

## University of Windsor Scholarship at UWindsor

---

OSSA Conference Archive

OSSA 4

---

May 17th, 9:00 AM - May 19th, 5:00 PM

# Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy: The Case of Robbe-Grillet's

Galia Yanoshevsky  
*Tel-Aviv University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

Galia Yanoshevsky, "Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy: The Case of Robbe-Grillet's" (May 17, 2001). *OSSA Conference Archive*. Paper 121.

<http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA4/papersandcommentaries/121>

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact [scholarship@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scholarship@uwindsor.ca).

**Title:** Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy: The Case of Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963)

**Author:** Galia Yanoshevsky

**Response to this paper by:** A. van den Hoven

© 2001 Galia Yanoshevsky

---

The purpose of this paper is to show how instances of textual heterogeneity, such as reported speech and the staging of polemics, are used as argumentative strategies in the New Novel's second manifesto, *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963).

### ***Introduction***

*Pour un nouveau roman*<sup>1</sup> is a collection of essays, considered as one of the two manifestoes of the New Novel<sup>2</sup>. Like other manifestoes of its kind, PNR owes its existence to previous press or journal articles<sup>3</sup>. Written in the 50's and the 60's, the articles and essays are grouped and rewritten to suit the purpose of the collection, namely, to explain Robbe-Grillet's personal enterprise as a novelist seeking to provide theoretical justifications for his new writing techniques. In addition, the collection contains essays pleading the cause of the New Novel, a school whose declared leaders are Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute.

When the articles and the essays are grouped for the purpose of the collections, they undergo rewriting. The paper articles obviously require editing that is *genre dependent*. For instance, the essay "On some obsolete notions" (1957) is a sort of "cut-and-paste" of a series of articles published initially in the *L'Express* and *France Observateur* during the same year. Other articles that have been published initially as literary essays necessitate minor rewriting, but nonetheless contain some transformations in the body of the text. These changes, I shall demonstrate, reflect the *polemic aspects* that are typical of a manifesto. In fact, Robbe-Grillet's PNR is an example of a collection of essays where the polemical content is staged at the *textural* level, thus voicing the exchange that took place between Robbe-Grillet and his critics, during the years he produced the essays.

In the course of this paper then, I would like to claim that textual alterations involved in the process of the assembling of the collection, as well as the various usages of reported speech are used as argumentative strategies by the author and are designated to construct his own discourse due to polemic considerations.

I will commence by suggesting a few working hypotheses regarding textual analysis. I shall then proceed to enumerate various techniques of reported speech used as argumentative strategies. I will then turn to certain techniques employed in the PNR in relation to specific writers and critics.

---

<sup>1</sup> I shall henceforth refer to to this collection as PNR.

<sup>2</sup> The first, entitled *L'Ere du soupçon* (1956) belongs to Nathalie Sarraute.

<sup>3</sup> Published mainly in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (*N.R.F.*) and *Critique* journals, as well as in the papers *France Observateur* and *L'Express*.

## ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 2***

### ***Working Hypotheses and Tools for Textual Analysis***

A text is by definition a *heterogeneous unit*, since it is always traversed by the word of another. Ducrot (1984) addressed the problem by discerning between the speaker or the actual person who is doing the speaking or writing, and the *source* that is responsible for the words that are spoken in an utterance. The very problem of source and utterance obliges us to seek for *co-texts* of the text we are examining, when investigating the argumentative aspects of a given text. For, just as each text is traversed by the word of another, so it is a part of a *textual chain*, since it is either based on another text or constitutes a response to it as part of an ongoing debate. Thus, theories of *intertextuality* (cf. for instance Piegay-Gros 1996) claim that no text comes into being *ex-nihilo* and that in fact, a text is always a response to other discourses which it echoes. A text thus becomes, in its very fabric, the manifestation of other discourses.

Secondly, we can view any text as argumentative, in the sense that argumentation is one of the essential factors of discursive coherence (Maingueneau 1991 : 228). Textual strategies can be thus regarded as argumentative, especially in cases involving the *conscious* use of a text's heterogeneity, that is, the restating and reformulation of another's words for polemical or persuasive ends.

