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Narrative Anachronies in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*

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Introduction

Narrative anachronies are : "... les différentes formes de discordance entre l'ordre de l'histoire et celui du récit".¹ We distinguish two great types of anachronies : analepses and prolepses.

A)- Analepses

Gérard Genette defines the analepsis as: "... toute évocation après coup d'un événement antérieur au point de l'histoire où l'on se trouve... »²

To distinguish the different kinds of analepses, Genette makes use of the 'scope' and the 'amplitude' of those anachronies. The scope is the temporal distance between the moment when the event took place and "le moment de l'histoire où le récit s'est interrompu pour lui faire place."³ As for the amplitude, it is the duration of the story covered by the anachrony. The determination of the scope allows to divide analepses into two classes: external analepses and internal ones. For instance, let us consider two discontinuous lines; one representing the analeptic narrative, and the other representing the first narrative. The scope point of the external analepse is exterior to the first narrative, whereas the scope point of the internal analepse is comprised in the first narrative. What can be summarised by the following schemata:

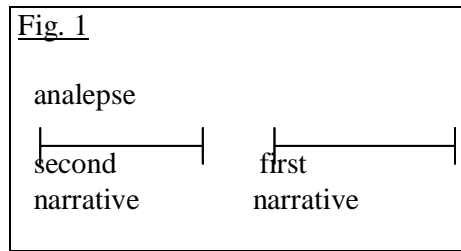


Fig 1 : Case of the
External analepse

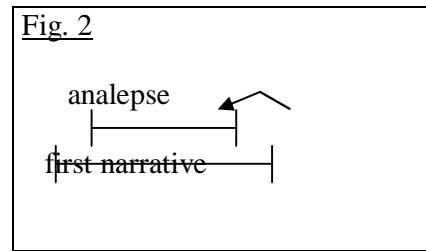


Fig 2 : Case of the
internal analepse

The scope and the amplitude permit to determine mixed analepses "dont le point de portée est antérieur et le point d'amplitude postérieur au début du récit premier."⁴

Gérard Genette makes precise that external analepses, because they are external, do not risk to interfere with the first narrative that they only complete in lightening the reader on such or such antecedent. It is their function. Such is not the case for internal analepses the temporal field of which is included in that of the first narrative.

Among the internal analepses, Genette distinguishes two categories. We have heterodiegetic internal analepses and homodiegetic internal analepses. The heterodiegetic internal analepses, "... c'est-à-dire portant sur une ligne d'histoire, et donc un contenu diégétique différent de celui (ou ceux) du récit premier ; soit, très classiquement sur un personnage nouvellement introduit et dont le narrateur veut éclairer les 'antécédents'... »⁵

As for Homodiegetic internal analepses, they "...portent sur la même ligne d'action que le récit premier."⁶ Homodiegetic internal analepses are of two types, according to a functional criterium. They can be completive when they are "...des segments rétrospectifs qui viennent combler après coup une lacune antérieure au récit."⁷ Finally, they can be 'repetitive'. They are still called "recalls" and "...sont plutôt des allusions du récit à son propre passé."⁸ The determination of the amplitude allows to distinguish two kinds of external analepses : partial analepses and complete ones. Partial analepses are "...retrospections qui s'achèvent en ellipse, sans rejoindre le récit premier."⁹ As for complete analepses, they "...viennent se raccorder au récit premier sans solution de continuité entre les deux segments de l'histoire."¹⁰

This could be summarized by the following schemata :

