De visie op literatuur van Jacques Derrida
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Summary

The aim of this thesis is to describe and explain Derrida's view of literature against the background of his linguistic philosophy. A key concept in this respect is "invention de l'autre": the evocation of "the other" (the singular, ineffable and incomparable) by an experimental use of language. That which eludes words is nevertheless evoked by certain experimental littérateurs: thus it is possible, although only provisionally, to speak of "the other".

The INTRODUCTION discusses the great popularity that Derrida has acquired among literary theorists in the United States: the American deconstructionists, however, primarily took Derrida's linguistic philosophy and his critical analyses of philosophical texts as their starting point, and paid significantly less attention to Derrida's own view of literature. As a result the attention he paid to the "invention de l'autre" was not sufficiently brought into the limelight.

CHAPTER I discusses three of Derrida's philosophical forerunners, all of whom discuss "the other". Heidegger is concerned with the unfathomable openness of the "being of beings"; according to him that which "is" has no conceivable secure basis. He also discusses the mystery of time, and mortality: man is "thrown" into an uncanny world. Bataille follows Nietzsche in discussing the world after the "death of God": a chaos without a centre, the richness of which is both attractive and terrifying. He often speaks of indescribable experiences: dying, total surrender and erotic self-abandonment, fear of death, indescribable rapture, irrational fear and lust, etc. He also discusses (with Freud) the unconscious: "the other" in relation to conscious thought, but then influencing this conscious thought. Finally, Levinas develops an ethics of the other, which tries to do justice to the otherness of the other person. He also discusses the "il-y-a": the indefinite and amorphous "there is" that remains when all the beings that give meaning have been abstracted from. He also mentions experiences which confront one with the "il-y-a": pain, despair, depression, the inexpressible suffering of Auschwitz. All three of these thinkers try to express the inexpressible, and are searching (as is Derrida himself) for other types of language use that do better justice to the mystery of human existence.

CHAPTER II demonstrates how Derrida, on the basis of these three thinkers, arrives at concepts such as "invention de l'autre" and "expérience de l'autre". In his linguistic philosophy, in which there are tangible influences from Saussure and Blanchot, Derrida concludes that language is an ambivalent phenomenon. Language captures the world in a differentiated network of words and provides the world with a certain order: this order is arbitrary, however, and is abstracted from the singularity and changeability of things. In addition, this order is not closed: precisely those aspects which generate this linguistic order (the play of differences, the abstracting from the concrete reference, the role of the context in determining meaning) also ensure that linguistic constructions are accompanied by ambiguity. The development of this ambiguity is what makes the "invention de l'autre" possible: by increasing the ambiguity present in language as much as possible the linguistic order can be partly breached, and perspectives can be developed on what is covered up by that linguistic order. These perspectives are always hypothetical and tentative: we can never see the other "an sich" beyond the linguistic horizon. It is, however, certainly possible to look for perspectives on the borders of language: these are then language forms on the edge of shapelessness and singularity. At the end of this chapter I examine the notion of "différence": an ambiguous notion which Derrida uses to try to outline the ambiguousness of human experience.

CHAPTER III examines a few of Derrida's art-philosophical insights and the context within which they evolved. Heidegger argues that art evokes being as an impenetrable mystery:
he describes a work of art as the "Urstir" between an opened world and a "sich
verschliessende" earth. The materiality of the work of art (the in itself meaningless sound of the
poem, the still partly unworked stone of the statue) can serve as a sign of the hidden. The
material of the work of art may tentatively evoke "the other" by not conforming to a transparent
meaningful form. Derrida adopts this insight in a slightly more radical form. He also makes
Kant's concept of the "interesseloses Wohlfallen" more radical: according to Derrida the
aesthetic experience is definitely "ohne Begriff" to an extreme extent, an experience of slippery
and indescribable meaning, and thus an experience of "the other". Kant's concept of "das
Erhabene" is also made more radical by him: for Derrida the sublime is connected with the
attempt to say more than can be said, but without the promise of a Higher Sense. In addition,
Derrida argues for the rehabilitation of "das Ekelhafte", the disgusting that according to Kant has
no place in fine art. According to Derrida the "invention de l'autre" must concern itself with the
disgusting, because the other in its absurdity and intangibility often causes disgust. With Bataille
he defends the value of the laugh which relativizes everything, and of a heterogeneous style in
which all genres are mixed and relativized.

This chapter also deals with Derrida's essays about metaphors. Derrida argues that too much
emphasis is traditionally placed on analogy as the basis of metaphor. By alluding to Lautréamont
and Bataille, he shows other types of metaphor which are able to evoke the other. He examines
catachresis, wordplay, playing with sound and meaningless letters, contingent associations,
malicious development of ambiguity: all things which are dismissed by traditional philosophers
(and littérateurs), but which are used productively by experimental littérateurs. This type of
condemned figure of speech (suggests Derrida) is suitable for the dramatization of the other.

