

# LITERARY HISTORY, MODERNISM, AND POSTMODERNISM

# UTRECHT PUBLICATIONS IN GENERAL AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Utrechtse Publikaties voor Algemene Literatuurwetenschap  
(UPAL)

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*Utrecht, The Netherlands*

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Volume 19

Douwe W. Fokkema

*Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism*

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LITERARY HISTORY, MODERNISM,  
AND POSTMODERNISM

(The Harvard University Erasmus Lectures,  
Spring 1983)

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

1984



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences — Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

### **Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Fokkema, Douwe Wessel, 1931-

Literary history, modernism, and postmodernism.

(Utrecht publications in general and comparative literature, ISSN 0167-8175; v. 19) (The Harvard University Erasmus lectures; spring 1983)

1. Literature--History and criticism--Theory, etc.-- Addresses, essays, lectures. 2. Modernism (Literature)--Addresses, essays, lectures. 3. Postmodernism--Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title. II. Series. III. Series: Harvard University Erasmus lectures; spring 1983.

PN 441.F59 1984 809'.91 84-23498

ISBN 90-272-2194-4 (hb.)

ISBN 90-272-2204-5 (pb.)

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## Preface

The lectures published in this volume were originally announced under the title "Dutch Literature in its European Context" and delivered at Harvard University on 9, 16, and 23 March 1983. In view of the fact that they were presented as the "Erasmus Lectures on the Civilization of The Netherlands," the title was fully justified. The attention to Dutch literature, however, is rather subdued, and now that they appear in print it is appropriate to emphasize their general character. In fact, they gave me an opportunity to present an outline of my thoughts on the writing of literary history, in particular with respect to twentieth-century European literature. They also carry the major results of the research undertaken by my wife, Elrud Ibsch, and myself in the field of Modernism. Furthermore, they explore some of the conventions of Postmodernism. The lectures are presented largely in the manner in which they were read; I have made no attempt to remove traces of oral delivery.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Erasmus Committee of Harvard University and its chairman, Professor Arthur L. Loeb, for having invited me to spend a semester at Harvard. I also feel indebted to the Comparative Literature Department, in particular Professor Claudio Guillén and Professor Walter Kaiser for their hospitality and collegial cooperation, as well as to Miss Bette Ann Farmer and Mrs. Anne Smith for their secretarial support. I thank Lidy van Roosmalen of the

Institute of General and Comparative Literature, University of Utrecht, for giving the manuscript its final shape.

University of Utrecht  
May 1983

Douwe W. Fokkema



## **I. Literary History from an International Point of View**

It is my intention to deal with various aspects of modern literary history and to pay some attention in particular to contributions made by Dutch writers and scholars. The position of The Netherlands between its German, French and English speaking neighbours makes it almost impossible to discuss the fate of Dutch literature in isolation. My topic, therefore, will be modern Dutch literature in its European context, in particular the literature of the interbellum and that of the period since World War II. I shall focus on Modernism in the 1920s and 1930s in my second lecture, and on traces of Post-modernism in contemporary literature in my third lecture. Today, however, I will devote most of my time to a number of rather general issues with respect to literary history.

This distinguished and sophisticated audience will have little confidence in the naive narrative of literary history as an enumeration of great and less great writers and their works. Similarly, in The Netherlands the methods of literary history have been questioned to the extent that the art of writing literary history has almost been lost. The effect of Russian Formalism and later developments has been that the *writer-oriented*, biographical method was discredited and abandoned. The Formalists' criticism of earlier literary history, of course, was largely correct. Their interest in literary *form* enabled them to draw a clear, though not always convincing line between art and non-art. One of the

Russian Formalists, Jurij Tynjanov, however, observed as early as 1924 that it is impossible to give a general definition of artistic form without reference to the particular historical moment of its production and reception.<sup>1</sup> Tynjanov was correct in postulating that the restriction to purely formal issues prevents the literary historian from resorting to explanations which have their basis outside the literary series. As Jurij Striedter and others have shown, there is a line that connects the incipient criticism of the early Formalist position by Tynjanov with the insights of Czech Structuralists such as Jan Mukařovský and Felix Vodička, and the idea of a *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, launched by Hans Robert Jauss in 1967.<sup>2</sup> The focus on the reception of literature by the *reader* appeared to be fruitful and gave rise to numerous theoretical comments and several valuable studies of the response to particular texts and writers.

I will not go into the hermeneutic entanglement which at times has obscured Jauss's position, nor into Wolfgang Iser's approach which sometimes appears to be closer to text-immanent criticism than to reception history. Let us restrict ourselves to the question why, so far, no serious attempt has been made to write a reader-oriented history of literature that aims at a considerable degree of completeness. A problem with *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, of course, is that there are so many recipients, and a criterion for selecting particular readers as worth mentioning in a history of literature cannot easily be found. The function of the artifact, or *Ausgangstext*, the text that is being received, is also problematic. Should it remain a point of reference in a reader-oriented literary history? Or should the reception historian merely focus on the processing of the text by the reader, on *Textverarbeitung*, as Götz Wienold has called it?<sup>3</sup> An answer to

these questions would by implication settle the issue of the adequate interpretation or, in the plural, the problem of whether it is possible for the historian to distinguish between adequate and inadequate interpretations. Do we — in our capacity of literary historians — have criteria to reject or ignore certain interpretations and other forms of reception because they are gross distortions, the far-fetched fantasies of idiosyncratic minds? I fear we do not, as evidenced by the irresistible wave of Deconstructionist criticism and, in general, the continuing multiplication of interpretations.

When the Formalists and Structuralists left the solid ground of the biographical method and attempted to replace the historical narrative focussing on the writer by a text-oriented, and — at a later stage — by a reader-oriented literary history, they met with grave difficulties which have led many scholars to question the value of both the Formalist and the reception-historical insights. The quandary of the literary historian has not remained unnoticed in The Netherlands. A couple of months ago, Ton Anbeek, a newly appointed professor of Dutch literature at the University of Leiden, argued in his inaugural address that the text-immanent or formalist approach to literary texts had virtually ended the writing of literary history.<sup>4</sup> The search for the one, adequate interpretation had destroyed interest in larger historical concepts and explanations. I consider his diagnosis largely correct. Like Anbeek, I also regret that work in the field of literary history has come almost to a standstill. The cure which Anbeek offers, however, would never be my prescription. He considers reception studies of interest only insofar as they are confirmed by later interpretations, in particular those of Anbeek himself. There are other problems in his argument as well.

The program Anbeek proposes consists of a literary history based on correct interpretations supported by reception studies and narratological analysis. I am prepared to give his text-oriented approach the benefit of the doubt, but am not convinced that text interpretation by the scholar should be the cornerstone of literary history. The obvious question, of course, is whether the scholar can ever interpret and evaluate literary texts in a way that transcends his own interests. If we view interpretation as the attribution of significance or, more precisely, as the construction of a meaningful relationship between the world of the text and the lifeworld of the reader, the answer to that question is no. Any interpretation remains tied up with the interests of the reader. The historian who relies on his own textual interpretations as a criterion for interpretations by others will write a literary history that is restricted by the scope of his own interests. It is doubtful whether such a literary history can still have the pretension to explain anything at all.

As Claudio Guillén has argued: unlike the critic, the literary historian cannot be satisfied with an atomistic approach to literature.<sup>5</sup> It may be advisable to discriminate from the outset between text interpretation and literary history. The latter includes, among other things, the history of text interpretation, even though the historian at times cannot avoid resorting to his own interpretations for lack of reception documents or other reasons. After having abandoned the writer as the predominant point of reference in literary history, it is not at all self-evident that the recipient or the text (i.e. textual interpretation by the scholar) should take his place. The literary historian may be concerned with issues that can neither be described nor explained by focussing ex-

clusively or mainly on the text or the recipient. One of the crucial phenomena in literary history is the change of norm systems: the replacement of Romanticism by Realism, of Realism by Symbolism and Modernism, and of Modernism by Postmodernism are major events in literary history. The Russian Formalists, particularly in their later publications, laid the foundation for the systematic examination of the succession of literary systems. They were interested in stylistic and compositional devices that can be found in more than one text, and they considered the effect literary texts in general may have on the reader. In short, they paid much attention to the system of compositional and thematic conventions which governs the production and reception of texts, and they studied the literary system not only in its synchronic appearance but also in its diachronic aspects. Inspired by Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure, they laid the basis for a semiotic study of literature.

The system of conventions that regulates the organization of a text can be called a code. In a recent definition by Jurij Lotman, a code is "a closed set of meaningful units and rules governing their combination, rules which allow for the transmission of certain messages."<sup>6</sup> Evidently, the organization of a literary text depends on more than one code. This has also been observed by Lotman, who distinguished at least two codes in any literary text: the linguistic code and the literary code. Lotman emphasizes that a code is a system that models our perception, and at times he appears to be closer to the Sapir-Whorf thesis than seems advisable. In his view the code of language determines our perception and thinking to a considerable extent. The same applies to the code or codes of literature, which are conceived to be supralingual, i.e. not restricted to a particular language.

In other words, the codes of literature do not respect linguistic barriers. The code of Romanticism, or of Realism, can be found in the literature of most European nations as well as in America. The generic code of fiction, or of tragedy, or of the sonnet has played a role in text production in all major Western languages. The idiolect of individual writers, such as Dostoevsky or Beckett, appeared to be translatable into other languages. The codes of literature may superimpose themselves on the linguistic rules. They may contradict and overrule the standard linguistic usage, as appears from the exceptional semantic and syntactic options in Futurist or Surrealist poetry, which have been accepted by thousands and thousands of readers.

Obviously, the comparatist interested in literary history from an international point of view will be curious to know to what extent the concept of code can serve his ends. Let me repeat Lotman's definition of code that I gave earlier: "a closed set of meaningful units and rules governing their combination." Lotman clearly distinguishes between the semantic and the syntactic components of codes. Codes also have a pragmatic component which determines under what conditions the semantic and syntactic rules are applicable.<sup>7</sup> When we deal with the code of Postmodernism, it is usually taken for granted that those who apply or admire it will not do so under all circumstances. Neither Donald Barthelme, nor Thomas Pynchon, nor their admiring readers, will always speak the disturbing language of Postmodernism. I cannot elaborate now on the pragmatic aspect of literary codes.

One of the issues in the debate on codes is their degree of rigidity. In his *Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco distinguished between strong and weak codes.<sup>8</sup> The

Morse code and the numerical system are examples of strong codes; in each there is a clear one-to-one relationship of signifier and signified. Other codes, such as certain types of symbolism in literary texts or connotative codes, are supposed to be weak. I do not believe that the distinction between strong and weak codes has been helpful. The problem with a code of connotations is not that one is relatively free to use it for encoding or decoding a text, but that one must know more of the pragmatic situation in which the potential signifier occurs before one can decide that the connotative code is applicable. A connotative code is based on rules as rigid as in other codes, but its validity is limited to a particular and rather restricted context. In the novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* of André Gide the term “dépersonnalisation” has a favourable connotation, but in his *Retour de l’U.R.S.S.* the connotation of the same term is negative.<sup>9</sup> The latter book, however, appeared many years after *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, referred to a different social context, and aimed at a different audience. In short, the pragmatic conditions of the connotation were completely different and the later connotation of “dépersonnalisation” did not interfere at all with the earlier use of the word.

Another objection that has been made to using the concept of code in the study of literature is that codes should be based — according to a definition of George A. Miller — on “prior agreement between the source and destination.”<sup>10</sup> It appears to me that this requirement can apply only to artificial codes, not to the codes of language, literature, manners, fashion, and other systems of verbal and non-verbal communication that are rooted in a long history of social behaviour. I am not at all inventing here a new usage of the term code. Let us recall that Virginia Woolf in her famous essay, “Mr.

Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) observes that the "code of manners" of the Edwardians is no longer accepted.<sup>11</sup> One year later, the Dutch novelist Carry van Bruggen wrote in her essay *Hedendaagsch Fetischisme* (Contemporary Fetishism) that language can be considered a code.<sup>12</sup> George Miller also called the English language a code, distinct from other codes such as French or German — in spite of his own definition.

Non-artificial codes do not rely on prior agreement between sender and receiver. The receiver, however, must learn the codes that are used in the community of which he is a part. In social communication most codes are subjected to some degree of gradual change, and it is useful to distinguish between the synchronic and diachronic study of codes. The diachronic aspect involves sign production — to which Umberto Eco has devoted much attention — and is of considerable importance for the study of literature. However, before going into the motives for sign production and code changing in literature, we must attempt to make the concept of code more concrete.

Lotman distinguished at least two codes; I, however, would suggest that there are at least five codes that are operative in virtually all literary texts (my five codes are quite different from the five codes distinguished by Roland Barthes<sup>13</sup>): 1. the linguistic code, which, for example, directs the reader to read the text as an English text; 2. the literary code, which predisposes the reader to read the text as a literary text, i.e. a text with a high degree of coherence, with obvious consequences for the production and acceptability of connotations and metaphors; 3. the generic code, which instructs the reader to activate certain expectations and to suppress others, depending on the genre that has been chosen; 4.



the period code or group code, which directs the reader to activate his knowledge of the conventions of a period or particular semiotic community; and 5. the idiolect of the author, which, insofar as it is distinguishable on the basis of recurrent features, also has the character of a code. At this point several questions can be raised, such as, how we should conceive the interrelationship between the five codes mentioned. Another question, of course, is, why these five codes and not less or more? Umberto Eco suggests that, in text production, each subsequent code further restricts the selection of semantic units and the rules for their combination that was possible on the basis of the preceding codes.<sup>14</sup> Thus the literary code restricts the options that are open under the regime of the linguistic code. The choice of a genre further restricts the options of the two preceding codes. The selection of a group code further restricts the range of options open under the three preceding codes. Finally, resorting to a particular idiolect limits the range of possible options once again. It is due largely to the habitual interests of the student of literature and the state of our discipline that I do not mention more than five codes, but the number is far from sacred. If one would conceive of more than these five codes, in principle their interrelationship would not change. Any additional code will further restrict the range of options the sender has in encoding his text.<sup>15</sup> It is in accordance with Jurij Lotman to conclude that the more codes the sender uses for encoding his text, the greater the amount of information the text contains. And, similarly, the greater the knowledge the recipient has of the codes that have determined the text, the more information he will be able to elicit from that text.

It is not at all certain, however, that a poet or writer

when he begins to write first picks a language, then decides to write in a literary way, next selects a genre, then joins a particular group or movement, and finally sets his idiolect free. He possibly takes all these decisions, but not necessarily in this order and not always in full awareness. Whatever the case, his final text is a product of a hyperselection, which can be fairly well represented by the model of the five interrelated codes that we have sketched. It cannot be maintained, however, that the selection process always takes place along lines which attribute more weight to the general decisions than to the specific ones; for instance, more to the choice of language than the selection of the various codes of literature.

Apart from making the selection more specific, the next step in the selection process may also jeopardize the earlier steps. The period code, for instance, not only restricts the options of the linguistic code but may also contravene the rules of the linguistic code. Likewise, the idiolect may to some extent contradict the conventions of the period code or genre code. The final individual decisions of the author may be the beginning of a new period, stretch the conventions of the genre, challenge the literary code and even go against the basic rules of language. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* provides the obvious example, but few literary texts have reacted against the existing conventions with similar vehemence. The fact that what we have presented as the later steps in the selection process may overrule earlier decisions, corresponds with our intuition that deviation from the standard language in literary texts cannot be considered a mistake, and also with the more general notion that creative innovation should be valued more highly than the correct cliché.

Please accept my apologies for this rather long and tedious explanation of the concept of codes in literature. Unwarranted simplification would not have been in the spirit of the Erasmus lectures. The concept of code in literature provides a clue to the writing of literary history, in particular the history of literature in various languages. Our distinction of five codes operative in literary texts now appears to be helpful. For it is not the linguistic code that yields much material for the writing of a literary history, nor the literary code, which predisposes the reader to look for coherence (and internal references and connotations based on the assumption of a strong coherence). The genre code, too, is still relatively stable throughout historical change; variations in the system of genres and subgenres coincide, however, with the rise of new period codes, or rather group codes. Therefore, I would suggest that the literary historian who wishes to come to any general observations, and possibly also explanations, should work with the concept of group code or sociocode, i.e. the code designed by a group of writers often belonging to a particular generation, literary movement or current, and acknowledged by their contemporary and later readers. Together, these writers and their readers form a semiotic community in the sense that the latter understand the texts produced by the former.

There are several reasons why the term period code is not very appropriate. First, it assumes a unilinear development of all literature, which is wrong, even if one tacitly restricted oneself to European and American literature. Not only are there Asian and African literatures which do not participate in the European periodization, but the quick succession and frequent coexistence of different avant-garde movements in twentieth-

century European literature in fact forbid the term period code and suggest its replacement by group code or sociocode. Second, the term period code obscures the simultaneous existence of avant-garde, canonized, and popular literature (*Trivialliteratur*), produced and read by different semiotic communities. The concept of period code tends to obfuscate the fact that, apart from the succession of avant-garde literature, older types of literature are still being read. The period code of Realism is supposed to have ended about 1880 or 1890, but there are still many readers of Flaubert and Tolstoy. The literary historian should create concepts to deal with such facts; the term sociocode may enable us to describe the protracted existence of codes that once were avant-garde but later became canonized or even trivial.

Literary history, then, can be described with reference to more or less dominant sociocodes, and in order to make more concrete what I have in mind, I will present a brief sketch of the syntactical aspects of the sociocode of Modernism. I shall mention the main conventions of Modernism, which are constraints on the options of the writer in the field of the syntactical and compositional arrangement of the text. In my next lecture I shall also discuss the Modernist preference for particular themes, in other words, the constraints on text semantics.

My view of Modernism has been very much inspired by Harry Levin's well-known article, "What Was Modernism," written in 1960, and coincides to a considerable extent with the concepts of Modernism in Peter Faulkner's little book *Modernism* (1977) and in David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977), but it rather differs from the position expressed in the collection of papers edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James

McFarlane under the title *Modernism 1890-1930*.<sup>16</sup> In my opinion Modernism as a forceful code in literary history begins in or about 1910, when, as Virginia Woolf noted, “human character changed,”<sup>17</sup> Larbaud’s novel *Fermina Márquez* was published in the *Nouvelle Revue française*, and Joyce’s *Dubliners* were waiting for publication. It is before World War I that Proust completes the first volume of his *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (1913) and Gide writes *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), known in English as *Lafcadio’s Adventures*. Much earlier Thomas Mann published his *Tonio Kröger* (1903), which in many respects anticipates the Modernism of *Der Zauberberg* (1924). Robert Musil began publishing his critical essays before World War I. In Holland Carry van Bruggen published her novel *Heleen* in 1913, which announces the Modernism of her later essays and *Eva* (1927). In general Dutch Modernism has a somewhat later start than French or English Modernism. It is not accidental that the very first traces of Modernism can be seen in France, where Symbolism originated, and was parodied from a Modernist point of view by André Gide in his *Paludes* as early as 1895. The sketches of *Monsieur Teste* by Paul Valéry, published one year later, describe a character that fully conforms to Modernist conventions: “une sorte d’animal intellectuel [...], capable de tout, dédaignant tout.”<sup>18</sup>

There is a basic difference between Realism on the one hand and Modernism on the other. “The Realist creates an epic world, by means of a comprehensive, encircling and inclusive narrative,”<sup>19</sup> writes Peter Demetz in one of the best studies of Realism. The Modernist does not try to be complete and lacks the certainty that would make him attempt to discover the laws governing human existence. Like Monsieur Teste, however, he is

an intellectual who never gives up thinking, even if he knows that the results of his deliberations can be only provisional. Therefore, he often presents them as hypotheses, as indeed Proust has done using hypotheses which repeatedly are qualified. In the description of Albertine, the hypothesis of absolute virtue is launched and subsequently amended. Proust writes: "Pour ce qui concerne l'hypothèse d'une vertu absolue [...], je ne laissai pas de la remanier à plusieurs reprises."<sup>20</sup> The poetical device of the hypothesis used by Proust was soon recognized, for instance, by Jacques Rivière who in 1920 in the *Nouvelle Revue française* expressed his admiration for Proust's dislike of obscurity. He observes that if Marcel does not know enough to characterize a person, he is to present his hypotheses: "faute de mieux il les peuplera de ses hypothèses."<sup>21</sup> Here the sender's code has been acknowledged and confirmed by a reader. Such confirmation by a critic is a crucial event in literary history, as it shows that communication on the basis of the new code has taken place. A new code that has never been acknowledged by an audience can hardly count as an important historical fact, and perhaps should not be called a code. Obviously, here is a role for reception history, which may help us to clarify when and in what respect new codes at first have been recognized. It may help us to detect the primary facts of historical change in literary communication. Similar facts of early acknowledgement of the Modernist code occurred, of course, in English literature; for instance, when in 1917, J.C. Squire in the *New Statesman* hailed the author of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* for his intellectual integrity, sharp insight and "detachment."<sup>22</sup> In The Netherlands the recognition of Modernism occurs somewhat later but perhaps clearer than anywhere else;

in the early 1930s Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron express their admiration for an array of Modernists, such as Thomas Mann, Gide, Proust, Larbaud, Joyce, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf and Pirandello, ostensibly regarding them as a group with which they would like to identify themselves.

The major convention of Modernism with regard to the composition of literary texts is the selection of hypothetical constructions expressing uncertainty and provisionality. It affects the relations between the text and other factors of the communication situation, as well as the organization of the text itself.

(a) With respect to the relation between text and author it is a Modernist convention to consider *the text as not being definite*. As Paul Valéry said: "Un poème n'est jamais achevé."<sup>23</sup> After having completed his *Confessions of Zeno* (1923), Italo Svevo continued to write stories which were published in English as *Further Confessions of Zeno*. If the text cannot be considered definite and complete, the notion of the ending becomes a relative one. In principle, any text, the Modernists believe, can be continued, precisely as Edouard, the main character in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, puts down in his diary; he wishes to finish the novel he is writing with the words: "pourrait être continué."<sup>24</sup> This explains the Modernist preference for the diary or quasi-diary, which ends *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as well as Du Perron's *Het Land van Herkomst* (Country of Origin). In fact, the last pages of Du Perron's novel contain a letter, asking for an answer which we never see. Apparently, the text is never completed, and can always be continued, qualified, improved, — even revoked.

This attitude also has repercussions on the organization of the text. We have already mentioned the diary

with its suggestion of continuation as a means of camouflaging the ending. We must further point to the lack of well-constructed plots in Modernist texts, to the reliance on rather arbitrary intrigues — often borrowed from the available stock of myths — and to the stylistic devices of enumeration and continuing qualification. All these devices express provisionality, both at the level of the sentence and of the text. They are based on intellectual experiments which defer any final conclusion.

