

Book Reviews

Bernard Duyfhuizen

Narratives of Transmission

Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992. Pp. 278. \$37.50

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

Bernard Duyfhuizen's wide-ranging and insightful study narrates nothing less than the story of storytelling. Narrative transmission is obviously a very broad topic, too broad to be dealt with adequately in a single monograph. Consequently, and advisedly, the author confines himself to those texts that make acts of narrative transmission "essential parts" of their narrative strategies (17). And, while discussions of narrative structure have often tended to be formalistic or technical in nature, Duyfhuizen correctly asserts in his introduction that power resides in all gestures of storytelling, and that the analysis of the latter can improve our understanding of power-relations in society.

In Chapter 1, Duyfhuizen provides a brief overview of contemporary narrative theory. Although he mentions Bakhtin's germinal work and Peter Brooks's Freudian model, among others, Duyfhuizen places greatest emphasis on narratology, especially Genette's position. In the seven interpretive chapters that follow, an informed eclecticism marks his methodology though, again, Genette remains the strongest identifiable influence.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with epistolary and diary novels, respectively, while Chapter 4 investigates fictions that utilize various sorts of inserted documents in their narration. Focusing on high canonical works—notably Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and selected fictions by major nineteenth-century novelists—Duyfhuizen analyzes both strategies of transmission in these two important subgenres and their reception. The concluding section of Chapter 2 discusses the allied themes of seduction and transgression in the epistolary novel and therein offers the book's most sustained and best commentary on the homologies operating between literary form and cultural ideology (64-73).

In some respects against the odds, Chapters 5 and 6 are the best chapters in *Narratives of Transmission*. In these two essays is the influence of Gérard Genette at its strongest. Genette's work is clearly helpful in identifying various narrating positions/identities and the complex relationships that exist between them but its reluctance to move beyond taxonomy and other intraliterary matters to consider the sociopolitical relevance of the latter leaves it open to the charge of formalism. Sartre thought of the structuralist's investigation of text as akin to a scientist's probing of a cadaver. Narratology often manifests this same shortcoming. However, the problem of dehistoricization only comes up occasionally in Duyfhuizen's appropriation of Genette. While Duyfhuizen uses a steadily multiplying number of

terms borrowed (or adapted) from Genette—narrations can be extradiegetic, intradiegetic, historiodiegetic, homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, etc.—he does not treat novels as either socially dead or morally inert. Though sometimes involving refined Linnean distinctions, the discussions of frame narrations in Chapter 5 and 6 do not confine themselves to mere categorization but try to relate types of narration to philosophical positions. Chapters 7 and 8 conclude Duyfhuizen's survey of narrative transmission by looking at the use of transcribed oral narration in works by Abbé Prévost, George Sand, E. Brontë, and Mary Shelley.

One could propose an alternative group of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictions to illustrate narrative transmission but it would be parochial to do so. Duyfhuizen's exemplary texts document effectively key narrative structures and techniques. It would not, however, be parochial to question his relative neglect of twentieth-century fictions which, in many cases, respond—whether parodically or otherwise—to precisely those conventions of narrative transmission that are first defined and codified by the authors Duyfhuizen discusses at some length here. In fairness, there are allusions to Joyce and Pynchon, and brief discussions of Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*. Yet, by failing to consider with comparable patience and acuity modernist and postmodern strategies of narrative transmission, Duyfhuizen misses an opportunity to map the historicity of particular narrative forms, to consider why, for example, epistolary novels are more important in the eighteenth century than in the late twentieth, why Dos Passos and Vonnegut, for example, are more likely to cite "public" documents like newspapers and historical documents to advance extradiegetic claims of authority than are nineteenth-century writers, why narratorial reflexivity looks different in postmodern works than it does in traditional diary novels. Chapters might well have been devoted, for example, to the use made of inserted genres in modernist novelistic montage and to the significance of inserted (meta)critical commentary in fictions by, variously, Calvino, Borges, Coover, Nabokov, Barth, Sorrentino, Vonnegut, Sukenick, Handke, Heissenbüttel, Julian Barnes, etc. *Narratives of Transmission* has no conclusion. Perhaps a survey of modernist and postmodern framing narratives would have fittingly concluded a book that is demonstrably erudite, a book that makes a thoughtful contribution to the theorizing and explication of major narrative techniques.

Gayle Greene

Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition

Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp. 302

Reviewed by Jane Campbell

In this resolutely argued book, Gayle Greene discusses feminist fiction by British, American, and Canadian women from the 1960s to the present. Greene starts from the assumption that feminist fiction, with its awareness of gender as socially constructed, is "the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction" because of its "understanding that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it" (2). She is especially interested in feminist *Künstlerromane* in which metafictional exploration of the problems of narrative becomes also an analysis of