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'Snowed Up': A Structuralist Reading

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'I've got a fire in my bedroom tonight, and am writing cosily before I retire as the books say' (21). Edie's diary entry for 'Jan. 4th' alludes to conventions of literary expression, to phrases that characterize the writing of fiction. The reference to what 'the books say' affirms the diary's factuality; it too is written, yet it is distinct from those completed works of imagination. Here we may see the writer writing, in a particular place, at a specific time. What could be more real?

It is the end of the day, when diaries are usually composed; it is 'Jan.', not 'Dec.' or 'Feb.'; and it is the 4th, rather than the 3rd, or the 5th. But no year is given, to ground our reading in history, and it is prudent to ask what historical authenticity, what reality is actually conveyed by the specified date. Experience may tell us that in January, in England, snow may well fall, so there is a credible relationship between the action of this story, centred on heavy precipitation, and the time of its setting. Yet it is surely essentially the case that 'Jan. 4th' acquires meaning *only* in relation to other dates, from which it is distinct, within our calendar system for indicating the passage of time.

Let us turn to that fire, keeping Edie warm as she writes. We are tacitly invited to envisage it, to imagine its comforting glow. The invitation is issued not only by Edie, but by Richard Jefferies, the author of her writing. The fire is an example of those descriptive details which add flesh to the bare bones of storytelling,

and convince us that here is a substantial world. Often such details have less apparent significance than this source of heat in a story of isolating snowdrifts. The fire, then, fulfils a double function: it contributes to a set of thematic oppositions of warmth and coldness; and it adds to the solidity of the world we project as we read 'Snowed Up'. The French critic, Roland Barthes, noted how such descriptive details (to his end the more superfluous the better) deliver 'the reality effect' (Barthes 1982, 11–18). As readers, our sense of 'concrete reality' resides largely in such particulars of concocted, fictional worlds.

Our perception of concrete detail relies, Barthes suggests, upon 'the *direct* collusion of a referent and a signifier' (1982, 16). In other words, the verbal registration, whether written or spoken, of 'a fire' (signifier) leads us directly to an actual, physical fire (referent). For Barthes, a structuralist reader, immersed in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, 'this is what might be called the *referential illusion*' (1982, 16).

Saussure, whose theory of language provides the basis for the wide range of practices known as structuralism, denied words this seemingly natural referential status. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), he proposed a model in which the verbal or graphic *sign* (for example, a word written or printed on paper), unites a phonic *signifier* (for example, the sound of a word when uttered), and a *signified* (a concept). In our case, the printed word 'fire' fuses the sound made when it is read aloud, or mentally pronounced during silent reading, and a generalized, conceptual understanding of 'fire'. The referent is excluded from this model; we have lost direct access to that actual mound of burning coals, throwing out its palpable heat. Structuralism surrenders 'the referential illusion'.

Saussure, in effect, rejected the common-sense notion that the structure of language imitates the structure of things in the world. Instead, he conceived it as a self-contained system, generating meaning according to internal relationships of difference. In the *Course*, he explains this conception by analogy to the game of chess, where 'the respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all other terms'. Chess is possible because of 'the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move' (Saussure 1981, 88). Language similarly has its constant principles that underlie all meaningful

instances of language use. At the same time, however, the values of meanings of the words also depend on, and emerge out of, their relationships with other words, other phrases, and so on. In Saussure's view, then, while invariant rules are the basis for variant utterances, the act of signification is essentially arbitrary.

In Barthes's analysis, descriptive details in a text do not form a bridge to the world of things, rather they signify the 'category of the real'. Structuralist approaches regard the text as a literary system, and aim to clarify how that system produces meaning. The structuralist reader attends to sets of differences within a work, or works, and identifies a structure for consideration – this might be, for instance, genre, narrative, or character. Attending to descriptive detail, Barthes sought to show how the ostensibly incidental belongs integrally to the literary system, and may be encompassed within structuralist analysis more familiarly handling, 'separating out and systematizing the main articulations of narrative' (1982, 11).

