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Bewegend lezen : voorstel tot een cinematografische leeshouding

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Summary

The reading method proposed in this study differs from traditional ways of reading. What one could call “motion reading” (a literal translation of the title *Bewegend lezen*) employs a cinematographic approach. This way of reading is either spurred by the text or undertaken by the reader as a deliberate choice. In line with narratology, cinematographic reading uses traditional narrative principles and focalization ideas. In addition, these reading principles introduce the literary equivalent of filmic techniques developed by thinkers in the field of Film Studies. In this context, the image is essential. Cinematographic reading envisions the narrator mainly as a camera that shows images in slow motion, fast motion, and in various gradations, in close-up, for instance. Three kinds of imagery can be distinguished: sensory imagery (which can be perceived), consciousness imagery (which characters imagine), and trophological imagery (which is communicated through figures of speech). Cinematographic reading presents a new take on this imagery; yet, this way of reading is related to narratology and film analysis.

Applying the concept of cinematographic reading, the author of this study analyses the concept and “game” of Thomas Rosenboom’s novel *Gewassen vleys* [*Washed flesh*] (1994). Reviewers have regularly identified this as a “historical novel”—without having a solid foundation for this characterization. Many in literary-historical circles consider this novel to “play a game”—without explaining the central concept of this game. This PhD thesis maps out these various supposed game components. The interplay of these components creates what Roland Barthes writes in *The Pleasure of the Text*: “the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.” As Barthes’ quote indicates, readers should assume a reading posture that is production-oriented rather than consumption-oriented.

In this study entitled *Bewegend lezen* [*Motion reading*] the key question is How can we apply the cinematographic reading technique to *Gewassen vleys*, with its enormous capacity for imagery? The author of *Bewegend lezen* considers this question against the background of the predominant titling—the dominant fiction—of the historical novel. The idea is that we need to explore not just *how* this novel deals with a past presumed to be familiar, but how

it relates to the usual way of dealing with this (Dutch) past. To answer this question, the first chapter covers the tension between the action sequence and the imagery sequence. At the narrative level of the *fabula*, the action sequence is the sequence of actions and events. At the same time, the imagery sequence unfolds the series of sensory, consciousness, and trophological images. Subsequently, a second point of tension is introduced: the contrast between *literary realism* and *modern realism*. Both of these notions derive from the theories of Roland Barthes. Literary realism deals with the pretense of authenticity and *concludes* the past in a satisfactory manner. Modern realism focuses on the referential illusion that the past *introduces*, creating a connection with the present. Exploring and analyzing these two points of tension results in distilling the game components as: image, construction, wonder, and reorientation.

The second chapter centers on a close reading of an excerpt from *Gewassen vrees*. The excerpt stands out because it proves the novel contains sections that clearly fall outside of the dominant fiction of the historical novel. The excerpt is remarkable also for its use of two cinematographic languages. One language can be characterized as “Eisensteinian dialectics,” images that oppose each other—in both form and content—despite being closely connected. Another language is a “Hollywood-like transition” of images that focuses attention exclusively on the relationship between men and women. This close-reading approach opens up options for identification that are contemporary rather than historical and that question and revise the affective influence upon the reader. This introduces a fifth game component: affect.

Chapter 3 combines text, theatre and film to explore how they interact (rather than to suggest they are the same). After re-evaluating the concept of theatricality, the author explores the impact of image, space and camera use and proposes we distinguish between *theatrical voyeurism* and *cinematographic voyeurism*. In *theatrical voyeurism*, the spectator-reader maintains a safe distance between the stage and anonymous theater seats. In *cinematographic voyeurism*, the voyeuristic spectator-reader is absorbed by the space. The action of the narrating, constantly moving camera directs this process. The spectator-reader emerges from the dark and the present—figuratively speaking, of course—to enter the space

where the action takes place: “there” becomes “here.” This *cinematographic voyeurism* is the final game element to complement *image, construction, wonder, and reorientation*, all of which the novel uses to manipulate and move the reader.

In the fourth and final chapter, cinematographic analysis gives way to a cinematographic-thematic exploration in which cinema acts as intertext. Applying a cinematographic reading technique enables one to distinguish filmic genres and themes. For instance, the genre of slapstick becomes apparent in scenes reminiscent of the Keystone Cops and The Muppet Show; an eighteenth-century love letter transforms into an internet porn movie; and a classic ogre turns into a creature from a modern horror movie. Both generally and specifically, cinematographic intertexts can be identified here: Rosenboom’s imagery sequences evoke images from Dutch directors Alex van Warmerdam and Paul Verhoeven.

This thesis presents various conclusions. *Bewegend lezen* shows that *and* how cinematographic reading can lead to forms of identification that differ from strictly historic-intellectual identification. In addition, cinematographic reading makes the notions of “filmic” and “visual writing” tangible and clear—in words. The author of this study also demonstrates how the imaginary power of language acquires affect through the interaction of rhetorical means and cinematographic techniques. The various chapters also show how the novel *Gewassen Vlees* challenges the historic novel’s dominant fiction. The author illustrates how this novel fosters a merging of past and present that reinforces a received attitude towards the past—while emphatically undermining this very attitude.

The conclusion of *Bewegend lezen* is less a summary than an evaluation. The conclusion challenges readers with a fundamental question: Should we not adopt a different way of looking at an evoked past? Usually, we *look* at a past that is constructed, and the way we look is constituted. The first part of the conclusion is that *Gewassen vlees* plays a dual role in the evocation of the past. On the one hand, the novel exploits the dominant fiction of the historical novel by presenting it as an object of desire. This is a form of historicizing pornography. On the other hand, the novel upsets the dominant fiction by introducing imagery that is part of the film tradition not only formally but in terms of substance. A cinematographic way of reading thus

shows the past in a different way. The second part of the conclusion is that readers should view history less through identifying idiopathically and be more conscious of identifying heteropathically. This is indeed what a cinematographic approach to reading encourages.

This approach is predicated on readers' being familiar with this way of reading and with taking an active role; or, as Gilles Deleuze once remarked: "Don't ask what it means, ask how it works." Every reader must develop a productive way of looking.

In this thesis, "every reader" refers to two groups: adult readers as well as secondary-school readers of literature. Until approximately two decades ago, secondary-school students were trained primarily in structural analysis; in the past couple of decades, students have instead been required to write book reports. In addition to offering readers of literature an early introduction to cinematographic reading, *Bewegend lezen* posits a radical change in the way literature is taught at the secondary level. Currently, teaching students to read astutely means not only doing justice to language, but doing justice to images. This can happen when texts are embedded in an intertextual, interdiscursive, and intermedial context, a context relevant not only to how we grapple with our past, but how we grapple with the present.