In any case, a manifesto, such as is the case of the PNR, is not only argumentative, but is clearly polemical (Gleize 1980:13). As a declaration of a group or a school, it seeks to convince or persuade in the vigor and necessity of its own program. But in addition, it aims to declare the obsolescence of past traditions sustained by others who speak against it, and against whom it speaks. However, since the essay is authored by one voice (albeit representing a group in the case of the manifesto), the other voices of those with whom it carries a dialogue or against whom it contends, are evidently brought forth by various types of *reported speech*. We can thus speak of *staged polemics*, used by the writer as an argumentative means. As Maingueneau puts it, in order to preserve its own identity, a given discourse can only allow for the voice of another to penetrate into its own discursive space through a simulacrum constructed for that end (Maingueneau 1991: 165).

In view of this and in order to understand the PNR's argumentative and polemical objectives, I propose to analyze its linguistic and rhetorical levels of the essay, by tracking down the various stages of rewriting it had undergone, from the press article to the collection of essays. As Maingueneau puts it, the process of [textual] decoding includes a genealogy of the text aimed at tracing back the enunciative process (Maingueneau 1991: 107).

Within the framework of this article, I shall reserve the analysis to specific procedures of *reported speech* and show their rhetorical effect in several cases where the linguistic technique of reported speech. A few words need to be said though, in regard to the various types of this technique, before proceeding to the actual analysis of the PNR.

## ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 3***

Within the category of reported speech, Direct and Indirect Speech are the most typical manifestations of enunciative heterogeneity (Maingueneau 1991: 134-135), but maintain different discursive functions. *Direct Speech* is not simply the naive transmission of another's

speech, but is more likely to become a theatricalization of a previous utterance, especially within a polemical context. Direct Speech inserts an utterance situation into another: while preserving its independence, it pretends to preserve the exact words of the speaker. Thus, it authenticates the reported utterance, but it also enables a speaker to distance himself from the utterance of another. On the other hand, *Indirect Speech* maintains only the content of the quoted discourse. It is thus a *mixture* of two different voices. However, in both cases of reported speech, the utterance is one (Maingueneau 1991: 149).

Amongst *reported speech* techniques, Piégey-Gros (1996 : 45-71) enumerates different types of *quotation* and *quotation manipulation* such as reference, plagiarism and allusion, each creating effects of authority or authentication. Thus, in all cases of reported speech – Direct, Indirect and Free Indirect Speech, we should pay attention to the way the other is quoted or paraphrased, including cases of hypothetical, imaginary or inexact quotations (Sarfati 1997: 60).

### ***Analysis of Pour un Nouveau Roman***

Within the PNR, Robbe-Grillet refers in a manner both explicit and implicit to sources of authority and polemics. In the course of the following demonstration, I shall show how these references function as argumentative strategies. For the purpose of doing so, I shall trace back earlier versions of the text. In addition, I will shall study mention briefly some of external texts (i.e., texts written by writers other than Robbe-Grillet) they refer to.

### ***Appeal to Authority or the Case of Nathalie Sarraute***

Robbe-Grillet is deeply indebted to Sarraute. She is in fact a prominent source for the ideas he expresses in his essays and for the vocabulary he largely makes use of when setting forth the need for a new novel in the PNR. Their theoretical relationship becomes quite evident when during 1956, he publishes an article in *Critique* (Robbe-Grillet 1956a: 695-701), where he reviews *L'Ere du soupçon*, a collection of literary essays by Sarraute published during the same year.

If Sarraute is a primary source for Robbe-Grillet, then we would expect an appeal to her authority, even a straight forward one. However, this is not always the case in the essays comprised in the PNR. Moreover, in most situations involving the usage of Sarraute's concepts, we do not find the explicit or implicit allusion to the source we would expect. Rather, we are most surprisingly confronted with an *omission* of the source, in a way that only the expert eye may track down the origins of the PNR to *L'Ere du soupçon*.

### ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 4***

For instance, upon assembling his essays in 1963, Robbe-Grillet chooses to exclude his first literary criticism on *L'Ere du soupçon*. On this omission he notes:

This text was not included in the PNR. The reasons are obvious. On the one hand, the reservations appearing towards the end of the article did not have a place in a work that attempts, on the contrary, to reveal a certain concordance of view – albeit a negative one – between writers whose efforts, albeit in diverse directions, are directed in all cases to break apart from the restraints of accepted forms [...] (Robbe-Grillet 1978: 10 ; my translation)

The omission is thus justified in terms of presenting a unified front, needed during the initial stages of a movement seeking to revolutionize the field of literature. The decision to exclude the review of *L'Ere du soupçon* stems from the fact that Robbe-Grillet finds it inappropriate to include a text (where he criticized some of Sarraute's arguments), which might break the monolithic effect of the collection, by calling attention to divergence of opinion within the movement of the New Novel, where on the contrary convergence of opinion is called for.

The procedure of omission is applied again when, while including the second essay - "A path towards a New Novel" - published during 1956 in the *N.R.F* (Robbe-Grillet 1956b: 77-84) in the collection, he leaves out the *epigraph* that appeared in the journal version of the article. Quoted from Sarraute's *L'Ere du soupçon*, the epigraph alludes to her idea that holding on to old techniques of novel writing hinders the novel's status:

Thus, in a movement analogous to that of painting, the novel, which only a stubborn adherence to obsolete techniques places in the position of a minor art (Robbe-Grillet 1956: 77; Quoted from *L'Ere du soupçon* 1956: 77-78.)

It thus provides a justification for Robbe-Grillet, who appeals to Sarraute's authority in order to justify his demand for ridding the novel of obsolete techniques such as the building of a character and recounting a story, claims he advances in the essay, which would soon be considered a manifesto in its own right. In the paper's journal version then, the epigraph is used to tie and to integrate Robbe-Grillet's new discourse to a larger textual ensemble of previous utterances – that of the discourses opposing the old Balzacian novel, represented here by the allusion to Sarraute. Thus, inserting the epigraph in the original essay enables Robbe-Grillet to place himself within a tradition, albeit a new one. By inserting the epigraph, he admits that his writing is inspired by Sarraute's essays. Furthermore, a collective effect is obtained, similar to the one achieved by avoiding to include his first essay in the collection.

However, the choice to omit the epigraph, when including the essay in the collection, may be explained by the tension existing within every manifesto between the need to carry out a revolution while necessarily adhering to some tradition. Thus, in 1956, when the New Novel is still making its first steps as a defier of the novel's tradition, Robbe-Grillet clings to the elderly "chef" of the group as a source of authority, as part of the movement's foundation act. However, in 1963, when the New Novel is already an established fact, there is no longer a justification of appealing to immediate ancestry. Thus, Robbe-Grillet remains with the call for a revolution that annihilates all that precedes it, omitting the epigraph from the final version of the article

### ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 5***

In the previous cases, the final version is only constitutively heterogeneous in that it does not retain an explicit reference to Sarraute. However, throughout the collection, there is one particularly striking counter example, where an explicit reference to Sarraute is on the contrary absent initially, but *inserted* into the final version. Such is the case of the re-writing of the last part of the essay "On Several Obsolete Notions" (1957). The original version of the essay's last part, entitled "Form and Content", contends indirectly with the critics' blame against Robbe-Grillet's poetic writing – namely, that it is formalistic, avoiding content and manifesting an interest for structure only:

Formalism, if this word has a meaning at all, can only be applied to the novelists overly concerned with their “content” who, to make themselves more clearly understood, abjure any exploration of style likely to displease or surprise: those who, precisely, adopt a FORM which has given its proofs, but which has lost all force, all life. They are formalists because they have accepted a ready-made, sclerotic form, which is only a formula; because they cling to this fleshless carcass (Robbe-Grillet 1957c ; my translation).

However, in the *final* version, Robbe-Grillet inserts an explicit reference to Sarraute:

Such is the case for the term “formalism”. Taken in its pejorative sense, it should actually apply – *as Nathalie Sarraute has pointed out* – only to the novelists overly concerned with their “content” who, to make themselves more clearly understood, abjure any exploration of style likely to displease or surprise: those who, precisely, adopt a form – a mold – which has given its proofs, but which has lost all force, all life. They are formalists because they have accepted a ready-made, sclerotic form which is no more than a formula, and because they cling to this fleshless carcass (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 46; my italics).

