Introduction

At the Formentor literary conference of 1964, the $10,000 International Prize was awarded to the French writer Nathalie Sarraute (1900–99). Newspaper reports from the time show that Sarraute's victory did not come easily: the prize was 'awarded in public by seven national or multi-national delegations each consisting of five members', collectively tasked with 'the encouragement of an author of any country with an adequate body of work behind him [sic], but who is not yet sufficiently well known'.[1] Major writers weighed in for Sarraute, with Alberto Moravia and Mary McCarthy speaking on behalf of her novel *Les Fruits d'or* 'with a magisterial eloquence'—'one airily comparing her to Molière, the other pronouncing the book a born classic'. However, the American novelist Herbert Gold 'wondered how anyone could vote for a book without characters, plot, or psychology'.[2] Sarraute won only after four ballots.

The British delegation had put forward V. S. Naipaul, and had gained an extra vote after the Indian novelist Khushwant Singh protested Sarraute's burgeoning success by tactically withdrawing support for the candidate of his own national delegation.[3] Singh is said in one report to have 'defined this year's prize as a fight between the national novel versus the Parisian novel'.[4] This opposition presents a now unfamiliar image of the postwar novel. On one side, Naipaul embodies a 'national novel' divested of nationalism's parochial and ethnocentric associations. If Naipaul's work of the time represented Britain's 'national novel', then this kind of novel depicted worlds both inside and outside of British national space, attesting to the intricacies of identities and narratives forged under a now-disintegrating imperial world-system. Aesthetically, however, this 'national novel' remained notionally traditional: on Gold's terms, characters, plot, and psychology prevail in Naipaul's writing. Sarraute, meanwhile, was one of the most significant proponents of the French *nouveau roman*, where the aspects of the novel so valued by Gold had been discarded in search of new aesthetic horizons. Singh's alternative to Naipaul's 'national novel', then, is of the *nouveau roman* as the new international style in fiction. Consecrated by a prominent prize jury, through Sarraute, the *nouveau roman* had transcended its insurgent status and had established itself on a global stage as a viable option for the future of the novel.

[1] John Weightman, 'Literary Politics in Salzburg', *Observer*, 3 May 1964, 23.
[2] Elaine Dundy, 'Formentoracle', *Guardian*, 4 May 1964, 7.
[3] Weightman, 'Literary Politics', 23.
[4] Dundy, 'Formentoracle', 7.

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Any potential held in this moment in 1964 went largely unfulfilled. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson asks if 'the extinction of the *nouveau roman*' has 'anything to tell us about the survival (or the waning) of the 1960s (including its fashionable—and mostly French!—theories)?'. He adds that '[s]ome will remember what reading a *nouveau roman* felt like'. Published in 1991, *Postmodernism* addresses a *nouveau roman* encountered—albeit in precautionary scare quotes—'"within living memory"'.[5] Today, that memory is barely living: all of the *nouveaux romanciers* have died, and Jameson's 'some' who remember reading a *nouveau roman*—or who are still reading it—has dwindled. Outside of pedagogical settings, the *nouveau roman* survives in the main as a convenient critical shorthand for a nebulous postwar version of experimentalism or avant-gardism in the novel. This book recovers the *nouveau roman*'s force in its time, traces of which are held in both Singh's concerned diagnosis of his literary moment and in Jameson's retrospective nose-thumbing. By looking at the *nouveau roman* at its point of emergence in a foreign literary field, I try to understand the meanings and functions that the *nouveau roman* once had for a wide range of readers and writers. In the process, this book makes the case for the centrality of the *nouveau roman* to many histories of post-war literature. To start, though, the *nouveau roman* needs to be introduced in its own place as well as in its own time.

The Emergence of the *nouveau roman*

In keeping with its aesthetic forms, the *nouveau roman* is not easily described in concrete or linear terms. Instead, it is better understood through a series of pre-histories and false starts, revisions and after-images, and even outright denials of its existence. The *nouveau roman* emerged against a storied literary-historical background. Following the experience of occupation, and the work of restoration and reflection that began with the liberation of Paris in 1944, the defining demand in French literary culture was for an *engagé* ('committed') literature. This demand was articulated most stridently in the pages of the journal *Les Temps modernes* and in the writings of two of its editors, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Many of Sartre's key statements of the times were collected in his era-defining 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?' (1948), in which the

> 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He [sic] knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the

[5] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 132, 131.

> human condition. Man is the being towards whom no being can be impartial, not even God.[6]

Although they competed with more doctrinaire party-political strands in French intellectual life (at least until 1956), ultimately, such terms defined the dominant part of the postwar French literary field. Accordingly, the task of the novel in particular was understood by many to be to depict the radical existential freedom of individuals turned towards the concrete and contingent demands of the present. Even in the famous novels of Albert Camus—who broke decisively with Sartre's call for explicit political commitments—the same impetus abides. In famous novels like *L'Étranger* (1942) and *La Peste* (1947), Camus's focus is still on the extreme commitment that individuals can show to a truth when it is disclosed to them.

Given the dominance of committed literature, a counter-movement was inevitable. If the *nouveau roman* was the most complete expression of this counter-movement, then it built on the work of certain important predecessors, all immediate contemporaries of de Beauvoir and Sartre. As Martin Crowley notes, two figures in particular rose to 'relatively belated, but increasingly significant prominence' in 1950s French letters: Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. For Crowley, Bataille and Blanchot 'set literature at a very different angle to the world than their existentialist peers' through writing where 'the very existence of something like literature already poses radical questions about the nature and purpose of human activity in general'.[7] Bataille and Blanchot both wrote—albeit often to very different ends—literary and critical/theoretical/philosophical texts in equal measure. But given the philosophical tenor of their literary works, both Bataille and Blanchot eroded the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, carving out a fluid space where *writing* as such could stage an encounter with the most opaque questions of language and Being. It was also on such terms that the third important forebear for the *nouveau roman*, Samuel Beckett, articulated his literary project. Beckett's French prose writings of the 1950s develop what Beckett called a 'syntax of weakness', written in a language that 'appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it'.[8] Like Bataille and Blanchot, Beckett pushed his fiction to a point that was as remote as possible from ordinary language and everyday referential content.

Beckett's emergence as perhaps the preeminent innovative Francophone writer of his age was facilitated by his publisher. In 1950, around the same time as it

[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1967), 13.

[7] Martin Crowley, 'The Modern French Novel' in William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond, and Emma Wilson, eds, *The Cambridge History of French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 571.

[8] Quoted in Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 249; Samuel Beckett, Letter to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937, in Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 518.

acquired Bataille's journal *Critique* (which was founded in 1946, a year after *Les Temps modernes*), Jérôme Lindon's publishing house Les Éditions de Minuit took on Beckett's *Molloy* (1951) after its rejection by numerous other French publishers.[9] Minuit had emerged during the war as a precariously situated publisher of the Resistance. But after 1945, rather than work with the Sartrean grain, Minuit forged a new identity as an illustrious publisher of the avant-garde. For Minuit, the *nouveau roman* was the culmination of this process. Not long after first publishing Beckett, Minuit published the first works that would come to be defined as the earliest *nouveaux romans*. In 1953 and 1954, Minuit published two debut novels: Alain Robbe-Grillet's (1922–2008) *Les Gommes*, and Michel Butor's (1926–2016) *Passage de Milan*. With the publication in 1955 of his second novel, *Le Voyeur*, Robbe-Grillet also began working as a literary editor at Minuit, helping to bring the publisher a number of texts and authors that would ensure its reputation as the primary sponsor of the *nouveau roman*.