(b) As to the relation between text and social context, the Modernist preference for hypothesis forbids any sort of law-like explanation of human behaviour as was common in Realism. One remembers Virginia Woolf's criticism of the Edwardians as being "materialists."<sup>25</sup> The polemics between André Gide and Maurice Barrès is also of importance in this respect and I intend to go into that dispute in the next lecture. In Modernism the relation between text and represented world is characterized by the convention of *epistemological doubt*. There is no pretension that the text indeed describes the world it aims to describe, nor that the explanations it gives are more than an approximation of truth. With regard to the organization of the text this implies a preference for the continuing flow of the stream-of-consciousness, which never aims at a definite result and even less at general validity. The tendency towards epistemological doubt has implications with respect to the intrigue, such as Gide's playing with unmotivated action (*l'acte gratuit*), and Thomas Mann's resorting to lengthy, essaylike dialogue. The composition of the text is very much determined by the opposition of conscious deliberation on the one hand, and action dictated by the natural and social environment on the other, with an ob-



vious preference for the first.

(c) With respect to the relation between text and code, it is a Modernist convention to resort to *metalingual comment*, that is, to discuss the codes used, either in the text itself or on other occasions. As Robert Alter has shown, this type of self-reflexivity also occurred before the Modernist period. It acquires, however, considerable importance in the Modernist code, where it leads Gide to write a *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, in which he discusses the writing of his novel. It motivates Thomas Mann to comment on his major novels. It makes Virginia Woolf discuss her fiction in her diary and letters. It causes Du Perron and Ter Braak to engage in a correspondence that — precisely in view of this Modernist convention of metalingual comment — may be considered as belonging to the corpus that provides material for literary history. The metalingual discourse of the Modernists may pertain to all five codes mentioned earlier: the linguistic code (cf. James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Thomas Mann, Carry van Bruggen), as well as the literary code (Menno ter Braak, for instance, argued that the boundaries of literature are or should be shifting, and he quotes H.L. Mencken in support of this view<sup>26</sup>). The metalingual comment may also refer to the generic code (an obvious example is Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, but also Du Perron's *Country of Origin*), or to the sociocode (Virginia Woolf discussed her affinity with the "Georgians," Lytton Strachey, Joyce and Eliot, and her criticism of the "Edwardians," Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells;<sup>27</sup>Gide's *Prétextes* (1903) provides similar examples, as does the correspondence of Ter Braak and Du Perron). It also happens that the idiolect was made object of metalingual discussion: both Gide and Thomas Mann discussed their own intentions.

So did Ter Braak and Du Perron, who moreover reflected on their differences: "I believe," wrote Ter Braak, "that Stendhal is your 'Urbild' and Nietzsche mine."<sup>28</sup>

Indeed the significance of Nietzsche for Modernism can hardly be overestimated. His influence is great in the work of Musil, Thomas Mann, Larbaud, Gide, Paul Valéry, Carry van Bruggen, and Ter Braak. His *Sprachskepsis*, reinforced by Bergson's philosophy of language, lies at the basis of the Modernist convention of metalingual considerations, which underline the provisionality of all that can be said. Nietzsche disclaimed the possibility of the adequate use of language: "die Forderung einer adäquaten Ausdrucksweise ist unsinnig."<sup>29</sup> This attitude may also be discerned in the organization of Modernist texts. They easily shift from one register to another, as happens in *Barnabooth*, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, *Ulysses*, and *Country of Origin*. The belief that adequate expression was impossible prevented the Modernists from indulging in linguistic experiments of the sort the Futurists, Expressionists and Surrealists had undertaken.

(d) Last but not least, the Modernists assigned a rather important role to the reader. Gide paid explicit attention to the reader when he, on the last page of his *Paludes*, provided a blank space for writing down "les phrases les plus remarquables de *Paludes*."<sup>30</sup> The *respect for the idiosyncrasies of the reader* became a Modernist convention which, as will be shown in our next lecture, also appears from the textual organization.

## **II. Modernist Hypotheses: Literary Conventions in Gide, Larbaud, Thomas Mann, Ter Braak, and Du Perron**

In my previous lecture I discussed the Modernist preference for hypothetical constructions, specifying the main compositional and syntactical conventions as (a) the presentation of the text as not being definite or complete (b) epistemological doubt with respect to the possibility of representing and explaining reality, (c) metalingual scepticism as to the possibility of expressing adequately whatever knowledge about the world one thinks to have found, and finally (d) respect for the idiosyncrasies of the reader, or the idea that reading is a private affair upon which even the writer should not intrude. This made Valéry Larbaud describe the act of reading as an unpunished vice, “ce vice impuni.” Gide was even more explicit and wrote, as early as 1895: “Il suffit qu’il y ait possibilité de généralisation; la généralisation, c’est au lecteur, au critique de la faire.”<sup>31</sup> The artist creates only the possibility of generalization, the generalization itself is up to the reader, to the critic.

All four points can be elaborated, and it would be worthwhile doing so, in particular as they also seem to form a good starting point for our discussion of Post-modernism. Today, however, I shall focus mainly on the issues of epistemological doubt and metalingual comment, which so strikingly set Modernism off from Realism as well as Symbolism, and also provide an approach to the study of Modernist semantics.

In *Le Traité du Narcisse* (1891) Gide still presented

a Symbolist poetics. He called the work of art a crystal, something self-sufficient, that cannot be affected by the vicissitudes of historical change: “paradis partiel ou l’Idée refléurit en sa pureté supérieure.”<sup>32</sup> Four years later, in his *Paludes*, Gide abandoned the Symbolist poetics he had helped shape. He denied that there could be an untouchable, superior idea and derided the use of symbols. The epistemological issue comes to the surface where Angèle comments: “Il n’y a plus de vérité du tout, puisque vous arrangez les faits comme il vous plaît.”<sup>33</sup> We hear the same criticism thirty years later in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*: the Symbolists did not want to know life, denied life, turned their back on life.<sup>34</sup> *Paludes* is built on the theme that resignation will lead to fossilization. Gide proposes “révolte” as an alternative to “acceptation,” travel is to replace immobility, the open window is considered as superior to the stuffy room. In *Paludes* the first traces of a Modernist semantic universe become visible.

Somewhat more complex was Gide’s criticism of Realism, which goes back to the last years of the nineteenth century, when he had read Maurice Barrès’ novel *Les Déracinés* (1897). In opposition to Barrès’ over-appreciation of family ties and fatherland, Gide praised again the notion of travelling, which provides the joy of no longer feeling attached, of not having any roots: “la joie qu’il y aurait à ne plus sentir d’attaches, de racines si vous préférez.”<sup>35</sup> Gide took a position completely opposite to that of Barrès by advocating “dépaysement (physique ou intellectuel),” “déracinement,”<sup>36</sup> and “détachement.”<sup>37</sup> His argument is strikingly similar to that of James Joyce who in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* described Stephen’s emancipation from the ties of home, fatherland and church,

and with Virginia Woolf's criticism of the "materialist" Edwardians. The early polemics between Gide and Barrès, which became known under the somewhat odd name "Querelle du peuplier,"<sup>38</sup> had serious political overtones. In the polemics, Charles Maurras, the founder of the Action Française and later collaborator of Pétain, sided with Barrès. Gide showed that a choice had to be made between provincial determinism and intellectual freedom, between narrow-minded nationalism and a cosmopolitan concept of culture. In fact, Gide fought against the ideological basis of the later National Socialism, and this confirms his significance as a thinker and a writer. He was one of the first to criticize a form of *Heimat*-ideology. His remarkable story *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* (1899), of which the title is polemical as well, continues his argument for attempting to conceive of a way of life that is not determined by natural or social conditions. In his view, man is human insofar as he is not conditioned by his natural environment or social background. Like William James, whom he admired,<sup>39</sup> Gide thinks in terms of an opposition between consciousness on the one hand, and natural and social conditions on the other.<sup>40</sup>

In this context the problem of free will, which in Gide's work is related to *l'acte gratuit*, is of paramount importance. It has a strong bearing on the concept of Modernism, and the concept of Postmodernism, too, can be discussed in terms of free will, namely, an excess of free will. In fact, the dilemma of free will is expressed by Alexandre in Gide's *Paludes*: "Il me semble, Monsieur, que ce que vous appelez acte libre, ce serait, d'après vous, un acte ne dépendant de rien; suivez-moi: détachable — remarquez ma progression: supprimable, — et ma conclusion: sans valeur."<sup>41</sup> This is a rather

adequate summary of what Gide had to say about the *acte gratuit*, the unmotivated and therefore also superfluous action. The rest is elaboration, further consideration, qualification. The idea haunted Gide for more than forty years, and yet it is impossible to say whether he ever advocated the *acte gratuit* or whether he believed that it was possible. In his discussion of the free, gratuitous act, Gide was a Modernist launching his hypotheses without giving a final judgment. As he explained in the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, the artist should not imitate what nature proposes, but should propose to nature what it might imitate.<sup>42</sup> This view is indicative of the wide rift between Realism on the one hand, and Modernism on the other. The text is seen as a hypothesis which is to be confirmed by reality.

It is tempting to trace the development of the concept of *l'acte gratuit* through Gide's work, from *Paludes* and *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné*, to his comment in *Prétextes* on Kirilov's suicide in Dostoevsky's *Possessed*, to the unmotivated crime of Lafcadio in *Les Caves du Vatican* and the Russian roulette in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. The gratuitous act has been studied by others, but to my knowledge not in its contrast to the determinism of Realism. The theme of intellectual freedom, in particular the topos of the gratuitous act, is a distinctive feature of Modernism. Valéry Larbaud deals with it in *Barnabooth* where he describes an experiment with kleptomania as an "action indifférente."<sup>43</sup> The influence of Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* is unmistakable in *Barnabooth*, as it is in the work of Gide. In *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, however, the concept of the gratuitous act is broadened to an ethical principle of far greater scope, and we will conclude our discussion of Gide by trying to characterize that principle of ethical behaviour.

It may be surprising to interpret *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* as an argument for a particular ethics. Not only has the novel been criticized for not being anchored in reality or verisimilitude,<sup>44</sup> but it has been plainly rejected as “un livre haïssable, une oeuvre [...] désagréablement immorale.”<sup>45</sup> In The Netherlands there was similar negative criticism, mainly based on arguments indigenous to a Realistic world view. Matthijs Vermeulen wrote in *De Gids* of 1927: “I cannot accept that all French lycéens are amoral bandits, who possess the cunning, impenitence and insolence of old, experienced criminals. I just read this week that a seventeen year old lycéen from Paris has beaten the English champion in swimming. [...] I must laugh when I think what contrast he makes with Gide’s degenerate gang, which indulges in all sorts of common and uncommon prostitution, steals letters from their fathers’ mistresses, blackmails the parents with these letters and circulates counterfeit money.”<sup>46</sup> What kind of ethical lesson is one to learn from such a book?

Nevertheless, Gide’s criticism of the Symbolists as having produced only an aesthetics and not an ethics,<sup>47</sup> is indicative of his own ethical concerns. His ethics is based on relativism. One of the characters considers the sinister paradox that each time a person sacrifices himself for others, he should be valued higher than they.<sup>48</sup> It appears that Bernard comes close to Gide’s own position, with which we are acquainted through the *Journal*. Bernard argues “que rien n’est bon pour tous, mais seulement par rapport à certains; que rien n’est vrai pour tous, mais seulement par rapport à qui le croit tel; qu’il n’est méthode ni théorie qui soit applicable indifféremment à chacun; que si, pour agir, il nous faut choisir, du moins nous avons libre choix.”<sup>49</sup> Bernard

knows that one is not always free to choose. He then observes that the most important thing in life is to maintain one's authenticity by a *personal* consideration of the factors which determine a decision: "Je voudrais, tout le long de ma vie, au moindre choc, rendre un son pur, probe, authentique."<sup>50</sup> This is all Gide has to offer, but perhaps it is a good deal. The rejection of an ethics that is valid for everyone means that everyone is to design his own ethics, which must be reworded for every new situation. Gide does not offer a ready-made solution for ethical problems, but lays the responsibility for ethical behaviour at the door of the person who is to act. This is strikingly similar to his concept of reading. The interpretation of his novel is up to the reader. The writer has only provided the possibility for interpretation. The reader may do whatever he wishes, he may add or leave out — it does not matter. *Tant pis* for the lazy reader, but Gide is not interested in him; he desires other readers. "Inquiéter," he says, "tel est mon rôle."<sup>51</sup> The question may arise as to what Bernard's ideal of authenticity is; but that, too, is a problem to be solved by the reader. The precise semantic load of authenticity will differ from person to person. Gide's appeal to the reader to draw his own conclusions discharges him of the necessity to fill in every empty spot. The code of Modernism provides a justification for *Leerstellen*.

