

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

The ideology of conduct: Essays in literature and the history of sexuality

Nancy Armstrong; Leonard Tennenhouse (eds.) 1987
London: Methuen

Reading in detail: Aesthetics and the feminine

Naomi Schor 1987
New York: Methuen

Two recent theoretical texts concentrate on details: *The Ideology of Conduct* interrogates what Defoe called the “abhorred Particulars” of everyday life (Defoe, 1727: 34–35, quoted in Flynn, 1987: 76 in Armstrong and Tennenhouse), while *Reading in Detail* reads, meticulously, what Hegel dismissed as “the prose of the world” (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1975: 150 in Schor: 32). And both texts suggest that detail, whether part of aesthetic or domestic practice, is connected to notions of femininity.

According to its back cover, *The Ideology of Conduct* “unfolds a history that has been virtually unseen and ignored until now”. This is the history of “books telling women how to become desirable . . .” (5), and it is a history that can only be excavated from fragments that have either been forgotten or are so familiar that they are almost invisible. Some contributors to *The Ideology of Conduct* turn to obscure texts, like eighteenth and nineteenth century conduct books (Nancy Armstrong); others focus on unexamined texts within otherwise well-known canons, like Rachel Bowlby who examines the fashion writing done by Mallarmé in *La Dernière Mode*, or reconsider odd moments in familiar texts, like Kathleen Ashley who explains some exchanges in medieval mystery plays as belonging to a courtesy tradition which was embedded in the religious work and which specifically interpellated female spectators. Juliet Flower MacCannell and Dean MacCannell even analyse the kind of writing that has been universally disregarded by serious critics: self-improvement guides for women à la Jane Fonda. Once these details have been brought into the glaring light of criticism, “a history” becomes “History”, and the “prose of the world” – shopping guides, domestic manuals, etiquette books – can be redeemed by its translation into the more prestigious language of cultural materialism (20). The subtitle of the collection signals an allegiance to Foucault, and the editors make it quite clear that they are “following Foucault” (21).

Yet, solid as its research and impressive as its credentials may be, *The Ideology of Conduct* is not a continuation of the radical work of Foucault. It is

in its dealings with detail that an element of intellectual conservatism becomes apparent in *The Ideology of Conduct*. Details – the minutiae of conduct, gesture and dress – are not used here to tell their own story, or any novel story, for that matter. The editors announce: “We will be telling the story of the language of kinship relations, and its appropriation by aspiring classes, the story, in other words, of the hegemony that brought the middle classes into power and made the world we know today” (5). They add that “the history of sexuality must be seen in relationship to economic struggles, . . . the struggle to represent ideal female behaviour indeed accompanies the struggle of an emergent middle class to gain economic power” (20). So the storylines – to mix a metaphor – are not redrawn. Instead, the outline of that thoroughly familiar master narrative, “The Rise of the Middle Classes”, is simply filled in with a new set of particulars. The arrangement of the essays as an historical “story” which begins in the Middle Ages and ends in the present day, does nothing to allay one’s suspicions that yet another version of a well-known tale is being offered.

Nancy Armstrong’s “The Rise of the Domestic Woman” occupies the thematic centre of *The Ideology of Conduct* because it deals at length with the crucial juncture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and because it is a minutely worked out statement of the premise that the middle class constituted itself as an homogeneous group around the figure of the “domestic woman”, a figure which provided the ideological focus needed to unify diverse and conflicting interests, without *appearing* political. Armstrong finds ample evidence of the discursive presence of the “domestic woman” in a variety of texts which predate, quite considerably, the official birth of the middle class. It seems plausible to assume that in this instance, discourse was instrumental in quoting a particular socio-economic reality into existence. Moreover, in the transition from the ideal of the aristocratic woman to the ideal of the housewife “we are witnessing the fact of cultural change from an earlier form of power based on sumptuary display to a modern form that works through the production of subjectivity” (Armstrong: 120).

Armstrong’s conclusions are both impeccably Foucauldian (a new discourse shapes a new subjectivity) and solidly Marxist (all this was part of the economic ascendancy of the middle classes). While it is difficult to fault Armstrong’s work, one cannot but wish that it were somehow more startling, provocative or even entertaining. Now that the second wave of French theory has crested and crashed in the Anglophone academy, one expects *more*.