The term '*nouveau roman*' was itself coined in 1957. In a review for *Le Monde*, the establishment writer and critic Émile Henriot saw Robbe-Grillet's third novel, *La Jalousie* and Sarraute's collection of short texts, *Tropismes* as evidence of a definable transformation at the forefront of French fiction.[10] The inclusion of Sarraute's text in this initial definition is emblematic of the *nouveau roman*'s complex status. The edition of *Tropismes* that Henriot reviewed was actually revised from a text initially published in 1938; Sarraute's first novel, *Portrait d'un inconnu*, was published in 1948. In fact, most of the writers that came to embody the *nouveau roman* all forged their craft—and often first published their writing—to little acclaim in the 1940s. Though not published until 1978, Robbe-Grillet's first novel, *Un Régicide*, was completed in 1949, when it failed to find a publisher. Marguerite Duras (1914–96) first started writing in the late 1930s, with her first novel, *Les Impudents*, published in 1943; *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, which represented the beginning of the central phase of Duras's career, was published in 1950. And Claude Simon's (1913–2005) first two novels were published in the 1940s too: *Le Tricheur* in 1945, and *La Corde raide* in 1947.

Simon eventually came to distance himself not just from his writing of the 1940s, but his next two novels as well, *Gulliver* (1952) and *Le Sacre du printemps* (1954). He saw the foundation of his mature aesthetic in his fifth novel, *Le Vent* (1957), which was also his first to be published by Minuit; from that point onwards, Lindon's firm issued all of Simon's works. For Minuit, *Le Vent* formed part of a collection of works published in the years 1956–8 that came to define the *nouveau roman*, as well as to secure its prominence in the French literary field.

[9] See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 376–8.

[10] See Émile Henriot, 'Le Nouveau roman: La Jalousie, d'Alain Robbe-Grillet/Tropismes, de Nathalie Sarraute', *Le Monde*, 22 May 1957, 8–9.

In 1956, as well as publishing Butor's second novel, *L'Emploi du temps*, Minuit picked up another writer, Robert Pinget (1919–97): the firm published Pinget's fourth work of fiction, *Graal Flibuste*, after which he—like Simon—remained with Minuit for the rest of his career. Although Lindon was not able to fully co-opt Duras and Sarraute from Éditions Gallimard (their usual publisher), at the high point of the *nouveau roman*, Minuit published single works by each—the revised edition of Sarraute's *Tropismes* that gave rise to Henriot's coinage of the term *nouveau roman*, and Duras's 1958 novel *Moderato cantabile*.

In this book, I take the core exponents of the *nouveau roman* to be Butor, Duras, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, and Simon. In the 1950s–70s, these writers were frequently published in translation in Britain, and were consistently evoked in British discussions of the *nouveau roman*. But in some of its defining early iterations in France, the term '*nouveau roman*' was flexible enough to encompass a broader range of writers. A 1958 special issue of the French journal *Esprit*, for example, offers ten *nouveaux romanciers*, namely Beckett, Butor, Jean Cayrol, Duras, Jean Lagrolet, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Simon, and Kateb Yacine.[11] Although he was not frequently invoked as a *nouveau romancier*, the inclusion of the Algerian writer Yacine in *Esprit*'s list is indicative of the fact that the *nouveau roman* was resistant to a monolithic account of Francophone writing. This aspect of the *nouveau roman* is further evidenced by the fact that Sarraute was Russian, only moving to Paris as a child, while Duras and Simon, though both of French parentage, were born in French colonial territories.[12] As discussed in Chapter 5, in both France and Britain, for many readers, the *nouveau roman* was strongly associated with the transformations brought about by the end of the European empires.

In late 1959, Mario Dondero produced the most iconic representation of the *nouveau roman*, photographing a number of writers outside of Minuit's offices for an Italian magazine article about the new movement in the French novel (Figure 1). Dondero's images include Butor, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, and Simon, but not Duras; instead they also include Beckett, Claude Mauriac, and Claude Ollier.[13] As the son of François Mauriac—one of the major French writers of the first half of the twentieth century—Claude Mauriac literalized the fact that the *nouveau roman* represented a new literary generation. The *nouveau roman*'s major function in the French literary field was as an expression of what Pierre Bourdieu calls artistic 'youth'—it consisted of writers who regardless of their biological age were, on Bourdieu's terms, 'new entrants, whose interest [was] in discontinuity, rupture,

[11] See Olivier de Magny, 'Panorama d'une nouvelle littérature romanesque', *Esprit*, 26.7–8 (1958), 3–17.

[12] As another example, Beckett, of course, was Irish. His inclusion in a number of definitions of the *nouveau roman* from the 1950s brings into relief the significant work undertaken by Beckett and his acolytes to undo any collective associations and to inscribe the often isolated image that still accompanies him and his work to this day.

[13] See Anne Simonin, 'La Photo du Nouveau Roman: Tentative d'interprétation d'un instantané', *Politix*, 3.10–11 (1990), 45–52.

Figure 1. Mario Dondero's *nouveau roman* photo, taken outside the offices of Les Éditions de Minuit (l–r: Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Claude Mauriac, Jérôme Lindon, Robert Pinget, Samuel Beckett, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Ollier). Though he does not appear in this image, Michel Butor features in other photographs from the set. [Image reproduced with permission of Elisa Dondero and the Associazione Culturale Altidona Belvedere.]

difference and revolution'. The fact that the *nouveau roman*'s particular personnel was never fully fixed also accords with Bourdieu's sense that ultimately, it is the use of '[w]ords, names of schools or groups, proper names' that makes 'things into something: distinctive signs, they produce existence in a universe where to exist is to be different, "to make oneself a name", a proper name or a name in common (that of a group)'.[14] In Britain as much as in France, the *nouveau roman* drew most of its energy from just such a performative quality, catalysing the aesthetic and political values associated with the new; in the process, the *nouveau roman* became a powerful organizing concept both for its adherents and its detractors.

Dondero's photographs attempt to legitimate the *nouveau roman* as an avant-garde in the sense that it was, in Renato Poggioli's definition, a 'group manifestation' understandable through such descriptors as the 'school', the 'movement', or the 'current'.[15] The *nouveau roman* exhibited another of Poggioli's definitions of

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 157.

[15] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 17, 19.

the avant-garde in the sense that it was strongly defined by its 'antagonism toward tradition'.[16] The *nouveau roman*'s common antagonism was towards orthodoxy as a vehicle of tradition, something it conceived on both sociological and aesthetic terms. As noted above, the *nouveau roman*'s sociological antagonism was directed towards the perceived *engagé* mainstream in French fiction. This antagonism even translated to the *nouveau roman*'s circulation in Britain: in 1962, the programme for the Edinburgh literary festival included a translated excerpt of one of Robbe-Grillet's essays with the title 'The Writer's Only Commitment is to Literature'.[17] Chapter 2 looks in further detail at Robbe-Grillet's critique of both Sartre and Camus. As a further example, when Sartre denounced the *nouveau roman* as bourgeois in the course of promoting his autobiographical work *Les Mots* (1963), Claude Simon's response is typical: 'Does Sartre believe that it is the undernourish[ed] masses who have placed *Les Mots* at the top of the best-seller lists or that over against a dying child his book can act as a "counter-weight" […]? When were corpses and books ever weighed on the same scales? Why write at all, why publish?'[18]

The writers grouped within the *nouveau roman* at least shared one answer to Simon's question: they wrote and published in opposition to the aesthetic traditionalism that characterized the contemporary French novel. This opposition was often caricatured as an opposition to nineteenth-century realism, when it in fact constituted a resistance to, as Butor put it, 'critics who brandish the name of Balzac like a sort of shield' and 'reactionary novelists who claim to be *doing* Balzac' when in fact 'the only true heirs of this great man' and his legacy of 'technical inventiveness' were 'Proust, Faulkner, etc.' .[19] The *nouveaux romanciers* saw a dominant culture in thrall to a staid and anachronistic conception of realism, whether in novels written in the spirit of Sartrean commitment or in those written to cater for the middlebrow bourgeoisie. This antagonism served political ends too. As Celia Britton shows, Robbe-Grillet in particular often conflated the Sartrean theory of committed literature with the 'rather different' form of socialist realism endorsed in the Soviet Union; to do so was, for Robbe-Grillet, 'a means of establishing' the 'political relevance' of the *nouveau roman* through 'alignment with the anti-Stalinist left'.[20]

[16] Poggioli, 30.

