

advisor of sexual harassment and, more important, of failure to understand that her feminist project, "The Female Body and Matisse," necessitates that she violently deface posters of Matisse's work. The Dean, who knows of Peggi's history of depression, anorexia, and attempts at suicide, reads the letters as tormented cries for help. Devoted to truthfulness and accuracy, she knows intuitively that there was no attempt at sexual assault. At the same time, she understands, although she does not share, Peggi's objection to Matisse's constructions of the female body. The advisor, an elderly, distinguished art historian for whom Matisse's work is "*the thing itself*" (124), can only respond angrily to what he views as the student's failure of imagination. The two discuss the issue in a Chinese restaurant, where a display case containing a dying lobster provides an image both for Peggi's room of anguished isolation and for the white space which, the two scholars discover, is for each of them an emblem of the possibility of suicide, which has attracted them also. On the other hand, there are the Matisse canvasses, which they both see as permanent affirmations of life and joy. In all three stories, these paintings are "bright forms" which "go on shining in the dark" (133).

In these stories Byatt again displays the range of effects and the sureness of touch of the mature artist. Her prose is witty, nuanced, and richly sensuous; it catches the confusions and tensions, the anguish and the comedy of everyday life, while offering its readers a cornucopia of colors, textures, sounds, smells, and tastes. *The Matisse Stories* will win Byatt new readers and continue to engage old ones.

Angelo Caranfa

*Proust: The Creative Silence*

Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990. Pp. 202

Reviewed by Anthony R. Pugh

This is an ambitious book, setting Proust in the context of the long Platonic philosophical tradition of reflection on the world of pure forms. A paragraph on the dust jacket gives the essence of Caranfa's argument: "Faced with the corruptibility of things, Proust flees into the world of art, where he finds momentary joy. At the same time, art reduces him to tears, even despair, since he sees himself as a mere nothing in the landscape of human existence. Yet in art Proust overcomes corruptibility; and *A la recherche du temps perdu* expresses existence by transforming it into a language of creative silence, thus conferring upon it a spiritual significance, a privileged moment."

Caranfa claims Proust as a phenomenalist. The self is subjective in nature, but feels the need to discover an objective form for itself. Caranfa's argument is that whereas the Platonic-Christian tradition considers the world of phenomena as a sign of a spiritual world, to which we are called, Proust cannot go further along that road than the experience of longing. The "form or image that exists in things . . . is forever beyond his grasp" (54). We do surpass the world of appearances, through dreams and memory, and these "privileged moments" are recomposed by the artist, whose world is entirely subjective, and the artist's work leaves wide open the question of the objective "sense" of the world behind phenomena. The word "si-

lence," highlighted in the title, and frequently used throughout the book, is meant to stand in opposition to the "noise" of life among the phenomena. Inner silence is poetic speech (159).

This is clearly a philosophical approach, and none the worse for that. Caranfa does not exactly endear himself to us literary critics by his opening paragraph, in which all literary critics are dismissed for being "fond of talking about Proust's novel as a work of art" (17), and failing to penetrate to the meaning of his concept of the self, never mind relate that to the larger tradition. Caranfa will "overcome the limitations of the traditional scholarship by means of a philosophical and theological study of Proust's view of the self and by a comparison of his view with those of certain thinkers" used as "foils." The points of comparison include Merleau-Ponty (a phenomenalist who did believe that we can reach beyond appearances), Claudel (who thought the musician did tap into the divine harmony of the universe), Bracq (for whom the form existed, and had to be brought out), Gabriel Marcel (who believed that through faith we could reach the ultimate mystery), and Augustine. I liked best the two chapters on Renaissance art and Giotto. Caranfa shows the essential difference between Giotto as seen through the prism of Bonaventura, in which Giotto's frescoes stand as an image of theological truths, and Proust's interpretation, in which they are reduced to icons, an expression of Giotto's sensibility.

There are certainly weaknesses in this study. It is not an easy book to read. Partly this may be due to the readiness with which Caranfa swings into philosophical language. He perpetually uses words like thus, therefore, hence, then, implying a detailed logical sequence which is not always apparent to the reader, even if the overall thrust of the argument is convincing. Some sentences are quite impenetrable.

Caranfa limits himself to the first volume of the old Pléiade. He does not even quote from Proust's discussion of the centrality of metaphor in *Le Temps retrouvé*, a most arbitrary decision. At times he strikes me as being quite fanciful, as when he sees the dialogue between violin and piano in Vinteuil's Sonata as a discourse between the phenomenal and the spiritual (62). But even if the book really does little more than restate a fundamental idea in an original way, and even if that way is rough going at times, I did find it stimulating. But I doubt if I shall go back to it.

Seymour Menton

*Latin America's New Historical Novel*

Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. Pp. x + 228

Reviewed by Evelio Echevarría

Seymour Menton offers his readers a provocative tour of the Latin American historical novel. He begins by taking the following position: to demonstrate the special characteristics of the historical novel that emerged in Latin America after 1949 and to explain why this subgenre achieved popularity in that geographical area. He divides his work into a "Prependix," eight text chapters, and the normative notes, bibliography, and index. The "Prependix" is composed of two separate