

BOOK REVIEWS

Umberto Eco

Six Walks in the Fictional Woods

Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994. Pp. 153. \$18.95

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

Umberto Eco has enjoyed extraordinary success both as a literary theorist and a novelist. Critical studies such as *A Theory of Semiotics* and *The Open Work* have reached sizable academic audiences while fictional works like *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* have enjoyed a worldwide readership extending, quite literally, into the millions. Indeed, for those who favor viewing over reading, and a mark of Eco's mass appeal, *The Name of the Rose* was adapted for the big screen in 1986 with Sean Connery playing a leading role.

In 1993 Eco was invited to give Harvard's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, and it is these that make up the six chapters of *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. As suggested in the metaphor of the title, and reinforced throughout the book, Eco likens reading to one's passage through a forest. Elaborating upon a simple taxonomy established in his *The Role of the Reader*, Eco defines two types of authors and two types of readers. The Empirical Author and the Empirical Reader are extratextual phenomena and, not surprisingly for a semiotician like Eco, of neither theoretical nor hermeneutic interest. No, for Eco the game is played out between the covers of the work itself as we seek to understand the Model Author—a nexus of discursive strategies that establish the very quiddity of the text—and the Model Reader, that "set of textual instructions" invested in every narrative work (15). Of course, as he acknowledges, his Model Reader bears similarities to Wolfgang Iser's "implied reader."

Pursuing his metaphor, Eco suggests that there are two ways that a Model Reader can move through a fictional wood. A "first-level" Model Reader will focus narrowly on events and actions, and work his or her way quickly through to the other side in order to reach the denouement as expeditiously as possible. (Yes, Jay Gatsby does die tragically and stalwart Nick Carraway returns to the morally pristine landscape of his native mid-west.) Alternatively, a "second-level" Model Reader elects to dawdle in the wood, exploring its many paths to learn more about the place itself. Such a reader will move slowly through *The Great Gatsby*, intrigued not so much by the building suspense in the novel as by the means through which the Model Author achieves dramatic tension and narrative interest. In short, the first-level Model Reader will attend to what the Russian Formalists called the *fabula* and what we refer to as the story or the natural chronology of events whereas the second-level Model Reader will focus on the *sjuzhet*, i.e., the plot or narrative chronology of the text, and enjoy time spent in the textual forest. Given his own performance as critic and novelist, there is no doubt what kind of reader Eco is himself and what kind of reader he hopes we will be.

The literary critic is always a guide of sorts, intent on directing the reader's attention to this or that text, to this or that discursive feature therein. And, secure in their knowledge, and empowered by it, the tour guide and literary critic alike can be imperious, perhaps even a little condescending, on occasion. However, more traveling companion than intrepid pathfinder, Eco is a guide of another stripe in *Six Walks*. Wearing his considerable erudition lightly, he moves through a number of popular and canonical texts—Nerval's neglected fiction, *Sylvie*, is a personal favorite of the author's—offering various insights on generic conventions, inter-textual relations, and the ontological status of stories and storytelling. Overall, Eco's essays achieve an immediacy and charm that are not invariably present in academic lectures.

Six Walks provides a readily accessible overview of Eco's ideas on reader-response and narrative semiotics as they have emerged over the last few decades. Further, the book serves as a loose critical complement to Eco's own novels and those of other innovative writers whom Eco admires, people like Sterne, Joyce, and Borges, not to mention his late friend, Italo Calvino, fellow Italian and presenter of the 1985 Norton Lectures. Buttressed by imaginative illustrations drawn from literature, film, and historical sources, *Six Walks* succeeds in capturing both the enthusiasm and wit of its author.

Lee A. Daniel, ed.

Cuentos de Beyhualé: Doce cuentos de Joaquín Bestard Vázquez

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1994. Pp. 101. \$15.95

Reviewed by Martín Rodríguez Pérez

As stated in the "Advertencia," the purpose of this book is to introduce Joaquín Bestard Vázquez to a North American readership (4). The anthology includes twelve stories about the fictional Yucatecan town of Beyhualé and the fate of the also fictitious Bech family. Even though most of these stories had been published in book form back in 1987 as *Los tiempos dorados de Tránsito*, two are being published for the first time and one is taken from another one of his novels. Other outstanding works by Bestard dealing with the Yucatan are *De la misma herida* (1985) and *Ocasos de un mar de cobre* (1992), the latter as the official literary contribution of the province to the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of America. Bestard's choice for the latter project reasserts his role as the peninsula's prophet, as he has come to be widely known, for giving those who are on the fringe and apparently voiceless a dignified stance as they face some of life's most adverse situations.

In the "Prologue" to the anthology, Bestard tells of the total attraction the Yucatan and its people have had on him, and he relates that his main concern has been to portray them faithfully on paper (6). Indeed, Bestard has changed radically our perception of this region, from being picturesque and quaint to tragic and compelling. This new vision is a complex one. To attain it, Bestard has relied on