

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

the [realistic] description, more particularly through the objective narrator and our participation in the illusion of reality. Balzac implanted impressions that become significant as we progress in our reading" (p. 55). "Presented the grand and evocative metaphor [the abstract description] and a dominating narrator, the responsive reader is manipulated into feeling rather than visualizing that which is described" (p. 71). Here too, discussion of the illustration selected for each type is good (the Maison Claës, in the opening of *La Recherche de l'Absolu*, and Paris in *Ferragus*, "the romantic metaphor of the monster"); but the author's distinction is ultimately not very useful, insofar as Balzac's "realistic" houses tend to become abstractions, and the conclusion she derives is scarcely novel ("Into both the realistic and the abstract descriptions, Balzac has encoded for us not only the organization of his narration, but also the guidelines for our interpretation of it" p. 72).

Ch. IV, "*Mise en Abyme: The Structure of the Short Story*," discusses the effect on the reader of structure in the conventional sense of disposition of parts. The one example of Balzacian short story used, "La Grande Bretèche," was carefully chosen for its segmented narration and loosely fitting context (*Autre étude de femme*). Confusing generality ("The structure of 'La Grande Bretèche' creates the relationship that propels the entire narration, creates the very relationship that allows it to exist as structure"; p. 78) yields to pertinent analysis, notably of the "cycle of desire-narration" that encompasses audience, narrator and reader.

Ch. V., "*Mastery of La Comédie humaine: The Reappearing Character*," follows the suggestion—here borrowed from Butor's "Balzac et la réalité"—that the ultimate control over the universe of the fiction and over the response of the reader is effected by means of the reappearing characters. "The reappearance of a character is . . . a provocative element, inviting us to associate texts, to construct the character's story, and to reinterpret as we read . . . We become tangibly involved in the work of coproduction" (p. 95). To illustrate, the author uses four characters featured in *Le Père Goriot*, each allowing a different type of "mastery" (Bianchon, Mme de Beauséant, Collin-Vautrin, and Rastignac). These distinctions are clear and the remarks cogent. Still, even from this last chapter, one does not emerge with a new or surprising perspective on *La Comédie*, and one can only share in Prof. McCarthy's concluding "hope that the image of Balzac as innovative artist who experimented with the balance between authorial control and freedom for the reader will spark further study" (p. 138). Such study should be considerably broader in scope.

This little book suggests finally some remarks on text presentation. I would not quibble with the usual typos, few in number here ("le mérite locale," p. 71; "son grande ainé," p. 93; "nous ne savons quère," p. 110). But I was annoyed by the translations which, in all likelihood, were required by an editor. How many readers of a specialized study on Balzac would not have sufficient familiarity with French to follow most of the quotations in the original? The assumption evidently made in this text, which relies on quotations constantly, is that even a cognate would not be recognized. Every word is translated after being offered in French! The absurd result is a patchwork in which one learns not only that "systèmes d'implication spécialement construits" are "specially constructed systems of implications" (p. 26), but also that "*feuilletonistes*" are "serial writers" (p. 6). After each French quote one is forced to either read a wooden English version or waste time looking for the end of the translation to continue reading the text. It is scarcely worth it. (When I once tried to see how the two versions correspond, I came upon "récit" translated as "recital," p. 76, and, on the next page, "Est-il" becoming "it is" in an interrogative sentence.) Cost conscious editors who move translation from the footnotes to the text could save even more by eliminating them altogether when not needed.