

Trivializing because Jane Austen is not original or subtle as a social thinker: many years ago, when the stream of consciousness was in its heyday as a critical term, Wayne Booth obdurately notes, "Jane Austen goes relatively deep morally, but scarcely skims the surface psychologically" (*Rhetoric of Fiction*, 163), and the same judgment applies to Austen the social thinker. Trivializing because such an approach fails to distinguish Austen's novels from the scores of more earnest and less sophisticated fictional defences of the social order of her day. Trivializing because it simplifies the actual fictional moment in order to find concealed general messages: Tanner, for instance, finds a new pessimism about society in the "want of union," "the principle of separation," that emerges in the Box Hill outing in *Emma* (193-94)--without ever acknowledging the quarrel between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax which is the cause of the Box Hill discord. Trivializing because it makes Jane Austen seem primarily valuable as a concealed prophet of modern alienation (221), the decline of the family (228), and assorted other social ills. Trivializing, finally, because ingenious attempts to find allusions to the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* (149), to the government's use of informers in *Northanger Abbey's* "voluntary spies" (69-70), to Mrs. Clay as suffering from syphilis in *Persuasion* (237), and the like, all make the novels socially relevant at the cost of showing them to be inept: if such charged issues are truly Austen's concern, why didn't she present them more directly and dramatically? As a Great Tradition critic, Tanner can make Jane Austen's readers understand that she and they are contemporaries, inhabitants of a timeless human realm; it is unfortunate that in doing so he feels obliged to evoke that portentous banality, Jane Austen, Our Contemporary.

Ben Stoltzfus

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET: LIFE, WORK, AND CRITICISM

Fredericton: York Press, 1987.

Reviewed by V.H. Harger-Grinling

Ben Stoltzfus is a well-known critic and is also well established as an authoritative voice in Robbe-Grillet criticism. This slim volume is part of a series of publications on important writers by recognized authorities. Within the confines of the format, Stoltzfus offers the student and reader a valuable research tool.

As is suggested by the title, Stoltzfus begins with Robbe-Grillet's biography, presenting a rather perfunctory outline of the author's life. He dwells somewhat more on Robbe-Grillet's background and the idiosyncrasies of his parents than on his adult life, describing events Freud would have relished. Throughout this chapter the reader is titillated by biographical incidents recounted with a black humor worthy of Robbe-Grillet himself.

The third chapter is comprised of a fairly detailed summarization of the novels, films, and works of Robbe-Grillet. In this chapter he changes his own pronominal reference. In the first chapter he is "Ben Stoltzfus" and in chapter three the third person narrative has shifted to the "I" and "we" of the first person in true "Nouveau Roman" fashion. His blanket statements regarding meaning and content are not always acceptable to a critic well-acquainted with Alain Robbe-Grillet's writings, and contain certain inaccuracies. For example, the two versions of *Djinn* (1981), known as *Djinn* in the French edition and as *Le rendez-vous* in the American version, are not, as Stoltzfus claims, "the same text" (18), nor are they "identical" (27). The French version contains a prologue and epilogue which are missing in the American counterpart, components which can be crucial in any comparative criticism of the two texts.

This useful but at times oversimplified recounting of the works is followed by a densely packed chapter evaluating Robbe-Grillet's work as a whole and within the context

of the novelistic genre. The confusion of level between the chapters reflects perhaps Stoltzfus's inability to decide at what level of reader his book is aimed. Given the scope of this volume and its title, (*Life, Work, and Criticism*), this fourth chapter seems to contain much extraneous material on the development of the novel as a genre, on philosophical ideas leading to the "Nouveau Roman," and on the general historical background.

There are criticisms to be levelled at this work but they arise mainly from the limited format. Ben Stoltzfus provides the reader with a great deal of insight offering the student a most valuable introduction to Alain Robbe-Grillet while suggesting the possibility of much more in-depth research.

Shirley Budhos

THE THEME OF ENCLOSURE IN SELECTED WORKS OF DORIS LESSING

Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing, 1987. Pp. 123. \$15.00

Reviewed by Katherine Fishburn

I regret to say that this study is a dissertation that should not have been published--at least as it now stands. Although it contains some provocative ideas about Lessing's fiction, this content is all but overwhelmed by the author's unfortunate style, which at times is virtually incomprehensible. Writing about *The Golden Notebook*, for example, Budhos states: "Lessing's persona in this novel is an author and character who also creates another character, Ella, and illustrates in an ongoing novel about her and another novel about two women friends who emerge as the 'free woman' how experience is transformed by the writer into art" (26). In other instances transition is the problem, for Budhos has the unsettling habit of using "however" when there is no apparent relationship between the ideas being compared. If these were occasional stylistic lapses, one might be able to overlook them. But the writing is so consistently bad, it serves to alienate rather than persuade the reader.

Further problems arise with Budhos's sloppy scholarship, which is bad enough to call her credibility into question. For example, she begins one sentence with the following distinction: "In the early books of *Children of Violence*, particularly *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm*, and *Landlocked* . . ." (30-31). As the series consists of only five novels, listing four in this context makes no sense. A more serious error is Budhos's claim that: "Throughout the first four books of the series, the Maynards participate in a competition with Maisie for the custody of the child . . ." (69). As careful readers will recall, Maisie doesn't even get pregnant until the third book. On what grounds does Budhos lay claim to critical authority when she cannot be trusted to remember the texts accurately? Further doubt is cast on her credibility--and thus her ideas--when, citing from Robert Ryf's essay "Beyond Ideology: Doris Lessing's Mature Vision," Budhos consistently misspells his name as "Ruff".

Although the copy editor can be held partially responsible for not correcting some of Budhos's stylistic weaknesses, the author herself must be held accountable for the book's content. Budhos therefore needs to be rebuked for her carelessness--and her publisher criticized for inadequate editing. As far as I was concerned, Budhos's awkward prose and bad scholarship proved fatal to the book's central arguments. In short, the way the book was written became the central issue with me. To be fair, I should also acknowledge at this point that I grow weary of thematic approaches to Doris Lessing.

What we need are studies that ask more demanding questions of this difficult novelist. Cannot we put aside for the moment questions of thematic patterns and concentrate instead on *how* Lessing does what she does? Nearly everyone who reads Lessing, for exam-