[17] See Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'The Writer's Only Commitment is to Literature', unattributed translation, in Andrew Hook, ed., *Edinburgh International Festival 1962: 'The Novel Today'* (Edinburgh, 1962), 43–4.

[18] Claude Simon, 'Whom DOES Sartre Write for?', trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, *London Magazine*, August 1964, 59.

[19] Michel Butor, *Répertoire: Études et conferences 1948–1959* (Paris: Minuit, 1960), 79, 81 ['critiques qui brandissent le nom de Balzac comme une sorte de bouclier, les romanciers réactionnaires qui prétendent faire du Balzac' (emphasis added in translation); 'les seuls héritiers véritables de ce grand homme'; 'invention technique'].

[20] Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman: Fiction, Theory and Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 14.

Butor's comments about 'Proust, Faulkner, etc.' point towards the aesthetic alternatives proposed by the *nouveau roman*, as well as the tensions that inhere within these alternatives. The valorization of what Butor calls 'technical inventiveness' is the first item in Colin Davis and Elizabeth Fallaize's attempt to define the formal characteristics of the *nouveau roman* as a whole:

> formal experimentation; disappearance of stable, easily distinguished characters as centre of the novel, accompanied by the refusal of received notions of psychological coherence; disruptions of chronological sequence; elusive, untrustworthy, or inconsistent narrators.[21]

Definitions like this expose the problems that arise from generalizing about the *nouveau roman*. If Davis and Fallaize's terms describe the novels of Butor, Duras, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, and Simon, they do so only insofar as they also describe the work of the progenitors named above by Butor—Marcel Proust and William Faulkner—as well as any number of those writers' modernist contemporaries, whether Djuna Barnes, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, or Virginia Woolf. But even if this were not the case, more fundamentally, the *nouveau roman*'s lack of a specific aesthetic character betrays the fact that in grouping a number of writers together, it elided the singularity and diversity of these writers' artistic aims and styles.

Introducing the *nouveaux romanciers*

Butor's definable contribution to the *nouveau roman* consisted of the novels *Passage de Milan* (1954), *L'Emploi du temps* (1956), *La Modification* (1957), and *Degrés* (1960). After these works, Butor's writing escaped easy definition within the domain of the novel as such, experimenting increasingly with forms of collage and typography, with the relation between word and image (often through collaborations with visual artists), and with both the literal and metaphorical implications of travel writing and the writing of place. As discussed further in Chapter 6, one of the abiding concerns of Butor's four *nouveaux romans* was with expansive, failing descriptions of apparently discrete everyday totalities, as in the apartment building described in *Passage de Milan*, the year spent in a northern English town in *L'Emploi du temps*, or the class in a school in *Degrés*. *La Modification* heralded an important moment of legitimation for the *nouveau roman* with its victory in the Prix Renaudot in 1957. The novel also uses one of the *nouveau roman*'s most famous—and controversial—literary devices, using the second person as its

[21] Colin Davis and Elizabeth Fallaize, *French Fiction in the Mitterrand Years: Memory, Narrative, Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

narrative pronoun so as to depict the experience of a man travelling by train from Paris to Rome to surprise his lover there. Nevertheless, Butor's most consistent formal signature in his early novels is his use of lengthy sentences, each divided up into strophe-like paragraphs that demarcate individual units of sense and rhythm within the surrounding whole.

Butor's maximalism is brought into relief when viewed alongside Marguerite Duras's work. Duras wrote spare, short novels, many of which consist mostly of clipped dialogue. She wrote at the interface of the novel, theatre, and film; in the latter, Duras worked as both a writer and a director, and created perhaps her most famous work in the scenario for Alain Resnais's film of 1959, *Hiroshima mon amour*. A number of her works cross the boundaries of her preferred media, existing in different versions, as with the parallel novels and plays of both *Le Square* (1955) and *L'Amante anglaise* (1967), and the film scripts of the novels *Moderato cantabile* (1958) and *Détruire, dit-elle* (1969)—the latter film was also directed by Duras. The novel versions of these texts in particular are written almost exclusively in dialogue. Though in this way Duras shares the formal interests of British writers like Ivy Compton-Burnett and Henry Green, such interests are ultimately a means to a further end. All of Duras's novels of the 1950s–60s are defined by the tendency that Gabriel Josipovici sees in *L'Amante anglaise*, with its 'constant circling round the event' and 'refusal to come up with explanations' creating an overall effect where the 'primacy of the event, the way it transcends all motive, all explanation, is borne in on us'.[22] The event, for Duras, is often inscribed at the intersection of love and violence, as with the man's murder of his lover that obsesses the two protagonists of *Moderato cantabile*, or with the mysterious past experiences of the title character of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), or Claire Lannes's apparently motiveless killing of her cousin in *L'Amante anglaise*. Duras often creates a tension between the rupture of the event on the one hand, and a pervasive mood of almost hallucinatory listlessness and stasis on the other. Hot climates are often the source and the primary figure of the latter, whether in the Mediterranean settings of *Le Marin de Gibraltar* (1952), *Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia* (1953), and *Dix heures et demie du soir en été* (1960), or the colonial locations of French Indochina in *Un Barrage contre la Pacifique*, or Kolkata in *Le Vice-consul* (1966).

Like Duras, Robert Pinget also wrote for the theatre, and equally drew on its resources for his novels. His huge novel of 1962, *L'Inquisitoire*—somewhat of a *summa* of his literary vision—takes the form of a question-and-answer dialogue, a police interrogation of sorts, as the servant of a chateau is called to account for a crime that might have been committed. Across his work, Pinget focuses on marginal characters and spaces: the old, the infirm, the socially oppressed, or those

[22] Gabriel Josipovici, *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 112.

with non-normative mentalities are usually encountered in Pinget's works in provincial French settings—small villages, neglected chateaus—that seem to have slipped out of the usual run of historical time. His work is rooted in epistemological uncertainty and concealment—for David Ruffel, an index of Pinget's queer aesthetics.[23] Pinget's narrative currency is rumour, speculation, unreliable anecdote, and unfounded opinion, spoken by characters who have lost faith in their own capacity to pin language to their own identities and experiences.

This uncertainty is reinforced across Pinget's oeuvre through a style that is labyrinthine in its repetitions and profoundly intratextual. Pinget frequently returns in his writing to the fictional backwater of Agapa. Within this imaginative geography, characters like Baga and Mahu, given their central turns in the novels that bear their names (*Mahu, ou, Le Matériau* (1952), *Baga* (1958)) then recur ambiguously within the linguistic texture of other works. At one point in *L'Inquisitoire*, for example, the interrogatee goes off on a tangent about the 'crackpot' Mahu, noting that 'the name Mahu is local they were originally from Fantoine I said there's a Rue des-Fossés-Mahu at Agapa'; in another flight of rhetorical fancy, it also transpires that the character knows of a 'rue Baga'.[24] Such allusions and echoes enable Pinget to create an atmosphere of uncanny and uncertain doubling, both at the linguistic and referential level. It is never clear whether there is a connection between the 'crackpot' Mahu evoked in *L'Inquisitoire* and the eccentric narrator of the novel that bears his name—indeed, until the very end of *Mahu, ou, Le Matériau*, Mahu allows the possibility that he might himself be the fictional creation of Latirail, another character in the text (and one who also recurs in *L'Inquisitoire*).[25]

Alain Robbe-Grillet was perhaps the most prominent writer of the *nouveau roman*, as well as, alongside his publisher Lindon, the most enthusiastic supporter of its very existence. As exemplified by his novels *Le Voyeur* (1955), *La Jalousie* (1957), and *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959), as well as his scenario for Alain Resnais's film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), Robbe-Grillet's writing cultivates disorienting structures of ambiguous repetition within a flat, affectless prose, rendering illegible a consistent or plottable notion of space, time, or identity. In *La Jalousie*, for example, the image of a centipede being crushed recurs throughout, with the present-tense narration leaving no absolute clue as to whether each iteration of the scene is a repetition of a single occurrence, or a series of structurally similar, but fundamentally different events. Despite the early reputation of his novels as an incarnation of the 'degré zéro de l'écriture' ('writing degree zero') formulated by his friend and supporter Roland Barthes, Robbe-Grillet's overall artistic trajectory in fact proves more to be a literal rendering of Barthes's later

[23] See David Ruffel, 'Pinget Queer', trans. Maria O'Sullivan, *Romanic Review*, 104 (2013), 127–45.