In his influential essay, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', Barthes leaves no doubt as to where the emphasis falls in his study of tales and telling:

> Narrative does not show, does not imitate; the passion which may excite us in reading a novel is not that of a 'vision' (in actual fact, we do not 'see' anything). Rather it is that of meaning, that of a higher order of relation which also has its emotions, its hopes, its dangers, its triumphs. 'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; 'what happens' is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming. (1977, 124)

It is stating the obvious, perhaps, but it goes against deeply engrained habits of reading to point out that the fire in Edie's bedroom is a linguistic phenomenon. So, indeed, is the bedroom. And so too, alas, is Edie. Even the diary, emerging before our eyes, is just an illusory entity, a linguistic knot in the web of Jefferies' storytelling. Why stop there? Richard Jefferies . . . what do those words signify . . . ?

We have jettisoned the projected world with which we began. Now let us turn to the structuralist adventure of *how* 'Snowed Up' comes to have meaning. Given that the tale is written in diary form, the organization of time, the nature of temporal relationships within it, suggests itself as a good point of departure.

The Russian Formalists stressed an important distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet* (these terms broadly corresponding to 'story' and 'plot'), and investigated ways in which a chronological sequence of events might be modified or distorted in an act of plotting. Viktor Shklovsky's study of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is a classic of such analysis. Formalist work stimulated a considerable amount of subsequent structuralist investigation.

Gérard Genette made a notable contribution with *Narrative Discourse* (1980). Genette is particularly concerned here with the time of narration, and distinguishes three broad areas of classification: *order*, *duration*, and *frequency*. An analysis attending to 'order' would remark how the sequence in which events occurred stands in relation to the sequence of their narration. So, we might note how the gift of furs made by Edie's Papa is temporally subsequent to the act of persuasion which prompted Edie to keep a diary, yet those elements appear in inverse order in the telling. From this inversion, aspects of what we may read as Edie's temperament emerge. The role of recipient suits her well; it is her excitement at the gift that is registered in the opening lines. But the diary is a chore; she finds it laborious, and so, uncongenial. Reference to the reason for its composition effects a cooling of the warmth of her initial excitement. We might say that in a textual system based on the opposition of production and consumption, Edie is located toward the latter pole. That location is established in this initial instance of narrative order, and is corroborated by later instances within the tale.

Duration relates to the pace of narration. In a written account, a decade or a century might be dealt with in a few lines, while pages might be dedicated to a momentary occurrence, or to the experience of a few minutes. Such distortion is particularly characteristic of Modernist narratives, such as Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In Jefferies' tale, it is evident that the diary entries are not of uniform length: 'Jan. 15th' is considerably shorter than 'Jan. 14th'. In this case the relative brevity of the later entry is rationalised internally: 'My fingers are so numbed I can hardly write . . .' (26). Here duration may be read as a measure of coldness, within the meaning system that proceeds from the opposition of coldness and warmth.

The length of the entry for 'Jan. 14th' also reflects the fact that the preceding entry is dated 'Jan. 10th'. A period longer than a day has elapsed; there is catching-up to do. But the missing days produce meaning of another kind. They testify to Edie's unreliability, to her lack of dedication to the task of writing. This characterological evidence supports the overt testimony of the confession: '. . . I shall never be a good diarist, my last entry I see was a month ago. Oh dear whenever shall I reduce this giddy head of mine to something like order' (19–20). In a textual system differentiating order and disorder, Edie veers toward the pole of disorder. The practice of writing is presented, on the other hand, as an agency for order. She remarks how the clergyman who advised her to keep a diary 'said it would help me to classify my ideas, and bring my mind into shape' (20). Those missing dates, then, register lapses into disorder.

In the light of this structure of meaning, our reading of the 'Jan. 14th' entry may be suggestively developed. It begins: 'Snowing still – nothing but snow. Troubles are coming faster and faster' (23). The accumulation of snow signals greater disorder, and as a corollary the pace of troubles arriving is increased. This substantial entry may be regarded as an assertion of order against the advent of chaos, an attempt to establish shape amid formlessness. To identify another system of opposition, the diary is an accretion of the blackness of print, against the white nothingness of snow, beyond the walls of the house. The terms of this opposition are developed further within the house, in the servants' declaration that they could not live on (white) flour and water, and Alderman Thrigg's descent to the cellar in search of (black) coals, with their promise of life-sustaining warmth.

