

existence" (59). Similarly, Tess Durbeyfield, the best known of Hardy's women, is a "combination of sexual vigour and moral rigour" (not one of Morgan's happier phrases) that makes her "not just one of the greatest but also one of the strongest women in the annals of English literature" (85). And in *Jude the Obscure*, Sue Bridehead, and more particularly Arabella Donn, are stunning portraits, respectively, of sexual repression and liberation. Morgan indeed revises the general view, for she shows convincingly that, in those cases she chooses to discuss, Hardy celebrates—in contrast to other novelists of his age—the "humanly imperfect, unconventional, strong, sexually vital, risk-taking" rebelliousness of women (155).

Morgan's view of Hardy's women produces novel views of certain of Hardy's men, e.g., Gabriel Oak, whom she describes as a victim of Hardy's irony. Also, in exhibiting Hardy as an iconoclast in his depiction of women, she uncovers an important aspect of Hardy's, and any writer's, creativity—the shaping of originals through subversive handling of conventions. The originals, as Emerson pointed out, are not original. This confirms, in turn, Hardy's important place among the sexual "progressives" of nineteenth-century English literature, Shelley, Eliot, Swinburne, Mill, and later Woolf and Lawrence. Hardy's appeal to the last two is traceable to the appeal of his

The relatively tight focus of Morgan's thesis has predictable, and excusable, results—a tendency to oversimplify the views of critics with whom she differs, neglect of possible counter-examples from life and work (e.g., Fanny Robin and Emma Hardy), and occasional stylistic excesses, as in the following: "Reaching her plateau of sexual ecstasy Tess soars to such a pitch of intensity that tears spring to her eyes . . . Fully in keeping with the intensity of her female sensation, her alternating 'waves' of orgasmic dilation, so too the lush, vegetative 'weedflowers glowed' . . ." (88). And this is just a beginning, as this description—I provide only half of it—concludes with a "melting ache that lingers on [that] has phased to bitter-sweet, post-orgasmic *triste*." Hardy does this much more nimbly. why not quote him? But such occasional straining is more than offset by Morgan's easy demonstration of Hardy's surpassing achievement with his fictional women, making her study a very important addition to the writing on Hardy's women, a group whose peer exists, in this reviewer's opinion, only in the plays of Shakespeare.

Ben Stoltzfus

*RED WHITE & BLUE*

Fredericton: York Press, 1989. Pp. 122. \$6.69

Review by Michèle Praeger

Ben Stoltzfus's short novel *Red White & Blue* is, Eco would say, an "open work." It requires a reader who is not a mere consumer, as Sartre would have it, but a collaborator of the artist. The reader is not presented with a completed work she has to decipher, to receive like the Host, the "right way." She is now herself a creator; one among others such as the writer, the characters, and, of course, language itself.

Stoltzfus's book shows that communication and modern art are not in conflict but, on the contrary, that they feed on each other just as writer and reader

do. Language in order to play or to create (two verbs that are linked in our modern artistic vocabulary) needs two partners. The "open work" is not, like the classical one, the work of one individual who subsequently offers it to the world to be admired; it requires, at every reading, to be performed in a different manner just as a sonata by Pierre Boulez incorporates parenthesis which may or may not be played.

Modern science has realized that there is no privileged, central, objective point of view but that, as Stoltzfus mentions in his foreword, "the observer" and the "observed" are linked and modify each other respectively. The elements that constitute the novel, the characters, their "actions," the dialogue form a constellation that does not follow a single course. The seeming lawlessness and absence of center, do not just require the reader to anticipate the unpredictable but require her collaboration to come into play. In Eco's words "information" that is negation of a predictable order takes precedence over "signification," immediate understanding.

It is therefore not necessary to say that *Red White & Blue* is intended to be read in more than one way as Ben Stoltzfus suggests in his foreword: as a parody of the "whodunit" genre, as a "polylogue" among different genres: theater, cinema, video art, poetry, fiction and also among certain perversions: gambling, sadism, and masochism.

