

*Assemblage* is both the only available source of information, for the general reader, about these picture-texts and also, for the reader whose training is in literature rather than in art, probably more informative than an undirected study of the visual works alone would be. Ideally, as Morrisette himself suggests, one would use his study as an introduction to, and as a guide in analyzing, the picture-texts themselves.

Morrisette's interest in the relationship between the visual material and the text in these works is readily understandable. Although there may have been as many texts written describing works of art as there are art works that illustrate texts, Robbe-Grillet's use of selected elements taken from works of art as generators of a text which neither describes nor attempts to re-create the total art work is very new. Robbe-Grillet's method is a form of intertextuality expanded to include quotations from nonliterary works. It incorporates the quoted elements as intrinsic parts of the newly created text, and as generators of the continuation of that text. Robbe-Grillet's method, then, reminds us of Charles Baudelaire's terrible vision in "Un Voyage à Cythère," a poem inspired by Watteau's pastoral "Embarkation for Cythera." Perhaps it is even more reminiscent of Stéphane Mallarmé's abstraction, from Edgar Allen Poe's real tomb, of the elements he incorporates into his "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe." Neither the painting nor the real tomb can be visualized by the reader of the resultant poems. Yet Robbe-Grillet's texts are longer and even more complex, in that each is inspired by a series of works of art which serve not only as a point of departure, but to which he repeatedly returns for new images which continue to engender the development of the text. The closest contemporary parallel is perhaps Italo Calvino's *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969, 1973; translated as *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*), which uses sequences of tarot cards, illustrated in the text, as generators of the fiction. But there are great differences between the traditional tales that Calvino's narrator "reads" from various arrangements of the cards in two tarot decks and Robbe-Grillet's recent fiction in which increasingly traditional images (eggs, melons, seashells, shoes, and daggers), originating in the visual works, are incorporated into a text in which events and characters are carefully kept in a state of constant metamorphosis.

The importance of the generative function of the visual material in the individual picture-texts suggests the question of how the two assemblage novels, *Topologie* and the *Triangle d'or*, which are published without any of the visual sources, are to be read: solely as novels that are complete in themselves, or both as individual novels and simultaneously as the separate picture-texts that they incorporate, with reference to the (almost unobtainable) works of art which served as their generators. When this question was raised at a roundtable discussion at Washington University in St. Louis in October of 1979, Robbe-Grillet responded by calling the preexisting picture-texts "des livres provisoires" ("temporary texts"). Insisting that *Topologie* and the *Triangle d'or* are complete works in themselves, he argued that demanding that a reader know everything James Joyce did before attempting to read *Ulysses* would be comparable to asking his readers to study the picture-texts in order to read the assemblage novels.

Morrisette immediately objected in a pleasant but firm manner, and one understands why he did so. Robbe-Grillet, as author, has to believe that the two assemblage novels must be able to stand independently if he has been successful in developing a new method of writing. But the responsible critic may not ignore the unusual origins of these two novels; for him, Bruce Morrisette's *Intertextual Assemblage* provides a much needed and very useful explanation of the construction of these two remarkable works, and offers assistance in his search for an answer to Robbe-Grillet's concluding words in the *Triangle d'or*: "Qu'ai-je dit? Qu'ai-je fait?" ("What have I said? What have I done?").

Emma Kafalenos

JACQUES BERTHOUD  
*Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase*  
Cambridge: Cambridge University  
Press, 1978. Pp. 191.

