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Betreft Bint. Bint van Bordewijk Modernistisch bekeken

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Summary

In my thesis I want to demonstrate why F. Bordewijks' novel *Bint* may justifiably be termed a modernist novel and why this characterisation is illuminating.

First, in a preamble, I state that, inspired by his youth in the inner city of Amsterdam, Bordewijk in his stories, novellas and novels has a tendency to give form to the unconscious problems of his male protagonists in a distinctive, particular modernistic architectural and cinematic way, comparable to film editing. The problems in question are associated with corporality and relations with women. The artistic design also has its magical and mythical aspects.

I am of the opinion that this way of looking at reality - involving the hidden sides of reality in the imagination and doing so in this particular cinematic and architectural way - also characterises modernism. I chose to state this in a preamble as a way of paying homage to Bordewijk who several times used this type of discourse.

The psychomachic way of reading which I use in this argument I borrow from Michel Dupuis and Dorian Cumps. I interpret *Keizerrijk*, a novella set in the inner city of Amsterdam in the time of Bordewijk's youth, in accordance with this method and I connect this text to facts from Bordewijk's biography. I announce that I will apply the psychomachic way of reading also to *Bint*, in chapter six and chapter seven.

In the second chapter I show how in three recent histories of Dutch literature, by Anbeek, Anten and Ruiters and Smulders *Bint* has been called a 'modernist' novel, albeit casually and not by mutual agreement. With reference to this classification a short review of the development of the term 'modernism' is given, including how Fokkema and Ibsch use the term. Finally I state how I myself will use the term 'modernism': like Anbeek en Anten, in agreement with the opinions of Theo van Doesburg who in *De Stijl* propagated a totally and radically different form for all the arts.

Chapter three deals with the reception of *Bint*, specifically with the novel's modernity. Important reviews in the daily papers and in general cultural magazines are dealt with as are independent publications about Bordewijk till his death in 1965. These show how people tried to get a grip on his work, especially the early novels and novellas. Gradually the critics commented upon more aspects of its modernity. Although some interpretations are very clarifying, traditional ways of reading, biographical, essentialist or intentional, often get in the way of understanding the novel. Many critics have discussed the place of the novel in the literary spectrum in relation to the literary movement of New Realism, which, with regard to *Bint*, is a confusing phenomenon. Moreover, the reviewing of some of the 'new realist' novels was used to explain the critics' own point of view as to politics and literature. This did not help make New Realism as such more understandable and the discussion about *Bint* got bogged down.

Next I show how after 1965 successive movements within Dutch literary studies and Literary Theory have commented on *Bint*. Bordewijk and his early novels have been situated in the international modernist movement. In this context aspects such as narration, description of reality, intertextuality and metaphor should have received attention but again intentional and biographical reading and particularly discussions about the relation between *Bint* and New Realism hampered such illumination.

Close reading chapter one of *Bint* in chapter four, I investigate in what way Bordewijk dealt with tradition. It becomes clear to me that the novel challenges every literary usage and, for the time being, can be qualified as modernistic. Language, narration and description of reality are provocatively different. The system of education, the theme of the novel, is, in view of the time of its publication extremely important. The reader has continually to alter his attitude towards what he is reading and is invited to reread. Reactions to the novel, as described in chapter three, become more understandable. Various aspects of the novel invite closer inspection and a different approach.

In chapter five I comment, in a mimetic, realist reading, on the speeches of director Bint. These speeches are written in direct speech

and the reader can consider himself as being addressed in the same way as the teachers in the world of the novel, to whom the speeches are addressed. I put the speeches in the framework of contemporary pedagogical writings by well-known pedagogues and politicians and of a recent dissertation on developments in Dutch education since Thorbecke, who drafted the constitution of 1848 and passed his law on education in 1863. Education in commerce - and Bint's school is a school of commerce - holds a special position in this development and emphasises Bint's attitude.

In the next, the sixth chapter, I consider the female figures in *Bint*. It becomes clear that nine female personalities, literarily organised in a very systematic way, play a hidden role in the experience of history teacher de Bree. Bint acts as the initiator into a psychomachic world in the isolated architecture of the school. In the course of the year the neurotic behaviour of the young teacher changes radically for the better. A psychomachic battle is fought. De Bree acquires independence as a full person and achieves a more realistic attitude towards women.

Chapter seven draws attention to intertextual signs. In comparison with earlier experiments in the extremely short novels *Blokken en Knorrende beesten*, *Bint* is no longer an experiment but an experimental modernist novel expressing relations towards modern art and communication. The concept of dialogism, introduced by Bakhtin and identifying the dialogue between literary tradition and individual works and genres, proves to be useful. Within the context of intertextual signs a dialogue starts between Bint and de Bree, between de Bree and his colleague Remigius, but also with the reader. The dialogue with the reader is about de Bree, his relation towards the class 'hell', and Dante's *Divina Commedia*. *Bint* can be read not only as a tragedy but also as a Dantesque 'commedia', that is with a happy ending. I compare the role of Bint as a guide with that of Vergil and place it in a psychomachic light. In this intertextual reading Bint's system of discipline becomes clearer especially in its relation to Christianity and to Nietzsche, his 'circular course' and his 'Umwertung aller Werte'. New perspectives of meaning come into being, characters

are emphasised, the novel acquires greater depth. The reader is invited to reread, to put at stake his knowledge of actuality and tradition.

Metaphor is the subject of the last and eighth chapter. Ricoeur's theory of metaphor gives the opportunity to tame the overwhelming quantity and variety of metaphors and bring them together in the unity of the plot. It is however a unity in motion; change is also at work inside the plot and Ricoeur's theory has to be adapted. The plot is in motion and the reader has to shift from one point of view to another. The theme of discipline, situated in the grand general frame of a transformed view of reality, of change in a moving unity of opposites, is brought to life by metaphors.

The novel shows, through the metaphors, how discipline works differently in different individuals and how variously nature takes its course. The metaphors, in their paradigms of similarity and difference, dictate poetic rules that reveal the plot, and reveal also change in nature and culture. Change in nature brings new life, after blossoming, decay and death; change of perspective in constantly changing subjects and generation, time and again sets in motion the congealed life of culture. Reading and rereading, in circular discourse, the reader is able to assist at this modernist vision of a mythical and natural religious unity.