At the end of this chapter I examine what according to Derrida is the desire of literature: to
say everything +n; dramatizing the whole right down to the most hidden and inexpressible
facets, whilst using all stylistic devices. Derrida recognizes this primarily in experimental
literature, because in traditional literature the fundamental strangeness of the other comes less
radically to the fore.

In CHAPTER IV, by far the longest in the book, a large number of Derrida's interpretations
of literature are discussed. Derrida's style register is always philosophical and literary:
philosophical because he chooses a certain philosophical conceptual framework, literary because
he attempts to make the development of ambiguity (in his opinion characteristic of literature)
tangible in the style of his criticism.

Section 1 examines Derrida's Artaud interpretations. Derrida shows that Artaud is groping
for the world of unarticulated and irrational passions: a hieroglyphic theatre has to be created
by means of shrieks, rough songs and dances, cryptic noises and playing with colours,
disharmonious music, etc. etc. Only in this way can the authentic human "I" be staged, according to Artaud: the singular I of the unconscious passions and affects that have not yet solidified into
an image. Derrida points out the "duplicité" of Artaud. One equivocality is that Artaud needs
forms in order to dramatize the formless; he cannot display the "passions themselves" in all their
formlessness. Another equivocality is that Artaud longs for authenticity: Derrida regards this as
being too traditional, and considers that it would be better to affirm that the singularity of the I is
per definition impossible to be experienced. But according to Derrida Artaud does recognize this
in a certain sense: he does not free himself of the longing for knowledge of his authentic self but
rather constantly affirms the impossibility of this longing.

Section 2 examines Derrida's interpretation of Mallarmé, and indirectly his essay about
Sollers. Derrida suggests that Mallarmé's poetry evokes an elusive world: by means of its
enormous polysemy, this poetry offers the reader the means of associative wordplay,
blunt space, by the ambivalent allusions. Derrida adopts these rather displays his con-plexity linguistic worlds: dualistic and polythetic. Derrida challenges interpretations, and
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Section 3 deals with Glas, respectively. Genet, outcast and
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enormous polysemy, this poetry dramatizes experiences of ambiguity. Mallarmé achieves this by means of associative wordplay, by associations with meaningless letters and sounds, by use of blank space, by the ambivalent dreamy atmosphere of some of the poems, and by intertextual allusions. Derrida adopts these stylistic characteristics: he does not elucidate Mallarmé but rather displays his complexity. According to Derrida, Mallarmé is creating anti-synthetic linguistic worlds: dualistic antitheses are being continually evoked without hope of a synthesis. Derrida challenges interpretations in which Mallarmé is presented as a poet of The Absolute. Mallarmé demonstrates linguistic models that do not obey the normal logical-discursive pattern and generates new and interesting perspectives on the mystery of existence - thus Derrida.

Section 3 deals with Glos, a very experimental text in two columns about Hegel and Genet, respectively. Genet, outcast and poet of the abject, is contrasted with Hegel, the philosopher of the synthetic "Aufhebung" and the meaningful totality. Derrida shows that Genet's figures of speech are a parody of traditional figures of speech, and further that they have a particularly ambiguous oscillating meaning. Derrida's own style is at least as ambiguous: his criticism attempts to do justice to the associative and flowing character of Genet's work. He opposes Sartre because the latter's famous criticism of Genet apparently spends too much time searching for unequivocal centres of meaning. In a really intricate linguistic game Derrida displays a whole procession of ambiguous and offensive motifs: fetishism, sound games referring to unconscious passions, surrender to the disgusting, dream images in which perverse obsessions are both revealed and concealed, parodies of the crucifixion of Christ, murder or suicide fantasies, a nauseating fascination for the maternal and rejection of the father figure, etc.

Section 4 deals with Parages, Derrida's collection of Blanchot interpretations. Derrida shows how Blanchot evokes an indefinite world full of negations: the story line is interrupted, the characters remain for the most part inarticulate. The story is constantly at cross-purposes with itself: something is being related that cannot be related. In this way Blanchot wants to do justice to the elusiveness of the other: to the irrationality of WWII (the interruption of every meaningful story), to the painful and insoluble mystery of mortality and death, to the despair of certain erotic experiences. Derrida wants to do the other justice as well: that is why in his criticism he chooses allusion rather than explanation, or words with several antithetical meanings. He pays a great deal of attention to the "viens-oui, oui!", the being open and receptive to the intangible. This receptivity he considers to be essential: literature has a "promesse émancipatoire" and perhaps even a utopian function, because it can enhance our sensitivity to the other. Literature is searching for a language for the senseless and inexplicable that is usually suppressed.