The most irritating contribution to *The Ideology of Conduct* is “The Beauty System” by the MacCannells. Any text, which is written by a husband and wife team, and which baldly asserts that heterosexual relations presently exist only as “reciprocal sadism” (222), elicits immediate scepticism. The MacCannells approach the gender codifications of the twentieth century with a remarkably smug detachment. The following attempts to defamiliarise, but ends up being merely priggish: “Infants classed as males have a penis and testicles where infants of the other class have a suture in the place of a penis” (210). “The Beauty System” alludes, in its title to Roland Barthes’s *Système de la Mode*, but whereas Barthes was intent on demonstrating that the

"system" of fashion was a grammar, the MacCannells claim that the "system" of beauty is also a structure of oppression. Given the allusion to Barthes, one should perhaps recall how the intensely ethical Barthes summed up the dangers of demythologisation at the end of *Mythologies*: "... the mythologist cuts himself off from all the mythconsumers, and this is no small matter" (Barthes, 1973: 156). Their easy assumption of an immense critical distance from the practices and discourses of the culture that produced them, mars the MacCannells' work: how is their promotion of demystified femininity different from the female "self-improvement" propagated by centuries of conduct books?

Naomi Schor's new work, *Reading in Detail*, proceeds from assumptions very different to those of *The Ideology of Conduct*. Schor admits, disarmingly, her involvement in the material she describes: "My own love of the detail – and like all loves this love is shot through with ambivalence – is inextricably bound up with by Oedipus: my father, a goldsmith, was a master of the ornamental detail . . ." (7); Schor acknowledges that her history of the detail in aesthetic theory and textual practice, is "both a defense of the detail and an illustration of its lures" (7). A text which devotes a chapter to Salvador Dali's "paranoiac-critical" misreading of minor elements in Millet's *Angelus* can hardly fail to consider what Schor calls "the delusion of interpretation" (110-119). She makes a sweeping statement in her introduction, which is triumphantly borne out by the rest of her book: "... all literary methodologies, all critical theories and histories of critical theory serve to validate idiosyncratic relationships to the text" (6). Yet, adds Schor, even the most idiosyncratic reading can "encounter in other readers recognition and response" (7).

Schor's text brings together Joshua Reynolds and Salvador Dali, Duane Hanson and Hegel, Emile Zola and Freud, Barthes and Dutch *genre* painting; the eccentric fragments she assembles evoke immediate and delighted response. More, *Reading in Detail* provides one of the most compelling English essays on Barthes, and also slips in, quite unobtrusively, a radical revision of classic realism, which has had a remarkably bad press since structuralism. (To do this, Schor relies precisely on Barthes's: "L'effet de réel", which contains the "scandalous assertion" that realism is an effect of gratuitous details, Schor: 85.) In her chapters "The Delusion of Interpretation: *The Conquest of Plassans*" and "Details and Realism: *The Curé De Tours*", Schor shows how, *pace* current critical opinion, classic realism does not perpetuate naive notions about the adequacy of language to represent a supposedly extra-linguistic reality. Instead, classic realist texts anxiously interpret the details of which they are composed, soliciting them for their "truth", and very often dramatising this process of interpretation.

A surprising aspect of *Reading in Detail*, given its subtitle, "Aesthetics and the Feminine", is the absence of either overt feminist theory or, in the later chapters, of texts by or about women. That critical thought, for two centuries, has nearly unanimously feminised the detail as precious or prosy, decadent or homely, is convincingly demonstrated in the first section of *Reading in Detail*.

Yet when the time comes to draw an explicitly feminist conclusion, Schor is quick to say that her findings will "disappoint" (97):

Despite the extensive and highly sophisticated work carried out in recent years by feminist critics committed to uncovering the specificities of women's artistic productions, there exists no reliable body of evidence to show that women's art is either more or less particularistic than men's. Indeed, further investigation of this question may lead us to formulate a surprising hypothesis, namely that feminine specificity lies in the direction of a specifically feminine form of idealism, one that seeks to transcend not the sticky feminine world of prosaic details, but rather the deadly asperities of male violence and destruction (97).

But this "specifically feminine form of idealism" is just what Schor does *not* analyse; in fact, that is the only reference to it in *Reading in Detail*. So, oddly enough, feminism and the "feminine" appear to be under erasure in this work. Such erasure is all the more astonishing given a recent essay by Schor in which she castigates Barthes and Foucault for professing to celebrate a feminine paradigm, while in truth proposing "desexualisation" (a term Schor takes from Foucault, Schor in Jardine and Smith, 1987: 104), or a "discourse of indifference" (Schor in Jardine and Smith, 1987: 109). But in *Reading in Detail* Schor has performed exactly the same swerve away from femininity.

