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THEME AND TECHNIQUE IN THE NOVELS OF CLAUDE SIMON

by

LYNDA HARPER KELLY

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Thesis Director's signature:

Houston, Texas

May 1974
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Lynda Harper Kelly
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LE VENT:</strong> PROLEGOMENA TO A FUTURE NOVEL.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative technique</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interrelation of theme and technique</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax: &quot;l'ordre et le désordre&quot;.</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The novel as &quot;tentative de restitution&quot;.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES:</strong> &quot;LE FOISONNANT ET RIGOUREUX DÉSORDRE DE LA MÉMOIRE&quot;</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The material world of nature.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in nature.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technique: the eye and the mind</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and the image.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From relativism to formalism.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The psychic or affective ensemble in memory</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques of association:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contiguity</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Detemporalization of the narrative:
Discontinuity and Contiguity. . . . 118
Parentheses . . . . . . . . . . 119
The present participle. . . . . . . 124
Phenomenological description . . . 129
A painter's vision . . . . . . . . . . 132
Composition: the mode of arrangement of images into an esthetic whole . . . 135
Composition and the expression of Weltanschauung . . . . . . 139
The novel as verbal composition. . . . 146
Toward an art of autonomous structure . . . . . . . . . . 150
A timeless world of formal harmonies . . . . . . . . . . 154

CHAPTER III  HISTOIRE: MIMESIS AND AUTONOMOUS STRUCTURE, A DELICATE BALANCE. . . . . . . . . . 157
A myopic vision . . . . . . . . . . 160
Narrative technique:
Techniques of association . . . . . . . 165
"Spatial" form . . . . . . . . . . 176
The psychic or affective ensemble . . . 182
The family, microcosm of life. . . . . 183
The world: "la vaste terre le monde fabuleux fastueux bigarré inépuisable" . . . 189
Composition: the orchestration of themes .......................... 203
Time, the image, and the self .............................. 221
L'ordre et le désordre ................................. 226

CONCLUSION ................................. 230

NOTES ........................................ 250

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................... 274
ABBREVIATIONS

We have used the following abbreviations for titles of Simon's novels, all of which were published by Les Editions de Minuit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>La Corde Raide</td>
<td>1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Le Vent</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L'H</td>
<td>L'Herbe</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>La Route des Flandres</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Le Palace</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Histoire</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPh</td>
<td>La Bataille de Pharsale</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Frank
INTRODUCTION
...je m'apercevais que ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer, puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur.

Proust, Le Temps retrouvé

How will the writer translate his vision? His technique, like that of any artist, will be determined by the preoccupations of his time. The obvious example which immediately comes to mind is that of Emile Zola who, influenced by the theories of the biologist and physician Claude Bernard and imbued with the scientific fervor of his time, wrote novels which pretended to demonstrate the experimental method and to rival in truth documentary case histories. For another example we may turn to the intellectual atmosphere in fifteenth-century Florence which led to the discovery of linear perspective and its application in the art of painting:

Rather than remaining a generalized interest in this world, however, the naturalism of the Florentine 15th century took a noticeable scientific turn. Careful observation of natural phenomena and the will to reproduce objects as the eye sees them is evidence of an empirical attitude; dissection of cadavers in order to see the structure of the human body reveals a spirit of free inquiry; and
the study of mathematics so as to put objects into proper perspective involves a new concept of space.¹

Or we may recall the important discoveries toward the end of the last century about optics and light which led to a style of painting appropriately called impressionism in which the artist sought to capture the fleeting impression of light in a given scene at a transitory moment in time. Emphasis was placed on the recording of an evanescent moment of visual experience. The invention of photography near the middle of the nineteenth century also had a profound impact on the orientation of the art of painting. The invention of the camera provided an added stimulus to the trend away from naturalistic representation which began in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Our present study focuses on the evolution in technique of a contemporary literary artist working in a specific art form, namely the novel. We propose to study the evolution of narrative technique in three novels of Claude Simon published over a ten-year period from 1957 to 1967--Le Vent, La Route des Flandres, and Histoire--in order to follow the path of development of a literary formalism with parallels in modern abstract painting. Both in interviews and in allusions within his novels, Simon has invited analogies between his literary creations and the art of painting. His early training as a painter is well-known as are his
frequently expressed regrets on not having succeeded in that much-loved vocation: "La peinture—c'est ce que j'aime le plus au monde. Je suis un peintre râté." Since this writer so frequently alludes to the plastic arts and especially to the art of painting, we have chosen to explore the direction in which his art has evolved in the light of trends in the sister art of painting in our time.

Particularly useful to our attempt to define the evolution of Simon's technique and to understand that evolution in terms of the broader context of art in our time has been the influential study of Wilhelm Worthinger Abstraktion und Einfühlung or Abstraction and Empathy which, upon its timely publication in 1908, had a profound impact on the minds of artists who were "discovering" primitive art. Worringer's book saw successive editions, a fact which, in the author's own words, proved its relevance to the thinking of artists at that time. In 1910 he wrote that "the most recent movement in art has shown my problem to have gained an immediate topicality, not only for art historians, whose concern is with the evaluation of the past, but also for practicing artists striving after new goals of expression." In what way did the work of the so-called "Fauves"--Dufy, Matisse, Derain, Rouault--and of Picasso and Braque, the pioneers of the Cubist movement in the first decade of our century, offer a splendid confirmation of Worthinger's ideas?
Before we can answer this question we must define Worringen's thesis which, in essence, is that the will to abstraction in art is a recurrent historical phenomenon having nothing to do with inferior artistic skill on the part of those who create such forms but rather to be understood in terms of different psychic needs which in various historical periods people seek to satisfy through different forms of art.

By the feeling about the world I mean the psychic state in which, at any given time, mankind found itself in relation to the cosmos, in relation to the phenomena of the external world. This psychic state is disclosed in the quality of psychic needs, i.e. in the constitution of the absolute artistic volition, and bears outward fruit in the work of art, to be exact in the style of the latter, the specific nature of which is simply the specific nature of the psychic needs.

Abstract art tends to be produced by a society whose fundamental attitude toward nature is one of apprehension, a society, in other words, which does not possess a sense of harmony with the external world. On the other hand, naturalistic art is the creation of a society which does possess a sense of confidence in nature and of a harmonious relationship with the external world. Since the latter culture finds the vision of the external world to be comforting and inspiring, it tends to reproduce the forms of nature with
exactitude in its art. Naturalism, according to Worringer, is not motivated by the impulse to imitation per se, although this mimetic quality broadly distinguishes it from abstract forms. Naturalism to these people is primarily a mode of inducing a more intense feeling of participation in the organic world. Abstract, formalized art, on the contrary, expresses the aspirations of a people for a stability and harmony which they do not perceive in the world around them.

Tormented by the entangled inter-relationship and flux of the phenomena of the outer world, such peoples were dominated by an immense need for tranquillity. The happiness they sought from art did not consist in the possibility of projecting themselves into the things of the outer world, of enjoying themselves in them, but in the possibility of taking the individual thing of the external world out of its arbitrariness and seeming fortuitousness, of eternalising it by approximation to abstract forms and, in this manner, of finding a point of tranquillity and a refuge from appearances. Their most powerful urge was, so to speak, to wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context, out of the unending flux of being, to purify it of all its dependence upon life, i.e. of everything about it that was arbitrary, to render it necessary and irrefragable, to approximate it to its absolute value. 6

According to Worringer, the urge to abstraction "stands at the beginning of every art and in the case of certain peoples at a high level of culture remains the dominant tendency, whereas with the Greeks and other Occidental peoples, for
example, it slowly recedes, making way for the urge to empathy." In the history of Western civilization the florescence of rationalism induced a confident sense of ability to cope with, indeed to dominate, external phenomena. Such was not the attitude toward the cosmos of some highly developed Eastern cultures:

The civilised peoples of the East, whose more profound world-instinct opposed development in a rationalistic direction and who saw in the world nothing but the shimmering veil of Maya, they alone remained conscious of the unfathomable entanglement of all the phenomena of life, and all the intellectual mastery of the world-picture could not deceive them as to this. 8

The pertinence of Worringen's thesis to the evolution towards abstraction of art in our time is fully appreciated when we consider that the birth of our century coincided more or less with a diminishing of faith in reason. "Sa mère mourut en lui donnant naissance: en 1900 la Raison Universelle, qui avait protégé les siècles précédents, cessait de représenter le pôle maternel des idées et des arts," affirms R. M. Alberès at the outset of his *L'Aventure intellectuelle du XXe siècle.* 9 An important study of existentialism maintains that this philosophy and modern art go hand in hand:

.. Not only do the two treat similar themes, but both start off from the
sense of crisis and of a break in the Western tradition. Modern art has discarded the traditional assumptions of rational form. The modern artist sees man not as the rational animal, in the sense handed down to the West by the Greeks, but as something else. Reality, too, reveals itself to the artist not as the Great Chain of Being, which the tradition of Western rationalism had declared intelligible down to its smallest link and in its totality, but as much more refractory: as opaque, dense, concrete, and in the end inexplicable. At the limits of reason one comes face to face with the meaningless; and the artist today shows us the absurd, the inexplicable, the meaningless in our daily life.10

Without reference to Worringer, but supporting his ideas, this same study asserts that the prime difference between artistic form in East and West stems from a different philosophic outlook on the world, between the Western tradition that the cosmos is, finally, intelligible and the Oriental attitude of a meaningless universe.

Our century has witnessed a total about-face in the prevailing Western attitude toward the external world. The separation between man and the world is reflected in the writings of Albert Camus and of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the latter's La Nausée, for instance, the protagonist, Roquentin, discovers in a kind of epiphany that the material world is intrinsically alien to human consciousness. Of course, this theme is reflected in the thinking of Alain Robbe-Grillet who
has accused Sartre and Camus of finding this separation to
be tragic and has called for putting an end to anthropomorphism.

Ironically, our penetration of more and more of
nature's secrets and our increasing mastery of her forces have
not endowed us with hope and confidence. The stupendous
progress of science at the beginning of our century, instead
of fostering an attitude of optimism, inseminated in the minds
of many intellectuals a sense of doubt and frustration at the
prospect of endless vistas of knowledge suddenly opened up and
yet to be explored:

L'atome? Dès que vous aurez découvert
l'atome, il vous éclatera au nez. Dès
que vous aurez découvert l'éther, il
s'évaporera. Dès que vous descendrez
à la base réelle d'un phénomène, il se
dissoudra en mille éléments qui
seront tous de nouveaux problèmes.
Et plus de problèmes vous résoudrez,
plus il en surgira... il

D. H. Lawrence thus voiced the pessimism of many of his con-
temporaries in the face of the new advances of science and of
the myth of progress through technological advancement. The
crisis of reason with which our century began can be seen to
dominate the intellectual temper of the age:

On pourra dire qu'elle commença en
1896, lorsque Brunetière proclama dans
un article célèbre la 'faillite de la
science.' .....La crise de la Raison
Universelle n'est pas, dans l'histoire
des idées, un fait du début du XXe
Indeed, in the novels of Claude Simon, as we shall see in detail later, the bankruptcy of reason and the depreciation of logic are fundamental themes. The world-view reflected in these novels is not one of a stable, harmonious universe, but of a world whose underlying principles are chaos and flux. The novels of Simon are expressive of the *Zeitgeist*. It is within the context of the decline of rationalism and the rise of an anti-intellectualism that we must seek to understand the evolution of modern art and the most recent trends in fiction.

Some years before Wilhelm Worringer formulated his thesis concerning the psychology of abstract as opposed to naturalistic art, steps were being taken by a French painter named Edouard Manet which would eventually lead to an abstract form of painting. Despite his fundamental adherence to naturalism, Manet did bring about a new orientation in painting by giving the medium more importance than the subject:

> When we turn to Manet's picture, we discover something very strange: what we see in the mirror is not the young woman's likeness but a bevy of brush-strokes, loosely knit, rough, thick—we see paint. Here is a sign of a rebellion so momentous that it was to transform the course of art: since the Renaissance, even since the late Middle
Ages, painting had been content to represent the subject; henceforth it would demand to present itself, to exist on its own. In 1890, more than a decade after Manet painted Before the Mirror, the artist Maurice Denis summed up this drastic reversal of priorities in the relationship between the subject depicted and the act of depicting: 'Remember that a picture—before being a war-horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote—is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.' This revolution was brought about by Manet.13

What Manet initiated and his successors pursued was an effort to give the language of painting its own independent existence:

All painting, to be sure, is basically an operation performed on the two-dimensional canvas. Until Manet, however, artists had sought to disguise its two-dimensionality and to persuade us, by means of such devices as perspective, modeling and shadowing, that viewers had access to that essential platform on which the world of reality rests, the third dimension. Manet prevents the spectator's eye from plunging into make-believe depth; instead, he forces us to dwell on the surface of the picture. Thus, the artist forces the viewer to see Olympia not only as a naked girl, but also as patches of paint laid on the surface of the canvas.14

The importance of this revolution has been summarized by André Malraux: "....a language independent of the thing portrayed—as specific, sui generis, as music. True, none of
the great painters had been unaware that this language existed, but all had given it a subordinate place. Thus to think of painting as an end in itself involved a new conception of the whole function of painting."\textsuperscript{15}

Literature was also affected by this new orientation. Poetry was first to abandon discursive language and organization: "Poetry shared in the great adventure and was similarly transformed; with Baudelaire it utterly discarded the 'story,' though traditionalist poetry continued wallowing for years in narrative and dramatic lyrics."\textsuperscript{16} Although it would be many years before the novel would follow suit, Flaubert seems to have envisioned a radically "new" novel when he dreamed of a work about "nothing":

\begin{quote}
Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. ..............C'est pour cela qu'il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains sujets et qu'on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se posant au point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir les choses.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

It was Flaubert's great contemporary Baudelaire who, advocate of the imagination as mainspring of artistic creation, became
the herald of art to come:

Dans ces derniers temps nous avons entendu dire de mille manières différentes: 'Copiez la nature; ne copiez que la nature. Il n'y a pas de plus grande jouissance ni de plus beau triomphe qu'une copie excellente de la nature.' Et cette doctrine, ennemie de l'art, prétendait être appliquée non seulement à la peinture, mais à tous les arts, même au roman, même à la poésie.18

In support of this esthetic of imagination, Baudelaire praised the work of Manet, Daumier, and particularly of Delacroix who became a symbol for the freedom of the artist to express his own vision instead of imitating nature according to the conventions of the Neo-Classic painters of the time. This glorification of imagination, of the primacy of the artist's personal vision, gave rise to what Herbert Read has called "a progressive emancipation of art from any external necessity (such as representing or copying 'nature')"19 and eventually led to the development of an art of internal necessity, of art conceived as autonomous structure.

To an interviewer who once asked him to which painters he owed the most, Simon replied, "A Cézanne, pour cette espèce de reconstruction de la nature qu'il a tentée dans toute son oeuvre; et à Poussin, dont je suis passionné."20

The significance of this statement is enhanced when we recall Cézanne's ambition of "doing Poussin over entirely from
nature." Like Paolo Ucello, Piero della Francesca, and Poussin before him, Cézanne was interested in construction and formality of design. Although he always advocated a fidelity to nature, he believed that the artist has the right to deviate from photographic truth in the interest of simplification and structuralization of nature or to suit a desired arrangement or pattern.

Cézanne's purpose was twofold. He wanted to paint nature convincingly so as to reveal its basic structures and their relationships in space. Seldom did he abandon nature and paint solely from his imagination or fail to create a solid, well-balanced form. His second aim was to convey the unequivocal message that his pictures were flat, painted canvases, not imitations of reality.²¹

Of the difference between Cézanne and the Impressionists, Herbert Read has written:

Cézanne's temperament was fundamentally classical. He was for structure at any cost, that is to say, for a style rooted in the nature of things and not in the individual's subjective sensations, which are always 'confused.'²²

It is no coincidence that La Bataille de Pharsale by Simon contains descriptions of paintings by Uccello and della Francesca nor that he has done a monograph for Skira entitled Orion aveugle after a favorite painting by Poussin. A title once entertained for the novel Les Corps conducteurs, Simon
confided to us, was 'Construction ou les espaces infinis' referring simultaneously to the structural quality of the book and to a passage from Pascal: 'le silence de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.' Simon is an artist intensely aware of the dialectic between order and disorder and of the artist's drama in imposing form on the chaos of existence. Cézanne's famous advice to a young painter to see in nature the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone reflects his goal to impose and create order out of complex, disorderly nature. Simon's mature style likewise reflects a will to impose composition and architectural form on the chaos and confusion of perception of the world, of consciousness. We shall see how the concept of design on a flat surface adopted from Cézanne by the Post-Impressionists, the Cubists, and later abstract painters finds a parallel in literature as exemplified in the novels of Claude Simon.

From Le Vent to Histoire a progression is visible from a conception of the novel as mimesis to a conception of the novel as autonomous linguistic structure. The evolution of narrative technique in the aforementioned novels of Simon coincides more or less with the evolution of "objective" modes of narration in twentieth-century fiction. These narrative methods represent, of course, the final stages of the concept of the novel as mimesis. The use of a first-person witness narrator in Le Vent and of direct interior
monologue in _La Route des Flandres_ repeats techniques already developed and widely used in the fiction of our century as alternatives to the omniscient narrator in the interest of a more convincing illusion of "reality" or, as it is commonly called, of verisimilitude. In the novels of Simon, however, these techniques have an ironic function, for the narrator in his quest for "reality" is unable to reach any other conclusion than one of extreme skepticism. _Le Vent_ and _La Route des Flandres_ are a _mise en question_ of the novel as mimesis. For even when, as in _La Route des Flandres_, the point of view is confined to a single consciousness in the process of reconstructing his own past (not invention, but memory: hence, illusion of "reality"), the patent unreliability of memory raises a fundamental doubt as to the possibility of ever knowing the "truth" about one's own past. The impossibility of discrimination between "reality" and illusion or memory and imagination leads to the implicit conclusion that even the most objective techniques are but artifice and that the novel can never be a "mirror of reality." This fundamental skepticism leads to solipsism and finally to a concept of the narrator as novelist and of the novel as a verbal construct composed of, as Simon has often phrased it, "ce qui est présent dans l'esprit au moment de l'écriture."

In the creation of such a novel the medium has ascendancy over the subject, which constitutes a parallel with
the evolution of modern painting. Simon has repeatedly explained that for him words actually determine the content of the novel:

Les images pour moi viennent des mots, de l'écriture. Tout se passe au niveau de la feuille de papier. Ce qui pousse un écrivain c'est l'envie d'écrire—comme un peintre a envie de peindre avant même de savoir ce qu'il va écrire ou ce qu'il va peindre. Novalis dit 'Un auteur a nécessairement pour but d'être un auteur.'

So it is that the writer, in the case of Simon, has the impression of being "un accoucheur." Concerning the role in the creation of his novels of the dynamics of language, Simon has observed:

Ajoutons ce mystérieux travail qui se fait presque à l'insu de l'écritain, cette dynamique du langage, des mots qui en entraînent d'autres. Jean Ricardou, dans une étude d'une pénétrante lucidité, a remarquablement analysé ce phénomène:

'L'étroitesse du rapport scriptural, ...entraîne cette conséquence que parler d'un objet c'est déjà, en quelque manière, en évoquer un autre, ou encore décrire l'un c'est amener l'autre à la pensée. L'écriture tend alors à se développer selon ses propres lois, à gauchir l'imagination et la pensée de l'écritain, à secrèter sa matière propre et sa propre orientation, à constituer son spécifique univers scriptural.'

Nous voilà donc très loin de la révolution espagnole (du moins en tant que phénomène historique ou social dont sont d'ailleurs seuls qualifiés
pour en parler les historiens ou les sociologues). 25

The writer does not begin with a predetermined subject to represent but rather allows the act of writing itself to suggest to him the themes of his work. As for the modern painter, the act of execution is as important as the ultimate creation. With reference to his own work Simon often cites a remark made to him by the painter Raoul Dufy: "Il faut savoir abandonner le tableau qu'on voulait faire au profit de celui qui se fait." 26 The act of writing, furthermore, is a kind of self-discovery, for the unforeseen relations disclosed by the dynamics of language are significant: "En écrivant—et en écrivant seulement—il découvre un monde—et se découvre." 27

It would be erroneous to conclude that Simon conceives of the writer's role as one of utter passivity. It would be equally incorrect, as our study will show, to think of him as a naive writer who has nothing to say. A careful study of the texts of Simon's novels reveals, particularly in those works which follow L'Herbe, a deliberate and conscious composition or esthetic design. The images to which the dynamics of language give rise are artfully arranged for esthetic and expressive ends. Of the images which present themselves to consciousness, the writer makes a selection, and upon them he imposes an order: "...entre ces images, je ne prends pas
n'importe laquelle. Si vous me demandez quels sont mes
critères, je vous répondrai comme tout à l'heure: des
critères formels dans tous les sens du terme. Il s'agit
toujours de faire une œuvre qui se tienne debout.\textsuperscript{28} The
order of arrangement of these images, Simon has explained
numerous times, obeys two laws: first, the relation of images
by "affinités sensorielles" or more precisely "par les
qualités particulières de ces événements qui dans notre
mémoire les associe étroitement" and secondly, the "nécessités
formelles de l'œuvre."\textsuperscript{29} The inner logic of the work of
art is its composition as an architectural whole. Simon has
explained this structural aspect of his novels:

La logique intérieure, c'est la logique
formelle. C'est par des similitudes, des
parentés de formes (quelquefois, comme
l'a souligné Lacan, de simples assonances)
que les images se regroupent; ce sont
des nécessités de formes qui commandent
leur organisation dans l'œuvre. Comme
je l'ai dit tout à l'heure à propos de
la table, il faut qu'elle tienne debout
sur ses quatre pieds. Il faut que
l'œuvre fasse un tout, qu'elle se com-
pose, qu'elle se referme, qu'elle
s'architecture; que les différentes
parties répondent les unes aux autres.
Pour \textit{La Route des Flandres} j'ai mis
très longtemps à trouver le plan. Le
livre commence par la mort du Capitaine
et elle finit également par la mort du
Capitaine. C'est donc une composition
symétrique.\textsuperscript{30}

The composition of \textit{La Route des Flandres}, as Simon goes on to
explain, is far more complex, but the important idea contained
in the preceding excerpt is that of the emphasis placed on composition and construction. As we pursue the study of the interrelationship of theme and technique in the novels, we shall see how through the composition—the arrangement of images—"meaning," in terms of a view of life or world-view, is revealed. "Forme et fond sont une seule et même chose," Simon is fond of saying. The Greek word for "idée," he pointed out to us in an interview, means "forme."

Just as painting in its evolution away from mimesis discarded the third dimension and achieved a flattening of pictorial space, so the novels of Simon evolve toward an elimination of depth through the gradual restriction of narrative viewpoint to the myopic focus of a present consciousness in which past and present interfuse on a single plane of time. Clearly parallel to the surface compositions of modern painting are the formal patterns of images within an anonymous present consciousness. In his article "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Joseph Frank explains the significance of the disappearance of depth in non-naturalistic art:

Presenting objects in depth gives them a time-value, or perhaps we should say accentuates their time-value, because it connects them with the real world in which events occur; and since time is the very condition of that flux and change which, as we have seen, man wants to escape from when he is in a condition of disequilibrium with nature,
Henri Matisse  Coffee Pot, Carafe, and Fruit Dish, 1909.
non-naturalistic styles shun the dimension of depth and prefer the plane. 31

Citing the ideas of Worringer, Frank maintains that the elimination of depth is symptomatic of a change in man's view of his relation to the cosmos. Time, flux, and a vision of a world in mutation are themes which permeate Simon's fiction.

The flattening of space in modern art is accompanied by what has been called the flattening out of values. Small, seemingly insignificant objects, such as the cake of soap in Bloom's pocket in Ulysses, may receive unprecedented attention in the modern novel. 32 This same trend may be observed in Simon's fiction in which ordinary objects, such as a cigar box in Le Palace, are described in minute detail. This flattening out of values is well illustrated in Matisse's "Cafetière, Carafe et Comptoir" from the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. Background and foreground dissolve into a single plane so that the entire image appears to be parallel with the front plane of the canvas. The bold arabesque patterns of the background are at least as important as the main objects—a copper coffee pot, a green glass bottle, and a white compote filled with fruit. Significantly, this painting dates from 1909, the year following Worringer's publication of his ideas concerning the psychological condition underlying the prevalence of abstract art: "The less mankind has succeeded, by virtue of its spiritual cognition, in
entering into a relation of friendly confidence with the appearance of the outer world, the more forceful is the dynamic that leads to the striving after this highest abstract beauty." The return to art conceived as autonomous structure is seen by Worringer as a desire to wrest the art object out of the flux or whirlwind of appearances:

Not that primitive man sought more urgently for regularity in nature, or experienced regularity in it more intensely; just the reverse: it is because he stands so lost and spiritually helpless amidst the things of the external world, because he experiences only obscurity and caprice in the interconnection and flux of the phenomena of the external world, that the urge is so strong in him to divest the things of the external world of their caprice and obscurity in the world-picture and to impart to them a value of necessity and a value of regularity. To employ an audacious comparison: it is as though the instinct for the 'thing in itself' were most powerful in primitive man. Increasing spiritual mastery of the outside world and habituation to it mean a blunting and dimming of this instinct. Only after the human spirit has passed, in thousands of years of its evolution, along the whole course of rationalistic cognition, does the feeling for the 'thing in itself' reawaken in it as the final resignation of knowledge. That which was previously instinct is now the ultimate product of cognition. Having slipped down from the pride of knowledge, man is now just as lost and helpless vis-à-vis the world-picture as primitive man...
The "thing in itself," obviously, may be the modern painting in which, as Manet said, "paint is paint," or it may be the verbal construct: "En littérature, en art, les seuls 'rapports réels' d'une peinture sont ceux qui s'établissent entre la réalité des éléments qui la composent: couleurs, masses, mots ou groupes de mots."35

Having completed his exposition of the psychological roots of spatial form in modern literature, Joseph Frank warns that it does not suffice to remain on the level of formal analysis, for, as Worringer observed, "The true psychology of style begins when the formal value is shown to be an accurate expression of the inner value, in such a way that duality of form and content cease to exist."36 The attention devoted in our study to thematic analysis is not gratuitous but is intended to disclose the meaningful correspondance of theme and technique. Our aim is to show how thematic analysis illuminates our understanding of the evolution of form in Simon's novels. The themes recurrent throughout these novels constitute a world-view which is essentially one of alienation from nature. Underlying Simon's creative effort is a fundamental obsession: that of the dialectic in human existence between matter and mind, between the material world of nature to which man belongs and human consciousness. The universe of matter is abundantly present in these novels. Each of the four elements--earth, air, fire,
and water—is seen to participate in an unending process of matter in mutation. The eternal cycles of creation and destruction are concretely evident in images of the womb and of human decrepitude or in images of mutilated corpses of men and animals strewn along roads in Flanders amid the luxuriance of nature's vernal rebirth.

The eternal mutation of matter is symbolic of the march of Time. Time is concretized in these novels: "et ce corps prêt à tomber en poussière, si familier du temps qu'il semble le temps lui-même" (L'H, p. 12). Time in the natural world is an eternal recommencing: "le temps, l'éternel recommencement, l'éternel cheminement de la matière inerte, insensible, tournant dans l'infini, se déplaçant avec cette foudroyante et implacable lenteur ..." (V, p. 198). On a cosmic scale nature pursues "cette sorte de paisible, d'irrésistible recommencement, de pulsation mystérieuse, majestueuse, féerique, avec l'immuable succession de ses phases immuables" (V, p. 54). Amid this world of ceaseless flux man longs for some form of stability: "jusqu'à ce que le monde hasardeux et compliqué cesse de tournoyer sans trêve et sans bruit, s'organise, s'ordonne et s'immobilise enfin" (V, p. 148). In the formal relations of his creations, the artist, as Wilhelm Worringuer maintained, can find a stability, harmony, and order unseen in nature.

Consciousness differentiates man from the material
world to which he is inextricably bound, but does not endow him with the intellectual superiority which, since Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal, has been the keystone of Western humanism. Man has an insatiable "appétit de logique," but the chaos of life eludes his desire to comprehend the world. It seems that "seul notre esprit, ou plutôt notre orgueil, nous enjoint sous peine de folie et en dépit de toute evidence de trouver à tout prix une suite logique de causes et d'effets......." (V, p. 10). The world is opaque to man's thirst for rational comprehension. "L'absurde," said Albert Camus, "n'est ni dans l'homme ni dans le monde mais dans leur présence commune."

Instead of adopting a moral bias in the face of the world's opaqueness, Simon sees in consciousness a possibility for re-creation of the world through the work of art. "La nature," said Baudelaire quoting Delacroix, "n'est qu'un dictionnaire."37 Consciousness for Simon is both man's scourge and his salvation, for not only is it responsible for his anxiety in the face of an incomprehensible world, for his suffering, and for his sense of a tragic destiny, but, on the other hand, through the eye (retina) and the mind (memory) the artist can transform and hence transcend nature in the creation of the work of art. A significant passage in Le Vent alludes to this dual role of consciousness:
sa rétine, oui, sa mémoire, oui aussi (parce que l'homme est sans doute autre chose que de la matière: peut-être pas beaucoup plus, mais quand même un petit quelque chose de plus, juste pour son malheur, car mieux vaudrait pour lui qu'il n'ait pas plus de capacité de souffrance qu'un appareil photographique, qu'on puisse à tout moment et aussi souvent que l'on voudrait enlever le couvercle, retirer la bobine impressionnée, la jeter et la remplacer par une vierge, et qu'il recommence à fonctionner, armement et déclen, avec la même mécanique et neuve indifférence), puisque bien plus tard elle (sa mémoire) pouvait tout restituer...... pp. 49-50

Through the creative act the artist can elude the temptation to obliterate consciousness—and thereby suffering—in death and reintegration into inert matter. Gauthier, the derelict artist in Le Tricheur, in renouncing the creative act, forfeits his salvation and symbolically allows himself to tumble from his bicycle to the earth. Sleep and physical love appear in these novels as means whereby consciousness is temporarily eclipsed: "cette paisible et illusoire sensation d'immobilité ou plutôt d'immuabilité cherchée dans le ventre du sommeil" (L'H, p. 111). By contrast to the endless travail of nature symbolized in Le Vent by the incessant blowing of the wind—"force déchaînée, sans but, condamnée à s'épuiser sans fin, sans espoir de fin, gémissant la nuit en une longue plainte"—death may appear a blessing: "comme si elle se lamentait, envoyait aux hommes endormis, aux créatures passagères et
périssables leur possibilité d'oubli, de paix : le privilège de mourir" (V, p. 241). Thus the ambivalence of the attitude expressed in these novels toward the material world of nature: repulsion and attraction, horror of death and disintegration into inert matter: and desire to "réintégrer la paisible matière (matrice) originelle" (RF, p. 244).

Our study of the novels of Simon involves an elucidation of structure and meaning through the analysis of technique as the writer's instrument of expression. As Jean-Paul Sartre has pointed out, "une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier." 38 Although Claude Simon disavows more than a superficial acquaintance with the subtleties of formal philosophy, the thematic content of his novels reveals a preoccupation with certain fundamental philosophical problems and the techniques employed in his fiction display a knowledge, if only intuitive, of the philosophical method propounded by Edmund Husserl and the school of continental philosophy called phenomenology.

Underlying the strict adherence to a subjective point of view in the novels we have chosen to study is Husserl's fundamental idea that the world is there but that it is perceived by consciousness. Through the Husserlian concept of intentionality, which he borrowed from his teacher Brentano, the old dualism between outer and inner, or object and subject, is transcended. All consciousness, said Brentano and Husserl
after him, is consciousness of something. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the *avant-propos* to his *Phénoménologie de la perception*, has emphasized the importance of this concept:

La plus importante acquisition de la phénoménologie est sans doute d'avoir joint l'extrême subjectivisme et l'extrême objectivisme dans sa notion du monde ou de la rationalité.  

The traditional narrative viewpoint of the omniscient author assumed the possibility of knowledge of the objective existence of things, which is, according to phenomenology, unobtainable. As one leading phenomenologist has asserted, "by virtue of intentionality the very notion of a reality in itself or of an absolute object becomes absurd, and in any case unthinkable."  

In order to understand the new orientation in technique, one has only to contrast the narrative method of Balzac instructing his reader at the outset of *Eugénie Grandet* of what he would see were he to pass along the streets of Saumur....

Vous verrez un marchand de merrain assis à sa porte et qui tourne ses pouces en causant avec un voisin.....Après avoir suivi les détours de ce chemin pittoresque, dont les moindres accidents réveillent des souvenirs et dont l'effet général tend à plonger dans une sorte de rêverie machinale, vous apercevez un renforcement assez sombre, au centre duquel est cachée la porte de la maison à M. Grandet.  

with the method of Simon in presenting to the reader only the ephemeral, uncertain images which form the content of a
consciousness engaged in re-creating the past or, in later novels, engaged in the act of writing, of composition. The fallacy of the omniscient mode of narration is simply that it posits a knowledge of which no individual can have possession, for as Husserl maintained, "Objective space, Objective time, and with them the Objective world of real things and events—these are all transcendencies (Transzendzen)."

As the narrative viewpoint from *Le Vent* to *Histoire* narrows from that of an outsider attempting to reassemble the various fragments of a "story" to that of a consciousness engaged in reassembling the fragments of his own mental life during one day's existence, a progression from relativism to formalism is exhibited. As a result of this evolution in technique, the novel in its traditional form is destroyed. The characters are but images, reflections in the mind of the narrator. What, after all, do we know about other people? In an interesting passage in *La Route des Flandres*, Corinne is compared to the image of the queen of hearts on playing cards—a flat, stylized image:

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rien qu'un simple bout de carton, donc,
une de ces reines vêtues d'écarlate,
énigmatiques, et symétriquement
dédoubleées, comme si elles se reflétaient
dans un miroir, vêtues d'une de ces
robes mi-partie rouge et verte aux
lourds et rituels ornements, aux rituels
et symboliques attributs (rose, sceptre,
hermine): quelque chose sans plus
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Plot also disappears as the limitations of a subjective point of view render knowledge of cause-effect relationships impossible. When the viewpoint becomes the myopic focus of an anonymous present consciousness, the images seem to acquire greater autonomy with the result that the novel becomes an orchestration of themes through the esthetic arrangement of images aroused in the mind of a narrator-novelist as he pursues "le cheminement même de l'écriture."\(^4^3\)

In their emphasis on description at the expense of narration, on contemplation at the expense of action, the novels of Claude Simon exemplify yet another bias of phenomenology which has had a profound impact on French fiction of recent years:

Il s'agit de décrire, et non pas d'expliquer ni d'analyser. Cette première consigne que Husserl donnait à la phénoménologie commençante d'être une 'psychologie descriptive' ou de revenir 'aux choses mêmes,' c'est\(^4^4\) d'abord le désaveu de la science.

The novels of Simon consist of phenomenological descriptions of objects apprehended by a subjective consciousness prior to any conceptualization or organization by the intellect. "Voir,"
wrote Merleau-Ponty commenting Simon's work, "c'est la permission de ne pas penser la chose puisqu'on la voit."⁴⁵ A significant passage in Le Vent alludes to this primary, elementary apprehension of the world:

sans que rien d'autre (aucun concept, aucune idée, à plus forte raison aucune pensée) ne s'ensuivit dans son esprit: rien d'autre que la simple conscience des formes, des objets... p. 192.

Phenomenology calls for a return to the primary world of lived experience which always must precede any cognitive act of reason or judgment:

Tout ce que je sais du monde, même par science, je le sais à partir d'une vue mienne ou d'une expérience du monde sans laquelle les symboles de la science ne voudraient rien dire...
..... Le monde est là avant toute analyse que je puisse en faire....⁴⁶

In the novels of Simon, the psychological analysis for which the French novel is justly renowned is utterly absent. Consequently, some critics have referred to the phenomenological fiction of the so-called "new novelists" as "pré-romans" or "anté-romans."

