

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-

ping patterns for the overt elements of the text" (p. 3). How can the critic arrive with so much certainty at that "static base, that, as generating *écriture*, underlies it" (p. 3), without suffering through the indeterminacy of reading? What prevents other consistent readings? The analogy on which Foster operates is the deep structure of language as presented in early Chomskian linguistics, and it can at least be said that poststructuralism and many critics will not concur with such a static notion of an abstract, pre-textual, generating structure posited as more than a possible underlining. (Foster himself does not seem to believe [see p. 31] that such a discovery can be made once and for all, but he recovers his confidence elsewhere.)

(B) Descriptions of the stories are clear and very well organized. They will be useful to students and are a good introduction to the stories of Borges and Cortázar. In each case Foster will seek "the mechanics of textual production" (p. 19). For Borges, he will discover the frustration of attempts at possession through writing, a frustration that generates writing. Rulfo exemplifies "a conception of literature as the interplay of signs" (p. 32), while García Márquez seeks a peculiar sort of complicity with readers. Cortázar's manipulation of language is seen as rupture and subversion. Foster explores Benedetti's networks of oppositions and Cabrera Infante's relativization of an ideal description of a happening when transcribed into documents, legends, literature, and other versions.

(C) and (D): How useful are these analytical descriptions? This reader believes that there is a danger of an exhaustive reiteration of the obvious, instead of the search for an insight that opens up a problem. The studies of Rulfo's or García Márquez's stories organize neatly the rhetorical processes involved, but it seems highly improbable that such characteristics as exaggeration or ironic language need to be described in detail in the latter case. Perhaps it is worthwhile to insist on the *criticism* aspect of the writing about literature, something that a scientific linguistic description does not even begin to broach. Culler writes in the third chapter of *Structural Poetics* in reference to Lévi-Strauss and Barthes that "linguistics does not provide a discovery procedure which could be followed mechanically." Foster, as Lévi-Strauss or Barthes, offers many interesting observations that depend more on his expert reading than on the merits of his method.

(E) A reader of *Studies* will certainly be immersed in most of the crucial problems of contemporary Latin-American fiction writing. But when at the very last page some of these are enumerated by Foster, the question remains as to how one might further analyze what has been perceived. For example, where can one place, or how should one account for, "the need to experiment with received literary forms"? The problem is not only that this feature has existed in other periods (since Foster recognizes it as part of a constellation of characteristics), but more that a need is not explained by describing it.

It is also possible that Culler's alternative is misleading: we are not just confronted with the option of bringing within our ken the text, or remain gaping before monumental inscriptions. We may interpret these texts in a creative reading that claims no absolute privilege but is also free from the remnants of a static deep structure that claims to need discovery. The new Latin-American fiction demands an active reader, even a misreader in the Bloom tradition, and a critic who is able to be moved into the different experience of the text and produce (even create) the revelations—aesthetic, linguistic, or otherwise—made possible by the text for each reader.

But, where some of the traditional criticism in Spanish has been rather imprecise and nevertheless axiomatic, Foster's efforts to explore the usefulness and risk of a precise method, and to recognize some of its limitations, are exemplary. He has written a model exploratory book. The shortcomings of the final product belong more to a static *écriture* than to his own writing.

Randolph D. Pope