Her text begins as feminist aesthetics, but from the very start, details that seem to be feminine turn out to be *masculine*: the minutely ornamented bracelet by Ilya Schor which is pictured in the frontispiece is an example of the work of the father to whom Schor alludes in her introduction, and even the detail-exquisite arabesques of interlaced hands and embroidered drapery – from a Renaissance painting reproduced on the cover of the book – depicts two *male* hands (Tobias's and his angel's). Further, the same detail from *Tobias and the Angel* by the school of Verrocchio appears on the cover of one English translation of Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, as Schor herself notes (95). She makes much of this detail in one of the more idiosyncratic moments in her chapter on Barthes, when she notices, and is seduced by, the frequency with which the detail of hand with splayed fingers seduces the lover of *A Lover's Discourse*. The reproduction of the image on the cover of Schor's text quite explicitly signals that she is writing under the sign of the textual father, while her frontispiece pays tribute to the biological father.

The last reader of detail analysed by Schor is the Abbé in Balzac's *The Curé de Tours*. Schor comments that "it is perhaps not a coincidence that a novel dedicated to the legitimization of detailism is set in a clerical milieu" (147). The reason she advances is that the use of detail in classic realism tries to make the secular sublime, for realism itself undertakes a sanctification of the everyday. However, just before this, she remarks on the significance of celibacy in *The Curé de Tours*. ("... celibacy and egotism are inextricably linked", Schor concludes from Balzac's novel, 145.) It is not perhaps a coincidence that a work which desexualises detail ends with a discussion of detail in the context of *male* celibacy.

Preferable as *Reading in Detail* may be to *The Ideology of Conduct*, to

become caught up in the delusions of interpretative details has its own hazards.

References

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 Schor, Naomi. 1987. Dreaming dissymmetry: Barthes, Foucault, and sexual difference. In: Jardine, Alice; Smith, Paul (eds.). *Men in feminism*. New York: Metheun.

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Dagblad

Hennie Aucamp 1987
 Pretoria: Haum-Literêr

Die werk van die kritikus en meer spesifiek: van die dagbladresensent is gewis nie maklik nie. Skrywers sien die kritikus meermale as 'n "vyand"; die publiek meen 'n mens skryf te geleerd en moeilik; en akademiese kollegas weier soms halsstarrig om in te sien dat 'n mens nié altyd akademies of teoreties-geleerd kan skryf nie. Boekeredakteurs versoek maklik-toeganklike kopie wat die gewone leser en die meer gesofistikeerde leser sal bevredig.

Onlangs is Afrikaanse dag- en weekbladresensente van "residensiële resensiegemak" verwyt deur 'n akademikus wat blykbaar die mening huldig dat dit die dagbladresensent se taak is "om die openbare literêre smaak en invloedstrukture te konfronteer".¹ Sulke kritiek getuig, myns insiens, van onwil om te erken dat daar ooglopende verskille tussen die aard van 'n dagbladresensie en dié van 'n wetenskaplike diskoers in 'n literêre tydskrif bestaan. Die groot gevolgtrekking van hierdie akademikus is dat "die boek wat nuut en anders is, nie meer op Afrikaanse literêre koerantresensente kan reken vir 'n ingeligte en doeltreffende ontvangs nie".

Wanneer 'n mens Hennie Aucamp se *Dagblad* opneem, ontstaan die vraag of die bovermelde soort akademiese kritiek vir die unieke skrywer-kritikus Aucamp ook van ondoeltreffendheid sou verdink. Ek meen dat 'n mens juis in Aucamp se kritiek 'n gesonde balans kry tussen skryf vir die gewone leser en tendense aantoon vir die meer ingeligte, gesofistikeerde leser. En op die koop toe skryf Hennie Aucamp 'n helder, toeganklike prosa sodat 'n mens sou kon vra: is *Dagblad* nie dalk 'n werkboek vir die voornemende resensent nie? Want hierin vind 'n mens talle fabrieksgeheime, wat nié alleen vir die skeppende skrywer van waarde is nie, maar ook illustreer dat 'n knap resensent ten eerste moet kan formuleer; dat 'n goeie beheer van Afrikaans 'n voorvereiste is. 'n Styl wat oorlaai word deur Franse, Duitse of Engelse verwringings plus die uitstal van teoretiese jargon hoort nie in 'n Afrikaanse dagbladresensie tuis nie.