Within the context of the descriptive bias of phenomenology, Simon's statements concerning the objectives of his art become more meaningful and significant. It is interesting to compare Merleau-Ponty's statement that the aim
of phenomenology is to be a "description directe de notre expérience telle qu'elle est, et sans aucun égard à sa genèse psychologique et aux explications causales que le savant, l'historien ou le sociologue peuvent en fournir"\(^47\) with Simon's frequently voiced contention that "le romancier moderne n'a aucune compétence particulière pour faire valoir ses thèses, sociologiques ou psychologiques, par exemple: les sciences humaines, qui ne cessent de se développer, sont au contraire armées pour cette découverte du réel, qui ne peut être promise par le roman."\(^48\) The novelist, according to Simon, should aspire to nothing more than "traduire une subjectivité partielle,"\(^49\) which in his novels takes the form of description of elements of his Lebenswelt, or life world: "décire ces parties de moi-même que sont une certaine place, certains personnages, certains souvenirs.....cet univers personnel du vraiment perçu..."\(^50\) This descriptive enterprise, this perpetual "tentative de restitution," is intimately bound up with the author's conception of time, the image (that recording of the world through the retina and memory), and the self. In the eternal present of consciousness, rendered in the descriptive continuum of the transcendent objects of consciousness, the reader is immersed in a world of contemplation in which Time is suspended. The techniques whereby the limits of a successive, temporal medium are transcended to produce the effect of a descriptive stasis will
be our concern as we examine individual novels.

It would appear that the ultimate objective of Simon's art as a whole is to transcend time, either through an attempt at resurrection through the verbal medium of the world of memory and imagination (the "tentative de restitution") or, as exemplified in his last three novels, through a kind of escape into an autonomous linguistic universe.

Before turning to the analysis of Simon's fiction, we should point out that description in these novels is not devoid of meaning or signification. Because the objects described form the content of a particular consciousness, they are, as John Sturrock rightly insists, significant for that consciousness. "L'intentionalité est une visée," comments Jean F. Lyotard in his book *La Phénoménologie*, "mais elle est aussi une donation de sens." 51 It is the task of the reader to interpret the descriptions and their interrelationship in the text:

The mode of narration is an implicit one, the narrator remains silent on the explicit significance of the images of which the novel is an inventory. The responsibility for abstraction is surrendered to the reader, who can at least be confident that each one of these images is significant, that each one of them is asking to be interpreted as an 'intentional correlate'. 52

In the light of these ideas we may understand more fully
Simon's orientation to the novel which he clearly expressed to Pierre Daix and others at a colloquium on the novel:

Pour moi (et je crois pouvoir dire pour certains d'entre nous) il y a, au départ, les faits, les lieux, les choses, les impressions ou les sensations, qu'il importe de soigneusement observer et décrire. Peut-être en jaillira-t-il ensuite des idées et une signification, mais cela est une autre affaire. Daix est un idéaliste, nous des matérialistes. 53

Consciousness is consciousness of things, of the material world in which man is immersed during life and to which he returns at death. Perhaps the writer can, in some small way, transcend the limits imposed on human existence by nature and time through the creation of the work of art. Consciousness could then be triumphant.
CHAPTER I

Le Vent

Prolegomena to a future novel
CHAPTER I

LE VENT: PROLEGOMENA TO A FUTURE NOVEL

Analytical Table of Contents

The drama of human life portrayed against a backdrop of nature, time; dramatic structure in Le Vent; Simon within tradition of technique in 20th century fiction; the problem of authorial omniscience; the application to the novel of the concept of relativism; the "synthetic" approach to reality; idea of relativity dramatized in Le Vent; the fragmentary nature of any attempt to reconstruct the past; narrative perspective and the presentation of fictional material; the impossibility of isolating causes; Le Vent: first step in a process of carrying to its logical conclusions the concept of the novel as mimesis; externalization of characters; one subjectivity filtered through another; the location of the world of fiction in imagination (of author/narrator and reader); "phenomenological technique": an implicit mode of narration via a return to the "things themselves"; participation of the reader in the activity of imaginative re-creation (an effect of immediacy through the use of present participles which plunge the reader into the duration of the action); the absolute participial clause and synchronization of the reader's inner time or durée with that of the narrator.
as he pursues the activity of imaginative re-creation; the a-temporal world of the mind; the elimination of depth in modern art and dechronology in modern fiction symptomatic of a change in attitude toward nature and man's relationship with the external world; fatalism; "l'ordre et le désordre": the conventional syntactic structure of language imposes on the anarchy of life a false order and logic; excerpt illustrating the complexity of any attempt to explain, put in order, or give a rational account of a situation; ironic effect of "logical tool" words which imply a rational function, but do not govern the structure of the sentence; use of parentheses; the strain of syntax to transcend the limits of the verbal medium (comparable to the "tension" characteristic of the baroque style in the visual arts); Le Vent as "tentative de restitution d'un rétable baroque"; language as incantation, "sorcellerie évocatoire": the experience of fiction as an experience of consciousness.
The sound of the wind blowing is the sound of time itself: "le long chuintement du vent dans les pins comme le bruit même du temps épuisé, harassé" (p. 35). The metaphor of the wind symbolizes a view of existence echoed throughout the novels of Simon: that of the eternal cycles of history and nature. Simon sees time in nature as a slow mutation of matter: "le temps, l'éternel recommencement, l'éternel cheminement de la matière inerte, insensible, tournant dans l'infini, se déplaçant avec cette foudroyante et implacable lenteur..." (p. 198). Silently, like the wind blowing without end, the inexorable process of mutation and regeneration continues, in Time: "la lente terrifiante, et irrémédiable dérive du temps" (p. 85). Human life is viewed as an inevitable "acheminement vers la mort." Aside from the ephemeral bloom of adolescence, it is "un acheminement de défaites en défaites jusqu'à la décrépitude finale, jusqu'au désastre final et définitif..." (pp. 152-153). Interwoven with evocations of commonplace existence (the novel has been said to have a "traditional naturalist foundation"), the symbol of the wind conveys the perpetual and universal oppression of time and nature. While the drama of human life portrayed in the novel plays on, the wind continues to blow: "l'infatigable, permanente tempête se ruant sans trêve sous le ciel diaphane" (p. 41). Time marches on. Nature indifferently pursues her
course.

_Le Vent_ is a novel which possesses a dramatic structure. There is a basic narrative sequence which the reader can reassemble: Montès's arrival in town, his meeting with the lawyer, his decision to retain his father's land, his friendship with Rose and her two little girls, his involvement in Rose's problems, the death of the latter at the hands of her gypsy paramour, and so forth, do follow one another in the order of their occurrence in clock time. Although this chronology is more or less shrouded within the ramifications of the narrator's stream of thought, it is more visible than in later novels. Allusions to "clock time" are interspersed throughout the novel:

Ce fut l'après-midi de ce même jour qu'il alla sonner chez le notaire... p. 16.

Mais il y avait déjà plus d'un mois de cela... p. 61.

cela se passait un matin, le surlendemain du jour où Maurice lui avait parlé: quarante-huit heures, ce fut le temps qu'il mit à se décider... p. 75.

comme Maurice deux jours plus tôt..... Cela se passait le surlendemain et il s'était écoulé une nuit entière, puis un jour, puis encore une nuit... p. 176.

The poignant, tragic story of Montès and Rose has a violent climax and a dénouement: the two orphans depart, the foreman
wins his suit against Montès, and the latter is left to contemplate the stillness and tranquillity of the surface of things, of the site where shortly before violent death fractured his idealistic view of the world. What distinguishes *Le Vent* from the traditional realist or naturalist novel is the way in which the story material is presented.

Vivian Mercier has justly observed that "One feels that Simon is recapitulating in his own career the history of the twentieth-century novel."² Certainly his effort to remove the narrative from objective time and his refusal to portray a so-called "objective reality" place him within a well-established tradition of technique in twentieth-century fiction. Erich Auerbach, analyzing a passage from *To the Lighthouse* in which "there actually seems to be no viewpoint at all outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed, any more than there seems to be an objective reality apart from what is in the consciousness of the characters,"³ concludes that the most significant feature of modern fiction is the change in "the author's attitude toward the reality of the world he represents."⁴ The narrator in *Le Vent*, in raising the question of the possibility of telling a "story" about anyone, focuses on the problem of authorial omniscience which from Henry James to the present has been paramount in critical thought concerning the art of fiction.

On the opening page of *Le Vent* a first-person narrator
recalls an account given to him by a lawyer of his impressions of someone, presumably the protagonist of the "story" to which reference is made. The lawyer launched himself once again "sur cette histoire (ou du moins ce qu'il en savait, lui, ou du moins ce qu'il en imaginait, n'ayant eu des événements qui s'étaient déroulés depuis sept mois, comme chacun, comme leurs propres héros, leurs propres acteurs, que cette connaissance fragmentaire, incomplète, faite d'une addition de brèves images, elles-mêmes incomplètement appréhendées par la vision, de paroles, elles-mêmes mal saisies, de sensations, elles-mêmes mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximative logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions..." (pp. 9-10).

The theme of the inadequacy of perception to give an integral view of "reality" echoes the attitude prevailing in our time toward the limitations of man's ability to know his world: "Realization that our whole knowledge of the universe is simply a residue of impressions clouded by our imperfect senses makes the quest for reality seem hopeless." At most our organs of sensation can apprehend something like "ces bribes de réalité—visages, gestes, voix—entrevois, happés au passage depuis une auto, un tramway, un train, un véhicule en marche, disparus avant même d'avoir fini le mouvement..." (p. 197). In La Route des Flandres passages describing the
alteration of Georges'; perception by fatigue and hunger reiterate this theme. As the phenomenologists assert, we are imprisoned within our subjective, relative perception of the world: "Une réalité absolue équivaut exactement à un carré rond." Jean-Paul Sartre, an early proponent of the application to the novel of the phenomenological approach to psychology, pointed out in a scathing critique of François Mauriac's role of God in his fictional universes that our awareness of the relativity of knowledge has made us question the role of the author with respect to his created world. In the interest of truth to life, Sartre contended that a story should be presented from the vantage point or points of one or more characters within the frame of the novel ("chaque point de vue est donc relatif"), and said that novelists of the future should bear in mind "que la théorie de la relativité s'applique intégralement à l'univers romanesque, que, dans un vrai roman, pas plus que dans le monde d'Einstein, il n'y a de place pour un observateur privilégié...."

The narrator in _Le Vent_ is attempting a synthesis of the pieces of a story, that of the experiences of one Antoine Montès following his arrival in a town in southern France during a period of about seven months. He tries to re-create through memory and imagination numerous subjective impressions of the events, based on what he has learned from various
townspeople, from Montès himself, and on what he has been able to imagine. A story exists only in the minds of those who lived it:

car ou tout n'est que hasard et alors les mille et une versions, les mille et un visages d'une histoire sont aussi on plutôt sont, constituent cette histoire, puisque telle elle est, fut, reste dans la conscience de ceux qui la vécurent, la souffrirent, l'endurèrent, s'en amusèrent, ou bien la réalité est douée d'une vie propre, superbe, indépendante de nos perceptions et par conséquent de notre connaissance et surtout de notre appétit de logique—... (p. 10).

This synthetic approach to reality, as Erich Auerbach points out with reference to Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, provides "a close approach to objective reality by means of numerous subjective impressions received by various individuals."

Throughout Le Vent allusions are made to the important idea of the limitations of our knowledge of others and indeed even of ourselves, a strong conviction of Claude Simon which he expressed to an interviewer: "Et comment voyons-nous les gens? Par de petites lucarnes, une heure, deux heures, trois heures par jour, mais le reste du temps, où sont-ils? Ils disparaissent dans de grands trous." The narrator admits he has to supplement his knowledge with conjecture and to imagine what Montès experienced from what he has been told, emphasizing thereby the impossibility of omniscience where
another person is concerned. He can only imagine, for example, what the countryside was like where Montès used to live or what activities the latter performed when he was not present:

Mais ce n'était qu'une supposition: ce pays lointain et inconnu, et ici ces jours, ces heures inconnues hors desquelles il apparaissait à nos regards comme un acteur surgì de derriìre un rideau, puis disparaissait de nouveau—parfois, je restais plus de quinze jours sans le voir—rëapparaissant à l'improviste (devenant entre temps quoi? allant où? faisant quoi: éprouvant quoi?: ce que les ragots rapportèrent? ce que lui-même m'en raconta? ou crut pouvoir m'en raconter? ou put vouloir se rappeler? ou crut pouvoir se rappeler? ou simplement se rappela?) ........ (pp. 106-107)

The protagonist himself may not be able to give a "true version" of the events he experienced.

Given the numerous allusions to relativity in Le Vent, it seems clear that this idea has been dramatized through the use of a narrative technique which demonstrates the impossibility of presenting events from an absolute viewpoint. The narrator does not report what went on in the mind of Montès; he tries to imagine it. He draws inferences, makes suppositions, about how Montès felt and about what he thought. The adverbs "peut-être" and "sans doute," the conjunction "à moins que," which imply conjecture, abound in the novel. A typical example of this process can be seen in the following
Et je me demande si, jusque-là, il
(Montès) avait fait attention à elle,
et même si encore à ce moment il la
vit, fut frappé ou ému par ce visage
qu'il ne devait pas oublier de sa vie.
Cela il ne me le dit pas, et, sans
doute, parce qu'il n'avait rien à dire
là-dessus, car ce n'était pas le genre
de type à bluffer ou à dissimuler, et
même en supposant qu'il l'eût été,
à l'époque et dans les circonstances où
il me raconta tout cela, je ne pense
pas qu'il eût encore éprouvé le goût
du bluff ou de la dissimulation, au
contraire. Il ne me dit donc pas si
elle avait fait sur lui une impression
quelconque (et je pense encore: aucune,
du moins dans le sens où l'on dit
généralement qu'une femme a fait
impression sur un homme), ne me la
décrit même pas. (p. 51)

The narrator tries to show the various ways to focus on a
story: from the center—in trying to project himself through
imagination into the heart of Montès' own experience—from
the periphery—in reporting parts of the "story" from the
standpoints of a lawyer, a bailiff, a district attorney's
wife—and from the front through his own first-hand im-
pressions. At no time does he possess omniscience; all is
relative, just an amalgamation of information from various
sources, supplemented by the exercise of imagination and
"une approximative logique."

Through the technique used, the reader participates
in this "tentative de restitution." We experience the
fragmentary nature of any attempt to reconstruct the past, of any view of "reality." In his novel Le Rouge et le Noir, Stendhal, through the voice of Saint-Réal, tersely summarized the ideal of objective realism: "Un roman, c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un chemin." Interestingly, the mirror image appears in Le Vent, but how different are its implications for the novel today:

et maintenant, maintenant que tout est fini, tenter de rapporter, de reconstituer ce qui s'est passé, c'est un peu comme si on essayait de recoller les débris dispersés, incomplets, d'un miroir, s'efforçant maladroitement de les réajuster, n'obtenant qu'un résultat incohérent, dérisoire, idiot .......... (p. 10)

The only possible mirror of phenomena is that of an individual consciousness. From the moment that individual, subjective vision replaces that of an omniscient viewpoint, the mirror held up to nature becomes shattered and no longer reflects a coherent, logical world.

Obviously, if the focus in Le Vent were the memory of Montès, an entirely different novel would have been created. His channels of information would be more restricted than those of a witness-narrator. Such a limited narrative perspective would not constitute an effective mode of presentation of the fictional material in Le Vent. Knowledge which the protagonist, being a stranger in town and being of a
solitary disposition, could not convincingly have possessed, is needed by the reader if he is to follow the "story." The focus of a "tiers témoin" is necessary in order to show different facets of the events and to intimate the possible roles of the various characters. He is needed, moreover, to present an objective view of the protagonist who certainly plays a decisive role (if only through his ludicrous, unconventional appearance which, at the least, attracts attention and, at the most, inspires antipathy) and who is not very lucid about himself. It is true that Montès admits to the narrator that his brusque treatment of Maurice, who had intruded upon his privacy, was perhaps a foolish reaction. And Maurice, the narrator tells us, did occupy a key position in the determination of the course of events: "ce Maurice qui par la suite devait jouer un si grand rôle dans toute cette affaire" (p. 68). But, as implied numerous times throughout the novel, no single identifiable cause or even causes of the outcome can be isolated and fixed with the blame for what happened. Even the role of the protagonist cannot be strictly defined:

de sorte que tout ce qui venait de se passer pendant cette brève période de quelques mois, les événements qu'il déclencha, ou plus exactement débrida—et ceci, sembla-t-il, bien plus que par ses actes, par sa seule apparition, sa seule présence, à la façon de ces réacteurs chimiques, de ces excitateurs,
ou plutôt encore de ces objets chargés
d'une vertu bénéfique ou maléfique et qui
n'ont besoin pour manifester leur
puissance de faire autre chose que se
contenter d'exister, d'être là— .......
(p. 11)

For what the novel attempts to portray is that composite of
circumstances, that creation of a situation which can be
attributed to no intelligible cause but which blind fate
seems to frame by convening at a certain time and place the
necessary elements of conflict.

Le Vent thus represents a first step in a process of
carrying to its logical conclusions the concept of the novel
as mimesis. The narrator in Le Vent has gleaned information
from a multitude of sources, but ends up with "une sorte de
plésiosaurique réalité reconstituée de bric et de broc à
partir de deux vertèbres, un frontal, un demi-maxillaire et
trois métacarpiens pêchés dans la grise vase du temps et
assemblés au petit bonheur des goûts et prédilections de
chacun" (p. 107). It would be "trucage" for the novelist to
"combler les vides."12 The implications for the novel of
the application of the concept of relativism are manifest.
Fragmentary perception, coupled with faulty memory, preclude
any possibility of establishing relationships of cause and
effect between events. The interaction of various characters
in Le Vent results in a tragic event, but instead of proceed-
ing in clear linear fashion from cause to effect, as in the
traditional novel narrated from the omniscient point of view, their paths seem to cross with random, indeterminate, and inexplicable fortuity: "une simple suite d'allées et venues, inexplicables, inexpliquées" (p. 215). The fallacy of plot is demonstrated by the illogicality with which these characters pursue their respective roles:

puis apparaît le cousin pauvre ou plutôt riche puisque c'est lui qui vient d'hériter, ce qui en fait le principal sujet des conversations et de l'intérêt général, non seulement du riche veuf et de sa famille mais encore d'un certain nombre d'autres personnages se rencontrant, ou manquant de se rencontrer, ou s'évitant, ou se recherchant dans une suite d'actes, de scènes, de chassés-croisés, de quiproquos, sans oublier même l'épisode bouffon, salace, vert, et même scabreux, plus élisabethain à vrai dire que castillan, plus digne de Ben Johnson que de Calderon ....... (p. 113)

The complexity of Baroque drama seems to approximate the disorder to life as it necessarily appears from a subjective, relative viewpoint: "ressemblant assez à une de ces pièces à l'espagnole, un de ces trucs de Calderon ou de Lope de Vega, une de ces comédies-drames à multiples journées réparties dans, ou plutôt exhumées, émergeant sporadiquement hors d'un temps vague, d'une incertaine durée trouée d'épisodes burlesques ou macaroniques" (p. 112).

No less than traditional plot, the traditional portrayal of characters from the inside has been sacrificed on
the altar of relativism. The characters are externalized. (The less a novelist allows himself to know and to say, what is left but the description of surfaces?) As the characters become bodies performing movements and gestures, the reader becomes a spectator. A curious effect results from the use of the present participle detached from its noun or pronoun subject: the gestures seem to occur independently, as if they did not emanate from sentient beings. In the following absolute participial clauses voices and hands seem to exist apart from the human beings to whom they belong:

et le complet ajusté, repassé avec soin, mais élimé, et la main brune sortant d'une manchette elle aussi immaculée et élimée, tenant entre deux doigts un de ces petits cigares noirs ..... (p. 48)

et Montès faisant peut-être un geste de la main, se râclant la gorge, disant: 'Si je....,' puis sa voix s'éteignant de nouveau, cessant, la main s'agitant comme pour écarter quelque chose, comme si elle essayait d'exprimer ce à quoi les lèvres renongaient..... (p. 78)

The materialist implications of this stylistic device are obvious. Forms and postures registered on the retina of a perceiving consciousness, the characters are assimilated to inanimate objects. Thus Montès, in trying to describe to the narrator his impressions of Rose, compared her to an antique statue possessing "cette paisible invincibilité de la pierre ou du bronze malmenés, outragés, et continuant
son existence de pierre, de bronze" (p. 56). This objectification of characters is typical of the "new novel" in general and is strikingly represented in Alain Resnais' film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* based on a script by Robbe-Grillet in which people appear in rigid, statuesque poses comparable to the baroque sculpture which serves as a leitmotif throughout the film. Of course, the feelings and emotions of others can be inferred from their words and actions, as when Rose intimates to Montès during their "étrange et nocturne duo d'amour" (p. 101) her frustrations and humiliations.

The only justification for an "inside" view, for a penetration into another consciousness—in this case of the narrator into the mental life of Montès—is what the other person has recounted or described to us. In *Le Vent* we are given an indirect view of a subjectivity; we do not see what Montès saw directly through his eyes, but indirectly through the mind of the witness-narrator. Or, more precisely, we see one subjectivity as filtered through another. Such expressions as "Plus tard, lorsqu'il me raconta la scène, il me semblait exactement les voir" (p. 92) and the omnipresent "me dit-il" or "me raconta-t-il" remind us that the fictional material is filtered through the narrator's imagination. We are presented not with "reality" but with a kind of residue of reality in the form of the mental images of the narrator. Whereas, traditionally, narrative technique sought to disguise the
fictionality of fiction, in *Le Vent* the world of fiction is explicitly located where it always resides—in the imagination of author (narrator) and reader.

Thus the narrator attempts to re-create in his mind's eye the subjective "phenomenological" perception of Montès at different moments in time, from what the latter has described to him. A typical example of this is the evocation of the first encounter of Montès with two little girls, daughters of a café waitress named Rose and a gypsy, for whom he develops a poignant paternal attachment which lends human depth to the tragic outcome of the novel. In this passage the little girls (the transcendent objects of consciousness, in phenomenological terms) are described as they appeared from a particular point of view, apprehended by a particular consciousness. Instead of being presented in their over-all physical appearance—in a "portrait en pied"—as in a typical nineteenth-century novel, the children are rendered in terms of particular features which impinge upon the consciousness of an individual observer. Someone else, the reader assumes, would have perceived the scene differently, would have focused on other details than the two pair of bold, black eyes staring in the half light or the amorphous cake adhering to the sticky fingers of the smaller child:

et alors il se retournait et les découvrit: tout d'abord non pas elles, me dit-il,
mais ces deux paires d'yeux identiques, trop grands, noirs, profonds, fixés sur lui, et après seulement les deux gamines, assises à l'une des tables, contre l'autre fenêtre, la plus petite avec dans une main une de ces choses gluantes qui a été un gâteau une heure plus tôt et qui à force d'être sucé ou léché a pris cette consistance informe d'aliment déjà à moitié digéré avant même d'avoir été avalé, et le tour de la bouche barbouillé, et les doigts eux aussi gluants et luisants tenant toujours le gâteau à hauteur des lèvres.... (p. 46)

The passage is an excellent rendering of "ce contact naïf avec le monde" which, as Merleau-Ponty explains, it is the aim of phenomenology to explore.

Instead of an analysis or explanation of the thoughts or feelings of a character, the "phenomenological" technique of narration presents the objects which serve as supports for thoughts and emotions: "(aucun concept, aucune idée, à plus forte raison aucune pensée) ne s'ensuit dans son esprit : rien d'autre que la simple conscience des formes, des objets" (p. 192). The thing perceived and the consciousness of it are one and the same. Thus we are not "told" the depth of emotion felt by Montès at the shattering of his "vision boy-scoutesque du monde" or his sense of revolt toward a religion which serves to "travestir la souffrance en bienfait et la pourriture finale en délivrance, ou tout au moins en avatar sans importance" (p. 153). Instead, we are presented with an image of Montès seated in a chapel of a church after having
placed in the hands of a priest the jewels stolen by Rose's gypsy "husband," whereupon his eye comes to rest on a multitude of "plaques de remerciement":

il recommença à être capable de sentir, de percevoir autre chose que le silence, le calme, reconnaître les images inscrites sur sa rétine, lisant le mot MERCI répété en lettres d'or sur la base du mur, juste en face de lui, comme une espèce de revêtement continu : MERCI MERCI MERCI MERCI MERCI MERCI ........ (p. 194)

This implicit mode of narration via a return to the "things themselves," the description of the objects intended by the consciousness of a character, places upon the reader the task of attributing meaning or signification to these objects.

Certain stylistic devices induce us to visualize the scenes which the narrator conjures up in his mind's eye, to participate in the activity of imaginative re-creation. The narrator in Le Vent feels compelled to remind us that what we see are his own mental re-creations of scenes described to him by others:

Et je cherchais à l'imaginer, comme le décrivait le notaire, regardant autour de lui, de cet air placide .... (p. 15)

Et au fur et à mesure qu'il me racontait la scène il me semblait maintenant la vivre mieux que lui-même ....... (p. 138)

The expressions employed to introduce visualized scenes serve
as a kind of signal for the reader who participates in the thought process of the narrator. Just as the latter presumably is animating the scenes he is describing through the activity of his imagination, so the reader is explicitly invited to do the same.

An effect of immediacy is created by the use of present participles which plunge the reader into the duration of the action: "mais les lèvres ne remuant plus maintenant, pas plus que la main, pas plus que la gorge, rien que les yeux le regardant..." (p. 46). Since the present participles evoke action as perceived while in progress—"ils peignent l'action sous l'aspect de durée, de continuité"—the dominant impression is one of actualism. To the reader the action seems to be occurring now, in his present consciousness—hence in his imagination. This effect is fundamental to the esthetics of Simon and to his conception of the novel:

Un roman, c'est-à-dire une fiction, n'est pas le récit d'événements qui se seraient produits avant que le romancier ne les écrive. Les événements, les personnages d'un roman sont le fait de l'écriture, et n'ont d'existence qu'à partir du moment où ils sont écrits. Ce que le romancier décrit ou raconte se passe toujours au présent (rédaction ou lecture).

In Le Vent an accent is placed upon the experience of fiction as an experience of consciousness, of imagination, which according to phenomenology is "une certaine façon qu'a l'objet
de paraître à la conscience, ou, si l'on préfère, une certaine façon qu'a la conscience de se donner un objet."

It is through "l'éphémère, l'incantatoire magie du langage," to borrow a phrase from La Route des Flandres, that the world of fiction is intended. Compared to the conventional narrative tense, the past definite, the effect of the present participle is indeed incantatory. No suggestion of duration is possible when the past definite is used because the reader interprets the action as terminated prior to the time of reading: "Ce temps indique qu'une action s'est produite à un certain moment déterminé du passé, et n'a plus aucun rapport direct avec le moment présent ..... Il donne des faits passés une mention purement abstraite, sans réviviscence, sans effet sur le présent."  

The retarding effect of the present participle on the tempo of the novel is largely due to a special use of that verb form, which constitutes a stylistic dominant in the prose of Simon: the absolute participial clause. We follow the action step by step as it unfolds:

et lui: 'Thérésa?', et elle se taisant, et lui 'C'est bien ça: Thérésa? Tu t'appelles Thérésa?', et elle se contenant de le fixer, ses yeux luisant d'un éclat noir dans la pénombre, et lui: 'Et ta petite sœur? Parce que c'est bien ta pe' ............. (p. 47)

This stylistic device creates a synchronization of the
reader's inner time or durée with that of the narrator as he pursues the activity of imaginative re-creation. Fictional time and reading time are made to coincide: "Je voudrais amener le lecteur à confondre son temps avec le mien," Simon once told an interviewer.18

Thus, while it is true that chronology plays a greater role in Le Vent than in succeeding novels and that a sense of depth or perspective is created by frequent references to objective time, it is apparent that steps have been taken in this novel to remove the narrative partly from chronological time and from the objective, organic world and to situate the world of fiction within the eternal present of consciousness—that of author (narrator) and reader. The present participle is Simon's device for placing the action within the a-temporal world of the mind: "L'emploi du participe présent me permet de me placer hors du temps conventionnel."19 Syntax also contributes to this effect of a-temporality through a departure from the conventional order "substantif, verbe, complément" which corresponds to a "conception d'une durée à une seule dimension le long de laquelle les événements-noeuds, le passé, le présent et l'avenir, se suivraient sans bousculade..." (p. 163). Within the duration of the long sentences are encompassed scenes belonging to various points in past time so that the reader has the impression of events and characters "se dessinant
vaguement dans une durée elle-même floue, incertaine" (p. 83).
We have the illusion of being suspended in "no-time," of
passing from scene to scene "comme dans ces rêves où l'on
passe subitement d'un endroit à l'autre, d'une situation à
l'autre sans transition" (p. 83).

Moreover, the long sentences convey the feeling of
the subjective experience of fluctuation in the perception of
time: "le temps se télescopant, s'immobilisant ou se dilatant
tour à tour" (p. 146). For within the framework of a single
sentence, we may encounter telescoping of time through the
passé simple, immobilization of time through the present
participle, and dilation of time through the use of paren-
theses or dashes to suspend the forward movement and hold the
reader's mind in abeyance while inserting additional details
(often an entire supplementary tableau):

l'inspecteur—il avait tout de même enlevé
son chapeau: sur son crâne chauve, étran-
gement blanc, quelques rares cheveux ramenés
avec soin gardaient encore l'empreinte du
peigne et, là où le cuir de la coiffe avait
porté, une zone rose barrait le front—en
train de rempaqueter maladroitement dans
son emballage de vieux journaux le coffret
de fer, puis attrapant la ficelle, se
mettant en devoir de défaire le nœud (et
toujours le prêtre et Montès le regardant
faire, regardant silencieusement les doigts
tâtonner, tirailler, s'énerver, jusqu'à
ce qu'ils renoncent, fassent une boule de
l'écheveau emmêlé, et la fourrent dans la
poche d'où un bout dépassa encore, pendant
le long de la jambe du pantalon, Montès
avançant alors la main, le doigt tendu dans
la direction de la poche, toujours sans rien dire, et l'inspecteur le regardant à son tour d'un air cette fois étonné, presque indigné, furibond, puis détournant les yeux, et renfournant le bout de ficelle dans la poche), après quoi, sans marquer de temps d'arrêt, comme si chaque geste déclenchait immédiatement le suivant ou plutôt comme si la fin de chaque geste était déjà le commencement de celui qui lui succédait, il reprit le coffret, le mit sous son bras, le regard de Montès restant cette fois accroché là, fixant stupidement autour de l'aisselle l'auréole frangée de gris (comme un dépôt salin, comme ces festons que la mer laisse sur le sable) qui tachait l'étoffe sombre du costume ...... (p. 190)

The long sentences stretch out, like that characteristic of time in memory, "sans commencement ni fin" (p. 149). Drawn along in the movement of these sentences, the reader plunges into the "épais magma" of memory, the indeterminate durée of past time.

As suggested in our introduction, the key to the transposition of the temporal existence of the fictional world from objective to subjective or "phenomenological" time may be found in the author's attitude toward the material world of nature and time in nature. The elimination of depth in abstract painting and the dechronology characteristic of modern fiction seem to be symptomatic of a general change in attitude toward nature and man's relationship with the external world. The sense of alienation from nature is acute in the novels of Simon. Human drama in Le Vent unfolds
against the backdrop of the incessant blowing of the wind, symbol of the indifferent continuity of nature "avec l'immuable succession de ses phases immuables" (p. 54) and of the inexorable flow of time: "le temps même fuyant, filant irrémédiablement" (p. 172). The blind, irrational aggression of nature is symbolized by the hostility of the wind: "cette tempête, cette sorte d'ouragan quasi permanent, de violence sans objet, sans raison, qui se jetait sur lui, l'assaillait, le houspillait furieusement" (p. 16). Man is forever prey to forces beyond his comprehension or control, among which is the irresistible temptation of woman whose only role seems to be: "seulement se contenter de se tenir, patientes et attentives, dans l'éternelle position de la montagneuse mère du monde, de l'éternelle putain—Déméter ou Dalilah—avec, ouvert au centre d'elles, ce piège, cette bouche avide et ténèbreuse où, de génération en génération, la moutonnière troupe des mâles vient s'engloutir et se perdre" (p. 163). A force of nature, woman is equated with the earth: "la terre (ou les femmes, ce qui est la même chose)...") (p. 103). Elaboration of this analogy is seen in succeeding novels.

A heavy atmosphere of fatalism reigns in Le Vent. Montès' very presence in the town is seen as part of the invisible workings of fate: "comme si l'ouragan faisait aussi partie de cette tacite conjuration qui semblait l'avoir accueilli ici, ourdie à la fois par les hommes et les
éléments pour le rejeter, le refouler, le renvoyer là d'où il venait..." (p. 26). The conclusion of the novel with its ambiguity regarding the precise causes of the outcome corroborates the striking image expressed at the outset of the helplessness of the individual in the face of an unintelligible world: "là où tout ce que la raison parvient à voir, c'est cette errance, nous-mêmes ballottés de droite et de gauche, comme un bouchon à la dérive, sans direction, sans vue, essayant seulement de surnager et souffrant, et mourant pour finir, et c'est tout..." (p. 10). This philosophy finds expression in the passive attitude not only of Montès, but of other Simonian characters: Louise in L'Herbe, Georges and Blum in La Route des Flandres, the student in Le Palace.

Explicit expression of this attitude is voiced by Montès when he tells the narrator: "Et ne croyez pas que j'avais des idées de suicide: se tuer est encore un acte de vivant, et je ne pouvais plus être que passif, et même la passivité, ne rien faire que supporter, c'était encore au-delà, non de mon courage ou de ma capacité, ou de ma résignation à souffrir, mais de mes forces" (p. 174).

The epigraph to Le Vent, a quote from Paul Valéry, alludes to a contradiction underlying all artistic creation, the act of imposing order on the chaos of life: "Deux dangers ne cessent de menacer le monde: l'ordre et le désordre."

In other words, two dangers threaten the world: disorder and
false order. The world is disorder, chaos, and defiance of reason as we see throughout Le Vent, which closes on a note of wistful interrogation as the narrator evokes his final vision of Montès seated before a café table and gazing into space:

Et alors je le laissai, partis, me retournant une dernière fois pour le voir, toujours assis devant ce demi dans lequel il avait à peine trempé ses lèvres, et ce fut la dernière vision que je gardai de lui, comme si désormais son souvenir ne devait plus être que cela: cette question sans réponse....... (p. 238)

The conventional syntactic structure of language imposes on the anarchy of life a false order and logic in such a way that one can open a newspaper and read "sa lénifiante ration de meurtres, de violences et de folie ordonnés de cause à effet..." (p. 175).

If we have given the subtitle "prolegomena to a future novel" to our analysis of Le Vent, it is because this novel represents a re-thinking on the part of the author of problems of form and language posed by the necessity of forging a fictional technique in conformity with the modern way of looking at the world, which is, of course, diametrically opposed to the philosophical outlook implicit in the techniques of nineteenth-century realism and naturalism:
Or, comme on sait, le réalisme français est solidement fondé sur certains principes de la pensée cartésienne tels que la croyance en un ordre clair et rationnel du monde, et la supposition d'une causalité logique des êtres et des choses. Par conséquent, la querelle littéraire, en ce début du XXe siècle, n'est rien d'autre que la mise en question de cette vision rationaliste, ou, comme le dira R.-M. Alberès, de 'la confiance de l'homme en sa propre raison, qu'il avait crue indépendante, capable d'expliquer l'univers et de construire le monde.'

In Le Vent, Simon is recapitulating some questions already posed by his predecessors Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner. Among them is the question of the antinomy between the order of language and the disorder of life, or, more precisely, of life as apprehended by human consciousness. The modification of normal prose syntax is an important feature of the technique of modern novelists for the purpose of portraying the life of the mind: "by breaking up the categories of language and syntax, they strive to express their sense of life as a sequence of non-causal impressions...."

Similarly, in Le Vent the dislocated syntax is presented as an attempt to render the incoherent experience of life:

Car, me dit-il, ce fut ainsi que cela se passa, en tout cas ce fut cela qu'il vécut, lui: cette incohérence, cette juxtaposition brutale, apparemment absurde,
de sensations, de visages, de paroles, d'actes. Comme un récit, des phrases dont la syntaxe, l'agencement ordonné—substantif, verbe, complément—seraient absents. (p. 174)

Rather than dismissing the convoluted form of the sentences in Le Vent as pastiche—of Faulkner in particular—as some critics have done, let us attempt to determine whether the syntax, whatever its origin, serves the expressive ends of the author in this novel and whether it poses questions which point to new directions pursued in later, more original works. For it seems to us that Le Vent represents a necessary step in an evolution toward a more personal style, toward the mature novels which explore other potentialities of language, relationships other than logical, syntactical relationships.

