

again, as do Charles and Isabelle. The most poignantly written passages in the book evoke those very encounters: Isabelle's alcoholism, Charles's guilt, Florent's hate transformed into forgiveness. *Le Salon du Wurtemberg* is a meditation on the meaning of fidelity and friendship.

Perhaps no other young French novelist in recent years has set his sights so high. One senses in *Le Salon du Wurtemberg* the author's desire to compose what Roland Barthes in his last writings, after defending for two decades the French literary avant-garde, referred to recurrently as a "real novel," a novel in other words which could be set alongside the classics of nineteenth-century fiction. In such company certain shortcomings inevitably become manifest in *Le Salon du Wurtemberg*, the most grievous among them being that, apart from Isabelle, Florent, and Mademoiselle Aubier, an elderly lady from whom the couple rents rooms in the plush Parisian suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, most of the other characters remain mere accessories, not because they are minor characters, but rather because the narrator has no lasting interest in them. It is the narrator's self-centeredness which the reader must bear throughout the middle third of the novel, and because the self-centeredness is not dealt with thematically—as an eccentricity, for example, or philosophically as a common denominator of human intercourse—one wearies of its mere role as the instigator of increasingly lengthy ruminations on acts which have lost their interest for all except the doer. During the several years which follow the ending of Charles and Isabelle's relationship and precede their reunion as well as that of Charles and Florent one senses generally absent the perduring tension under which one might have expected the narrator to live: the tension deriving from the constant possibility of meeting up with one or both of them and thus with his past and thus with himself. What anguish Charles feels—and it is an anguish more of existential than of interpersonal origin—leads him rather to painful remembrances of his relationship with his mother and beyond to his troubled (though not always believable) relationship with the German language and culture into which he was born. A parallel with *Wieland* might also be drawn here. It is in this dispersion of the emotions that the novel loses some of its cohesiveness and hence a part of its potential emotional impact.

That such questions can be raised at all exemplifies the extent to which Quignard in *Le Salon du Wurtemberg* has revived the importance of the emotions in contemporary French literature. "In my novel," confided the author to Josyane Savigneau in an interview published in *Le Monde* (3 Oct. 1986), "the emotion is always out of harmony with the moment; the emotion never arises at the moment that it should." Alas, what more accurately describes the emotional structure of the book is that Quignard, as opposed to Proust, is unable to sustain an underlying emotional rhythm throughout the progression of these fictionalized memoirs; the long, lyrical, meditative passages give way to short, telegraphically written ones designed to bring the plot up to date and especially, one fears, to give at all costs a chronological structure to the book. Upon the perplexingly intricate structure of memory is imposed the more facile chronological reconstruction of action. Unlike Proust once again, Quignard is unable to make these two disparate literary methodologies work harmoniously and seem as if they were one.

To such criticisms it might be replied that it is unfair to compare a contemporary work on nearly every point to such authors as Proust, *Wieland*, Goethe, Mme de Lafayette, and André Gide. But the novel too easily reveals its inspiration, hence inviting such comparisons; one's interest in the plot is interrupted with distracting reminders of literary traditions, be they explicit allusions or stylistic tones. It is in this sense that the author's approach remains, as in his previous works, erudite and ultimately derivative. Yet *Le Salon du Wurtemberg* is a novel showing such potential that one can only hope that in coming works Pascal Quignard will have mastered artistically his penchant for erudition and at last have forged a style uniquely his own.

Dina Sherzer

REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH FICTION

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. Pp. 205
Reviewed by Ben Stoltzfus

This is a lively, intelligent, and useful book that highlights four modes of representation (serial constructs, multimedia montages, reflexivities, and postmodern feminist writing) in selected fictions by Jean Ricardou (*L'Observatoire de Cannes*), Alain Robbe-Grillet (*La Maison de rendez-vous*), Claude Simon (*Triptyque*), Michel Butor (*Mobile*), Maurice Roche (*Circus*), Philippe Sollers (*H*), Samuel Beckett (*L'Innommable*), Robert Pinget (*Quelqu'un*), Roger Laporte

(*Fugue*), Monique Wittig (*Les Guérillères*), Marguerite Duras (*L'Amour*), and Hélène Cixous (*Souffles*).

