

MIEKE BAL

Narratologie, Les Instances du Récit: Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes.

Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1977.
Pp. 199.

Formerly a professor in a department of textology and currently in a department of literary theory, Mieke Bal's interests lie within current trends in structuralist and semiological studies. Because her theoretical and pedagogical activities are closely connected, her book combines concept and method, showing how her theories might actually be applied in a literature classroom. In a long introduction Bal sets forth the goal of her book: to make a contribution to the study of narrative signs by demonstrating how the "narrativity" of a *roman* brings its part to the signification of a total text. To this end she provides a list of definitions which are qualified as provisory and operational. Narrative phenomena are said to be determined by a triplicate stratification, specifically characteristic of narrative, as opposed to poetic or dramatic. It is through these phenomena which act as signs that unperceived meanings (signifieds) may be revealed. Thus, "narratology" is the science (French sense of the word) which seeks through a study of narrativity to formulate the theory of the relations between the three levels of narrative—*récit*, *histoire*, *texte*—and their inclusive levels of narrator, actors, and *focalisateur*. There is, however, a problem in the study of the narrative, as Bal sees it: critics either fail to evolve clear concepts (Dolezel and Schmid's concept of text, p. 11) or they differ with each other to such a degree that one must wonder why. For example, supporting the concept of triplicate narrative structure, Barthes sees the *récit* as being on the bias of the signified while Genette defines it in terms of the relations between signified and signifier. Bal proposes to define these three levels more clearly by combining certain structural concerns with semiological concepts. Thus, to the structuralist question of, "How does the story become a narrative text?" she proposes a semiological question in answer: "How does the narrative text become a story?" Suggesting that the answer to this second question lies in the special function of the *récit*, Bal defines *récit* as the signified of a narrative text (at the

linguistic level) which, at the same time, signifies a story which transcends its linguistic ties. Decrying the frequent confusion between the terms text and *récit* or *récit* and story, she clarifies her view of the tripartite structure by use of Genette's conception of focalization, to which she adds refinements of her own. Going beyond Genette's precision of the traditional "point of view" to internal and external, Bal sees focalization as including any object of the *vue*. Thus, she separates the term from narration itself, evolving symmetrical notions of narration—the story in words—and focalization—the multi-leveled aspects of the vision portrayed. This innovation helps her to separate text, story, and *récit* by using various degrees of focalization to explain the complex and often ambiguous interplay of linguistic elements in combination with non-linguistic implications.

Insofar as Bal's introduction is somewhat dense and diffuse, her intentions become clearer when one gets to her textual applications. Each of four chapters considers one specific trait of one novel which is then analyzed in terms of its narrativity and linked to the overall meaning of the novel, in an effort to solve a problem of interpretation. Chapter I brings the concepts of narration and focalization to bear on Colette's *La Chatte*. The failure of a marriage is linked to the presence of a cat: the text invites the reader to judge, to assign fault. There is confusion between seeing (focalization) and talking (narration). Eight "rules" of the *récit* are adduced to explain textual ambiguities and to suggest a final judgment based on narrativity. In Chapter II Marguerite Duras's *Vice-Consul* is considered in terms of the problem of narrative responsibility (*Qui parle?*). The structure is *récit* within a *récit*, the narrator of the main story recounting the story of the second *récit* which is that of a mute madwoman. The problem to be solved is to find out in what measure the two *récits* are related to one another. Rejecting the concept of "meta-" *récit* with its implication of inferior and superior levels, she introduces the term "hypo-" to focus on the dependence of the two stories. Through a detailed analysis of the narrative elements in both, she finds that the seemingly dissimilar *récits* are interdependent, revealing a continuous narrative line. In Chapter III Bal, carrying on a running debate with Genette, and sometimes with Barthes, thinks these critics are wrong to reject the significance of

description in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Bal analyzes the description of Rouen, characterized by a lack of action verbs and few events, as typical of Flaubert's evocation of places. In a structural remarriage of form and content, she interprets the description as a type of discourse which ironically parallels the *vide* in Emma, her *s'ennuie à mourir*. In Chapter IV Duras's *L'Après-midi de M. Andesmas* is said to invite the critic to analyze the three-hour time period itself. Using Genette's categories for analyzing narrative temporality (chronology, duration, frequency), Bal examines the interplay of many different *durées*: past, present, future; the use of shadow as an icon of the threatening aspect of the father's lonely wait, paralleling the progressive character of time; the use of the haunting refrain sung in the village, concretizing the stagnation of time. Bal concludes that the apparent temporal simplicity of the novel hides an extremely refined narrative technique, the rigorous and ordered chronological aspect of the story hiding a profound temporal disorder. Thus, time is seen to be the unique event in this story, filling the novel with its significations.

Part of the value of *Narratologie* is its interest for different audiences. Bal's attempt to combine various structuralist and semiological concerns, particularly through application of Peirce's concept of iconicity, will give food for thought to partisan theoreticians. Those interested in Colette, Duras, or Flaubert may wish to read only the related chapters for the interpretations given. In my estimation, Bal is particularly original and insightful on Duras. For pedagogical purposes this book is excellent. Traditionally inclined teacher/critics may fault Bal for her remarriage of form and content ("Have we not always done so?"). However, she illustrates beautifully how the minute tearing apart characteristic of structuralist endeavor can provide students with a systematic methodology for discovering the complexity (the interdependence of elements) and the overall beauty of a literary text themselves. The flaws of *Narratologie* are largely endemic to the fact of its being (an evoked) dissertation. The morass of definitions and theoretical material work against an overall unity and integration. My other criticisms lie within the realm of personal preference. Is a structural analysis really less naïve than another (p. 3)? Can analysis and interpretation actually be separated? Do we have to have all the

new terms (focalization to the 2nd degree!)? Can ever more precise definitions and categories truly resolve or explain literary ambiguity or interpretative plurality? If narrative only becomes possible to the extent that a story "won't tell" (Shoshana Feldman), will narratology not have to continue in the direction suggested by Bal, to resist the comforting categories of static models?

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction After Ulysses

New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. 201.

Robert Martin Adams has produced three studies of James Joyce. The first, *Surface and Symbol* (1962), a truly memorable analysis of the manipulation of realistic detail in *Ulysses*, was directed toward skilled readers concerned with the substance and texture of Joyce's artistry. The second, *James Joyce: Common Sense and Beyond* (1966), an insightful survey of Joyce's work as a whole, was directed to the "perceptive reader" who wished "to gain a footing in Joyce" (Random House, p. ix). The latest, *Afterjoyce* (1977), an attempt to trace Joyce's influence in modern fiction, seems directed to uninformed students in "several undergraduate classes at the University of California, on whom some of these ideas were first tried out" (to these students, but not to his colleagues nor to scholars who have dealt with the subject, Adams expresses gratitude, p. xiii).

Afterjoyce shortchanges the students—to say nothing of readers at higher levels. Anyone who studies Nabokov or Barth, for example, cannot but be aware of Joyce's presence behind and even within their diverse fictional constructs; an assessment of the nature and extent of Joyce's influence should open new areas of understanding and lead to further, productive studies. But Adams—surely, one would think, the right man for the task—simply