

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

sex urge to be stronger than the will to live. This then evolves as the book's central theme.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the novel, apart from its unique narrative perspective, is the characterization of Inspector Guedes of the Rio de Janeiro Police Department. Guedes is depicted as a loner living in a roach-infested flat, dressed always in the same sweat-stained jacket. In Brazil, after the "ditadura," or military dictatorship, Fonseca has created a character—an authority figure—who is scrupulously honest, intelligent, streetwise, and appealing. Guedes symbolizes the man of virtue whose life is lived out amid the corruption of contemporary society. His personal life in shambles, it is Inspector Guedes who is intent on righting the amorality that he confronts daily. However, at times, Guedes's sense of personal morality goes well beyond the limits and rigidity of the law.

While Fonseca's crime fiction has a *film noir* quality about it, it is approached from a Brazilian perspective. Like American author Andrew L. Bergman's Jack LaVine series ("The Big Kiss-off of 1944"), Fonseca seems to stop just short of parodying the genre.

*Bufo & Spallanzani* is an interplay of exotic atmospheres and compelling mystery. Fonseca, in the guise of a hack writer, is able to comment freely upon Brazilian society and politics. The book is footnoted in scholarly fashion, while its love story is the equal of any TV soap opera. This entertaining and darkly comic novel is arguably Fonseca's best to date. The novel converges upon contemporary literary theory, science, and the conventions of pulp fiction to create an ingenious amalgam of all three.

Adolfo Bioy Casares

*THE DIARY OF THE WAR OF THE PIG*

Translated from the Spanish by Donald & Gregory Woodruff

New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988. Pp. 192. \$7.95

Reviewed by Evelio Echevarría

The war of the young against the old in its most violent form is the topic of this novel by the Argentinian Bioy Casares. The story is told in the form of a diary, as well as through dialogues sustained among groups of public servants who are about to retire from their jobs. One of them is Isidoro Vidal, almost sixty years old and in love with a much younger woman. The action takes place in the Argentinian capital or any big, modern city and, presumably, in what could be the present or the very near future. Fired up by a fanatic, youths get out of control harassing, robbing, and killing senior citizens, or "pigs." The war is carried out without any dogma or doctrine, but not without a number of reasons which the author expresses repeatedly: the young kill the old out of hatred the old they themselves will become; by sheer numbers, old men are now masters, occupying posts and jobs that the young also need; the dictatorship of the proletariat has now ceded its place to the dictatorship of the elderly; the old