

Twenty-five years ago Robertson-Lorant wrote an impressive doctoral dissertation on the subject of Melville and race. It was a critical milestone in the liberal rehabilitation of Melville, and Robertson-Lorant maintains her earlier perspective without, however, screening out or blocking evidence to the contrary. That perspective may be labeled feminine, even feminist, but it is clearly not committed to exposing or magnifying "dysfunctional" attributes of her subject. She can be very persuasive in arguing that Melville in his full maturity embodied a breadth of humanity that embraced both the masculine and feminine values of an individual or an institution. Perhaps a refinement of Hawthorne's dialectic of head and heart, she demonstrates how *Billy Budd* hinges on the systemic incompatibility of legal necessity on the one hand and morality and mercy on the other. In a man-of-war world the maintenance of discipline represents rationality and reliance on the head; whereas the heart, basically sentimental and irrational, represents "the feminine in man," and in the world as Melville knew it, the heart "must be ruled out." A generation ago, scholarly fashion encouraged biographical studies entitled "The Art and Mind of ..."; Robertson-Lorant has given us "The Heart and Mind of Herman Melville."

Valuable for its genealogical information and description of family relationships, for its summary accounts of the significance of Melville's apprentice works, for sounding the depths of *Moby Dick* (1851) or admirably explicating the ambiguities of *Pierre*, Robertson-Lorant's *Melville: A Biography* excels in conveying an understanding of *Clarel's* spiritual wasteland and of the lesser known poems that were the avocational by-product of Melville's day job as a customs inspector. This book should find a place on the shelf of the scholar as well as that of the general reader.

Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds.
Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community
Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. Pp. 581. \$59.95 \$22.95
Reviewed by George R. McMurray

The term "magical realism" has been tossed about rather freely in recent decades, especially since the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). During much of this time some scholars refused to use the term because it had not been properly defined. In more recent years, however, more serious studies have been published on magical realism, one of several examples being María-Elena Angulo's *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* (1995). The present volume, containing essays by scholars with different points of view, is far more extensive than any of the others I have seen on the subject.

In their introduction, the editors explain one of their basic tenets: that magical realism is by no means limited to Latin American literature, but rather

can be considered universal in its scope. This tenet is illustrated by the essays on writers from other parts of the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia, the United States, Canada, and Australia. The editors also emphasize magical realism as a mode that transgresses ontological, political, geographical, and generic boundaries. In the editors' words: "Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction" (5-6).

This volume is divided into four sections: Foundations, Theory, History, and Community. Although some of the essays included under Foundations are well known to many scholars, this section will nevertheless provide the novice with a broader understanding of the subject. These essays include ones by German art critic Franz Roh, which deals with postexpressionist paintings in the 1920s in Europe; Alejo Carpentier's theory of *lo real maravilloso* in Latin America; Angel Flores and Luis Leal, who endeavor to define magical realism in the early stages of the "movement." In this same section are Amaryll Chanady's comments on magical realism and European surrealism, and Scott Simpkins's analyses of works by Borges and García Márquez.

In one of the best pieces on Theory, Wendy Faris elaborates on what she and Zamora write in their introduction, that is, the view of magical realism as an international movement and, in addition, as a revitalizing force from the peripheral regions of Western culture. She also sees it as "a strong current in the stream of postmodernism" (165) The subject of another fine essay in this section is the "textualization of the reader," a process, according to Jon Thiem, whereby the boundaries between the readers' and the characters' worlds are magically erased. Thiem bases his comments on works by Michael Ende, Italo Calvino, Woody Allen, and Julio Cortázar, the latter's "Continuity of Parks" representing perhaps the best example of this erasure of boundaries. In addition, Thiem explores the psychological, cultural, and philosophical implications of "textualization," considering this technique an "expression of the postmodern fascination with ontology" (244).

The essays in the section on history focus more on individual works that make use of magical realism to shed new light on episodes of the past. Examples include P. Gabrielle Foreman's comparison of *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende and *The Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison; both authors utilize magic to recreate realities of the past that have been obscured by injustice. (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it seems to me, would also fit perfectly into this category.) In a similar vein, an essay by Patricia Merivale on Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* presents characters linked to European colonialism and World War II. And symbolic meaning as a bridging concept linking psychology and literature is discovered by Steven Walker, who studies magical realism and Jungian psychology in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

The final section, dealing with magical realism and communities, demonstrates how this literary mode often registers the rise and fall of societies instead of the struggles of individuals. The emphasis here is on the deconstruction of colonialism in postcolonial communities, as seen in essays by Stephen Slemon, who focuses on four Canadian writers; John Erickson, who analyzes two North African works of fiction; Melissa Stewart, who examines depictions of city life in works by well-known American writers; and Lois Parkinson Zamora, who compares elements of magical realism—the appearance of ghosts, for example—in American and Latin American literatures. (Again, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would seem to represent an excellent example of the category.)

With a total of twenty-three well-written scholarly essays, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* stands out as a valuable contribution to the definition and discussion of a subject which, until recently, cried out for further exegesis. Now, after the publication of this weighty tome, scholars can no longer complain about a lack of critical understanding of the literary mode so widely known as magical realism. Faris and Zamora are to be highly commended for compiling and contributing their own scholarship to this valuable text.

Raylene L. Ramsey

The French New Autobiographies

Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996. Pp. 263. \$49.95

Reviewed by Doris Y. Kadish

How, from the vantage point of the 1990s, do we assess the significance of the French New Novel and the evolution that the principal new novelists have undergone since writing their most well-known works in the 1960s? Readers seeking answers to these questions will find Raylene L. Ramsey's *The French New Autobiographies* a useful, thorough, and insightful work. Well written and clearly developed, it provides a sophisticated and theoretically informed treatment of its subject: the semi-autobiographical works written in the 1980s and 1990s by Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Marguerite Duras. Although Ramsey focuses primarily on six texts—*Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* by Sarraute, *Le Miroir qui revient* and *Angélique ou l'enchantement* by Robbe-Grillet, *Emily L.* and *L'Amant de la Chine du nord* by Duras—her analyses also touch on works by Claude Simon, Roland Barthes, and other writers who similarly interweave their personal histories with French history of the Second World War and the postwar period. Accordingly, Ramsey's work transcends her limited topic of the three writers and six works she has chosen to discuss and assumes broad relevance for the study of the modern French novel and contemporary French literature in general.