

Kerr is forced to overvalue *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Reivers*, which she calls a “‘valediction forbidding mourning.’” At the same time, darker yet artistically more significant texts such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* get undervalued. Before *The Reivers*, Kerr admits that “Yoknapatawpha so far is a moribund society,” yet she sees Faulkner’s novel as a “final affirmation” which tips the cosmic scales to the side of Christian optimism. While the most recent is not always the best or the most representative of an author’s work, Kerr’s philosophical outlook as well as her strategy of treating the Yoknapatawpha novels as a continuous chronicle forces her to take that uncomfortable position. All told, this leaves Kerr’s book with the same kind of problem that she attributes to Faulkner’s character Isaac McCaslin, who had so much trouble supporting with meaningful action his high ideals. While *William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha* provides a useful overview of a great deal of secondary material and a few warm personal anecdotes that show Professor Kerr’s reverence for her subject, the book does not make a strong original contribution to Faulkner studies.

Raymond Federman

*SMILES ON WASHINGTON SQUARE*

New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1985. Pp. 145. \$13.95

Reviewed by Melvin J. Friedman

Raymond Federman published his first book twenty years ago. It was a critical study of Samuel Beckett’s early fiction, *Journey to Chaos* (1965). While he has continued to be a devoted interpreter of Beckett’s work—he co-authored *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography* (1970) and co-edited the Cahier de l’Herne *Samuel Beckett* (1976) and *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (1979)—he has turned his talents in recent years to the writing of fiction. In the five novels he has produced to date (he has also published a French narrative *Amer Eldorado*, an early version of *Take It or Leave It*), he has acknowledged at every turn the extent of his indebtedness to Beckett. In *Take It or Leave It* (1976) he characteristically nods fondly to his mentor: “In complete LESSNESSness my friend Sam would say where nothing is even less than nothing.” *The Voice in the Closet* (1979) achieves a startling process of reduction which makes one think of Beckett’s recent texts, like *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho*. Federman goes to Beckett’s *The Lost Ones* for the title of *The Twofold Vibration* (1982) and makes occasional reference to the Irish writer’s work, such as “. . . he sounded like old Winnie sinking into her mound of earth, you know in *Happy Days*, casually observing her own burial.”

Federman’s fifth novel, *Smiles on Washington Square*, is his most conventional thus far as it avoids many of the eccentricities of telling, typography, paragraphing, and punctuation of the earlier fiction. It offers a narrative which circles about an “initial encounter across a smile” between a man and a woman. This “almost” meeting between Moinous (a literary alter ego Federman has cultivated in his earlier fiction) and Sucette is precisely dated as occurring on March 15, 1954, during the McCarthy hearings. The rest of the text abounds in problematical turns, which feature words like should, would, could, perhaps, and if. The following sentence is fairly characteristic: “And if Moinous were familiar with Kafka’s work, which regrettably he is not at this time, he would perhaps remember this marvelous passage from *The Diaries*, and quote it to himself to justify his present confusion” (p. 49).

Federman flirts with the device of the novel-within-the-novel, somewhat in the manner of André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* and Claude Mauriac’s *La Marquise sortit à cinq heures*, when he has Sucette work on a short story which mirrors characters and events in *Smiles on Washington Square*. The narrative is cleverly made to exist on a variety of levels, with fiction triumphing over fact, imagination over reality. Moinous, the French immigrant, and Sucette, the Bostonian with the social conscience, have a life together only when their creator posits hypothetical situations: “It would probably be a good place in the love story of Moinous & Sucette for her to suggest that perhaps they should go to her apartment where Sucette could then read her story to Moinous” (p. 138).

*Smiles on Washington Square* thrives on circularity: the telling proceeds in a series of concentric circles. Jerome Klinkowitz accurately characterizes what goes on here as "antinarrative." While Federman seems to have tired somewhat of his earlier experiments with disrupting the appearance of his text, he still emerges from his latest novel as an experimentalist par excellence. For example, the tentative nature of reality with a "story that cancels itself as it goes" (words from *Take It or Leave It*) seems to survive intact from the early fiction. Federman makes interesting use of the present tense through much of his narrative, capturing the illusion of what Gertrude Stein once called "a continuous present."

Despite the claims on the dust jacket, I personally find less of Beckett in *Smiles on Washington Square* than in the rest of Federman's work. It is difficult to ignore a term like "seedy optimist" (p. 11) which clearly recalls Beckett's "seedy solipsist" from *Murphy*, but there are fewer of these echoes here than in *Take It or Leave It* or *The Twofold Vibration*. The writer who comes to mind for me is Marguerite Duras.

Bruce Morrissette

*NOVEL AND FILM: ESSAYS IN TWO GENRES*

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985. Pp. 181

Reviewed by Paul J. Schwartz

*Novel and Film* brings together twelve essays published by Bruce Morrissette between 1962 and 1975. As James Lawler explains in the volume's "Foreword," the publication of *Novel and Film* commemorates Morrissette's retirement from his Chair at the University of Chicago and pays tribute to an eminent scholar who during the last thirty years has brought intelligence, clarity, and originality to the analysis of contemporary fiction. Morrissette's name is frequently associated with Alain Robbe-Grillet (who incidentally pays tribute to Morrissette in his 1984 autobiography), and it is therefore not surprising that Robbe-Grillet to a great extent dominates this latest volume; his novels, films, and essays are cited in almost every chapter.

It is a difficult task to weld together disparate articles. Lawler, in his "Foreword," warns us not to expect them to "elaborate a single argument." Morrissette has edited them to produce unity, and has made an effort to bring some of the older articles up-to-date and to eliminate or apologize for ("as I have mentioned earlier") repetitions. However, there remain some awkward restatements of the same arguments (for example, the comparison of the transition following the hotel room scene in *La Jalousie* to a cinematic *fondue* occurs repetitiously on pages 19 and 32), and a few failures to cite obvious recent examples of techniques discussed (the essay on "Games and Structures in Robbe-Grillet" makes no allusion to OULIPO, which is nonetheless mentioned in Chapter One; and Perec's *Un Homme qui dort*, also mentioned in Chapter One, is not cited among the examples of "You" narrations in Chapter Nine).

Perhaps the most interesting essays are the second, "Aesthetic Response to Novel and Film," in which Morrissette studies historically the interactions of the two genres from the points of view of film makers and writers on one hand and critics on the other, and the sixth, "Topology and the *Nouveau Roman*," in which Morrissette discusses "topological" features such as holes, ellipses, and Kleinian unfolding as models for narrative technique. Also of great interest are Chapters Ten, "Interior Duplication," which contains a thorough history of the technique commonly referred to as *mise en abyme*, as well as an analysis of its uses in contemporary French fiction; and Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine, which form a unified subset of essays; an insightful discussion of "Modes of Points of View" introduces more specialized analyses of two particular forms of narration, the "Alienated 'I'" and "Narrative 'You'."

These and the other essays provide clear and original commentary on the techniques of novel and film and continue an important lineage of critical inquiry into the nature of creativity.