If as implied in numerous passages in Le Vent the syntax is intended to reflect the illogicality of life, the following excerpt illustrates the complexity of any attempt to explain, put in order, or give a rational account of a situation. Once the parentheses are opened and the process of interpolation begun, each additional qualification leads to another tangential thought.22 The interruption of the logical sequence is so prolonged that a third "car" (the second having appeared shortly after the first) is necessary to direct the reader's attention back to the point of interruption:
scandale et stupeur qui s'accrurent encore lorsqu'on apprit qu'il restait, allait s'installer là en dépit, comme le raconta le notaire, de toute raison, et même, allèrent jusqu'à dire certains, de toute pudeur. Car, non seulement il ne fit pas ce que les gens s'attendaient à (ou espéraient, ou souhaitaient, ou avaient escompté) lui voir faire, mais encore ce qu'il fit (entreprendre--prétendre entreprendre--là où l'un d'eux s'était à demi ruiné--et en un sens par sa faute, quoique indirectement--car cela chacun le savait: cette fuite, cette vengeance de femme, cette frustration d'un fils ayant été à l'origine de tout, celui qu'on ne pouvait appeler ni le veuf ni le divorcé, quoiqu'en quelque sorte il fut les deux à la fois tout en n'étant ni l'un ni l'autre, ne s'en étant jamais consolé, jamais remis: de là le dégoût, l'abandon, l'à-vau-l'eau--entreprendre donc d'exploiter un domaine seulement sien en vertu d'un acte nocturne (cette ténébreuse, obscène, brutale et éphémère saillie, pénétration, fécondation d'une chair par une autre) sans témoins et sans suivants--ou presque--et datant de plus de trente ans; un hasard, un malentendu ayant pour quelques semaines accoupés dans le même lit un homme et une femme inconnus jusque là l'un à l'autre et destinés par la suite à ne plus jamais se revoir, comme si avec sa semence l'étrangère était en même temps venue dérober au mâle, lui extorquer les fertiles terres rouges, les détournier en quelque sorte, les soustraire à leur destination naturelle, savoir: une postérité, une descendance tenant ses droits non pas seulement d'un coût éphémère et pour ainsi dire clandestin, puisque sans lendemains, mais encore par ce qui (gîtes reçues, inquiétudes données, leçons apprises, cohabitation, alarmes, joies, mythes hérités et partagés), tout autant que le sang, fait d'un enfant l'indiscutable héritier non seulement des biens mais d'une certaine tradition, mode de vie, décorum, manière d'agir, ce que l'on vit
bien car:) ce qu'il fit, donc, il l'accomplit de telle sorte (cet accoutrement, cette dégaine de pauvre, ce vélo brinqueballant, ferraillant, sur lequel on le rencontrait partout, cet air hagard et optimiste de doux imbécile, cette paisible obstination dans l'impossible, l'irréalisable, en dépit des conseils, cet insolent défi en un mot) que les gens ne pouvaient en aucun cas l'admettre, et cela n'importe qui à sa place l'aurait su.... (pp. 19-20)

In this excerpt all the motives for the outrage of the town's citizens with respect to Montès and his decision to retain his father's land are brought together and interrelated within the framework of a single sentence. The causal conjunction "Car," a simple and familiar word, stands at the beginning of the long, involved sentence, ostensibly announcing its purpose, namely that what follows will constitute an explanation for the "scandale et stupeur qui s'accrurent encore...." The position of "Car" and its enhancement through capitalization seem to confer to it a dominance over all that follows. This effect would be lost if the various parts of the long sentence were made into separate short sentences, reducing thereby "Car" to a position at the head of a simple, short sentence. Furthermore, if the various thought units of this complex sentence were isolated from one another and stated in a series of shorter independent sentences, the reader would no longer have the
impression of a complex body of interrelated motives which, when taken together, constitute, to the extent that it is possible to explain a complex situation, an explanation for the townspeople's reaction. Without the complex sentence structure, in other words, the dominant idea would not be conveyed, namely that the simple word "car" never deserves a simple answer, that the task of identifying causes is hopelessly difficult. This is, of course, a major theme of the novel. In the mind of the narrator, the attitude of the people toward Montès should be regarded as the result of not one but numerous intertwined circumstances, a fact which is conveyed to the reader through the form of the sentence.

Closer examination of the form of the sentence will reveal how all the motives are interrelated within its framework and will clarify their relationship to the causal conjunction with which the sentence commences. While the preponderant "Car" lends causal overtones to the entire ensuing development, it logically refers only to this imprecise statement:

Car, non seulement il ne fit pas ce que les gens s'attendaient à (........) lui voir faire, mais encore ce qu'il fit (.................) ce qu'il fit, donc, il l'accomplit de telle sorte (............... ) que les gens ne pouvaient en aucun cas l'admettre...

Although rather vague, this sentence is logically and
syntactically complete without the specification of what Montès did or how he went about doing it. The complex body of interrelated motives, specifically described, depend, for their appearance in the sentence, not upon "Car" but upon the expressions "ce qu'il fit" and "de telle sorte" which they serve to qualify. Although the monumental "Car" standing at the entrance to the entire sequence seems to announce causal relationships, in fact the "causes" depend for their presence in the sentence not upon this conjunction, but upon the tendency of thought to proceed by association and, in this instance, to call forth precisions of statement in the form of parenthetical material.

Thus, as Jacques Guicharnaud affirms with respect to the "logical tools" in the syntax of Le Vent, "what really binds the sentences is internal, somehow independent of such words."²⁴ What "Car" governs is the skeleton of the sentence, what remains after the meat has been removed. What is most unusual about this syntax is that the logical, sequential progression of thought is interrupted in order to intercalate within parentheses supplementary details which turn out to constitute the main body of thought expressed. In other words, the specific motives for the townspeople's reaction occupy a subordinate position in the sentence, as if to confer to them the status, not of causes since they do not depend upon "Car" for their inclusion in the discourse, but of relevant
circumstances which might constitute a kind of explanation if one were to insist upon finding that "suite logique de causes à effets" (p. 10) which our incorrigible pride seems to demand. Thus, "logical tool" words are used in such a way as to produce an effect of irony, for they imply a rational function, but do not govern the structure of the sentence. The words which explain are parenthetical and occupy an ancillary position in the sentence, independent of such "logical tools" as "car," "de sorte que," "donc," etc. What Simon seems to be saying through this syntax is that the order of logic is a false order, with the implication that the novel should be structured on another order: ultimately, in later novels, the order of art, of pattern in and through language, i.e., the medium itself. The repudiation of the order of logic implies, of course, the elimination of chronology, to which we have alluded.

If the order of logic cannot account for the infinite complexity of life, it is equally incapable of encompassing the infinite richness of sensory experience, the rendering of which appears to be a, if not the, principal objective of Simon's art.²⁵ In the following sentence parentheses suspend logical progression in order to permit the interpolation of a description of the scene taking place at the time of the action stated by the finite verbs with which the sentence begins:
Lorsqu'il pénétra, on plutôt fit irruption dans la chambre de Montès (cette fois sans s'annoncer, sans même frapper: la porte s'ouvrait soudain, violemment, comme sous la poussée d'un coup de pied, comme si, me raconta Montès, on ne s'était même pas donné la peine de tourner la poignée, si bien, me dit-il, que si elle avait été fermée à clef la vieille serrure branlante eut certainement sauté avec le reste, pêne, gâche et clef volant jusqu'au milieu de la pièce tandis que le battant allait frapper durement le mur dont un moment après—comme s'il avait attendu que le silence fut revenu--un fragment de plâtre se détacha, tomba sur le carrelage où il se pulvérisa avec un bruit léger, insignifiant, de ruines, d'ossements s'en allant en poussière, et plus rien. Et Maurice debout au milieu de la chambre, et cela sans que Montès se souvint de l'avoir vu marcher de la porte jusque-là, pas plus qu'il n'aurait pu dire s'il l'avait entendu marmonner un vague bonsoir: seulement cet air mauvais, sombre, considérant maintenant au-dessous de lui Montès—il pouvait être environ dix heures du soir--étendu dans ce lit où je l'avais trouvé un jour qu'il était malade: ses longs cheveux pendant de part et d'autre du front, vêtu d'une de ces chemises de nuit comme n'en portent plus que les pensionnaires des collèges de province, strictement boutonnées, avec un liseré rouge au col et aux poignets, et le regardant lui aussi, de son air légèrement ahuri, mais calme, tenant dans ses mains posées sur la couverture la brochure qu'il était en train de lire l'instant d'après), il avait visiblement bu. (p. 160)

The use made of parentheses in this prose relates to certain limitations inherent in the medium of the written word. The inevitable linear progression of language presents a contradiction with any effort to record the multiplicity of phenomena present to the senses at any moment. If language be
used not merely to narrate consecutive actions but to evoke the aura of existence surrounding events, normal prose syntax must be modified. A straightforward linear structure cannot convey the infinite richness of perception. Of course, words are notoriously inadequate to do this anyway, but in *Le Vent*, as implied in the subtitle "Tentative de restitution d'un rétable baroque," an attempt is made to suggest the opulence of life: the multiplicity of impressions contained in each moment of existence. The "tension" characteristic of the baroque style in the visual arts can be felt in the strain of the syntax in *Le Vent* to transcend the limits of the verbal medium.

The rich sculptured decoration, the overflow of ornament, by which lines of pillars and arches are concealed in Baroque churches communicate a sense of tension between the form or structure of the building and the profusion of ornament which appears to exist as an end in itself and to exceed the physical structure or means of support.

Furthermore, the allegorical and narrative aspect of the altarpiece or retable suggests an effort to transcend the limits of the visual or plastic medium, to tell a story through images in space much as the pictorial writer tries to paint a picture in words proceeding through time. In each case, demands are made on viewer or reader, either to re-create a narrative sequence, the stages of an action, or to form
mental images on the basis of the abstract signs of language.

Of course, an obvious implication of the altarpiece or retable with respect to *Le Vent* and other novels of Simon is the idea of a work of art composed of multiple images co-existing simultaneously. 26

Through the use of parentheses for the intercalation of minor events—such as the fragment of plaster falling belatedly to the floor and disintegrating in a cloud of dust—the récit is made to seem less "faux, artificiel" than would be the recording of a multitude of minor impressions within the current of the discourse:

Peut-être ne remarqua-t-il pas (Montês) toutes ces choses telles qu'il me les rapporta plus tard. C'est-à-dire les détails.....Seulement voyant, enregistrant sans en prendre tout à fait conscience, de sorte que le récit qu'il m'en fit fut sans doute lui-même faux, artificiel, comme est condamné à l'être tout récit des événements fait après coup, de par le fait même qu'à être racontés les événements, les détails, les menus faits, prennent un aspect solennel, important, que rien ne leur confère sur le moment. (pp. 48-49)

Intercalated within parentheses, the details of perception occupy an ancillary position in the sentence, which confers on them the status of marginal impressions which they occupy in reality. They do not, therefore, acquire "un aspect solennel, important, que rien ne leur confère sur le moment."
And yet they are the essence of the novel (a very large part of which is within parentheses), just as it is implied that they are the essence of life. The preoccupation of Montès with the details of perception is offered, indirectly, as a justification for their profusion in the novel:

Car ce fut en définitive la dernière chose dont il me parla, avec cette méticulosité dans le détail, l'insignifiant—ou du moins ce qui, pour tout autre, paraissait insignifiant—qui faisait hausser les épaules aux gens, s'attachant à me décrire le bruit cartonneux des feuilles froissées par le souffle de la nuit, les formes des feuilles semblables à des étoiles découpées et le va-et-vient sporadique des branches rigides, raides. 'Comme toujours à cette époque de l'année, me dit-il, quand elles ne sont encore presque pas chargées de feuilles, quand le poids n'est pas encore suffisant pour leur donner ce port lourd, les mouvements lents, majestueux et paisibles de l'été.'

(p. 102)

Indeed, the most striking quality of the prose of Le Vent is the attention to concrete detail, the attempt to record through the verbal medium the wealth of sensations, the minutiae of perception.

The "story" in Le Vent is but the bare outline, the skeleton, of the content of the novel, for what matters here is not the recounting of events in their logical relationship to one another, but the attempted resurrection of fragments of life (more precisely, of memory: "les débris dispersés, incomplets, d'un miroir") through the verbal medium in a
richness of descriptive detail to rival the opulence of the baroque style in the visual arts. As the subtitle indicates, Le Vent is a "tentative de restitution," and the ornateness of the baroque altarpiece symbolizes both the wealth of detail present to the senses—sounds, smells, sights—at every moment of existence and the verbal exuberance necessary to record this sumptuous sensory experience. The prose of the novel is itself opulent in an attempt to mirror the richness of life: "le monde bigarré, grouillant et infépuisible"—to borrow a phrase from Histoire. The world is "infépuisible" and the "tentative de restitution" is open-ended; hence the use of parentheses, the accumulations of synonyms, and the endless comparisons introduced by such expressions as "comme si," "ou plutôt," "ou plus exactement," etc. Thus, despite the presence of an anecdote and of characters in a near-traditional sense, the medium in Le Vent has begun to assume ascendancy over the subject, much as it did for the pioneers of modern painting at the end of the last century.

This reversal of priorities prefigures that baroque masterpiece La Route des Flandres in which, through the "sorcellerie évocatoire" of language, the reader is suspended—much as Louis in Le Tricheur is caught up in his rêverie to the extent that he does not hear the clock chime and nearly misses his train—in the a-temporal world of the imaginary: "tandis qu'ils essayaient de se transporter par procuration
(c'est-à-dire au moyen de leur imagination......)." The experience of fiction is perhaps the epitome of the experience of phenomenological time, for the world of fiction exists only in the realm of the mind. Of the mode of existence of music, the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz has written: "It is the occurrence in inner time, Bergson's durée, which is the very form of existence of music." Fiction—as our analysis of Le Vent has revealed—may also be understood as a "flux of tones unrolling in inner time"—the "tones" being the various mental responses (auditory, visual, or other images) elicited by the abstract signs of language.
CHAPTER II

La Route des Flandres
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LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES

Analytical Table of Contents

A sense of estrangement from the natural world; the appearance of formal concerns; an examination of vocabulary and imagery to show correlation between world-view and an evolution toward formalism (parallel to the theory of Wilhelm Worringer that abstraction in the plastic arts corresponds to a widespread sense of alienation from the organic world of nature), - recurrent motifs of mud and clay, the womb as mold; woman as elemental force of nature, physiological determinism, universal disintegration; images of cosmic catastrophe, march of Time manifested in the mutation of matter ("l'étèrnel cheminement de la matière"), death, the dialectic between the material world of nature to which man is inextricably bound and human consciousness, objectification of the past self, scenes of the past irrevocably eroded by time, the "disintegration" of the haunting image of the death of Captain de Reixach, boundaries unclear between memory and imagination, the unreal mode of existence of the referent of the signifié, from relativism to formalism, the psychic or affective ensemble, de Reixach at the center of a network of
associations; scene of his death as catalyst for the creation of the novel, association by contiguity, "intensive synthesis," association by similarity, verbal association, discontinuity and contiguity, parentheses, the strain of syntax to overcome the inevitably linear character of language; the use of parentheses within parentheses comparable to the massive totality of the baroque style in the visual arts, the present participle, phenomenological description, a painter's vision, the mode of arrangement of images into an aesthetic whole, composition and the expression of Weltanschauung, "l'éternel recommencement," the novel as verbal composition, toward an art of autonomous structure, technique becomes liberated from the strict simulation of consciousness in Histoire, comparison between evolution in Simon's technique and transition from analytical to synthetic phase of Cubism, a timeless world of formal harmonies, increasing emphasis on design and formal values related to Simon's acute sense of alienation from the material world of nature with the inexorable progression of time in nature, detemporalization of the narrative and the evolution of technique toward "spatial" form correspond to a feeling of anxiety in the face of the instability of the external world.
The less mankind has succeeded, by virtue of its spiritual cognition, in entering into a relation of friendly confidence with the appearance of the outer world, the more forceful is the dynamic that leads to the striving after this highest abstract beauty.

-- Wilhelm Worringer,
Abstraction and Empathy

Of all the novels of Claude Simon, *La Route des Flandres* is the one in which a sense of estrangement from the natural world is perfectly expressed. It is also the first novel in which formal concerns are manifest. In *Le Vent* repudiation of conventional narrative structure, the "suite logique de cause à effet," was seen to be a consequence of the application to the novel of the concept of relativism. Our analysis of *La Route des Flandres* aims to show the place of this novel in an evolution of narrative technique from relativism to formalism. The trend toward formalism in the mature novels of Simon offers an interesting literary parallel to the theory of Wilhelm Worringer that abstraction in the plastic arts corresponds to a widespread sense of alienation from the organic world of nature. Our study of *La Route des Flandres* begins with an examination of vocabulary and imagery for the purpose of showing a correlation between world view.
and an evolution toward formalism.

THE MATERIAL WORLD OF NATURE

Human life, for Simon, is mired in material existence. His novels reflect not a sense of joyful participation in the organic, but of passive subjection to the forces of the material world of nature. The theme of materiality receives subtle emphasis in La Route des Flandres through recurrent motifs of mud and clay: "la boue," "la vase," "la pâte," and "l'argile." Of the suggestiveness of these images, Gaston Bachelard has written:

On est bien obligé de convenir qu'avec la terre molle on touche un point sensible de l'imagination de la matière. L'expérience qu'on en prend renvoie à des expériences intimes, à des rêveries refoulées. Elle met en jeu des valeurs anciennes, des valeurs qui sont aussi bien anciennes pour l'individu humain que pour l'espèce humaine.¹

Elsewhere Bachelard has observed that "le véritable type de la composition, c'est, pour l'imagination matérielle, la composition de l'eau et de la terre."² Although composed of the same combination of elements, mud and clay possess different associative values for the narrator in this novel.

Mud is associated with war, destruction, death, and reassimilation into inert matter. Mud and muck pervade the death-ridden atmosphere of war. The soldiers of the narrator's regiment bivouac in rain and mud: "la boue noire
piétinée par les bêtes" (p. 64). A dead horse encountered by the dragoons in their wanderings appears swallowed up by "une boue liquide et gris-beige," as if the earth in her most absorptive state had begun to reclaim what was originally hers. Associated with mud is a vocabulary of ingestion and consumption: "engloutir," "digérer," "absorber," "dévorer." Lying in a ditch to hide from the enemy, Georges imagined his own death and subsequent reassimilation into the bosom of the earth, as if he, too, were "aussi mort que le cheval et déjà à demi englouti, repris par la terre, sa chair se mélangant à l'humide argile, ses os se mélangant aux pierres, car peut-être était-ce une pure question d'immobilité et alors on redeviendait simplement un peu de craie, de sable et de boue..." (p. 243). For mud symbolizes the earth's active role in the perpetual transformation of matter. The dead horse is swallowed up "avec un bruit de succion."

Even the epithets used to describe the abjection and humiliation of the prisoners of war underscore their approaching return to the earth:

et eux aussi uniformément revêtus de ces défroques, couleur de bile, de boue, comme une sorte de moisissure, comme si une espèce de pourriture les recouvrait, les rongeait, les attaquait encore debout, d'abord par leurs vêtements, gagnant insidieusement: comme la couleur même de la guerre, de la terre......

(p. 172)
In the dislocation of their sense of time and space, the men perceive the entire world as if gummed up with mud: "comme une espèce de boue, de vase, stagnante, comme enfermée sous le poids du suffocant couvercle de puanteur s'exhalant de milliers et de milliers d'hommes croupissant dans leur propre humiliation..." (p. 121).

Symbolic of the creative function of nature are "la pâte" and "l'argile." "La pâte," according to Bachelard, is "le schéme fondamental de la matérialité." It is associated in the narrator's mind with "ces moules dans lesquels enfant il avait appris à estamper soldats et cavaliers, rien qu'un peu de pâte pressée du pouce..." (p. 42). By analogy, he thinks of the womb as a kind of mold in which humanity takes form and substance, a mold from which have emerged from time immemorial all the men of arms who have spread their teeming multitudes across the earth. Like the earth to which she is often compared, woman is envisioned less as man's human counterpart than as an elemental force of nature: "cette matrice le creuset originel qu'il lui semblait voir dans les entrailles du monde..." (p. 42). This epic vision of the dual creative forces in life--earth and the female principle--receives development in an extended metaphor near the conclusion of the novel. "Le caractère cosmique des souvenirs organiques," writes Gaston Bachelard, "ne doit d'ailleurs pas nous surprendre
dès qu'on a compris que l'imagination matérielle est une imagination première."

Three women--unrelated in terms of social rank or time--combine in the narrator's mind to express the universal and eternal role of woman in the great cosmic cycles of nature. The creative role of woman is symbolized by a peasant girl encountered in a barn where the squadron sought shelter during the winter of bivouac before the enemy invasion of the following spring. This archetypal image of Woman suggests a fundamentally materialist vision:

non pas une femme mais l'idée même, le symbole de toute femme, c'est-à-dire
............... sommairement façonnés
dans la tendre argile deux cuisses un ventre deux seins la ronde colonne du cou et au creux des replis comme au centre de ces statues primitives et précises cette bouche herbue cette chose au nom de bête, de terme d'histoire naturelle--moule poulpe pulpe vulve-- ........ (pp. 41-42)

Another aspect of man's subjection to the domination of nature is the physiological determinism which is responsible for the union of the sexes in the act of procreation. From time immemorial woman has been to man the eternal temptation and the eternal threat, an abyss in which he is doomed to fall and to relinquish some of his vital forces. An allusion to the sexual act as a means whereby woman robs man of his "forces vives" is contained in the frequent reference to the
vulva as "cette bouche cachée, secrète," or "cette bouche herbue," and to the position of woman in the act of physical love "sur le dos." The idea of woman as an insatiable devourer of men also underlies certain compositions of the painter Edvard Munch, whom Kenneth Clark refers to as an artist dominated by sex in an uncomfortable way. The series of the kiss by Munch portrays the fusion of two beings, the smaller of which devours the other.

In the light of this view of the role of woman, the choice of a passage from Martin Luther as epigraph to Part II of La Route des Flandres becomes significant: "Qui a bien pu donner à Dieu l'idée de créer des êtres mâles et femelles et de les faire s'unir?" (p. 103). Surely it would have been more rational to have attributed the procreative power entirely to the earth, and to let the sun shine all the time:

S'il m'avait demandé mon avis sur la procréation des hommes, je lui aurais conseillé de s'en tenir à la motte de limon. Et je lui aurais dit de poser le soleil, comme une lampe, au beau milieu de la terre. Comme ça il aurait tout le temps fait jour. (p. 103)

For what reason was a physical relationship between the sexes necessary? Why, as we saw in Le Vent, the existence of woman at all, whose only purpose seems to be:
seulement se contenter de se tenir, patientes et attentives, dans l'éternelle position de la montagneuse mère du monde, de l'éternelle putain--Déméter ou Dalilah--avec, ouvert au centre d'elles, ce piège, cette bouche avide et ténébreuse où, de génération en génération, la moutonnière troupe des mâles vient s'engloutir et se perdre.

The symbolism of the vulva communicates a vision of revolt against the flesh, against the physiological determinism which, compounded with the oppression of time, consigns man to a role of passivity.

The themes of materiality and man's physiological constitution are closely allied to the dominant theme of war. Erotic desire intensified by the conditions of war degenerates into lust, as suggested by numerous gustatory images characteristic of Georges' erotic dreams. With her "chair laiteuse," the farm girl appears to him as something to be consumed:

Georges disant: 'Mais je l'ai assez vue pour savoir qu'elle est comme du lait. Cette lampe suffisait. Bon sang: c'était exactement comme du lait, de la crème répandue...' et Blum: 'Quoi?,' et Georges: 'Tu n'étais tout de même pas crevé au point de ne pas t'en apercevoir, non? Même un mort... On avait seulement envie de se mettre à ramper et à lécher, on...' (p. 61)

The purely physiological aspect of Georges' fantasies is evident in the following evocation of Corinne clothed in a
vaporous dress:

son corps dessiné à l'intérieur en transparence (la fourche de ses jambes) par les rayons frisants du soleil et se détachant nettement, comme si elle était nue, en rouge foncé dans le nuage vaporeux des voiles de sorte qu'elle faisait penser (mais pas penser, pas plus que le chien ne pense quand il entend la sonnette fatidique qui déclenche ses réflexes: donc pas penser, plutôt quelque chose comme saliver) à quelque chose comme un de ces sucreries d'orge (et sirop, et orgeat, des mots aussi pour elle, pour cela), de ces sucreries enveloppées de paper cellophane aux teintes acides (papiers dont le froissement cristallin, la couleur seule, la matière même, avec leurs cassures où la paraffine apparaît en un fin réseau de lignes grises entrecroisées, provoque déjà les réflexes physiologiques)... (p. 49).

Throughout the novel, sexuality is equated with bestiality, the physiological drive to which man passively obeys: "seulement je n'étais plus un homme mais un animal un chien plus qu'un homme une bête si je pouvais y atteindre connaître l'âne d'Apulée poussant sans trêve en elle..." (p. 292).

With regard to man's fundamentally physiological nature, the barbarism and brutality of war strip away the veneer of refinement, of what we consider civilized humanity, and reveal our kinship with the common beast: "même plus des soldats même plus des hommes, ayant peu à peu appris à être quelque chose comme des animaux mangeant n'importe quand et n'importe quoi pourvu qu'on puisse réussir à le mâcher et l'avaler..." (p. 291). Caught up in the catastrophe of war
where human values once revered were ignored, Georges and Blum found themselves in the role of captive soldiers and witnessed a degradation in the sense of their humanity: "sentant avec indifférence grouiller sur leur corps la vermine dont ils étaient couverts..." (p. 216).

Scenes pertaining to the narrator's remembrance of war belong roughly to two categories of time: the fall and winter before the enemy invasion—characterized by rain, mud, and symbolizing the washing away of things—and the spring during which Georges' squadron was annihilated, Georges taken prisoner—characterized by the heat of the sun rotting things and symbolizing dissolution, decomposition, putrefaction. The absence of chronological structure in the novel creates an effect of blending of the rain and sun motifs, so that the reader has an impression of universal disintegration. Images of cosmic catastrophe, of the entire earth dissolving and disintegrating, abound in the novel and represent a subjective distortion of vision caused by a physiological state:

au milieu de cette espèce de décomposition de tout comme si non pas une armée mais le monde lui-même tout entier et non pas seulement dans sa réalité physique mais encore dans la représentation que peut s'en faire l'esprit (mais peut-être était-ce aussi le manque de sommeil, le fait que depuis dix jours nous n'avions pratiquement pas dormi, sinon à cheval) était en train de se dépiaruer se désagréger s'en aller en morceaux en eau en rien... (pp. 16-17).
Typical of the distortion of vision through imagination and sensibility (considered by Odette de Mourgues to be an important aspect of baroque poetry) echoed throughout the novel is the analogy between the sound of the rain and "le multiple et secret grignotement d'invisibles insectes en train de dévorer insensiblement les maisons, les arbres, la terre entière" (p. 65).

The arrival of spring seems to herald a transformation of the earth, to replace liquefaction in mud and rain with a carpet of green, but even in the midst of nature's rebirth dissolution of matter continues in another form. Putrefaction replaces liquefaction. The bodies of Wack and de Reixach are left for dead on a road in Flanders: "pourrissant comme des charognes." The dead horse encountered four times during Georges' odyssey of escape along undifferentiated byways—the same hedges, the same red brick houses, the same deluge of refuse, dead and decomposing matter—epitomizes the process of decomposition in its transformation at each encounter, changing from an animal freshly slain and still displaying the hues of life: "sa tête raide et renversée dont la mâchoire ouverte laissait voir la tache violette du palais" (p. 28) to colorless matter having undergone the stages of gradual dissolution: "et retournait maintenant, ou était déjà retourné à la terre originelle sans apparemment avoir eu besoin de passer par le stade intermédiaire de la putréfaction"
In Georges' final vision of the animal--its decomposition having reached the ultimate stages--he imagines its stench pervading the total atmosphere of war: "jusqu'à ce que la terre entière le monde entier soit obligé de se boucher le nez..." (p. 308). Recurring allusions to putrefaction on a cosmic scale communicate a vision of a world in decay: "cet inextricable, monotone et énigmatique sillage des désastres ......... quelque chose comme une vaste décharge publique répandue sur des kilomètres, et exhalant non pas la traditionnelle et héroïque odeur de charnier, de cadavre en décomposition, mais seulement d'ordures, simplement puant ........." (p. 204).

TIME IN NATURE

War thus represents an intensification and acceleration of the processes of disintegration, decomposition, and decay of matter which are always occurring but not ordinarily so flagrantly. As Georges commented to Blum: "as-tu remarqué comme tout cela va vite, cette espèce d'accélération du temps, l'extraordinaire rapidité avec laquelle la guerre produit des phénomènes--rouille, souillures, ruines, corrosion des corps--qui demandent en temps ordinaire des mois ou des années pour s'accomplir?" (p. 205)

Time is not an abstraction for Simon. The march of Time is manifested in the slow, almost imperceptible (in
time of peace at least) mutation of matter: "l'éternel cheminement de la matière .... se déplaçant avec cette foudroyante et implacable lenteur...." Subtle manifestations of the mutation of matter symbolic of passing time can be detected in the erosive action of rain and mud in La Route des Flandres, which, though occurring on a very small scale, seems to be sweeping away the entire earth:

Un lacis de rigoles emmêlées courait sur le sable blond du chemin le bord du talus s'effritait peu à peu se dépiotait glissait en de minuscules et successifs éboulements qui obstruaient un moment un des bras du réseau puis disparaissaient attaqués rongés emportés le monde entier s'en allait avec un murmure continu de source de gouttes se poursuivant le long des branches luisantes se rattrapant se rejoignant se détachant tombant avec les dernières feuilles les derniers vestiges de l'été des jours à jamais abolis qu'on ne retrouve ne retrouve jamais ... (p. 274).

Simon's world is not the inanimate universe of Robbe-Grillet. It is a world in perpetual transfiguration: the wind assails; the rain pelts the earth and washes it away; the sun rots and putrefies; the earth ingests and reassimilates. In a sense, war is but a metaphor for life. Life itself is the débâcle. Absolutely nothing remains stable or fixed. Metamorphosis and chaos characterize the universe of matter in mutation: se désagrègeant, se dissolvant, se rouillant, se dépiautant, se liquéfiant, se putréfiant.

The frequently recurring nouns "cheminement" and
"acheminement" underscore the theme of the march of Time and of man's bondage to Time. Hoof beats of horses in the narrator's squadron suggest to him "quelque chose de majestueux, monumental: le cheminement même du temps, c'est-à-dire invisible immatériel sans commencement ni fin ni repère..." (p. 30). Even the incessant rain becomes a symbol of passing time: "la pluie tombant toujours et peut-être depuis toujours, les noyers les arbres du verger s'égouytant sans fin..." (p. 64). The march of time is, of course, an irreversible march toward death and nothingness: "l'immuable et irréversible acheminement vers la mort."9

The theme of death haunts the novels of Claude Simon. The agony of an old woman serves as "toile de fond" for the rêveries of Louise in L'Herbe. Once again war represents an acceleration of time. Lurking behind every tree and hedge-row in the deceptively peaceful countryside of spring, death awaits young soldiers in Flanders: "sans le soleil la campagne semblait encore plus morte abandonnée effrayante par sa paisible et familière immobilité cachant la mort aussi paisible aussi familière et aussi peu sensationnelle que les bois les arbres les prés fleuris..." (p. 93). The horse with its gaping wound, the ancestor with his blood-stained face, Wack sprawled against an embankment with empty, staring eyes represent the swift extinction of violent death.
THE EYE AND THE MIND (PARCE QUE L'HOMME EST
SANS DOUTE AUTRE CHOSE QUE DE LA
MATIÈRE ............)

From the earliest novels of Simon, the themes of
time, and memory are paramount. In Le Tricheur,
published in 1946, we find a sense of anguish before the in-
difference of nature:

Il émanait de cette eau une sensation
presque angoissante d'indifférence
éternelle et paisible. La nature entrait
dans l'obscurité qui la débarrasserait
des hommes; géante même pas moqueuse, trop
sûre de sa victoire.10

In the same novel the derelict artist Gauthier solemnly
reflects upon man's march toward "l'anéantissement." His
father, now dead, remains "un souvenir seulement vivant dans
sa conscience." That, too, will pass: "et quand celle-ci
à son tour aurait cessé d'être, ce serait, à ce moment-là,
toujours, la mort de celui qui avait été son père...."11
Human existence is bound up with the perpetual transformation
of matter. Man is imprisoned in matter and doomed to
deterioration and death. Yet he is alone among living
creatures to be conscious of his time-haunted, nature-bound
condition. A fundamental obsession appears to underlie
literary creation for Simon: the dialectic between the
material world of nature to which man is inextricably bound
and human consciousness through which man is aware of his
subjection to the forces of time and nature and at the same time the means whereby he may transcend his condition in the creation of the work of art. The scene of *La Route des Flandres* is consciousness—the a-temporal world of memory and imagination. The world of fiction is reflected through the prism of an individual mind: "sa rétine, oui, sa mémoire, oui aussi (parce que l'homme est sans doute autre chose que de la matière: peut-être pas beaucoup plus, mais quand même un petit quelque chose de plus...."  

Whereas in *Le Vent* the reader participates in the narrator's effort to re-create and to synthesize numerous subjective impressions of events composing a "story," in *La Route des Flandres* the narrator, or more precisely the narrative consciousness, attempts to re-create his own past as it existed for his past self or selves, and in so doing he creates the novel. Memory is the raw material of creation in this novel. The narrator's opening monologue is a monologue of memory. Having abandoned any semblance of logical order, the progression of the novel now simulates "le foisonnant et rigoureux désordre de la mémoire."  

The narrator's quest for the recovery of the past as it existed in his past consciousness takes the form of an alternation between first (present self) and third (past self) -person narration. The theme of "dédoublement" is given subtle emphasis in recurring images of the narrator
or other figures accompanied by shadows or doubles. From the standpoint of technique, objectification of the past self allows for the use of conventional third-person narration without the implication of the point of view of an omniscient author. Thus, technique reflects the subjective, relative nature of all descriptions.

With the exception of passages enclosed within quotation marks and representing remembered direct speech, the first person is used only in the first eighteen pages, again at the very center of the novel for some fourteen pages, and throughout most of the third section. The narrator is trying to recall what he thought, felt, said, imagined, and even remembered at various times in the past and with different people. The effect of third-person narration in this novel is again that of an indirect view of a subjectivity—one subjectivity filtered through another—seen from "trop loin, caché derrière sa haie, derrière le temps" (p. 49). This is an important distinction as we shall see with respect to the novel Histoire in which the narrator is concerned with the past only as it exists for him in his present consciousness. The reduction of depth in Histoire accentuates the "spatial" effect of the novel.

The narrowing of narrative focus in La Route des Flandres from a witness-narrator to a narrative consciousness performing a "tentative de restitution" of his own past
constitutes a further step in an evolution of narrative technique from relativism to formalism. The nearest we can come to any "objective" view of reality is, as we saw in Le Vent, through a synthesis of a number of subjective impressions received by various individuals. Yet no matter how thorough our attempt to reassemble the scattered debris of the broken mirror of the past, we are likely to end up with nothing more than "un résultat incohérent, dérisoire, idiot où seul notre esprit ou plutôt notre orgueil nous enjoint sous peine de folie et en dépit de toute évidence de trouver à tout prix une suite logique de causes et d'effets ...."\(^{14}\) In La Route des Flandres this skeptical attitude is carried to the extreme of denying certain knowledge of one's own past. Unlike Proust who believed in the power of involuntary memory to restore past scenes in full—"l'édifice immense du souvenir"—for Simon the scenes of the past are irrevocably eroded by time. The world of memory is a world in dissolution and decomposition: "le monde arrêté figé s'effritant se dépiautant s'écroulant peu à peu par morceaux..." (p. 314).

TIME AND THE IMAGE

The act of memory involves recognition that the content of consciousness derives from our past experience. In other words, as Armand Cuvillier points out, "il n'y a pas
souvenir proprement dit si l'image qui surgit à notre esprit n'est pas reconnue, c'est-à-dire plus ou moins consciemment attribuée au passé." There is, however, no purely "reproductive" imagination, and the scenes from the narrator's past have been re-created under so many different circumstances and at so many different times that they have undergone modification. He no longer remembers, for example, with whom he has re-created certain scenes or whether certain words were spoken by himself or his interlocutor:

et Georges (à moins que ce ne fût toujours Blum, s'interrompant lui-même, bouffonnant, à moins qu'il (Georges) ne fût pas en train de dialoguer sous la froide pluie saxonne avec un petit juif souffreteux—ou l'ombre d'un petit juif, et qui n'allait bientôt plus être qu'un cadavre—un de plus—de petit juif—mais avec lui-même, c'est-à-dire son double, tout seul sous la pluie grise, parmi les rails, les wagons de charbon, ou peut-être des années plus tard, toujours seul (quoiqu'il fût maintenant couché à côté d'une tiède chair de femme), toujours en tête-à-tête avec ce double, ou avec Blum, ou avec personne): ... (p. 187).