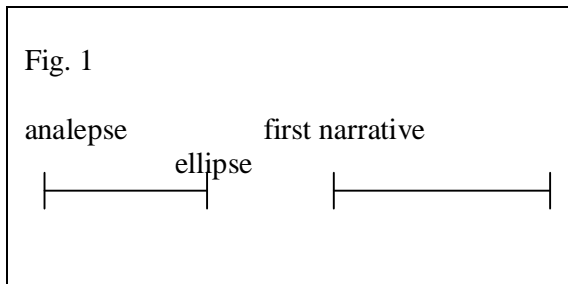


Fig. 1 : case of the external analepsis

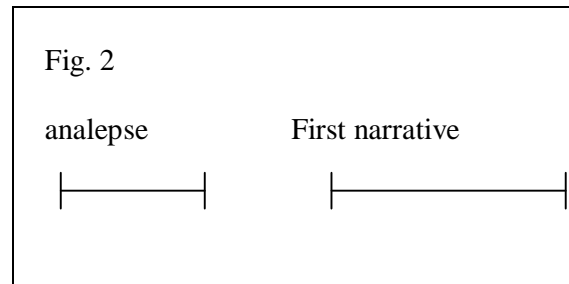


Fig. 2 : case of the complete external analepsis

To come now to the two novels that we are studying, we will say that *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* contain two kinds of analepses. We have external analepses and homodiegetic internal analepses. In *Adam Bede*, in total, there are six analepses (ch. 13, P. 180 ; ch. 17, P. 221 and P. 225 ; ch. 22, P. 295 ; ch. 27, P. 338 ; ch. 45, P. 8 497-499). Let us note that two of them are external (ch. 17, P. 221 and P. 225).

The first two paragraphs of chapter 13 of *Adam Bede* constitute an analepsis. It is the temporal gap which allows us to perceive that flash back. In chapter 12, when Arthur meets Hetty who is going to Mrs Pomfret's, it is about four hours p.m. because Hetty says: "She expects me at four o'clock. I'm rather late today..."¹¹ In chapter 13, the narrator comes back to what happened in the morning, using the verb 'to happen' in the Preterit, and 'to have' in the plus perfect: "It happened that Mrs Pomfret had had a slight quarrel with Mrs Best, the housekeeper, on this Thursday morning..."¹²

Here, the reader is in presence of an internal analepsis for its scope (a flashback of about eight hours) is internal to the first narrative. Let us add that internal analepsis is homodiegetic for it bears on the same line of action as the first narrative. The object of that analepsis is to explain why Hetty has been able to take back her way home at the hour she had given Arthur. In addition, that analepsis discloses the hope Hetty nourishes to meet Arthur. Besides, it is what happens. In chapter 17, the narrator proceeds to a flash back of about sixty years, when he says : "Sixty years ago-it is a long time, so no wonder things have changed-all clergymen were not zealous..."¹³ It is about an external analepsis for its scope is

external to the first narrative. The object of that flashback is to establish a relation between the pastors of the years before 1799 and those of 1799.

The Mill on the Floss possesses ten analepses (Book I, P. 261 ; Book II, P. 230, P. 265 ; Book III, P. 279, P. 331, P. 352 ; Book IV, P. 373 ; Book V, P. 408 ; Book VI, P. 517. All those analepses are internal ones. The first one is found in chapter 10. In the first paragraph, the narrator presents Lucy coming in Mr and Mrs Pullet, full of mud "from her small foot to her bonnet-crows"¹⁴ The reader ignores what happened. Then, the narrator is going to make a flash back. The analepsis is announced by the following passage: "To account for this unprecedented apparition in aunt Pullet's parlour, we must return to the moment when the three children went to play out..."¹⁵

The presence of that analepsis is made manifest by the expression "we must return to". In the analepsis, the reader learns that Lucy is covered with mud because Maggie Pushed her in the pool. That analepsis is situated at that place to present a dramatic scene. It is the scene of Lucy being pushed by Maggie in the mud.

Among the ten analepses of *The Mill on the Floss*, the one which starts in chapter 7 of Book III draws our attention. It is an internal analepsis for the narrative which constitutes that analepsis takes place after the beginning of the plot, or because it is situated within the first narrative (the main story) which is that of the Tulliver family. The analepsis starts on page 265 when the narrator says: "... on the morning of a dark cold day near the end of November, he (Tom) was told, soon after entering the study at nine o'clock, that his sister was in the drawing-room."

That analepsis permits the reader to know that Mr Tulliver has lost his suit in justice. The peculiarity of that analepsis is that it gives birth to another analepsis which begins in chapter 1 of Book III (p. 273). We have the impression that it is the analepsis of chapter 7 which continues. The new analepsis is signalled by the title of the chapter 'what had happened at Home'. It informs the reader about the circumstances which have caused Mr Tulliver's fall from his horse as well as his state of coma. That analepsis ends at the beginning of the second

paragraph of page 279. The analepsis ends when the narrator takes back the first narrative on page 279 : "And the next morning Maggie went as we have seen..."

The amplitude of the analepses of the two novels, that is, the duration covered by those anachronic narratives, is not really measurable. The only analepsis we can partly measure the amplitude is that of chapter 13 of *Adam Bede*. It is an analepsis which covers a period of some hours. In chapter 12, it is about fifteen hours when Arthur meets Hetty who is going to Mrs Pomfret's. In chapter 13, the narrator comes back to some hours before "on this Thursday morning" (p. 180), without precisely indicating the hour.