Genette's third term is 'frequency', where a single event may repeatedly be recounted in a narrative, or, alternatively, a repeated action may receive a single mention. A variant of this notion of frequency, featuring prominently in 'Snowed Up', is the regularity of Edie's reference to her suitors. This repeated reference establishes a set of relationships between her character, the nature of the suitors (according to her perception), and the situation in which she is a prize to be won, a commodity to be purchased, or a gift to be bestowed by her father. I do not seek to emulate here the complexity and sophistication with which Genette reads texts. Rather, I have drawn on his terms to illustrate the kinds of structural category that can be utilised in a structuralist reading. The way I have used them demonstrates that numerous systems to generate meaning are present simultaneously within

any text. So, a verbal matrix may further the story and develop character, at the same time. This is scarcely a revelation, but structuralists such as Genette, Barthes, and the Bulgarian theorist, Tzvetan Todorov, have produced subtle, rigorous and stimulating models for analysing the internal operations of that matrix.

In explaining how linguistics may provide the foundational paradigm for a structural analysis of narrative, Barthes points out that 'linguistics stops at the sentence, the last unit which it considers to fall within its scope' (1977, 82). Structuralism posits a homology, a corresponding formal organization between the sentence and the structure of more extended signifying systems, such as the textual narrative. In short, Barthes declares that 'a narrative is a long sentence', although it cannot be reduced to 'the simple sum of its sentences' (1977, 84). Just as a linguist can identify the particular order that constitutes a sentence, and can analyse how that order produces meaning, so a structuralist reader can attend to the arrangement of narrative elements, and to the generation of meaning through that ordering. It is evident that structural analysis can elucidate the combination of elements involved in a narrative's unfolding along its horizontal axis (in structuralist terminology, derived from Saussure, the syntagmatic axis).

Barthes takes pains to point out that 'to understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in "storeys", to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative "thread" on to an implicitly vertical axis' (1977, 87). Reading is not just a matter of moving from one word to the next, but crucially involves movement across levels of meaning. The vertical (paradigmatic) axis is vital to the generation of meaning, which is never simply the culmination of a simple, horizontal thrust.

I have suggested that a number of binary oppositions are set up on the vertical axis of 'Snowed Up': warmth/coldness, order/disorder, blackness/whiteness. Others may readily be added: wealth/poverty, fatness/thinness, age/youth, mobility/immobility, and so on. The meaning of Edie, of her diary, and of the events it records may be seen to arise from these minor meaning systems; in keeping with Saussure's teachings, it proceeds from internal differentiation, rather than through reference to external events or circumstances.

We need, then to recognize 'storeys' within our story, but it is important not to confuse these with depth, of the kind familiarly associated with character defined as a discrete entity, with a psychological dimension. Structuralism approaches characters not as distinct individuals, but as components of a system, or in terms of relationships. In analysing narratives we are not confronted with flesh-and-blood beings; rather, as Barthes points out, we are faced with 'paper beings' (1977, 111). Indeed, it is appropriate to structuralist reading to drop the notion of 'beings', and to examine characters as participants. They participate in what Barthes calls 'a sphere of actions'. This is to be understood not in terms of 'trifling acts', but of major narrative articulations such as desire, communication, or struggle (1977, 107).

This notion of spheres of actions is indebted to work performed, during the 1920s, by the formalist Vladimir Propp. He took a sizeable sample of Russian folk-tales, and set out to isolate their common features, to discover the invariant model underlying the variations constituting a diverse, yet identifiably related, range of stories. Propp identified thirty-one 'functions' within the invariant model, with 'function' conceived as 'an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action' (Scholes 1974, 62). These functions are not tied to particular characters, yet they form the fundamental components of the tales; they are limited in number, and while not all occur in every tale, the sequence of their appearance is unchanging. This disclosure provided a vital, pioneering example for later structuralist study of narrative.

In addition to functions, Propp identified seven 'spheres of action' within the folk-tales. These are basically roles performed in the realisation of each and every narrative. In Propp's case they are: villain; donor; helper; princess and father; dispatcher; hero; and false hero (Scholes 1974, 65). Importantly, role was not of necessity identical with one specific character; a character might take more than one role; one role might be performed by more than one character. As with the structuralists, a certain level of abstraction is crucial to identification of the basic terms of analysis.

It would be possible to apply Propp's spheres of action to 'Snowed Up', but he appears here as a precursor to Barthes, and what follows will look more broadly at how Jefferies' characters participate in communication, as one of the major spheres of action (in Barthes's sense) of the story. It will soon become

apparent that a number of the minor meaning systems referred to already can be subsumed within this sphere.