Accustomed to a positive account of events by an omniscient author, the reader is at first taken aback by passages expressing the idea that the content of the novel is but relative truth, dependent upon such factors as the state of mind of an observer at the moment of perception or the erosive effect of time which undermines our hold on the past.
In his *Traité de Psychologie Générale*, Maurice Pradines corroborates the view that knowledge of our own past is relative:

Le problème de la conservation du passé a été et semble être demeuré le problème des problèmes de la mémoire...... Mais peut-être que le passé n'est pas conservé et que la chose ainsi dénommée n'est qu'une reconstruction que nous en faisons dans le présent, en partant de la simple notion qu'il a existé, au moyen de repères que nous avons pris sur lui quand il existait et qui nous conservent dans le présent sa trace. Nous ne connaissons guère autrement notre existence passée que celle de Napoléon, qui n'a laissé cependant aucune trace dans notre mémoire: du moins l'immense majorité de nos souvenirs de nous-même n'est-il que notion pure, à laquelle des lambeaux d'images effilochées restent confusément attachés.16

Simon himself is fond of referring interviewers to Stendhal's description of his recollection of crossing the Saint-Bernard pass with Napoleon's army:

Il me semble que nous entrâmes, ou bien les récits de l'intérieur de l'Hospice qu'on me fit produisirent une image qui depuis trente-six ans a pris la place de la réalité. Voilà un danger de mensonge que j'ai aperçu depuis trois mois que je pense à ce véridique journal.17

Frustrated in his efforts to recover the past as it existed for his past self (Georges), the narrator in *La Route des*
Flandres is forced to recognize that the memory image is eroded by time, that it, too, is subject to "l'incohérent, nonchalant, impersonnel et destructeur travail du temps" (p. 314).

Certainly the most moving instance of this process of mental "disintegration" in the novel is the narrator's loss of certitude regarding the reality of the haunting image of the death of Captain de Reixach—the image which serves as catalyst for the creation of the whole novel! In the years following the war, Georges indulged obsessively in the re-creation of his past, as indicated in the following passage which reflects his thoughts while driving a tractor back and forth across a field on his father's farm:

tandis que passaient parfois confusément les images, le visage décharné de Blum, Iglésia, et quand ils faisaient cuire les galettes, et l'obsfure silhouette équestre, levant le bras, brandissant le sabre, s'écoulant lentement sur le côté, disparaissant, et elle.... (p. 234).

At the outset of the novel, recommencing once again the process of re-creation, the narrator recalls the image of de Reixach in a positive tone:

un moment j'ai pu le voir ainsi le bras levé brandissant cette arme inutile et dérisoire dans un geste héréditaire de statue équestre... (p. 12).
On the final page, however, a negative conclusion to his efforts to recover the past emerges from his doubts regarding the reality of his vision of the Captain's death:

sa silhouette grandissant jusqu'à ce que le tireur distingue peu à peu les galons, les boutons de sa tunique les traits mêmes de son visage, le guidon choisissant maintenant l'endroit le plus favorable sur sa poitrine, le canon se déplaçant insensiblement, le suivant, l'éclat de soleil sur l'acier noir à travers l'odorante et printanière haie d'ubépines. Mais l'ai-je vraiment vu ou cru le voir ou tout simplement imaginé après coup ou encore rêvé, peut-être dorénavant je n'avais-je jamais cessé de dormir les yeux grands ouverts en plein jour bercé par le martèlement monotone des sabots des cinq chevaux piétinant... (p. 314).

Allusions to Georges' dreaming while rocked by his horse's gait are reiterated in the opening pages of the novel. At the conclusion the insinuation is made that all that has gone before may have no more foundation in reality than a dream.

Remembering the journey of his squadron on horseback under driving rain, the narrator suggests that perhaps they never stopped that night at a barn, that perhaps the peasant girl seen at dawn, the quarrel between the lame farmer and the mayor's assistant, never existed:

et cahotés sur nos montures invisibles nous aurions pu croire que tout cela
(le village la grange la laiteuse
apparition les cris le boîteux
l'adjoint la vieille folle tout cet
obscur et aveugle et tragique et
banal imbroglio de personnages....)
que tout cela n'avait existé que
dans notre esprit: un rêve une
illusion alors qu'en réalité nous
n'avions peut-être jamais arrêté
de chevaucher chevauchant toujours
dans cette nuit ruiselante et sans
fin continuant à nous répondre sans nous
voir..... (p. 277).

As a consequence of his re-creation of imaginary scenes
invented by himself and Blum during their long internment
in prison camp simultaneously with the scenes remembered
from his past, the narrator has come to confuse the real
with the imaginary, to be unable to distinguish the boun-
daries between them. He has come to wonder if in fact he
has not made it all up, as Corinne insinuated:

Alors peut-être avait-elle raison après
tout peut-être disait-elle vrai peut-
être étais-je toujours en train de lui
parler, d'échanger avec un petit juif
maintenant mort depuis des années des
vantardises des blagues des obscénités
des mots des sons rien que pour ne pas
nous endormir nous donner le change nous
encourager l'un l'autre, Blum disant
maintenant: Mais peut-être ce fusil
n'était-il même pas chargé ...........
Les deux voix sans visage alternant
se répondant dans le noir sans plus de
réalité que leur propre son, disant des
choses sans plus de réalité qu'une suite
de sons ....... (pp. 277-279).
Thus the seed is sown in the reader's mind that he is not in the process of re-creating through the abstract symbols of language the ersatz of reality traditionally offered to him in the novel.

In *La Route des Flandres*, as in *Le Vent*, the world of fiction is explicitly located where it always resides—in the imagination of author (narrator) and reader. This emphasis on what Roland Barthes has called "la réalité irréelle du langage"—"la littérature n'est que du language, son être est dans le langage"—may be seen to constitute a parallel to non-figurative or abstract painting in which form is achieved not in terms of the recognizable depiction of natural objects but in terms of the development of the medium itself. From Manet to the present painters have undertaken "une série de recherches pour échapper aux servitudes de la représentation" and have felt "un besoin d'affirmer la spécificité de leur art." Similarly, for Simon "l'art est un système de rapports: dans la peinture, les couleurs; dans l'écriture, les mots. Le sujet n'est que le prétexte."  

FROM RELATIVISM TO FORMALISM

The theme of reality versus illusion which pervades *La Route des Flandres* is but another facet of the theme of relativism fundamental in *Le Vent*. The only direction open to the novel as a result of the strict application of the
concept of relativism to traditional form is that of estheticism or formalism. As A. A. Mendelow observes, with the disappearance of plot, "The wider rhythm of aesthetic effect replaces the closed pattern of structure." With Simon the novel eventually becomes an autonomous structure in language, a verbal construct. Formal values—the creation of patterns, harmonies and contrasts, themes and counter-themes—come to take priority over any intention to represent a "reality" external to the work of art.

In the face of the tyranny of nature and time, of the pessimism inherent in a world-view dominated by relativism and skepticism, there remains "l'oeuvre." Between his gossamery past and total obliteration the writer does have "cette poreuse, grossière et fragile barrière des mots." Out of the residue of his past—the "lambeaux d'images effilochées"—he will create the novel. Our analysis of narrative technique in *La Route des Flandres* will show, first, how the structure of the novel simulates the structure and functioning of consciousness (memory): the mode of existence of past experience in the mind. In this sense *La Route des Flandres* remains within the tradition of the novel as *mimesis*. Secondly, we shall see how the internal structure of consciousness becomes a framework upon which the writer builds a verbal tapestry or collage, a formal composition.
THE PSYCHIC OR AFFECTIVE ENSEMBLE

It is, then, the unique relations of an individual memory structure—a psychic ensemble or what might be called an affective ensemble—which serve as scaffold for the composition of La Route des Flandres. No memory image occurs in isolation. It is always part of a complex of associations. As one study of the psychology of memory has described this phenomenon:

Une évocation n'est donc jamais isolée. Entendons: une évocation s'explique toujours, en référence, sinon à des chaînes conscientes, du moins à des chaînes subconscientes. Le souvenir est un point d'intersection; il est intégré à une structure, et lié par de multiples relations, soit à une expérience actuelle, soit à l'inactuel. Le mécanisme du rappel correspond, à partir de la perception, d'une idée, ou d'images, à l'analyse d'une structure d'ensemble.  

Simon described this characteristic of psychic functioning to an interviewer in more esthetic terms: "Mais une émotion, une sensation—Samuel Beckett l'a très justement remarqué—ne se présente jamais seule au souvenir. Elle provoque des harmoniques, ou si vous préféarez des couleurs complémentaires."  

Three types of mental association are seen to determine the structure of the novel: association by contiguity (the remembrance of a past scene is associated with the remembrance
of having recalled it at another time), association by similarity or by contrast, and finally verbal association.

If the opening pages of the novel are devoted to the evocation of de Reixach, captain of the narrator's squadron, it is because he is the central figure of the entire affective ensemble. His introduction at the outset establishes the axis upon which the other evocations depend, for he is at the center of a network of associations linking him to various areas of the narrator's experience: childhood and family (the narrator's mother, portrait of the ancestor), the Battle of France in May, 1940, horses, and erotic rêverie through Corinne, young wife of the Captain. As the narrator's superior officer, de Reixach figures prominently in his experience of war, and as a kinsman he represents one of a long line of de Reixachs whose fortunes and adventures constitute a large part of family tradition and lore as transmitted by the narrator's mother, Sabine. Indeed, the narrator's fascination for de Reixach and persistent desire to penetrate the enigma of his behavior following the annihilation of his squadron in ambush--behavior which caused his death on a road in Flanders--largely motivate the recurrent efforts of the narrator to re-create the scenes of the débâcle and are therefore the raison d'être of the whole novel.

Central to the narrator's remembrance of the
dissolution and disintegration of the world which seemed to be taking place in May of 1940, is the recollection of the collapse of military order and discipline, epitomized in the attitude of the Captain:

ne se sentant sans doute plus tenu à aucun devoir non pas en ce qui nous concernait personnellement mais en ce qui concernait son rôle sa fonction d'officier, pensant probablement que ce qu'il pouvait faire ou ne pas faire sur ce plan n'avait au stade où nous en étions arrivés plus aucune espèce d'importance: délivré donc libéré relevé pour ainsi dire de ses obligations militaires à partir du moment où l'effectif de son escadron avait été réduit à nous quatre (son escadron) lui-même étant à peu près tout ce qui avait fini par rester du régiment tout entier avec peut-être quelques autres cavaliers démontés perdus par-ci par-là dans la nature) ........ (p. 16)

The capital scene of the annihilation of the squadron in ambush is located at the very center of the novel, and, significantly, is interpolated within the evocation of a race in which de Reixach rode his own filly, symbolically to defeat his rival in his wife's bed, the jockey Iglesia. De Reixach's defeat in the race represents a first form of auto-destruction--loss of face and honor before his wife. The ambush in which most of his men were killed signifies a second supreme humiliation, that which, the narrator supposes, divested him of whatever desire to live remained within him. But as the narrator repeatedly admits, "Comment
savoir?" Hence the return of his thoughts to the same images in the hope of uncovering some decisive clue, some evidence overlooked before.

As the reader strives to follow the detours of the narrator's thought, he initially sees in the novel only disorder—a narrative style which, as Jean Ricardou points out, reflects a vision of a world in decomposition. Only after much reflection does the designed quality of the novel become apparent.

TECHNIQUE OF ASSOCIATION: CONTIGUITY

The return of obsessive memories to the forefront of consciousness is a form of eternal recommencing, like the rain drop on the edge of a roof:

de sorte qu'un instant après il semble que ce soit la même goutte qui pende, s'enfle de nouveau, toujours à la même place, et cela sans fin ... (p. 25).

Every moment in past time was once a present, during which other more remote past moments were recalled. The past is like a series of ripples in a pool created when a pebble penetrates the water's surface. Any given scene from past experience may be envisioned as surrounded by the concentric rings of the other past times when it has been recalled and re-created. The following diagram illustrates this principle
with regard to the scene which has most persistently haunted the memory of the narrator, the mysterious death of Captain de Reixach brandishing his saber and falling:

In the opening pages of the novel, narration in the first person expresses the process of mental re-creation of past scenes at present. When the focus turns to the narrator's past self, Georges, he begins to remember himself in the past in the process of re-creating the scenes of the débâcle and particularly the scene of the death of his captain. He sees himself with Blum during their journey in a railroad box-car as prisoners of war, and he remembers having described to Blum de Reixach's apparent suicidal death. The flow of memories continues with recollections of the scenes of the débâcle, and the reader assumes Georges to be
in the box-car reminiscing with Blum, when he encounters these startling words: "Puis il se rendit compte que ce n'était pas à Blum qu'il était en train d'expliquer tout ça (Blum qui était mort depuis plus de trois ans maintenant..." (p. 93).

Where, then is Georges? The answer, the reader learns, is that over the last pages Georges has been recalling the box-car sequence and the conversation exchanged therein while re-creating these past scenes once again, this time in a hotel room in the company of a woman, whom the reader eventually identifies as Corinne.

Of course, Georges also re-created the haunting scene of the death of his captain numerous times during his captivity in enemy prison camp. The multiple existence of certain scenes on different planes in time creates a very complex temporal structure. This structure aims to represent a feature of consciousness known to phenomenologists as "intensive synthesis":

Each phase of mental life, being intensive (retentively and protentively) to other phases of the same mental life, is also intensive to their respective transcendent objects.

To remember having remembered is to intend the transcendent objects of each phase of recollecting. Other examples of the literary depiction of this complex functioning of consciousness will emerge from our discussions. Through the
process of association by contiguity the reader confronts the intersection of time planes widely separated in terms of chronology, a technique which parallels Cézanne's effort to integrate surface and depth (thus creating spatial ambiguity) by "passage" or "the running together of planes otherwise separated in space." In order to reconstruct the objective sequence of events in La Route des Flandres the reader must conscientiously take note of all the scattered references to categories of chronological time: hours, seasons, years.

TECHNIQUE OF ASSOCIATION: SIMILARITY

Equally important for the structure of the novel is the process of association by similarity or resemblance which explains the parallel in the mind of the narrator between the death of de Reixach and an account handed down by family tradition of the death of another de Reixach who, after having suffered defeat as a commander of troops in the war with Spain in 1793, supposedly took his own life upon returning home and finding that his wife had been unfaithful. Or perhaps it was to avoid the guillotine? If in fact suicide was the cause of death in either case, what, the narrator wonders, motivated the act? In neither case can he arrive at the truth, for his information about the ancestor is derived from family legend and what he knows about de Reixach is largely based on family gossip and rumor. The
recollected recollection of the legend of the ancestor colors his impressions concerning the death of de Reixach with the result that in his mind the stories intermingle, blend, and tint one another with their individual colors.

Tales of the de Reixachs are an integral part of the narrator's affective world. As a child he became acquainted with certain relics of the past, remnants of history which his mother had inherited from the de Reixachs. Old papers and documents crumbled at his touch and dust filled his nostrils as he perused the contents of old trunks, but the legacy which made the most profound impression on his child's mind was a portrait of the ancestor whose fate later seemed to him to foreshadow that of his descendant:

ce portrait que pendant toute son enfance il avait contemplé avec une sorte de malaise, de frayeur, parce qu'il (ce lointain géniteur) portait au front un trou rouge dont le sang dégoulinait en une longue rigole serpentine partie de la tempe, suivant la courbe de la joue et dégouttant sur le revers de l'habit de chasse bleu roi comme si -- pour illustrer, perpétuer la trouble légende dont le personnage était entouré -- on l'avait portaituré ensanglanté par le coup de feu qui avait mis fin à ses jours...

( pp. 56-57).

He remembers having told his fellow prisoner Blum that the ancestor with his fatal wound seemed to fit into the setting—the hedgerows and meadows of the peaceful, but deadly,
springtime countryside—in which de Reixach had succumbed to enemy mortar. The ancestor's bloody face seemed to symbolize the horror of the reality of death that the narrator had encountered for the first time on the field of battle: "la brusque révélation de la mort c'est-à-dire enfin connue non plus sous la forme abstraite de ce concept avec lequel nous avons pris l'habitude de vivre mais surgie on plutôt frappant dans sa réalité physique" (pp. 88-89).

There is in fact a fusion and interpenetration in the mind of the narrator between the two de Reixachs, with the result that the reader often has difficulty in following the transition in the narrator's thoughts from one personage to the other. Thus, Georges, while elaborating on the events following the ancestor's defeat by the Spanish, suddenly and without overt transition begins to allude to Captain de Reixach and to his attitude following the defeat of his squadron in May of 1940:

et embrassant (les paysans et les contrebandiers) une vieille croix crasseuse sortie de sous leur chemise avant de décharger à bout portant de derrière un chêne-liège ou un fourré leur vieux tromblon sur un blessé ou un traînard avec cette sorte de rage sacrée, de sainte et meurtrière fureur, criant en même temps que part le coup quelque chose comme: 'Tiens, salaud, mange ça!', et lui (de Reixach) apparemment sourd et aveugle (aux coups de feu, aux chants d'oiseaux, au soleil
déclinant), morne, absent, se laissant conduire par son cheval, les rênes abandonnées, déjà parvenu ou entré dans un autre état, un autre degré, soit de connaissance, soit de sensibilité—ou d'insensibilité—et à un moment donné un type—un soldat tête nue, sans écussons ni armes—sortant de quelque part (du coin d'une maison, de derrière une haie, du fossé où il s'était tapi) et se mettant à courir près de lui en criant: 'Emmenez-moi, mon capitaine, emmenez-moi, laissez-moi aller avec vous!', et lui ne le regardant même pas ..... (p. 227).

This transition is so subtle that the effect is one of fusion, as if the narrator were seeing in his mind's eye both ancestor and descendant in the pose of a defeated officer, unmindful of the sporadic gunfire and heedlessly allowing himself to be borne along at his horse's will as if he were in a trance. At the exact moment of the transition there is but one small clue that the subject of the narrator's thoughts has changed from the ancestor to the Captain: the use of the particle "de" in the name de Reixach. The alert reader will recall that the ancestor, due to his sympathies with the Revolution and the concept of human equality, had dropped the aristocratic "de" from his name. Should he not remember this detail, his perception of the transition will be delayed until he reads of the wandering soldier who asked the Captain to take him with him: "Emmenez-moi, mon capitaine, emmenez-moi, laissez-moi aller avec vous!"
TECHNIQUE OF ASSOCIATION: VERBAL

The apparent incoherence of the narrator's thought, its brusque changes of direction, are often provoked by a suggestion contained in a single word. It is a fact well known to linguists that every word is surrounded by a network of associations which Charles Bally has named its "associative field." 29 The verbal associations which play an important role in the transitions of thought in La Route des Flandres may be seen to be based on either sound or sense, or on both sound and sense, and in this regard they conform to the observations of Ferdinand de Saussure:

...l'association peut reposer aussi sur la seule analogie des signifiés (enseignement, instruction, apprentissage, éducation, etc.), ou au contraire, sur la simple communauté des images acoustiques (par exemple enseignement et justement). Donc il y a tantôt communauté double du sens et de la forme, tantôt communauté de forme ou de sens seulement. Un mot quelconque peut toujours évoquer tout ce qui est susceptible de lui être associé d'une manière ou d'une autre. 30

In a picturesque expression de Saussure adds: "Un terme donné est comme le centre d'une constellation, le point où convergent d'autres termes coordonnés, dont la somme est indéfinie." 31

De Saussure's remarks refer to the associative property of language as it can be seen to operate on the level of "la
langue," i.e., language as an accepted code of communication among members of the same linguistic group. In the fiction of Simon, verbal association is seen to operate within the more restricted field of "la parole," i.e., the individual or personal use of the code of language. On this level the constellation of associations clustered around words is highly subjective and variable; hence the use of verbal association in some forms of psychotherapy. It is, of course, the subjective and private nature of the associations in Simon's fiction which accounts for their obscurity for the reader.

A word or word-group may, as Jean Ricardou points out, serve as a kind of "aiguillage" to shift from one idea or image to another. Thus the witty and ingenious pun concerning de Reixach's allegiance to a military code--"de ces réflexes et traditions ancestralement conservés comme qui dirait dans la Saumur" (Saumur referring simultaneously to brine, "la saumure," and the French cavalry school, "Saumur")--becomes a structural hinge ("charnière structurelle") around which thought revolves before pursuing a new and divergent direction:

Par simple symétrie, la phrase bifurque autour de cette charnière que constitue le mot Saumur, et, sans transition, passe à un autre thème, à l'évocation de Corinne qui fit abandonner la carrière --le prolongement de Saumur--à de Reixach.32
A web of associations spun around the consonance of the words chair and terre gives rise to other transitions of thought. The reader must, as Ricardou observes, develop a kind of conditioned reflex to certain recurrent associations.

He must come to know, for example, that pubic hair is always likened to vegetation growing on the surface of the earth: "ce buisson," "cette touffe broussailleuse," "cette bouche herbue," "ce suave et tendre et vertigineux et broussailleux et secret repli de la chair," "le nid la toison bouclée." The assimilation of the dual creative forces of nature—earth and the female principle (woman assimilates and transmutes, as does the earth)—is implicit in an abrupt transition from the memory of Georges lying in a ditch "dans ce sillon de la terre" to the memory of Georges lying with Corinne "blotti au creux soyeux de ses cuisses." Some ten pages prior to its occurrence the transition is foreshadowed:

(pensait Georges, toujours couché dans le fossé, attentif, raide, maintenant complètement insensible et paralysé de crampes, et aussi immobile que la carre morte, le visage parmi l'herbe nombreuse, la terre velle, son corps tout entier aplati, comme s'il s'efforçait de disparaître entre les lèvres du fossé, se fondre, se glisser, se faufiler tout entier par cette étroite fissure pour réintégrer la paisible matière (matrice) originelle ........ (p. 244).

The word "lèvres" in the phrase "les lèvres du fossé" is the
"charnière" that binds the association through the suggestion of an analogy between the lips of the ditch and the labia of Corinne. Also implicit in this transition is the idea of a return to the source, of a smothering of consciousness in a total reassimilation into "la paisible matière (matrice) originelle":

peut-être étais-je toujours couché là-bas dans l'herbe odorante du fossé dans ce sillon de la terre respirant humant sa noire et âcre senteur d'humus l'appelant son chose rose mais non pas rose rien que le noir dans les ténèbres touffues me léchant le visage mais en tout cas mes mains ma langue pouvant la toucher la connaître m'assurer.... et il ne restait plus alors de mon corps qu'un foetus ratatiné repetissé couché entre les lèvres du fossé comme si je pouvais m'y fondre y disparaître m'y engloutir accroché comme ces petits singes sous le ventre de leur mère à son ventre à ses seins multiples m'enfouissant dans cette moiteur fauve... (pp. 256-257).

Thus in La Route des Flandres we see the emergence of the novel conceived as a verbal construct. Many scenes or descriptions are motivated by characteristics of language, by suggestions contained in the signifier or the signified.

The assimilation of woman and the world of nature is in operation throughout the novel, as can be seen in the following comparison of Corinne's flesh first to sponges, then to marine flowers and madreporas:
sa chair—bougeant imperceptiblement, c'est-à-dire respirant, c'est-à-dire se dilatant et se contractant tour à tour comme si l'air pénétrait en elle non par sa bouche, ses poumons, mais par toute sa peau, comme si elle était faite d'une matière semblable à celle des éponges, mais d'un grain invisible, se dilatant et se contractant, semblable à ces fleurs, ces choses marines à mi-chemin entre le végétal et l'animal, ces maddépores, palpitant délicatement dans l'eau transparente, respirant... (p. 236).

It would appear that this rich and dense metaphor is an outgrowth of the consonance Corinne: corail to which reference is made on the previous page: "dans cette robe rouge couleur de bonbon anglais......peut-être à cause de son nom, parce que 'Corinne' faisait penser à 'corail'?" (pp. 234-235).

Finally, a network of associations with erotic overtones is woven around references to birds. From the suggestion that Corinne's arm seems to undulate like the neck of a swan (the erotic theme being implicit in the reference to Léda whom Zeus visited in the form of a swan) a transition is made to the memory of the peacock motif on a curtain behind which the alluring peasant girl shielded herself from view:

tandis que quittant mon cou son autre bras semblait ramper le long d'elle-même comme un animal comme un col de cygne inverterbé se faufilant le long de la hanche de Léda (ou quel autre oiseau symbolique de l'impudique de l'orgueilleuse qui le paon sur le rideau de filet retombé sa queue chamarrée d'yeux se balançant oscillant mystérieux) .... (pp. 262-263).
The peacock is a symbol of coquetry, of the eternal temptation of woman:

ces désirs virginaux frais guettant la fille entrevue te souviens-tu nous guettions levions sans cesse la tête vers cette fenêtre ce rideau de filet que nous avions cru voir bouger .......

(pp. 121-122).

The softness of Corinne's skin is compared to the feathers of birds: "l'incroyable délicatesse, la tragique fragilité des plumes, du duvet" (p. 238). Even her breathing suggests the palpitating breast of a bird: "sa poitrine, ses seins s'élevant et s'abaissant comme ces gorges d'oiseaux, palpitant..." (p. 237).

DISCONTINUITY AND CONTIGUITY

Simon once explained the objectives of his technique to an interviewer in terms of the discontinuity and contiguity characteristic of subjective time and space:

J'étais hanté par deux choses: la discontinuité, l'aspect fragmentaire des émotions que l'on éprouve et qui ne sont jamais reliées les unes aux autres, et en même temps leur contiguïté dans la conscience. Ma phrase cherche à traduire cette contiguïté.33

As we shall see, the discontinuity and contiguity of mental functioning provide a "raison d'être"—a pretext, if you will—for the construction of a "spatial" composition in
language, the medium of time. (Discontinuity and contiguity also characterize the techniques of many modern artists, *viz.*, the reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica* on the cover of a popular edition of *La Route des Flandres*.) In the medium of language, normal prose syntax must be modified for the purpose of suggesting the simultaneous coexistence of past experience in the mind: "Tant de choses coexistent et s'interpénètrent dans notre conscience."34 Although literary form can never achieve the objective spatiality of the visual arts, it is possible to suggest simultaneity so that the reader can be made to feel it subjectively.

**PARENTHESES**

The disruption of logical temporal sequence through the use of parentheses expresses the fusion and interpenetration of images in the mind, their simultaneous coexistence. As an example of this method for interpolating one scene within another, we may refer the reader to the sequence evoking the arrival of Georges' squadron at a barn after a night on horseback under icy rain (pp. 38-43). While recalling the farm girl as she appeared in the warm, protective atmosphere of the barn---"cette sorte de tiédeur pour ainsi dire ventrale au sein de laquelle elle se tenait---the narrator is reminded of an analogy between the womb and a mold from which emerge countless legions of soldiers. Abruptly he begins
to recall the very different scene of a hotel room where he lay beside a woman, whom the reader eventually identifies as Corinne (pp. 42-43). The interrupted sequence is resumed at the conclusion of the sequence within parentheses, so that the reader concludes that the two scenes are co-present in the narrator's mind. That the structure represents the memory of a memory is indicated by the final words of the interpolated passage: "et lui se rappelant:""). The narrator is remembering the night spent with Corinne within the context of recreating the events of the war. The memory of this night is the memory of a previous attempt at reconstructing the past and hence is another example of the synthetic function of consciousness ("intuitive synthesis") to which we referred earlier.

The following passage illustrates another way in which parentheses are used for the purpose of creating within a consecutive medium an effect of simultaneity:

et Blum: 'de sorte que ce pathétique et noble suicide pourrait bien ne...
Oui: voilà, voilà!' (la malingre et bouffonnante silhouette se mettant en mouvement, se démenant, s'arc-boutant, agitée de brèves secousses, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait réussi à charger la fourche de quatre ou cinq briquettes détrempées, puis la fourche décrivant un rapide arc de cercle, les briquettes un moment en l'air, sans pesanteur, tournoyant lentement sur elles-mêmes puis retombant avec un bruit sourd sur le plateau du camion, puis la fourche de
nouveau verticale, les dents en bas, les deux mains de Blum réunies en haut du manche et son menton appuyé dessus de sorte que quand il parle de nouveau ce n'est pas sa mâchoire inférieure--fixe--mais toute sa tête qui s'élève et s'abaisse légèrement dans un mouvement de sentencieuse approbation à chaque parole:)
'...Parce que tu prétends que cette femme à moitié nue entrevue dans l'entrebâillement de la porte... (p. 189).

The intercalation of scene within dialogue expresses the concurrence in memory of word and action.35 The visual image of Blum coexists with the words he spoke. The idea of simultaneity is conveyed by having the description of Blum as he appeared at that moment interrupt his conversation, which is then resumed at the conclusion of the description. The same technique applied on a much larger scale may not be readily recognized. The intercalated scene which interrupts a dialogue may extend over a number of pages with the result that the reader forgets the point at which the digression began. Suddenly he finds himself back where he was several pages before, as if the entire sequence within parentheses were outside of Time. This technique is, of course, counter-narrative. Normal narrative sequence is disrupted for the purpose of expressing the mind's simultaneous awareness of disparate elements.

Since the forward movement is constantly interrupted in order to interpolate additional details, associated ideas or images, the reader has no sense of progression. A passage
in the novel alludes indirectly to this effect of progressing without advancing:

si bien que l'escadron, le régiment tout entier semblait progresser sans avancer, comme au théâtre ces personnages immobiles dont les jambes imitent sur place le mouvement de la marche tandis que derrière eux se déroule en tremblotant une toile de fond sur laquelle sont peints maisons arbres nuages. (p. 30).

The movement of the discourse is one of expansion rather than of progression. The conjunction donc generally marks the return to a distant point of interruption and has the effect of abolishing any sense of a continuous forward movement:

Destiné à renouer avec le thème majeur, donc se trouve diverses fois inscrit à l’issue d’une annexe hypertrophiée qu’il sectionne alors qu’elle est devenue thème majeur. Quant au fil initial auquel le donc se réfère, il est maintenant si lointain que le nouveau développement ne peut aucunement en constituer la reprise; nous lisons une nouvelle digression.  

The aim of this technique is to stop the clock, to transcend the time-logic of language in order to rival the spatial form of the visual arts.

The use of parentheses and of parentheses within parentheses exemplifies the tedious work of restoration of the canvas of the past darkened by age and neglect—to recall the comparison of the recovery of the past to the cleaning of
"la surface d'un tableau obscurci par les vernis et la crasse et qu'un restaurateur révèlerait par plaques—essayant, expérimentant ça et là sur de petits morceaux différents formules de nettoyants" (p. 137). Each opening of parentheses may be compared to the cleaning of another segment of canvas, to the revelation of another "plaque nettoyée." Thus are spatial effects created within a temporal medium.

The strain of syntax to overcome the inevitably linear character of language is, once again, observable in *La Route des Flandres*. The tension between the limitations of the verbal medium and the effort to restore, to reconstitute scenes gives rise to a narrative style which may be compared to the "baroque" style in the visual arts. Not only does the style of *La Route des Flandres* exhibit the same extraordinary attention to concrete and sensuous detail which we saw in *Le Vent*, but more significantly the syntax of this novel with its more intricate and complex use of parentheses magnifies the effect of a massive "totality" characteristic of baroque art and architecture. Heinrich Wölfflin's famous distinction between baroque and Renaissance art rests on the fact that, contrary to the art and architecture of the preceding age, "The baroque could not allow the parts to exist independently; everything remained enclosed in the mass of the whole."37 Scenes intercalated within scenes, detours of thought which lead back to a distant point of interruption, minimization of
punctuation, ideas or images generating other ideas or images with no division of thought—all contribute to the effect of a massive totality, of an "épais magma." The parentheses within parentheses might actually be compared to the double columns or pilasters typical of baroque architecture: "In the Renaissance every architectural member was simply and purely stated, while in the baroque members were multiplied. The main reason for multiplication was the abnormally large proportions which demanded more vigorous forms, but soon it became quite usual to repeat forms several times over, encasing, for instance, pediments in pediments."38

THE PRESENT PARTICIPLE

Fundamental to the effect of "detemporalization" of the narrative is the use of the present participle in clauses which would normally contain a finite verb. Throughout La Route des Flandres a special use of the present participle in absolute clauses lends to this verb form greater independence from finite verbs in main clauses, so that the aspectual value of action in process overshadows implications of temporal value from the finite verbs.39 Of "propositions participiales absolues," G. and R. Le Bidois write:

D'ordinaire, le participe se rattache à une proposition dont il qualifie, à titre soit d'épithète, soit d'attribut, le sujet ou l'objet: ....... Mais le
participe peut aussi s'employer d'une façon détachée, c'est-à-dire avoir son sujet propre et former avec lui une proposition distincte, sans lien syntaxique avec la principale. Ce genre de proposition, sans être authentiquement une subordonnée, en a, au fond, la valeur.\textsuperscript{40}

An ambiguous relationship exists between these clauses and the principal clause of the sentence in which they appear, for they are essentially subordinate clauses and yet they are "sans lien syntaxique avec la principale." Possessing greater autonomy, these present participles seem to express action in progress outside of time. The action is evoked at the moment of its passing and expresses a sense of time arrested: "le temps pour ainsi dire solidifié."\textsuperscript{41} Within the context of the obsessive themes of the ineluctable flight of time, of time's destructive action, the "propositions participiales absolues" represent a kind of verbal petrification.

The absolute participial clauses serve, furthermore, to telescope the various elements composing a scene in order to suggest a picture in space. Through the omission of connectives, the absolute participial clauses create an effect of compression, of abridgement of the time sequence, and thus corroborate the opinion of A. A. Mendilow that "it is taking too narrow a view to associate too closely co-existence with the space-arts and succession with the time-arts. Lessing and most of the modern critics who have
considered the matter at all have identified too exactly the medium with its logical limitations. They have slurred over the factor of illusion by which extra-medial effects can be communicated."\(^{42}\)

The reader of the novels of Simon enters a world of contemplation: "le temps enfin arrêté figé vaincu."\(^{43}\) An accent is placed on the experience of fiction as an experience of consciousness, of imaginative re-creation, during which Time (objective, chronological time) is suspended: "le temps assassiné pour un temps et rendu consubstantiel à la lecture"—to modify somewhat the words of Malcolm de Chazal which serve as epigraph to the third section of La Route des Flandres: "La volupté, c'est l'étreinte d'un corps de mort par deux êtres vivants. Le 'cadavre' dans ce cas, c'est le temps assassiné pour un temps et rendu consubstantiel au toucher" (p. 253).

During their internment as prisoners of war, Georges and Blum discovered the incantatory power of language as a means of transporting themselves through imagination outside of "l'innommable réalité":

\[\text{tandis qu'ils essayaient de se transporter par procuration (c'est-à-dire au moyen de leur imagination, c'est-à-dire en rassemblant et combinant tout ce qu'ils pouvaient trouver dans leur mémoire en fait de connaissances vues, entendues ou lues, de façon—là, au milieu des rails mouillés et luisants, des wagons noirs, des pins} \]
détrempés et noirs, dans la froide et blafarde journée d'un hiver saxon--à faire surgir les images chatoyantes et lumineuses au moyen de l'éphémère, l'incantatoire magie du langage, des mots inventés dans l'espoir de rendre comestible--comme ces pâtes vaguement sucrées sous lesquelles on dissimule aux enfants les médicaments amers--l'innombrable réalité) dans cet univers futile, mystérieux et violent dans lequel, à défaut de leur corps, se mouvaient leur esprit: quelque chose peut-être sans plus de réalité qu'un songe, que les paroles sorties de leurs lèvres: des sons, du bruit pour conjurer le froid, les rails, le ciel livide, les sombres pins:...).... (p. 184).

The role of the present participle in the creation of an effect of suspension in the a-temporal world of the imaginary is fundamental. The experience of fiction is perhaps, as we suggested in our study of Le Vent, the epitome of the experience of phenomenological time, of the succession of subjective states of consciousness known as duration. The present participle creates a synchronization of inner-time consciousnesses (author/narrator and reader) so that the reader has the illusion of participating in what J. P. Sartre has called the "durée immédiate" of fiction. Instead of presenting the reader with an "objective" chronicle of events, the novel creates a fusion of his inner-time or duration with that of the fictional narrator as he pursues the activity of imaginative re-creation.