Appealing to Sarraute’s authority in this case becomes necessary in order to rebuff any criticism manifested against Robbe-Grillet’s ideas since the publication of his articles in the press and in literary journals. Since Sarraute is in no way suspected of being a formalist in the critics’ sense of the word (i.e., a writer exploring textual structures and style only), her definition of formalism can most certainly reinforce Robbe-Grillet’s word against criticism. The logic behind the explicit appeal to Sarraute’s authority can be reconstructed in the following manner: Sarraute defines formalism in a certain way. According to Sarraute’s definition, I am not a formalist in my writing. Thus, the critics are wrong in accusing me of formalism.

## ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 6***

### ***Conclusion***

A partial textual study of two of the PNR’s essays (“A path for a New Novel” and “On Several Obsolete Notions”) and their original versions has shown how the usage of an implicit as well as an explicit appeal to Sarraute’s authority reveals some of the strategies underlying the construction of PNR as a manifesto. I shall now proceed to show how another strategy is used, namely the staging of a polemic, to the same effect.

### ***Staging polemics or the case of the critics***

As I have previously mentioned, the usage of textual heterogeneity as an argumentative strategy involves more than just the technique of appeal to an authority, expressed by a quotation or even an implicit reference to the source. Amongst its other procedures we find the staging of polemics, involving extensive usages of reported speech. In the course of this section, I shall first demonstrate a general ruse used when staging the critic’s discourse. Then, I will refer to particular cases involving two of Robbe-Grillet’s prominent critics: André Rousseaux of the *Figaro Littéraire*, and French Academy writer, François Mauriac.

#### ***a. “O the scandal of it!”***

In the example that follows, taken from *the essay entitled “The Use of Theory”* (1955 and 1963), Robbe-Grillet mimics a critic’s possible sigh when running into a reflective writer:

Nonetheless, if there is one thing in particular which the critics find hard to endure, it is that the artist should explain himself. I certainly realized as much when, after having expressed theses and several other notions quite as obvious, I published my third novel (*Jealousy*). Not only was the book attacked, decried as a kind of preposterous outrage against belles-lettres; it was even probed that such an abomination was only to be expected, for *Jealousy* was a self-acknowledged product of premeditation: its author – *O the scandal of it!* – permitted himself to have opinions concerning his own profession (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 10; my italics).

The linguistic strategy used then by Robbe-Grillet is that of *reported speech* or more specifically, a strange case of *reported direct speech*, where he simulates a quote by the critics. An effect of irony is achieved by the exaggeration of the critics' hysterical reaction to the seemingly normal event of the writer's explanations.

### ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 7***

Following this passage, we find in the final version a few inserted passages introducing a new argument. Pretending to voice the critics' wish that he not express himself theoretically, serves as a pretext for Robbe-Grillet, for his own theory. By staging the critics' claim and by further developing it into "theory of writing and reception", Robbe-Grillet prepares the grounds for his counter-argument. According to the critics, the author is a Golem, who writes unconsciously, and who is deprived of theoretical and interpretative faculties. The charge of interpretation is then passed on to readers and critics who are the only ones capable of appreciating the writer's works. Robbe-Grillet objects to this restriction placed upon the writer: drawing a conclusion from his own case, he claims that not only is the writer capable of estimating his own work, but also that [self] criticism can instigate further investigations in writing.<sup>4</sup> The effect of irony produced by the exaggeration of the critics' opinion, enhances the impression that Robbe-Grillet's argument is, on the contrary, quite reasonable.

#### ***b. A dialogue with Specific Critics: the Case of "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy"***

Since relationship with the critics is intrinsic to Robbe-Grillet's writing, as the author of the PNR himself admits<sup>5</sup>, it is not surprising then to find out that he chooses polemics as his principal scenography.<sup>6</sup> His October 1958 *N.R.F.* essay – "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy" –, provides a good example of that. It is actually a response to his *Figaro Littéraire* critics, the chronicler André Rousseaux and the renowned French Academy Writer, François Mauriac. Originally echoing Roland Barthes' conception of tragedy's function in literature, the scope of this article once published under the new title<sup>7</sup> surpasses the mere defense of Barthes' idea of the

---

<sup>4</sup> "Once the work is completed, the writer's critical reflection will serve him further to gain a perspective in regard to it, immediately nourishing new explorations, a new departure" (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 12).