[24] Robert Pinget, *L'Inquisitoire* (Paris: Minuit, 1963), 157, 81 ['tordu'; 'ce nom de Mahu est du pays ils étaient originaires de Fantoine j'ai dit qu'il y a la rue des Fossés-Mahu à Agapa'].

[25] See Pinget, *L'Inquisitoire*, 313, 317.

notion of the 'texte de jouissance' ('text of bliss').[26] Beginning in earnest with the novel, *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1965) and his second work as a director, the film *Trans-Europ-Express* (1966), Robbe-Grillet reveals his inheritance to be that of de Sade: transgressive and obsessive in both an erotic and an aesthetic sense, Robbe-Grillet's work seems increasingly to venture that the erotic and the aesthetic are not just coterminous, but in fact coextensive. Though the early works that made Robbe-Grillet's name fall less squarely within such designations, these works nevertheless augur his later preoccupations, as in the different modalities of voyeurism explored in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie*—as well as these works' keen attention to the posture and positioning of the female body—or the more explicit sadomasochistic tableau of the 'La Chambre secrète', from the collection of short texts, *Instantanés* (1962).

Robbe-Grillet was also seen as the lead theoretician of the *nouveau roman*, with his pointedly titled collection of essays, *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963) a kind of proxy manifesto. Two particular strands of Robbe-Grillet's thinking at least provide an interpretative key for his own writing. As discussed further in Chapter 5, Robbe-Grillet's fiction and theory maintain an insistence on the primacy of objects, something that was characterized as Robbe-Grillet's *chosisme* ('thingism'). Accordingly, in one central Robbe-Grilletian dictum, both classical and Existentialist epistemologies are attacked in equal measure: 'the world is neither significant nor absurd. It *is*, quite simply.'[27] Such a precept results in the call for a fiction where the human is profoundly decentred, resulting in writing purged of anthropomorphism and metaphor.[28] Robbe-Grillet theorizes the expression of this new aesthetic precisely by rejecting certain inherited aspects of the novel, a rejection best summed up at the start of his 1957 essay 'Sur quelques notions périmées':

> we are so used to hearing about 'character', about 'atmosphere', about 'form' and 'content', about 'message', about the 'storytelling talent' of 'true novelists', that an effort is required to extricate ourselves from this spider's web and to understand that it represents an idea about the novel (a preconceived idea, which everyone accepts without debate, therefore a dead idea), and not at all this so-called 'nature' of the novel in which we are supposed to believe.[29]

[26] See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1967) and *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1976).

[27] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Minuit, 1963), 18 ['le monde n'est ni significant ni absurde. Il *est*, tout simplement.' (emphasis original)].

[28] In particular, see Robbe-Grillet, 'Nature, humanisme, tragédie', in *Pour un nouveau roman*, 45–67.

[29] Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman*, 25 ['nous sommes tellement habitués à entendre parler de «personnage», d'«atmosphère», de «forme» et de «contenu», de «message», du «talent de conteur» des «vrais romanciers», qu'il nous faut un effort pour nous dégager de cette toile d'araignée et pour comprendre qu'elle représente une idée sur le roman (idée toute faite, que chacun admet sans discussion, donc idée morte), et point du tout cette prétendue «nature» du roman en quoi l'on voudrait nous faire croire.'].

Such comments are characteristic of the *nouveau roman* and its self-positioning against the prevailing norms of French fiction. At the same time, the rhetorical generality of Robbe-Grillet's essays enabled them to circulate far beyond 1950s–60s France, and to become standard-bearers for innovative writers across the world.

Nathalie Sarraute's book of essays, *L'Ère du soupçon* (1956), predates Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* by seven years, with the collection's earliest piece published in 1947. There are many conceptual similarities between the two works, with Robbe-Grillet's 'Sur quelques notions périmées', for example, constituting a restatement of Sarraute's earlier ideas shorn of their affective vocabulary. In her essays, Sarraute maps a series of negative affects as part of a wider questioning of traditional literary forms. Readers of her age were, Sarraute argues, 'wary of the brutal and spectacular actions that shape characters with resounding blows', and equally wary of plot, 'which winds itself around the character like a bandage, giving it, at the same time as an appearance of cohesion and life, the rigidity of a mummy'.[30] Correspondingly, the writer, 'when he [sic] considers telling a story and says to himself that he must, under the mocking eye of the reader, bring himself to write: "The Marquise went out at five o'clock," he hesitates, he lacks the heart, no, decidedly, he cannot'.[31] For Sarraute, this pervasive mood of wariness and weariness derives from an encompassing modernity, an 'age of suspicion' ('ère du soupçon') that motivates the creation of new literary forms. Sarraute's account of this 'age of suspicion' dovetails aesthetic and historical analysis: '[w]hat made-up story could vie with that of the confined woman of Poitiers, or with the testimonies from the concentration camps, or from the Battle of Stalingrad?'[32] Here, the 'invented story' is rendered doubly obsolete, both by the transformative experience of twentieth-century history and this experience's equally transformative textual witness. Though Robbe-Grillet's essays also argue along similar lines, Sarraute makes a more sustained effort to describe the confluence of history and representation. As discussed in Chapter 4, this tendency most effectively secured the *nouveau roman* within the domain of a reconfigured form of literary realism:

[30] Nathalie Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon* (2nd edn, Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 79 ['il se méfie des actions brutales et spectaculaires qui façonnent à grandes claques sonores les caractères; et aussi de l'intrigue qui, s'enroulant autour du personnage comme une bandelette, lui donne, en même temps qu'une apparence de cohésion et de vie, la rigidité des momies']. All subsequent quotations are from the second edition cited here.

[31] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 83–4 ['quand il songe à raconter une histoire et qu'il se dit qu'il lui faudra, sous l'œil narquois du lecteur, se résoudre à écrire: «La marquise sortit à cinq heures», il hésite, le cœur lui manque, non, décidément, il ne peut pas'].

[32] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 82 ['Quelle histoire inventée pourrait rivaliser avec celle de la séquestrée de Poitiers ou avec les récits des camps de concentration ou de la bataille de Stalingrad?']. The confined woman of Poitiers was Blanche Monnier (1849–1913), who was held captive in a single dark room by her family for twenty-five years of her adult life. Sarraute's allusion subtly evokes both a traumatic historical event and its subsequent representation, as Monnier's case found enduring fame through André Gide's account, *La Séquestrée de Poitiers* (1930).

indeed, it was in a review of Sarraute's work that Claude Mauriac coined a less famous name for the *nouveau roman*, that of *nouveau réalisme*.[33]

The elliptical style and the dense blurring of voices of Sarraute's novels is explored at greater length in Chapter 3. As a whole, Sarraute's fiction can be understood through her two central—and interrelated—theoretical concepts, that of 'tropisms' and 'sub-conversations'. Deriving from her debut collection of fictions, the biological metaphoric of tropisms presents Sarraute with a language to describe the minute shifts and interactions that for her generate human perception and behaviour:

> those subtle movements, barely perceptible, fleeting, contradictory, evanescent, of faint trembling, of the beginnings of timid calls and recoils, of light shadows that slip by, and whose incessant interplay constitutes the invisible weft of all human relationships and the very substance of our lives.[34]

Sarraute suggests that, given the technologies and epistemologies available to the writer under modernity, a subtler means of description became possible for rendering the human subjects of the novel. A technique of writing sub-conversations is one such means that Sarraute developed for capturing tropisms. In Sarraute's view, novelistic dialogue shows 'the suppleness, the finesse, the variety, the abundance of words' that suggest 'behind them movements more numerous, more subtle, and more secret' than those that can be found 'underneath actions'.[35] Therefore, one of her stated tasks as a novelist was to write—as she saw in the fiction of Ivy Compton-Burnett—'somewhere on the fluctuating boundary that separates conversation from sub-conversation'.[36]

Claude Simon is the final *nouveau romancier* considered in the present work. Among the writers most consistently associated with the *nouveau roman*, Simon reached the highest peak of consecration in the international literary field when he won the Nobel Prize in 1985.[37] One potential reason for Simon's Nobel could be the fact that, compared with the other *nouveaux romanciers*, there is a more

[33] See Claude Mauriac, 'Nathalie Sarraute et le nouveau réalisme', *Preuves*, 7.72 (1957), 76–81.

