error into a source of moral enlightenment, while simultaneously transposing the mechanisms of limitation and exclusion into a rehabilitating vision of knowledge. The thralldom of hysteria, the war between mother and daughter, the pressure of biological existence, the Freudian mechanisms of foreclosure, the search for the ‘true-real’, the ecological and social system surrounding the body: these diverse aspects of the subject’s emergence as a subject-in-process are brought together in Kristeva’s attempt to carry her project to ‘the outer borders of the signifying venture’ (*Desire in Language*, p.x).

Ivan Rabinowitz, University of South Africa

Roland Barthes: *The Rustle of Language*.

London: Basil Blackwell, 1986

Editor: Francois Wahl

Translator: Richard Howard

To review any work by Roland Barthes is a daunting task, not only because of the respect accorded to him, but also because our own evaluative paradigm has to a large extent been inherited from him. Indeed, is there a more important criterion for evaluation than that which gives the greatest value to the text which offers its readers the most freedom? The text which implicates its readers, and which does not offer itself as a foreclosed object, but beckons to its reader to re-write it is a shimmering place of freedom, perhaps, as Kristeva once said, the only place where freedom has any meaning. The question to ask then is: does Barthes offer us, his readers, a similar freedom?

In the context of Barthes’ work, where there is an erasure of the distinction between theoretical and literary text, this is not an irrelevant question to ask

of 'theoretical' discourse. In a collection of essays, reviews and scholarly articles such as this, which, according to the editor, are classified under the rubric of 'the pleasure owed to the text', it is, first and foremost, the question of pleasure which is asked. The pleasure taken in language, in writing, in the search for the exact word, as in the case of Benveniste (Barthes comments on the neutrality of his language, adding: "only occasionally does a word – by dint of being accurate, one might say, so much does accuracy seem to accumulate in him – gleam out, delight like a charm..." 1986:166) or in the collapse of theory and discourse, as in the case of Kristeva:

The value of Kristevan discourse is that it is homogenous to the theory it enunciates (and this homogeneity is the very theory itself): in it, science is writing, the sign is dialogic, the basis is destructive; if it seems "difficult" to some, this is precisely because it is *written*. (1986:169)

This collapse points to the fact that, with Barthes, it is always a question of language, or of discourse and of pleasure. To be more precise, the type of collapse envisaged by him is operative only when the text has been written in pleasure, when, that is, there is a relation of desire between writer, text and reader. It is in these terms that Barthes answers the question "Why I love Benveniste". Pleasure is thus not a contingent effect of theoretical discourse: it is bound to its validity and its relevance. Speaking of the research of his students, he says:

... it is just when research manages to link its object to its discourse and to dispossess our knowledge by the light it casts on objects not so much unknown as unexpected – it is at just this moment that research becomes a true interlocution, a task in behalf of other, in a word: a social production. (1986:75)

Pleasure is inextricable from the process of interrogation so valued by Barthes, a process which can however never finitise itself, which must forever slip through the grasp of "... that monster, the Last Signified". (1986:178) Pleasure is an effect of the signifier which suspends its signified, of a question which refuses to be answered, of an endless interrogation which imposes nothing. Pleasure then, offers a certain freedom. But is it, in fact a pleasurable, even hedonistic freedom?

Barthes came to the notion of pleasure after a long trajectory of testing possible sites of commitment for literature. Pleasure, by its very banality and apparent innocuousness, is the ultimate form of responsibility, since faced with it triviality, no alibi (not even that of responsibility) of the recuperative image-repertoire will be able to make a stand or become fixed. Pleasure is the ultimate undermining of any possible form of the Last Signified on the condition, however, that it destroy even its own gesture of commitment. The aporia of the question of commitment in literary as well as theoretical discourse, is contained in the duplicity of Pleasure. If it is the ultimate liberation, it is also the ultimate destruction; it carries with it, even in those of Barthes' texts which celebrate it (as is often the case in this collection), the shadow of its own failure.

Is the question of freedom then not a recuperative one? By perpetually searching in Barthes' texts only for an invitation to continue the endless play of signifiers, to unleash our own 'creativity', to produce unbounded meanings and finally, as a last reward, to experience the bliss of an unbounded eroticism are we not merely indulging ourselves in the worst form of sentimentalism? Is Barthes, in *The Rustle of Language* opening the way to the joy of listening to the voluptuous fullness of signifiers in and for themselves, or is the pleasure thus evoked a lever for asking the most radically political questions, those which do not even accept their own politicisation? The heteroclitic texts and fragments gathered in this collection offer answers to these questions, but also erase them. Often inconsistent, fragmentary and partial, constantly shifting, they force us to ask in turn what Barthes is for us. Why is it that we never tire of him: is it because we now expect the provocativeness of his writings, or are we still waiting for the 'last signified' which will surely appear in the next posthumous collection? If so, we are not likely to get from Barthes himself, anything more definitive than the following:

I imagine myself today something like the ancient Greek as Hegel describes him: he interrogated, Hegel says, passionately, uninterruptedly, the rustle of branches, of springs, of winds, in short, the shudder of Nature, in order to perceive in it the design of an intelligence. And I – it is the shudder of meaning I interrogate, listening to the rustle of language, that language which for me, modern man, is my Nature. (1986: 79)

Annamaria Carusi, University of South Africa