With regard to our intention to demonstrate a
correlation between theme and technique, between worldview and an evolution toward formalism, the role of the present participle in the expression of timeless evocations of memory and imagination becomes significant:

The act of recollection itself is timeless in that it seems to have no date or temporal index attached to it. It is a permanent or timeless possibility. The recollection may burst into consciousness at any time or place, which gives it the quality of being beyond time and place.....45

Abstract styles in the plastic arts, argues Wilhelm Worringer, stem from a desire "to wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context, out of the unending flux of being, to purify it of all its dependence upon life ...... to approximate it to its absolute value."46 In novels of realism and naturalism care is taken to situate the "object of the external world" within its natural context and within the flux of time. The drama which Balzac recounts in Le Père Goriot, for example, is explicitly situated in the year 1819, and the pension of Madame Vanquier is located "rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, entre le quartier latin et le faubourg Saint-Marceau." In direct contrast is the method of evocation of timeless images through the present participle --images which the narrator has re-created countless times, such as the eternally present vision of de Reixach brandishing his saber in a futile gesture of self-defense under the
onslaught of enemy fire or the vision of his gaunt figure on horseback proceeding along the road strewn with bodies and debris upon which he was to encounter fatal bullets.  

PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Consciousness (memory) structures the novel. Mental representations, imaginary and mnemonic, constitute its content in the form of phenomenological descriptions. In accordance with the concept of the intentionality of consciousness, the objects described are consubstantial with mental life. These descriptions of the intentional objects of consciousness are expressive of an individual way of looking at the world. The writer, like each of us, is defined by the objects which occupy, or perhaps we should say preoccupy, his consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty observed, "il n'y a pas d'homme intérieur, l'homme est au monde, c'est dans le monde qu'il se connaît." Or as Stephen Heath has explained: "Consciousness is always consciousness of something, it is an intentional act, in which alone can the perceiving subject grasp himself through the objects consciousness intends." Hence the insistence of Simon that writing constitutes a kind of self-discovery or self-exploration: "Le roman se fait, je le fais, et il me fait."

Implicit in the profusion of detailed, minute descriptions of natural phenomena in La Route des Flandres--
and indeed throughout the novels of Claude Simon—is an
obsessive preoccupation with nature, to which we have already
alluded. Enlargements or blow-ups of natural phenomena--
the image of a snail on a blade of grass:

si petit qu'il le faisait à peine
ployer sous son poids avec sa
minuscule coquille en colimagon
chaque volute rayée de fines lignes
brunes son cou fait aussi d'une
texture grumeleuse.... (p. 261).

of the nipples on a woman's breasts, of a rain-drop slowly
detaching itself from the edge of a roof, of grass, flowers,
and plants growing against a brick wall--convey both a
fascination with nature and an exacerbated sense of the omni-
presence of nature in human life. The starved prisoners of
war eat the grass of the earth to which they know they shall
presently return:

alors je me jetai par terre mourant de
faim pensant Les chevaux en mangent
bien pourquoi pas moi j'essayai de
m'imaginer me persuader que j'étais un
cheval, je gisais mort au fond du fossé
dévoré par les fourmis mon corps tout
entier se changeant lentement par l'effet
d'une myriade de minuscules mutations en
une matière insensible et alors ce
serait l'herbe qui se nourrirait de
moi ma chair engraisssant la terre
(pp. 258-259).

Nature sustains us and finally reclaims us. So fundamental
is the idea of the cycle of nature in the vision of life
expressed in *La Route des Flandres* that it manifests itself at all levels in the texture and structure of the work, from evocations of the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds to the fragmented description of a dead horse undergoing the stages of decomposition to mark a progression for the reader through the maze of memories in the mind of the narrator.

The following descriptive sequence evokes the consciousness of Georges at a moment of extremely vivid perception caused by his emotional state as he lay hiding from the enemy, his heart pounding with fear and his head throbbing from gin he had just consumed at a village bistrot. He experienced visual sensations of extreme intensity, as manifested in the minute description of vegetation perceived against a brick wall:

> une herbe sauvage, d'un vert délicat, poussant irrégulièrement tout contre la base du mur (comme pour dissimuler la ligne de jonction, la charnière, l'arête du dièdre formé par le mur et le sol), et, un peu en avant, le départ des fortes tiges dont la visière de son casque l'empêchait de voir le haut, la fleur (ou les bourgeois: peut-être des roses trémières ou de jeunes tournesols?) : à peu près de l'épaisseur du pouce, rayées de stries ou plutôt de cannelures longitudinales d'un vert plus clair, presque blanc, et couvertes d'un léger duvet, non pas couché, mais poussant perpendiculairement à la tige, les premières feuilles du bas déjà flétries et desséchées, pendant, flasques, comme des feuilles de salade rongées, leurs bords jaunis, mais celles du dessus
encore fermes, fraîches, avec leurs nervures claires et ramifiées comme un réseau symétrique de veiules, de fleuves, d'affluents, la matière même des feuilles moelleuse, veloutée, quelque chose (se détachant sur les briques rugueuses, minérales et sanglantes) d'incroyablement tendre, immatériel, les brins d'herbe à peu près immobiles seulement agités parfois d'un faible frisson, les tiges vigoureuses des hautes plantes absolument immobiles elles, les larges feuilles palpitant mollement de temps à autre dans l'air calme....
(pp. 247-248).

The preponderance of nouns and adjectives and of verbs which function as adjectives (the present participles) creates an effect of descriptive stasis. Action is expressed as a static quality of the subject. The reader's retina being fused with that of the narrator, he is plunged into "la durée immédiate." Within the flux of inner time or duration all sense of objective temporal progression is abolished. We are suspended in a world of contemplation: in the descriptive continuum of the transcendent objects of consciousness.

A PAINTER'S VISION

Clearly, Simon has the vision of a painter. The detailed, precise nature of his descriptions and their emphasis on the minutiae of visual experience (a trait attributed to Montès in Le Vent) recall the technique of the fifteenth-century master Albrecht Dürer to whom reference is
made in La Bataille de Pharsale in the form of an excerpt from Elie Faure's *L'Art renaissant*:

tout l'inquiétait passionnément la forme des herbes des bestioles la mousse des rochers éclatés sous la poussée patiente des racines les monstruosités humaines ou animales les choses vivantes les choses inertes les cuirasses de fer forgé les armes les casques à antennes les bannières armoriées sa sympathie universelle ne négligeait rien de ce qu'elle jugeait nécessaire au perfe-

tionnement de son métier et de son esprit ni un bout de bois mort ni un tas de pierre ni la disposition de fortune de la clôture d'un champ maintenue avec des cordes on dirait que la nature est restituée pêle-mêle dans l'ordre ou plutôt l'absence d'ordre où elle se présente à

The passage refers implicitly to the technique of Simon himself. It could also be applied to the manner of Robert Rauschenberg whose works are among the reproductions which appear in *Orion aveugle*.

Simon himself disposes of a palette of incredible richness. The description of the plants reveals an effort to transcend the limits of the verbal medium, to rival the concreteness and plasticity of the visual image. This writer seems to wish to use words as a painter uses color, applied in successive touches so that each stroke renders the image clearer and more precise in the mind.

The pictorial quality of Simon's writing brings to mind another connotation of the word "pâte," connotation of
which the author was certainly not unaware: "Masse de couleur préparée sur la palette pour être posée sur la toile." In L'Herbe a summer sky is described in terms of "cette épaisse et opaque matière, comme la pâte d'un pinceau trop chargé, dans laquelle il semble être coulé tout entier ...." The artist in La Bataille de Pharsale is viewed at work before his easel:

Je regardai le pinceau prendre un peu de rose géranium puis se charger de blanc au passage il l'écrasa sur la toile le rouge ne se mélangeant pas tout de suite dans la pâte épaisse où il dessinait de minces filaments sinueux comme dans ces pâtes à

The words "ces pâtes à" doubtless refer to the "pâte à modeler" which represents the creative function in La Route des Flandres.

Gaston Bachelard speaks of "les joies du modelage" with regard to a literary vocation:

Modelage! rêve d'enfance, rêve qui nous rend à notre enfance! On a souvent dit que l'enfant réunissait toutes les possibilités. ....... Il y a cependant un moyen, au centre même de la maturité, de retrouver ces possibilités perdues. ....... Ce moyen, c'est la littérature. Il n'y a qu'à écrire l'oeuvre peinte; il n'y a qu'à écrire la statue. .... Par le biais de l'imagination littéraire, tous les arts sont nôtres. .... Parler, écrire! Dire, raconter! Inventer le passé! Se souvenir la plume à la main....
Words are mere sounds, abstract symbols. They seem to have no substance, to be ephemeral: "quelque chose peut-être sans plus de réalité qu'un songe" (p. 184). And yet they have the power to evoke, to cause us to feel the presence of the object named—present by procuration. La Route des Flandres is a novel in which the evocative power of language—that "sorcellerie évocatoire" of which Baudelaire wrote—is exploited to the fullest. The creative role of the reader in this attempt at restoration is essential. He must put to work his faculty of imaginative re-creation: "à faire surgir les images chatoyantes et lumineuses au moyen de l'éphémère, l'incantatoire magie du langage" (p. 184).

COMPOSITION: THE MODE OF ARRANGEMENT OF IMAGES INTO AN ESTHETIC WHOLE

In La Route des Flandres narrative has been subordinated to formal values. The "story," to the extent that one exists, is fragmented and lies concealed in the verbal tapestry created by the formal arrangement of scenes. Simon himself has invited the analogy between the arrangement of scenes in his novels according to their qualitative relationship to each other and the composition of elements in a painting: "J'écris mes livres comme on ferait un tableau. Tout tableau est d'abord une composition."56 In La Route des Flandres the juxtaposition of images (descriptions) creates thematic and esthetic patterns which prefigure the
orchestration of themes achieved in *Histoire*. The notion of contrast and balance, a fundamental structural principle of the plastic arts, has become a key to narrative structure. No longer does the novel aspire to be a representation of a so-called "reality": "L'oeuvre du créateur est une 'composition,' non une reproduction du réel."\(^{57}\)

By way of illustration, we may point out that idealized scenes of the peaceful world of the race-track are consistently juxtaposed to scenes evoking the horrors of war. The following is a summary of the sequence of scenes between pages 17 and 26:

- de Reixach as seen riding along a road in Flanders just before his death, chatting with his second lieutenant and seemingly oblivious of the danger posed by the presence of the enemy or the stench emanating from dead bodies and refuse lining the road

- the milieu of well-to-do owners of racing stables

- Georges and Blum cramped with other prisoners in a stinking, suffocating railroad box-car

- the contrasting imagined and real versions of the scene at the old inn

- thoroughbreds parading on green turf under the glistening rays of the sun ... evocation of the race-course and its habitués

- back to de Reixach and his three remaining men, the second lieutenant, Georges, and Iglésia, as they proceeded on horseback
along a road in Flanders under the
constant threat of death at the hands
of the enemy

Juxtaposed to the atmosphere of war, the very feel of it
in the air,

comme si la lumière elle-même était
sale, comme si l'air invisible contenait
en suspension, comme une eau souillée
troublée, cette sorte de crasse
poussiéreuse et puante de la guerre ...
(p. 18)

is the evocation of the very different atmosphere of peace:

le chatoyant et impalpable poudroissement
de poussière dorée suspendu dans le
paisible et vert après-midi ....
(p. 20)

Peace is: "des ombrages verts avec des femmes en robes de
couleurs imprimées" (p. 19), a graceful thoroughbred "la
longue queue blonde se balançant, accrochant les éclats de
soleil" (p. 24), and a beautiful woman: "Corinne se levant
nonchalamment, se dirigeant sans hâte--sa vaporeuse et in-
décente robe rouge oscillant, se balançant au-dessus de ses
jambes--vers les tribunes..." (p.24). And war is the
humiliation of defeat, prisoners "grouillant rampant lente-
ment les uns sur les autres comme des reptiles dans la
suffocante odeur de déjections et de sueur" (p. 20). It is
"les décombres, les morts, l'espèce de traînée, de souillure,
de sillage d'épaves que laisse derrière elle la guerre" (p. 26).
In tone with these oppositions is the juxtaposition at the center of the novel of the chaotic ambush scene and the scene of refuge in a peaceful forest. In the following passage we are made to feel the confusion wrought by sudden unforeseen attack:

la moitié à peu près de l'escadron se trouvant engagée lorsqu'ils refluèrent vers le carrefour c'est-à-dire comme un accordéon comme sous la pression d'un invisible piston les repoussant, les derniers continuant toujours à avancer alors que la tête de la colonne semblait pour ainsi dire se rétracter le bruit ne parvenant qu'ensuite de sorte qu'il se passa un moment (peut-être une fraction de seconde mais apparentement plus) pendant lequel dans le silence total il y eut seulement ceci: les petits chevaux-jupons et leurs cavaliers rejetés en désordre les uns sur les autres exactement comme des pièces d'échecs s'abattant en chaîne .... (p. 156)

In contrast to this scene is that of the tranquil springtime forest where, following the ambush, Georges sought to escape from the enemy:

puis je restai là assis à la lisière du bois derrière les fourrés écoutant les coucous se répondre parmi les troncs silencieux dans l'air printanier et vert .... je perçus le froissement délicat des feuilles et de nouveau le chant d'un coucou et peu après au tournant de la route débouchèrent deux officiers promenant leurs chevaux mais peut-être ici ne savait-on pas que c'était la guerre ils marchaient tranquillement au pas en devisant quand
Implicit in this juxtaposition of scenes is the irony of the calm indifference of nature amid man's wanton slaughter of his fellow men. The ironic opposition between the tranquility of nature resplendent in the verdure of spring and the ominous presence of death is fundamental to the scheme of contrasts in La Route des Flandres. This checkerboard pattern of scenes is evidence of an evolution in technique from an explicit to an implicit mode of expression of a world-view.

COMPOSITION AND THE EXPRESSION OF WELTANSCHAUUNG

Technique, however artful or ingenious, must serve the ends of expression. The abrupt, often imperceptible, transitions from one scene to another, based on the principle of psychological free association, express the fusion and interpenetration of images in the mind, and the juxtaposition of certain images is, in turn, expressive of a view of life. The mental association between the ancestor and his descendant, for example, the parallels drawn between their ultimate destinies, suggest certain continuities and universals in life. The fact that both suffered a "double defeat" in battle and
in love is more than mere coincidence for the narrator. A vision of life emerges from these analogies. Throughout the novel, allusions are made to a view of the permanence of certain aspects of human existence. Lust is as timeless as violence and war.

War, in essence, the narrator remembers having said to Blum, is always the same:

'Mais ils avaient d'abord commencé par la défaite, dit Georges, et les Espagnols les avaient rossés à cette bataille où Reixach commandait, et alors ils durent battre en retraite par toutes les routes qui descendaient des Pyrénées, c'est-à-dire, je suppose, de vagues chemins. Mais routes ou chemins c'est toujours la même chose: des fossés bordés de morts, des chevaux crevés, des camions brûlés et des canons abandonnés.....'

( pp. 215-216)

The experience of war seems to have left the narrator with the impression of having participated in a fundamental act of human life. He concludes that the ancestor clothed in "la redingote bleue au col montant, aux revers brodés d'or, le bicorn, les plumes d'autruche" (p. 202) felt the same violent emotions and knew the same sense of shame and loss of honor following the rout of his troops in 1793 as his descendant in the military disaster he experienced a century and a half later, under an exterior of stiff, unadorned khaki: "cet équipement guerrier de drap raide de cuir de courroies" (p. 271).
As if to fortify this conviction, Georges, thinking of the disillusionment of the ancestor at the defeat of his hopes for a better society—"l'idyllique et larmoyant règne de la Raison et de la Vertu" (p. 202)—suddenly remembered the general of his brigade who, bewildered at the utter destruction of all of his command, also took his own life:

disant tout haut (Georges): 'Mais le général aussi s'est tué: non pas seulement lui, cherchant et trouvant sur cette route un suicide décens et maquillé, mais l'autre aussi dans sa villa, son jardin aux allées de gravier ratissé ...
(pp. 202-203)

The progression of thought from the ancestor to the general and finally to Captain de Reixach is expressive of their interrelation in Georges' mind. Significantly, ten pages later, the transitions recur in reverse order.

Thus the interest of Captain de Reixach for the narrator, and hence for the reader, depends upon his situation within what one might call the cycle of ever-recurring constants in life. De Reixach in and of himself is but a cavalry officer whose misfortunes in war seem to have been doubled by an equally unhappy domestic life. Juxtaposed to the legend of the ancestor, the fate of de Reixach transcends the particular to assume a broader significance:

comme si la guerre la violence le meurtre l'avaient en quelque sorte ressuscité
pour le tuer une deuxième fois comme
si la balle de pistolet tirée un siècle
et demi plus tôt avait mis toutes ces
années pour atteindre sa deuxième cible
mettre le point final à un nouveau
désastre... (p. 79).

For the narrator, de Reixach is not simply the commander of his
cavalry squadron, but the incarnation of a heritage both
personal and cultural having its origins in the medieval
chevalier. De Reixach's profile cast against the sun suggests
the eternal equestrian statue:

silhouette obscure dans le contre-jour
qui le décolorait comme si son cheval
et lui avaient été coulés tout ensemble
dans une seule et même matière, un
métal gris .... (p. 12).

This important image situated at the beginning of the novel
conveys the historical dimension which elevates the Captain
from the transitory to the level of the timeless and the
eternal.

Similarly, the infidelity of Corinne is merely a
variation on the eternal theme of woman the adulteress—an
expression of a permanent, immutable aspect of life. Thus
Georges and Blum imagine the ancestor's wife, Virginie, not
pining as a faithful Penelope in his absence, but having in-
vited the valet to share her bed:

sa petite poulette ou plutôt sa petite
pigeonne adorée qui en avait profité
pour forniquer, elle, de la façon la plus naturelle, c'est-à-dire comme cela se fait depuis le commencement du monde, avec simplement pour partenaire non de chlorotiques rêveries mais un garçon pourvu de reins solides... (p. 200).

The sequence to which we refer is that in which Georges and Blum, pursuing a game of invention and confusing fact with fantasy, imagine a servant-girl and a valet discovering the body of the dead ancestor. The scene becomes as real to them as the old portraits which did exist of the ancestor and his wife. Soon they transform the servant-girl and the valet into the ancestor's wife and an imagined plebeian lover. The following is an example of their interminable dialogues of invention:

et Blum: '...de sorte que ce pathétique et noble suicide pourrait bien ne....
Oui: voilà, voilà!'..... 'Parce que tu prétends que cette femme à moitié nue entrevue dans l'entrebâillement de la porte, le sein et le visage éclairés d'en dessous par une bougie ... tu prétends donc que cette femme serait une servante accourue derrière celui que tu baptises le valet ou le domestique réveillé par le coup de feu, et qui n'est peut-être que son amant--non de la servante car ce n'en est pas une mais bien la femme, l'épouse, c'est-à-dire votre commune arrière-arrière-arrière grand-mère, l'homme--l'amant--appartenant d'ailleurs peut-être en effet à l'espèce domestique comme tu le prétends, pour peu qu'elle ait aussi partagé en matière sexuelle ces goûts plébéiens ou plutôt chevalins, je veux dire les mêmes dispositions pour
l'équitation, je veux dire la même tendance à choisir ses amants du côté des écuries...

(pp. 189-190).

This excerpt shows how the transforming process is carried a step further with the assimilation of Virginie to Corinne as implied in the allusion to Iglésia contained in the phrase "tendance à choisir ses amants du côté des écuries." A blurring of lines of distinction results from the interweaving of details from family legends, portraits of Virginie, and hearsay about Corinne.

Other expressive juxtapositions to be observed in this novel include detailed descriptions of physical love and human anatomy interwoven with evocations of natural phenomena, of war and violence (human aggression) and of the physiological nature of man. We have already alluded to the cosmic vision of woman as a creative force of nature. The juxtaposition of erotic scenes to scenes evoking the violence of war implies an analogy between the physical confrontation of the sexes and the violent confrontation of battle. In the novels of Simon the male sexual organ is variously referred to as "l'ancestral et aveugle bélier" (V), "le même bélier nous ébranlant" (RF), and "lance rouge tendue pointée en avant de lui" (BPh). Stendhal compared love to waging war in terms of strategy. For Simon, love and war are analogous as violent physical confrontations perpetuated from
age to age.

Like many modern writers, Simon displays a "mythical imagination for which historical time does not exist--the imagination which sees the actions and events of a particular time merely as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes."58 In essence, Simon's vision of time as "l'éternel recommencement" is the same as the cyclical theory of time or history which James Joyce borrowed from Giambattista Vico. The repetition of the words "éternel," "interminable," "sans fin," "toujours," "immuable," "hors du temps," "recommencement," "du fond des âges," and "depuis la nuit des temps," underscores this vision of a cycle of ever-recurring constants in life. The wailing of an aged peasant woman, for example, is transformed into "une déclamation emphatique, sans fin, comme ces pleureuses de l'antiquité" (p. 63).

Obviously, the importance for Simon of this cyclical view of time or, as Nietzsche called it, the principle of "the eternal return of the same,"59 lies in the possibility it provides for transcending the historical march of time. Despite the inevitable "acheminement vers la mort," the narrator can envision himself and the other horsemen of his regiment as belonging to the caste of all the warriors of ages past. The image of time as a gigantic glacier in which are encompassed not only Georges' regiment but also the phantoms of horsemen of a bygone age contains a suggestion of
continuity in the face of the pessimistic implications of objective temporal progression:

"...eux, leurs vieilles carnes macabres, leurs éperons, leurs sabres, leurs armes d'acier: tout debout et intacts, tels que le jour lorsqu'il se lèverait les découvrirait à travers les épaisseurs transparentes et glauques, semblables à une armée en marche surprise par un cataclysme et que le lent glacier à l'invisible progression restituerait, vomirait dans cent ou deux cent mille ans de cela, pêle-mêle avec tous les vieux lancquenets, reîtres et cuirassiers de jadis, dégringolant, se brisant dans un faible tintement de verre.... " (p. 32).

The horses themselves are not merely animals occupying a certain point in time but part of a long sequence of war horses which have done battle through the ages: "les vieux chevaux d'armes, les antiques et immémoriales rosses qui vont sous la pluie nocturne le long des chemins, branlant leur lourde tête cuirassée de méplats" (p. 31).

THE NOVEL AS VERBAL COMPOSITION

Patterns which are perhaps more subtle and difficult to recognize than those based on direct juxtapositions involve similarities of certain descriptions in terms of their verbal composition. It is certainly no coincidence, for example, that in both vocabulary and rhythm the descriptions of the steeplechase, the ambush in which de Reixach's men were killed, and the climax of sexual intercourse bear great
resemblance to one another. The excitement of the spectators at the start of the race is explicitly allied to an orgasm:

sa voix ne finissant pas, mourant, engloutie, submergée (au-dessus du tintement brutal and lancinant de la cloche) par l'espèce de long soupir s'exhalant de la foule délivrée, pâmée et vorace (non pas à proprement parler un orgasme, mais en quelque sorte, un pré-orgasme, quelque chose comme au moment où l'homme pénètre la femme) .... (pp. 167-168).

Why the obvious intent to create a superimposition of these scenes in the reader's mind? He seems to hear simultaneously the thundering of the horses' hooves and the thundering of blood in the veins of the lovers:

morts elle et moi assourdis par le vacarme de notre sang se ruant refluant en grondant dans nos membres se pré- cipitant à travers les ramifications compliquées de nos artères comme comment appelle-t-on cela mascaré je crois toutes les rivières se mettant à couler en sens inverse remontant vers leurs sources..... (pp. 264-265)

The violence of the ambush is paralleled in the violence of the sexual act: "les mêmes coups sourds le même bélier nous ébranlant tous deux comme un animal allant et venant cognant allant et venant violemment dans sa cage" (pp. 292-293).

It is the orgasm, the physiological compulsion to lust of which man is victim, which underlies de Reixach's
passion for "la fille de vingt ans plus jeune que lui et qu'il avait épousée quatre ans plus tôt dans une rumeur de scandale et de chuchotement autour des tasses de thé" (p. 58).

His passion for Corinne determines de Reixach's decision to ride his own pure-bred filly in an attempt to prove his prowess in the domain of his rival ("son frère en chevalerie"), the jockey Iglesia. The irony of the two men's brotherhood "en chevalerie" lies, of course, in the double entendre of the related word "chevaucher":

pour que cent cinquante ans plus tard
un de ses petits-fils parte à la guerre
en amenant avec lui celui—une sorte de domestique ou faisant fonction—qui
avait chevauché, sailli sa femme ni plus
ni moins qu'une jument...
(pp. 282-283).

ne pensant peut-être même pas à la
femme de son frère chevauchée ou plutôt
à la femme chevauchée par son frère
d'armes ou plutôt son frère en chevalerie
puisqu'il le considérerait en cela comme
son égal, ou si l'on préfère le contraire
puisque c'était elle qui écartait les
cuisses chevauchait, tous deux chevauchant
(ou plutôt qui avaient été chevauchés
par) la même houli la même haletante
hoquetante haquenée.... (p. 296).

The steeplechase is obviously a modern parallel to the medieval tournament in which knights vied for the favors of noble ladies. Thus de Reixach and Iglesia wear the colors of Corinne: "de la toque noire et de cette casaque rose vif, tirant sur le mauve, qu'elle leur avait en quelque sorte
imposée à tous deux (Iglésia et de Reixach) comme une sorte de voluptueux et lascif symbole (comme les couleurs d'un ordre ou plutôt les insignes de fonctions pour ainsi dire séminales et turgescentes) ..." (p. 154).

The hero of the modern tournament is not de Reixach, that last vestige of an aristocratic order which was already crumbling one hundred and fifty years before when his ancestor sat at the Convention and voted the death of the king, but the plebeian jockey with his grotesque "profil jaune et triste d'oiseau de proie," who, to the knowledge of all concerned, could easily have brought to victory de Reixach's horse:

Iglésia pensant, disant plus tard: 'Mais alors bon sang il avait qu'à me laisser monter. Si c'était pour faire cette démonstration, mince! Qu'est-ce qu'il espérait? Qu'après ça elle ne coucherait plus qu'avec lui.... (p. 154).

That the aristocrat de Reixach has been supplanted by the plebeian jockey in all except the outward forms which only the Captain continues to observe, is one more example of the important themes of deterioration and disintegration which pervade the novel. In the ambush sequence intercalated within the evocation of the steeplechase, the horses are slaughtered by tanks; hence the obsolescence of the cavalry and the emphasis on the vision of a world in mutation. As Iglésia commented to Georges: "S'ils font la guerre
assis sur des banquettes, qu'est-ce qu'on foutait là, nous, avec nos cagneux" (p. 252). The decay of the old order has reached its culmination so that the jockey is left as existing relic of the old chevalier. Iglesias survived the débâcle in which de Reixach, seemingly acknowledging his double defeat, allowed himself to be killed: "lui, le noble de naissance et dont la guerre--c'est-à-dire, en une certaine façon, l'oubli de soi, c'est-à-dire une certaine désinvolture, ou futilité, c'est-à-dire, en une certaine façon, le vide intérieur--était la spécialité" (p. 194).

TOWARD AN ART OF AUTONOMOUS STRUCTURE

Although narrative technique in La Route des Flandres aims to simulate the mode of existence of past experience in the mind, the portrayal of psychic life is not Simon's exclusive, perhaps not even his prime objective in this novel. Even those novelists whose principal objective is the depiction of the psyche must, as Robert Humphrey points out, devise a method for imposing form and order on the disorder of mental life, for "Art, the art of fiction, demands pattern, discipline, and clarity."60 In a sense, Simon's art is a reversal of priorities. Whereas stream-of-consciousness writers aim first to represent psychic life, which is by nature chaotic, and then make use of formal patterns to aid "an outside consciousness (the reader's) to follow,
Georges Braque  The Chateau at La Roche-Guyon, 1909.
understand, and interpret the minds of the characters which
the author creates," Simon's technique increasingly turns
toward the creation of an art of autonomous structure, to
pattern for the sake of pattern.

Despite the proliferation of parentheses which obscure
any division of thought, the appearance of formal concerns is
manifest in La Route des Flandres. This novel represents a
vital step in an evolution toward "spatial" form, which has
been defined as "pattern arising from the spatial interweaving
of images and phrases independently of any time-sequence." Our study of the novel Histoire will show how technique becomes
liberated from the strict simulation of consciousness so that
the dynamics of language (the medium itself) play a greater
role in the creation of pattern. In Histoire pattern begins
to exist for the sake of pattern.

The evolution in technique from La Route des Flandres
to Histoire and succeeding novels might be compared to the
transition which took place in modern painting from the
analytical to the synthetic phase of Cubism. The analysis of
a motif which characterized the experiments of early Cubism
(1908-1910) had its origin in Cézanne's departure from
"fidelity to direct retinal experience in favour of an art
which, although less directly and literally realistic, re-
lected more faithfully than did impressionism the complex
psychological process of visual perception itself." In La
Paul Cezanne  Still Life with Fruit Basket, 1886-88.
Route des Flandres we see a kind of analysis of a motif: the débâcle and rout of the French army in May of 1940. (For this novel Simon once considered the title "Description fragmentaire d'un désastre.") The portrayal of this catastrophic experience as it exists ultimately composed in memory is not unlike the Cézannian method of organizing "his subject according to the separate acts of perception he had experienced; houses and other solid objects were depicted as the artist had conceptualized them after a long series of perceptions." 64 Often described as an art of conception rather than of vision, Cubism in its so-called "analytical" phase carried to its extreme the Cézannian practice of treating objects as a composite of multiple perceptions from various points of view.

The formal preoccupations of Cézanne—his distortions of objects for the purpose of achieving contrasts of form—were also pursued in Cubist art:

Cubism rediscovered qualities that were still central to art in the early Renaissance, in which the hieratic and formalized Byzantine vision was still alive, and in which naturalism was sublimated to a conceptual purity.

Note that in the painting of the earlier Italian masters of Venice, Florence, and Siena, who have themselves been doubtfully labelled 'primitives,' a distinct formalism survived not only through Giotto but on into the work of Piero della Francesca. 65

Indeed, the Battle of San Romano, a painting of the mid-fifteenth century by Paolo Uccello, constitutes an almost
Paolo Uccello  The Battle of San Romano, mid-fifteenth century.
abstract composition in which are stressed the relationships between different shapes and patterns. Fernand Léger's Nudes in the Forest of 1909-10 has been compared to the Battle of San Romano in the Louvre (two other versions exist in London and Florence) with respect to a "frieze-like flatness (which) is opposed by a perspective in large part invented" and "a stillness produced by means of strict formalism." Certain battle scenes in Simon's La Bataille de Pharsale implicitly describe elements from different versions of the Battle of San Romano, and allude thereby to the formalism characteristic of Simon's mature fiction.

Emphasis on formal relationships and on pictorial structure became so important in Cubist art that by mid-1910 the compositions of Picasso and Braque were approaching complete abstraction. Yet abstraction as an end in itself was never advocated by Parisian Cubists. Of the evolution visible in Picasso's three great Cubist portraits of Vollard, Uhde, and Kahnweiler, Nicholas Wadley has observed:

Through the three paintings, painted in the above order, the poise between the painting as external image and the painting as internal structure grows more poignant. 67

Even of the Vollard portrait, the earliest of the three, Edward Fry has remarked that "the real subject ... is not Vollard but the formal language used by the artist to create a
Pablo Picasso  Still Life with Violin and Fruit, 1913.
highly structured aesthetic object." The advent of the "synthetic" phase of Cubism with the use of papier collé and condensed signs summarizing in one form many different characteristics of an object saw almost unlimited possibilities for the creation of formal compositions. In the novel Histoire, as technique becomes liberated from the strict simulation of consciousness, a poignant tension is created between the novel as mimesis and the novel as autonomous structure—a verbal construct parallel to the free pictorial compositions of synthetic Cubism.

A TIMELESS WORLD OF FORMAL HARMONIES

Simon's primary objective in the novels which follow Le Vent and L'Herbe is to create a timeless world of formal harmonies. In this regard the highly designed quality of his mature novels parallels the formalized compositions of the fifteenth-century Italian master Piero della Francesca, whose Victory of Heraclius over Chosroes is evoked throughout La Bataille de Pharsale. Lionello Venturi's description of della Francesca's art could well apply to the art of Simon:

The trend towards abstraction that has transformed art since the beginning of the 20th century finds a noble precedent in Piero della Francesca's taste for contemplation which he always gratified at the expense of action.
Piero della Francesca  Victory of Heraclius over Chosroes, fifteenth century.
Venturi also writes: "Piero's art is a monument of contemplative beauty. In it life goes imperturbably on as if time had never been." The simplification of syntax in the novels following La Route des Flandres renders design or formal composition more obvious. The lack of favor of Piero's art in the 17th and 18th centuries may well be attributed, as Venturi observes, to what was probably its major fault in the eyes of men at that time: "its complete absence of elaborate baroque convolutions." In La Route des Flandres baroque convolutions are very much present. They have disappeared from Histoire.

Increasing emphasis on design and formal values is related, as we have suggested, to this writer's acute sense of alienation from the material world of nature with the inexorable progression of time in nature: "l'éternel cheminement de la matière." The world-view echoed throughout Simon's fiction reflects a passive submission to the all-powerful dominion of the organic. Detemporalization of the narrative and the evolution of technique toward "spatial" form correspond to a feeling of anxiety in the face of the instability of the external world, of the flux and change from which man wants to escape when he is in a condition of disequilibrium with nature. The reduction of depth both in the visual arts in our time and in the novel, as we shall see in Histoire, increases the "spatial" effect of the work of art. Perfection of form, furthermore, corresponds to a
spiritual need for order amid the confusion of the world-picture: "jusqu'à ce que le monde hasardeux et compliqué cesse de tournoyer sans trêve et sans bruit, s'organise, s'ordonne et s'immobilise enfin." 72 Like primitive man and the Oriental, the soul of the modern artist sees in abstract forms a possibility for "creating a world beyond appearance, an absolute, in which it may rest from the agony of the relative." 73
CHAPTER III

Histoire
CHAPTER III

HISTOIRE

Analytical Table of Contents

The problem of point of view: a myopic vision; anonymity of the narrative consciousness contributes to "abstraction" of the composition; use of the present participle independent of noun or pronoun subject; the privacy of consciousness; a primary, elementary apprehension of the world, precedent to any intellectual analysis or conceptualization; narrative technique: techniques of association; association by contiguity; verbal association; the narrative consciousness (je₁) as opposed to the narrator-novelist (je₂); verbal associations—which occur in the mind of the narrator-novelist composing the text; the motif of the monster: part of a pattern of descriptive fragments composing a verbal collage; formalism as a structure based on esthetic and thematic relationships internal to the work of art; "spatial" form; the effect of discontinuity enhanced; greater intricacy and density of pattern resulting from the reduction in size of the units of meaning; "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time";
"spatial" form in violation of Lessing's concept of the laws of language; the genesis of "spatial" form in Madame Bovary; the psychic or affective ensemble; the family, microcosm of life; deterioration in illness, decrepitude in old age, dilapidation of old family home; themes of disintegration, deterioration, decomposition; theme of death; the rituals of life and death expressed quintessentially within the family unit; the theme of universality; mother and grandmother part of a vast population of grotesque, hybrid beings who inhabit the surface of the earth; no liberation possible from suffering, injustice, or inevitable decrepitude and death; metamorphosis, flux, and change; vocabulary of disintegration: "se décomposer, s'effriter, s'en aller en morceaux"; portrayal of a violent, turbulent, chaotic world, and a vision of a world in decay; implicit expression of a world-view through patterns of "phenomenological" descriptions; composition: the orchestration of themes; composition of the seventh chapter as example of the expressive and esthetic value of the juxtaposition of images; the deceptiveness of the appearance of stability; irony of the optimism of reformers: "LES TEMPS FUTURS," "VINCEREMOS," "UNION POUR LE PROG..."; contradiction between the ideals we set before us and things as they exist: theme of the loss of illusions which permeates Simon's fiction; man's subjection to a pre-determined physiological constitution; themes of war and
erotism interlaced; "l'éternel recommencement"; a delicate balance between art conceived as mimesis and art as autonomous structure; psychological verisimilitude often violated in the interest of pattern; the self; the disintegration of the memory image in time; increased emphasis in Histoire on the existence of the text itself as a verbal construct, an autonomous structure in writing with its own "reality"; "l'ordre et le désordre"; emphasis on composition in Cézanne, Simon's mature novels; the elimination of depth in non-naturalistic styles in the plastic arts and in Simon's mature fiction; concept of design on a flat surface has found an application in the literary art.
In a penetrating analysis of the problem of point of view in fiction, Norman Friedman has written that "the choice of a point of view in the writing of fiction is at least as crucial as the choice of a verse form in the composing of a poem."¹ And certainly in the three novels of Claude Simon, published over a period of ten years from 1957 to 1967, on which we focus our attention in this study, consideration of evolution in point of view is fundamental to an appreciation of the total effect of the work of art.