As in Robbe-Grillet's novels posterior to *In the Labyrinth*, *Red White & Blue* is amoral and devoid of metaphysics. In *Red White & Blue* you can have your cake and eat it too, you can enhance your sexual pleasure thanks to a contraceptive pill.

As in Robbe-Grillet's novels "characters" are, as comic strips drawings, surfaces, playing cards; they do not claim to have any more depth than the objects that they use or misuse. Like Jasper Johns's flags they have no hidden meaning, they do not represent anything but themselves and therein lies the scandal: nothing could be more demythifying than to present the modern icons without comment. They seem, as if magically, to become as light and as playful as bubbles. They are beautiful and pleasurable images, nothing more, nothing less.

The metaphor of the Moebius strip comes up a few times in the novel: a prostitute becomes a martyr, pain/pleasure, inside/outside, the hidden is made obvious, order begets disorder, "form becomes content" in the two senses of the verb: to transform and to suit. Form is not "uniform" but is a field of possibilities; content also. For Jakobson and the Russian Formalists, the essence of poetical discourse was not in the absence but in the multiplicity of meanings. In that sense, *Red White & Blue* is a poetical work.

As Stoltzfus points out, the "novel" as a genre, in itself, is innovative because it calls for other genres: what is "innovative" in his novel is that it takes advantage of these possibilities in a self-conscious but noncontrived way.

*Red White & Blue* is also innovative in the sense that it questions the genre of the novel, the imperialistic gesture of narrating. The President, the chief, is the teller of the story: this telling also leads to his demise (not just

politically): ". . . the more he talks and the more he attempts to impose meaning on what happened, the more he realizes that the facts are elusive" (Foreword). The characters and language have a life of their own; they rebel against their "creator" and escape his grip. As Ricardou so aptly put it, the modern, or postmodern novel, is not the writing of adventures but the adventures of writing.

*Red White & Blue* does, in spite of its "artiness," in fact because of it, yield a message as the two epigraphs to the book seem to suggest: it is not the American flag that is made fun of but a certain organization, the I.R.S., the three pillars of a certain American society: Religious intolerance, Research for profit, "Rehabilitated sexuality." Ben Stoltzfus does not preach against the "three R's", he merely lets the reader-player come to the conclusion that they are but constructs of a certain ideology which camouflages itself as "natural" and "moral." At the end of the book, these three pillars do not support anything anymore as the novel has self-destructed.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, writes Eco, the composition of a work of art was akin to the organization of an imperialistic or theocratic society; the laws that governed writing or reading were the same as the laws prescribed by an authoritarian government, guiding men towards certain aims and giving them the means to reach them. A nontotalitarian form of government provides the climate for a different form of art, multidirectional, collaborative, in constant recreation and reappraisal. Reciprocally, Ben Stoltzfus shows us in his novel, how this type of art can undermine any drift toward Fascism which, in the author's words, "always tries to justify itself in the name of law and order, God, and common sense."

*Red White & Blue* creates a "Calderian" (spatial, mobile) poetic and political world.

Dorothy Kelly

*FICTIONAL GENDERS: ROLE AND REPRESENTATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH NARRATIVE*

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Pp. 216. \$25.00

Reviewed by Terence Dawson

Dorothy Kelly's study explores the problems raised by the ambivalence of gender in relation to institutions, rhetoric, and representation, as they manifest themselves in an unequal spread of realist, fantastic, and decadent texts. With an introductory chapter on Freud, Lacan, and Derrida, it is not surprising that the author describes her own critical stance as deconstructive *feminism*, the italicization of the substantive being designed to situate her study in the tradition not of American feminism, more concerned with establishing an authentic female discourse and identity, but of that aspect of French feminism which is more interested in theoretical considerations.

The first chapter sets out to establish that institutions heavily influence the definition of gender identity. Kelly argues that the class distinctions in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*, the familial divisions of power in *La Cousine Bette*