Claude Simon's *Leçon de choses:*
Myth and Ritual Displaced

THOMAS D. O'DONNELL, *Clark University*

If the French *nouveau roman* is characterized in a descriptive rather than in a prescriptive fashion, we find that many of the qualities by which we now recognize it are reactions against the traditional, referential novel. The traditional novel is predicated upon the existence of a message: a novelist "has something to say and says it well." In such a system, a novel's worth is to be judged, at least in part, by its "depth." "Profound" is a term of tribute; "superficial" is an insult. The shift away from a theory of the novel based on depth could not occur overnight. Before significant numbers of readers turned their attention to the textual surface, a weaning process first had to separate the reader from his traditional quest for the best possible interpretation of the author's "message." An early stage of this departure from hermeneutic aesthetics may be seen in Jean Rousset's *Forme et signification.*[1] The form of a text corresponds, positively or antithetically, to the meaning of the text. While the door is thus opened to an examination of a text through a study of its structure, preexistence of the message is always implicit. Structure is considered to emanate from the subject, just as the textual surface, to whatever extent the reader is aware of it, is ascribable to the text's depth.

A parallel to the depth/surface and subject/structure relationships in the traditional hermeneutic approach to the novel may be found in certain post-Darwinian theories of ritual and myth. For many years Anglo-Saxon mythologists, oriented towards sociology and ethnology, held that myths had no particular cosmic references, and were to be interpreted as the symbolic expression of the institutions and rituals they were invented to explain and validate. Ritual is immediate and precedes myth, its mediate interpretation. Frazer's view of myth as "a fiction devised to explain an old custom, of which the real meaning and origin had been forgotten,"[2] both begs the question and is implicitly tautological. Be that as it may, in a dated approach to myth which parallels the dated referential aesthetics of literature, myth is seen to proceed from ritual, just as surface and form were seen to be reflections of depth and signification, respectively. Ritual, the action performed, exists before myth, the words that rationalize it. Avoiding confusion with the explanations of the comparative philologists who saw myth as a "disease of language," we may say that generally, in both referential novel and post-Darwinian mythology, things take precedence over words.[3]

We may now focus our attention more directly on the *nouveau roman.* "Superficial" has, in some quarters, at least, lost its pejorative connotation. Depth has fallen into considerable disrepute, as the good novelist "has nothing to say, and says it well." Analysis often takes place at the level of macrostructure, i.e., the form of the work, or at the level of microstructure, through an examination of the figures and transits found in the text.

[1] Jean Rousset, *Forme et signification* (Paris: Corti, 1963).

[2] J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1915), IV, 153.

[3] Max Müller was perhaps the most vigorous proponent of this view. For a succinct and well-documented discussion of Müller's theories, see Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology," in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 25-63.

The current sovereignty of surface and formal structure over depth and signification is reflected in a similar shift of emphasis in the dialectic of ritual and myth. Mircea Eliade sees myth as a narrative of events which took place *in illo tempore*, i.e., as a recounting of the creation of the world and of mankind.[4] Ritual, according to this view, is then a societal attempt to abolish linear time in favor of cosmic, i.e., cyclical time, through a sacred repetition of the actions of the first ancestors. Thus, in the post-referential novel and in post-post-Darwinian mythology, words tend to take precedence over things.

The more or less concurrent shift of emphasis from the referential to the literal (Ricardou's sense of the word) has not been without paradoxical result in the novel, because of the traditional interrelation between literature and myth. The myths of the Western world have furnished vast amounts of material to our literary tradition. Some critics have in fact gone so far as to equate myth and literature.[5] At first glance, it would appear that the recent supremacy of literal surface over referential depth would have, as an immediate effect, the expulsion of myth from the novel: everyone now concedes that myth has meaning but the post-Barthesian novel and its components do not, in theory, signify beyond themselves. Moreover, a structuralist such as Claude Lévi-Strauss predicates his entire approach to the study of myth on the existence of universally operative mental structures. In other words, there is a clear-cut conflict between the structuralist aesthetics of the novel, postulated on an implicit denial of human nature and often seen as a literal surface, and the structuralist view of the mind, where depth and meaning persist. If the predication of universally present mental structures, susceptible to representation by myth and subsequently by ritual, is accepted as valid, if all forms of human expression bear the imprint of these structures, how will these structures manifest themselves in a novel without "characters" and "content"? When a novel becomes a literal surface, what happens to myth and ritual? This essay will consider the depth/surface dialectic in the light of both the relationship between message and structure and the similar relationship between myth and ritual, turning to the structure of Claude Simon's *Leçon de choses*[6] as an object lesson illustrating one manifestation of myth in recent French fiction: its displacement from the domain of the novel's content to that of its structure.

