

intention of demonstrating the different kinds of engagements as well as the possibilities and limits of the language in regard to them.

The author tries to answer the question as to whether the writer's function is to supply society with solutions for its problems, or merely to help in formulating the relevant questions. Should he take over the role of the prophet or only act as an *advocatus diaboli*. Hans Wysling ends the book by stating that: "Nicht Lösungen oder gar Losungen sollten wir von ihm erwarten, aber Zeitgenossenschaft" (p. 50), which might be translated in the following fashion: "Not solutions nor watchwords should we expect from him, but contemporaneity."

S. Elkhadem

RAYMOND FRASER

The Struggle Outside

Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975. Pp. 138.

The dust jacket blurb on this book calls it a "funny serious novel." There is certainly fun, in the form of slapstick and farce, but there is little to compel readers to take the story seriously. And to call it a novel is surely to stretch the term's definition beyond normal limits—the term "novelette" would be more appropriate to the work's 138 pages of text.

Raymond Fraser's first book of fiction, *The Black Horse Tavern*, was a collection of short stories set mainly near the Miramichi River in north-eastern New Brunswick. It was an uneven work, and although it included a number of competent stories, it

attracted little critical attention. *The Struggle Outside*, Fraser's first attempt at longer fiction, shares the New Brunswick setting of the earlier work, and records the escapades of a motley group of misfits who attempt to stage a political revolution in the province.

The revolutionaries, who call themselves the Popular Liberation Party, include the unnamed narrator, a vicious neanderthal called Moses, a shrill-voiced, paranoid slut named Liz, and Cavanaugh, an ex-professor of chemistry and sexual deviant. Collaborators who play lesser roles include LeBlanc, a dim-witted Acadian, and a fork-tongued Indian chief, Magaguadavic, who is frequently referred to as a betrayer of the cause, but who never actually appears in the work.

The story takes the form of a combat journal, supposedly smuggled out of prison (or madhouse?) where the narrator has been incarcerated. As the "author's preface" tells us, it is meant to be "the definitive account of the origins of the revolution presently engulfing New Brunswick." Briefly, the journal recounts the group's unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government and rouse popular support by first kidnapping the Minister of Justice. In the course of a wild highway chase, however, the Minister is unceremoniously dumped out of the rebels' speeding car to delay the pursuing police and enable the kidnappers to reach their farm hideaway. One piece of incompetence follows another, as the fleeing desperadoes escape to the woods with another hostage, this time an evangelical preacher called Brother Bell. The rest of the fragile plot is based on a sequence of forced marches through dense forest at night, and an attempt to collect ransom for Brother Bell. Inevitably bungling things, the group is surrounded and ambushed by the forces of law and order, although three of them escape temporarily. They soon fall out with one another, and as the story ends, the narrator leaves Moses and Liz copulating savagely on the forest floor as he stumbles away to be captured.

The trouble with Fraser's fiction is that it offers so little for the mind. This is no provocative study of revolution, nor are the characters and their predicaments revealed either in depth or with compassion.

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.