Between the two novels, *The Mill on the Floss* is the one which has more analepses. Concerning that novel, one can speak of an analeptic work of fiction. In any case, the narrative of that novel, as well as *Adam Bede* is analeptic by definition in the sense that the narrator tells us the story after that the latter has occurred.

Although analepses complete ellipses and allow the reader to better understand the story, their considerable number in *The Mill on the Floss* disturbs the reading in constantly fragmenting the text.

B) Prolepses

Gerard Genette defines prolepsis as : "... toute manœuvre narrative consistant à raconter ou évoquer d'avance un événement ultérieur..."¹⁶ Like the analepses, Gérard Genette distinguishes external prolepses from internal ones. The function of external prolepses "...est le plus souvent d'épilogue : elles servent à conduire jusqu'à son terme logique telle ou telle ligne de l'action"¹⁷ Genette says that internal prolepses pose the same problem as analepses of the same type : that of interference. For heterodiegetic prolepses, « ...ce risque est nul, que l'anticipation soit interne ou externe"¹⁸. Genette adds in his study on heterodiegetic prolepses : «... on distinguera encore celles qui viennent combler par avance une lacune ultérieure (prolepses complétives), et celles qui toujours par avance, doublent, si peu que ce soit, un segment narratif à venir (prolepses répétitives).»¹⁹

Gerard Genette makes the difference between repetitive prolepses with what he rather calls 'baits': "On ne confondra pas ces annonces, par définition explicites, avec ce que l'on doit plutôt appeler des amorces, simples pierres d'attentes sans anticipation... »²⁰

To come back to *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, we will say that two kinds of prolepses are visible in these novels. We find internal and external prolepses. In the first novel, there are anticipation clues put by the authoress to announce the future death of Thias Bede (Adam's father). It is an internal prolepsis for it is situated at a moment which is posterior to the beginning of the plot. That prolepsis is repetitive. The first anticipation image about the death of Adam's father is found on page 88. That sign is the redness of Seth Bede's eyes (Adam's brother). The second sign is the howling of the Bede's dog (p. 93). The third one occurs when Adam's mother tells Seth : "Let me pray a bit with thee for father..."²¹ That is reinforced by the prayer that Lisbeth Bede and her son Seth make on page 91, and Lisbeth's cries: "So the mother and son knelt down together and Seth prayed for the poor wandering father... Lisbeth's ready tears flowed again, and she wept aloud."

There is also an internal prolepsis announcing Dinah's next status as a mother, in chapter 51 (p. 548). The anticipation image occurs when Dinah takes the child in her hands and when Seth tells her about marriage. The function of that prolepsis is to convey an image, namely that of procreation.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, the reader numbers eight prolepses. Five of them are concentrated in Book I (ch. 2, p. 182). Another one is found in chapter 13 of Book VI (p. 584). The last two are in Book VII (ch. 3, p. 629 and ch. 12 p. 182 ; Book VII ch. 5 p. 651). Indeed, they are part of a story which is external to the main narrative. Their role is to sensitize the reader about the theme of flood which will take place at the closure of the novel. Two important prolepses are to be considered in this novel. The first one is in relation to Maggie's next death. The second prolepsis is linked to the flood by the river Floss.

In Book I, liquid images warn the reader about the heroine's drowning. From the beginning of the narrative, the authoress lets hover a threat of flood. The woman novelist makes us

perceive that future flood through indirect warnings located at regular intervals. Thus, from the second chapter of the novel, Mrs Tulliver worries for Maggie who is always at the edge of the Floss: "wanderin' up down by the water, like a wild thing: she'll tumble in some day."²² The image of anticipation concerning the next death of her daughter is found thirty pages further (ch. 5), when Mrs Tulliver exclaims: "Godness heart ! she's got drowned..."²³ The link between Maggie, Tom and the Floss becomes obvious in the reader's mind when Mrs Tulliver avers in chapter 11: "There're Such children for the water, mine are"²⁴ The announcement of the heroine's future death reappears in chapter 13 of Book VI. When Lucy proposes the idea of a small boat travel on the Floss with Maggie, Philip intervenes and fears that Maggie sells her Soul "...to that ghostly boat man who haunts the Floss-only for the sake of being drifted in a boat for ever."²⁵

In chapter 14 of Book VI (p.596), the prolepsis in relation to Maggie's drowning reappears when Maggie dreams that the small boat in which she and Stephen have taken place, capsizes. Finally, in chapter 30 of Book VII, the reader has the impression that Maggie is dead drowned when the narrator gives him Mrs Glegg's point of view after Maggie's misadventure on the Floss with Stephen: "She felt assured that Maggie was drowned..."²⁶ That opinion which intervenes six chapters before the end of the novel, strengthens the idea of Maggie's death by drowning. After that last anticipation image, the reader expects undoubtedly Maggie's death in the river Floss.