Structurally, *Leçon de choses* (1975) is both like and unlike Claude Simon's previous novel, *Triptique* (1973). It is similar primarily through its tripartite nature: like *Triptique*, it contains not one but three "plots," each fragmented and interspersed among the bits and pieces of the other two, all of the fragments attaching themselves to their respective neighbors through various exercises in metaphor and metonymy. The differences between the two novels are three-fold. The three plots of *Leçon de choses* are not only structurally integrated but are as shall be demonstrated shortly all components of a larger "super-plot," encompassing all the elements of the novel; that is to say, the unity of *Leçon de choses* is more immediately evident that that of *Triptique*. A second major structural distinction between the two novels may be discerned in the refined subdivision of one of *Leçon's* plots into two subplots. In the first of these (generated by a calendar and a matted illustration on the wall), a man spends the afternoon in the countryside trying to convince a woman, Estelle, of the desirability of an assignation once the sun has set. In the sequel,

[4]See Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963). Eliade's viewpoint is echoed in many of his other works.

[5]See Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949).

[6]Claude Simon, *Leçon de choses* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1975). All translations are mine.

Estelle leaves her sleeping child and abandons herself to her new "lover" in a tryst as comically unsuccessful as any of Simon's other romantic interludes. Were the events of this subdivision presented in logical order, Simon's technique here would not be in any significant way distinguishable from that employed in *Triptyque*. Instead, he treats each of the subplots the same way he treats the other two plots, deploying it from the beginning to the end of his novel. Thus the text constantly hesitates between the ternary, hermetic symbol of instability and generation, hence of mobility, and the quaternary, symbol of stability and therefore of immobility. As in Claude Simon's *La Bataille de Pharsale* (1969), mobility and immobility play thematic roles of considerable technical and philosophical import in *Leçon de choses*. The third salient difference between *Leçon de choses* and its predecessor lies in the overall structure. *Leçon* is divided not into three chapters but rather into seven, each endowed with its own title. The first and last chapters begin with identical descriptions of a rubble-strewn room; the room, we soon discover, may be simply a framed picture described from the point of view of a hypothetical observer. Chapters two, four, and six, occupying the bulk of the novel, deal with the three plots; each chapter is a single extended paragraph consisting of approximately forty-five plot fragments, following each other randomly, or in recognizable patterns. The two remaining chapters, entitled "Divertissement" and "Divertissement II," are written in a stream of consciousness style reminiscent of Simon's earlier works. The man whose consciousness we share in the two divertissements will prove to be one of the principal actors in two of the three plots. Thus, in *Leçon de choses* Simon incorporates his old techniques into new structures, suggesting once again his favored theme of kinesis/stasis.

"Générique," the title of Simon's first chapter, indicates quite clearly the chapter's role as a locus for generators which will be used to produce the remainder of *Leçon de choses*. In addition, by means of a kind of self-reflective polyvalence, it presents itself as a *mise-en-abyme* of several mutually metaphorical plots: it is the *genus*, they the various *species*. Moreover, the chapter title is substantive as well as adjectival in nature: the *générique* of a French film is that section, usually at the beginning, in which credit is given to those who have collaborated in its production. This reading of the title, consistent with the other readings, suggests that the items described and their relationships to each other are going to share, at the very least, a strong bond of kinship with the characters and situations in the remainder of the novel.

The generative function of "Générique" is underlined by the title of the chapter following it, "Expansion": the plot has come out of the wall fragments of "Générique," *ex-pans*. More literally, it is the first of several possible expansions of "Générique," predictable expansions to be brought about through "minutie," "métaphores," "addition" and/or "hypothèses" (pp. 10-11). Further, the title bears directly upon each of the three plots: in the military passages relating a very subjective account of the debacle of 1940, it suggests both the German claim to *Lebensraum* and, etymologically, the deployment of troops on the field of battle; in the second plot, two masons are deconstructing part of a wall to facilitate the expansion of a farm house; in the seduction scenes, "expansion" may readily be understood in the physiological context of sexual excitation.