Let us further examine the relation between Gide's ethics and his poetics. It was his aim in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* to develop a relativistic ethics on the basis of the principle that "nothing is good for everyone." Every human being must find his own solution to his relation with his fellow human beings. This attitude alone can be called pure or authentic. Similarly, in the field of epistemology: "Nothing is true for everyone," says Ber-



nard. "There is no method, nor a theory which is applicable under all circumstances." With respect to poetics this means that no story is equally valid for everyone, and that there is no one single way of telling a story. The definite and complete description of reality, valid under all circumstances and for all readers, is impossible. This explains Gide's need for continuing metalingual comment, qualifying the texts already written and avoiding the finality of a definite ending. The specific form of a text can be considered adequate only from a particular point of view and in a particular context of time and place. If the moment for which it was created has passed, the text needs comment or rewriting. The aim of authenticity — Bernard's ideal — is closely connected with a sense of history, with the awareness of a personal, momentary and unique experience.

One may wonder whether Gide is so important as a Modernist writer that I should pay so much attention to him as I do. I think he is, and he certainly is from the perspective of Dutch Modernism. Both Du Perron and Ter Braak, the authors who are the central figures of Dutch Modernism, closely followed the French scene and were admirers of Gide. They knew much less of English literature. We cannot even be certain that Ter Braak ever read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although Du Perron did.<sup>52</sup> We know, however, that both were rather critical of the Joycean experiment in *Ulysses*. In The Netherlands Joyce was imitated by Vestdijk in his novel *Meneer Visser's Hellevaart* (Mr. Visser's Descent into Hell). This irritated Du Perron to such an extent that in a letter from Paris — where he lived — he charged his friend Ter Braak to discuss the matter with Vestdijk. On July 5, 1934, Ter Braak reported back to Du Perron: "He accepted your observa-

tion concerning the imitation of Joyce, and seemed to agree, but in the meantime he had almost again completed another novel, which, as I wrote earlier, indeed does not resemble Joyce, but rather Larbaud."<sup>53</sup> The new novel by Vestdijk to which Ter Braak referred must have been *Terug tot Ina Damman* (Back to Ina Damman), which, like Larbaud's *Fermina Márquez*, describes the life of schoolchildren and their first sensations of love. However, it seems to have been inspired much more by Proust than by Larbaud.<sup>54</sup>

For various reasons, Valery Larbaud became Du Perron's model, in particular, his work that came to be known as *Barnabooth*, but which was published in 1913 as *A. O. Barnabooth, Ses Oeuvres complètes, c'est-à-dire un Conte, ses Poésies et son Journal intime*. Eddy du Perron, the son of wealthy parents who had returned to Europe from the Dutch East Indies shortly after World War I, recognized much of himself in the Latin-American multimillionaire Archibald Olson Barnabooth, who — economically independent thanks to an annual income of 10 million pounds sterling interest — travels through Europe in pursuit of intellectual experiments and freedom. Indeed, in 1908 Gide advised Larbaud to call Barnabooth's diary, "le journal d'un homme libre."<sup>55</sup> Although Larbaud ignored the advice, the theme of freedom in the Modernist sense of independence and intellectual detachment is central to the "Journal intime." The point is that Barnabooth often feels his wealth as a burden. People do not believe that a multimillionaire can think. For the popular press the combination of original ideas and millions of pounds appears an impossibility. Barnabooth feels the danger of becoming a slave to his possessions, and in his own way he fights the economic determinism that was also

criticized by André Gide and Virginia Woolf.

It would be wrong, however, to focus exclusively on the “Journal intime” and to isolate it from his *Oeuvres complètes*. The combination of the story about “Le pauvre Chemisier,” the poetry in free verse, and the diary in these so-called “complete works” gave Larbaud an opportunity to describe his hero from different angles. The narrative mode is explicitly mentioned as a problem. When in “Le pauvre Chemisier” the character Barnabooth is introduced, the narrator explains that he prefers to talk of himself in the third person: “Je préfère parler de moi à la troisième personne, c’est plus convenable.”<sup>56</sup> In the poetry and the “Journal,” however, the first person is used. The differing narrative modes and the different genres provide the kaleidoscopic view that is characteristic of Modernism. Barnabooth is not identical with Larbaud himself, not only because he undertakes things which have only been imagined by the author, but also because the portrayal of a person never can show the complete truth about the living person.

Epistemological doubt is very much present in the *Oeuvres complètes*, but perhaps even more important is the metalingual scepticism. The text, including the poetry, is never fully adequate, and the reader is advised not to be content with what he reads but to look for what transpires from it in spite of the poet’s efforts: “Prenez donc tout de moi: le sens de ces poèmes,/Non ce qu’on lit, mais ce qui paraît au travers malgré moi.”<sup>57</sup> In the diary there are explicit comments on earlier sections, which are characterized, for instance, as “de pauvres paradoxes d’écolier.”<sup>58</sup> The metalingual comment is motivated by an uncertainty rising from the awareness that absolute correctness may be a norm, but can never materialize. Barnabooth is afraid of finding more and

more certitude in writing and would regard such a development as fatal: "Alors j'écrirai 'je' sans hésiter, croyant savoir qui c'est. Cela est fatal, comme la mort."<sup>59</sup> Doubt is preferred to certainty, the first is equated with life, the second with death. This is typical of Modernist semantics.

After the publication of the complete works of Barnabooth and his earlier novel *Fermina Márquez*, Larbaud occupied himself primarily with international literary traffic, for example, in his function of editor of the journal *Commerce*. Just as Barnabooth listened to his friends Putouarey and Stéphane, Larbaud paid much attention to the work of others; he read and translated Samuel Butler, Walt Whitman, Joyce, and Svevo. His interpretations, introductions and translations are the products of an exemplary cosmopolitan spirit. Here, too, I see a Modernist aspect: the Modernist role of detached observation is close to that of being an intermediary. The Modernist does not see the text as final, but looks for the dialogue and expects comment. The boundaries of the text, of the genre, and even of literature are violated.

In 1923 Eddy du Perron read *Barnabooth* during a journey through Italy. Repeatedly Du Perron conceded that he felt he had much in common with Larbaud and also physically resembled him. Apart from this, it is Larbaud's preference for the clarity of the common word that impressed Du Perron. He experienced the relativism and *Sprachskepsis* in *Barnabooth* as an antidote, both to the neologisms of Dutch sensitivism ("het Nieuwe Gids-jargon") and the absolutist pretensions of Marinetti, Cubism, Surrealism, and Dadaism. In the 1920s the latter were often grouped together as "modernism," a term used in a somewhat different way than I

propose to do now. It appears from his correspondence with Paul van Ostaïjen, the Flemish poet, that Du Perron in his early career as a writer took some interest in a modernism that borders on Cubism. In 1929 he stated in an interview that he had also wanted to be modern and that he still considered the modernism of the 1920s to be a healthy illness.<sup>60</sup> After his cubo-modernist interest, Du Perron took quite another course. Deeply impressed by Larbaud and Gide, he wrote the novel *Een Voorbereiding* (A Preparation), first published in 1927 and rewritten in 1928. It imitates many of the tricks *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* also has — it is a novel about a writer, who writes a novel and discusses his work in a diary which is extensively quoted. I prefer to proceed, however, immediately to Du Perron's major work, *Country of Origin*, for which I use the English title under which it may be known one day in the Anglo-Saxon world. A translation has been finished and is in the hands of an American University Press. One can also read *Het Land van Herkomst*, first published in 1935, in French. In 1980 it was published as *Le Pays d'origine*, in an excellent translation by Philippe Noble and with a preface by André Malraux, who served as a model for one of the main characters in the novel.

*Country of Origin* is partly based on memories of the Dutch East Indies, where Du Perron spent the first twenty years of his life, but in truly Modernist fashion it also describes the process of recovering and reporting these memories. There is a resemblance to Proust's undertaking, but Du Perron adds geographical and cultural distance, and is fully aware of the political situation of his time. The book has chapters devoted to the years in East India and to his European experiences, but they interfere, especially where he describes the workings of

his memory and reports on the faithfulness and modality of precision of his recollections. Both the epistemological doubt and the metalingual scepticism are fully present in this lengthy novel, which I consider one of the major texts of Modernism. Like *Barnabooth* and *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, it is not an autobiography. The character that most resembles Du Perron is named Ducroo. As in these other novels, the narrator is aware of "the untruth of all chronology."<sup>61</sup> Where chronology fails, consciousness is to order the material, and precisely in order to underline the important role of consciousness, the laws of chronology are violated. There are a few instances where Du Perron describes (reconstructs) moments of "mémoire involontaire." There is a continuous opposition between chronology and achronological awareness. Within the achronological consciousness there is another opposition between personal experience on the one hand and the upheaval of contemporary political events on the other.

Through the visit to Ducroo of Wijdenes, a character modelled on Ter Braak, the threat of National Socialism is reported in the novel, and so are the rather confused political developments, strikes and demonstrations in Paris during the years 1933-34. Marxism is a more frequent topic of discussion than National Socialism. Here the position of Héverlé, a rather accurate representation of Malraux, is interesting. Héverlé, the Marxist and man of action, confesses to living without memories. Ducroo's position is exactly the opposite. Ducroo uses his memories to resist the schematization of the future. Héverlé urges him to join a political party, but Ducroo hesitates and faces the dilemma in terms of the qualifications of an active consciousness on the one hand and the schematization of a promised fu-

ture on the other: "At this moment nothing seems to me to be so poor a solution as to devote oneself to a part of humanity, called a party, which wants to occupy a particular position. To have no time any more for qualifications, to sacrifice everything to the idea of 'getting there,' a goal that again and again turns out to be only 'temporary'! To be a *human being* only, for instance, as a communist, to find oneself back as a human being only through Marx."<sup>62</sup> Ducroo decides to remain loyal to himself — and he adds a particular Modernist phrase: "This so delicate and endlessly variable self."<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, he is fully aware of the fact that political forces may want to destroy him. He does not resign himself to such a fate, however, and, again in a typically Modernist train of thought, adds: "Let us keep open other possibilities."<sup>64</sup>

In his preface to the French translation Malraux observed that Ducroo remained rather unaffected by the conditions under which he lived, whether in the East Indies or in Brussels and Paris, whether living in wealth, or, when he had lost everything, working for his daily bread. In Malraux's words, "Les décors le touchent peu," and "Il est dans un constant détachement en face d'un monde d'apparences."<sup>65</sup> Here, Malraux hits on the Modernist convention of anti-determinism, which made Barnabooth say: "les événements ne peuvent rien sur nous."<sup>66</sup> This detachment, which Malraux considered characteristic of Du Perron, is a distinctive feature of Modernism, and is in contrast to Malraux's own novels, in contrast to Existentialism, and, of course, Socialist Realism.

