

frightening consequences for the English public of reading Woolf in purely formal terms, an approach which constitutes, in itself, a political position. I feel like I am falling into a well when I read an entirely aesthetic Woolf criticism because DeSalvo, Marcus, and many others have told me that the hole in the ground lurks just there and that Woolf is trying to warn me about it while the premise that the well is a mere literary invention is likely to tumble those who know no better right into it. Critical antipathy to the psychosocial dimension of Woolf's fiction makes me empathize with what Freud's patients must have felt like when their Viennese fathers rejected his findings about real occurrences of incest. For how many Viennese daughters did analyzing their abuse as mere "fantasy" spell lifelong trauma, and how many students and common readers in England will fall straight into its patriarchal wells if they are taught to read Woolf's detailed, passionate warnings as merely poetical?

Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires

*TELLING STORIES: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE FICTION*

New York: Routledge, 1988. Pp. 197. \$12.95

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

*Telling Stories* offers another retelling of the story of structuralist narrative theory. The first chapter appropriates Saussurean language theory though it endorses at the same time two well-known criticisms of the latter's position--Volosinov's regarding Saussure's neglect of language's diachronic aspects, and Derrida's on Saussurean phonocentrism. In the second chapter, the authors build on Jakobson's insights into metaphor and metonymy to advance a taxonomy of narrative play. To Jakobson's relations of similarity and contiguity are added relations of opposition. The discussions of language and tropes in the opening chapters are methodical and clear, and provide a useful general introduction to the central tenets of structuralist narrative theory. However, the readings suffer in some measure from excessive acquiescence to these same tenets, from a reluctance to question their viability and to consider that of other theories of narrative. While an eclecticism does emerge later, notably in Chapters 5 and 6--moving *Telling Stories* in the direction of poststructuralism--this eclecticism is not apparent here nor does it subsequently offer a metacritique of structuralism itself.

Chapter 3 analyzes plot structure. It is most stimulating when it dares to go beyond the *merely* theoretical to relate strategies of plot configuration to such social themes as gender politics and the moral implications of the latter. Chapter 4 looks at narration, at its various components and modalities. As is often the case with structuralism, the accretion of categories and analytical constructs in these chapters seems almost an end in itself with the relevance of the taxonomies more assumed than proven. While it is clearly useful to name the constitutive elements of plot and narration, the usefulness lies not in the naming process itself but in the new lexicon's capacity to identify the values and priorities at play in the text. Cohan and Shires would certainly agree with this claim, for they admit that narrative structure is not merely the function of

some abstract structural system, but is itself a "signifying practice" because "historical and cultural conditions determine the actual structures which a given text deploys to emphasize certain values over others" (78). Yet, the inclination to focus narrowly on narrative form in the first four chapters—rather than on structure as the mediating agent of axiology—is a shortcoming in *Telling Stories*, though one that is remedied in part by the author's efforts in the final two chapters to contextualize the formal and textual within the social.

Relying on the scheme worked out by Barthes in *S/Z*, Chapter 5 considers the cultural codes invested in such diverse media as film, the novel, and print advertising in an effort to discern their ideological claims. The analysis of a Woolrich clothing ad is particularly insightful and identifies advertising both as a powerful representational medium and as a discursive field that structuralist narrative theory can effectively elucidate. The concluding chapter discusses subjectivity and gender relations, and how the latter are constructed narratively in selected films and novels. In moving beyond the *merely* formal and *merely* theoretical in the concluding chapters, *Telling Stories* brings in to productive interplay structuralism and cultural critique, and therein narrates important new applications of structuralist narrative theory.

Rubem Fonseca

*BUFO & SPALLANZANI*

A novel translated from the Portuguese by Clifford E. Landers  
New York: Dutton/Obelisk, 1990. Pp. 249. \$18.95

Reviewed by Robert DiAntonio

Rubem Fonseca's *Bufo & Spallanzani* is a fascinating and oftentimes ironic exploration of the art of storytelling. The metafictional nature of the work is underscored by the book's narrator-author, Gustavo Flavio, who discusses the very novel he is working on, the one the reader is presently reading. From within the narrative itself, the novel's characters even debate the merits of the story with the fictional author; episodes are discarded, ideas are proposed and rejected.

Of late, Fonseca—one of Brazil's best-known authors—has concentrated on mystery and detective fiction as his 1987 novel, *High Art*, won praise from a large international audience. In *Bufo & Spallanzani* his style has crystallized as this genre evolves as an art form. The murder-suicide of a Rio de Janeiro socialite meshes with the story of this strange and compulsive writer who effortlessly turns out novels on his beloved Radio Shack TRS-80. The book is gravid with social commentary and literary parody. Ironically, the writer himself is the prime suspect in the murder investigation.

Spallanzani is Lazzaro Spallanzani, the founder of modern experimental biology, and Bufo is *bufo marinus*, the common toad, one of the objects of his experiments. The specific experiment focused upon in the novel affirms the