[34] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 38 ['ces mouvements subtils, à peine perceptibles, fugitifs, contradictoires, évanescents, de faibles tremblements, des ébauches d'appels timides et de reculs, des ombres légères qui glissent, et dont le jeu incessant constitue la trame invisible de tous les rapports humains et la substance même de notre vie'].

[35] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 131–2 ['la souplesse, la finesse, la variété, l'abondance des paroles'; 'derrière elles des mouvements plus nombreux, plus subtils et plus secrets que ceux qu'il peut découvrir sous les actes'].

[36] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 143–4 ['quelque part sur cette limite fluctuante qui sépare la conversation de la sous-conversation'].

[37] Simon's Nobel citation celebrates a writer 'who in his novel [sic] combines the poet's and the painter's creativeness with a deepened awareness of time in the depiction of the human condition': 'Claude Simon: Facts', *The Nobel Prize*, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1985/simon/facts, accessed 8 July 2019.

pressing ethical weight to his fiction. Whereas Sarraute saw the concentration camps and the Battle of Stalingrad as a background to her writing and that of her contemporaries, Simon often used the grave events of twentieth-century history as the material for his fiction. Two particular historical scenes preoccupied Simon: first, the Spanish Civil War, which in different ways sits at the centre of both *Le Palace* (1962) and *Histoire* (1967); and second, the Second World War—*La Route des Flandres* (1960) details the brutal violence experienced by French cavalry charges in that war, while *La Bataille de Pharsale* (1969) weaves together experiences of the 1940s with reflections on Caesar's victory over Pompey at Pharsalus in Greece. Simon's works of the late 1950s and the 1960s developed a baroque style, consisting of lengthy, digressive sentences that take unexpected descriptive and rhythmic turns, modulating between concrete and abstract, literal and figurative; within these sentences, graphic descriptions of sex and violence make for a fiction of extremes. However, by the end of the 1960s, and often in dialogue with the visual arts, Simon became increasingly preoccupied with the writerly and readerly experience of form. Intricately arranged and self-reflexive, novels like *Les Corps conducteurs* (1971) and *Triptyque* (1973) are often more concise at the sentence level in order to direct attention to their overarching structures of arrangement. A meticulous capacity for detail characterizes all of Simon's novels, but these later works become more overwhelmingly phenomenological, as they attend equally to perception *and* its objects, to mediation *and* the mediated.

Ends and Beginnings

Much of the *nouveau roman*'s success in France came from the fact that it was written about by many of the prominent intellectuals of the day. This legitimation came from a diversity of sources. Despite the self-positioning of writers like Robbe-Grillet and Simon against the Sartrean influence in French culture—as well as the willingness of sponsors like Lindon to reinforce this image—the real distinction between the *nouveau roman* and preceding literary tendencies was often less clear-cut. Sarraute published her first essays in *Les Temps modernes*, and Sartre himself wrote a preface to *Portrait d'un inconnu*, where he dubbed Sarraute's novel an 'anti-roman' ('anti-novel')—a label often used in Britain to describe the *nouveau roman*. In the 1960s—albeit once he had broken with Sartre and *Les Temps modernes*—Maurice Merleau-Ponty also wrote a short piece for a Minuit journal, *Médiations*, in praise of Simon's writing.[38] At the other pole of the French

In terms of other Nobel winners associated more peripherally with the *nouveau roman*, Samuel Beckett won in 1969, while a writer of a younger generation who nevertheless emerged in the wake of the *nouveau roman*, J. M. G. le Clézio, won in 2008.

[38] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cinq notes sur Claude Simon', *Médiations*, 4 (1961–2), 5–9.

literary field, Blanchot was an early supporter of Robbe-Grillet's work, while, as further discussed in Chapter 3, the dialogue between the work of Beckett and Pinget was important for both writers.[39]

However, figures from the next intellectual generation more firmly secured the *nouveau roman*'s position in the French literary field. An entire chapter of Lucien Goldmann's *Pour une sociologie du roman* (1964) is dedicated to the *nouveau roman*.[40] Robbe-Grillet and Butor are the starting points for key essays in the development of the narratology of Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, respectively.[41] And Jacques Lacan's only writing on a living author was a piece on Duras's *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*.[42] But these were isolated instances in a reception history that was otherwise dominated by a particular group. As shown in Roger-Michel Allemand's work, the *nouveau roman* was mainly a phenomenon of the 1950s. By the 1960s the cultural centrality of Minuit and the *nouveau roman* had been superseded by that of Éditions du Seuil and its journal *Tel Quel*.[43] But in the process of gaining such prominence, *Tel Quel* continued to foster discussion on the *nouveau roman*.

Roland Barthes was an early supporter of Robbe-Grillet's work, writing two essays, 'Littérature objective' (1954) and 'Littérature littérale' (1955) for Bataille's *Critique* in response to the publication of Robbe-Grillet's first two novels.[44] But in 1958, at the height of the *nouveau roman*'s cultural prominence, Barthes wrote 'Il n'y pas d'école Robbe-Grillet', where he proclaims scathingly that 'nothing is more reassuring than a *named* rebellion', when in fact 'this school does not exist' and the works supposed to exemplify it are in fact 'antinomical'.[45] In some ways, Barthes's essay sounded a death-knell for the *nouveau roman* only a year after its formal invention; ironically, it was *Tel Quel*—the journal with which Barthes would later become associated—that kept the idea of the *nouveau roman* alive. In the decade after Barthes's essay, individual writers associated with the *nouveau roman* would publicly disavow the concept, beginning with Butor who, moving from Minuit to Gallimard in the early 1960s, questioned the seriousness of Robbe-Grillet's theoretical pronouncements.[46] In the foreword to the second edition of *L'Ère du soupçon*, Sarraute only grudgingly accepts the notion that the ideas

[39] See Maurice Blanchot, 'Notes sur un roman', *Nouvelle nouvelle revue française*, 3 (1955), 105–12.

[40] See Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 181–209.

[41] See Gérard Genette, 'Vertige fixé', in *Figures I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 69–90 and Tzvetan Todorov, 'Typologie du roman policier', in Poétique de la prose (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 55–65.

[42] See Jacques Lacan, 'Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras, du *Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*', *Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud–Jean-Louis Barrault*, 52 (1965), 7–15.

[43] See Roger-Michel Allemand, 'Robbe-Grillet à Minuit: *Editoring* et lancement du Nouveau Roman (1955–1963)', *Travaux de littérature*, 15 (2002), 345.

[44] See Roland Barthes, 'Littérature objective', *Critique*, 86–7 (1954), 581–91 and 'Littérature littérale', *Critique*, 100–1 (1955), 820–6.

[45] Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 91. See also Roland Barthes, 'Il n'y a pas d'école Robbe-Grillet', *Arguments*, 6 (1958), 6–8.