Hoewel Aucamp as kreatiewe skrywer al talle bekronings ontvang het, soos die W.A. Hofmeyr-prys in 1974 en die Hertzogprys in 1982, word hy myns insiens nie genoegsaam as *vakman* of *kritikus* geag nie. *Kort voor lank* (1987) bevat *essays* oor die kortverhaal as genre, en *Woorde wat wond* (1984) karteer “randverskynsels” in die literatuur – die sogenaamde “nuwe gevoelighede” waarvan Van Wyk Louw gepraat het. *Die blote storie*, met die verhelderende subtitel, *’n werkboek vir kortverhaalskrywers* (1986), is gewis dié hoogtepunt in Aucamp se oeuvre: nie alleen word die leser bewus gemaak van sy enorme kennis van die kortverhaal nie, maar telkens kom die *skrywer* Aucamp ook na vore; amper ’n klein Hitchcock-moment wat wil “waarsku” en “raadgee”, wat hierdie leser opnuut daarvan bewus gemaak het dat die skrywer-kritikus altyd ’n *apologia pro domo* lewer. Want Aucamp – nes Eliot – wéét dat dié soort kritikus telkens probleme formuleer (eintlik *herformuleer*) wat hy sêlf moet oplos, of dalk reeds opgelos het.

Die jongste bundel kritiese prosa heet *Dagblad* en is deur Haum-Literêr uitgegee op gelerige koerantagtige papier om die hele sfeer van die koerant-resensie (vermoedelik) vas te lê. Op die buiteblad verskyn dan ook ’n koerantfoto van Aucamp. Die bundel bevat ’n persoonlike keuse uit sy dagblad-resensies en -artikels vanaf 1968 tot 1986. Hopelik sal sy voortreflike *De Kat*-stukke óók nog gebundel word.

Resensies, artikels en informasies is hierdie stukke, wat in die breë gesien beslis méér werd is as die meeste koerantresensies wat ’n mens te lese kry. Al is die koerantresensie dan net “’n eerste mening” word ’n mens hier telkens beïndruk deur die stilistiese versorging van die stukke. Elke resensie is tot in die vesels toe versorg, elke argument word gesubstansieer. Daarom was dit miskien nie nodig om die stukke op die koerantagtige papier te druk nie; Aucamp se *essays* word immers op ander wyses “ewig”.

’n Mens word in hierdie bundel telkens beïndruk deur die sobere en nugtere aanbod. Wanneer Aucamp byvoorbeeld verskil van mede-kritici, soos oor Boerneef se *Versamelde prosa*, bly hy nugter en word dit nooit *ad hominem* gedoen nie. Hy skryf oor “onverdedigbare weglatings en enkele twyfelagtige insluitings” (32) by A.P. Grové se keuse uit Van Melle se prosa, maar nooit kry ’n mens die gevoel dat hy die samesteller probeer bykom nie, eerder dat hy besorg is oor die skrywer wat ’n onreg aangedoen word. Dit gaan hier om die literatuur, en die literatuur alleen.

’n Mens word telkens bewus van ’n waarskuwende noot in sy stukke – veral wanneer Aucamp voel dat ’n kultus rondom ’n skrywer die skrywer se beeld kan aantast. Hy skryf o.m. in “M.E.R.: ’n kosbare erfenis” die volgende: “Die gevaar is natuurlik dat M.E.R.-bewonderaars – en ek is een van die luidrugtiges – elke woord van TaMiem as ’n orakelwoord gaan sien. Só kan ons ’n potensiële publiek van M.E.R. vervreem, want ’n kultus lok altyd teenstand uit” (11). Aucamp kyk dus besonder krities na die skryfster se kladboeke – want hy weet hoe nadelig ’n verheerliking vir haar beeld kan wees. Nou onlangs het Aucamp in *Die Burger* (21 April 1988) geskryf oor Robert Louis Stevenson se *The Lantern-Bearers and other essays*. ’n Skrywer moet ’n landkaart hê voordat hy begin: ’n fantasie, ’n konsep, ’n fantastiese konsep, ’n konseptuele fantasie. En Aucamp verwys dan verder na Stevenson se

waarskuwings teen die betreklikheid van populariteit en pryse. 'n Tydige waarskuwing vir diegene wat pryse té ernstig opneem en dikwels vergeet dat die beloning vir die skrywer in die *skryf lê*, omdat skryf 'n ontdekkingsproses is.