This book, the ninth in a series (British Authors Introductory Critical Studies), is an attempt "to understand" Conrad's work "in terms of his own understanding of himself" (p. 5; Berthoud's italics). *A Personal Record* is

the subject of Chapter I, in which the critic explores some of "the parallels between Conrad the seaman and Conrad the writer" (p. 7). No reference is made to the Preface to *The Nigger of the "Marcissus"* or the nautical/literary *Mirror of the Sea*. In an effort to match the "precision of utterance" (p. 13) of *A Personal Record*, Berthoud strives for philosophical accuracy, as in his distinctions between "cause" and "reason," "necessity" and "sufficiency." The seaman and the artist, it is argued, share a moral life defined by the virtues of solidarity, restraint, and fidelity, the pivots of Conrad's fundamentally tragic vision of man: conflicts issue, in the words of *A Personal Record*, from "the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature" (Dent Collected Edition, p. 36; cited on p. 20). This chapter, proposing the thesis of Conrad's "intellectual power and consistency" (p. 23), while admirable in its insistence on the need for intellectual discrimination, sometimes fails to match the strength of its subject, as when it argues that "a writer who confesses to a positive phobia for loss of self-possession is unlikely to be reliable on the subject of love or passion" (p. 14). The contrary of this proposition is just as intellectually tenuous, of course.

The second chapter, on *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* gives an account of the tragic condition of a crew caught up in the irremediable conflict of service (sea morality) and self-seeking (land morality). The shrewd explication of the text's surface does not concern itself with analogical relation. In Chapter III, Berthoud observes that an "antithetical conception of reality—in which the recognition of a basic truth prompts the affirmation of a counter-truth—is at the centre of 'Heart of Darkness'" (p. 53); and he offers that Marlow's lie to the Intended is the work's "central irony" (p. 62). The brilliance of the analysis extends into the next chapter, which argues persuasively for the "overall intellectual coherence" (p. 67) of *Lord Jim*: Part II of the novel is a "systematically reversed" reenactment of Part I (p. 90). Such insight considerably improves on the conventional view. Chapter V, on *Nostramo*, examines the fundamental ambiguity of Conrad's vision of politics as "a perpetual permutation of action and reaction" (p. 97). The critic's attention to detail allows him to revise Albert Guerard's analysis of the chronology of events in this epic novel. *The Secret Agent*, the subject of the subsequent chapter, incorporates the Conradian prin-

ciple of life: "Positive and negative are locked together in a tragic embrace" (p. 156). Berthoud repeats the notion R. W. Stallman expressed in an article which remains the most comprehensive on the subject: "Everything exists in contradiction of itself" ("Time and *The Secret Agent*," ed. Stallman [East Lansing, 1960], p. 240).

The least persuasive of the chapters, VII, examines *Under Western Eyes*, in which the English Teacher is said to provide "the touchstone of the real" (p. 163), reality being defined, according to Berthoud, in accordance with the principles of British empiricism as expressed by David Hume (p. 163). Like Hume, the Teacher is "on his guard against metaphysics" (p. 163). As a "defender of rationality" (p. 164), this Teacher is said to possess a fine intellect: "The penetration of his mind compels respect" (p. 164). Perhaps Berthoud is being ironic here, for it is the English Teacher, proud of his "faculty of putting two and two together" (Dent Collected Edition, p. 195), who calculates that since Razumov (a tsarist agent, in fact) arrived in Geneva from Stuttgart, a revolutionary center, he must be working for the anarchists. This *non sequitur* parallels the unreason of the anarchists: since the ostler Ziemienitch hanged himself shortly after Victor Haldin's arrest, thinks Sophia Antonovna, for example, he must have done so out of remorse for betraying the assassin. Like Hume, whose thought undermines the very ground of philosophy and science, the Teacher, in fact, joins the anarchists in unreason. A representative, as Berthoud seems ingenuously to contend, of "the pragmatic-scientific tradition" of British "common sense raised to the level of intellect" (p. 163), the Teacher is perhaps more aptly considered another secret agent. Reference to Bergson and Kierkegaard (p. 195) seems merely to heighten the apparently unwitting irony. In this chapter and elsewhere, the critic does not appear to have at his disposal an adequate philosophical context to provide him with a language for expressing with greater precision the ambiguities unveiled by his brilliant plot analysis. Berthoud's notion of "the tragic" seems not sufficiently refined to meet the complexities of his subject. A language enabling him to deal with both "the metaphysics of darkness" and "the humanly intelligible" (p. 186) might have been provided by a close study of European intellectual history. But, as the General Preface to the study indicates, such background has been deemed "an insuperable