The prolepsis relative to Maggie's death is a repetitive prolepsis which functions as a recall. The Second prolepsis that the reader retains is that of the flood which drowned Dorlcote Mill and its surroundings. The allusions to that flood are present in chapter 6 of Book I (pp 103-104) in which Tom reminds Bob that there was a great flood in which many animals died drowned and many boats were led adrift. In chapter 12 of Book I, the reader learns the legend of St Ogg's which was flooded by the waters (p. 182). In that chapter, we

follow the story of the boatman who made the Virgin cross the river one stormy evening. The legend adds that he appeared again to the inhabitants during the evenings of flood.

The image of flood reappears in chapter 9 of Book III when the narrator says: "... the old half-timbered mill that had been there before the last great floods, which damaged it..."²⁷

In chapter 13 of Book VI (p.584), Philip alludes to the legend of St Ogg's linked to the overflowings of the Floss. That flood occurs in the last chapter of the novel. The narrator speaks of its appearance: "At that moment Maggie felt a startling sensation of sudden cold about her knees and feet: it was water flowing under her. She started up..."²⁸

The repetitive internal prolepsis about the flood of the river Floss, functions as a reminder.

C) Ellipses

There is an ellipsis when a part of the story is not told. Gérard Genette studies in *Figures III* the various ellipses which one finds in narratives. He distinguishes three kinds: explicit ellipses, implicit ellipses and purely hypothetical ellipses. Explicit ellipses are those

... qui procèdent soit par indication (déterminée ou non) du laps de temps qu'elles élient, ce qui les assimile à des sommaires très rapides, de type 'quelques années passèrent'²⁹

In explicit ellipses, Gérard Genette distinguishes determined ellipses in which the exact number of years or days is given, from undetermined ellipses, in which time is given to us in a vague way of the type 'some years' or 'long years'.

Implicit ellipses are « celles dont la présence même n'est pas déclarée dans le texte, et que le lecteur peut seulement inférer de quelque lacune chronologique ou solution de continuité narrative. »³⁰ Hypothetical ellipses are omissions « impossibles à localiser, parfois même à placer en quelque lieu que ce soit... »³¹

The reading of *Adam Bede* allows to discover six ellipses (ch 4, p. 87; ch 35, p. 408; ch 44, p. 485; ch 47, p. 507; ch 49, p. 517; epilogue, p. 581). *The Mill one the Floss* counts six ellipses concentrated in Books III, V and VI (Book III ch 7, p. 329; ch 8 p. 346; Book V ch 4, p. 432; ch 6 p. 452; Book VI ch 8 p. 539; the conclusion, p. 656).

Adam Bede is characterized by implicit ellipses. The reader counts four of them. Chapter 35 speaks about February, 1800, while in the previous chapter, it was a question of November (p.403). If the narrator evokes January and February which marked Mrs Poyser's convalescence (p. 409). He does not say anything of December. We are here in front of an implicit ellipsis in the sense that the period covered by the ellipsis is not visible at first sight. It is the discount of months which allows to disclose it. If the narrative authority has omitted to speak about what happened during the month of December, it is because there was nothing to say concerning the engagement of Adam and Hetty which took place in November (ch. 34); Adam being occupied by his work. Chapter 44 of this novel contains another implicit ellipsis. At the beginning of the chapter, the story takes place in December because the narrator says in speaking about Arthur: "He threw up the Windows, he rushed out of doors into the December air"³²

On the same page we are in March because the narrative authority says: " It was March now: they (Adam and Hetty) were soon to be married "³³ The story makes a jump of two months. Here, we are in front of an implicit ellipsis which extends from the month of December up to the end of January. This ellipsis corresponds to the journey of Arthur. The narrator prefers not to speak about it and contents himself with paying attention to the month of March which marks Hetty's arrest and judgement.