<sup>5</sup> In the opening essay of his collection, "The Use of Theory" (1955 and 1963), he reviews the history of his essays, claiming they were mostly a *response* to reactions in the press to his theories and books (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 7-14).

<sup>6</sup> I'm referring here to Maingueneau's usage of the term, namely, to the way a discourse constructs a representation in his own utterance situation (Maingueneau 1996: 73).

<sup>7</sup> The essay was supposed to be published originally under the title: "un art non-tragique, est-il possible?", but finally appeared in the *N.R.F.* under the above mentioned title; the final version still carries Roland Barthes' Epigraph, pertaining to Tragedy: "Tragedy is merely a means of "recovering" human misery, of subsuming and

tragedy. It becomes a response to the critics of “A Path for the Future Novel”. As the first important theoretical contribution of Robbe-Grillet (Wolf 1995: 26), this essay provokes numerous responses by critics in the papers, and mostly in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro Littéraire*, the main polemical arenas of the time (Wolf 1995: 27). In “Nature, Humanism, Tragedy” of 1958, then, Robbe-Grillet attempts to respond to the critics who attacked the ideas expressed in his 1956 essay.

### ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 8***

In the above mentioned essay, Robbe-Grillet addresses the critics in general, making an explicit reference to Rousseaux and Mauriac only:

That writers as different as François Mauriac and André Rousseaux, for example, should concur in denouncing the exclusive description of “surfaces” as a gratuitous mutilation, the *blind folly of a young rebel, a kind of sterile despair leading to the destruction of art* nonetheless seemed quite in order. More unexpected, more disturbing, was the position – identical, from many points of view – of certain materialists who, in order to judge my enterprise, referred to “values” remarkably similar to the traditional values of Christianity. Yet for them there was no question of a confessional *parti pris*. But on either side, what was offered as a principle was the indefectible solidarity between our mind and the world, while art was reduced to its “natural”, reassuring role as mediator; and I was condemned in the name of the “human.” (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 50 ; my italics).

At first sight, criticism made by Rousseaux and Mauriac and represented here through Robbe-Grillet’s discourse seems like a paraphrase of what they had actually said, however, it is most certainly a simulacrum. For, when looking into their respective articles published in the press, we find none of the terms used by Robbe-Grillet in his article. While seemingly justifying their right to criticize him, Robbe-Grillet puts exaggerated terms in their mouths through the usage of Free Indirect Speech. The rhetorical effect achieved thus is that of ridicule – their criticism seems disproportionate to the writer’s poetic attempts.

Robbe-Grillet then proceeds to answer separately each of the critics. His answer to André Rousseaux is part of an ongoing controversy between the two, initiated by Rousseaux, who in 1956, in an article of the *Figaro Littéraire*, vividly attacks Robbe-Grillet’s sympathy for superficial descriptions of objects and to the novelist’s attempts to put in theory his ideas (Rousseaux 1957: 2). In a private letter to Rousseaux written around the time of the essay’s publication Robbe-Grillet dedicates it to Rousseaux.<sup>8</sup>

The response to Rousseaux is conducted by changing the priorities set forth by the critic. While the latter views Robbe-Grillet’s novel, *La Jalousie*, as “an example of the rules set out by the theory” (Rousseaux 1956), Robbe-Grillet emphasizes in “Nature, Humanism, Tragedy” the fact that there is no more than a rather loose parallelism between the three novels I have

---

thereby justifying it in the form of a necessity, a wisdom, or a purification: to refuse this recuperation and to investigate the techniques of not treacherously succumbing to it (nothing is more insidious than tragedy) is today a necessary enterprise.” (R. Barthes)

<sup>8</sup> “L’article que je publie maintenant dans la NRF n’est que le développement de notre entretien, il s’adresse directement à vous: je voudrais (...) vous faire admettre que ma position est raisonnable, et qu’elle ne désespère pas de l’homme – tout au contraire” (quoted in Wolf 1995: 46).



published up to now and my theoretical views on a possible novel of the future is certainly obvious enough [...] and also, that it is easier to indicate a new direction than to follow it, without failure – partial or even complete – being a decisive, definite proof of the error committed at the outset. (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 50-51).

