

It is quite obvious that the high quality of contemporary Latin-American literature has justifiably earned an excellent reputation in North America for the likes of Gabriel García Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and perhaps another dozen or so writers. Unfortunately for English-speaking readers, this explosion of literary talent (known in Spanish as "el 'boom' de la nueva novela") has arrived—by means of translations—a decade after the actual "boom" reached its peak in Latin America. There are, however, advantages for the North-American audience in this situation, not the least of which is the ability to concentrate critical attention on a handful of these writers, savoring the exceptional quality of their writing. Moreover, whichever way one shuffles the eighteen or so writers whose work warrants further examination, it is clear that Carlos Fuentes figures prominently in any honest selection. Given this reality, the Brody-Rossman critical anthology—when combined with the (superior) collection of essays edited by Helmy Giacomani (*Homenaje a Carlos Fuentes* [New York: Las Américas, 1971]), is a useful tool to evaluate the work of Carlos Fuentes, and deserves wide academic distribution.

Penny Boumelha

THOMAS HARDY AND WOMEN: SEXUAL IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE FORM

Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982. Pp. 178. \$24.95

Reviewed by: Peter J. Casagrande

Penny Boumelha's book alters our view of Hardy's women, that remarkable group that, as Boumelha notes, has intrigued Hardy's readers from the first. In a chapter on "sexual ideology" in England between 1850 and 1900, Boumelha describes the sexual views and practices of the English middle class. In another on women writers and the new fiction of 1880-1890, she describes the coming-out of women novelists at the end of the century. She writes a separate chapter on Hardy's fiction between 1871 and 1886, as well as chapters on *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess*, and *Jude*.

Identifying in Hardy's fiction an "androgynous voice" (p. 32) that permitted Hardy to make "aphoristic and dismissive generalizations about women" and at the same time "to attempt to make the central female characters the subjects of their own experiences, rather than the instruments of the man's" (p. 32), Boumelha offers a balanced and probing account of Hardy's at once sympathetic and skeptical treatment of his heroines. In fact, Boumelha does not always achieve this balance, as, for example, in her discussion of *The Return* as a "collision" (p. 61) of three literary modes attached to the major females in the novel (romantic tragedy: Eustacia Vye; pastoral: Thomasin Yeobright; realism: Mrs. Yeobright). Her concern with colliding modalities nearly overwhelms her strong interest in Eustacia's struggle to express her passionate nature in a repressive, male-dominated society. It is to reduce to near insignificance Hardy's daring depiction of Eustacia's hunger for love to urge simply that Bathsheba "displaces her active feelings in a way . . . distinctively female in a male-dominated society" (p. 55). On the other hand, to approach Eustacia as a woman who "finds her potential for effective activity cripplingly limited" (p. 56), is itself interesting, both as an example of the working of the sexual ideology of the age, and as a human phenomenon.

Boumelha's effort to describe Hardy's modal experiments and his uncertainty with his heroines is more successful in her discussion of *The Woodlanders*, probably the most neglected of Hardy's major novels. In Boumelha's view, *The Woodlanders* is, like the earlier novels, a troubled mixture of mainly pastoral but also tragic, realistic, and melodramatic effects (p. 100). Given this melange, a reader can only with difficulty keep in sharp focus Grace's character within the rustic versus urban polarity that dominates, especially since this polarity climaxes with Giles Winterborne's death. This death of an exemplary male diminishes, according to Boumelha, "the residual tragic potential of Grace's situation" (p. 105). Hardy, of course, acknowledged a difficulty with the making of Grace; it is instructive to consider that this difficulty may have arisen from Hardy's inability to construct, out of varied and contending generic elements, a "coherent [female] personality or psyche capable of ordering these elements" (p. 114).