One may wonder whether Thomas Mann shares this disengagement. He certainly does in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918). It was only a few

weeks before Hitler came to power that Thomas Mann in an open letter expressed the conviction “dass der geistige Mensch bürgerlicher Herkunft heute auf die Seite des Arbeiters und der sozialen Demokratie gehört.”<sup>67</sup> This, however, is a political statement and did not affect his artistic production, including *Doktor Faustus*—with the exception, as Elrud Ibsch has shown, of certain judgments by Serenus Zeitblom and the very last lines of the novel.<sup>68</sup> In *Der Zauberberg* (1924) and later works Thomas Mann is evidently a Modernist. He explained his poetics as follows: “Schön ist Entschlossenheit. Aber das eigentlich fruchtbare, das produktive und also das künstlerische Prinzip nennen wir den Vorbehalt.”<sup>69</sup> Intellectual reservations, detachment, and irony characterize Mann’s idiolect. He feels congenial to Gide and, after having read Harry Levin’s book on *James Joyce*, comes to the conclusion that there are also profound similarities between Joyce and himself. Their common basis is their aim to destroy the “reality” of the Realistic novel.<sup>70</sup>

In 1935, Menno ter Braak observed this anti-Realism in *Der Zauberberg* (1924): “Those, who insist on reading *Der Zauberberg* as a realistic novel of life in Davos, cannot escape disillusion.”<sup>71</sup> Many readers, argued Ter Braak, make the mistake of beginning to read this novel with antiquated conceptions of the novel in mind. Indeed, Modernism had changed the existing norms of the generic system; the novel had partly given way to the essay, the primary form of intellectual consideration. Ter Braak recognized the metalingual scepisis in Thomas Mann’s works, and with evident agreement quoted Mann’s view that truth does not coincide with particular words: “Die Wahrheit [...] fällt nicht mit einem bestimmten Wortlaut zusammen, — vielleicht



sogar ist das ihr Haupt-Kriterium.”<sup>72</sup> Of course, Nietzsche had expressed himself in a similar way, and if Ter Braak admires Thomas Mann and André Gide, it is partly a tribute to Nietzsche. Apart from many longer and shorter essays, Ter Braak wrote also two novels, one of which, *Hampton Court* (1931), was criticized for being an “unsuccessful pastiche of Proust.”<sup>73</sup> Ter Braak, however, confessed he had never read Proust. By then, however, the devices of Modernism were rather well-known, whether through Proust or Mann or Gide or Joyce or Virginia Woolf. *Hampton Court* begins with a *monologue intérieur* which reduces time to the awareness of a split second, and has several moments where the *mémoire involontaire* does its work. Andreas, the protagonist, emancipates himself from the bonds of love, but also from the predictable workings of cynicism. At the end of the book we find a change of register with ironic implications expressing metalingual scepticism.

The material I have dealt with is rather diverse. Surely, induction seldom leads anywhere and should be used only for didactic purposes. Let me now jump to conclusions and present a rough model of the semantic universe, in which the Modernists felt at home.

Our model is to visualize what in fact are certain preferred options of the mind. As in the case of the syntactical aspects of the Modernist code, also its semantics is set up in contrast to other codes, mainly Realism and Symbolism. It also differs sharply from the coexisting code of Surrealism. Any semantic universe can be thought to be divided into segments, segments which consist of large semantic fields or groups of semantic fields. Whereas, in principle, everyone has access to all of these segments and the semantic information they contain, a person can only handle this information if he

has learned the necessary semantic code.

Apart from the possibility of having no knowledge of particular segments of the semantic universe, there also is the possibility that a person (writer or reader) will consider certain segments as being irrelevant, and others of crucial importance. His view of the world implies a certain hierarchy of semantic segmentation. For the Modernists, the center of the semantic universe consists of the notion of awareness, which we can view as a semantic field containing several related words— words having the semantic feature [+awareness] in common —, among them the lexemes “awareness,” “consciousness,” “deliberation,” “thinking,” “intellectual,” etc.

To specify the hierarchy of the Modernist semantic universe we may use the metaphor of concentric circles. The semantic field of *awareness* can be thought to occupy the space enclosed by the first of three concentric circles around the “I,” the thinking subject, or, as Du Perron said, “this so delicate and endlessly variable self.” The second circle should enclose the semantic field of *detachment*, accomodating words such as “separation,” “departure,” “depersonalization,” or in French: “dépersonnalisation,” “déracinement,” or in German: “Vorbehalt.” The third concentric circle encloses the semantic field of *observation*, containing words such as “observation,” “perception,” “view,” “window,” etc. Of course, the Modernists also show a preference for words which belong to two or all three of these semantic fields: “intelligent,” “subtle,” “experiment,” “hypothesis,” “adventure.” The list can be extended, but I must restrict myself to one more addition: the metaphor “kaleidoscope,” which one finds in Proust, Musil, Carry van Bruggen, and elsewhere, has the semantic features of [+observation, +detachment,

+change, –finality/ and is particularly characteristic of the Modernist preferences.

The three concentric circles form a first zone, which is at the top of the semantic hierarchy in all Modernist texts. There is a second zone which consists of a number of neutral semantic fields, which can be arranged in conformity with the rules of the idiolect of the various writers. Finally, there is a third zone which comprises semantic fields which in all Modernist texts are at the bottom of the semantic hierarchy. The semantic fields of *religion* and *nature*, which were at the top of the Symbolist semantic universe, belong to this third zone in Modernism: they have a negative connotation or are simply not used. The semantic fields of *agriculture*, *industrial production*, and *economy*, which occupy a rather important place in Realist texts, also belong to this third zone in the Modernist universe, although an exception must be made for the speculative aspects of the economy characterized by adventure and personal risk. Speculation in securities, banking and inheritance are subjects which are dealt with rather extensively by Larbaud, Paul Valéry, Svevo, Pessoa, and Du Perron.

Modernism has introduced a number of topics which were rarely or never treated in Realist or Symbolist texts. The semantic field of *sexuality* (including homosexuality) is a Modernist acquisition. The semantic fields of *psychology*, *science* and *technology* were expanded. In Modernist texts, words belonging to the field of *criminality* acquire a neutral, or even positive connotation, namely [+adventure, +consciousness/.

One may wonder whether this is more than pure speculation, and whether any testing is at all possible. Word counts may lead to some confirmation or refutation, although one should not blindly believe in the rele-

vance of statistical data with respect to literary texts. Contrastive analysis, for instance, of Realist and Modernist texts, Symbolist and Modernist texts, may provide some further ground for testing. Our concept of the structure of a semantic universe may be confirmed by psycholinguistics, in particular, research into the organization of memory. The production of new codes in literature provides an argument against the linguistic determinism of the Sapir-Whorf thesis and can be explained in terms of the dual-coding theory of Allan Paivio, based on research in the field of long-term memory for linguistic and non-linguistic events.<sup>74</sup> The role of perception, irrespective of the linguistic and literary codes in use, should not be underestimated. Independent perceptual coding provides the basis for metalingual considerations and made Thomas Mann define truth as something that does not coincide with a particular phrasing. The awareness that the world differs from our verbal representation of it may explain the attempt to design new codes, which we notice throughout literary history.

By now, we can be rather certain that the organization of Modernist texts is basically different from that of Realist and Symbolist texts. It is tempting to describe that difference as precisely as possible, and the concept of sociocode can help us to do that.

### **III. Postmodernist Impossibilities: Literary Conventions in Borges, Barthelme, Robbe-Grillet, Hermans, and others**

It seems quite appropriate that the certitude with which I could deal with the hypothetical constructions and semantic preferences of Modernism, shrinks considerably when I come to my last topic: international Postmodernism and its reflection in Dutch literature. Let me raise some of the problems what we encounter. (1) The problem of continuity versus discontinuity: does Postmodernism provide a break with the past or is it merely a continuation of the more extreme aspects of Modernism? If this is a historical problem, there is also a geographical one, namely, (2) Where are the boundaries of Postmodernism? And where did it originate? The latter question is closely related to (3) the semiotic problem of whether one should distinguish between various branches of the Postmodernist code, or rather take them together at a higher level of abstraction.

If we treated these preliminary questions carefully, there would be no time for going into a description of what I propose to call the hard core of Postmodernism, which consists of texts written by Borges, Cortázar, García Márquez, Barth, Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon, Fowles, Butor, Robbe-Grillet, Calvino, Handke, Bernhard, Rosei, and others. Let me add immediately that not all of their work bears the hallmark of the Postmodernist code, but the texts that I will quote certainly do. In The Netherlands, Postmodernist devices can be

found in the writings of Willem Frederik Hermans, Cees Nooteboom, Gerrit Krol and Léon de Winter, and possibly other writers, such as Sybren Polet and Gerrit Komrij, but within the scope of this paper I have to restrict myself to the most evident cases.

As to the relation between Modernism and Postmodernism, I will try to show in what respects Postmodernism *departs* from Modernism; I am interested in the difference, but will never be able to prove that the discontinuity is more important than the continuity, or the continuity more important than the discontinuity. The argument by Frank Kermode and Gerald Graff for continuity is always won, if one selects a level of abstraction that enables one to see more similarities than dissimilarities.<sup>75</sup> My interest in the difference is justified by the historical fact that many writers and readers believe they see a difference — although from a great historical or geographical distance, say a thousand years from now, or from the point of view of contemporary Chinese readers studying Western literature, the difference between *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, between Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* and Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le Labyrinthe*, Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull* and Borges' story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" may hardly be relevant and not worthwhile devoting much reflection to.

It can be argued that Postmodernism is the first literary code that originated in America and influenced European literature, with the possibility that the writer who contributed more than anyone else to the invention and acceptance of the new code is Jorge Luis Borges, active as a writer of fiction since the 1930s. His stories were first translated into French in 1952 under the title *Labyrinthes*, and ten years later also into English. Borges, who usually is considered to be highly original,

strikingly exemplifies the problem of continuity and discontinuity by translating Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (in 1937). Borges' preference for this novel, which makes its principal character not only change sex but also live several hundreds of years, is closely linked to his own imaginative treatment of time, which has set a paradigm for Postmodernism. Whatever the case, the context of Dutch literature which we are discussing is no longer European, but Atlantic or international.

It also could be argued, however, that the *Nouveau roman* is a tributary of the code of Postmodernism, providing another instance that rather similar literary codes can be invented simultaneously or almost simultaneously at different places. Perhaps Postmodernism was born independently in France and in Latin America; in either case it became a powerful code through its acceptance in North America, from where it influenced the later development in the *Nouveau roman* which, in turn, affected the work of Italo Calvino. It is unclear how the sudden and rather recent production of Postmodernist texts in the German language came about. Even if some future comparatist proved the influence of the *Nouveau roman* or American Postmodernism, the popularity of Peter Handke, Botho Strauss, Peter Rosei, and Thomas Bernhard (born in The Netherlands but an Austrian writer) will not have been explained. The German and Austrian Postmodernist writers are a group apart. The autogenetic aspect of their code seems more important than what they learned from foreign examples, and yet they found solutions in their writings which show a striking similarity to solutions that were found in France or America. This leads inevitably to the question of to what extent historical and social conditions restrict the options open to the writer and pave the way for the rise of

typological similarities, as defined by Viktor Žirmunskij and Dionýz Ďurišin.<sup>76</sup>

In an attempt to view Postmodernism as a code dominating all of Western literature since the 1950s, one may want to look at its outer fringes, such as Concrete Poetry, so well described by Mary Ann Solt, and Pop Literature, which Leslie Fiedler and Jost Hermand have regarded as part of the mainstream of post-war literary production.<sup>77</sup> Also the relation to the Absurd Theater, to Beckett and Ionesco, should be determined. Postulating one literary code for the post-war period, however, may make us blind to the differences between the various branches of which it supposedly consists, and also to other codes that lead a protracted existence: Realism, Surrealism, Dada. Since the semiotician Luis Prieto was unable to decide on such a simple question as to whether or not traffic lights and the round red shield with a white bar signifying “do not enter” belong to the same code,<sup>78</sup> I may perhaps be forgiven for deferring a decision on whether the Absurd Theater, Concrete Poetry and Pop Literature should be included in a description of the code of Postmodernism. Today, I shall mainly focus on the prose writings of the authors I mentioned. This list of names is long enough and will itself prevent me from treating each of them in a fair and equal way.