### ***Textual Heterogeneity as an Argumentative Strategy 9***

While Rousseaux commences his argument by checking out on theory, than proceeds to the analysis of the novel, Robbe-Grillet carries on in his reply by changing the hierarchy proposed by Rousseaux, that is, by suggesting that novels precede theory. Secondly, he refuses to accept the assumption that one could be extrapolated from the other.

He further answers Rousseaux by an attempt to *re-define* the concept of Humanism. Rousseaux's complaint on Robbe-Grillet's superficial treatment of objects relates to the former's conception of the novelist as someone who's descriptions lack humanism (as ironically paraphrased by Robbe-Grillet in one of his other essays: "The New Novel has expelled Man from the world"). In an attempt to defend himself against that sort of claim, Robbe-Grillet's move consists first of all of declaring void the original definition of what is "human":

Is there not, first of all, a certain fraudulence in this word human which is always being thrown in our faces? If it is not *a word quite devoid of meaning* what meaning does it really have? (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 51; my italics).

He then proceeds in rendering ironic the critics' position by summarizing it *ad reductio* "in two sentences" and by dubbing them pejoratively "inquisitors":

It seems that those who use it all the time, those who make it the sole criterion of all praise as of all reproach, identify – deliberately, perhaps- a precise (and limited) reflection on man, his situation in the world, the phenomena of his existence, with a certain anthropocentric atmosphere, vague but imbuing all things, giving the world its so-called *signification*, that is, investing it from within by a more or less disingenuous network of sentiments and thoughts. *Simplifying, we can summarize the position of our new inquisitors in two sentences [...]* (Ibid.; my italics).

A further ironical effect is achieved by exaggerating the critics' position:

If I say, "The world's is man," I shall always gain *absolution*; while if I say "Things are things, and man is only man," I am immediately charged *with a crime against humanity*. The crime is the assertion that there exists something in the world which is not man, which makes no sign to him, which has nothing in common with him. The crime, above all, according to this view, is to remark this separation, this distance, without attempting to effect the slightest sublimation of it (Ibid.; my italics).

By attributing christian morals to his critics, Robbe-Grillet puts into their mouths the claim that he is committing a so-called "crime against humanity." This claim may seem indeed ridiculous and disproportionate to the reader. And indeed, Robbe-Grillet rejects the accusation, by proving just the opposite, namely that man is present in every line of his novel:

What could be, in other words, an "inhuman" work? How, in particular, could a novel which deals with a man, and follows his steps from page to page, describing only what he does, what he sees, or what he imagines, how could such a novel be accused of turning away from man? [...] (Ibid.)

Finally, he proceeds to redefine humanism:

To condemn, in the name of the human, the novel which deals with such a man is therefore to adopt the humanist point of view, according to which it is not enough to show man where he is: he must further be proclaimed that man is everywhere. On the pretext that man can achieve only a

subjective knowledge of the world, humanism decides to elect man the justification of everything. A true bridge of souls thrown between man and things, the humanist outlook is preeminently a pledge of solidarity (Ibid., 52-53).

In answer to Rousseaux and other critics then, who decry the lack of humanism in Robbe-Grillet's writing, the author of the PNR introduces a new definition of humanism, which buys him a place of honor in the humanist paradigm, the new boundaries of which he has just traced.

### c. François Mauriac and the Hamper Technique

The second critic with whom Robbe-Grillet contends overtly in "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," is François Mauriac. As in the case of Rousseaux, the two exchange articles, in a controversy initiated by Mauriac when he publishes an article in the *Figaro Littéraire*, entitled "Technique du Cageot" ("Hamper Technique"; Mauriac 1956: 1, 3). In this article, he refers to a poem in prose by the poet Francis Ponge, dubbed "Le Cageot" ("The Hamper") arguing that Robbe-Grillet's ideas on the surface of things originate in Ponge's descriptive technique. Secondly, as a fellow writer, he criticizes Robbe-Grillet's weakness as a literary critic. Robbe-Grillet retorts to those accusations in the second part of "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy" (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 70-73), by deploying his argument in the following way:

1. Demarcation from Ponge by specifying the latter's epistemological project, and claiming it is essentially different from his own: While Ponge suggests, through his anthropomorphic images [the hamper feels clumsy], that the world *is* man, Robbe-Grillet believes on the contrary that man *is* man, watching a world where things are just there).