A MYOPIC VISION

In Histoire the reader has absolutely no sense of distance. His viewpoint is the myopic focus of a present consciousness in which past and present interfuse on a single plane of time. He must constantly readjust his vision to coincide with that of the narrative consciousness. In Le Vent the witness-narrator refers to the obscurity of the subjective point of view of Montès:

Et encore ceci: cette constante façon qu'il avait d'employer sans autre précision les pronoms 'il' ou 'elle' pour désigner n'importe quel homme ou n'importe quelle créature féminine dans une sorte de constante confusion des personnes, comme si le monde lui apparaissait à travers une sorte de myopie...²
The position of the reader with respect to the narrative consciousness in Histoire is not unlike that of the witness-narrator in Le Vent with respect to the candid, unelaborated presentation by Montès of his past experiences: "cette incohérence, cette juxtaposition brutale, apparente- ment absurde, de sensations, de visages, de paroles, d'actes."³ Unclear pronoun references abound in Histoire. The identification of places, persons, or things which form the content of consciousness is left up to the reader.

Since the reader's point of view coincides with that of an anonymous narrative consciousness, the novel possesses a more abstract quality. Reader involvement or participation is enhanced by the recurrent use of the present participle independent of a noun or pronoun subject, exploiting this impersonal, abstract form of the verb. The implied subject is the "moi" of the narrator, but since this pronoun is not explicit, the reader tends to fill the void, attributing to himself the action expressed through the present participle:

les imaginant, sombres et lugubres, perchés dans le réseau des branches.

Relevant les yeux, la découvrant, me rendant compte qu'elle avait sans doute parlé, (p. 138)

me rappelant cette affiche que l'on pouvait voir sur les murs un peu partout là-bas, (p. 212)
Pensant comme elle devait être secouée
là-dedans Pensant qu'est-ce que ça
pouvait foutre L'imaginant rigide un
crucifix aussi dans ses mains,
(p. 227)

Through the impersonal use of the present participle, the
effect of immediacy is enhanced, of making the reader seem
to create the novel while in the act of reading.

Unlike its predecessors from the pen of Claude Simon,
this novel begins with a lower-case letter which, contrary
to the convention of opening a novel with a capital letter,
creates a feeling of intimacy from the outset. The unclear
reference "l'une d'elles touchait presque la maison" further
enhances the impression of privacy. The "Il tenait une
lettre à la main" with which commences La Route des Flandres
is less ambiguous. What was it which almost touched the
house? The reader continues in the hope of delayed identifi-
cation, and comes upon a clue in "je pouvais la voir ou du
moins ses derniers rameaux." The object of consciousness is
therefore a tree, but the word "arbre" is masculine and
cannot refer to "elles." If the reader has not already
guessed, he soon comes to a clear identification of the
reference in "dans l'obscur fouillis des branches." But it
will be some thirty pages before he encounters a specifi-
cation of the kind of tree whose branches brushed against
the house: "les centaines de plumes de petites feuilles
ovales de l'acacia grises elles aussi parfaitement immobiles ..." (p. 38).

On the opening page the reader gradually visualizes a tree with its leaves like feathers delicately palpitating in the darkness, and he hears the soft noise of rustling leaves. Next is evoked the faint sound of birds twittering and chirping: "de faibles froissements de faibles cris d'oiseaux endormis tressaillant s'agitant gémissant dans leur sommeil" (p. 10). But upon reading the next few lines, he is out of focus once again, for although the pronoun "elles" reappears, it clearly no longer refers to the branches of a tree: "comme si elles se tenaient toujours là, mystérieuses et geignardes, quelque part dans la vaste maison délabrée" (p. 10).

The reader must re-create in his own mind the association which caused the change of vision. The plaintive tones of the cries of the birds "gémissant dans leur sommeil" give rise in the narrator's mind to the sounds emitted by old women who likewise created an impression of sadness by their voices: "mystérieuses et geignardes." The assimilation of the old women with the birds next moves from a simple comparison to a fusion of disparate images elicited by the remembrance of a caricature seen in a history book representing the royal family in the form of birds with human heads sitting perched on the branches of their family
tree. The portrayal of mental life in these opening pages conforms to the following observation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

A chaque instant aussi je rêve autour des choses, j'imagine des objets ou des personnes dont la présence ici n'est pas incompatible avec le contexte, et pourtant ils ne se mêlent pas au monde, ils sont en avant du monde, sur le théâtre de l'imaginaire.

The fusion and interpenetration of images concludes with the implication that certain physical characteristics of the old ladies evoke the image of birds: "leurs yeux vides, ronds" and "leurs sombres et luisantes toques de plumes traversées par ces longues aiguilles aux pointes aiguës, déchirantes, comme les becs, les serres des aigles hérauldiques, et jusqu'à ces ténébreux bijoux éclats dont le nom (jais) évoquait phonétiquement celui d'un oiseau" (p. 11).

Unclear pronoun references, discontinuous sequence, and the density of detail characteristic of a myopic focus create an effect of chaos. The reader seems lost amid a welter of minutiae. The level of consciousness portrayed is that of a primary, elementary apprehension of the world in terms of sensation—the return to "the things themselves," to the primary world of lived experience which, as Husserl insisted, must always precede any intellectual analysis or conceptualization of the world. Objects are evoked at the
moment when we become conscious of them, before we organize or conceptualize this consciousness: "encore l'oeil, mais plus seulement l'oeil, et pas encore l'esprit..." (p. 274).

There results an art of suggestion which tantalizes the reader and bewitches him in a game of recognition and identification of objects evoked. As Mallarmé said, to name an object is to destroy three-fourths of the reader's pleasure, which is to divine it.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE
TECHNIQUES OF ASSOCIATION

The basic types of association observed in La Route des Flandres are in operation in Histoire, with the one striking difference that in this novel verbal association has come to the fore. Association by contiguity and association by comparison or contrast play a role subordinate to association of words, on the basis of either sound or sense, or on the basis of both sound and sense. Nevertheless, contiguity and comparison or contrast, often in conjunction with verbal association, do explain certain transitions in the narrator's thoughts and the fusion of certain images in his mind.

Unlike the technique employed in La Route des Flandres, association by contiguity in Histoire does not involve a juxtaposition of different past times which serve as contexts for the same mental image. Association by contiguity in this novel means the coexistence of a present perception with an
image from past experience with the result that perception is in some way transfigured. In the following example from the second chapter of the novel, the process of association by contiguity seems to interact with that of comparison. The narrator has just aroused himself from slumber: "Puis debout, titubant sous le poids du jour, pensant comment était-ce déjà cette prière Me voici devant vous ô Seigneur. ..." (pp. 41-42). The thought of the prayer he used to say as a child brings back the Catholic school of his youth and the image of stained-glass windows in the chapel: "Sur le vitrail je pouvais voir l'éternelle charge des zouaves pontificaux.... Du Guesclin agonisant sous son arbre Moïse enveloppé dans un péplum violet faisant jaillir du rocher frappé de son bâton l'eau d'argent ..." (p. 42). On the following page his entrance in the bathroom is suggested: "S'avançant alors dans la glace, vacillant, le fantôme inglorieux du genre humain en pyjama fripé, traînant les pieds ..." (p. 43). And simultaneously he again repeats to himself the prayer pronounced at school: "Devant vous ô Seigneur chaque jour chaque matin...." Follows the significant passage in which images (i.e., mental representations) of the past—the memory of the prayer, of a stained-glass window in the chapel, of the puns whereby a school friend mocked the responses sung in church ("En trou si beau adulte est bêni au lieu de Introibo ad altare Dei")—
combine with the data of perception (specifically with the bathroom basin) to form an image in the literary or linguistic sense of a figure of speech expressing similarity or analogy:

Appelait ça la Putrification quotidienne. Arsenal de calements et de contrepèteries censé l'affranchir par la magie du verbe des croyances maternelles et des leçons du catéchisme. Donc je suppose quelque chose comme Introibo in lavabo, rocher de Moïse maintenant en porcelaine émaillée et le bâton miraculeux remplacé par une couronne de baronet en cuivre jaunâtre et terni, et alors l'eau jaillissant furieusement, m'éclaboussant, m'inondant tandis que je le refermai précipitamment ... (p. 43).

The basin has become the rock of Moses, and in approaching it the narrator thinks "Introibo in lavabo" by analogy with "Introibo ad altare Dei." Had the context of life in a Catholic school not been present in his mind, he would not have transfigured the basin into the rock of Moses. The comparison occurred to him only because of the contiguity in his mind of certain images from his past with the present data of perception.

Among the techniques of association employed in Histoire, that of verbal association predominates. The preponderance of this mode of association forecasts its development and amplification in succeeding novels. To call the attention of the reader to the technique of verbal association, specific references to the process are included
in the text:

comme cette tante de Reixach, cette baronne Cerise qui avait autrefois brillé dans les concours hippiques ... et dont le nom était pour moi la source de multiples associations ... les vieilles lèvres crevassées peintes d'un rouge évoquant de façon bourrue la fraîcheur du mot cerise qu'on retrouvait aussi dans les couleurs pimpantes agrestes (casaque verte, manches et toque cerise) portées par les jockeys que grand-mère et maman m'avaient montrés à Pau la première fois où j'avais assisté à une course de chevaux, le mot toque lui-même amenant à mon esprit (s'accordant au maquillage, à la légende d'amazone, au registre aigu et précieux de sa voix et aux coiffures emplumées qu'elle arborait) le qualificatif de toquée qui paradoxalement la nimbait pour moi d'un prestige particulier ...
(p. 12).

Allusions to the process of verbal association found at the very beginning of the novel are reinforced by other references appearing throughout the work.

The manifold suggestions contained in a word are well illustrated in the flux of the narrator's thoughts as he gazes at the name of a café in which he is seated:

Sur le rabat de la tente dehors je pouvais distinguer en transparence les lettres

RÉGENCE BAR

symétriquement encadrées d'une chope mousse au-dessus de laquelle était écrit en demi-cercle BIÈRE LA LORRAINE

By association with "RÉGENCE BAR" he thinks "Rialto Trianon
Tivoli," the pompous names so often given to such shadowy, lackluster places. Tivoli and images of gardens, fountains, cascades, and ruined villas become interlaced in his mind with the image of drunken soldiers returning from a tavern. The word "frasques" meaning "escapades" seems to derive from Frascati, the name of an Italian wine and possibly the name of the tavern--the narrator cannot recall it with certainty--where the soldiers of his regiment went on their permissions. Drunkenness being associated with wine, "fiasque" and "Chianti" are also contained in Frascati and Fiaschanti. The location of the tavern at the foot of a hill on the summit of which stood a monument commemorating the battles of the last war suggests "fracas," also phonetically linked to Frascati. Finally, the Italian accent of Frascati combined with the concept of battle recalls to mind the image of "zouaves pontificaux" depicted on stained-glass in the chapel of the religious school attended by the narrator--which associations give rise to an entire network of images related to that portion of his life. The process of verbal association described here can be seen to function with even greater subtlety and obscurity in other passages of the novel.

The extreme subtlety and complexity attained in certain passages are evident in the evocation of the narrator's thoughts as he passes from a hot, noisy street illuminated by a blazing sun to the cool, quiet, somber atmosphere of a
bank: "une sorte d'univers géométrique, poli et minéral."
By association he thinks of "des profondeurs des grottes, des cavernes." The incessant hum inside the bank, coupled with the idea of consumption of values, suggests "un froissement continu, insidieux et obsédant de mastication, de..." From the idea of mastication and the image of underground caverns in a mineral universe the thought graduates to a monster harbored somewhere in the underground corridors of the bank.

Here the verbal associations become very subtle. In a sense, the monster represents the animus of the bank, its very life-blood. It is immense, like the boiler for the heating system. The incessant noise like that of mastication suggests "une sorte de ruminant impotent et obèse." Now the network of associations—underground caverns, a monstrous ruminant concealed in the basement corridors—leads to an inevitable analogy: the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Within parentheses the comparison is suggested: "mais pas les cornes, le front bouclé, les bras d'égorgeur." There follows an explicit reference to Theseus in modern dress as a greasy kid armed with a machine gun who has come to rob the bank. Only he would abandon her (Ariadne) not on a beach, but on the side of a road or in a cheap hotel after having relieved her of her dowry of titles to oil wells, mines, and other sources of wealth. This analogy concluded, the parentheses
close, and we return to the idea of the bank as haven for a
monster, obese, voracious and vegetarian, whose diet con-
sists not of vegetable matter but of paper money and checks.

The absolute necessity of money for the maintenance of
human existence represents another facet of the Simonian
theme of determinism—in this instance sociological or
economic rather than physiological, although money must be
used for the satisfaction of the basic needs of the body.
Throughout *Histoire* the narrator's preoccupation with money
is suggested, in his selling of an antique chest belonging
to his dead mother, in his driving out to his cousin's beach
house in order to have him sign a paper mortgaging part of
the family estate, in his consciousness of symbolic motifs
ornamenting paper money. Bank notes are described in
meticulous detail throughout the novel. The reader must
identify the notes from the images described, e.g., the
portrait of Voltaire, quill in hand, on the ten franc note,
the portrait of "le bon grand-père ami des pauvres" being
most likely Pasteur on the five franc note. The dominion
of money is seen in the reverence which it universally
elicits. The banker, the antique dealer, the Greek builder
and developer acquire an expression of gravity when the
subject turns to money.

Since the anonymity of the narrator gives him less
substance as a fictional character, the reader may be inclined
to see in him a rather disembodied intermediary for the author. A legitimate interpretation might be to consider the narrative consciousness portrayed as performing the acts of a day's existence and, at the same time, re-creating the past through memory and imagination to be a very recent "present self" (hence the absence of objectification) of a narrator-novelist of whom the text which we read is the creation.

In order to clarify our idea, we may designate the narrative consciousness to which we have made continuous reference as \( \text{je}^1 \) and the narrator-novelist as \( \text{je}^2 \). There are several justifications for such an interpretation of the relationship between author, narrator, and fictive world in *Histoire*. The consistent use of the past tense to describe the events of the day of \( \text{je}^1 \) places their occurrence prior to the moment of narration or composition. The use of the present participle in conjunction with the past tenses, in particular with the *passé simple*, conveys the dual existence of most scenes on two temporal planes: the past of their actual occurrence in time and the present of their imaginative re-creation by \( \text{je}^2 \) in the act of composing the text which we read. The presence of \( \text{je}^2 \) makes itself felt at intervals, as for example when the present tense marking the moment of narration or composition suddenly intrudes amid the past tenses and their accompanying present participles:
tout arrêté figé le temps figé Je suppose que si quelqu'un avait alors pris une photo on aurait pu nous voir tous les deux nets debout face à face devant le flanc de ce wagon... (p. 390).

Furthermore, certain verbal associations cannot be construed to have taken place in the mind of je¹ but seem to occur in the mind of the narrator-novelist composing the text.

A lizard may have been hiding in a crack on a block of marble inscribed with Latin words seen by the narrator in a museum of Roman antiquities, but the coincidence seems unlikely:

Salles II-III.: sarcophage, oeuvre remarquable du IIIᵉ s. ap. J.-C. --Salle IV : inscriptions fêlure lézarde déchirant le marbre qui de part et d'autre s'affaisse légèrement, les deux plans séparés formant un angle dièdre à grande ouverture, le marbre -- ou la pierre -- offrant cet aspect savonneux résultat d'une longue érosion comme si on l'avait patiemment frotté usé arrondissant les angles de sorte que si, de loin, l'aspect rigide et géométrique des caractères persistait encore, de près leur entaille aux bords ébréchés ou effondrés n'était plus qu'un vague sillon bordé de lèvres molles et alors quel orgueilleux MARCELL vainqueur ou quoi DIVIN illisible USQUE...

tout à coup un lézard apparu aussitôt immobilisé circonspect sur ses délicates pattes griffues écartelées son corps dessinant un arc de cercle l'extrémité de sa longue queue pendant encore dans sa cachette sa fine tête inspectant à droite à gauche tournant par à-coups brusques, puis sans pré-avis disparaissant de nouveau dans la fente aux bords dentelés qui coupe en deux les rangées de lettres carrés, obliques, barres triangles serrés par des coins racontant perpétuant quel triomphe
quel apotheosis and millenium without end massacre .... (pp. 117-118).

The only bond between the crack on a block of marble inscriptions and the lizard, as far as we can see, is the resemblance lézarde/lézard residing in the form of these two words. The association lézarde/lézard seems too fortuitous to convey an impression of verisimilitude with regard to what the narrator actually saw or experienced in a museum of Classical antiquities. Instead the association appears to occur in the mind of the author in the act of writing and applying the technique described as follows:

Chaque mot en suscite (ou en commande) plusieurs autres, non seulement par la force des images qu'il attire à lui comme un aimant, mais parfois aussi par sa seule morphologie, de simples assonances qui, de même que les nécessités formelles de la syntaxe, du rythme et de la composition, se révèlent souvent aussi fécondes que ses multiples significations.

The juxtaposition of images (crack in a marble block inscribed with time-worn letters recounting, perhaps, some ancient military victory and a lizard which emerged from between the edges of the crack) resulting from an external correspondance of morphology of words seems to function to create the contrast: prehistoric creature versus the ruins (décombres) of Classical antiquity. The monster in this instance is Time.

Throughout the fourth chapter the themes of violence,
chaos, decomposition, and disintegration are manifested in diverse areas of life: war, revolution, love, the ravages of time and nature, and even in the subtle violence exercised by an institution (the bank) over the individual who finds himself at its mercy. Like the Minotaur, the bank is a monster. The motif of the monster is continued within this context in a description of Mithra and the bull depicted on a bas-relief:

---Salle I: monuments relatifs aux cultes orientaux de Rome Bas-relief représentant Mithra coiffé d'un bonnet phrygien vêtu d'une courte tunique un genou sur l'échine du monstre dans le cou duquel il enfonce un glaive court La tête du taureau terrassé inclinée en avant touchant le sol du front le mufle humide et baveux frotté d'une mince couche de poussière ocre devenant marron là où (près des naseaux et des lèvres) elle est impregnée de bave la peau... (pp. 115-116).

It is by now apparent that the description of the lizard has a function independent of the representation of psychological reality. It is part of a pattern of descriptive fragments which compose a verbal collage: "ciseaux et colle se substituant à la fastidieuse narration du metteur en scène pour restituer à l'action sa foudroyante discontinuité" (p. 41). The lizard is the counterpart in miniature of the bull; "un genou sur l'échine du monstre" is counterbalanced by "le lézard reparut gris foncé monstre miniature fragile et
craintif alarmé" (p. 119). The function of these descriptions can be defined only in terms of the internal structure of the work of art. The motif of the monster relates to the themes of war, time, lust, money, illness and physical deformity. Formalism as manifested in this novel may be defined as a structure based on esthetic and thematic relationships internal to the work of art as opposed to a structure based on logical, causal relationships referential to a "reality" independent of the work of art. In Histoire we are moving in the direction of art as autonomous structure, in the direction of the creation of pattern for the sake of pattern: verbal pattern and visual pattern (in imagination).

"SPATIAL" FORM

Our study of Histoire will attempt to show how an appreciation of "meaning" in terms of the vision of life expressed and of esthetic effect can be attained by examining the novel in the light of its "spatial" structure. Spatial form, we may recall, is aptly defined by Joseph Frank as pattern arising from the spatial interweaving of images and phrases irrespective of any time sequence. The genesis of spatial form is visible in Le Vent where traditional narrative structure (a temporal, causal sequence) is altered through the use of parentheses to suspend the forward movement and to hold the reader's mind in abeyance, so to speak, while
evoking the aura of existence surrounding acts or events. More important than the act itself is the total sensory context within which it occurs. There results a discontinuous composition characterized by the juxtaposition of discrete fragments or tableaux, each constituting a "unit of meaning." Within the unit of meaning there may be progressive action, but more often than not, by means of various stylistic devices, acts or events are evoked as simultaneous.

In our study of *La Route des Flandres* we saw how a composition based on a discontinuous sequence of tableaux provided a means for creating patterns of expressive and esthetic value—meaningful juxtapositions. This is the structural principle which, with some significant modifications in its application, underlies the form of *Histoire*. A major difference between its application in *Histoire* by contrast to that in *La Route des Flandres* lies in the proportions of the individual units of meaning which are generally shorter in *Histoire*. As the units of meaning contract in size, the effect of discontinuity is enhanced and the possibilities for creating complex and intricate patterns increase. In *Histoire* we see greater intricacy and density of pattern resulting from the reduction in size of the units of meaning, a trend which extends to succeeding novels.

Despite the necessity of sequence in a consecutive, temporal medium, the descriptive fragments or "units of
meaning" are meant to be apprehended spatially in a moment of time. By this is meant that the reader, having committed to memory or assimilated the multifarious descriptions, should conceive of the novel as a complex of co-existing images which have to each other a reflexive reference precedent to any external reference to a world outside the boundaries of the novel. The grotesque guerrilla munching a sandwich, the narrator's gaunt and haggard mother, his cousin Corinne with her long hair framing a too beautiful face, his grandmother and her aged friends with their perpetual expression of chagrin and their perpetual lamentations, his wife Hélène in her dress of floral motif, the loquacious antique dealer, the sower distributing seeds depicted on a postage stamp, Roman soldiers casting their javelins in the heat of battle, Uncle Charles standing over a desolate, hueless grave, various images on post-cards and stamps displaying "le globe terrestre avec ses continents compliqués ses mers ses océans" (p. 22)—all must be apprehended by the reader as juxtaposed in an instant of time. He must see them side by side in his mind's eye contrasting to one another, casting mutual reflections upon one another, and illuminating one another by their juxtaposition.

The sum of these images, their total structure, may be considered to form an image in the sense of a linguistic structure which brings together, conjoins, disparate elements.
Underlying the evolution in poetry, and subsequently in the novel, toward "spatial" form, observes Joseph Frank, is the concept of the poem as one vast image, defined by Ezra Pound as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." This complex presented in an instant of time is what we have called the psychic or affective ensemble. The image in the linguistic sense "is defined not as a pictorial reproduction, but as a unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time. Such a complex is not to proceed discursively, according to the laws of language, but is rather to strike the reader's sensibility with an instantaneous impact." Frank has shown how the esthetics of spatial form in poetry formulated early in the twentieth century illuminate our understanding of the development of the modern art novel in which spatialization of form through reflexive reference has replaced traditional narrative structure.

In order to place the "spatial" structures of the mature novels of Simon within the broader context of other similar experiments in modern literature, we may consider some points made by Frank in his analysis of techniques for achieving spatial form. He takes as point of departure the distinction made by Lessing in his *Laokoon* between literature and the plastic arts with respect to the possibilities for creation within the bounds of their different sensuous
Form in the plastic arts, according to Lessing, is necessarily spatial, because the visible aspect of objects can best be presented juxtaposed in an instant of time. Literature, on the other hand, makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time; and it follows that literary form, to harmonize with the essential quality of its medium, must be based primarily on some form of narrative sequence.  

Frank acknowledges that the effort to create within a consecutive medium an effect of simultaneous co-existence contradicts the way in which Lessing had said that language must be perceived. In order to achieve an effect of spatial co-existence, early experimenters like Pound and Eliot realized, "it would be necessary to undermine the inherent consecutiveness of language." Such is the effect in the novels of Simon of certain devices for "detemporalization" of the narrative: parentheses, the present participle, repetitions or the return of certain images to the mind, and, in the novels after Le Palace, the reduction in size of the unit of meaning, which can sometimes be no more than a phrase, with the result of intensifying the effect of discontinuity, the breaking up of temporal sequence. The dispersion of references, the fragmentary presentation of people, places, objects, and events, forces the reader to apprehend them by synthesizing the various references into a total picture in his mind's eye.
Thus is achieved a kind of perception in a moment of time, an instantaneous fusion or amalgamation into a totality.

It is easy to see how a novel constructed on the principle of reflexive reference could become a self-enclosed unit, an autonomous structure, which is indeed the end to which evolve the novels of Simon. The principle of reflexive reference, Frank observes, "is the link connecting the esthetic development of modern poetry with similar experiments in the modern novel." These experiments extend back to Flaubert where Frank begins his discussion of esthetic form in the modern novel. Briefly, he shows how the famous county fair scene in Madame Bovary illustrates, on a small scale, what we mean by the spatialization of form in a novel. For the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narrative is halted: attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the limited time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative; and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning.

The irony which emerges from the scene is expressed through the spatial interweaving of three levels of action: the crowd in the street attending a livestock exhibition, the officials on a platform mouthing platitudes, and, from a window overlooking the activities, Emma and Rodolphe engaged in amorous conversation.
An admirer of the work of Flaubert, James Joyce used an elaborate system of cross-references in his Ulysses to create an impression of a totality, both of Dublin and of the whole of human knowledge and experience:

Ultimately, if we are to believe Stuart Gilbert, these systems of reference form a complete picture of practically everything under the sun, from the stages of man's life and the organs of the human body to the colors of the spectrum...  

Since the totality is the creation of the reader who is obliged to fuse together reflexive references dispersed throughout the novel, to progress through the novel "connecting allusions and references spatially, gradually becoming aware of the pattern of relationships," he feels a more direct participation in the world of the novel. Fitting together fragments scattered dozens, often hundreds, of pages apart, he constructs the novel. As Frank points out with respect to Ulysses, such a novel is not meant to be read, but to be re-read.

THE PSYCHIC OR AFFECTIVE ENSEMBLE

What is the totality which we as readers are called upon to re-create in Histoire? It is quite simply the world, as viewed through the prism of an individual mind. Underlying the complex of "phenomenological" descriptions in Histoire
is the Husserlian concept of a "pregiven" life-world (the Lebenswelt). Obliquely, the work is a metaphor for the world or Kosmos of the novelist "whose imagination selects and transforms elements of his Lebenswelt and creates out of them a fictive construct, a fictive 'universe'.”

THE FAMILY, MICROCOSM OF LIFE

At the center of the psychic or affective ensemble in this novel is the family. Histoire portrays a more personal world: the aged grandmother, the emaciated and dying mother, the uncle who assumed the role of father to the narrator following the death of his real father, the narrator's cousins, and his enigmatic wife. At the outset is evoked his memory of the care-worn faces of his grandmother and her aged friends—faces which seem to sum up an entire world-view:

Leurs visages effondrés empreints de cette identique expression de perpétuelle désolation et de perpétuelle majesté apprises dans le longues suites de désastres, réels ou imaginaires, comme si là aussi tout le tumulte du monde venait mourir, se perdre, insignifiant, tout également confondu dans une même plainte incohérente, monotone, à travers laquelle les événements heureux, malheureux ou neutres, la maladie de maman, les mauvaises récoltes, les fiançailles des petites filles, les voyages, les soupçons sur les régisseurs, les naissances, les morts, les mésalliances, les incartades de leurs enfants, les ruines, étaient indifféremment réduits à
ces bribes de phrases navrées, ces commentaires suspendus dans l'air immobile comme ces vibrations qui persistent long-temps après que les cloches se sont tues ...
(pp. 25-26).

This description of old faces reflecting the afflictions of the world—the minor disasters, calamities, and catastrophes of existence—sets the tone for the work. Interfused in the narrator's mind with the lamentations of the old women is the image of their eyes in which permanent tears seemed suspended. His grandmother's tearful gaze is an expression, on the personal level, of the turmoil of the world: "...grand-mère se tenant là à regarder avec ce visage empreint de cette expression perpétuellement effarée pleurarde installée à demeure, comme si ses soucis d'argent les histoires de domestiques les décolletées ou la conduite de Corinne n'étaient qu'une seule et même manifestation d'un monde violent malintentionné et redoutable" (p. 78).

The narrator's recollections of his mother center around her last years when she was sick with a terminal illness. Emaciated and grotesque, she sat in a brilliantly lit salon on evenings of chamber music and received guests who could barely conceal their astonishment at her appearance:

pareille, avec ses pommettes carmin et sa coiffure apprêtée qui semblait quelque postiche directement sorti de la vitrine d'un coiffeur et dérisoirement posé au-dessus de la face ravagée, à quelque
mannequin, quelque épouvantail méchamment disposé là, bourré non d'explosifs mais de morphine, à titre de macabre avertissement, comme le centre pompeux et terrifiant d'on ne savait quelle parade dans le salon jonquille illuminé ....... (p. 52).

Her gradual deterioration in illness is interwoven with images of decrepitude: of "vieilles chairs jaunies," of an old man "son squelette flottant dans son complet trop vaste," and of the aged grandmother "élévant sa main ridée, cireuse aussi, les extrémités des doigts décolorées ex-sangues." Linked to these images is that of the dilapidated old family mansion whose rotting plaster and slowly detaching wallpaper recur as leitmotifs throughout the novel. Indeed, the recurrent motif of the deteriorating old house is essential to the lyrical quality of the novel. For it was the center of all that palpitating life of which remain but débris in memory.

Along with her daughter's illness and her deteriorating home for which she could not afford the necessary repairs, the grandmother's expression of perpetual chagrin resulted from the tragedy of her son, Charles, who, the reader is given to understand, became a recluse after the death (by suicide?) of his wife. He left the capital, returned to his home in southern France, and devoted himself to running the family winery. It is implied that the motive behind the suicide of Charles' wife was her despair upon learning of her
husband's affair with another woman. At the end of the novel the narrator imagines Uncle Charles and his wife in the process of disintegrating, as if, following her discovery of his affair, the core of their being, the very essence of their living selves, began to dissolve.

The themes of disintegration, deterioration, and decomposition find further expression in the narrator's own unhappy marriage which also ended in tragedy. We know very little about his wife, Hélène: that she and the narrator spent their honeymoon in Greece, that their marriage did not begin in harmony, that they did share some happy moments as when, following nocturnal fishing trips, she would remain with fishermen cooking sardines on the beach and would return late in the morning—her hair perfumed with the scent of seawater—to find the narrator in bed, and that she eventually left him on a train for Barcelona. The obsessive image of their parting on a railroad platform returns to his mind throughout the novel. Certain phrases—"Yeux immenses me regardant humides mais pas de," "lacs de larmes," and "tu sais bien que nous ne pouvons pas nous perdre"—associated with Hélène and the scene of their parting reappear throughout the novel, creating by their repetition a lyrical intensity.

The reader is given to understand that the cause of the dissolution of the narrator's marriage was also in large
part his affair with another woman. Furthermore, he ultimately lost his wife in an absolute sense, for there is implication that following their unhappy separation, Hélène died. No explicit reference to the cause of her death is made, but there is an allusion to a core of future illness which perhaps already existed within her body at the time of the honeymoon trip to Greece:

je ne pouvais voir que ses cheveux blonds
son dos comme un mur énigmatique enfermant
cachant cette espèce de tragique mélancolie
cette chose sombre noire qui était déjà
en elle comme un noyau de mort cachée comme
un poison un poignard sous le léger tissu
de sa robe imprimée décorée de fleurs et
plus profond sous sa chair ses seins doux
que j'aimais tenir presser contre mes tempes
avec leurs bouts pâles fragiles)
(PP. 109-110)

Henceforth the image of her breasts under the dress decorated with flowers is associated with death, either of Hélène herself or of the wife of Uncle Charles.

The theme of death finds expression throughout the novel from the descriptions of old women "attendant la mort, ou peut-être déjà mortes" (p. 13), to the scent of putrefaction which pervades the old house, like a residue from all the dead who once lived there: "cette violente odeur de moisie de cave ou plutôt de caveau comme si quelque cadavre de quelque bête morte quelque rat coincé sous une lame de parquet ou derrière une plinthe n'en finissait plus de pourrir
exhalant ces âres relents de plâtre effrité de tristesse et de chair momifiée" (p. 10). Of course, death finds its most poignant expression in descriptions of that living cadaver, the narrator's mother. Her shocking deformity at the end of her life underlies the origin of another of those simple words or phrases associated with the narrator's affective life which, repeated as leitmotifs throughout the novel, create a lyrical intensity:

Une fois dans le brouhaha j'entendis quelqu'un dire qu'elle était à faire peur pensant faire-part pensant qu'on enverrait ces cartons bordés de noir où ont la douleur de vous faire part de la mort de leur mère fille soeur tante cousine pieusement décédée en sa quarante-cinquième peut-être sixième au maximum année... (p. 77).

son visage supplicié de polichinelle à faire-part on les avait envoyés maintenant... (p. 227). se décider à décéder. Faire part. Faire peur..... (p. 362). Décharnée maigre à faire-part... (p. 383).

The death of their wives left both the narrator and his uncle widowers, a state which seemed to run in the family, as the narrator remarked to an old friend of Uncle Charles whom he encountered on his way to the bank:

Oui c'est une tradition de famille chez nous Je veux dire le veuvage Une de ces maladies de femmes vous savez Congénitale comme on dit Oui Transmissible aux hommes du clan par voie utérine, lui me regardant méfiant perplexe se demandant s'il devait rire ou quoi... (p. 69).
He grew up amid the rituals of life and death expressed quintessentially within the family unit: "Oui le noir lui allait très bien aussi Toujours les habitudes familiales J'ai grandi dans les lamentations les histoires d'hypothèques et l'odeur du crêpe..." (p. 76).

The family is, then, a microcosm of life. In Histoire microcosm and macrocosm are placed side by side in a movement from the particular to the universal. The eternal cycles of life and death, of creation and destruction, become known first within the context of the family, then on the vast scale of universal existence. The themes of birth (the narrator's final vision on the last page of the novel is of himself in the womb: "sorte de têtard gélatineux") and death, of creation followed by inevitable deterioration and decay, represent a vision of eternal recommencing in time. Mental life literally encompasses the whole world, what we have come to know of it—both in terms of space and time, or history.

THE WORLD: "LA VASTE TERRE LE MONDE FABULEUX FASTUEUX BIGARRÉ INÉPUISABLE"

The theme of universality is so fundamental that, in a sense, it is what Histoire is "about"—about the universality of violence, passion, suffering, death, decomposition, decay, and rebirth. When we finish reading this novel, we feel that we have been presented with a summation of life compressed
within the 400 pages of the book, with a vision of the particulars and the universals and of the particular as an expression of the universal. The theme of universality in terms of space is underlined in the post-card motif recurrent throughout the novel. Described in meticulous detail, the cards belong to a collection cherished by the narrator's mother, a large number of which were sent to her by her fiancé who travelled around the world as a French colonial officer. Consequently, the post-card motif bears an affective resonance. By virtue of their diverse images representing the entire earth, the cards lend to the content of the novel, to its various themes, implications of universality, as does the recurrent motif of the history book, "le manuel d'Histoire."

Universality applies to the dimension of time as well as to that of space. The theme of history, echoed in the title of the novel, finds concrete expression in descriptions of images contained in the narrator's childhood history manual and in descriptions of his recollections of contact with the remnants of the past, in the form of visits to the sites of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, to museums of Classical antiquities, and of schoolboy translations of Latin texts, contact with a dead language, with dead words—the débris of the past, of time.

At the center, then, of the psychic or affective
ensemble portrayed in the novel is the family, but the particular is placed within the perspective of the universal. The narrator's sick mother with her "visage en lame de cou- teau," his grandmother and her decrepit contemporaries described as "vaguement fantastiques vaguement irréelles fabuleuses," and whose appearance suggests creatures of a hybrid nature: "tout--jusqu'à ces maquillages maladroits--concourant à leur conférer l'aspect mythique et fabuleux d'êtres à mi-chemin entre l'humain, l'animal et le sur- naturel" (p. 13), are part of a vast population of grotesque, hybrid beings who inhabit the surface of the earth. The narrator envisions this multitude to which his mother belonged as existing on a cosmic scale:

comme si quelque chose dans son destin
l'avait irrésistiblement vouée à ces
multitudes terribles et migratrices
tourbillonnant sans fin à la surface de
la terre errant de l'Orient à l'Occident
à travers le temps et l'espace se
traînant de lieux saints en lieux saints
fanatiques cauchemaresques avec leurs
yeux chassieux leurs ulcères leurs membres
tordus leur colère et leur désespoir les
haillonneux troupes de paralytiques
d'affamés de borgnes de boiteux et de
bossus se bousculant dans les déserts les
défilés les montagnes sauvages les villes
pestiférées et vides dans l'espoir
d'impossibles miracles se traînant
claudiquant véhiculés dans un bruit de
béquilles de voitures d'infirmes de
carrioles d'autos démantibulées de litanies
d'hymnes de sébilles et d'imprécautions
jaillies pêle-mêle des bouches édentées
avec les gluants fragments d'innommables
nourritures riz croûtons de pains
hosties ou sandwiches Pouvant voir...
(pp. 226-227).