obstacle" to the prospective reader of volumes in this series; evidently, it is not normally consistent with "the methods associated with Cambridge" (v). As a consequence, perhaps, Berthoud's treatment of Conrad's notion of "the real" fails to do justice to the brilliant equivocations of his subject's intellect: "reality" is "not in the sphere of the inner and the private, but in that of the outer and the public" (p. 187). The disjunction is quite unlike Conrad, for reality, like comedy and tragedy in the Conradian universe, "is but a matter of the visual angle" ("The Tale," *Tales of Hearsay*, Dean Collected Edition, p. 62); and, like the word "Duty," reality "contains infinities" (p. 61). Seen from the point of vantage of Berthoud's disjunction, Marlow's observation that Jim's fate lends "little meaning" to distinctions between "truth" and "illusion" (*Lord Jim*, Dent Collected Edition, p. 222), for example, loses its precision and complexity of meaning. The conclusion of Berthoud's study, that Conrad is "a much more intellectually coherent figure than the one criticism has accustomed us to" (p. 186), follows from this careful scholar's evidence. One might wish that, in both matter and concept, the study had been more comprehensive and, therefore, more coherent in articulating this valid thesis.

Camille R. La Bossière

**BERNARD F. RODGERS, JR.**  
*Philip Roth*  
 Boston: Twayne, 1978. Pp. 188.

One hears from colleagues engaged in adding to the monumental output of the various Twayne Authors Series that steps are finally being taken to upgrade the quality of the whole enterprise. Certainly a new desire for academic respectability is reflected in the publication on the half-title page of Bernard Rodgers's *Philip Roth* of the name of the distinguished scholar, Warren French, as "Editor of this Volume." What has not changed, however, is the basic Twayne format and, however scrupulous editorial practices might have become, this seems likely, at least on the evidence of Rodgers's book, to continue to militate against creative criticism.

Bernard Rodgers is clearly an intelligent and sensible scholar and his goal is to cut through the critical nonsense that has for so long obscured the nature of Philip Roth's achievement. He rejects the persistent notion that Roth must be treated as a "Jewish" writer and instead approaches him through his use of realistic techniques. In tracing the ways in which Roth has gradually broadened his realistic base by introducing elements of ribald humor, pornography, and fantasy, Rodgers is able to deal with aspects of his work that the ethnic school of criticism finds embarrassing and subliterary. In that Rodgers integrates his study of Roth's technical evolution with an analysis of how he has developed the theme of the effect of contemporary American reality on the self's private life, his book amounts to an impressive attempt to deal with the totality of the author's oeuvre. Roth, a writer who has often appeared to readers to be repeatedly setting off in new and bizarre directions, is revealed, under Rodgers's guidance, to be evolving in a consistent and meaningful fashion.

Yet, for all Rodgers's intelligence, and the soundness of his approach, *Philip Roth* is not as successful as it might have been. The Twayne format—which demands from the critic a comprehensive survey of the author's works, stress on his place within literary history and genre, attention to biography, and coverage of his treatment by other critics—must be blamed for this. Rodgers does manage to escape from the biographical trap and refers to Roth's life only where it is relevant to autobiographical fictions like *The Professor of Desire*, and to his nonfictional writings only in so far as they illuminate (as they so often do) his fiction. However, he is very obviously caught in the stranglehold of the other aspects of the Twayne format.

Not all of Roth's books are equally important and Rodgers does not have interesting things to say about all of them. However, as a Twayne author, he is obliged to extend his study to include the minor fiction that appears in the *Goodbye Columbus* volume and is reduced to padding out some chapters—in particular, the one which deals with *Letting Go*—with plot summary. Not only does this mean that sections of the book are dull and uninformative, but that there is too little space left to discuss Roth's more complex works.

Lack of space alone, however, is not responsible for the failure of Rodgers's