Section 5 discusses Signéponge. Ponge is attempting to dramatize the intangible singularity of things by turning words into unfathomable and intangible things: he makes them as ambiguous as possible, gives their sound values and graphic values the most importance, and in that way turns them into cryptic hieroglyphs. As a result of their ambiguity, the words then provide a tentative image of the singular thing, the thing in its as yet non-linguistically formed shape. Derrida is playing a similar sort of game: he turns the word "Ponge" into a polysemous and unfathomable thing, and uses associative rhymes such as that between "Ponge" and "éponge" (sponge) as a kind of metaphor for Ponge's polysemous poetry. In this way he is able to evoke many of the different facets of Ponge's poetry in a poetic way. "La chose" is for Ponge a "maîtresse terrible", says Derrida, an unattainable woman who is regarded with fascination and fear. His poetry dramatizes an "erotic" longing for the singularity of things: a longing that is never satisfied, but also never ceases to exist.
Section 6 deals with Schibboleth-pour Paul Celan. Derrida regards Celan's poetry mainly as mourning for "ashes", that is, the loss of singularity. In this poetry singular data and events are often recalled: the Spanish Civil War, the victims of the Holocaust, the inexpressible suffering of Auschwitz. The suffering of the victims evaporates as soon as you name it: nevertheless it must be named. This tension is central to Celan's poetry, and to Derrida's criticism as well: both Derrida and Celan are seeking an uncertain way between naming and not naming. Derrida pays special attention to the Jew in Celan's poetry. The Jew is the figure without individuality, without a home, without a destination: a stray in an uncanny world. Derrida admires Celan's poetry because it is trying to find a relationship between unspeakable riddles that nevertheless must be spoken of. This is why he also calls this poetry "a hermeneutic event!".

Section 7 discusses Ulysse gramophone. Derrida gives his personal view of Joyce: he ties his own motifs in with Joyce's motifs, and suggests that Joyce's oeuvre has enriched his own linguistic philosophy. In a very discreet way Derrida alludes to a few of his own linguistic philosophical motifs: he does not explain them but turns them into structural elements of his style. The way in which he does this also expresses admiration for Joyce. Derrida points out tense relationships within Joyce: he is conservative and innovative, masculine and feminine. Derrida pays a great deal of attention to the other that is dramatized by Joyce: the "stream of consciousness" tellingly demonstrates the receptivity of Joyce's characters, a receptivity that according to Derrida is essential for us all.

Paragraph 8 discusses Donner le temps. 1: La fausse monnaie. A flood of motifs are distilled from Baudelaire's prose poem "La fausse monnaie": including the problematic nature of a gift, the simulacra of the capitalist market economy, fictional speculation as an attempt to think more than can be thought, fiction as a simulacrum, the essential uncertainty that is inherent in friendship. According to Derrida, Baudelaire is evoking a poetical world in which all referentiality is floating and undecidable. In this way Baudelaire is revealing an undecidability that can occur in all linguistic utterances and dialogues. Language alone can offer reference possibilities in this world, but at the same time linguistic meaning is virtual. It is exactly this problem that is the crux for Baudelaire.

CHAPTER V deals with the differences and similarities between Derrida and Paul de Man. The insights of both thinkers are often lumped together. I, however, show that they employ different conceptual frameworks and have different points of attention. Derrida himself shows that with De Man an "invention de l'autre" also plays a part: when he deconstructs homogenizing thought systems, De Man is implicitly drawing attention to what falls outside these systems. His work, however, remains primarily linguistic criticism, whereas Derrida explicitly places "the other" in the foreground. For De Man every text is "literary", because every text is more or less undermining its own order. Derrida, however, differentiates literature from other types of text: for him literature is a non-thetical text type in which a relationship to the other is searched for. This is why Derrida is also much more interested in experimental literature, which tries to evoke the other. He is primarily interested in attempts to describe the indescribable, whereas De Man mainly points out a priori's and lacunae in the linguistic structure.

In the CONCLUSION I examine the value that Derrida could have for the study of literature. He bequeaths no method and no meta-language. His criticism is very complex and literary, and demands a patient reading attitude. He is constantly drawn to experimental literature: his view of literature thus makes no claim to general validity. He does, however, develop new thoughts on metaphors, mimesis and the aesthetic experience, among other things: these thoughts could be interesting for literary theory. Further, these thoughts have a practical importance: his theories about literature, and offer an interest in literary criticism is also interest in singularity of the literary text, Old methods of interpretation literature makes other demands experimental literature in the case of this world. What is important (as is often thought), but not insoluble mysteries of existence
importance: his theories about metaphor link up with metaphor studies in modern experimental literature, and offer an interesting perspective on that type of literature. His implicit appeal to literary criticism is also interesting: he is in favour of doing justice to the strict individuality and singularity of the literary text, and he also emphasizes the singularity of literary interpretation. Old methods of interpretation fit in with the demands of traditional literature, but experimental literature makes other demands. Derrida shows that it is possible to retain the complexity of experimental literature in the criticism. His interpretations also draw many intriguing details to the surface. What is important is that he does not regard literature as a gratuitous linguistic game (as is often thought), but rather as an attempt to find a means of expression for the many insoluble mysteries of existence.