Aucamp is geen polemiese kritikus òf genadeloos bitsig nie. Die literatuur word ter wille van die literatuur bedryf en slegs een keer raak hy skerp oor 'n mede-kritikus se werk: omdat daar 'n skewe beeld van die literatuur gegee word. Hy het geen vrede met Jean Marquard se *A century of South African short stories* nie, en hy spreek die hoop uit dat hierdie boek "grondiglik hersien gaan word". Hy sluit af: "Soos dit nou staan, gaan dit baie lesers, veral die jong lesers wat dit voorgeskryf gaan kry, kondisioneer volgens die smaak van die bloemleser; en dít is, opvoedkundig gesien, niks minder as 'n ramp nie" (106).

Die temperament van die kritikus kan helaas nié verbloem word nie. En Aucamp se *persona* is die soort wat opvoedkundig kyk, wat kritieke skryf tot stigting en lering, soms ook ter waarskuwing. 'n Duidelike waarskuwingswoord word aan Letoit gerig oor sy *Nou's die Kaap weer Hollands* (99-100) se vermenging van genres. Wil Letoit "hoë" literatuur skryf of gewoon middelmoot-werk lewer? Plesierig en toeganklik mag dit wees vir *almal*, maar die skrywer wat sy vakmanskap verwaarloos ter wille van gewildheid, speel met literêre vuur. Aucamp verduidelik: "'n Sinryke staaltjie van dr. Con de Villiers het my te binne geskiet by die lees van talle van Du Toit (die boek is gepubliseer onder die naam André le Roux du Toit, J.H.) se verhale. 'Richard Tauber', het dr. Con gesê, 'het glo gedink hy kan vier seisoene lank Franz Léhar sing en net so terugkeer na Mozart. Wel hy kon nie'. André le Roux du Toit mag uitvind dat 'n terugkeer na komplekser verhale van hom 'n moeilike afleer van kitsresepte gaan verg" (100).

Dagblad is 'n versameling Aucamp-vintage: helder en goed geformuleer met raad aan die voornemende skrywer én kritikus. Trouens, ek is van mening dat *Dagblad* 'n werkboek is vir die jong kritikus, soos *Die blote storie* die handgrepe van skryf aan die jong kortverhaalskrywer verduidelik.

Dié "persoonlike keuse" verraaï 'n besonderse kennis van en insig in die literatuur. 'n Mens kan voorts aflei dat hierdie skrywer-kritikus werklik die literatuur eerste stel en dat die kritikus – nes die kreatiewe skrywer – ook op 'n ontdekkingstog is.

Aantekening

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Teodoliet

Henning Snyman 1987
Kaapstad: Dias-uitgewers

Teodoliet is 'n ambisieuse werk. Dit het as doel 'n beskrywing van die belangrikste kenmerke van D.J. Opperman se oeuvre. In dié studie van 221 bladsye kom sy digbundels sowel as sy versdramas ter sprake. Die uitgangspunt is die begrip *deiktiese ruimte*, wat Snyman in sy inleiding omskryf as “die samehang tussen ego-sentriese spreker in die teks met die ontwikkeling van ruimte, tyd en beeld”. In sy bespreking van “Bontekoe” pas die skrywer *deiksis* só toe:

Met Bontekoe as ek-spreker (eerste-persoonspreker) kry al die *deiktiese* verwysings hul beslag en hul gelokaliseerdheid (die *deiksis* van die gedig). Daar sal sprake wees van *deiktiese ruimte* as bewys kan word dat Bontekoe ook Opperman is, as 1619 ook die hede kan wees, as Sumatra 'n Suid-Afrikaanse bestemming kan bedui. Die *deiktiese ruimte* sal behoorlik beslag kry as allegoriese verwysings binne die geïmpliseerde taalvorme 'n bewysbare tuiste kan vind (22: kursivering, H.v V.).

Dié toepassing van *deiksis* (waarmee Snyman aansluiting vind by John Lyons se *Semantics* 2, 1977) doen geforseerd en artfisieel aan. Die voortdurende herhaling van “*deiksis*” en “*deiktiese ruimte*” het 'n vervreemdende effek op die leser, wat dié eiesoortige gebruik van taalkundige begrippe in 'n literêr-kritiese betoog as 'n hindernis vir begrip ervaar. Waarmee die skrywer hier worstel, is die verhouding tussen die Bontekoe-tekste (sewentiende-eeuse reis-verhaal) en die outobiografiese gegewens van die Opperman-gegewe wat sentraal staan in *Komas*. Met die begrip intertekstualiteit en intertekstuele wisselwerking sou sy betoog onmiddellik aan toeganklikheid wen. Die Bontekoe-verhaal tree as allegoriese intertekste op waarmee Opperman sy outobiografiese gegewens vergestalt. Die begrippe *deiksis* en *deiktiese ruimte* is verduisterend, aangesien die leser nooit 'n behoorlike greep kry op waarheen die skrywer daarmee wil nie.