Whereas the Modernist aimed at providing a valid, authentic, though strictly personal view of the world in which he lived, the Postmodernist appears to have abandoned the attempt towards a representation of the world that is justified by the convictions and sensibility of an individual. The Modernist did not claim a general validity for his views, but defended his private assumptions and value judgments. The Postmodernist may have his



private views, but sees no justification for preferring them to views held by others. He rejects the intellectual hypotheses of the Modernist as arrogant and arbitrary, and therefore irrelevant. As early as 1940, in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, Dylan Thomas expressed his criticism of English Modernism when one of his characters asserts “that the everyday man’s just as interesting a character study as the neurotic poets of Bloomsbury.”<sup>79</sup> The Postmodernist does not discriminate. He is eager to dethrone the intellectuals, who in a time of secularization tried to climb on the empty throne of God in order to spread the gospel of their private semantic universe. With the Postmodernist abuse of intellectual thinking, the capacity for discerning, judging and selecting also goes down. One might be tempted to say that the Postmodernist is driven by a democratic, even populist, iconoclastic impulse, but such a statement would obscure the historical fact that on the eve of World War II, Modernism had already been thoroughly weakened. The Modernist writers and their intellectual followers had not succeeded in preventing World War II, in spite of their participation in congresses “pour la défense de la culture” or committees of anti-fascist intellectuals. They knew that Modernism could not survive in an environment of war, as was dramatically exemplified by the death of both Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron on the day the Dutch government capitulated to the German armies.

It is not political history alone, however, which paved the way for Postmodernism. At the same time, the restrictions of the code of Modernism — restrictions that are inherent in any code, also in any code of literature — were subjected to internal criticism. In *Finnegans Wake* (1939) James Joyce departed from the care-

ful reconstruction of a past moment in order to embrace, as Harry Levin wrote, “the timelessness of a millennium.”<sup>80</sup> In *Doktor Faustus* Thomas Mann showed the limitations of intellectual scepticism and detachment. In more than one way, the publication of *Doktor Faustus* signalled that the time for criticism of the Modernist code had come.

A programme of Postmodernism could read as follows: “We may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems.”<sup>81</sup> The quotation is from an unexpected source, Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, from the part that was completed in 1945. Of course, Wittgenstein was not a theorist of Postmodernism, but provides — now from a philosophical angle — an additional argument as to why the Modernist search for hypotheses and explanatory devices, however much of a provisional and corrigible nature, had to be abandoned.

Whereas Modernist texts relied on the selection of hypothetical constructions, the sociocode of Postmodernism is based on a preference for nonselection or quasi-nonselection, on a rejection of discriminating hierarchies, and a refusal to distinguish between truth and fiction, past and present, relevant and irrelevant. Yet, as a code it has contributed to texts that as a result of their discussions of basic philosophical problems, such as the nature of causality, or morality, or evolution, or time, or infinity, are highly relevant to contemporary thought.

Let us examine how the major convention of Post-

modernism affects the composition (text syntax, as well as sentence syntax) of texts and their function in the communication situation. My exposition, of course, relies to a large extent on work done by others, such as Ihab Hassan, Jerome Klinkowitz, David Lodge, Bruce Morrisette, Jean Ricardou, Robert Scholes, and many others.<sup>82</sup>

(a) The relation between text and author is a much less strained one than in the Modernist code. The author is seemingly unconcerned with the status of his text, where and how it begins, how it connects, where and how it ends, and whether it consists of linguistic or other signs. Still quite an exception in Modernism, Gide suggested an alternative ending in his *Paludes* (1895), but in Postmodernism the device of the multiple ending is fully exploited, as appears from Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Malamud's *The Tenants* (1971), Nooteboom's *Een Lied van Schijn en Wezen* (A Song of Appearance and Essence, 1981) and other texts of fiction. In a rare case, as in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), the multiple ending is matched by a multiple beginning. Donald Barthelme's *City Life* (1970) provides an example of a text that is interspersed with illustrations which belong to the text, and so is Italo Calvino's *Il Castello dei destini incrociati* (The Castle of Crossed Destinies, 1973). John Barth made an attempt to challenge the conventional idea of a book by making "fiction for print, tape, [and] live voice" (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 1968). In *Boomerang* (1978), the third volume of *Le Génie du lieu*, Michel Butor presents several texts more or less simultaneously, printed in black, blue and red in order to preserve a minimum of readability.

Whereas the Modernist presented his text as non-final, the Postmodernist may end his story at any arbi-

trary moment. Whereas the Modernist kept up a standard of well-connected sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, the Postmodernist aims at destroying the idea of connectivity by inserting texts that emphasize discontinuity, such as a questionnaire or other unrelated fragments (Barthelme's *Snow White*, 1967). Many Postmodernist texts are a collection of relatively unconnected fragments, which challenge the literary code that predisposes the reader to look for coherence. Connectivity may also become problematic within the paragraph or sentence; sentences are not always completed, in which case stock phrases must be supplemented by the reader (Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*). A favorite option is the inventory or enumeration, which in a moderate way can be found already in Gide's *Paludes* and *Les Caves du Vatican*, as well as in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, but which is regularly employed by the Postmodernists. One remembers Borges' poem "Inventario,"<sup>83</sup> but the device occurs also in texts by Barthelme, Handke, Strauss, W.F. Hermans, Léon de Winter and other Postmodernists. Like other mathematical devices, such as duplication, the enumeration suggests a high degree of arbitrariness. Duplication or mirroring is of crucial importance in Borges,<sup>84</sup> in Cortázar's "All Fires the Fire" ("Todos los Fuegos el fuego," 1960) and Fuentes' *Aura* (1962). Multiplication appears in the multiple endings, but multiplication that leads nowhere is a labyrinth. In Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959), Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Hermans' *Het Evangelie van O. Dapper Dapper* (The Gospel of O. Courageous Courageous, 1973), the development of the plot provides no conclusion. Destroying our commonplace conceptions of time and place, the labyrinthine plot is a crucial compositional de-

vice of Postmodernist fiction.

(b) With respect to the relation between text and social context, the Modernist rejected any law-like explanation of "reality," but the Postmodernist, much like Wittgenstein suggested, has completely given up the attempt at explaining. In his descriptions he will rather provide a parody of explanation, developing a logic which admits inner contradictions, such as in Borges' story, "The Garden of Forking Paths," ("El Jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan," 1941), or granting an ontological status to objects that exist merely in the mind, such as the *hrönir* in Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1941). The suggestive slogan of the French students' revolt, "l'imagination au pouvoir," itself a popularization of a Surrealist heritage, captures an important aspect of Postmodernism, in particular the Latin American version of it. It is Carlos Fuentes, who in an address to a congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in August 1982, expanded the nonselective, arbitrary position of "nothing matters" by coining the slogan "nothing matters, anything goes." Having listened to him again here at Harvard University, where on March 2, 1983, he presented the Renato Poggioli memorial lecture, we now know that anything goes as long as it has received a name. In the universe of Postmodernism, words invent our world, words shape our world, words are becoming the sole justification of our world. Therefore, the Postmodernist keeps talking, even though he may be conscious of the fact that he cannot do more than recycle petrified meanings. In his story *Die Widmung* (1977) Botho Strauss defined the vocation of the writer in Postmodernist terms: "Dennoch liegt, nach wie vor, die Technologie der Wiederaufbereitung verbrauchten

symbolischen Wissens, das recycling des Bedeutungsabfalls in den Händen einiger ungeschickter Leute, Dichter!"<sup>85</sup> This rather accurately describes what Strauss himself, Handke and Rosei do, as well as John Barth, Robert Coover, and Donald Barthelme, or W.F. Hermans and Gerrit Krol: they recycle semantic waste.

The Postmodernist is convinced that the social context consists of words, and that each new text is written over an older one. Edmund Wilson was the first to use the metaphor "palimpsest" as a characterization of a Postmodernist text, when in *Axel's Castle* (1931) he discussed Joyce's "Work in Progress."<sup>86</sup> Since then the term has become popular, not only in relation to Postmodernism but also with reference to intertextuality in general and the workings of memory, as appears, among other things, from Gérard Genette's early essay, "Proust Palimpseste" (*Figures*, 1966), and his recent book *Palimpsestes* (1982). The device of the palimpsest is used by Donald Barthelme (*Snow White*), Edward Bond (*Lear*, 1971), Peter Handke (*Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, 1972), Michel Butor (*Envois*, 1980), and others. If the Postmodernist believes that the social context is predominantly made up of words and calls for more words, there is an exception to his attitude of non-selection. The Postmodernist evidently prefers words over silence, logocentrism over Taoism. Like all codes, Postmodernism has its bias as well: the Postmodernist ontological doubt can be expressed and contained only by words.

(c) In fact, the relation between text and code has already partly been clarified by what I have just said. In Postmodernism the emphasis on the code is even clearer than in Modernist texts. In certain cases, the question of how a story should be told appears to be more important

than the story itself. This applies to Fellini's film *8½* and Antonioni's *Identificazione di una donna*, as much as to Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* and Butor's *L'Emploi du temps* (1957). Barthelme's *Snow White* shows that much of the meaning of the story consists of learning to understand its code — a code that opens our eyes to our habit of repeating semantic waste without being aware of it. In several metalingual passages the code is discussed, for example when “the ‘blanketing’ effect of ordinary language” is explained. This refers “to the part that sort of, you know, ‘fills in’ between the other parts. That part, the ‘filling’ you might say, of which the expression ‘you might say’ is a good example [...]”<sup>87</sup> Here the code is exposed by its very use, but there is also a more explicit warning which sheds light on how *Snow White* was written: “We like books,” one of the characters says, “that have a lot of *dreck* in them, matter which presents itself as not wholly relevant (or indeed, at all relevant) but which, carefully attended to, can supply a kind of ‘sense’ of what is going on. This ‘sense’ is not to be obtained by reading between the lines (for there is nothing there, in those white spaces) but by reading the lines themselves — looking at them and so arriving at a feeling not of satisfaction exactly, that is too much to expect, but of having read them, of having ‘completed’ them.”<sup>88</sup> Barthelme's hint not to go “reading things into things”<sup>89</sup> is strikingly similar to Robbe-Grillet's warning in the preface to *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959) that the text should not be subjected to allegorical interpretation, and to his advice in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) that the characters are nothing else than what one sees of them.

The code is not supposed to produce “sense.” This also applies to the work of W.F. Hermans, which can easily be overexplained as was done in the case of *De*

*God Denkbaar Denkbaar de God* (The God Thinkable Thinkable the God, 1956), for instance by J.J. Oversteegen, who was criticized for this by the author in a sequel to this novel, *Het Evangelie van O. Dapper Dapper*.<sup>90</sup> The polemics with a critic in a novel about the interpretation of an earlier novel is certainly an example of metalingual comment. It also shows that the criteria of the genre are hardly respected. It further points to the important role assigned to the reader.