Communication assumes a message, a sender and a receiver. It also requires a medium to bridge the gap and convey the message, and a capacity, shared by both the interested parties, to understand what the message says. At the end of 'Snowed Up', an editorial voice enters, having tacitly framed Edie's narrative from the start, to draw a lesson from it. This act of overt communication provides a new focus for local instances of meaning generated throughout the tale. The conclusion highlights how snow, rendering the railway immobile, constituting a major breakdown between sender and receiver (in this case of goods), foregrounds a recurrent structural configuration of the story. It is notable that the editor takes for granted a shared interpretative competence with his reader, a kind of understanding that is distinctly male-gendered; Edie may have exaggerated things, but the editor and reader, more detachedly the donor and receiver of 'Snowed Up', may communicate none the less as reasonable beings. Structuralism alerts us to the fact that the editor and his projected reader are in fact produced by the text, rather than producers of it; the addresser and his assumed addressee are poles of a relationship established within, not beyond the literary system. As Barthes puts it, 'the signs of the narrator are immanent to the narrative' (1977, 111).

Edie, as diarist, is, in a sense, both sender and receiver, although an implied reader can be detected in the text, who is other than its 'author'. The message may be read as the need for order as opposed to her habitual disorder, with the black print, as mentioned before, accumulating sense against the blanket of snow that conceals information under uniform whiteness. More pressingly, perhaps, the message is affirmation of a subject position for Edie, engaged as an 'I' in the act of writing, in opposition to the object role in which she is cast throughout the story – notably, as a prize to be won, or a gift to be bestowed. Indeed, while being realized in the text as both sender and receiver, it can equally be argued that Edie is the message, in that she is regularly conceived as this object of exchange between her father and her suitors.

The category 'communication' clearly accommodates that of 'exchange', which we might differentiate as having a more overtly material basis. It also draws into its sphere the classification

'desire', which often figures as the dynamic or motive force evoked in the communicative act. For example, the diary opens with reference to a set of furs, Edie being the recipient, her father the donor. It is a gift, yet the furs are clearly given in expectation of a reciprocal giving; for example, of love, or allegiance, or obedience. The object of Edie's desire, the furs, once attained, enhances her sense of a self that might be perceived as the *actual* object of desire. This leads us into complex areas of psychoanalytic reading, so let us return to the significations of material exchange that generate a structure of meaning in 'Snowed Up'.

Papa, being a law-abiding citizen, aware of the economic rules governing exchange in capitalist society, has paid a substantial amount of money for the furs. Edie speculates that some of that money might have been borrowed from Alderman Thrigg, her suitor who, she believes, 'has been lending paper money' (20). The Alderman 'has mountains of gold which he made by selling green peas' (20). In our structuralist analysis, the gold and peas do not refer to actual gold and peas; rather they signify a communicative action, where seller and purchaser assume the roles of sender and receiver, and the coins and the vegetables are messages sent through the medium of commercial transaction. The Alderman signifies 'wealth' on the text's paradigmatic axis, while 'poverty' (its binary opposite) is signified by Lieutenant Aurelles, a penniless soldier.

Thrigg and Lord Bilberton make a formal approach to Edie's Papa, as rivals asking him to give her away as their bride. Thrigg's wealth is the obvious token of exchange in his negotiation, while Bilberton 'has immense influence with the Ministry' which might enable Papa to become an Ambassador. Again, wealth and poverty are the terms within which meaning arises, as Papa fears bankruptcy unless a good deal might be struck using Edie as coin to buy social advantage. It is appropriate to note here that Claude Lévi-Strauss, a prominent champion of structuralist methodologies, used just this equation of woman and money (with language as a shared third term) in his extensive anthropological writing on systems of kinship and marriage regulations.

The 'formal' and the 'informal' provide another pair of terms constituting our sphere of communication. Edie, referring to the soldier, her favoured suitor, has to correct herself, rather coyly, when informality sneaks in to expose her desire: 'Phillip, I mean Mr Aurelles, did see me, and smiled, – perhaps he saw me kiss

my hand too' (20). This transgressive, non-verbal act of communication between lovers is set in opposition to the contractual approach to marriage assumed by the other suitors. Yet while Phillip must still be distanced as Mr. Aurelles, Lord Bilberton's efforts to establish informal contact with Edie are rebuffed: 'I can't call him "Charley" as he wants me to, such an *old* thing as that' (20–1).