Teodoliet bestaan uit ses hoofstukke, met in elkeen van die ses, buiten die tweede hoofstuk, gedigte uit *Komas* uit 'n bamboesstok as kerngedeeltes. Volgens die inhoudsopgawe word 17 Opperman-tekste bespreek: 16 gedigte (waarvan 7 uit *Komas*) plus *Periandros van Korinthe*. Reeds hieruit kan die leser aflei dat die balans in dié oeuvre-studie aansienlik skeef getrek is, met die fokus op *Komas*. (Opperman se oeuvre bestaan naamlik uit 9 digbundels en 3 versdramas.) Maar goed: die skrywer wil sy seleksie regverdig deur te verklaar dat hy slegs 'n “masker vir 'n oeuvre-studie” wil skep met die werk. (Met “masker” neem ek aan dat hy iets soos “raamwerk” bedoel.) Tog kry die leser die indruk dat *Komas* met sy sterk outobiografiese inslag as interpreterende teks gedien het vir die res van die Opperman-oeuvre. Alles is vanuit dié laaste bundel geïnterpreteer, en word deur die inslag van dié bundel bepaal. Hiermee sou mens vrede kon hê, as dit nie was nie dat die skrywer

eksplisiet in die inleiding verklaar: “Die doel van die werk is drieërlei: (a) om die gemene delers in hierdie digter se werk uit te lig; (b) om die belangrikste samehange – in tema en taal – in verhouding tot mekaar te plaas; (c) om by te dra tot ’n beter begrip van die Opperman-oeuvre.” Met ’n oeuvre-studie as einddoel, is dit onaanvaarbaar dat slegs een (*Heilige beeste*, *Kuns-mis*, *Edms. Bpk.*) of twee (*Dolosse*, *Negester oor Ninevé*, *Engel uit die klip*) gedigte uit ses bundels die oorgrootste deel van die digter se oeuvre verteenwoordig, teenoor sewe uit die afsluitende bundel. (*Blom en baaierd* en *Joernaal van Jorik* word nie in die inhoudsopgawe verteenwoordig nie!) Dit word gaandeweg duidelik dat Snyman *Komas* sien as die “masker” vir sy oeuvre-studie van Opperman. Vandaar die beklemtoning van die outobiografiese as “primêre kenmerk van die Opperman-oeuvre”, die sentraalstel van “erotiese beelding” en “parodie”, en sy aanname dat “die enkeling-figure . . . ’n verwikkelde en uitgebreide stel alter-ego’s vir die figuur D.J. Opperman (vorm)”, (uit die slot: 215–216). Aangesien *Komas* na my gevoel ’n andersoortige aard het as die voorafgaande bundels, het ek fundamentele beswaar teen die gebruik van tiperende kenmerke van dié bundel as beskrywend van die res van die oeuvre.

Snyman kom verder ook tot die gevolgtrekking: “Die Opperman-digkuns keer telkens terug in sovele gestaltes tot ’n vorm van *Ars Poëtica* . . . alles werk mee aan hierdie *Ars Poëtica*-onderbou van die Opperman-werk” (216). As voorbeeld van dié laaste stelling dien die bespreking van “Glaukus klim uit die water” (148–160). Volgens die skrywer is die geboorte van dié eietydse Opperman-Glaukus uit die water soos die geboorte uit die baarmoeder. (Hier is ’n Freudiaanse uitgangspunt merkbaar, wat ook opvallend is in sy beklemtoning van “erotiese beelding”, soos in die uitwys van die klapperdop in “Bontekoe” as ’n falliese simbool!): “In hierdie sin word Glaukus dan ’n alter-ego vir ’n Jorik, en trouens vir die hele reeks Opperman-gestaltes” (49). (Die Freudiaanse inslag word voortgeset in die aantoon van alter-ego’s.) Shaka, Periandros, die skriba in “Skriba van die Carbonari”, die alchemis uit “Toorklip”, Skewe Koen, die “Nagwag”, W.A. van der Stel, Trigardt, Michelangelo – almal word gesien as alter-ego’s van Glaukus, en by implikasie van D.J. Opperman.