The grotesque creatures described in the novel include those with physical deformities, such as two hunchbacks; others who, though outwardly "normal," become monstrous and grotesque under the impact of passion or emotion; still others who become something less than what we like to think of as human when they are absorbed in the act of making money, of cold calculation for profit at the expense of others; and finally among the grotesque we find man in the act of physical love, which reiterates a fundamental theme of *La Route des Flandres*. The significance of the motif of the monster represented by the lizard and the Minotaur now becomes fully apparent.

Physical deformity and grotesquie are epitomized in descriptions of two hunchbacks, one seen in a restaurant where the narrator has lunch:

enfermé dans son orgueilleuse monstruosité semblable à une sorte d'échassier sa tête de héron rejetée en arrière posée ou plutôt engoncée dans ce buste télescopé difforme comme si un ventre proéminent se gonflait immédiatement sous son menton solennel douloureux (p. 205).

and another remembered from his days in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War:

sa tête plate pivotant lentement à droite
et à gauche sur les épaules difformes
promenant son regard sur chacun à tour
de rôle les dévisageant avec une in-
flexible et hautaine condescendance comme
si le désespoir la souffrance endurée
du fait de son infirmité en même temps
que son aspect monstrueux inhumain vague-
ment fabuleux lui conféraient (à la
façon de ces redoutables et hideux gnomes
des légendes) on ne savait quel pouvoir
on ne savait quelle autorité d'essence
surnaturelle... (p. 210).

The latter hunchback was one of a group of Spanish guerrillas
who gathered in a street to parley after having engaged in a
gun battle across a tree-lined avenue in Barcelona, during
which the narrator sought protection in the cover of a stone
wall.

Certain words used to describe these monstrous figures
also characterize the narrator's mother in whom suffering
and despair induced a prideful withdrawal into the private
exaltation of fanatic devotion: "poussée par un bizarre
mélange de dévotion et d'orgueil elle envoyait acheter le
contenu entier d'une boutique de fleuriste..." (p. 389).
The narrator's memory of his mother is associated with the
vision of the sick, maimed, and deformed who come to Lourdes
"dans l'espoir d'impossibles miracles" (p. 226). Not unlike
their hope and devotion was that of the Spanish guerrillas.
That the latter are included among the "multitudes terribles
et migratrices tourbillonnant sans fin à la surface de la
terre" is implied in the reference, along with holy places
and religious shrines, to "les villes pestiférées et vides" (Barcelona), in the mention along with the vehicles of the sick and maimed of "autos démantibulées" (the autos confiscated from private citizens by the guerrillas), and finally in the mention along with hymns and prayers of "imprécactions jaillies pêle-mêle des bouches édentées avec les gluants fragments d'innommables nourritures riz croûtons de pains hosties ou sandwiches." There is no hope for improvement of the human condition either along the plane of history or through religious faith. No liberation is possible for man from suffering, injustice, or inevitable decrepitude and death.

Grotesque by fanaticism, passion, and violent emotion, the guerrillas are epitomized by a hideous, toothless figure eating a sandwich out of the corner of his mouth whom the narrator saw suddenly exploding in a fit of rage:

se débattant et jurant maintenant, l'instant d'avant absent aurait-on dit uniquement absorbé par la mastication de ce sandwich et tout à coup explosant criant, des parcelles de nourriture mâchée jaillissant entre ses chicots les yeux fous sa main droite agitée de tremblements fébrile essayant maladroitement sans qu'il cessât de crier de fourrer le quignon de pain dans la poche de poitrine son arme dans la main gauche il fendit le groupe ... (p. 208).

The raucous and furious voices of the guerrillas: "tous jacassant à la fois s'injuriant," their bodies equipped with
weapons: "harnachés comme des panoplies et le doigt sur la détente d'armes même pas encore refroidies," their gestures full of hostility and enmity, suggest a resemblance with primitive forebears, with aboriginal humans: "On aurait dit deux tribus voisines sur un terrain de chasse contesté en train de se disputer le dépêçage d'une grosse bête abattue palabrant sans se comprendre dans leurs idiomes gutturaux violents..." (p. 188).

Included among the beings "à mi-chemin entre l'humain, l'animal et le surnaturel" are those who, professionally involved in buying, selling, lending, or other enterprises directly related to the exchange of money, become grotesque and monstrous when engaged in calculation for profit. A bank employe in charge of loans is transfigured into a hybrid creature, rather like the ancient Sphinx: "un de ces oracles, une de ces énigmatiques et monumentales divinités au visage aveugle, méditatif, au corps de chien ou de griffon, et à la bouche de bronze" (p. 75). One's fate, the narrator muses, would be told by this monster not in terms of verbal formulas but in terms of money. Henceforth the banker is referred to as "le Sphinx vêtu de gris anthracite." His cryptic face ornamented with gleaming gold-rimmed glasses and his smile of aurification bespeak the dominion of money: "aux yeux invisibles derrière les reflets des lunettes cerclées d'or, au sourire affable, froid et aurifié lui
aussi..." (p. 99).

The person who seems to epitomize cold, calculating
cupidity is a woman who deals in antiques with whom the
narrator has already done business before she comes to buy,
more accurately to steal, a chest from him. Her assimilation
to the banker is explicit:

Je la fis entrer dans le salon la priai
de s'asseoir mais elle resta debout
Appris à s'habiller à porter des choses
côteses décées et sévères comme les
sous-maîtresses de bordels le banquier
gris anthracite et or l'émeraude qu'elle
avait au doigt discrète aussi (p. 228).

She seems to be entirely under the dominion of her rapacious
eyes over which she has little or no control once she is in
the narrator's house and able to see his furniture: "Ne
pouvant empêcher ses yeux de lui échapper par instants les
rappelant aussitôt à l'ordre obligée de ranger pour ainsi dire
ses troupes en formation de bataille..." (p. 229). When he
has to leave the room, he imagines her gorging herself on the
furniture in his absence. In his imagination she is trans-
formed into a monster, like a giant voracious insect "énorme
comme une de ces araignées dévoreuses." Like an insect's
imperious need to kill, her greed appears to derive from
instinctual habits of the race for survival:

elle ressemblait à un de ces insectes .......

........ absorbés au milieu de l'éblouissant
chatoiement des tiges et des pétales
dans des besognes secrètes impérieuses
ou plutôt rituelles c'est-à-dire dont
les phases successives (camouflage, ruse,
construction de pièges, attaques) sont
commandées par les réflexes millénaires
de l'espèce: quelque chose qui existerait
et aurait survécu depuis les temps
immémoriaux où le monde n'était que
vapeurs et boues... (p. 232).

Amiable and garrulous prior to the conclusion of the sale, she
becomes silent and serious when counting out the money. Like
the banker in anthracite grey, her voice becomes cold and im-
personal. Transformed by her rapacity into "une créature
fabuleuse" she joins the ranks of the grotesque and the
monstrous.

Among the bizarre, the grotesque, the misshapen, a place
is reserved for the couple in the act of physical love. A
motif recurrent in the novels of Simon, its expression in
Histoire calls to mind passages in La Route des Flandres. One
might compare, for instance, these words from Histoire whereby
the couple in the posture of love-making is explicitly
designated as hybrid creatures, not wholly human:

... pariahe
rime avec hamadryade
mais pas oiseaux quoique vaguement animaux ou plutôt
entre l'animal et l'humain ... (p. 341).

with the evocation of the couple in La Route des Flandres as
"l'espèce de bête qui possède deux têtes, quatre bras, quatre
jambes et deux troncs soudés par le ventre au moyen de cet
organe commun..." (p. 192). Reminiscences of La Route des Flandres become explicit when the narrator reflects on the rumored sexual relations between his cousin Corinne and the jockey Iglésia:

ragots sur elle et ce jockey au nom espagnol qui montait pour Reixach....
Se faire baiser ou plutôt cette fois se faire monter par Imaginant quelque chose de faunesque quelque chose avec de l'herbe des feuillages (peut-être à cause des champs de course des haies)
et pas un homme mais une sorte de créature hybride aussi moitié étalon
moitié homme s'avancant en sautilant maladroITEMENT à la façon d'un caniche debout sur ses pattes de derrière...
(pp. 341-342).

This hybrid creature, too, is assimilated to the migrating hordes of the sick and maimed which move from one holy place to another: "ses bottes semblables à ces prothèses d'infirmes faites de bois de fer et de cuir" (p. 342). Man can no more escape from the determinism of his physiological nature than from other sordid aspects of the human condition. An implicit parallel between man and beast is contained in the repeated allusions to "l'âne d'Apulée" and in the excerpts from the Golden Ass of Apuleius incorporated in the text of Histoire.

The metamorphosis of human beings into strange, hybrid creatures is but one manifestation of the eternal process of flux and change occurring unceasingly throughout the earth. This process is visible within the narrow circle of family
life and within the wider arena of universal existence. It is perhaps best symbolized by the narrator's haunting memory of air redolent of fermenting grapes associated with his uncle's office and his task of running the family winery: "pouvant avant même d'entrer sentir l'odeur : douceâtre, entêtante, avec ce quelque chose de cadavérique qui s'exhale des matières en décomposition..." (p. 46). As a child, he witnessed his mother becoming hideous from illness, his grandmother declining into senility, the family home becoming more and more dilapidated, until one evening in the presence of guests assembled to hear chamber music, he felt himself to be participating in an unreal world "en train de se décomposer, s'effriter, s'en aller en morceaux autour de ce cadavre vivant à la tête fardée, parée, immobilisée une fois pour toutes dans un rictus enjoué et affable..." (p. 62). Tumultuous music and a dazzling display of light combined to produce an effect of transformation of the ordinary world of the family salon into an unknown, unfamiliar universe in the process of decomposing, as if under the surface of things "quelque chose de vorace, grouillant, s'activait qui ne laisserait plus à la fin des assistants, des meubles, du salon tout entier qu'une mince pellicule extérieure, une croûte prête à s'effriter..." (p. 83).

Images of the devastation wrought by the first World War (during which, it is implied, his father was killed)
which the narrator beheld in his history book gave him early intimations of the universal process of mutation and transformation. Situated on one of the last pages of "le manuel d'Histoire" was a photograph of a battlefield seen from the air in which what was once a checkerboard of fields, plowed land and woods, has become "une étendue croûteuse, pustuleuse, comme une maladie du sol même, une lèpre" (p. 105). Throughout Histoire are echoes of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Spanish Civil War, shattering events which brought drastic changes in the early twentieth century. Revolution transformed what had appeared a model city (Barcelona) as portrayed on an aquatint hanging in Uncle Charles' office into an embattled, polluted city in which men and matter alike were slowly undermined by the impending threat of death: "(de même que (par les fondations, les égouts?) elle (la mort) attaquait, minait la ville d'où s'exhalait cette macabre odeur de cadavre, de pourri--de melon pourri, de poisson pourri, d'huile rance)" (p. 193).

As if to underscore the perpetual rise and fall of civilizations (the cycle of eternal recommencing), the débris of the Classical world of Greece and Rome are described at length: objects which the narrator saw in museums and words of the Latin language which he was obliged to learn at school. As he ventured into the arena of life beyond the family circle, he came to regard the familiar process of
distillation of must as symbolic of universal disintegration: "Je pouvais entendre de nouveau ce bruit, ce bouillonnement, écoutant se séparer ce que l'été, la terre, le soleil, les pluies avaient peu à peu amalgamé et que la petite flamme silencieuse était en train de décomposer de nouveau, comme si tout ne faisait que se réunir, se combiner, se désunir de nouveau, comme si cela ne cessait jamais..." (p. 153).

It is by now apparent that Histoire portrays a violent, turbulent, chaotic world, and a vision of a world in decay: people growing old and decrepit, things, objects disintegrating, marriages dissolving, the dead decomposing, an embattled, polluted city becoming engulfed in stench and filth, the family home falling into ruin. Concrete descriptions characterized by fineness of detail communicate this vision. The themes of the novel are implicit in the descriptions. As in La Route des Flandres, from the juxtaposition of the various tableaux and the resulting interlacing of themes a world view emerges. Once again, we see the evolution in Simon's technique from an explicit to an implicit mode of expression of a world-view or philosophy of life through patterns of "phenomenological" descriptions.

The ensemble of associated images in Histoire, however, represents a broader spectrum of modes of reflecting the world. Photographs, post-card scenes, figurations on stamps, and portraits join with mental images, imaginary and mnemonic,
to provide the diversity of images which constitute the 
psychic or affective ensemble portrayed in the novel. The 
vision which emerges from the ensemble is cosmic. All of 
His creation, as infinite in variety as the images on all 
the world's post-cards, is subject matter for the novel:

tout ce qu'il a créé tout ce qui vole 
respire palpite se balance les rochers 
les fleuves les villes tout ce qui 
court rampe bouge s'édifie s'écroule 
pourrit les papillons les caïmans les 
palmiers du Botanical Garden le Camel 
Market d'Aden Caravan at rest Anes en 
promenade Suez Group of Somali Women 
Palais des Sources Mesdames Vichy 
Battery Road Singapore Un coin d'arroyo ...
(p. 371).

Nothing is too trivial to find its place in this mosaic of 
life. The welding of the trivial with the monumental conveys 
the impression of a totality, of the entire world compressed 
within the pages of the book. The orchestration of themes 
in the novel is artfully concerted to express a personal 
vision of a complex and paradoxical world. Affective themes 
are interlaced with objective themes so as to create an 
effect of fusion of the world without and the world within, 
or, more precisely, to portray the incorporation of the world 
without into the world within.
COMPOSITION : THE ORCHESTRATION OF THEMES

The orchestration of themes is achieved through a composition based on the principle of contrast and balance operating within a discontinuous sequence of descriptive fragments. The expressive and esthetic value of the juxtaposition of images is well illustrated in the composition of the seventh chapter where we see a series of juxtapositions of grotesque to allegorical figures. In particular are described at some length the symbolic motifs and figures represented on paper money. We never see a hunchback depicted on a bank note, yet the sick, maimed and deformed are legion. Death is ubiquitous; yet the images so widely circulated on money are more likely to represent the gift of life, as symbolized by the maternal breast. So the narrator reflects as he gazes at the bills he placed on the table in payment for his lunch. The last words of chapter six express his recollection of configurations which ornamented old paper money now retired from circulation: "Autrefois ils étaient plus grands dans des ton bleuâtres ornés de figures allégoriques une femme allaitant assise comme celles..." (p. 203).

The seventh chapter commences with the evocation of a gypsy nursing an infant: "...celles (ou celle, car on aurait pu croire que c'était toujours la même) qui se tenaient
toujours sur les marches des églises des banques ou les rebords des trottoirs....le nouveau-né agrippé à la lourde mamelle" (p. 204). Symbol of new life, the maternal breast signifies nourishment and the necessity of sustaining life through nourishment. An abrupt transition occurs to the now familiar figure of the guerrilla munching a sandwich:

"bouche de mort édentée mastiquant la bouillie blanche grumeleuse broyée entre les chicots jaunâtres...." This macabre vision is followed by a rapid return to the interrupted evocation of the gypsy mother, which is succeeded by a description of an allegorical figure of a young mother nursing an infant depicted on a bank note:

\[
\text{la femme représentée sur le billet d'un type toutefois classique Lorraine peut-être (puisqu'on distinguait dans le fond de hautes cheminées fumantes des ponts roulants des grues), le sein jaillissant par l'ouverture délacée d'un de ces caracos que porte Jeanne d'Arc sur ces images où on la voit gardant ses moutons.... (p. 205).}
\]

Maternity is an obvious expression of the themes of fertility and fecundity, to which allusion is made throughout the novel in the recurrent motif of a sower distributing seeds depicted on a postage stamp.

The theme of fecundity is further underscored in the presence on the bank note of yet another allegorical figure placed along side the young mother: "et derrière elle,
debout, une autre femme au même aspect vigoureux tenant une gerbe ..." (p. 205). These figures are accompanied by a second child, a nude little boy, and by the vigorous young father engaged in worthwhile, fruitful labor:

..... la jeune mère et celui qu'elle regardait avec une attention grave passionnée : un homme debout devant une enclume, un lourd marteau dans sa main droite levée au-dessus de sa tête, le buste nu, musculeux ............
la main gauche tenant au bout d'une pince sur l'enclume la pièce qu'il était en train de forger, sans doute un soc de charrue ou un fer à cheval ......
(pp. 205-206).

Depicted amid the tools of his trade, the young blacksmith is significantly positioned under the inscription indicating the value of the note so as to underline the idea of money as a reward for industry. The descriptions conclude with an explicit designation of the blacksmith, the young mother and child, the woman holding a sheaf of wheat, and the nude little boy as belonging to "cette inépuisable et sereine famille des figures symbolisant travaux et vertus sous les aspects de personnages éternellement géorgiques, sommairement vêtu et optimistes ..." (p. 207).

The significance of these allegorical figures emerges from their contrast to descriptions of grotesque and hideous beings to which they are juxtaposed. Intercalated within the evocation of the industrious young parents portrayed on the
obsolete bank note is the evocation of the hunchback seen in a restaurant with his "tête de héron." The description of the exemplary couple is accompanied by a description of another allegorical ensemble, a statue symbolizing the transformation of arms of war into a useful, productive plowhead, entitled LES TEMPS FUTURS and depicting a giant "s'acharnant à coups de marteau sur un faisceau d'épées et d'armes qu'il serrait dans son poing gauche, les maintenant du genou contre le rocher utilisé comme enclume et sur lequel les lames martelées et à demi fondues commençaient à prendre la forme d'un soc de charrue, tout son corps tendu et arc-bouté..." (pp. 207-208). Three suspension points following the final words of this passage indicate an interruption to be resumed later, and indeed four pages later exactly the same words, preceded by three suspension points, mark the resumption of the interrupted sequence. The expressiveness of this allegorical figure depends upon the technique of fusion and interpenetration of images whereby the description of the symbolic statue is interrupted for the interpolation of an evocation of furious Spanish guerrillas: "à présent ils criaient tous ensemble de nouveau lui hurlant et se débattant deux autres essayant de le maintenir et de lui arracher son arme vers laquelle se dressait une gerbe de bras tendus ils se bousculaient tous vociférant..." (pp. 208-209).

The juxtaposition of the optimistic statue and
allegorical figures on bank notes to the transformation of a peaceful and banal Barcelona avenue into the scene of a gun battle contains an irony rather like that of the ubiquity of death amid the tranquil vernal setting of Flanders in May of 1940. Thus is implied the deceptiveness of the appearance of stability. In the outbreak of war or revolution, transformations are abrupt, brutal, and consequently more visible, as implied in the image on a post-card entitled "Les Troubles de Limoges" in which ordinary objects have been transformed "en autant d'espaces emphatiques et terrifiantes comme pour rappeler qu'à tout instant le monde ordonné et rassurant peut soudain chavirer, se retourner et se mettre sur le dos comme une vieille putain troussant ses jupes et, retournant au chaos originel, en dévoiler la face cachée pour montrer que son envers n'est qu'un simple entassement d'ordures et de détritus..." (pp. 66-67).

The statue placed in a public garden with its optimistic, confident inscription LES TEMPS FUTURS seemed a fixed and permanent object, made of bronze, solid, seemingly indestructible, and symbolic of the will to lasting peace, but ironically it was no more enduring than peace itself, for one day in time of war it disappeared, its metal appropriated for the fabrication of arms. Its pedestal stood empty amid a bed of flowers "avec son inscription énigmatique et optimiste que l'on pouvait toujours lire, idyllique,
dérisoire..." (p. 212). The naive optimism of the statue is duplicated in the bold slogan VINCEREMOS which the narrator saw everywhere in Barcelona during the Civil War. This declaration of hope and determination was illustrated by a gaunt profile of a man brandishing a rifle with a broken chain dangling from an iron cuff on the wrist of the hand clutching the gun.

Finally, "cette figure allégorique qui dans les années vingt ornait les timbres de Memel" brings to the narrator's mind a boyhood friend, Lambert, with whom he used to exchange stamps:

me faisant au contraire remarquer la valeur exceptionnelle de ceux en sa possession comme celui de Memel par exemple du fait du statut éphémère de ces pays baltes arrachés par violence (la honteuse intervention des troupes alliées à la Révolution qu'ils ne tarderaient d'ailleurs pas à rejoindre (pp. 213-214).

Cocky, self-assured, and thoroughly mediocre, Lambert became a politician, and it is his face (the reader eventually learns) which is displayed on posters all over town and on billboards along highways leading in and out of town. This boyhood friend of the narrator, who early showed signs of becoming as vulgar and boorish as indeed he did become, is associated on the posters and in the minds of those who flock to his rallies with the slogans of idealism: "UNION POUR LE
The seventh chapter concludes with a scene of dialogue between Lambert, who had accompanied the narrator home from school, and Uncle Charles in which Lambert tactlessly referred to the crumbling old family home with sarcasm:

Dites donc on voit que c'est vieux on pourrait faire deux étages dans un on avisa une grande tache d'humidité sur le mur la montra du doigt se tourinant vers oncle Charles souriant tout à coup cordial protecteur Le papier aussi est d'époque? (p. 216).

In the final pages of the novel when the narrator returns to town from his cousin's seaside residence a political speech is being delivered (by Lambert, we soon discover) at the town hall, and half the town has gathered in the streets and within the hall to hear his platitudes and promises:

Pendant un moment je l'ai écouté expliquer qu'il était le seul à pouvoir empêcher les communistes d'être élus Il ne les appelait d'ailleurs jamais communistes mais kominformistes le mot Kominform revenant fréquemment accouplé à terreur ou à dictature (p. 332).

Following the speech are ovations and frenzied acclamations for this man of the most common sort. Significantly, a parallel is implied between Lambert and Lenin, who can be identified from descriptive details on a photo of him presented earlier as part of the "manuel d'Histoire."
parallel becomes overt when a passage describing Lenin from Dix jours qui ébranlèrent le monde by John Reed is intercalated within a description of the enthusiasm, indeed the furore, with which Lambert's words are received:

l'imaginant faisant peut-être un signe de la main s'épongeant le front tandis qu'il reprenait souffle puis levant la main plus impérieusement encore se tenant sur le rebord de la tribune il promena sur l'assistance ses petits yeux clignotants en apparence insensible à l'immense ovation qui se prolongea pendant plusieurs minutes réclamant leur imposant silence et recommençant à parler élevant baissant le ton l'élevant de nouveau la voix vibrant se déchirant puis la houle des applaudissements et des acclamations grésillant dans les haut-parleurs.... (p. 328).

Implications of universality, once again, are contained in the juxtaposition of Lambert to Lenin. One day, it is implied, Lambert may join the Cardinal de Richelieu, Voltaire, Pasteur, and other national heroes who, on the paper money of all nations, form: "la théorie, le défilé, la frise grisâtre des empereurs, des conquistadors et des financiers .......... réincarnations, réapparitions sporadiques d'un unique personnage répété à travers les siècles" (pp. 84-85). As John Sturrock points out, Simon adamantly refuses "any hope of an ultimate transcendence of the human condition along the plane of history." Hence the irony for him of the optimism of reformers.
Thus concentrated within the seventh chapter is an expression of the contradiction between the ideals we set before us and things as they exist: the theme of the loss of illusions, the shattering of youthful idealism which permeates Simon's fiction. Bank notes are always ornamented with exemplary persons, men successful in business, government, banking, war—national heroes, in short—but the images of harmony, fecundity, industry, and heroism circulated on paper money or embodied in sculpture are mendacious in that they do not represent the truth of life. This view is communicated in Histoire through juxtapositions of images of violence, chaos, death, illness, deformity, deterioration, destruction, and human mediocrity to allegorical images of peace and harmony, fertility, diligence in labor, nobility, heroism, and prosperity. The vision of these oppositions permeates the novels of Claude Simon. Thus in Le Vent it is suggested that the turbulence of Montès' existence resulted from the fact that he maintained an obstinate belief in order: "cet Ordre au mythe duquel il s'accrochait avec une espèce de crainte superstition et fétichiste,"17 and from the fact that he was himself "exactement le contraire de cette volonté d'ordre, de stabilité, de cette conception obstinément boy-scoutesque et optimiste du monde à quoi il s'accroche, qu'il cherche à toute force à préserver, à tenir pour vraie contre l'évidence même...."18
The world portrayed in *Histoire* is a violent, turbulent world and a world in which mankind is oppressed by the heavy hand of determinism. In scenes of aggression and hostility, of sexuality, even of the everyday act of eating, man's subjection to a pre-determined physiological constitution is evoked. For a concise and explicit statement of this theme echoed throughout the novels of Simon we may look back to an early book of memoirs, *La Corde raide*:

La guerre m'intéressait, parce que c'est le seul endroit où l'on puisse bien voir certaines choses, et aussi parce que je voulais essayer de comprendre cette occupation si importante et pour ainsi dire essentielle en ce sens qu'elle rentre dans les trois ou quatre besoins fondamentaux, comme coucher avec des femmes, manger, parler, procréer, pour lesquels les hommes sont faits et dont ils ne peuvent se passer.19

This statement, coupled with another unequivocal reference to man's essential nature in the phrase "puisqu'il est dans la nature de l'homme de tuer"20 also contained in *La Corde raide*, has obvious application to the view of life revealed in *Histoire*, as well as in other novels of Simon. The thematic continuity of *Histoire* with earlier works is manifested specifically in the themes of war, violence, chaos, and the exacerbation of the physiological need for satisfaction of the sexual drive.

The evocation of the male genitals as blind mechanisms
implies a concept of man as victim of physiological determinism and hence not responsible for his acts: "cet aspect à la fois terrible borgne turgescient furibond et perpétuellement frustré stupide de ces organes" (p. 258). The following passage evokes the narrator's imaginative re-creation of a dialogue between Uncle Charles and his wife following her discovery of his affair with an artist's model. The narrator projects his own thoughts into the mind of his uncle, lending to his uncle his views on the subjection of man to the compulsion of lust:

Bon Dieu qui sait tout qui voit tout qui connaît tout qui permet tout
et elle:
quêl âge a-t-elle?
et lui:
qu'est-ce que ça peut faire?

..............
et elle: t'enfuir tu t'imagines qu'alors tu
et lui: non pas m'enfuir pourquoi m'enfuir
non ce n'est pas ça non ... Puis sa voix à
son tour mourant tandis qu'il pense Muscle et
un couple de glandes de singe comme la carotte
qui fait avancer l'âne sauf que celle-là a une
grosse tête borgne comme à la fois un œil et
une bouche muette de poisson comme chez ces
organismes primaires... (pp. 373-374).

These passages echo the theme of the over-powering, irresistible temptation of woman so artfully and forcefully presented in La Route des Flandres. Who can penetrate the mystery of the attraction of woman, the narrator wonders as he gazes at the nude model depicted on an old photo with his
uncle and other persons in an artist's studio:

immobilisée dans cette pose paisible, banale, sa paisible et banale nudité tellement dépourvue de mystère qu'il en émanait cette espèce de mystère au second degré caché au-delà du visible, du palpable, cette terri-
fiante énigme, insoluble, vertigineuse ...... (p. 283).

Woman can be defined only as a mysterious physical entity with absolute power to entrap and ensnare her victim: "une hanche, la barre d'ombre entre les cuisses, le creux d'un flanc respirant: quelque chose d'insolite : cette matité, cet éclat, cette tiédeur dévinée, cette inoffensive et terrifiante immobilité de piège" (p. 273).

In Histoire, once again, the themes of war and eroticism are interlaced to contribute to the orchestration of themes expressive of Weltanschauung. Erotism finds expression in the narrator's adolescent awakening to sexuality, in his schoolboy fascination for lascivious Latin words and for a copy of the Golden Ass of Apuleius discovered in his uncle's library, and in allusions to his mature sexual life including his relationship with his wife, escapades with servant girls during the period of his military service, and an affair which, it is implied, destroyed his marriage. In accordance with the movement of thematic material from the particular to the universal, the narrator's deflowering of a servant girl ("elle pas plus émue ni troublée que si elle n'avait
fait que ça depuis sa naissance ..... l'âne d'Apulée copuler
moi vaguement écoeuré déflorée parmi les fleurs sylvestres")
is counterbalanced by excerpts from L'Ane d'Or.

In the fourth chapter images of carnage and copulation
are interwoven to suggest a parallel between orgasm and the
feverish excitement of battle. Some twenty years before the
publication of Histoire, the intoxication of participation in
war was expressed in La Corde raide:

Pour votre part, à la guerre, piétinant
les emblavures, saccageant, vivant sans
heures et sans certitude, vous éprouverez,
à un degré ou à un autre, une sorte
d'ivresse.21

Whether or not Roman soldiers evoked in excerpts from Caesar's
War Commentaries included in the text of Histoire were either
able or inclined to analyze the flame kindled in their blood
by battle is uncertain, but the excerpts suggest a continuity
from century to century of the fever and excitement of battle.
Likewise, salacious passages from L'Ane d'Or, a Latin text
of the second century A.D., contain implications of eternal
recommencing for the theme of erotism. The couple welded in
coition join the soldier in combat in the perspective of the
everlasting. Except for external form, observes the narrator
of La Corde raide, warfare remains the same:

D'autant que de la façon dont ça se
passait (apparemment très différente de
ce que j'avais pu entendre raconter ou lire sur la guerre 14-18, j'avais la sensation de voir quelque chose de très typique et qui, si l'on faisait abstraction de la forme moderne (avions, tanks, etc...) devait ressembler point par point—feu et sang, cohortes, invasions—dans le fracas du temps et de l'espace s'écoulant, à ce qui se déroulait, il y a deux cents, deux mille ou dix mille ans.\textsuperscript{22}

Approximately the same idea is voiced by Georges, as we have seen, in \textit{La Route des Flandres} when he comments about war:

"Mais, routes ou chemins c'est toujours la même chose: des fossés bordés de morts, des chevaux crevés, des camions brûlés et des canons abandonnés...."\textsuperscript{23}

The concept of man's destiny which is implied is that of an ineluctable, because innate, tendency to chaos. Excerpts from Caesar's account of the Battle of Pharsalus interwoven with excerpts from \textit{Dix jours qui ébranlèrent le monde} by John Reed summarize the testimony of History, both ancient and modern, on behalf of the concept of eternal recommencing:

\begin{quote}
\textit{depuis la plus haute antiquité on a établi l'usage de faire sonner de toutes parts les trompettes et pousser par toute l'armée une clameur, avec l'idée qu'on effrayait l'ennemi et qu'on excitait les siens proptera quod est: parce qu'il y a quaedam animi incitatio: je ne sais quel enthousiasme atque alacritas naturaliter: et quelle vivacité naturelle}
\end{quote}
innata omnibus : innée chez tous les hommes
quae studio pugnae incenditur : qu’enflamme
l’ardeur du combat les vagues hurlantes des
gardes rouges qui allaient à l’assaut étaient
décimées par la mitraille
dimisit : il envoya
numidas equites cuisses de bronze musculeux
pressant les flancs trempés des chevaux aux
poils collés (pp. 118-119)

The incorporation in the text of these passages from accredited accounts of historical events lends to the individual truth of the narrator’s personal experience an aura of universality and eternity.

The fourth chapter concludes with allusions to still another aspect of determinism in human existence—death and return to the earth as expressed in a description of the form and color of clods covering the grave of Uncle Charles’ wife. Following the description of the gravesite, post-card scenes ranging from the Great Wall of China to the Cirque de Gavarnie and St. Andrew’s Cathedral in Singapore are described with the effect of underscoring the theme of universality in its application to all that has preceded and of conveying the idea of incorporation of the world without into the world within. Caesar’s Commentaries and Reed’s account of the Russian Revolution join the post-cards, the memory of Greek ruins, illustrations in a childhood history manual, and prurient images evoked by salacious Latin texts to form part of the "connaissances vues, entendues ou lues" which constitute the narrator’s mental world.
Georges Braque  Pitcher and Violin, 1909-10.
The final chapter provides a recapitulation of the principal themes of the novel. Through a kaleidoscopic interlacing of images expressive of the major themes, the world view presented at length throughout the novel is given again in synopsis. The dominant theme of chaos is manifested in the devastation wrought by war, in the disruption of old orders in revolution, in the dissolution of human bonds, in deterioration in illness, decrepitude in old age, in death and material disintegration of the body, and perhaps most significantly in the living chaos of consciousness dispersed amid the myriad phenomena of perception or fragmented amid the débris of the past in memory.

The myopic vision of a subjectivity seems chaotic until the reader begins to sort out and identify references, to connect disparate allusions, until, in short, he begins to see pattern, composition, and order emerging from apparent disorder. Out of what seems to be an indeterminate proliferation of words emerges a rigorous structure and composition. In Histoire we see a delicate balance between art conceived as mimesis and art as autonomous structure, a balance rather like that achieved by Braque in his composition Pitcher and Violin (1909-1910) in which "the facetting of forms has reached a point where the intersecting planes have begun to follow an artistic logic of their own." At the top of the painting, however, Braque painted an illusionistic
nail as though to focus on the contrast between traditional painting and the concept of the tableau-objet with its emphasis on the formal relations of elements on the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. On the one hand, the novel Histoire ostensibly represents the mental world of an anonymous narrative consciousness, a complex of images co-existing in his mind, but this ensemble largely composed of repetitions or variations on the same obsessive images forms a closed system of references which is more structured and integrated than any imaginable psychological reality. The work of art represents a means whereby order may be imposed upon disorder.

The objective of Simon's art is not the portrayal of a mind in order to show the functioning of human consciousness, the inner workings of the human mind. Instead, he is using the functioning of consciousness, and in particular the discontinuous sequence of the free flow of thought, as a means of giving pattern and coherence to the various fragments of description which form the principal objective of his art. This is most apparent in Histoire where the reader finds that the artful interweaving of themes and fragments of description often exceeds psychological reality. Psychological verisimilitude is often violated in the interest of pattern. One example of this are the numerous verbatim quotations from literary and historical texts, viz. Caesar, Apuleius, John
Reed, of which the narrator seems to have a photographic memory! One is reminded of Julien Sorel whose prodigious memory won him the admiration of those placed far above him in society. Of course, the lengthy excerpts from universal known texts incorporated into the text of Histoire have a function independent of any reflection of psychic life. They betoken the evolution in Simon's art toward the creation of pattern for the sake of pattern, toward art as autonomous structure. They might even be compared to the fragments of typography incorporated in Cubist compositions of the so-called "synthetic" period.

The scaffolding for Histoire is, then, mental life or mental functioning, but consciousness is not portrayed as end in itself. It serves rather as a means for creating thematic and esthetic patterns or meaningful juxtapositions which, our study has shown, do not represent an indulgence empty arabesque. In Histoire a distinct formalism does exist in the sense of a structure based on esthetic and thematic relationships internal to the work of art. Form does serve the ends of expression in Histoire, as in La Route des Flageolets but in later novels the balance shifts in the direction of the verbal composition as an end in itself, much as Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler (1910) has shifted the balance between pictorial structure and the description of the visual world further towards structure.
TIME, THE IMAGE, AND THE SELF

Who is this man, this anonymous narrative consciousness who serves as focus for all that is described in _Histoire_? What this man does is not exceptional or extraordinary. Indeed what he does is not as important as what he thinks about as he does it. He wakes up in the morning, goes through the actions of a typical day's existence, goes to bed again at night, and nothing dramatic has happened. The acts he performs are no more than the banal motions of living: eating, conversing, negotiating a loan, selling some furniture, driving to see a cousin, returning, eating, going to bed. And yet within his mind as he does these things, perception, memory, and imagination combine to create a universe within the frame of one day's activities. What we experience with the narrator is that most universal of human activities, the re-creation of the world inside the mind.