(d) In Postmodernism, the most “democratic” of all literary codes, the role of the reader is emphasized even more than in Modernism. Of course, the reader is often addressed, instructed, questioned in the text. If there are multiple endings, he may select the one that he prefers, although it would be more in accordance with the sender’s code to express no preference. At times, there is an attempt to make him into a major character, or to describe a character as if he were the reader or listener. This explains the second person narration in Butor’s *La Modification* (1957) and Fuentes’ *Aura*. Most important of all, however, is that there is no symbolic explanation of these texts to be sanctioned by the author or a community of educated readers. The advice of Donald Barthelme not to go “reading things into things” should be taken seriously. Of course, how could a literary system that questions the familiar distinctions between truth and fiction, mind and matter, now and then, here and there, invite any sort of textual explanation? Within the terms of the Postmodernist code, any interpretation relying on some sort of knowledge of the world, on common sense logic and testability is superfluous, if not plainly wrong. The scholar, however, may be tempted to interpret precisely this position, as we are doing now.



The semantics of the Postmodernist code can also be described in contrast to the Modernist code. There is, however, a difficulty. If the Postmodernist has a preference for nonselection and if on purpose he does not want to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant, how can one distinguish between semantic fields that are more relevant, and others that are less relevant to him? We have noticed a certain bias toward verbosity in the Postmodernist code already, but if the Postmodernist were equally nonselective in every respect, he would, in fact, have made a choice. By keeping to the principle of nonselection, the Postmodernist *is* taking a decision. Here we hit on one of the contradictions within the Postmodernist code, one of its impossibilities.

In describing the structure of the Postmodernist semantic universe we may take seriously the Postmodernist intention to let nonselection prevail. After all, that intention materializes to a large extent. As a result, at the center of the Postmodernist semantic universe we find the semantic fields *inclusiveness*<sup>91</sup> and *assimilation*. The psychological considerations of narrator and characters, typical of Modernism, have been relegated to the background. In Postmodernism, the semantic fields *awareness* and *detachment* belong to the third zone, consisting of semantic fields that are to be dealt with polemically, or simply to be abandoned. Instead of discussing the various options open to him in a detached, intellectual way, as the Modernist did, the Postmodernist assimilates and absorbs the world that he perceives, without knowing or wanting to know how to structure that world so that it might make sense. The semantic field of *perception*, including "observation," but also "reading," "listening," and "talking," is close to the center of the Postmodernist semantic universe, but this

perception is assimilating and possessive, rather than reserved and judicious, as in Modernism.

Each sociocode betrays itself by selecting certain words (used repeatedly and in a prominent context), which, through their semantic features, belong to the semantic fields central to the code. We assume that all words with the semantic feature [+poly] or [+pan] can be subsumed under the semantic field *inclusiveness*. As far as Borges is concerned, many of his semantic preferences have been compiled and investigated by Ana María Barrenechea and Jaime Alazraki.<sup>92</sup> “Labyrinth” is one of those words, appearing also in Robbe-Grillet, but the *notion* of labyrinth appears in the work of all Postmodernists, e.g. Barth (“funhouse”), Rosei (“die Stadt und ihr Winkelwerk”), Calvino (*Le città invisibili*). The word “mirror” and other words expressing duplication or multiplication are used prominently by Borges, García Márquez, Robbe-Grillet, Calvino, and others. The word “journey” is a privileged term in Butor, Borges, Handke, Rosei, Calvino, De Winter, and others, in particular in the collocation or with the connotation: journey without destination (“Reise ohne Ziel”), which expresses the vastness of space and the vanity of human effort, and makes the meaning of the word different from the Modernist usage. In their fiction the Postmodernists do not avoid the world of mechanical devices and science, nor the world of science-fiction, as Teresa L. Ebert has shown.<sup>93</sup> Instead of focussing on the inner self, as the Modernist was tempted to, the Postmodernist does not respect any frontier. His characters may go as far as outer space, or into the distant future. They experiment with drugs or automatization; they indulge in the unstructured mass of words, the library, the encyclopedia, advertising, television and

other mass media. Each writer has his own preferences. Borges may favour the library and the encyclopedia, Cortázar and Robbe-Grillet the photograph or film, Handke and Strauss the mass media, Butor the *6,810.000 Litres d'eau par seconde* (1965). In their various idiolects they share a common interest in things which are "poly-" or "pan-", lacking uniqueness.

This sketch of the Postmodernist code, brief though it is, nevertheless provides a basis for the thesis that some of the novels of the Dutch author, W.F. Hermans, are characterized by Postmodernist devices. Recently other writers in The Netherlands have also discovered the Postmodernist code.

In his *De (Ver)wording van de Jongere Dürer* (The (De)formation of the Younger Dürer, 1978), Léon de Winter, who closely follows contemporary German fiction, describes a journey without destination, as Handke and Rosei did earlier, and plays with variable narrative possibilities, including a title and an ending that allow for two interpretations. He provides an enumeration of articles on sale in a department store, fights the clichés of polluted speech, and rewrites Eichendorf's *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*. Cees Nooteboom's novel *Een Lied van Schijn en Wezen* (1981) is a book that addresses itself to the problem of fictional truth. It is a story about writing a story, — nothing new since *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Nooteboom, however, knows and quotes Borges. The writer in his novel believes himself to be a character in another story, whereas the characters of his own story come to life and feel a real pain when the writer decides to burn his manuscript. One could argue that the text has more than one ending and through its title and an epilogue referring to Frederik van Eeden and Calderón de la Barca, it

is firmly rooted in intertextual relations. The third author I wish to mention, Gerrit Krol, has written a novel from the point of view of a robot, who in the course of the story acquires more and more human features. *De Man achter het Raam* (The Man behind the Window, 1982) is a story about an artificial human being without a soul, without a past, without a sense of time. One could classify it as science-fiction. "Everything that he will experience, has already been experienced as it has been written down, although the programme [...] is changing continuously."<sup>94</sup> The robot maintains that there is no criterion for distinguishing between good and bad. Like Escher, whom he admires, he admits "impossible" thoughts. He seems to express a Postmodernist position when he believes that he has many more, infinitely more thoughts that human beings can have; they, however, have something the robot does not have: thoughts that one likes, the so-called hypotheses.<sup>95</sup> For the robot, beginning and ending can be the same. Of course, the novel has more than one ending (one on p. 16 and one on p. 119).

There is more Dutch fiction in which Postmodernist devices have been employed, but I should proceed now to a discussion of two novels by Willem Frederik Hermans, a prolific writer, active since the 1940s. He is critical of Ter Braak and Du Perron, and an admirer of Wittgenstein. We may see an approximation of the Postmodernist code in *De God Denkbaar Denkbaar de God* (The God Thinkable Thinkable the God). One can read it as a persiflage on the rise of a new religious sect, but it also parodies the devices of the mystery novel and pornography. Certainly our common sense conceptions of cause and effect, chronological and spatial order are challenged by the miraculous adventures of Mr. Thinka-

ble. The text also challenges our expectations of coherence and well-connectedness. The plot is a labyrinth: there are secret papers hidden in some fake embassy in Paris and enemies prevent Mr. Thinkable from finding them, but who his enemies are and why they are his enemies remains unclear. The development of the plot is highly arbitrary, and so is, in many instances, the connection between words and sentences. The connection is often motivated by phonetic similarity or homonymy. There are parodies of both scientific and religious language, and there is a continuous criticism of all kinds of clichés, whether they occur in travel guides or in administrative forms, such as: “Doorhalen wat niet verlangd wordt; het bedrag in cijfers” (Delete whatever does not apply; the amount in figures).<sup>96</sup> Hermans’ verbosity equals that of Donald Barthelme, and, like the latter, he employs the device of exposing the cliché by using it. The name “Thinkable” provides an interesting clue. Mr. Thinkable explains himself as follows: “In me every separation between act and thought has been transcended. I am everything that can be thought.”<sup>97</sup> Because to him everything that can be thought is possible, Mr. Thinkable assumes a power usually attributed only to God, therefore he becomes God, and assembles a huge crowd as followers. The only thing that he lacks is “the secret papers.” These are never found and this throws a shadow on his omnipotence. Mr. Thinkable becomes involved in a war with a new god, called “Horrible Baby” (Afschuwelijke Baby), and dies.

*Het Evangelie van O. Dapper Dapper* employs the same codes: the genre of the phantastic, parodying the mystery novel; the sociocode of Postmodernism; and, of course, Hermans’ own idiolect, with his preferences for biting irony, sadistic pleasure in the description of

cruelty, humor and puns. A difference with the *De God Denkbaar* is the greater role that has been attributed now to the reader, a greater role also for the self-generating production of the text on the basis of taking clichés literally, phonetic similarities, and repetition. Indeed, Hermans is recycling semantic waste, and his criticism of the codes that we use without being fully aware of them seems more important than the referential function of this story, which takes place five billion years later than *De God Denkbaar*, but has the same characters as the earlier novel and professes to be an exemplification of the “Ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen.”<sup>98</sup> As in *Finnegans Wake*, time in *Het Evangelie* has become cyclical, as it probably must be in any true gospel on resurrection from death.

Why did I speak of Postmodernist impossibilities? The Modernist wrote about conceivable, possible worlds; the Postmodernist writes about conceivable, at least thinkable, but impossible worlds, worlds that — so reason tells us — can exist only in our imagination.<sup>99</sup> Here one should remember Borges’ story of how Pierre Menard recreated *Don Quixote*. With Borges, the reader conceives how this is to be done, and in agreement with the narrator his conclusion must be that “the undertaking was impossible from the very beginning.”<sup>100</sup> Here, the word “impossible” refers to an *empirical* possibility based on our knowledge of the world.

There is also a *logical* impossibility in Postmodernist texts, based on an internal contradiction in the structure of the Postmodernist code: the paradox that the preference for nonselection *is* a preference, a choice. In his novel *De Man achter het Raam*, which we briefly discussed above, Gerrit Krol carried this

paradox to its ultimate conclusion. He created a narrator who most consistently displays a sort of intelligent indifference or nonselection. In truly Postmodernist fashion the narrator has neither a past, nor a future, attachments nor worries, and does not distinguish between relevant or irrelevant, but can answer all questions, though sometimes in a way human beings cannot understand or appreciate. The more this robot acquires human features, the more he begins to have preferences. The story clearly shows that consistent indifference, if at all possible, is not in the least interesting. This is one of the major “philosophical” problems that Postmodernism has brought forward. Consistent indifference or nonselection does not seem to be a human quality, and can hardly be conceived.

In most Postmodernist texts, however, the principle of nonselection has not been as rigorously maintained as in *De Man achter het Raam*. In general, Postmodernism shows a preference for words over silence, imagination over experience, verbal texts over the empirical context. It is here that the Postmodernist code shows its bias. The moment this bias is exposed and known to a larger group of writers and readers, the time will have arrived for replacing the code by another one which necessarily will be biased in other respects.

The Postmodernist code can be linked to a particular way and view of life, common in the Western world, including part of Latin America. The literary preference for nonselection coincides with an “embarras du choix” offered by luxurious living conditions, which enable many people to have numerous options. The Postmodernist appeal to the imagination is out of place in the world of Ivan Denisovič, or in the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese have a proverb which could have

been derived from a story by Borges, namely, "painting a cake to satisfy hunger." In the code of the Chinese language, however, this expression has a strongly negative connotation. For this and other reasons, a favourable reception of Postmodernism in China is inconceivable. Or, if we focussed on another part of the world, the Postmodernist anti-empirical emphasis on imagination cannot provide an answer to the problem of religious fanaticism. The Postmodernist code clearly has its geographical and sociological limitations. This is an additional factor as to why in the near future certain writers may want to design a new code, which will initially be difficult, disturbing and embarrassing, but which may turn out to be well suited for expressing and perhaps solving some of our current problems.