Dié neiging tot gelykstelling van almal aan almal, is hinderlik. Dat daar verwantskappe is by figure in ’n oeuvre, dit sal niemand bevraagteken nie. Maar die leser kry geen beter begrip van Opperman se oeuvre deur op Freudiaanse wyse te poneer dat alle gestaltes wisselvorme van een en dieselfde figuur is nie. Die veelvoudige geskakeerdheid wat juis een van die sterk punte van Opperman se poësie is, word hiermee geïgnoreer. ’n Ouvre-studie behoort juis die veelkantigheid, en die geleidelike ontwikkeling van die komplekse oeuvre in reliëf te plaas, eerder as tot een noemer te reduceer. Tussen *Heilige beeste* (1945 – in Snyman se bibliografie sonder verder verduideliking aangegee as 1979!) en *Komas uit ’n bamboesstok* (1979) lê daar 34 jaar se poëtiese groei en bowenal verandering van toon en tematiek waaroor Snyman in *Teodoliet* net té gemaklik heen skeer. Die skakeling binne oeuvreverband waarop die studie gebaseer is, is dáár, maar aansluitend hierby is dit die verskil van aanslag in elke bundel (van byvoorbeeld die belydenisgedig in

die eerste bundel na die parodiërende toon in *Komas*) wat die ontwikkeling en aard van die oeuvre die duidelikste illustreer.

Nog 'n probleem wat ek met *Teodoliet* het, is die slotsom oor "hierdie Ars Poëtica-onderbou van die Opperman-werk" (216). Dié opmerking getuig van gevaarlike oorvereenvoudiging in die lig van die kompleksiteit van die oeuvre. Digtters skryf nou eenmaal nie net oor die "kuns van dig" nie. Watter aantyging sou dit nie wees as die hele oeuvre van dié digter net gereduseer kon word tot 'n "Ars Poëtica-onderbou" nie! *Teodoliet* identifiseer nie die mees tipiese Opperman-kenmerke, soos Afrika-gerigtheid en -betrokkenheid en die konkreetheid van sy poësie wat dié kontinent haarfyn beskryf nie. Aan die slot van die studie gee die skrywer hoog op oor "Kantelkompas" as "'n beeld van die Opperman-oeuvre":

Dit word ook in die geheel 'n allegorie vir 'n Ars Poëtica. Die "periodieke praaie van die potjieriet" . . . word die beliggaming van die poësie wat die realiteit kan ontvlug . . . (220; kursivering, H.v V.).

Die trefkrag van "Kantelkompas" lê in die vasvang van die Franskraal-wêreld en Doors Dop-verhaal in eenvoudige taal en presiese dialoog, waarin die geografiese, soölogiese en sosiologiese besonderhede van dié streek noukeurig weergegee word. Die taal is gestroop van metafisiese pretensies. Die teks hoef nie "gered" te word deur 'n "dubbele lesing" nie. Dis betreurenswaardig as selfs die beskrywing van 'n tipiese Franskraal-insekklink in die nag ("periodieke praaie van die potjieriet") verhef word tot "die beliggaming van die poësie wat die realiteit kan ontvlug". (Dit herinner sterk aan Van Wyk Kousse se kommentaar oor "Grense" wat volgens die skooljuffrou nie 'n liefdesgedig kon wees nie, maar eerder 'n "gedig met 'n kuns-teoretiese laag"; in Louw, 1970: 15). Dié lesing is simptome van wat Snyman met die hele Opperman-oeuvre doen. Daar is 'n konsekwente neiging om elke gedig te oorlaai met "ars poëtikale"-lesings.

Henning Snyman het met *Teodoliet* 'n lowenswaardige ambisie gehad: 'n "masker" vir 'n oeuvre-beskrywing van D.J. Opperman. Dit het nie geslaag nie as gevolg van 'n oorbeklemtoning van *Komas* as matriks van die oeuvre, die gebruik van die begrip "deiktiese ruimte" wat enduit obskuur bly, en sy neiging tot vereenselwiging van alle figure. Die skrywer kry myns insiens nie genoeg greep op die essensiële kenmerke van Opperman se omvattende oeuvre nie.

Verwysings

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Why seers are not believers

Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology

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pp 549 R50,90.

Film theory (as distinct from film criticism) was a late starter in England and the United States. Elsewhere film theory had been established from at least the 1920's, with Eisenstein's work providing a benchmark.

