

Nonetheless, Fraser's talent for sardonic humour is considerable, and this does at least provide the reader with some genuinely funny scenes. Among them are a series of verbal clashes between the Bible-quoting Brother Bell and the foul-mouthed Moses, the opposing accounts of sexual encounters between Liz and Cavanaugh, and the description of a glorious unplanned explosion at the group's farm hideout.

Perhaps *The Struggle Outside* is best considered as a study of folly and incompetence. On these grounds it has something to recommend it.

Stan Atherton

BRUCE MORRISSETTE

The Novels of Robbe-Grillet

Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975.
Pp. 318.

It is now twelve years since Bruce Morrisette patiently exploded an understandable prejudice against Robbe-Grillet. Clearly his novels were difficult, flaunting all the expectations of a generation nurtured on traditional narrative techniques. Robbe-Grillet himself had repeatedly admitted as much. Professor Morrisette's eminently sensible exegeses of the texts of the four novels and the *ciné-roman* Robbe-Grillet had published at that time—preceded by an admirably clear analysis of the author's critical views—showed that once one had resolved certain key questions, it was quite possible to "make sense," in fairly orthodox way, of these new novels. The book did a great service in making Robbe-Grillet more accessible to countless readers who needed such reassurance. Bruce Morrisette has now translated his book into English, along with the original preface by Roland Barthes, and he has added chapters on Robbe-Grillet's output since 1963—two more novels and two more *ciné-romans*. Professor Morrisette's approach remains the same—lucid accounts of the narrative

structures of each work, with perceptive discussion of critical issues raised on the way.

Rereading the 1963 chapters after an interval of some years, I find myself pulled in two directions. For most of the time, I am entirely persuaded by Bruce Morrisette's expositions. He writes beautifully, and his argument is clear even when the details he is discussing seem to defy clarity. His erudition is considerable, and used discreetly. I foretell that this new English edition will draw more readers to Robbe-Grillet, grateful to be provided with an "Open Sesame" so pleasant to use. I gladly admit my own debt, having found Dr. Morrisette's article on *La Jalousie* (later taken up into the 1963 volume) indispensable when I was wrestling with the novel for the first time. And yet, now that I am familiar with the novels, I find that my own reading of the ones I know best—*La Jalousie* and *Dans le Labyrinthe*—does not always agree with Professor Morrisette's. There are textual problems in both novels which he does not touch upon in his elegant demonstration. This objection is not totally met by a very interesting footnote on page 125, in which Dr. Morrisette mentions "chronological dead ends," and admits that "one cannot construct a linear chronology." His point, and it is well taken, is that unless one has worked out the basic framework which does seem to underlie the shifting events recorded, one is lost. I would only add that Robbe-Grillet does this quite deliberately in order to prove that the novelist need never be the prisoner of realism, even the kind of realism which is defined as fidelity to mental experience. Ultimately, the imagination is free, and must assert its freedom in order to survive. It has its own laws, its own logic, as T. S. Eliot remarked, and as long as it is faithful to that, it can justify itself.

This attitude, already implicit in the early works, has become more and more evident with Robbe-Grillet's subsequent development. Bruce Morrisette puts his finger on it when he writes on his very last page that Robbe-Grillet's latest book, *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* is not "about" its overt subject matter, "but 'about' the metaphoric structuration of sexuality and violence." "Metaphoric structuration," even if one does not much care for the word, is indeed a good description of Robbe-Grillet's prime concern in his fiction.

I was a little surprised that Bruce Morrisette did not present his new book by describing his aims in 1963, and discussing the changes in Robbe-Grillet criticism since then. I think he is quite right in not wanting to tamper with the earlier text, and I applaud him for discussing the later works in the same manner. It points to the validity of his approach, and the book is all the stronger for it. Nevertheless, it leaves one with an odd feeling that his is the only approach to Robbe-Grillet. Footnotes refer extensively to discussions of the new novel, but very rarely to points which have been raised about the individual novels with which Dr. Morrisette deals. One has the impression that this is the official view, subtly reinforced by having a preface by Barthes (who does evaluate Morrisette's contribution to Robbe-Grillet studies very fairly, page 13), and by the references to discussions which have taken place between the author of the study and his subject, the novelist. (In this connection, a delightful glimpse of the genesis of the New York novel, on page 283.) There are other exciting things to discover in Robbe-Grillet's texts; but certainly Professor Morrisette has provided a way into that world for which he deserves praise and gratitude, and if we resist the implication that this is the only way, it is certainly a way we all shall have to tread before we risk developing our own insights.

Anthony R. Pugh

MERLE GOOD, ED.

People Pieces: A collection of Amish and Mennonite Stories

Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1974. Pp. 172. \$2.95.

The "people" are the "plain people," as the Mennonites are often called and *People Pieces* is a collection of short stories by young Mennonite authors. Editor Merle Good sees these pieces as windows, "part

pane and part mirror": that is, they reveal the "people" to themselves as well as to the stranger. The "mirror" concept is possibly quite valid, but the outsider who seeks a detailed photographic panorama of Mennonite life will be disappointed. Because of the great variety of lifestyles involved, such a representation in such a work would, in fact, be a very demanding task. The editor has achieved a great deal, however, in assembling a collection which while showing this variety manages as well to bring out some of the unifying threads in this diverse culture.

Thus, in "A Visit to the Zoo" we can see both the capacity for deep enjoyment of very simple things on the part of the farm family, for whom the visit to the big city is a once in a lifetime event, and the lack of comprehension, even cruelty, on the part of other visitors, for whom the Mennonites in their outlandish garb are the most curious spectacle of all.

In "The Tent" this separation from society is manifested in distrust and fear of "the world," this time suggesting a gesture of self-defence which however is not carried out, its violence being perceived, though dimly, as a sellout to the very alien values against which it was directed. The sideshow tent remains standing, the boys, more frightened than frightening, put away their knives, and the ordinary round of farm life resumes.

In other pieces, the "world" gains a partial or a temporary victory: a family, once close-knit, that has already lost to the "world" two sons who went off to university and rejected their former traditional values faces the prospect of losing the third; again, a daughter who has been away and out of touch, is reconciled with her father through the shock of her mother's death.

Occasionally, religious faith itself is the theme. In "The Present Strength" it is the faith visible in, and lived by, a young foreign pastor that touches empty lives and dispels ancient hatreds. In "The Dark Behind the Door" a young husband realizes he has been given the strength to face up to the loss of his wife and unborn child.