

guish between a Romantic concept of reality and that of, let us say, a classical concept. They do not explain the Romantic world epistemologically. They do not explain, for example, the difference between a mythical and a metaphysical view of reality. At times, notably when he claims that the "mind loves to have the feelings aroused," Professor Rafroidi seems ready to project such an explanation but does not.

A second requirement is the application of a literary theory which when applied to the period will reveal its essentially literary characteristics and its essentially period characteristics, in this instance Romantic. Unfortunately, Professor Rafroidi does not assume any particular critical position but, rather, moves among several: aesthetic (formal), moral, historical, sociological. Therefore, we are not offered a consistent measure by which we can determine the literary quality of the period. Ironically, however, the multiplicity of positions works for Rafroidi, allowing him to include, surprisingly, such writers as novelists William Carleton and Maria Edgeworth and statesman-essayist Edmund Burke.

A third requirement is the presence of a sufficiently large and challenging body of literature to which the literary theory can be applied. Rafroidi struggles heroically here but his stress on Thomas Moore and James Clarence Mangan almost forces him to that apology often used by enthusiastic defenders of Irish history and culture, namely, that one should not wonder at the quantity of Irish literature but be awed that there should be any literature at all. In spite of his enthusiastic appraisal of the literature of Ireland's Romantic period, Professor Rafroidi occasionally slips into statements which suggest that his enthusiasm is, at times, forced. There is, for example, his tacit acceptance of Hippolyte Taine's now out-of-fashion theory of the relationship of race and literature, implying that whatever Ireland produced was in keeping with its racial characteristics. In addition, he sees literature in Ireland as a product of its attempt to compensate for its impoverished political and economic life, an observation which comes close to a Freudian view of literature as sublimation. These and other statements suggest that Professor Rafroidi's claims for Irish Romantic literature must be read in the context of a statement in the Preface, that there is much to be studied which goes "beyond the scope of the individual researcher who, in each and every field may lay himself open to the

reproaches of the specialist for his lack of knowledge, of the critic for his emphasis on history, and of the methodical analyst for his impressionistic conclusions."

Somewhat paradoxically, it is in the context of this quotation that Professor Rafroidi's work may have its greatest value. Through the very audacity of his claim that the politically undefined period (which included Edmund Burke) prior to the Emancipation is a prominent part of a Romantic period which stressed nationalism, he has established a goal at which other scholars of "Irish Literature in English" can take aim. Simultaneously, he offers the results of painstaking and sensitively intelligent bibliographical work which should provide those scholars with an excellent beginning. *These* contributions are of great significance.

Frank L. Ryan

JANE P. TOMPKINS, ED.  
*Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*  
Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Pp. 275.  
\$6.95.

Given the current importance of response-centered theory, Jane P. Tompkins's collection of essays by Walker Gibson, Gerald Prince, Michael Riffaterre, Georges Poulet, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley E. Fish, Jonathan Culler, Norman N. Holland, David Bleich, and Walter Benn Michaels is, indeed, timely and valuable. As Tompkins points out, although all the essays focus on the reader and the reading process, they "represent a variety of theoretical orientations: New Criticism, structuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction." But despite different allegiances, the essayists "are united in one thing: their opposition to the belief that meaning inheres completely and exclusively in the literary text." Tompkins also indicates that she has arranged the reprinted material in "roughly chronological order," an arrangement which allows one to perceive "coherent progression" or "the

drama of the reader's emergence into critical prominence." Actually, Tompkins makes the progression seem a little more systematic than publication dates allow (first reprinted essay, 1950; second, 1973; third, 1966, and so on). Of course, all the material is not of equal value: since subjectivism is now admissible, I suggest that Prince's "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" is pedantic; Poulet's "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," repetitious; and Bleich's "Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response," a review of scholarship, provokingly tedious. On the other hand, the essays by Iser, Fish (both "Affective Stylistics," no model of economy, and "Interpreting the *Variorum*"), Culler, and Holland merit contemplation. Holland's "Unity Identity Text Self" is especially readable. Though Iser's "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," the final chapter in *The Implied Reader* (1972) and the chapter reprinted by Tompkins, is representative and does look forward to Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1976), Tompkins's collection would have been a degree or two more valuable if she had managed to extract crucial sections from the later and, I assume, more influential work. But these are relatively minor demerits.

Even for those already acquainted with the reprinted material, *Reader-Response Criticism* should be a welcome book. Tompkins opens and closes with lucid essays and appends an excellent annotated bibliography (pp. 233-72), divided into "Theoretical" and "Applied" categories. In her "Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism" she offers a helpful preview of the essays to come; and in "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" (pp. 201-32) she presents a survey of the different effects that different ages have thought poetry to achieve (fiction is ignored). In describing periods before the transitional nineteenth century, Tompkins uses such words as "power," "utility," "instruction," "influence," and "weapon." Her concluding pages, a subsection entitled "Formalism and Beyond: The Triumph of Interpretation," are intensely interesting. She reflects on the different ways New Criticism and reader-response criticism have been or are related to language and science, and she insists that, despite major differences (objectivity vs. subjectivity), New Criticism and reader-response criticism both "assume that to specify meaning is criticism's ultimate goal." "What is most striking about reader-response criticism

and its close relative, deconstructive criticism, is their failure to break out of the mold into which critical writing was cast by the formalist identification of criticism with explication. Interpretation reigns supreme both in teaching and in publication just as it did when New Criticism was in its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s." Why? The answer is not as clear as one would like, but Tompkins suggests that "interpretation" has become a part of the educational establishment. But are all serious students of literature, formalists or otherwise (for instance, Iser), as preoccupied with "interpretation" as Tompkins believes? Her concluding paragraphs are in the prophetic mode: ". . . if, as the post-structuralists claim, reality itself is language-based," we may be returning to the ancient belief in "language as a form of power."

In short, *Reader-Response Criticism* is a considerably better-than-average anthology.

Daniel P. Deneau

## SIGBRIT SWAHN

*Proust dans la Recherche littéraire. Problèmes, méthodes, approches nouvelles.*

Études romanes de Lund 27. Lund: CWK Gleerup (Liber-Läromedel), 1979. Pp. 168.

There are many positive things to be said about this study. Sigbrit Swahn has had the commendable idea of taking an overall view of Proust criticism, discerning the key issues, diagnosing the differences of approach, suggesting ways in which the differences might be reconciled. The range of her reading, in general theory as well as within the field of Proust criticism, is impressive. Several of her insights are sharp, and several of her individual points are very well taken.

One's enthusiasm is nevertheless tempered by several factors. On the purely material level, the book is not very easy to