"Générique" is a repertory; all of the elements contained within it will appear later on in the novel. Sometimes the generative homologies are manifest; occasionally, they are more covert. A thorough examination of the more subtle homologies would consume considerably more space than is warranted here; this study, therefore, will concern itself only with a few of the essential ones.

The most apparent of the processes of thematic generation linking the rest of the novel to "Générique" is associated with Simon's privileged topic of "bricolage," as the debris of "Générique"'s wall appear and reappear throughout the novel. The masons, hammering away at the plaster, rearrange bricks when appropriate to form impromptu dining facilities. In the military scenes (transitions are facilitated by the fact that the older mason and one of the machine gunners are the same person), German artillery produces similar effects; in both cases, the clouds of dust resulting from the demolition cover the skin and clothing of those present, reducing them to the uniform grey of statuary. In each case, the result is a collapse of the ceiling, a real cave-in in the case of the machine gun crew, an imaginary one (p. 114) for the masons. In the seduction plot, the deconstruction of the wall corresponds both to the dismantling of Estelle's psychological defenses and to the gradual removal of strategic parts of her clothing. Estelle had entered the novel (p. 16) as a character painted in an impressionistic cliff scene. Late in the novel, the print which had originally generated her hangs askew by only one of its original four supporting thumbtacks. The once again two-dimensional Estelle and her companions are precipitated into space from the seaside cliff on which they had been strolling. This late scene relates back to "Générique" through the geological/architectural polyvalence of "corniche," the transit word that articulates the two scenes.

A second thematic link between "Générique" and the novel's three plots is to be found in the theme of light and darkness. The darkness of "Générique," emphasized by a feeble light bulb as well as by the shadows cast on the floor, will eventually pervade all three plots, with varying effect. For the masons, darkness signals the end of the work day; to the isolated soldiers of the French cavalry, it suggests their impending defeat and perhaps imminent slaughter by the advancing German army; for Estelle and her lover, "tout est complètement noir" (p. 173), an indication of the generally unsatisfactory nature of their liaison. Once darkness has set in, it is interrupted by flashes of light. The mason's cigarette lighter, the German rocket flare, and Estelle's lover's cigar all provide brief moments of illumination, freezing the novel's characters into a form of immortality associated with flashbulbs: a pinpoint in time and space is rendered permanent. Ultimately, the novel's obsession with precision is rendered in cosmic terms: in a sequence that occupies twenty-two of the page's twenty-seven lines, Simon depicts the flashing of a beacon across the water, at the very moment that divides day from night (p. 171); the message, preceded by secret rituals, appears to have been sent from far-off stars with the express purpose of setting into motion machinery and clockwork gears which indicate to observers the precise moment of transition. Like Ricardou and Pynchon, Simon finds himself fascinated with the interface as much as with the surface.

Hypothetical speculation over the origin of the plaster fragments on the floor of "Générique"'s room leads to further expansion of the plots. The removal of material from the wall produces a "saignée" ("groove" or "trench"), which in turn generates a more literal bloodletting as the younger mason mashes his thumb with a hammer (p. 34). The minor catastrophe is matched by that of Estelle, who manages to embed a piece of glass in her flesh on her way to her lover's arms. Just as the mason peels the dead skin off his finger, she peels an orange for her daughter Evelyne; the mason will later provide a further echo by shelling (French "peler") an egg. In the military plot the "saignée" is the immediate consequence of the artillery shell mentioned earlier: Simon takes full advantage of the polyvalence of the term *mortier* ("mortar") to introduce or reinforce themes of construction, deconstruction, and

destruction. At the moment of the artillery shell's impact, a soldier is caught in the doorway, projecting the same type of shadow, "distendue et échassière," as had been described in the novel's opening pages. Presumably wounded by shrapnel, he is stretched out on a mattress, which absorbs not only his blood, but his wound as well: "L'un de ses éperons a déchiré le tissu d'où s'échappe un duvet ou plutôt une bourre grisâtre" (p. 30). Thus, incidents are displaced not only from one plot to another, but also from one object to another within the same plot.

