

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.

The book consists of an introductory section, which lays the theoretical groundwork of the study, followed by a section devoted to each of the three main authors. In the introductory section, Ramsey's approach is typically postmodern: first she identifies the traditional autobiographical features of the works under consideration; then she places those features "under erasure" and demonstrates how those works undermine or deconstruct those features; and finally she identifies them as belonging to a new "autofictional genre," which has features of both traditional and nontraditional autobiography, by intermingling the real and the imaginary, and splintering unitary notions of self and history. Overall her approach is well argued and convincing, although I must say that some readers, myself included, may at times have wished to see Ramsey go farther in challenging her own and the new novelists' postmodern values and assumptions; and I must confess to a certain impatience when encountering talk, for example, of "the conflating of opposites to show their connections in a chaotic and dynamical nondialectical structure" (211).

After the introductory section, she discusses how individual works deploy the strategies of the autofictional genre she has defined, and she tries to demonstrate the ways in which they realize a "subversive potential," their ideological limitations notwithstanding. Thus, for example, she argues that Robbe-Grillet is not merely replaying but is also subverting the personal stories he recounts about sadistic sexual fantasies or his family's support for Nazi ideology. The resulting interpretation is a Robbe-Grillet who seeks to work through the return of a right-wing repressed for both his family and the French generally in the Second World War period. In the case of Duras, whose personal stories tend to cast women in a submissive, masochistic role, Ramsey argues that the author actually calls that role into question, writes about her past in order to assert her freedom and assume her sexuality, and ultimately oscillates between passive voyeurism and active exhibitionism. As for Sarraute, Ramsey presents a woman author who refuses to accept the existence of a feminine voice yet whose desire for the lost mother's presence is palpable; a writer who suppresses the historical events of the war and the Holocaust yet who returns to those events indirectly and in personal terms. Thus she shows that the feelings of fear and aggression or the need to control and build defenses that are expressed in Sarrautean "subconversations" are inextricably linked to the larger social issues of her time.

In conclusion, Ramsey's book is a laudable attempt to place the recent works by French new novelists in their full social, political, and historical context. Toward this end, she has had to look at and assess these writers' attitudes toward such thorny issues as the Holocaust, feminism, pornography, and colonialism. Those of us, critics and readers, who were used to confining ourselves to linguistic and literary matters in considering the new novel, and who tended to relegate these writers to an "all is language" category, have a great deal to learn, both from the new novelists' own evolution in recent years

and from books like Ramsey's that guide us through the new, more expanded notion of New Novel.

Julieta Campos

*Celina or the Cats*

Trans. by Leland H. Chambers

Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1995. Pp. 140. \$15.95

Reviewed by Dexter J. Noel

Julieta Campos, born in Cuba, is one of Latin America's growing number of women writers who are striving to create a new poetics independent of the traditional canon. Campos, a professor of literature, has published novels, reviews and a book on literary criticism. *Celina or the Cats*, originally published in Spanish (*Celina o los gatos*, 1968), is a collection of five short stories divided into two sections; the first contains three stories and the second, two. The stories are preceded by an introduction, intended to serve, in part, as an exegesis for the stories. In this introduction, Campos reviews the historical relationships between cats and humans and provides the underpinnings for the symbolism of cats, "our contact with all that is imaginary, indecipherable, unfathomable, inaccessible" (16). Cats, for Campos, "evoke worlds that belong not only to a beyond that is divine or satanic ... but also to the lost paradise of childhood..." (24).

The title story, *Celina or the Cats*, tells about the relationship between Carlos Manuel and his wife Celina. Although the story centers around the wife, it is told in the first person by the husband as he attempts to analyze the events that led to the marriage breakup and Celina's subsequent suicide. Carlos Manuel traces the stages of the relationship and tries to decide whether or not he was victim or culprit. Celina first seeks to express her personality through her husband's world; then, she moves away from this world and creates her own. Next, she tires of this and acquires some cats, becomes engrossed in them, and, finally, commits suicide. All of this is foreshadowed by Celina's obsession with her nails, her mirror, and her preening.

The second story, *The Baptism*, chronicles the events surrounding the baptism of Natalia's doll, Michel, and is the backdrop for Natalia's struggle with growing up. The tension is illustrated by the fact that Natalia wants the security of the known stage while, at the same time, she wants to seek out the new and unusual. In order to maintain control over her situation, Natalia returns to her favorite spot in the garden where she can be alone with her thoughts. Her loss of innocence is signaled when she finds Luis and Marisa in each other's arms in her garden, and when she finally discovers a change in the color of the sky.