Age is a key factor in the story's communicative relationships: Edie and Aurelles are young; Thrigg, Papa and Lord Bilberton are old. Philip's youth and good looks clearly differentiate him from the other men. They also serve to constitute him as 'hero', who (in accordance with Propp's scheme) might be seen as engaged in a form of quest to win the hand of the tale's 'princess'. In other words, he is mobile or dynamic, in contrast to the immobility or stasis of the older men. That immobility is graphically rendered when Alderman Thrigg, weighed down by his bulk, gets stuck in a drift, until rescued by the Lieutenant. Aurelles's energy can be read as a model of communicative efficiency, of the effective delivery of the message, in contrast to the inefficiency of the older competitors. His competence in action is rewarded when he is granted permission to marry Edie.

Early in the story Aurelles is seen to fall short when he assumes the formal approach to courtship. He is presented playing chess with Papa, but Edie tells us that he does not understand the game (20). I remarked earlier that the editor who concludes 'Snowed Up' assumes in his reader a shared level of competence in the game of interpretation. Here the chess-game highlights a lack of equivalence between the father's competence and that of the suitor. Underlying Saussure's linguistic theory is a tripartite distinction between *langage*, which 'includes the entire human potential for speech', *langue*, which is 'the language-system which each of us uses to generate discourse that is intelligible to others', and *parole* , the 'individual utterance' (Scholes 1974, 14). In this context, we might say that *langage* is analogous to the human capacity for playing games, *langue* to the rules of chess, and *parole* to a particular game, or to moves within it. Not understanding the rules of chess, Aurelles is deprived of the capacity to participate meaningfully. By analogy, he is excluded, on account of his social inferiority (gauged in terms of wealth), from the communication game that would allow him to speak directly with Papa, and consequently his message to the father of the 'princess' has to be transmitted as action, as accomplishment of the heroic deed.

Edie declares: 'I think papa wants to play chess with me as the queen.' There are sets of rules which locate her as a character, and determine her relationships with other characters. Another analogy occurs to her: 'A poor girl is just like a shuttlecock or a tennis ball with all these gentlemen tossing her about one to the other' (20). Here, as elsewhere in the story, the adjective 'poor' is used ambivalently, inviting sympathy, but also registering powerlessness, as in the binary opposition of wealth and poverty. The racquet games mentioned may be read as models of a communicative situation in which sender and receiver roles are assumed alternately by both players, with the ball or shuttlecock a message, with very limited informational input, caught up in a self-referring feedback loop.[1]

Against such formal games, Edie suggests another kind of play: 'I wish I was snowballing Aurelles' (21). The snowball replaces the tennis ball in an informal and far less closely regulated game; one, accordingly, identified with children rather than adults. Within the binary terms 'age' and 'youth', Edie is held in an uneasy tension, and in this case we can see how her subjectivity is formed in an ongoing oscillation between maturity and immaturity. These terms combine the age/youth distinction with that of formality and informality. Snowballing signifies pleasure of an ostensibly childish kind. It contrasts sharply with the obligation Edie faces, of seeing her father in his study: 'that's certain to be something disagreeable' (21).

Barthes has observed that 'many narratives . . . set two adversaries in conflict over some stake'. He goes on to say that this is 'all the more interesting in that it relates narrative to the structures of certain (very modern) games in which two equal opponents try to gain possession of an object put into circulation by a referee'. And he adds that 'there is nothing surprising in this if one is willing to allow that a game, being a language, depends upon the same symbolic structure as is to be found in language and narrative'. He concludes, with a flourish, that 'a game too is a sentence' (Barthes 1977, 108–9). This bold assertion might seem to push structuralism's claims rather too far, but it does help to draw together certain of the narrative components that form 'Snowed Up'.

Immediately after displaying relish at the prospect of snowballing,

Edie compounds her disgruntlement at the prospect of a meeting with her father with the outburst: 'How hateful it is of gentlemen when they will come to the point as they call it! We girls never care about such nonsense. It spoils life, I'm sure it does and I reflect a great deal, this always coming to the point' (21). The language of men, then, is directed towards specific goals, and ideally it follows a straight line to reach the culminating point. In Barthes's terms, the participant in the game strives 'to gain possession of an object'. Snowballing is not purposeful in this way; although she cites Aurelles as her target, Edie is suggesting a less straightforward pursuit of her goal. In her game, the prize is not won directly but seduced through more devious means. Her writing, similarly, while serving the overt goal of order, is in reality an erratic performance, full of digressions and diversions.