Further attention might be paid here to other themes first introduced in "Générique," such as the intermingling of odors (dust, sweat, plaster, oil, excrement, cigar, fish, geraniums, to name a few), or the burning sensations produced by the initial light bulb (Estelle's punctured finger; her partner's burned finger after lighting a cigar; the masons' hot coffee; cigar smoke burning the machine gunner's tongue). The list, however, would be well near endless, so only one more of "Générique"'s thematic generators will be mentioned: transition between and simultaneity of, stasis and kinesis. Movement and immobility have always played an important role in Simon's novels, and the prominence of this role has increased considerably in his "third phase" novels, beginning with *La Bataille de Pharsale* (1969). Characters are often in danger of freezing (or friezing) into statuary. The process is reversible, and may be associated with transitions between two- and three-dimensional existence: paintings come to life, whereas what were thought to be real people turn out to be flat images projected on a movie screen. A motionless scene can be described; once set into motion, it can be presented both through description and through narration. Simon uses the present indicative quite effectively as a grammatical tool whose ambiguity facilitates such *glissements.*

Transition from movement to stasis may be seen in both the geological and the architectural metaphors which develop from the wall and debris described (and narrated) in "Générique." The first of "Générique"'s three paragraphs mentions "un galon . . . où se répète le même motif (frise?) de feuilles d'acanthe dessinant une succession de vagues involvées" (p. 9). The "waves" and fallen plaster suggest a seascape and a chalk cliff, of the type frequently painted by Claude Monet (whose name is a partial anagram of the author's) and Boudin; for this reason, the second paragraph becomes a marine metaphor, starting with the waves: "Au-dessous du minuscule et immobile déferlement de vagues végétales qui se poursuivent sans fin sur le galon de papier fané, l'archipel crayeux de morceaux de plâtre se répartit en îlots d'inégales grandeurs comme les pans détachés d'une falaise et qui se fracassent à ses pieds" (p. 10). Bearing in mind that the entire sequence is a metaphorical description of pieces of plaster lying on the floor, we are struck by Simon's choice of verbs. The reflexive "se répartir" is perfectly appropriate for a still-life description, although it could equally be used in the narration of a cliff crumbling before our eyes. "Se fracasser," on the other hand, implies noise and violent movement; it could appropriately be used in the narration of a violent event, or in the description of a football scene frozen by a stop-action videotape camera, but seems quite out of place when used to describe a still-life scene. Similar subtle mechanisms will be deployed throughout the novel as transits between movement and immobility, and often between one plot and another.

The rather majestic stature accorded the wall by the metaphor of cliff and seascape is prefigured somewhat by the architectural metaphor of the first paragraph. "Plinthe," "bandeau," "frise" and "acanthe" all belong to the vocabulary of classical architecture and thus help to prepare the gradual "statue-ification" of soldiers and masons. Plaster dust suspended in the air

changes the masons' faces to grey masks, "masques gris" (p. 27; cf. pp. 45, 90). Similar dust has a similar effect on the dying soldier, whose hand appears to have been "sculptée dans une pierre molle et incolore" (p. 77). The soldier's gurglings (*gargouillis*) (pp. 28, 29, 77), suggest, etymologically, that he is about to become part of the architecture. (One cannot but think of Victor Hugo's description of Quasimodo growing out of the stones of Notre Dame, a human gargoyle.) Other characters play architectural roles in the novel: one of the masons is "obligé de s'arc-bouter un court instant" while pushing a wheelbarrow (p. 102), and Estelle accommodates her lover by arching ("se cambre") against the fence, like the girl on the Orangina bottle (p. 97; cf. p. 142). The soldiers, waiting to be overrun by the Germans, are not massacred at the end of the novel; instead, they are rendered immobile, reduced and elevated to statuary,

> comme ces personnages surpris par quelque cataclysme, pétrifiés dans des attitudes familières et uniformément recouverts d'une couche de cendre d'un gris plombé qui confère à l'ensemble l'aspect fantomatique, morne et exsangue de ces ateliers de sculpteurs peuplés de figures plâtreuses ou enveloppées de chiffons sales
>
> . . . .
>
> Le tireur semble composer avec le chargeur assis à côté sur une caisse un de ces groupes grossièrement moulés sur nature dans le plâtre liquide et qui, dans les musées ou sur les monuments aux morts, sont figés dans une terrifiante immobilité comme non seulement la négation du mouvement et de la vie mais une perpétuation macabre, fantomatique, de l'instantané et du périssable. (pp. 150-52)