The twelve texts that Dina Sherzer presents span a period of about thirty years during which time the "writerly," as Roland Barthes defined it, subverts the "readerly," asserts differences, and devalues normative expectations. Instead of univocity, totality, wholeness, hierarchy, and polarity, these fictions display randomness, pluralism, heterogeneity, multiplicity, dispersion, and indeterminacy. The author explains and expands upon these terms in her excellent study of postmodern French fiction. She argues convincingly that these *nouveau nouveau roman* texts do not stage the writing of adventures but present instead the adventures of writing. She maintains that although language may foreground itself by displaying intrinsic linguistic properties such as puns, portmanteau words, heterogeneous verbal textures, metaphors, intertextuality, play, and so forth, it also transmits referential meaning. Dina Sherzer validates the autonomous play of language *and* its mimetic properties. Says she: "It is not desirable to operate with the prestructuralist emphasis on signifiers; rather, it is necessary to examine both signifiers and signified with the understanding that there is not a one-to-one relationship between them but that both generate meaning independently of each other" (p. 5).

Although formalists may insist on the pure play of signifiers, verbal traces, and intratextual games, Dina Sherzer ably demonstrates that the subversion, devaluation, and parody of normative texts cannot function without a referential presence, that is, without the firmly anchored values that are being opposed. Thus, the indeterminacy and discontinuity of texts, while foregrounding language, nonetheless oppose the conventional norms of well-crafted fiction. What appears to be a closed, arbitrarily constructed linguistic system, is, after all, "open" to audience response. What appeared to be independent, floating, linguistic constructs, are entities embedded in a literary experience and a cultural matrix that allow intentionality to play with the denotations and the connotations of language even when language may not be intended to signify. "In these texts," says Dina Sherzer, "everything is meaningful; meaning is expressed not only by the semantic or referential content of language but also in the various modes of communication" (p. 5). Intertextual and architextual components, isomorphisms, and harmonics overlap and intersect in order to create multilayered systems of meaning. She evinces no single model—be it linguistic, literary, or psychoanalytic—but combines a diversity of approaches in order to arrive at a *thick description* of texts, a term borrowed from Clifford Geertz who has used it to define the deep, intricate, and plural nature of cultures. Indeed, in her chapter on feminist fiction, Dina Sherzer shows how Wittig's "systematic reversals," or Cixous's "mental and physical exhilaration," although employing the devices of postmodern writing, nonetheless affirm meaning by opposing the codes and the values of a phallogocentric culture in order to subvert the authority of a logocentric discourse.

Representation in Contemporary French Fiction provides essential insights for understanding the operational field of postmodern writing: how decentering, entropy, lack of temporality, and emphasis on process inscribe a reality that is isomorphic with the reality of the universe from the point of view of quantum mechanics and human behavior. Dina Sherzer demonstrates that in addition to the foregrounding of language and the interplay of constructs, these twelve texts have meaning precisely because they function as epistemological metaphors; because the ways in which their *representation* is structured reflect the configurations of contemporary science as well as the cultural stratifications of the postmodern era.

Jerzy Kutnik

*THE NOVEL AS PERFORMANCE; THE FICTION OF
RONALD SUKENICK AND RAYMOND FEDERMAN*

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986.

Pp. xxviii + 275. \$22.50

Reviewed by Melvin J. Friedman

Jerome Klinkowitz, in his *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction* (1975), seems to have been the first to couple Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman. Indeed since then the two have been fashioned by critics to fit the mold of Beckett's pseudocouples; they have become, so to speak, the Mercier and Camier of American surfiction.