

DIANA FESTA-McCORMICK

Honoré de Balzac

Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979.
Pp. 187.

This book is for those whose ignorance of Balzac is total, and who are prepared to devote half a day to dispelling it by finding out what happens in half-a-dozen famous novels, and picking up a few facts about his life plus a handful of anodine judgments. They will, I fear, not have the pleasure of reading elegant prose; Professor Festa-McCormick's style is the most slapdash I have come across in many years.

The plan adopted is certainly a defensible one. What depresses, is that all that emerges is a string of long established commonplaces. Two exceptions, perhaps, where the text flickers into life: the pages on *La Vieille Fille* and parts of the chapter on "The Universe of Women" (whatever that means). Although one must assume that the author has read the books she lists in her bibliography, she seems to have been impervious to their influence. (Was it by mistake that the bibliography jumps from D to L, omitting, for example, Herbert Hunt who is frequently mentioned in the text?). One has the impression that Balzac is great because despite what some people say, his characters are convincing. In 1980 we expect better than that.

It would be otiose to list the infelicities and inaccuracies with which this volume abounds. An example of the first would be the opening sentence, which says that the "attempt" to "do" a comprehensive study of Balzac in the limited space is "perplexing;" and of the second, the persistent addition of the definite article to the title of Balzac's finest novel, *Illusions perdues*. One puts the book down feeling a good opportunity has been lost. A concise study of Balzac courageously reassessing him in the light of shifting critical attitudes would have been a most worthwhile addition to the corpus of criticism on the unquenchable author of the *Comédie humaine*.

Anthony R. Pugh

AVROM FLEISHMAN

Fiction and the Ways of Knowing
Austin: University of Texas Press,
1978. Pp. 224.

This is an impressive collection of essays on the nineteenth and twentieth-century British novel which brings the learning of such disciplines as philosophy, linguistics, sociology, astronomy—in other words, the human sciences—to illuminate aspects of the novels. These are not easy essays, but they are insightful, learned, suggestive—in a word, *good*. Readers may find that the best parts of the studies are not the theoretical or the interdisciplinary, but rather the analyses of the novels themselves.

The book consists of thirteen chapters: an introductory essay, seven previously published essays on Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad, Joyce, Forster, Woolf, and Fowles, and five new pieces on Emily Bronte, Thackeray, Trollope, George Eliot, and Hardy.

The first of the reprinted essays applies anthropological theory to *Northanger Abbey*, to show how young Catherine becomes "an adequately functioning member of her society" (p. 24). Dickens's *Little Dorrit* is viewed from the perspective of Hegel's famous chapter on "master and servant," and the pervasive theme of liberation and servitude is examined. Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* is looked at from the point of view of the relationship between speech and writing, drawing on modern theories from such writers as Derrida and Merleau-Ponty. The essay on Joyce shows the "interplay of narration, characterization, and symbolism in Joyce's use of scientific materials" (p. 140), particularly the theory of relativity, solar parallax, and astronomy generally, in the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*.

Perhaps the best of the reprinted essays is the one on "Being and Nothing in *A Passage to India*: a meditation on its religious structure," a sensitive, illuminating, and richly suggestive piece, which gives a detailed, sentence by sentence analysis of the opening chapter where a tripartite structure of reality emerges, and then an explanation of the meaning of the caves and the drama therein enacted, all of which serves to clarify the whole novel.

In the next essay, the Cambridge philosopher John McTaggart's views about selfhood, perception, time, love, and so on, are shown to exhibit some parallels with the ideas and techniques of Virginia Woolf, particularly in *To The Lighthouse*. The final essay in the collection investigates the various myths and rituals (Orpheus, Eleusis, the Tarot, etc.) which inform John Fowles's *The Magus*.

The five newly published essays begin with a chapter called "*Wuthering Heights: The Love of a Sylph and a Gnome*" which examines the Gnostic and alchemical background of the novel, to show that its dramatic action is "metaphysical," that it "traces an alchemical transformation of the elements, a creature of earth and one of air transforming themselves so as to realize their union . . ." (p. 45). The next essay investigates how historical myth operates in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, specifically, how Becky Sharpe is "A Napoleon of Heroines." In the study of Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, the attempt to cast Melmotte as a late development of the Wandering Jew may seem a trifle forced, but the portrait of the great manipulator of the sham signs of his age who approaches tragic proportions is on the whole brilliantly done, and sheds light on the themes and symbols of the entire novel.

The central, longest, and most important essay is "Daniel Charisi," a study which seeks to correct the widely held view that the Gwendolen part of *Daniel Deronda* is the best and most successful half of the work. Professor Fleishman uses some of Arnold's ideas from *Culture and Anarchy* to show that Gwendolen is a Philistine, and that George Eliot believes not in individualism but in "the nation as the ideal object of loyalty" (p. 95), and that the Jewish people are valuable as a unique contribution to the organic unity of the total human community, and that they represent the "potential carriers of that culture" (p. 105) which is the antithesis of the spiritually impoverished culture of the English. It is impossible to do credit to this significant essay in this small space. The fifth essay examines the buried giant image in Hardy's *Return of the Native*, and finds that the main figure embodied in Egdon Heath is the "bound Titan," which represents, "the burden of a mankind forced to submit to an order of things that can only be explained . . . as deriving from an arbitrary, if not a malevolent authority." But there is also the image of the "long-

suffering, dormant but expectant" giant who "looks forward to an ultimate liberation" (p. 122).

The volume is an interesting, coruscatory collection by one of the foremost critics of the novel.

R. F. Kennedy

KURT J. FICKERT

Kafka's Doubles

Berne: Lang, 1979. Pp. 105. SFr. 19.

The doubles of Fickert's title are of various kinds. They include most of Kafka's heroes, for he takes them to represent the author or a basic aspect of his personality. Then, since he asserts that almost all the other characters in Kafka's novels and stories stand for facets of the protagonists, he speaks of them too as doubles of the heroes and of the author. He also comments on those figures that appear in pairs and argues that they either duplicate one part of the hero's personality or embody two contrasted or linked aspects of one person. He considers too, as another dimension of the technique of doubling, those figures or symbols that contain contradictions or paradoxes, e.g. the castle, a symbol of "something yearned for" and "something forbidding" (p. 83). All these doubles or "doublings" he relates to Kafka's sensitivity to dichotomies within himself, in particular to his belief that writing was irreconcilable with normal living. Some of them he ascribes to a homosexual tendency which Kafka himself may not have recognized. Though he does not deny the possible validity of other interpretations, Fickert claims that Kafka's fiction is concerned above all with Kafka's personality and the problems of the writer, and that any religious and social meanings in his works are of secondary importance.

Fickert treats Kafka's three novels, all his best-known stories, and others besides within some 60 pages of text (there is a generous allocation of blank pages between chapters and between text and notes). Patently he does not intend in this short book to indulge in subtle or detailed argument, but to outline his general interpretation. It owes much to other commentators