2. Rejection of Mauriac's claim in his article "Technique du Cageot", where the latter assimilates Robbe-Grillet's theories to those of Ponge. In analyzing this sequence we should take notice of the fact that reference to Mauriac's article which instigated the present discussion is introduced *at a later stage of the discussion*. This is probably due to the fact that it is in Robbe-Grillet's interest to introduce his own arguments in the first place, in order to create a solid base of agreement with the reader, before introducing his adversary's perspective.

He then alludes explicitly to Mauriac's following remark in "Technique du Cageot"<sup>9</sup>, to which he responds by saying:

I am asking myself whether it is not from this hamper that Mr. Robbe-Grillet, devoted enemy of the psychological novel, has taken his ideas on the future novel, where the objects will be there, before being something, where things lose their "romantic heart" and the universe its false depth, where there will no longer exist for the novelist, but only on the surface, where the optical, descriptive object will replace all the fake beauties of the old style." (Mauriac 1956; my translation, my italics).

François Mauriac, who – he said – had once read Ponge's Hamper on Jean Paulhan's recommendation, must have remembered very little of this text when he baptized Hamper Technique the description of objects advocated in my own writings. Or else I had expressed myself very badly (Robbe-Grillet 1996: 70).

---

<sup>9</sup> During the occupation, Jean Paulhan convinced me to read a poem in prose (by Mr. Francis Ponge, I believe), entitled "The Hamper". I could never have imagined that an object, the least characteristic there was, would succeed in existing as intensely, thanks to words, as this hamper in its brute reality.

This last remark evidently calls for a re-explanation of his own point of view. Indeed, following the doubt expressed in the previous paragraph, and the assumed error of Mauriac, Robbe-Grillet can again return to his own stakes, which consist of clarifying and restating his position to the reader.

a. Describing things is to place oneself on the outside, in front of them.

b. Only science may know things from the inside. Ponge's description makes science seem ridiculous. It can only know the representation man has in his mind of the inside of things. Anyway, Ponge is only interested in man and this clearly shows in the way he personifies things.

c. Outside Science, "the world around us turns back into a smooth surface, without signification, without soul, without values, on which we no longer have any purchase." (Ibid., p. 71). Things should be described in a way as to avoid any interpretation.

d. A simulacrum of criticism's voice and criticism of that voice:

The most common criticisms made of such geometric information: "it says nothing to the mind", "a photograph or a diagram would show the shape better," etc. – are strange indeed: wouldn't I have thought of them first of all?" (Ibid., p. 72)

e. Response to criticism through *definition by opposition*:

as a matter of fact, there is something else involved. The photograph of the diagram aims only at reproducing the object; they are successful to the degree that they suggest as many interpretations (and the same errors) as the model. Formal description, on the other hand, is above all a limitation [to interpretation]..." (Ibid.).

f. Reformulation of the argument "things are out there".

We can see how the staging of the critics' discourse becomes a mere excuse for the re-explanation of Robbe-Grillet positions, enabling him to reach the following conclusions:

1. Rejection of analogical vocabulary of traditional humanism.
2. Rejection of the idea of tragedy and the profound and spurious nature of man or things.
3. and (by extension) Refusal to accept all established order (Ibid, p. 73).

In both cases then, Robbe-Grillet uses the appeal to the critics' condemnation of his writings as a pretext to mount his own argument, that is, as part of the mechanism of his claim.

### **Conclusions**

I initially claimed that instances of textual heterogeneity such as reported speech and the staging of polemics are used as argumentative strategies in the New Novel's second manifesto, *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963). I have demonstrated it by showing how Robbe-Grillet utilizes various techniques of appeal to authority and the staging of polemics in order to set forth his own claims. I first showed, through the case of Sarraute, how the process of re-writing the articles assembled reflects the new objectives of the New Novel, as expressed in the manifesto. I then proceeded to retrieve the argumentative mechanisms and purposes at play in the staging of the critics' claims in the essays. I thus believe I have shown how the analysis of the linguistic level of a text reveal and confirms a text's rhetorical claims.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