The Mill one the Floss distinguishes itself by its determined or undetermined ellipses. In chapter 7 of the book III, for example, the narrator uses the expression ' the days passed ' (p.329) which shows that there is an omission of events in the days that the narrative authority jumps. The purpose of this ellipsis is to omit the days in which nothing particular happened; since the coma of Mr Tulliver did not evolve. This ellipsis also plays a role in the

economy of the story. In the following chapter, Maggie tells her father: "...You've been ill a great many weeks - more than two months."³⁴ Nothing is said of the disease of Mr Tulliver during those two months. We are in the presence of an explicit ellipsis. The function of this ellipsis is to inform us about the duration of Mr Tulliver's coma and to strengthen the effect of the new entrance of that character in the action of the novel. The reader discovers an implicit ellipsis in Bob Jakin's narrative program. The ellipsis is made obvious by the fact that there is a great part of Bob Jakin's life which is unknown to the reader. This character is presented to us for the first time in Book I (chap. 6, p.102 to p.106). He reappears in Book 3 (chap 6, p.322). He is seen again in Book IV (chap 3, p.373 to p.378). He is now a young man. The reader ignores what happened meanwhile as regards this character. What the reader knows now is that Bob has become a packer and that he got married. Then, he reappears in Book V (chap 2, p.408). Then he enters again in chap 5 (p.443) and chap 7 (p.462). Bob reappears in the first chapter of the last Book (Book VII) in which one sees him presenting his baby to Maggie (p.616). There is also an ellipsis concerning Mr Tulliver's judgment. In chap.2 of Book V, Mr Tulliver said that he was going to justice against Mr Pivart for a problem of irrigation of his lands. In chap.1 of Book III, the reader learns simply that Mr Tulliver has lost his lawsuit. From chap. 3 of Book II to Chap. 1 of Book III, nothing is said of that lawsuit. The function of ellipses is to drop information which is not necessary for the understanding and the overall meaning of the story.

The novelist has the peculiarity of concluding her first two novels by implicit ellipses. Between the last chapter and the conclusion of *Adam Bede*, about six years have passed. In chapter 55, the story is situated in November, 1801, while in the epilogue the narrator speaks of the month of June 1807. So, between chapter 55 and the epilogue, about six years have passed. Nothing is said between Adam's marriage with Dinah and that month of June, 1807. What the reader knows it is that meanwhile, Adam and Dinah had a little boy who was two years old in June, 1807 when the story that the narrator was telling us ended. The reader

wonders about the reasons of that long ellipsis of six years decided by the narrator. The hypothesis of a desire for conciseness of the story would not be put aside.

The conclusion of *The Mill on the Floss* lets discover an implicit ellipsis of four years. It intervenes just after the destruction of the mill and Tom and Maggie's death. In the conclusion, the narrator speaks about the fifth year after the flood which destroyed the mill, and gives the reader an overview of Dorlcotte Mill. But he does not say something about what happened during the four years which followed the destruction of the mill.

What is certain is that George Eliot makes use of ellipses to avoid telling non pertinent diegetic segments. Like comments, ellipses work for a certain economy of the plot in relation to the story.

Endnotes :

- 1- Gerard Genette, *Figures III* Paris, Seuil, P. 79
- 2- Ib. P. 82
- 3- Ib. P. 89
- 4- Ib. P. 91
- 5- Ib. P. 91
- 6- Ib. P. 92
- 7- Ib. P. 92
- 8- Ib. P. 95
- 9- Ib. P. 101
- 10- Ib. P. 101
- 11- George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books 1976. P. 176
- 12- Ib. P. 180
- 13- Ib. P. 221
- 14- George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books. 1976 P. 161.
- 15- Ib. P. 161
- 16- *Figures III*, P. 82
- 17- Ib. P. 107
- 18- Ib. P. 109
- 19- Ib. P. 109
- 20- *Figures III*, P. 112
- 21- *Adam Bede*, PP. 90-91
- 22- *The Mill on the Floss*, P. 60
- 23- Ib. P. 90
- 24- Ib. P. 166
- 25- Ib. P. 584
- 26- Ib. P. 629
- 27- Ib. P. 352
- 28- Ib. P. 649
- 29 *Figures III*, p. 139
- 30 ib., p. 140
- 31-*Figures III*, p. 141

32 *Adam Bede*, p. 485.

33 *Ib.*, p. 485

34 *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 346

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