

chronological interpretations, disparate tones seek to find a common voice: Narcissus aspires vainly to become himself. The entire text is indeed a kind of death mask: a ludicrous and tragic travesty of itself, celebrating its own impossibility.

*Fable*, mirrorlike, elaborately describes the difficulties of its own translation, difficulties which Barbara Wright has resolved with hardly a false note and many a deft, suggestive touch. What fineness of ear is needed to auscultate that "head full of sighing words," to capture all those "particular resonances, brief echoes, trenchant voices" which never cease to traverse the text, to register the variable palpitations and subterranean murmurs of "a voice, an inflexion, an accent, a second breath, a semisilence and then nothing, nothing"? And what sensitivity and balance are required to "move words around, a sublime game," to maneuver into position those "insubstantial passageways," to negotiate interminably those "crossroads of possible directions," and to handle with tact the "ineffable weft, warp, web of concomitant, coexistent, interchangeable states" which is the artistic marvel of *Fable*. Do not fail to read this recent voice of Robert Pinget.

Peter Broome

## DEIRDRE DAVID

*Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels—North and South, Our Mutual Friend, Daniel Deronda*  
New York: Columbia University Press, 1981. Pp. 209.

The title of Professor David's book informs us of what we will find and what we will not; it does not promise a general

approach to Victorian fiction or even a thorough discussion of some major Victorian novelists. Instead, the book treats three novels by three novelists; the works considered are not each author's indisputable best or most typical, though David says they are "well-known," nor is her selection of writers a reliable guide to the merits of Victorian novelists (Trollope's Palliser books appear occasionally for the purposes of comparison, but Thackeray is mentioned only briefly and Hardy and Meredith not at all). So, since the book is limited in the number of writers and the stature of the books discussed, Professor David's success depends on the extent to which she can trace her chosen theme in these three novels and the degree to which such an approach allows her to comment on the novels in a fresh way.

From the premise that Victorian novels were largely written by the middle class for the middle class, David explores the ways in which Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, and George Eliot portray social problems and conflicts to develop tensions which are resolved, she argues, by the use of fictions: in other words, each novel describes social issues in relatively objective terms (she makes considerable use of the analyses of Marx and Freud, though not necessarily of their conclusions), and then the novelist offers a solution to these problems in terms which are imaginative or, to use Professor David's term, mythical.

*North and South*, of course, presents the conflict between the faded gentility of the South and the new industrialism of the North on the one level, but the more important struggle is that between mill owner and worker. In David's argument, Mrs. Gaskell resolves this confrontation by mollifying Nicholas Higgins's rough working-class ways so that consensus is possible between Higgins and Mr. Thornton beyond their roles in union or management. Thus, Gaskell's myth of class cooperation based on individuals—whether Higgins and Thornton or Thornton and Margaret Hale—is used to resolve, however ambiguously or evasively, the central social conflicts of the novel.

Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* shows a society permeated with restless discontent, though this problem can be focused on the dual issues of class consciousness (and by implication, the class structure) and money. Class and money are the strong forces

determining behavior and attitudes in this society, but once again the difficulties they create are resolved mythically: a select few of the characters are allowed to enjoy the new social order which emerges at the end. Lizzie Hexam almost miraculously is able to marry Eugene Wrayburn while conscious of the obstacles raised by their difference in class, and Bella Wilfer, by coming to renounce the importance of wealth and by accepting her economic limitations, is paradoxically wedded to the very fortune she has given up.

In certain respects, *Daniel Deronda* is the most interesting example of David's thesis, if only because she argues that no reconciliation between the conflicting values of the book is effective. Gwendolen Harleth and Deronda start from roughly similar positions in the fashionable world, but Deronda's criticism of his peers, unlike Gwendolen's, is sufficiently searching to lead him away from his class and from his identity within that class to a new identity and the mission which arises from it. Gwendolen, on the other hand, criticizes her society somewhat complacently, receiving guidance and freedom too late for them to be of use to her. While Deronda finds an outlet for his discontent in becoming an epic hero engaged on a Zionist quest, Gwendolen is trapped in the perplexities of her corrupt surroundings. As in *Our Mutual Friend*, certain characters in *Daniel Deronda* represent such powerful corruption and evil that they cannot be changed. Because Gwendolen's society cannot find a quest as noble as Deronda's, it shows itself incapable of change or redemption.

Apart from the limitations of scope mentioned earlier, *Fictions of Resolution* offers interesting, occasionally controversial, but generally rewarding studies of the works it discusses. Professor David's approach effectively links the descriptive and objective treatment of social problems with the novelist's imagination; she shows that these writers are novelists first in that they postulate imaginative or mythical resolutions to social conflict. Deirdre David's book succeeds in the two areas outlined in its title: it offers stimulating readings of the novels, and it shows clearly and persuasively how these writers attempt to resolve the social conflicts they describe by reconciling the descriptive and the imaginative, the sense of a reality with a sense of the changes needed.

John Miller

DAVID WILLIAM FOSTER  
*Studies in the Contemporary Spanish-  
American Short Story*  
Columbia: University of Missouri  
Press, 1979.

These studies are generated by the example of Linguistics and the attempts of Russian Formalism and mostly French Structuralism to state in the language of knowledge the rules, mechanisms, and effects of the language of power—to use De Quincey's terms. Foster highlights as an epigraph to the first chapter of his thought-provoking book a quote from Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*: "The strange, the formal, the fictional, must be recuperated or naturalized, brought within our ken, if we do not want to remain gaping before monumental inscriptions." Foster aims to recuperate for our understanding excellent short stories written by unquestionably brilliant storytellers. In the process he raises serious questions about fiction and the method of writing criticism.

The explicit and implicit goals of *Studies* can be expressed as the discovery of procedures to: (A) define the describing concepts, especially *écriture*; (B) describe clearly and completely the *écriture* of diverse stories; (C) outline the limitations of his method; (D) prove the usefulness of structural analysis, and (E) reveal certain distinguishing characteristics of the new Latin-American short story.

(A) Praiseworthy is the care devoted by Foster to provide precise definitions of his describing concepts. He sees *écriture* as a series of structural premises that underlie a literary work, as an abstract generating principle that must be formulated by means of structural analysis. He also introduces some concepts of poststructuralism but he does not resolve the contradictions that arise when, for example, he speaks on the one hand about multiple readings and scant evidence to prove the proposition that certain elements exist in a given literary structure (p. 2), while on the other hand he writes of discovery (and we must assume that there is something to be discovered), proper perception (p. 40), true value (p. 50), and correct readings. It remains obscure why this *écriture* can be defined as "unmodifiable" (p. 3) while Foster assures us that in reading "we perceive a range of possible structures and multiple overlap-