[46] See Allemand, 345.

expressed in her essays might 'constitute some of the essential foundations of what is today called the *nouveau roman*'.[47] Similarly, Robert Pinget's postface to his 1968 novel *Le Libera* portrays his own 'connection with what has been called the "nouveau roman" ' as a mere coincidence in the 'formal problem' of the 'quest for a *tone of voice*'.[48]

However, as *Tel Quel*'s world-view crystallized, and its centrality to French literature and philosophy was established, the *nouveau roman* became a convenient fiction within its pages. The *nouveau roman* was both a negative image against which *Tel Quel* could define the literature it sponsored, and a critical space to be monopolized by the very specific *Tel Quel* view of writing. As Patrick ffrench shows, at its inception, *Tel Quel* exhibited a tactical support for the *nouveau roman* as a 'gesture of resistance to orthodoxy', publishing work by the *nouveaux romanciers* and praising these writers in reviews and essays. But, in ffrench's words, as *Tel Quel* began 'to develop a textuality in which the old problematic of real/unreal is redundant, as well as that of objective/subjective', the *nouveau roman* became a foil for the journal's emerging concerns.[49] In a position-marking review of Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* from 1964, Philippe Sollers—*Tel Quel*'s founder and chief writer of both fiction and theory—mischievously denounced Robbe-Grillet on the same terms that Robbe-Grillet used to denounce Sartre and Camus, delineating the failure of Robbe-Grillet's 'critical language' to 'truly break out' of the 'psychologism' it purports to reject.[50]

Tel Quel's most significant piece on the *nouveau roman* was only co-opted retrospectively. In 1963, Michel Foucault wrote the essay 'Distance, aspect, origine' for *Critique*; Foucault's essay was then reprinted in 1968 alongside works by Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Sollers in *Théorie d'ensemble*, a manifesto of sorts for *Tel Quel*. 'Distance, aspect, origine' positions the fiction of the writers who emerged with *Tel Quel* as overtaking and supplanting the *nouveau roman*. Foucault marks the difference between Robbe-Grillet on the one hand, and on the other, Sollers, Jean Thibaudeau, and Jean-Louis Baudry—writers of what would come to be known in some quarters as the *nouveau nouveau roman*. For Foucault, Robbe-Grillet's ambiguous narrative temporality still 'leaves traces which are differences, thus ultimately a system of signs'. Conversely, the *Tel Quel* writers exemplify a literature that is 'in the process of constituting itself as a network—and as a network where neither the truth of the word nor the series of

[47] Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon*, 12 ['constituent certaines bases essentielles de ce qu'on nomme aujourd'hui le «Nouveau Roman»'].

[48] Robert Pinget, *The Libera me Domine*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Calder & Boyars, 1972), 211 (emphasis original). Pinget's postface first appeared in Calder & Boyars's translation, and was only added in French to a Minuit edition in 1984.

[49] Patrick ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel (1960–1983)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 50, 58.

[50] Philippe Sollers, 'A. Robbe-Grillet: Pour un nouveau roman', *Tel Quel*, 18 (1964), 93 ['le langage critique'; 'à sortir vraiment du psychologisme'].

history can function, where the only *a priori* is language'.[51] Though Foucault's essay might have cancelled out the *nouveau roman*'s claim to radicalism in a literary-historical sense, at an analytical level it put forward the terms on which the *nouveau roman*'s critical rehabilitation would be conducted.

Foucault's view of Sollers, Thibaudeau, and Baudry is a version of the *Tel Quel* account of textuality popularized in Anglophone contexts by works like Barthes's 'La Mort de l'auteur' (1967/8). In the work of Jean Ricardou, the *nouveau roman* is apprehended in this way: in Ricardou's most famous phrase, the *nouveau roman* constitutes 'less *the writing of an adventure, than the adventure of writing*'.[52] Ricardou had emerged as a novelist with Minuit in the early 1960s, a living proof of the persistence of the *nouveau roman*. But only a year after the publication of his first novel, he also became a member of the editorial committee of *Tel Quel*, and eventually a contributor to *Théorie d'ensemble*. These two identities converged not just in Ricardou's writing on the *nouveau roman*, but in his activities as a public figure. As Jean H. Duffy and Alastair Duncan note, Ricardou used the occasion, in 1971, of a showcase conference on the *nouveau roman* at Cerisy-la-Salle to subsume the diversity of the writers called *nouveaux romanciers* within a 'coherent group' that solely produced texts which 'subverted the "referential illusion" and the manner in which fictions were generated intratextually by play on words and above all on their signifiers'.[53] In another sign that the *nouveau roman* of the 1950s had been completely eclipsed, Marguerite Duras refused to attend the conference of 1971, using the event as a means of decisively disassociating herself from any such associations. By this point, as ffrench puts it, 'the *nouveau roman* live[d] off the theoretical advances of *Tel Quel*, through the critical input of Ricardou'.[54]

Ricardou's annexation merely confirmed what was always already true about the *nouveau roman*—that it was a virtual rather than an actual phenomenon, a movable signifier that successively served a number of contingent agendas. This is the point of departure for the present study. Although every avant-garde, grouping, or school is guided in part by a set of projective fictions, the *nouveau roman* was distinguished by the fact that, in many ways, such fictions were all it had. The *nouveau roman* emerged at a time saturated at a global level with literary movements brought into existence by a rejection of inherited norms and an embrace of aesthetic innovation. Some of these movements were closely related to or intersected frequently with the *nouveau roman*—not just *Tel Quel*, but the German *Gruppe 47* and the Italian *neoavanguardia* as well. Others were merely analogous

[51] Michel Foucault, 'Distance, Aspect, Origin', trans. Patrick ffrench, in Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, eds, *The Tel Quel Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 101, 103.

[52] Jean Ricardou, *Problèmes du nouveau roman* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 111 (emphasis original) ['moins *l'écriture d'une aventure que l'aventure d'une écriture*'].

[53] Jean H. Duffy and Alastair Duncan, 'Introduction: The Critical Reception of Claude Simon since the 1960s', in Jean H. Duffy and Alastair Duncan, eds, *Claude Simon: A Retrospective* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 2.

[54] ffrench, *The Time of Theory*, 56.

or adjacent to the *nouveau roman* in the loosest sense. In the US alone, for example, the examples of Language poetry or the Black Arts Movement could be put forward. All of these examples exhibited some combination of a collective manifesto, a social manifestation, an institutional home, or a shared political or aesthetic project. Any attempt to understand the *nouveau roman* on such terms falls short. My underlying wager is that this lack of definition in fact gave the *nouveau roman* a privileged position and a particular symbolic power and value in the literary spaces in which it circulated.

New Fictions

But why focus on the British literary field? Scholarly work exists on the *nouveau roman* in a number of other contexts. Éanna Ó Ceallacháin's work on the Italian *neoavanguardia* shows how the *nouveau roman* 'is a constant reference point in debates on new directions for Italian literature around the end of the 1950s'.[55] Similarly, Mario Santana's work on the Spanish American novel in Spain considers the significance of the *nouveau roman* for Hispanophone writers.[56] Nicholas Michael Kramer has conducted important work on the Argentinian novelist and translator of Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute, Juan José Saer.[57] And Liu Kang discusses the Robbe-Grilletian elements of the story 'The April 3rd Incident' (1987) by the Chinese writer Yu Hua, with its 'minute, repetitive descriptions of objects' representative of Yu Hua's turn towards 'unsentimental, unobtrusive realism, even "clinically objective" naturalism'.[58]

In terms of the impact of the *nouveau roman* in Anglophone literary spaces, scholarly work has focused on North America. Loren Glass's work on Grove Press documents much of the *nouveau roman*'s initial circulation in the US.[59] Alice Kaplan's group biography of the 'Paris years' of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Susan Sontag, and Angela Davis, shows how Sontag's embrace of the *nouveau roman* resulted in her first novel, *The Benefactor* (1963), as well as the essays that made up *Against Interpretation* (1966). Kaplan also shows how Davis went to Paris to write a dissertation titled, 'The Novels of Robbe-Grillet: A Study of Method and Meaning', which argued for 'the New Novel and its revolutionary

[55] Éanna Ó Ceallacháin, 'Making it *nouveau*: *Neoavanguardia* Narratives and the French *nouveau roman*', *Italian Studies*, 68 (2013), 277.