Just as the soldiers and masons become commutable with three-dimensional statues, so Estelle and her companions, generated by two-dimensional works of art, will tend to exchange their living movement for the stasis of the tableau. The works of the impressionistic school are especially well chosen to convey the simultaneity of movement and immobility, thanks in large part to the fragmented brush strokes and the vibratory effect of fluidity they create: the painter can create a "tempête immobile" (p. 15) on his canvas, and the ocean will be seen as an "immensité à la fois immobile et mouvante" (p. 82). Monet's paintings (e.g., "Lady with a Parasol," "The Cliff Walk," "Wild Poppies," the many Etretat cliff paintings) constantly appear in *Leçon de choses* in various disguises and modifications. Monet's "Débâcle" paintings, inspired by the winter of 1880 and usually considered to be manifestations of transition in his own technique, obsess the novel without ever being named. Looking at the artist's impression of the breakup of river ice, one cannot tell where the ice stops and the water begins; more directly stated, the states of fluidity and solidity have been imbricated on the canvas. The historical resonances of the word "débâcle," moreover, reinforce other generative intersections in the novel, producing, not only the military catastrophe of 1940, but also "La Charge de Reichshoffen," a reference both to the high point of Estelle's night out, and to a French cavalry action during the earlier debacle, that of 1870. The suicidal charge of the French horsemen served no useful military function, yet was significant because it marked an historical transition. "On this battlefield, as henceforth on all others in Western Europe, the only choice before horsed cavalry lay between idleness and suicide."[7]

[7]Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 119.

Like Queneau's Icarus who enters *Vol d'Icare* by being blown out of (off?) an open manuscript and onto (into?) the streets of Paris, Estelle and her friends are born into *Leçon de choses* through metalepsis, a breakdown of the frame and of aesthetic distance. When first introduced into the novel, they are described/narrated in the ambiguous present tense, seen in such close focus that the frame of the tableau begins beyond the peripheral vision of the observer. As the frame is introduced, excluding narration, verbal connotation once again introduces temporal progression, *requiring* narrative technique. "Entouré sur le calendrier par les colonnes de noms de saints ou de martyrs, le groupe insouciant des promeneuses *continue* à dévaler le coteau" (p. 18; my emphasis). As the referential illusion becomes stronger and the picture frame, consisting, appropriately enough, of columns of words, has been forgotten, Simon seems to point out that the scene is not real, describing the boat Estelle is looking at as "*épinglé* à peu près à mi-hauteur de la large bande bleu-vert qui l'entoure de toutes parts." The "large bande," however, is immediately identified as "la mer sur laquelle il *semble* piqué . . . doué d'immobilité et de mouvement" (p. 89; my emphases). The ideal of having one's description and narrating it too is embodied in a seagull floating motionlessly over the cliff. "Sans bruit, sans effort, il reste là, existant et superbe, porté par rien, comme une sorte de défi non pas seulement aux lois de la pesanteur mais encore à l'impossible accouplement de l'immobilité et du mouvement, de même que la mer figée, le cargo à l'horizon et l'amoncellement rosé des nuages qui s'entassent dans le lointain" (p. 98-99). As the novel draws to a close, the downward motion *(dévaler)* of the strollers becomes a frozen fall when their picture is seen hanging at an angle by a single corner (p. 180).

In addition to the processes of thematic generation outlined above, processes of linguistic generation such as those suggested by Ricardou for *La Bataille de Pharsale*[x] are initiated in "Générique" and are developed to varying degrees in the remainder of the novel. Many of these processes, e.g., the slippage between *tache* ("spot") and *vache* ("cow"), or the progression *cheveux* ("hair")/*à cheval* ("straddling")/*cavalier* ("horseman") (p. 33) are quite fascinating; we will nonetheless limit our examination to three specific cases, each originating in "Générique" and extending beyond it to interact with thematic generators. The simplest of the examples to be presented, associated with the leit-motif of approaching darkness, begins with the introduction of shadows, "ombres" (p. 11). These, combined with "Générique"'s flowered wallpaper, produce *ombelles*, "umbels"; *ombres* and *ombelles* are joined in the very next sentence (p. 16) to provide the parasols, *ombrelles*, which will be mentioned a half-dozen or more times thereafter in the novel.

A considerably more elaborate pattern is generated by the light bulb *(ampoule)* illuminating the first few pages of the novel. With the help of the dust *(poussière)* covering the floor, it justifies the introduction of hen *(poule)* and hen house *(poulailler)*, thumb *(pouce)*, powder *(poudre)*, beam *(poutre)* and octopus *(poulpe)*, along with a dozen additional related words. Like the octopus of Ricardou's *Observatoire de Cannes*, Simon's *poulpe* is justified by the text, not by the plot. *Poules* generate roosters *(coqs)* (not to mention an egg: Simon would appear to have an answer to the perennial question) and the *ombelles* immediately suggest poppies *(coquelicots)*; a foundation is thus laid for shell *(coque, coquille, coquillage,* all specifically present in the novel), for *coquetterie* and roguery, *coquinerie* (and cuckoldry, *cocuage*), virtually present if left unstated.