Coming to the point is presented as the gentleman's way, and the means for it is a set of conventions that produces the gentleman's agreement. Edie sides instead with nonsense, being a 'girl' and so excluded from such an agreement. Casting this position in a positive light, she declares, 'I shall be a poetess some day' (20). Art, conceived as acts of imagination, is set up in opposition to the workaday factuality of men doing business. Coming to the point might appear an efficient communicative act, but it may also be perceived as the extinction of desire. Desire, once satisfied, ceases to exist, and Edie, seeking location on the side of pleasure rather than that of non-pleasure, favours the hero's quest over the business deal. The tale supports this inclination, for, as I have said, Phillip's actions achieve results which the direct address of the men of social power does not.

The dashing hero is elevated above the man of commerce in Edie's esteem: '(Fancy marrying a man who sold *onions*!)'(23). None the less Thrigg is 'not so silly as Lord Bilberton' (23). The Alderman communicates well enough, and demonstrates a high level of competence in interpreting the situation in which the characters find themselves: 'He can talk sensibly enough except when he tries to pay me stupid compliments. He seems to understand the position better than either papa, or anybody else' (23). Note that the *payment* of compliments is not successful; the anticipated purchase is not completed. Comparably, Thrigg's resourcefulness is channelled into the making of a dumpling, which, while it might resemble a large, rather grubby snowball, brings not pleasure but disappointment, as it proves inedible. A major part

of the problem is that this older man does not share the code in which Edie's messages are sent. Their resources for comprehension might overlap, but they are by no means identical. Aurelles, on the other hand, similarly powerless in economic and institutional terms, shares far more with the young woman.

But thus to align Edie and Aurelles is too simple. The aspiration towards being a poetess arises from a striking simile in which the soldier is compared to a Newfoundland dog. Suddenly the questing hero is cast as a dumb yet loyal companion: 'I can just fancy him curled up on this rug at my feet (he raves about my little feet and little paws, and littleness altogether, and wicked black eyes and and – but no matter). He would be on that rug like a great dog, and make love to me *so nicely* I do believe *forever*' (21–2). Evidently, Aurelles frames her as a lapdog. Both aim for positions of dominance within the relationship, and so assign the other to positions of subordination. The opposition of littleness and greatness obviously adds to this tension.

The rescue that Aurelles performs involves dragging himself through the snow in classic Newfoundland-dog fashion. Still, the gift of Edie Audeley is granted to him, along with presents of money from the grateful Thrigg. I have mentioned that in Propp's model of the spheres of action in narrative, a single role could be executed by more than one character. This is well illustrated here, for both Mr Audeley and Alderman Thrigg constitute the donor at this point in Edie's narrative. Marriage will follow, but the canine comparisons suggest that the relationship will not be unalloyed harmony; rather it will involve struggles for power concordant with other relational structures produced in the story.

At the end of Edie's account, 'people are rushing about once more almost as if nothing had happened' (29). The scene of animation shows a resumption of normality in the sphere of communication. Earlier the breakdown is presented in terms of failing technologies: 'All the trains were delayed. The Scotch express never reached town at all, and there's no news of them, for it seems a rough wind has blown down the telegraph poles and snapped the wires. There were crowds at the station all day – waiting for the trains' (22). Immobility and silence come together with the fall of snow. The thaw brings rushing crowds, and 'such a noise in the streets' (29).

Crowds have not always appeared so benign in this narrative.

At the height of the crisis they appear as an unruly and dangerous mob, whose significance springs not only from the familiar opposition of order and disorder, but also from the differentiation of 'us' and 'them' which points to distinctions of class within English society, and to the relationships existing between the classes. To pursue that issue would draw us into political or ideological analysis, of the kind exemplified by Marxist criticism.[2]

In this treatment of 'Snowed Up', I have been conscious of preserving, where convenient, the referential illusion, attributing thoughts and feelings to the 'paper beings', before restoring a critical distance, so as to isolate and identify the components of the integrated systems that generate the story's meaning. Structuralism has been criticized for being too abstract, technical, and consequently lifeless. This view has been encouraged by a proclivity to highly specialized vocabulary, or, to put it more negatively, technical jargon. I have purposefully avoided such terminology, but it should be said that the vocabularies developed by critics such as Genette and Todorov have served a useful function in compelling reflection upon what has often been taken for granted, or simply ignored, in literary study.