[56] See Mario Santana, *Foreigners in the Homeland: The Spanish American New Novel in Spain, 1962–1974* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 91–7.

[57] See Nicholas Michael Kramer, 'Writing from the Riverbank: Juan José Saer and the *Nouveau Roman*', PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009.

[58] Liu Kang, 'The Short-Lived Avant-Garde: The Transformation of Yu Hua', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 63 (2002), 107.

[59] See Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the* Evergreen Review*, and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

potential for understanding contemporary reality'. Even Bouvier Kennedy screened *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* in the White House.[60] More generally, the influence of the *nouveau roman* on the work of writers like Sontag, as well as Donald Barthelme, Raymond Federman, John Hawkes, and Ronald Sukenick, was a feature of the nascent postmodern novel of the 1960s with its sense, as John Barth put it, of 'the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities—by no means necessarily a cause for despair'.[61] The *nouveau roman*'s success in North America was equally indexed negatively. By 1976, Saul Bellow still felt it prudent in his Nobel Prize lecture to attack Robbe-Grillet's ideas about the novel because of their similarities with '[t]otalitarian ideologies'—as shown in Chapters 2 and 4, not an uncommon charge among the *nouveau roman*'s adversaries.[62]

To consider the impact of the *nouveau roman* in the British literary field, then, is to complement neighbouring scholarly endeavours, and to contribute towards a broader mapping of the *nouveau roman*'s global circulation. As such, there is a practical impetus behind the present study to fill a gap in the existing research. But by placing the *nouveau roman* at the centre of the British literary field and looking outwards from there, this book not only recovers an item of literary-historical importance that has been previously under-represented in scholarship, but also provides an alternative account of postwar British culture. This book argues for the signal importance of the *nouveau roman* in Britain in the period of its initial emergence—that is, a 'long sixties' beginning with the *nouveau roman*'s gradual appearance in the British public sphere in 1957, and ending in the early 1970s. My central claim is that, in Britain, the *nouveau roman* became a focal point for discussions of the numerous significations and modalities of the 'new'.

In Britain, discussions of the newness of the *nouveau roman* were most frequently set within two frameworks; these frameworks also guide much of the discussion in the present study. First, the *nouveau roman* became both a conduit and a cipher for debates about Britain's place—and British literature's place—in the world. By showing the prominence of the *nouveau roman* in the British literary field, I demonstrate the fact that readers and writers in Britain—and all mediating agents in between—were deeply engaged with contemporary literary developments at an international level. In this respect, the *nouveau roman* provides one among many examples of postwar British literary culture's entanglements with its global contexts. A list of those other examples would include writers with interests in other currents in French literature and thought—say, with Iris Murdoch and Existentialism or Alexander Trocchi and Situationism. It would also consider the

[60] Alice Kaplan, *Dreaming in French: The Paris Years of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Susan Sontag, and Angela Davis* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 115–17, 177, 179, 227.

[61] John Barth, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: Putnam, 1984), 64.

[62] Saul Bellow, 'Nobel Lecture', *The Nobel Prize*, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1976/bellow/lecture, accessed 8 July 2019.

impact of migration flows on the makeup of British literary culture, taking in the work of Elias Canetti, Doris Lessing, V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Eva Tucker, and Wilson Harris, to name only a few. Relatedly, too, it would register London's importance in brokering literary reputations internationally, for example with a publisher's series like Heinemann's African Writers Series helping to establish the careers of Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (writers who also both spent time in Britain).

Such lists are shored against the ruins of an image that presents postwar British literary culture as narrowly provincial. But one thing that the experience of the *nouveau roman* in Britain reveals is that the cosmopolitan and the parochial image of the postwar British literary field are in fact two sides of the same coin: these images respond in opposing ways to the same historical determinants. To this end, the present work seeks to expand Jed Esty's depiction of midcentury literature in Britain as 'reveal[ing] the inner logic and stylistic contours of a major literary culture caught in the act of becoming minor'.[63] In tracking a one-way traffic stream between the literatures of two former imperial metropoles at the moment of the end of empire, this book proceeds from the assumption that in the period in question, France and Britain were part of a world-system undergoing significant reorientation, where enforced designations of centre and periphery were being challenged, reconfigured, and levelled. The ramifications of this new global situation are evident in all aspects of the *nouveau roman*'s transit to Britain, from its dissemination, to its critical reception, to the manner in which its influence was inscribed in novels that followed its example.

However, modernism is the framework that determines much of the analysis in the present work. Recent scholarship has put paid to the notion that the postwar British literary field was characterized by a total rejection of modernism. Instead, as Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge show, '[m]odernism lingered in the literary imagination as, sometimes ironically, sometimes peevishly, mid-century writing reacted to its influence by adapting some of its elements to new political and fictional ends'.[64] Equally, if modernism itself is an overwhelmingly broad and contested term then, with Andrzej Gąsiorek, in 'acknowledg[ing] that the various writings which get labelled as "modernist" depend for this attribution on critical acts that have complex institutional and theoretical histories', the postwar period reveals itself to be an important moment.[65] Against this background, I propose that the *nouveau roman* became a unique site for discussions about the legacies of

[63] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3.

[64] Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, 'Introduction: British Fiction After Modernism' in Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds, *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

[65] Andrzej Gąsiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 6.

modernism, and specifically the viability of modernist formulations of the new after the Second World War.

The experience of the *nouveau roman* in Britain thus resonates with various definitions of what has come to be defined as 'late modernism'. Though Tyrus Miller sees late modernism as a phenomenon of the late 1920s and the 1930s, as with the writers considered in Miller's work, the *nouveau roman* helped 'mark the lines of flight artists took where an obstacle, the oft-mentioned "impasse" of modernism, interrupted progress on established paths'.[66] Fredric Jameson, meanwhile, sees a later late modernism coming after 1945, wherein, for example, 'Nabokov is unlike Joyce first and foremost by virtue of the fact that Joyce already existed and that he can serve as a model, not to speak of a scripture and the space of some "subject supposed to know", some absolute Other'; the *nouveau roman* often made relations of this sort explicit for agents in the postwar British literary field.[67] However, rather than fully accepting late modernism as a guiding framework, the present study instead stages a tension, where on the one hand, the *nouveau roman*'s imbrication with modernism—both at the stages of production and reception—is worked through in a British context, but on the other, the *nouveau roman* is also invested with the potentiality for transcending modernism as both a theory and an archive of the new.

This tension is the source of the present work's title. The *nouveau roman* provided a focus for discourse in Britain about writing *after* modernism in both an emulative and a temporal sense, indeed sometimes showing the inseparability of the two where modernism was concerned. For many readers and writers, the *nouveau roman* was reducible to high modernism's understanding of the novel as a form; this evaluation was shared by both those who endorsed and those who opposed writers like Butor, Duras, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, and Simon. But equally, for those who saw the modernist novel as a thing of the past, the *nouveau roman* represented a successor—again, either a worthy or an objectionable one. In 1967, the novelist Margaret Drabble famously stated that she would 'rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore'.[68] Too often parsed as side-swipes against the high modernist novel of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, I reveal statements like Drabble's to have a more complex set of significations. Placing the *nouveau roman* back into the scene of debates about the new in postwar Britain, an image of a possible future for the novel emerges that is different to those that have been accepted in existing scholarship.

[66] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

[67] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 200.

[68] Quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 65.