Hardy's problem with *The Woodlanders*, according to Boumelha, was to find a way to examine sex and marriage in a narrative focused upon the mind of a woman. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, particularly the manner of the omniscient narrator of Tess, reflects a "scientific" response to this same problem. *Jude the Obscure* is another kind of response, a "deflected and overtly partial mode of narration that will grant to Sue Bridehead an inaccessibility pushing beyond the emptiness of enigma" (p. 114). Here, as occasionally elsewhere, Boumelha's language is nothing less than daunting. I have wrung my brain nearly dry in an effort to decide what she means by "an inaccessibility pushing beyond the emptiness of enigma." Though I have failed, I can yet trust somehow that this "inaccessibility" exists, and probably for two reasons: Boumelha's sense of history is strong enough throughout to assure me that this is not merely a textual fantasy; this particular remark emanates from her sense of Hardy's novels as a series of interrelated, interworking texts. Boumelha is a careful reader; she moves not just between Hardy's texts, but has also gone behind them into the manuscripts and notebooks published in recent years. More often than not, her scholarship prevails.

Tess is, for Boumelha, the most celebrated example of Hardy's "narrative androgyny" (p. 120). Developing John Bayley's observation that Tess is "the most striking embodiment in literature of the woman realized both as object and as consciousness, both to herself and to others," Boumelha urges that Hardy, through his narrator, does not merely "speak" Tess, but also speaks for her. What is more, in speaking for her he does so with "an unusually overt maleness" (p. 120). That is, "the narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers" (p. 120). The implication here that Tess is violated by Angel Clare as well as by Alec d'Urberville is a bit off, but Boumelha goes on. Noting Hardy's attribution of semiconsciousness to Tess in her moments of erotic response, Boumelha observes that Tess's tragedy, like Eustacia's, "turns upon an ideological basis, projecting a polarity of sex and intellect, body and mind, upon an equally fixed polarity of gender" (p. 122). This seeming victimization of Tess by the teller of her story is curbed, however, by the fact that "Tess's sexuality eludes the circumscribing narrative voice," as evidenced by the narrator's several shifts: between detached observing and microscopically close study; between "analytic omniscience" and "erotic commitment"; between tragic, realistic, melodramatic, and polemical modalities; between romantic and scientific views of nature. This rippled texture is the product of Hardy's increasing unease with his ways of telling a story, especially a story that requires that a woman be exhibited from within and without.

In *Jude*, Boumelha argues, Hardy effected changes in certain elements of *Tess*: he "gives for the first time an intellectual component to the tragedy of the woman" and "a sexual component" to the misery of the man (p. 141). *Jude*, as D. H. Lawrence noted in 1914, is *Tess* turned roundabout. Unlike Angel and Tess (or Clym and Eustacia), Jude and Sue do not "inhabit different ideological structures" (p. 141). The picture of Sue is "openly a man's picture of a woman"; Sue is not, like Tess, rendered transparent by a "male" narrator. Reading and rereading this provocative chapter, I am led to suspect that the uncertainty in Boumelha's language when she writes of *Jude* (see above) is perhaps an honest refusal to force *Jude*—given its astonishing likeness to and yet difference from *Tess*—into the confines of her ideological approach.

If chapter-by-chapter *Thomas Hardy and Women* does not offer consistently a "new" understanding of Hardy's heroines, it does describe "the relation of Hardy's fiction to contemporary ideologies of sexual difference and of the nature of woman" (p. 4). And Boumelha's balance is always evident. Because she wishes to argue that "the radicalism of Hardy's representation of women resides . . . in their resistance to reduction to a single and uniform ideological position" (p. 7), she can, in her remarks on *Jude*, for example, correct the simplifications of Kate Millett in her remarks on that novel in *Sexual Politics*. What is more, there are some fine perceptions that this reviewer has noted for recovery and use in the classroom: the suggestion of literal seduction in Arabella's first meeting with Jude; the importance of Jude's and Sue's similarities to one another; the lurking "maleness" in Tess's narrator's attitude toward Tess. These insights and others, as well as Boumelha's use of history and of the interrelatedness of Hardy's novels, more than outweigh the occasional excursions into abstract, dehumanizing language. One wonders too if Boumelha's reluctance to approach Hardy's fiction as a product of his temperament or experience does not hamper her in her historical approach. To separate personal from cultural history in Hardy's case seems especially arbitrary, for Hardy remained close to his peculiar sense of his circumstances, as well as to those circumstances. Boumelha's