Structuralism has also been criticized for its exclusion of the historical dimension of its object of study. There is some justification for this view. In his comparison of language and chess, Saussure stressed that 'in chess, each move is absolutely distinct from the preceding and the subsequent equilibrium. The change effected belongs to neither state: only states matter' (Saussure 1981, 89). An analytical practice derived from this may provide insights into relationships at a given moment in time (synchronic analysis), but it will neglect matters of development or evolution (diachronic analysis). In this chapter, I have not sought to produce a rigorous structuralist reading of Jefferies' story, but to explain some of the basic assumptions of the approach, while indicating how it can furnish tools for literary analysis, focusing the reader's attention on aspects of the text which might otherwise have remained concealed.

I have paid particular attention to the area of communication, in part because, as Barthes remarked, 'narrative as object is the point of a communication: there is a donor of the narrative and a peceiver of the narrative' (1977, 109). Each of us, as we read it, becomes the receiver of 'Snowed Up'; common sense dictates that Richard Jefferies is its donor. But early on I suggested that we might question why the author's name should be exempt from our revised understanding of signification. For the structuralist reader, the play of signs (or *semiosis*, from the Greek word for sign) is endless. Heated debate has been generated by Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author', where he provocatively states: 'To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (Barthes 1977, 147). We have accepted that Edie is a product of her fictional diary, rather than its producer; should we take this further step and declare Richard Jefferies a product of the text which concludes with his name? Is it possible to uphold our rejection of the 'referential illusion' without taking this step and embracing unequivocally the endlessness of *semiosis*?

In the *Course*, Saussure suggested that while language is the most important of our systems of signs, it is one among many that constitute our social world. He proposed 'a science that studies the life of signs within society' (Saussure 1987, 16), which he called *semiology*. The anthropological work of Lévi-Strauss was important in developing this science, also known as *semiotics*, but it was with Barthes that it reached its apogee. Fashion, food, shopping, wrestling; he took the whole gamut of social practices and read them as signs. In doing so, his overriding concern was to remove the gloss of the 'natural' from our social environment, an environment arrived at inexorably through historical processes. This naturalization, in effect, unquestioning acceptance of the world as we find it, was the focus for a series of studies he called *Mythologies*. Such semiological investigation goes a long way to meet the charge that structuralism neglects history. It can also teach us that to read practices as signs does not in fact dematerialize those practices; the world does not dissolve just because we take language to be the key to reading it. So Richard Jefferies remains the donor; for 'Richard Jefferies' authored Edie's story, even if we dispel the referential illusion of the Author. And so the snow begins to melt, and we may admit the noise once more. . . .

NOTES

1. The badminton analogy was later used, comparably but with more trenchant effect, by Henry James in *What Maisie Knew* (1897),

where it casts light upon the situation of a child caught between divorced parents.

2. For an example of this kind of analysis, see Jessica Maynard's Marxist interpretation and John Brannigan's New Historicist reading in this collection. From another political perspective, that of feminism, see also Ruth Robbins's chapter, below.

2

Snow Me Again: A Poststructuralist Narratology of 'Snowed Up'

MARK CURRIE

Narratology is not usually seen as a poststructuralist critical approach. It is perceived as a structuralist enterprise, a phenomenon of the 1960s, when systematic and scientific approaches to the analysis of narrative were still in fashion. Now, of course, the authority of scientific method is considerably diminished in criticism after two decades of assault from poststructuralist theory and renewed interest in politics and history. Narratology undoubtedly flourished in criticism which was committed to formalist close reading, which put aside sociological and historical questions in order to focus on the text itself, on the technical operations of a narrative. Structuralist narratology developed an impressive terminology for the description of technique, analysing narratives in the way that a linguist would analyse a sentence; a rigorously analytical language sure to offend any critic still concerned with pre-critical issues like characters, literary value or emotional response.

This perception of narratology as a timely but now outmoded science is an extremely reductive version of recent intellectual history. I would see the evolution of narratology as a more incremental process, not an evolution leading towards anything in particular, but an increasing stockpile of available critical terms and models which can be and are adapted to non-formalist critical