European film theory developed intermittently until the birth of the Nouvelle Vague movement. The "Cahiers du Cinema" writers in the Fifties saw criticism and theory as interchangeable and their ideas were finally imported into Britain by "Oxford Opinion" and its successor "Movie" in 1960. "Monogram" and "Screen" helped establish film theory as a serious discipline in Anglo-Saxon countries in the Sixties and Seventies. The emergence of film culture as academic discourse (particularly in the United States) did not take place until the late Sixties and then ran into two sources of opposition – journalistic film discourse and English literary critical discourse.

This collection of essays shows why this opposition was inevitable. Journalistic practice argues that films are relatively easy to understand and film critics do not require specialised knowledge (as music or art critics do, for instance). When film theory borrows from Lacan or Saussure journalists are quick to label it pretentious or obscure. This anti-academism was paradoxically echoed by professors of English who had been using much the same sort of generalised filmic discourse in teaching film history and film genre. They had to relearn a new filmic discourse with a vocabulary derived from semiotics, structuralism and psycho-analysis. Crucially, in order to use this filmic discourse, academics had to come to terms with the political and ideological dimension of film.

In the Thirties and Forties Leavis and his followers had demarcated literary culture and literary criticism as the storehouse of moral values, above and beyond politics. As Masterman puts it,

In relation to the media, Leavisism forestalled for two generations any serious consideration within British culture of their ideological role, of their function as consciousness industries. What it put in their place was a theory of literary value and, in particular, an emphasis upon the importance of critical discrimination ('the sense that this is worth more than that') which persists as a limiting factor in discussions about the media to the present day.¹

What "Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology" demonstrates is the centrality of power relations (patterns of dominance, oppression and subordination) to the process of signification. The irony is that this volume appears 13 years after Barthes had made that point forcibly and succinctly in "Mythologies" when he wrote "Myth is depoliticised speech . . . (its function) is to empty reality; it

is literally a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence." This collection tries to restore politics to that "speech", it tries to fill reality, to staunch the bleeding away of the history of the signifying act.

Conscientious use of this work in an academic context will inevitably make teaching a political act since film study must then embrace social, cultural, political and ideological contexts. This tends to shake the foundations of the odd ivory tower.

Philip Rosen has organised the book according to the four most important divisions of contemporary film theory: Structures of Film Narrative (subtitled the Saussurian Impulse and Cinema Semiotics), Subject, Narrative, Cinema (or Text and Subject), Apparatus, and Textuality as Ideology. His excellent introduction to each section motivates the individual essays and provides a coherent overall view of the field. The totally initiated reader can expect to find a neat introduction to say, Saussure's contribution to structural semiotics or Jacques Lacan's theory of the Mirror Image and its influence on the formulation of the text/subject concept.

The initiate will be reminded, through the arrangement of the essays, of the importance of structuralism to early film theory. Particularly, how the notion of systems, and of codes derived from structuralism was of the greatest importance to the rediscovery of Hollywood and the codified conventions of the classic Hollywood film. Furthermore, the initiate will recognise the importance of post-structuralism for later film theory. The contribution of Althusser, Lacan, Kristeva and Lyotard towards a theory of the subject can be seen in clear perspective.

Each section is organised in a very sophisticated way. Each starts with a definitive critical text (like Bordwell's "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures"), which is followed by an elegant development (Christian Metz's "The Problem of Denotation in the Fictional Film"). The first section then concludes with a radical critique of the previous positions (Linderman's "Uncoded Images in the Heterogeneous Text").

This procedure is intelligently and consistently maintained throughout and marks the superiority of the collection over other anthologies, like Mast and Cohen's "Film Theory and Criticism", which simply present good essays without thought for contradiction or intertextuality.

The fact that some of these essays are (rightly) very familiar should not be seen as a detraction. Firstly, because no other anthology has brought them all together in one volume before. And secondly, because the juxtapositioning of the essays and the critical introduction to each section make them meaningful in a new way.

For instance, Laura Mulvey's influential and pioneering essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" benefits from having Willemsen's "Voyeurism, the Look and Dwoskin" next to it and Metz's recantatory "The Imaginary Signifier" as an additional reference a few essays later.

This volume could have benefited from a detailed reading list and suggestions for further research along the lines of the Methuen Critical Idiom series. The absence of any reference to the events of May '68 is quite strange in a

collection that explores the relationship between culture and politics so acutely. Sylvia Harvey's "May '68 and Film Culture" would have been a valuable text to quote.

Finally, anyone consulting this work will come away with a very good idea of what ideological scholarship looks like (or could look like!) It makes quite clear what the difference is between declared ideology and sterile dogmatism.

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