One such possible future for the novel that has begun to gain traction in recent scholarly work has been the idea of a definable avant-garde in the British novel of the 1960s–70s.[69] Citing earlier rejections of this idea, Julia Jordan accounts for its change in critical fortune by way of an increasing distance from the source:

> That we can now allow for a more nuanced picture of the ongoing late-modernist and avant-garde project in [the postwar] era means that we will in future be able to read these writers fairly: not as a fag end or a cul-de-sac, and not as a symptom of a simplistic binary opposition between realism and experimentalism, but as a generative cluster of movements in their own right.[70]

Mention of such an avant-garde usually evokes, among others, the names of Christine Brooke-Rose, Alan Burns, Eva Figes, B. S. Johnson, and Ann Quin. All of these writers are discussed in the present study. At the same time, I make no claim for these writers as a coherent avant-garde. Rather, this book leads from Robert Nye's revealingly reductive comment on Ann Quin's *Berg* (1964) regarding 'the fashionable French new-wavers its author had obviously read in her own publisher's translations and imagined she was imitating'.[71] In arguing for the *nouveau roman* as the preeminent image in Britain of a literary avant-garde in the 1960s, the present study suggests by extension that any parallel avant-garde impulse articulated in this period in Britain would have been positioned, either explicitly or implicitly, in relation to the *nouveau roman*. The *nouveau roman* modelled vanguard aesthetics and the theoretical formulation of such aesthetics for a generation of British writers. But more than this, it also provided a means for these writers to conceive of their diverse literary efforts collectively.

This book is divided into two parts, which also loosely subdivide its chosen period. Part I, 'Circulation', considers the *nouveau roman*'s dissemination and reception in Britain, with a particular emphasis on the years before 1965; Part II, 'Impact', looks at the *nouveau roman*'s literary impact through works that amass after this date. The rationale behind this arrangement is that the writers considered in Part II can be seen to build on the terms and ideas that are surveyed as an emergent context in Part I. In opening with the *nouveau roman*'s dissemination, this book draws extensively on archival and bibliographic sources, with a particular focus on the *nouveau roman*'s main British sponsor, the publisher Calder & Boyars. In moving on, in Chapter 2, to a similarly expansive survey of the *nouveau roman*'s reception in the mainstream British public sphere, another underlying impetus

[69] See Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams, eds, *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)—so far the most comprehensive collection of research of this sort.

[70] Julia Jordan, 'Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde Renaissance' in David James, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 156–7.

[71] Robert Nye, 'Against the Barbarians', *Guardian*, 27 April 1972, 15.

behind the present study should become clear. To date, much archival and documentary-based research on the circulation of postwar avant-garde, experimental, and late modernist literature emphasizes circulation within small networks: for example, scholarly work on the flourishing of innovative poetry in Cambridge in the 1960s (Veronica Forrest-Thomson, J. H. Prynne, etc.) produces an image of a literary phenomenon that replicated the transatlantic 'little magazine' culture of high modernism. While categorically rejecting the crude, value-laden binaries that still haunt modernist studies—popular vs. elite, mass vs. coterie—I am primarily concerned with charting a situation where the conditions of possibility existed for a notionally avant-garde cultural form like the *nouveau roman* to circulate widely and reach a large audience. Such a situation is not without precedent in the New Modernist Studies, and the work of Lawrence Rainey and John Xiros Cooper provides an important precedent for Part I's consideration of the initial dissemination and reception of the *nouveau roman* in Britain.[72] At the same time, Part I also establishes one of the major themes of this book, which is the complex and productive irreducibility of the *nouveau roman* to the history of modernist literature, both in a material and an aesthetic sense. The *nouveau roman* cannot fully be reduced to modernist aesthetics; the same can be said of the history of its dissemination and reception.

Whereas Part I takes the form of two longer survey chapters, Part II consists of four shorter essay-type chapters. These chapters offer a diverse set of snapshots, but each one sees the *nouveau roman* squarely in the centre of the scene. Chapter 3 asks what it was like to read the *nouveau roman* in English in its own time. This chapter looks at the factors that determined the *nouveau roman*'s translation into English, and the particular meanings that the *nouveau roman* accrued in Britain in the process of translation. The main case study here is that of Nathalie Sarraute and her friend and chosen translator, Maria Jolas. More than any other figures associated with the *nouveau roman*, Sarraute and Jolas had strong personal links with the culture of interwar Parisian modernism. Consequently, Chapter 3 shows how the very linguistic texture of Jolas's translations situated Sarraute's texts within a specific modernist lineage—that of *transition*, the influential magazine that Jolas ran between the wars with her husband, Eugene. Similar questions of modernist lineage are raised in Chapter 4. But these questions are shown to have been put forward less peaceably, with the *nouveau roman* becoming the source of a dispute about the constitution of novelistic realism. This chapter looks to a familiar scene, that of the campaign against so-called 'experiment' in postwar British literary culture, as pursued most aggressively by the circle around C. P. Snow. By considering a range of novels that invoke the *nouveau roman* at the level of

[72] See Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

content rather than form, Chapter 4 returns the *nouveau roman* to the centre of one of the postwar British literary field's defining debates. In doing so, this chapter suggests that one of the reasons for the *nouveau roman*'s appeal for many readers and writers in Britain was the possibilities it offered for a reconfigured type of realism, decoupled from the aesthetic and political conservatism with which figures like Snow had imbued the concept in the years following the Second World War.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the direct literary impact of the *nouveau roman* in the British literary field by looking at novels written in dialogue with Alain Robbe-Grillet's and Michel Butor's fiction. Chapter 5 takes novels by Brian W. Aldiss, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Denis Williams, and shows how these writers took up and modified Robbe-Grillet's *chosisme*. This chapter foregrounds the end of empire as the *nouveau roman*'s determining historical context—in particular its associations with the Algerian War of Independence. Aldiss, Brooke-Rose, and Williams portray this context as inseparable from their Robbe-Grilletian borrowings. Accordingly, these writers all use Robbe-Grillet's innovations with narrative form as a means of reflecting on the end of empire in a way more explicit than Robbe-Grillet did himself. In Chapter 6, novels by Eva Figes, B. S. Johnson, and Alan Sheridan are shown to align with Butor's earlier development of the novel of the 'project'. All of the works considered in this chapter put pressure on the received function of the novel as a form so that—to a range of different ends—they can solicit new forms of readerly affect.

In a different way to the previous discussions in the book, Chapter 6 concludes with the question of the *nouveau roman*'s periodization, showing how Butor, Figes, Johnson, and Sheridan resist recuperation on the terms of the postmodern novel. Finally, then, I shift my focus so as to reflect on the *nouveau roman*'s function in the British literary field as an evasive literary-historical measure, an engaging if insecure image of futurity for the novel, even when inscribed in the past. To do so, my Conclusion looks at the contemporary literary scene, and considers the case for the *nouveau roman*'s continued relevance.

'The label means nothing to me', Robert Pinget said of the *nouveau roman* in a British newspaper interview of 1962:

> I cannot imagine what kind of connection could exist between, for example, Robbe-Grillet and myself. Since we all appealed to the taste of our publisher, Jerome Lindon [sic], one is forced to believe that there is some connection. But what? It was a useful label to introduce us to Britain and America but it should not go on much longer. I think the whole idea should be dropped now.[73]

The British literary field answered Pinget's question by working out these connections for itself, both in order to define the *nouveau roman*, and to connect the

[73] Peter Lennon, 'Architruc', *Guardian*, 22 June 1962, 9.

nouveau roman to its own concerns. Pinget's comments also resonate strongly with the context in which they were uttered because of their affective force: in Britain, the *nouveau roman* became a magnet for much broader discussions about aesthetics and politics. The *nouveau roman* facilitated a rich and extensive discourse about the legacies of modernism and the avant-garde, about forms of newness (aesthetic and otherwise), and about the definition of literary culture beyond a national frame. Many postwar writers developed their positions on such matters in primary dialogue with the *nouveau roman*. As such, if Pinget's wish was eventually granted and the 'idea' of the *nouveau roman* was 'dropped', then by reanimating the underlying historical conditions of such a wish, this book hopes to pick the *nouveau roman* up again.