

*Narrative Crossings: Theory and Pragmatics of Prose Fiction.* By ALEXANDER GELLEY. Baltimore, Maryland, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1987. xiv + 178 pp. £17.70.

The pragmatic aspect is announced in the title of this book by Alexander Gelley. He investigates not a theory of fiction (in the strict sense) but a theory of representation, or a theory of description in fiction.

Considering description as 'not a homogeneous category' (pp. 6–7) the author distinguishes its four primary constituents: first, denomination and classification ('a cultural taxonomy'), second, an event or act (properly speaking, the plot), third, descriptive means, and fourth, a spatial model of the world. This set is rather conglomerative and can scarcely function correctly in the systematic research of literary texts, but it helps the author of the monograph to trace some characteristic features in narrative descriptions.

In the essay 'Character and Person' the author meditates upon the presentation of self in the novel. He defines two interdependent tendencies in the formation of the literary character, distinguishing between character as persona or social role and character as person or soul. This differentiation seems to be productive, and it is a pity that the idea has not been developed further in the book.

Even in his 'Premises for a Theory of Description' Professor Gelley demonstrates some methodological eclecticism. Further, he employs such different approaches as phenomenological and psychoanalytical, structuralist and Bakhtinian, deconstructionist, and so on. Of course, he is well read in modern literary theory, but his own work lacks methodological integrity.

Sometimes it lacks accuracy as well. For example, the following statement is open to criticism: 'Formalist criticism focused primarily on elements of content in the novel — action, character, and description' (p. 80). It contains three mistakes at least: the 'elements' are not homogeneous, not all of them are 'elements of content', and formal criticism, beginning with the Russian formal school, did not focus on 'elements of content'.

The most interesting essays in *Narrative Crossings* are those in Part II, where *concrete* problems are solved on the material of *concrete* literary texts. In the best essay, to my

mind, the author turns to the analysis of the dialogic structure in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas, he tries 'to adapt elements of a narrative pragmatics' (p. 118) in the famous novel and shows the ways and principles of linking of the different novellas into a whole novel.

Some genealogical problems are also treated there. So the author is quite right when observing that the road, as a kind of literary space, in the novel by Goethe (as distinct from *Don Quixote* or *Tom Jones*) 'does not serve as an integrating narrative device' (p. 118). He could have added that the genre of the *Wanderjahre* is absolutely different: it is a classic example of *Bildungsroman* but not a novel of the Cervantine type. Maybe the form of the protagonist's self-consciousness in the novel is not completely characteristic of the *Bildungsroman*, as Professor Gelley notes; however, considering Goethe's 'dilogy' about Wilhelm Meister as a whole, it may be unreservedly classified as *Bildungsroman*.

The novel, as 'the most assimilative and levelling of genres', is the most attractive for this investigator. But in some essays he treats other literary genres. One of the chapters is devoted to Hawthorne's short tale 'Wakefield' and contains several serious reservations upon the communicative function of discourse in fiction.

If the main merit of the theoretical part of the book under review is its laconicism, the essays of the second part contain some good analytical fragments which are of real interest and of a certain scholarly value.