## Notes

1. Jurij Tynjanov, "Das literarische Faktum," in Jurij Striedter, ed., *Texte der Russischen Formalisten, I: Texte zur allgemeinen Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa* (München: Fink, 1969), pp. 393-432.
2. See Jurij Striedter's "Einleitende Abhandlung" in his *Texte der Russischen Formalisten*, pp. LXXI-LXXXIII.
3. Götz Wienold, *Semiotik der Literatur* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972).
4. A.G.H. Anbeek van der Meijden, 'In puinhopen voel ik mij prettig, ergens anders hoor ik niet thuis': *Over de wederopbouw van de Nederlandse literatuurgeschiedschrijving* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers/Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1982). Inaugural address, Leiden.
5. Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 483.
6. Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1977), p. 20.
7. Doede Nauta, *The Meaning of Information* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), in particular pp. 220-222. Teun A. van Dijk, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London and New York: Longman, 1977), pp. 189-191.
8. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, *Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind. and London: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 56 and 125-126.
9. André Gide, *Romans, récits et soties, oeuvres lyriques*, ed. Maurice Nadeau, Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 1008-1009, and *Retour de l'U.R.S.S., suivi de Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 40.
10. George A. Miller, *Language and Communication* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), p. 7: "Any system of symbols that, by prior agreement between the source and destination, is used to represent and convey information will be called a code."

11. Virginia Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt etc., 1950), p. 115.
12. Carry van Bruggen, *Hedendaags fetisjisme*, met een voorwoord van Annie Romein-Verschuur (Amsterdam: Querido, 1980), p. 145.
13. Cf. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 203. Roland Barthes introduces his five codes in *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); English translation by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
14. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 44.
15. Cf. Roger Fowler, "Preliminaries to a Sociolinguistic Theory of Literary Discourse," *Poetics* 8 (1979), pp. 531-556. Fowler observes that language "varieties are not divisions of language but options within a repertoire" (p. 547).
16. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism," repr. in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 271-295; Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1977); David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Arnold, 1977); Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).
17. Virginia Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed*, p. 96.
18. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier, Pléiade, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1957-1960), 2, p. 1383.
19. Translated from Peter Demetz, "Zur Definition des Realismus," *Literatur und Kritik* 2 (1967), pp. 333-345. Quoted from p. 336.
20. Marcel Proust, *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Pierre Clarac et André Ferré, préface d'André Maurois, Pléiade, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 1, p. 940.
21. Jacques Rivière, "Marcel Proust et la tradition classique," *Nouvelle Revue française* 14 (1920), pp. 192-200. Quoted from p. 199.
22. Robert H. Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 101.
23. Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 2, p. 553.
24. Gide, *Romans*, p. 1201.
25. In "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader*, First series (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), p. 185.

26. Mencken is quoted to have denied "that immutable truths exist in the arts." See Menno ter Braak, *Verzameld Werk*, 7 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1950-1951), 4, p.269.
27. Virginia Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed*, p. 96.
28. Translated from Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron, *Briefwisseling 1930-1940*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1962-1967), 2, p. 183.
29. Quoted by Elrud Ibsch, *Die Stellung Nietzsches in der Entwicklung der modernen Literaturwissenschaft* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), p. 10.
30. Gide, *Romans*, p. 149.
31. Gide, *Romans*, p. 118.
32. Gide, *Romans*, p. 10.
33. Gide, *Romans*, p. 94.
34. Gide, *Romans*, p. 1043.
35. André Gide, *Prétextes: Réflexions sur quelques points de littérature et de morale* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1947), p. 45.
36. Gide, *Prétextes*, p. 50.
37. Cf. Angèle's advice "Détachez-vous" in *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* (Gide, *Romans*, p. 337).
38. Gide, *Prétextes*, p. 53.
39. Cf. André Gide, *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), p. 43.
40. Robert J. Richards, "The Personal Equation in Science: William James's Psychological and Moral Uses of Darwinian Theory," in *A William James Renaissance, Four Essays by Young Scholars*, A Special Issue of *The Harvard Library Bulletin* 30 (1982), pp. 387-425, in particular p. 408.
41. Gide, *Romans*, p. 115.
42. "La règle de l'artiste doit être, non point de s'en tenir aux propositions de la nature, mais de ne lui proposer rien qu'elle ne puisse, qu'elle ne doive bientôt imiter" (Gide, *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, p. 39).
43. Valery Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, préface de Marcel Arland, notes par G. Jean-Aubry et Robert Mallet, Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 158.

44. By André Thérive, see *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide* 7, no. 22 (April 1974), p. 44.
45. By André Billy, see *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide* 7, no. 22 (April 1974), p. 24.
46. Translated from Matthijs Vermeulen, "Fransche letteren," *De Gids* 91 (1927), pp. 456-466. Quoted from pp. 463-464.
47. Gide, *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, p. 58.
48. "Chaque fois que quelqu'un se sacrifie pour les autres, on peut être certain qu'il vaut mieux qu'eux" (Gide, *Romans*, p. 1128).
49. Gide, *Romans*, p. 1089.
50. Gide, *Romans*, p. 1093.
51. Gide, *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, p. 95.
52. As appears from a reference in *Het Land van Herkomst*, cf. E. du Perron, *Verzameld Werk*, 7 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1955-1959), 3, p. 294.
53. Translated from Ter Braak and Du Perron, *Briefwisseling 1930-1940*, 2, p. 463.
54. Cf. Toke van Helmond, "Simon Vestdijk en Marcel Proust: een vergelijking," in *Engelbewaarder*, Winterboek (Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 117-148.
55. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 1134.
56. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 31.
57. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 61.
58. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 98.
59. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 94.
60. G.H. 's-Gravesande, *Vergeeten en gebleven: Literaire beschouwingen*, ed. Dirk Kroon ('s-Gravenhage: Bzztôh, 1982). p. 165.
61. Translated from Du Perron, *Het Land van Herkomst*, in *Verzameld Werk*, 7, p. 126.
62. Translated from Du Perron, *Verzameld Werk*, 7, p. 533.
63. Translated from Du Perron, *Verzameld Werk*, 7, p. 540.
64. *Ibid.*

65. E. du Perron, *Le Pays d'origine*, traduit du néerlandais par Philippe Noble, préface d'André Malraux (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 9 and 11.
66. Larbaud, *Oeuvres*, p. 110.
67. Thomas Mann, *Politische Schriften und Reden* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1968), 2, p. 249.
68. Cf. Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, *Het Modernisme in de Europese letterkunde* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1984).
69. Thomas Mann, *Werke*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1967-68), *Moderne Klassiker* vols. 101-120. The quotation is taken from vol. 113, p. 216.
70. Th. Mann, *Werke*, 115, p. 133.
71. Translated from Ter Braak, *Verzameld Werk*, 5, p. 504.
72. Quoted by Ter Braak, *Verzameld Werk*, 7, p. 328.
73. Jacob Hiegentlich, "De Jongeren Schrijven Romans," *De Nieuwe Gids* 47 (1932), pp. 405-414. Quoted from p. 409.
74. Allan Paivio, "The Relationship between Verbal and Perceptual Codes," in Edward C. Carterette and Morton P. Friedman, eds., *Handbook of Perception*, vol. 8: *Perceptual Coding* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 375-399.
75. Frank Kermode, "Modernisms," in Bernard Bergonzi, ed., *Innovations: Essays on Art and Ideas* (London: MacMillan, 1968), pp. 66-92; Gerald Graff, "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough," in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction* (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1977), pp. 217-249.
76. Cf. Dionýz Ďurišin, *Vergleichende Literaturforschung: Versuch eines methodisch-theoretischen Grundrisses* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972), and *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature* (Bratislava: Slovart, 1974).
77. Mary Ellen Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington, Ind. and London: Indiana University Press, 1970); Leslie A. Fiedler, "Cross the Border — Close that Gap: Post-Modernism," in Marcus Cunliffe, ed., *American Literature since 1900* (London: Sphere Books, 1975), pp. 344-366; Jost Hermand, *Pop International: Eine kritische Analyse* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1971).
78. Luis J. Prieto, *Messages et signaux, Le linguiste 2* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), p. 34.

79. Dylan Thomas, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (London: Dent, 1968), pp. 144-145.
80. Harry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (London: Faber and Faber, 2nd ed., 1960), p. 165.
81. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), section 109.
82. Ihab Hassan, *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1980); David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Literature* (London: Arnold, 1977); Bruce Morrisette, "Post-Modern Generative Fiction: Novel and Film," *Critical Inquiry* 2(1975), pp. 253-262; Jean Ricardou, *Le Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1979).
83. Published in English translation in Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Alastair Reid (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 147.
84. Cf., for instance, the duplication of lost objects (*hrönir*) in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."
85. Botho Strauss, *Die Widmung: Eine Erzählung* (München and Wien: Hanser, 1977), p. 85.
86. Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York and London: Scribner, 1936), pp. 234-235: "The style he [i.e., Joyce] has invented for his purpose works on the principle of a palimpsest: one meaning, one set of images, is written over another."
87. Donald Barthelme, *Snow White* (New York: Atheneum, 1982). p. 96.
88. Barthelme, *Snow White*, p. 106.
89. Barthelme, *Snow White*, p. 107.
90. Schrijver Dezes [=W.F. Hermans], *Het Evangelie van O. Dapper Dapper*, met een voorwoord van Willem Frederik Hermans (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1973), p. 211. The name of Oversteegen is spelled as Oversteegjes. Oversteegen's criticism of *De God Denkbaar* appeared first in *Merlyn* 1:3 (1962-63), pp. 29-53, and was

reprinted in *Voetstappen van WFH* (Utrecht: Hes, 1982), pp. 29-54. Oversteegen observed correctly that Thinkable does not distinguish between reality that is experienced and reality that is thought.

91. The difference between the inclusiveness of Realism and that of Postmodernism should be specified. The distinction can probably be made in terms of orderly versus random inclusiveness.
92. Ana María Barrenechea, *Borges, the Labyrinth Maker*, ed. and trans. Robert Lima (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1965). The Spanish original appeared under the title: *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges* (Mexico: Colegio de Mexico, 1957). Jaime Alazraki, *La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges: temas, estilo* (Madrid: Gredos, 1968); idem, *Jorge Luis Borges* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971); idem, *Versiones, inversiones, reversiones: el espejo como modelo estructural del relato en los cuentos de Borges* (Madrid: Gredos, 1977).
93. Teresa L. Ebert, "The Convergence of Postmodern Innovative Fiction and Science Fiction: An Encounter with Samuel R. Delany's Technotopia," *Poetics Today* 1:4 (1980), pp. 91-104. Mrs. Ebert writes: "The function of technology in metascience fiction has been *backgrounded* relative to its function in the traditional science fiction, whereas in innovative and contemporary fiction technology has been *foregrounded*" (p.95).
94. Gerrit Krol, *De Man achter het Raam* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1982), p. 7.
95. Krol, *De Man achter het Raam*, p. 79.
96. Willem Frederik Hermans, *De God Denkbaar Denkbaar de God* (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 7th printing, 1980), pp. 51, 146, 150.
97. Hermans, *De God Denkbaar*, p. 54.
98. Hermans, *Het Evangelie van O. Dapper Dapper*, pp. 11, 14, 16 etc.
99. The "impossible" worlds of Postmodernism can still be described in terms of the possible worlds theory. Cf. Lubomír Doležal, "Narrative Worlds," in Ladislav Matejka, ed., *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976), pp. 542-552.
100. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, preface by André Maurois (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 66.