[*]Jean Ricardou, "La Bataille de la phrase," in *Pour une Théorie du nouveau roman* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), pp. 118-58.

"Courts-circuits," the final chapter and coda of *Leçon de choses*, behaves just as its name suggests it should: it repeats, not quite word for word, what has already been found in "Générique," continuing into truncated versions (or variations) of the novel's three plots. The novel does not end, but instead turns back upon itself, much like *Finnegans Wake*, a serpent biting its own tale. Thanks to information added in "Courts-circuits," we discover, in fact, that the generative process of *Leçon de choses* is not linear but rather circular: each of the three plots contains the seed of one of the others, so that the novel might best be emblematized by a three-way yin-yang diagram. Thus, the plot in which two workers tear down a wall "contains" the military plot, because the oldest worker recalls his past as part of the machine gun crew; consequently the military situation may be read as a flashback and would, in a traditional novel, be relegated to the category of secondary subplot. In the same vein, the seduction plot forms a subset of the novel's military scenes, because it is generated by pictures hanging on the wall next to the machine gun. Thus far, the generative process is linear. In "Courts-circuits," however, Estelle and her companions return to their cottage, *which the two workmen have left only moments before.* With the interdiction of linear relationships between plots, temporal relationships are also abolished, narration fades away in favor once again of description, and the novel has come full circle from a technical point of view.

Fredric Jameson writes that criticism must "come in terms not only with the ideology of content, but with that of *form*, of the message inherent in the medium."[9] The deep structure of the human mind has ordinarily been "found" in the "content" of a novel, in what corresponds, traditionally, to the novel's "depth." When this depth is eliminated and the novel is reduced in theory to a two-dimensional surface, the structures of the mind will necessarily continue to manifest themselves, but will necessarily do so on the surface, i.e., in the novel's formal structure and in its microstructures. In the traditional novel, the ultimate manifestation of psychological depth was doubtless to be found in the dimension of myth and ritual. Stephen Dedalus, for instance, escaping from his Irish labyrinth, was engaged in the ritual reenactment of the mythic action of his classical namesake. By acting out the myth, he acted out one of the structures of the human mind, which both the myth and the ritual signified. Such mental structures cannot be signified by the novel's content in *Leçon de choses,* if only because the novel generally purports to have *no* content with which to signify. Myth and ritual are not thereby eliminated from Simon's novel, however; rather, they persist in their mutual relationship, which becomes the novel's structural principle. Simon's "Générique" provides a general, static statement of "fact": the description of a rubble-strewn room, from which subsequent actions in the novel will be generated. "Générique," then, corresponds to Mircea Eliade's concept of myth: the legend, in the form of a script, of some event from the time of creation. The rest of *Leçon de choses* amounts to a series of expanded reiterations of the "givens" of "Générique"; that so many of these reiterations are, as we have seen, mutually metaphorical or, on the level of linguistic generation, paranomastic, is a good measure of their metaphorical relationship to the elements contained in the "legend" of "Générique." Each "plot" of *Leçon de choses* repeats and embellishes the material of the first paragraphs, and so we are justified in seeing the "plots" of the novel playing ritual to "Générique" 's myth. Thus, even in a novel which does not in theory signify beyond itself, mental structure, as

[9]Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and its Repressed: Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist," *Diacritics*, 6, No. 2 (Summer 1976), 12.

reflected in myth and its relationship to ritual, does not simply disappear; rather, it is displaced to the level of form, and this, Norman Holland would say, is what literature is all about. As a postscript, we might add that, like the ritualized reminiscences of any myth, the plots which arise from "Générique" are subject to infinite development and variation. Through his fragmentation and selective distribution of these plots, Simon manipulates the readers so as to make it impossible for them not to try to fill in the gaps and engage in an archeology of the text. For Claude Simon, the novel is a myth offering some form of aesthetic salvation in the modern age. Interacting with and extending his plots, the reader joins in the rituals of the Simonian novel, thereby participating in the author's myth of art.