- Barthes, R. 1954 (July-Aug.). "Littérature Objective". *Critique* vol. XV, 86-87: 581-591.
- Barthes, R. 1958. "Alain Robbe-Grillet." (trans. Howard, R.). *Evergreen Review*, vol. II, 5: 113-126.
- Barthes, R. 1972. *Critical Essays*. (trans. Howard, R.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Mauriac, F. 1956 (28 July) "Technique du Cageot". *Figaro littéraire*. 1,3.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1955 (20 Dec.). "Littérature engagée, littérature réactionnaire". *L'Express*, 11.
- Robbe-Grillet A. 1956a. "Le réalisme, la psychologie et l'avenir du roman". *Critique* 111-112: 695-701.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1956b. "Une Voie pour le roman futur". *Nouvelle Revue Française* 43: 77-84.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1956c (21 Feb.). "Le réalisme socialiste est bourgeois". *L'Express*, 11.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1957a. (24 Oct.). "La mort du personnage". *France Observateur* 389: 20.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1957b. (31 Oct.). "Un joli talent de conteur...". *France Observateur* 390:19.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1957c. (14 Nov.). "La forme et le contenu". *France Observateur* 392: 19.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1958 (Oct.). "Nature, Humanisme, Tragédie". *Nouvelle Revue Française* 70: 580-604.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1963a. "A quoi servent les thories". *Tel Quel* 14: 39-45.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1963b. *Pour Un Nouveau Roman*. Paris: Minuit.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. 1996 (First printing 1989). *For a New Novel*. (trans. Richard Howard), Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Robbe-Grillet A. 1978 *Obliques (les Pilles)* 16-17.
- Sarraute, N. 1956. *L'Ere du soupçon*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Sarraute, N. 1963. *The Age of Suspicion* (trans. Maria Jolas). NY: George Braziller.

### Secondary Sources:

- Abastado, C. 1980 (Oct.). "Le Manifeste DADA 1918": Un tourniquet". *Littérature, Les manifestes*. Paris: Larousse, 39-46.
- Bogue, R. 1980. "Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the Paradise of Writerly Text". *Criticism* vol. XXII, 2: 156-171.
- Compagnon, A. 1992. "Qu'est-ce que la critique littéraire?". *Dictionnaire des genres et notions littéraires*. Paris: A. Michel, 415-431.
- Dascal, M. 1995. "Observations sur la dynamique des controverses", *Cahiers de linguistique française* 17: 99-121.
- Ducrot, O. 1984. *Le Dire et le dit*. Paris: Minuit.
- Gleize, J.-M. 1980 (Oct.) "Manifestes, Préfaces: Sur quelques aspects du prescriptif" in: *Littérature, Les manifestes*. Paris: Larousse, 12-16.
- Idt, G. 1980 (Oct.). "La 'littérature engagée', manifeste permanent". *Littérature, Les manifestes*. Paris:Larousse, 61-71.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni C., Gelas, N. (eds). *Le discours polémique*. 1980. Lyon: P.U.L.
- Leroy, C. 1980 (Oct.). "La fabrique du lecteur dans les manifestes". *Littérature, Les manifestes* 39: 120-128.
- Maingueneau, D. 1991 *L'analyse du discours*, Paris: Hachette.
- Maingueneau, D. 1996. *Les termes clés de l'analyse du discours*. Paris: Seuil.
- Piégay-Gros, N. 1996. *Introduction à l'intertextualité*, Paris: Dunod.

- Ponge, F. 1948. "Le Parti pris des choses". *Oeuvres Complètes*. Paris: La Pléiade, 18.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. (1978) "Pourquoi J'aime Barthes." In: Compagnon, A. *Prétexte: Roland Barthes*, 244-272.
- Rousseaux, A. 1957 ( 13 Apr.). "Les surfaces d'Alain Robb-Grillet." *Le Figaro littéraire*, 2.
- Rousseaux, A. 1958 (8 Nov.). Un disciple de M. Robbe-Grillet." *Le Figaro littéraire*.
- Sarfati, G.-E. 1997. *Elements d'analyse du discours*. Paris: Nathan.
- van Eemeren, F.H., Grootendorst, R. (eds). *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*. 1996 Mahwah, NJ:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wolf, N. 1995. *Une littérature sans histoire:Essai sur le Nouveau Roman*, Genève: Droz.