chapter on *Tess* might have been even more interesting had she been willing to contemplate the peculiar manner of the narrator as the voice of Hardy only imperfectly objectified as "the narrator." Hardy noted his peculiar affection for his greatest heroine, and Robert Gittings and others have described his attraction to Gertrude Bugler, the woman who played Tess in a stage version of the novel. It seems possible that Hardy's intensely individual attraction to women (cf. *The Well-Beloved*) had a good deal to do with his creative response to his age's sexual ideology. If this reviewer asks for more, however, it is because what is offered is provocative, balanced, and refreshingly brief.

Mary Susan McCarthy

BALZAC AND HIS READER: A STUDY OF THE CREATION OF MEANING IN LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982. Pp. 152,

Reviewed by: Alexander Fischler

The author situates her study in a relatively recent current of criticism focusing on the reader's share in the "production of literary meaning." The line established in the introductory chapter extends from I. A. Richards (*Practical Criticism*), Wimsatt and Beardsley ("The Affective Fallacy") and Simon Lesser (*Fiction and the Unconscious*), to Norman H. Holland (*The Dynamics of Literary Response* and *5 Readers Reading*), David Bleich ("The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation"), Wolfgang Iser (*The Implied Reader and The Act of Reading*), and Gerald Prince ("Introduction à l'étude du narrataire," "On Presupposition and Narrative Strategy," etc.). Prof. McCarthy argues that *La Comédie humaine* offers a particularly good ground for reader-response study since Balzac is very conscious "of craft and of art," on the one hand, and of duality on the other: while taking for his "implicit" subject the "duality of the world . . . his choice of the fictional mode implied for him a further dual relationship, that of the reader and the text, and it is recognition of that relationship that is the subject of this study" (pp. 2-3). "Balzac certainly exercised his poetic privilege in the evocation-creation of a universe, and, as his own definition [in the "Avant-Propos"] indicates, the creation of a fictional reality was not in the representation of that which one knew, but the creative assembly, choice and composition of aspects of that reality, and in the structuring of these aspects and others into narrative form" (pp. 3-4). Professor McCarthy speculates that Balzac's "attention to the nature of the reader's participation . . . may well have led him to approve of, if not to enhance, twentieth-century critical tendencies, in particular those of reception theory" (p. 6).

The remainder of the book, four chapters and a brief conclusion, examines "controls structured within the text to shape the reader's response" (p. 19). Ch. II considers metaphor, which "By its very nature . . . implies a communicative act between author and reader" (p. 19). Actually, only key metaphors such as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in *César Birotteau* are considered. "Many other metaphors within Balzac's work are not so demonstrative in establishing a communication between author and reader, in facilitating the creation of a fictional reality, or even in serving as commentary upon artistic endeavors of reading and writing" (p. 22). Explanation of metaphoric communication here is sometimes fuzzy (e.g., "The challenge to which the metaphor responds is one of simultaneous exploration and portrayal of psychic depths of the reality we call the unconscious" p. 22), but the analysis of *César Birotteau* in terms of the symphony metaphor is interesting.

Ch. III, "A Map to Guide Us: The Opening Description," discusses the role of Balzac's famous openings in setting the reader in an appropriate relation to the text. The author distinguishes between the "realistic" description, "based on an illusion of absolute objectivity," and the "abstract" description that "subjectively abstracts, interprets, or reduces for us an object or a milieu too large, too grand, or too dynamic to be seized by the naked eye" (p. 43). "Through