Each of us has a private fund of mental images, a personal world consisting of everything we have experienced in life. Perhaps, as the structure of _Histoire_ implies, that elusive entity called the self can best be defined by the ensemble of images intrinsic to the individual mind. For explicit expression of this concept of the self which becomes implicit in later works, we may look again to _La Corde raide_:

Autant chercher à retenir l'eau dans ses doigts. Essayez. Essayez de vous chercher.
"Je est un autre." Pas vrai: "Je est d'autres." D'autres choses, d'autres odeurs, d'autres sons, d'autres personnes, d'autres lieux, d'autres temps.26

Significantly, Histoire concludes with the pronoun "moi," intimating thereby that all that has gone before constitutes a portrayal of the self of the narrator. It should also be noted, however, that the pronoun "moi" is followed by a question mark, so that the novel ends on a note of interrogation rather than of affirmation. The self cannot be defined by restriction to the "past self" because life is a process of eternal becoming. The self is re-born each day. Thus at the outset of Histoire the awakening of the narrator is evoked: "arraché au ventre blême de la nuit" (p. 43), and "mon double encore vacillant au sortir des ténèbres maternelles" (p. 45). Sleep, it is implied, is like a return to the womb and awakening is like a new birth. With the passage of each day the images of yesterday fade and deteriorate a bit more.

The disintegration of the memory image in time, a fundamental theme of La Route des Flandres and Le Palace, also haunts the mind of the narrator in Histoire. In the final pages of the novel he concedes that his memory of Barcelona, which resembled the opulent ports depicted in colorful panoramas on packages of dates or candied fruits, is becoming less distinct and that his memory of events he witnessed there
is becoming blurred:

la vieille image le vieil empaquetage de
confiserie jaunissant de plus en plus
pâlissant s'estompant et alors cela
s'éloigne s'efface peu à peu seulement un
brouhaha une gesticulation puis même plus
de brouhaha le silence tout se ralentissant
comme s'ils avaient de la peine à lever
leurs bras à brandir leurs armes dans un
air de plus en plus épais de plus en plus
étouffant les éclats de leurs voix aussi
de plus en plus ténus le bossu l'escogriffe
affamé celui qui portait des lunettes et
parlait avec patience et bientôt tout
disparaîtra complètement m'échappant.
(p. 391).

Nor can he prevent the inevitable erosion of images of the
guerrillas: "disparaissant peu à peu dans les épaisseurs du
temps et moi impuissant les regardant s'engloutir lentement
s'effacer conservant l'image d'un dernier visage d'une
dernière bouche ouverte sur un dernier cri un dernier geste
un dernier bras s'agitant non pour saluer ou appeler au
secours mais pour maudire ..." (p. 395).

If the individual is the sum of his experiences and
the self largely defined by the images from one's past, then
the disintegration of the image in time poses a threat to
identity. It is the identity of the narrator which is at
stake when he tries to recall with precision and accuracy
certain scenes from his past, anxiously repeating to himself
the questions: "Mais exactement, exactement?" and "Comment
était-ce?.........tout en même temps recommençons premièrement
deuxièmement troisièmement impossible ..." (pp. 174-175). Trying to recall with visual accuracy details of evenings of chamber music in the old family home, the narrator thinks apprehensively: "ne pas se dissoudre, s'en aller en morceaux" (p. 89). And he pursues his effort of recovery with intensity: "les lustres les lumières les archets soie jonquille bijoux noirs vibrations des bobèches. Un instant, essayant de tout retenir maintenir: de gauche à droite la cheminée la rangée des fauteuils de dos ..." (pp. 90-91).

Man journeys through life "chargé de son passé qui n'appartient qu'à lui."27 When he attempts to ascertain what degree of "truth" resides in his ethereal past, he finds his identity rests on nebulae. Within the inner world of consciousness as in the outer world of nature, chaos reigns. In the light of this philosophy, the literary work becomes a means to preclude a total disintegration of the self. As we have observed, between his gossamery past and total obliteration the writer does have "cette poreuse, grossière et fragile barrière des mots."28 The narrator in Le Palace, listening to another character, "l'homme-fusil," recount to him the "story" of his perpetration of an assassination, wonders: "Mais pourquoi raconte-t-il tout ça?"

se demandant qu'est-ce qui pousse un homme à raconter ("Ou à se raconter à lui-même, pensa-t-il: la seule différence c'est qu'il le fait maintenant à voix haute"), c'est-
à-dire à reconstituer, à reconstruire au moyen d'équivalents verbaux quelque chose qu'il a fait ou vu, comme s'il ne pouvait pas admettre que ce qu'il a fait ou vu n'ait pas laissé plus de traces qu'un rêve, pensant: "A moins que ce ne soit le contraire, à moins qu'il espère qu'une fois raconté, une fois mis sous forme de mots, tout cela se mette à exister tout seul sans qu'il ait besoin de le supporter plus longtemps, c'est-à-dire de servir à lui seul, avec ses maigres forces, sa malingre carcasse de coolie, de support ....

Like "l'homme-fusil" in Le Palace the narrator-novelist in Histoire tries to reconstruct experience through the verbal medium, either because he cannot admit that what he has said or done or felt has left no more mark than a dream or perhaps because he hopes that once formulated in words it may acquire an autonomous existence. Histoire is the last of Simon's novels to reflect the concept of the novel as "tentative de restitution." In Histoire we have observed an increased emphasis on the existence of the text itself as a verbal construct, an autonomous structure in writing with its own "reality." In succeeding novels the verbal composition itself becomes the "subject" so that, as Ludovic Janvier has remarked, "le sujet paraît s'effacer d'un texte qui se fait .... constellation anonyme de figures."
L'ORDRE ET LE DÉSORDRE

The words of Rilke which serve as epigraph to *Histoire* allude to the struggle of the writer to impose order and coherence on the chaos of experience:

Nous l'organisons de nouveau et tombons nous-mêmes en morceaux.

RILKE

The sumptuousness of all forms of sensory experience, a theme to which allusion is made in the subtitle to *Le Vent*, finds expression in the manifold sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations evoked through descriptions of post-cards in *Histoire*. Like the eyes and the other precious organs of sensation with which we are endowed, the post-cards are openings upon the unknown:

fragments, écailles arrachées à la surface de la vaste terre: lucarnes rectangulaires où s'encadraient tour à tour des tempêtes figées, de luxuriantes végétations, des déserts, des multitudes faméliques, des chameaux ... (p. 19).

They suggest the infinite variety and diversity of the world, the overwhelming richness of life: "le monde bigarré, grouillant et inépuisable" (p. 20). The adjectives "fastueux" and "somptueux" continuously reappear with reference to the earth. To exist, to breathe, to be alive—
Paul Cezanne  Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1904-06.
so many diverse impressions are crowded into a single day of existence that indeed "Cela nous submerge."

Out of the confused welter of sensations, the myriad images of the world, which constitute the self, the literary artist forges the work of art. His is the task of giving form and pattern to amorphous, chaotic experience. He recreatesthe world by rearranging the raw materials of experience to translate his subjective vision. Because the elements of his inner world know no predetermined order, the narrator-novelist in Histoire is at liberty to place them in whatever order he sees fit in the interest of art:

avant ou après quelle importance puisque tout était arrêté maintenant présent immobilisé tout là dans un même moment à jamais les images les instants les voix les fragments du temps du monde multiple fastueux inépuisable (p. 385).

The modern artist, as William Barrett has pointed out, "asserts his own subjectivity by the freedom with which he cuts up and dislocates objects ..... as it pleases him for the sake of the picture." 31 Just as the goal of Cézanne, a painter much admired by Simon for "cette espèce de reconstruction de la nature qu'il a tentée dans toute son oeuvre," 32 was to impose and create order, through simplification of forms and shapes, out of complex, disorderly nature, so in the later novels of Simon greater emphasis on composition, construction, and pattern for the sake of pattern is apparent. This trend
is accompanied by considerable simplification in syntax. With the breaking up of long sentences into paragraphs in Histoire, pattern is more readily visible. The advent of short sentences in succeeding novels renders the emphasis on design still more obvious.

Furthermore, like the art of Cézanne, that of Simon evolves toward a flatter, more spatialized composition in Histoire and succeeding novels. The style of the painter from Aix evolved to the practice of design on the flat surface of the canvas. The paint surface became as important for him as the thing represented. A direct analogy can be drawn between this elimination of depth and perspective by the pictorial artist and a similar effect created by the juxtaposition of images co-existing in the present consciousness of the narrator in Histoire. As is the practice of Simon in all his novels, an allusion to this evolution in technique is contained in the text of Histoire: "tout (du fait de l'écrasement de la perspective dans les jumelles) sur un même plan..." (p. 363).

Although in La Route des Flandres pattern and design are essential structural elements, the scenes described are not all on the same plane. While it is true that the objective, three-dimensional world is not portrayed in this novel, but only the subjective world with its reduction of space to images on the screen of the mind, nevertheless a
sense of depth is communicated through the various perspectives on the past, as in the many instances of scenes which are remembered as having already been remembered under other circumstances. With the restriction in Histoire to the present, consciousness which includes the past only as it exists in the mind at present, the last vestige of depth has been eliminated so as to create a more formalized composition comparable to non-naturalistic styles in the plastic arts.

Thus from Le Vent to Histoire a progression from relativism to formalism is evident. The concept of design on a flat surface adopted from Cézanne by Post-Impressionists, Cubists, and later abstract painters has found application in the literary art. The three novels which follow Histoire—La Bataille de Pharsale, Les Corps conducteurs, and Triptyque—represent further elaboration of the formalist tendencies present in Histoire.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

Analytical Table of Contents

Evolution in art and literature away from naturalistic representation of the external world; poetry begins to turn inward with Baudelaire and the Symbolists; nature begins to function as symbol; Baudelaire apologist of "l'art sur-naturaliste"; inward trend of art visible in creations of Rimbaud, Mallarmé; parallel between formalism of Mallarmé and that of Cézanne and his descendants, the Cubists and later abstract painters; Proust and subjectivism in the novel; the metaphor, Proust's instrument of transformation; transcendence of dichotomy between subjective and objective through technique of phenomenological description; divergence of Simon from the Proustian vision; the literary work becomes an end in itself; the novel as verbal construct; rejection of illusionism: reader has no sense of projection into a fictional world in La Bataille de Pharsale; the autonomy of the text; parallel with rejection of pictorial illusionism by Cubists, abstract painters; words and their articulation, the composition in the medium of language, subject of Triptyque; Triptyque realizes the Flaubertian dream of "un livre sur rien"; perfection of form in the work of art (in a novel like Triptyque or in a Mondrian composition)
corresponds to an acute need for order, harmony, and stability in the face of a world-view dominated by chaos, perpetual flux and change; literary artist must navigate between Scylla and Charybdis of didacticism and abstract formalism.
"Nature and art being two different things cannot be the same thing. Through art we express our conception of what Nature is not."

Picasso, 1923

Like the art of Picasso, the art of Simon represents the culmination of an evolution in art and literature away from naturalistic representation of the external world. The evolution of Western painting from Giotto to the present, observes José Ortega y Gasset, represents a process whereby "the artist, starting from the world about him, ends by withdrawing into himself."¹

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a fundamental change in man's attitude toward his natural environment. Some have explained this change in terms of the emergence of an industrial society:

Industrial man was rapidly forfeiting to the machine his place as the primary productive unit. With this loss of control came a corresponding shift from a rational world view toward an increasingly irrational one.²

Whatever its precise causes, the estrangement between man and his world has had repercussions in art and literature which are being felt to this day. There does seem to be a correlation, as Wilhelm Worringer argues, between world view and the
prevalence of either abstract or naturalistic art. With the rejection of the sympathetic natural world of the romantics came the gradual decline of naturalism which reigned in Western art from the Renaissance to the close of the last century. The abstract art of our time is the art of extreme subjectivism.

As opposed to the Lamartinian concept of "la nature amie" ("Mais la nature est là qui t'invite et qui t'aime," "Le Vallon," Méditations poétiques, 1820), Alfred de Vigny in "La Maison du Berger" of 1844 was clearly less convinced of nature's inherent goodness and benevolence. For him nature was "l'impossible théâtre" upon which the human drama is played. Thus he opposed the typical Romantic outpouring of love for nature:

Vivez, froide Nature, et revivez sans cesse
Sous nos pieds, sur nos fronts, puisque c'est votre loi;
Vivez et dédaignez, si vous êtes déesse,
L'homme, humble passager, qui dit vous être un roi;
Plus que tout votre règne et que ses splendeurs vaines,
J'aime la majesté des souffrances humaines
Vous ne recevrez pas un cri d'amour de moi.
"La Maison du Berger"

Vigny was, in fact, surprisingly modern in his outlook on nature:

... et je vois
Notre sang dans son onde et nos morts sous son herbe
Nourrissant de leurs sucs la racine des bois.
"La Maison du Berger"
Vigny's expression of the great cycle of organic life in which man is caught up is echoed, as we have seen, in the novels of Simon and in Paul Valéry's "Cimetière marin":

L'argile rouge a bu la blanche espèce  
Le don de vivre a passé dans les fleurs!  
Tout va sous terre et rentre dans le jeu!

With Baudelaire and the Symbolists poetry began to turn inward, to focus on the subjective world of the artist. Of course, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the apogee of realism and naturalism in the novel. Nevertheless, the germ of a new narrative style with a focus on the stream of inner life is apparent in Flaubert's introduction of "le style indirect libre" in Madame Bovary, which appeared in 1857, the same year as the publication of Les Fleurs du Mal. One critic has even pointed out in Zola "d'étonnantes pré-figurations de ce que seront et comporteront les techniques du 'courant de conscience'".3

The evocation of external nature had for Baudelaire an oblique value. Images from nature (outer world) become for him a means of translating inner reality, which is to say that nature begins to function as symbol, the aim of the poet being the evocation of inner experience. He seeks "dans la nature extérieure et visible des exemples et des métaphores qui lui serviront à caractériser les jouissances et les impressions d'un ordre spirituel."4 "La nature," wrote
Baudelaire quoting the painter Eugène Delacroix, "n'est qu'un dictionnaire." In explanation of this philosophy, he added:

Tout l'univers visible n'est qu'un magasin d'images et de signes auxquels l'imagination donnera une place et une valeur relative; c'est une espèce de pâture que l'imagination doit digérer et transformer. Apologist of "l'art surnaturaliste," Baudelaire argued that the true artist is a "parfait chimiste," that through his imagination he re-creates the world and thereby transcends nature. Baudelaire's cult of the imagination as "la reine des facultés"--the distinctively modern insight upon which he founded his esthetics--is, as Henri Lemaître has observed, "ce qui lui a permis de déceler tout ce que promettait de révolutionnaire l'évolution de la peinture au XIXe siècle, des Anglais à Rousseau et Corot, en attendant Gauguin et Cézanne." From Baudelaire descended two lines of poets: "les artistes" and "les voyants." The inward trend of art is visible in the creations of both. Arthur Rimbaud, the father of "les voyants" (of whom the Surrealists are perhaps the most famous modern exponents) practiced a systematic "dérèlement de tous les sens," through the use of drugs and other stimulants to liberate his mind from external reality. With Rimbaud the poet becomes "un opéra fabuleux" recording the fantastic configurations of his unbridled imagination. The art of
Odilon Redon, painter of hallucinations, has often been compared to the poetry of Rimbaud.

Stéphane Mallarmé, the high priest of "les artistes," elevated poetry into the realm of "les plus purs glaciers de l'Esthétique." The chief impetus behind the Symbolist movement, Mallarmé opposed Parnassian objectivism which had produced a poetry of surface description and, under the influence of German idealism (Hegel, Schopenhauer), created a poetry of suggestion which sought not to name an object, but to suggest the impression it gives: "évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou inversement choisir un objet et en dégager un état d'âme...." Or, as he also said, "Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit." Helmut A. Hatzfeld has rightly noted a parallel between the formalism to which Mallarmé's poetry evolved ("le 'fond' n'est plus cause de la forme: il en est l'un des effets") and the preoccupation with formal relationships of Mallarmé's contemporary Cézanne and of Cézanne's descendants, "the disciples of cubism and abstract art." In this regard we are reminded of Mallarmé's famous quip to Edgar Degas that it is not with ideas that one writes poetry, but with words. To Simon's preoccupation with the creative potential of the medium of language, we might compare Mallarmé's remarkable attempt at creation "à partir du néant," i.e., through the medium itself, in his "sonnet-en -yx," "Ses purs ongles très
haut...." The self-reflexive pattern which Joseph Frank has shown to characterize modern poetry and fiction derives from the poetry of Mallarmé, for whom "les mots--qui sont déjà assez eux pour ne plus recevoir d'impression du dehors--se reflètent les uns sur les autres jusqu'à paraître ne plus avoir leur couleur propre, mais n'être que les transitions d'une gamme."^15

The evolution of the novel in this century parallels that of painting and poetry in an increasing emphasis on subjective "reality." In 1887 Edouard Dujardin published _Les Lauriers sont coupés_, the first novel using interior monologue. It went unnoticed until Joyce was inspired by Dujardin's technique in the writing of _Ulysses_. The publication of _A la Recherche du temps perdu_ marked the beginning in France of a new era for the novel. Proust's great epic of time reconquered exalted what Charles Blondel has called "le subjectivisme et l'hétérogénéité du réel."^16 The narrator of _A la Recherche_ beholds the world through the narrow lens of "un solipsisme radical": "L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment."^17 In _Le Temps retrouvé_ where Proust sets forth his esthetic, metaphysical, psychological and other convictions, his view of the subjectivism of all knowledge, of the "caractère purement mental de la réalité,"^18 is reiterated: "Je m'étais rendu
compte que seule la perception grossière et erronée place
tout dans l'objet, quand tout est dans l'esprit."\textsuperscript{19} Of
course, Proust's image of the subjective nature of time is
well-known: "Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un
vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats."\textsuperscript{20}

For Proust, as for Baudelaire, the task of the great
artist is to re-create the world according to his subjective
vision:

car le style pour l'écrivain, aussi bien
que la couleur pour le peintre, est une
question non de technique mais de vision.
Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible
par des moyens directs et conscients, de
la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans
la façon dont nous apparaît le monde,
différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art,
resterait le secret éternel de chacun.\textsuperscript{21}

Proust's own instrument of transformation, of expression of
his subjective "vision," is the metaphor, which he consciously
employed for effects similar to those achieved by Im-
pressionist painters:

Le charme des tableaux impressionnistes
réside, pour Proust, dans "une sorte de
métamorphose des choses représentées,
analogue à celle qu'en poésie on nomme
méthaphore."\textsuperscript{22}

One has only to recall some of the later canvases of Monet--
paintings of the Houses of Parliament, the cathedral at Rouen,
the waterlilies—to appreciate the artist's "métamorphose des
chooses représentées." Yet the emphasis in this phrase belongs as much to the last word as to the first, for both Proust and the Impressionists, in their effort in words or in paint to capture fleeting sensations of the phenomenal world, remained within the tradition of art as mimesis. One could in fact maintain that the Nymphéas of Monet and À la Recherche du temps perdu are among the works which belong to the final stages of this tradition. Both wished to record the world of experience, specifically of sensory experience, in its unceasing variation within the flux of time.

In a chapter in La Littérature et le réel entitled "Postérité de Proust," Raymond Jean has noted a similar emphasis in Proust and Simon on the "primat du sensible sur l'intelligible, de la perception sur la signification." While Simon endorses the Proustian conviction of "le caractère purement mental de la réalité," his technique of portrayal of mental life through phenomenological description seeks to transcend the old dichotomy between the subjective and the objective ("seule la perception grossière et erronée place tout dans l'objet, quand tout est dans l'esprit") and to reject the interiority inherent in Proustian analysis in favor of the Husserlian concept of the intentionality of consciousness: "Toute conscience est conscience de quelque chose." Or, as Merleau-Ponty said, "il n'y a pas d'homme intérieur, l'homme est au monde, c'est dans le monde qu'il
se connaît."

The evolution of Simon's conception of the novel, furthermore, has led to a narrative form far removed from that of Proust. Although _Le Vent_ first brought into question the nature of the "reality" which the novel could portray, the decisive turn in a new direction seems to have occurred in _La Route des Flandres_ with its pessimistic conclusion as to the reality of the narrator's past and the possibility of recovering his past self. Herein lies the great divergence of Simon from the Proustian vision. Proust believed that man has access to a "reality" above and beyond the mediocre and constantly changing world revealed by the senses. He attributed to involuntary memory the power to restore the past in the freshness, fullness, and clarity of the original experience. He wanted his novel to record these miraculous resurrections of the past: "des fragments d'existence sous-traits au temps." For him, the self has a unity and a permanence:

Mais qu'un bruit, qu'une odeur, déjà entendu ou respiré jadis, le soient de nouveau, à la fois dans le présent et dans le passé réels sans être actuels, idéaux sans être abstraits, aussitôt l'essence permanente et habituellement cachée des choses se trouve libérée, et notre vrai moi qui, parfois depuis longtemps, semblait mort, mais ne l'était pas entièrement, s'éveille, s'anime en recevant la céleste nourriture qui lui est apportée. Une minute affranchie de
l'ordre du temps a recurée en nous, pour 
la sentir, l'homme affranchi de l'ordre 
du temps. 26

These experiences and the truths they contain, realized the 
narrator in Le Temps retrouvé as he prepared to write his 
western, would have to be converted "en un équivalent spirituel."

Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, 
qu'était-ce autre chose que faire une 
oeuvre d'art? 27

The literary work for Proust was a means to an end. For Simon 
it eventually becomes an end in itself.

Although Simon has claimed adherence to the Proustian 
concept of involuntary memory and has specified its role in 
the genesis of certain novels (La Route des Flandres, Le 
Palace), the novels themselves, as we have seen, reveal a far 
more pessimistic view with regard to the recovery of the past. 
The evolution of Simon's conception of the novel is summarized 
in this statement to Bettina Knapp in 1969:

Je disais autrefois: il est possible de 
reconstituer à partir de choses vécues, 
senties. Aujourd'hui, après avoir 
réfléchi je ne pense plus qu'on puisse 
"reconstituer" quoi que ce soit. Ce que 
l'on constitue c'est un texte et ce 
texte ne correspond qu'à une seule chose: 
à ce qui se passe dans l'écrivain au 
moment où il écrit. On ne décrit pas 
des choses qui pré-existent à l'écriture 
mais ce qui se passe aux prises de 
l'écriture. 28
Significantly, at the end of La Bataille de Pharsale, the novel which follows Histoire, the narrator is seen to be a novelist sitting at his desk, pen in hand, composing the text which we have just read. At the conclusion he writes the sentence with which the novel began. The implications of this for the interpretation of the novel are profound. A verbal construct (cf. the "tableau-objet") the novel is an autonomous structure existing in writing, referring to no other "reality" than that of its own verbal composition. This novel, as Françoise van Rossum-Guyon has remarked, "propose en outre, pour la première fois, sa composition même comme thème central."\(^\text{29}\) The Simonian motifs of war, violence, and eroticism are expressed in descriptions of images—mnemonic, imaginary, even of post-card reproductions of paintings reflecting the dominant themes (e.g., Paolo Uccello's Battle of San Romano, Lucas Crânach's Jealousy)—but it is obvious here that "le massacre aussi bien que l'amour est un prétexte à glorifier la forme dont la splendeur calme apparaît seulement à ceux qui ont pénétré l'indifférence de la nature devant le massacre et l'amour."\(^\text{30}\) One is reminded of the formal compositions of the Cubists in which the same motifs—violins, guitars, bottles, newspapers—reappear from canvas to canvas in different configurations.

Clearly, in La Bataille de Pharsale, Simon has broken completely with the tradition of art as mimesis. The
descriptions no longer possess a mimetic function. They no longer represent the content of consciousness of a fictional narrator, but that of the author in the act of composing the text. It is now possible to see an evolution in Simon's later technique toward what René Wellek and Austin Warren label the "ironic" method which "delights in violating any possible illusion that this is 'life' and not 'art,' emphasizes the written literary character of the book." An ironic reference to traditional "illusionistic" art is made in the form of a description of a young woman reading a novel on a train and appearing to be transported into the fictional world suggested in lurid images on the cover: "tandis qu'elle était maintenant tout entière sans doute dans ce monde vérâtre que représentait le dessin sur la couverture coloriée...." The reader of La Bataille de Pharsale has no sense of projection into a fictional world. He remains on the outside, or on the surface, his role confined to the observation of formal relationships. A parallel is suggested with the role of the viewer of the depthless, formal compositions of Uccello or della Francesca:

l'espace chez Poussin creux pour ainsi dire ou plutôt creusé entourant de toutes parts le spectateur même lorsque ses personnages ne sont répartis que sur un plan comme ceux des bas-reliefs Différence avec della Francesca où cavaliers et fantassins sont alignés pressés dans un espace d'une infime épaisseur la profondeur
chez Ucello ne dépassant pas celle limitée d'une scène de théâtre c'est-à-dire que le spectacle offert se déroule à l'intérieur du dièdre droit formé par le plancher de la scène et la toile de fond le spectateur restant toujours en dehors de l'autre côté de la rampe alors que chez Poussin il se trouve pour ainsi dire précipité critique anglais qui définit le baroque *movement into space* malheureusement intraduisible le mot *into* n'ayant en français que des équivalents faibles comme *au dedans de* ou à l'intérieur de. 33

The narrator in *La Bataille de Pharsale* is even more "refined out of existence" than the anonymous narrative consciousness in *Histoire*. The first-person pronoun does not make an appearance until the seventh page of the text. At the end of the second section the narrator begins to share with two other persons (Uncle Charles, an artist's model) the designation O. Clearly, an effort is being made to "abstract" the subject in the traditional sense and to focus the reader's attention on the images (descriptions) and their interrelationship in the text. Several critics have pointed out the symbolism of this choice of the letter "O" as sign of absence or nonexistence. What matters is the image (description) and the articulation of images in and through language, not the identity of the Observer. An effort is made to give the descriptions an autonomy of their own, an existence in and of themselves in writing, not merely as a mental content of a fictional narrative consciousness. Perhaps the abandonment of the present participle in favor of the
present indicative in the last part of La Bataille de Pharsale and in succeeding novels may be understood as an effort to underscore this new emphasis on "la réalité de la chose écrite."\textsuperscript{34} The present participle, we may recall, "n'affirme rien d'autre qu'une vision, une image, et non pas quelque chose qui s'est passé un certain jour, dans une prétendue réalité."\textsuperscript{35} The indicative, however, is the mood of affirmation: "L'indicatif présente l'action comme considérée dans sa réalité: il la situe sur le plan des faits constatés et affirmés."\textsuperscript{36}

The rejection of pictorial illusionism by the Cubists (and later abstract painters), their insistence that the painting be considered a real object in itself rather than simply an illusion of the visual world, thus finds a parallel in Simon's conception of the novel as a verbal construct, an autonomous linguistic structure.

Simon has continued further along this path. His latest novel, entitled Triptyque (after the composition in three panels which he has always favored), is his most abstract work. In La Route des Flandres and in Histoire, as we have seen, patterns are expressive of Weltanschauung. It appears that Simon has now exhausted that vein. The writing itself, the composition in the medium of language, is the subject of Triptyque in which three "faits divers"—insignificant news items—are skillfully interwoven to create what Jean Ricardou
Piet Mondrian  Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue, 1921.
has called a "tour d'écrou textuel." Furthermore, in *Triptyque* the use of the indefinite pronoun "on" lends to the various descriptions the objectivity and impersonality of the cinematographic image.

One has the feeling that this book, whose "subject" is the articulation of the whole in and through language, realizes the Flaubertian dream of "un livre sur rien ... qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style ... un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible...." The various parts of the composition in *Triptyque* fit together with the order of a machine or a precision instrument:

l'ensemble de l'oeuvre constitue un tout indissociable, et par l'unité de la facture, et par la façon calculée dont se répondent d'un volet à l'autre et s'équilibrent les différentes formes et les différentes couleurs....

We are reminded of the order and regularity of a Mondrian composition. There does seem to be a correlation between world view, and an evolution toward formalism in the art of Simon. The world is chaos, defiance of reason, perpetual flux and change. Art is order, composition, harmony, and stability. Speaking of abstract forms in the plastic arts, Wilhelm Worringer observes: "here is law, here is necessity, while everywhere else the caprice of the organic prevails." The "constellation anonyme de figures" realized in Simon's
last novels fulfills the same psychic need as the abstract compositions of modern painting.

The evolution of the art of Simon has thus followed a course parallel to that of painting since the end of the nineteenth century when not only Cézanne, but such diverse artists as Henri Rousseau, Edvard Munch, and Georges Seurat portended the arrival of a new will to abstraction in European art. The emphasis in modern art on the two-dimensional relations of formal elements in a painting, on the "reality" of the paint surface, is paralleled in Simon's increasing preoccupation with "la réalité ... de la chose écrite": "Le mot de réalisme me gêne. J'aperçois si mal la réalité ... et, dès qu'elle est transcrite, c'est une autre réalité de mots, de langage, qui obéit à ses lois propres."

The question naturally arises: Can the artist in words, once he has "abstracted" the subject and focused exclusively on the formal relations of the elements of his composition, continue to engage his reader's interest? We think that he cannot, and that the literary artist must always find a way to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of didacticism on the one hand and abstract formalism on the other. Unlike the painter who can rightfully speak of the reality of the paint surface which does exist in itself, the writer must engage the reader in an act of imaginative recreation through the abstract symbols of language. To our
mind, the high points of Simon's achievement lie in the novels *La Route des Flandres* and *Histoire* in which illusionism has not been abandoned altogether, and in which composition serves the ends not only of art, but also of expression. For it is through patterns of "phenomenological" descriptions in these novels that a world-view or philosophy of life is expressed.
NOTES

Introduction:


5Ibid., p. 13.

6Ibid., pp. 16-17.

7Ibid., p. 15.

8Ibid., p. 16.


11Quoted in R.-M. Albérès, op. cit., p. 16.

12Ibid., p. 20.


14Ibid., pp. 58-59.


22 Herbert Read, *op. cit.*, p. 16.


24 Statement which Simon made to us in our interview of June, 1970: "L'écrivain n'est qu'un ferment; il a l'impression d'être un accoucheur."


Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception, p. ii.

Ibid., p. i.


Anne Villedaur, op. cit., p. 5.
Chapter I:


9 Erich Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 536.


19 Ibid., p. 275.


22 Among the implications of the subtitle "Tentative de restitution d'un rétable baroque" is a parallel between the syntax of the novel and the asymmetry, irregularity, and distortion characteristic of the baroque style in the visual arts. The origin of the word "baroque" sheds light upon its meaning:

"At first Baroque was a term of abuse, probably deriving in Italy from the word *baroco*, which was used by medieval philosophers to describe an obstacle in schematic logic and consequently came to describe any contorted idea or involuted process of thought. It seems also to be partly derived from the Portuguese *barroco*, or the Spanish *barrueco*, meaning an irregular or imperfectly shaped pearl." [P. and C. Cannon-Brooks, *Baroque Churches* (London: Hamlyn, 1969), p. 1.]
It is likely that Simon, whose ancestral home is Perpignan in the Roussillon region of France once under Spanish rule, had in mind the Spanish baroque whose characteristics are probably the most flamboyant of any of the baroque style.

The "baroque" syntax of Le Vent is characterized by frequent detours of thought, the fluid and unstable forms always on the point of change seen in the baroque style in the visual arts: "The baroque never offers us perfection and fulfillment or the static calm of 'being,' only the unrest of change and the tension of transience." [Heinrich Wölflin, Renaissance and Baroque, trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 62.] This syntax stands in vivid contrast to the ordered, static, "classical" compositions of the mature novels of Simon.

23 This effect may be compared to the massive "totality" of the baroque: "The baroque could not allow the parts to exist independently; everything remained enclosed in the mass of the whole." [Heinrich Wölflin, Renaissance and Baroque, p. 100.]


25 In this regard we may consider statements made by Simon to interviewers: "Je pense beaucoup mieux en termes d'art qu'en termes de littérature. C'est que je ne suis pas un intellectuel, mais un sensoriel. Je suis très concret." [André Bourin, "Techniciens du roman: Claude Simon," Les Nouvelles Littéraires, No. 1739 (29 déc. 1960), p. 4.]

26 Yet another implication of the "rétable baroque" in Le Vent concerns the liking of Baroque artists for pathos—terror, passion, drama, and emotion—which are present in Le Vent to a far greater degree than in any other Simonian novel. As numerous critics have remarked, Montès is implicitly presented as a kind of saint. The chaotic swirling of events unleashed by his presence is explicitly compared to baroque drama.

An allusion to the dramatic, passionate, emotional aspect of the baroque style—particularly in painting and sculpture—is contained in the text of Le Vent: "aussi immobile que les deux autres statues de part et d'autre de l'autel, les deux saintes tordant leurs mains parmi les
tourbillons pétrifiés de leurs voiles sous l'imimpalpable et
poussiéreux linceul, leurs visages voluptueux et peints
ruisselants de larmes peintes, insensibles, défaillantes,
pâmées dans le feu d'une éternelle souffrance, d'une éternelle
extase" (p. 195).

27 The concrete appeal to the senses is characteristic
of baroque poetry in the seventeenth century: "The first
remarkable feature of this kind of poetry is its direct
appeal to the senses—the sense of sight to begin with, and
there the similarity borne by baroque poetry to the visual
arts is good evidence of its pictorial characteristic. The
reader is invited to concentrate upon some sensuous object
described by the poet....It is not only the sense of sight
which we are invited to apply to the object of our contem-
plation, but we are summoned to taste the salt of tears, to
smell the brimstone of Hell and to feel, like a fire, the
love of God." [Odette de Mourgues, Metaphysical, Baroque
78-79.]

28 For example:

"les événements qu'il déclencha, ou plus exactement
débrida" (p. 11).

"en dépit du feu, où plutôt du brasier maintenant,
qui crépitait dans la cheminée, promenant un regard ahuri
sur la table, la nappe immaculée chargée, disparaissant
sous les barquettes de hors-d'œuvre multicolores, comme si
paradoxalement cette aridité, cette plaine nue, la bâtisse
macabre, la femme aux vêtements noirs, avaient pour ainsi
dire étalé là à profusion leur contraire : quelque chose de
charnel, de pulpeux, de gras, d'indécent presque dans son
abondance, ses couleurs violentes, agressives--le vert des
olives, le rouge des piments, le mauve des viandes--...."
(p. 30)

"et la bouche de nouveau aussitôt refermée, ou plutôt
resserrée, ou plutôt scellée...." (p. 47).

"les cheveux ou plus exactement les tifs, non pas
coupés mais taillés--ou plutôt tailladés--courts, ...
(pp. 59-60)

"Mais il m'avait déjà séduit, ou plutôt accroché,
ou intrigué, ou subjugué, je ne sais pas ....." (p. 106)
"c'est-à-dire même pas des baraques, même pas des cases, mais une sorte de mur fait de briques creuses (et les briques elles-mêmes étaient inégales, mal cuites, ébréchées, de celles qu'on ramasse parmi les rebuts des chantiers) dans lequel s'ouvraient ou plutôt béaient non des portes mais des sortes de caries, des trous noirs aux formes irrégulières, la plupart même pas obstruées de rideaux, ...." (p. 120)

"cette Méditerranée, ce lac, cet étang, cette mare..." (p. 137).

"se contentant (c'est-à-dire non pas content de, mais sans doute moins malheureux de, éprouvant non comme un bien-être mais comme une atténuation, un répit,....... ) ...." (p. 206)

The preceding examples suggest a parallel between the style of Le Vent and the preference of Baroque artists for compositions which are "dynamic and open and tend to expand outside their boundaries; the forms that go to make them are associated in a single organic action and cannot be isolated from each other." [Germain Bazin, Baroque and Rococo Art (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 7.]


31 Ibid., p. 170.
NOTES

Chapter II:


3 Ibid., p. 19.

4 Ibid., p. 165.


7 Simon, Le Vent, p. 198.


11 Ibid., p. 93.

12 Simon, Le Vent, pp. 49-50.


14 Simon, Le Vent, p. 10.


20 Statement made by Simon to this writer during our interview in June, 1970.


26 For example, the scene of de Reixach's death is recalled: pp. 11-12 (where the use of direct interior monologue expresses the activity of the narrator's consciousness at present, as he begins the re-creation of his past which is the novel); p. 77 (remembered conversation with Blum during their journey in a railroad freight-car as prisoners of war); pp. 89-90 (memory of death of de Reixach and description of it given to Blum while relating all these past events to
Corinne, young wife of de Reixach whom the narrator met after the war and with whom, during a night spent with her in a seedy hotel room, he re-created his experiences of the war; p. 125 (Georges telling Blum again of de Reixach's death during their internment in prison camp); p. 234 (scenes of the débâcle re-created by Georges after the war, while plowing land on his father's farm); pp. 313-314 (in these final pages the narrator doubts the reality of his vision of de Reixach brandishing his saber and falling).


31 Ibid., p. 174.


34 Claude Simon, "Entretien: 'Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée du monde'," Le Monde (des Livres), n° 6932 (26 avril 1967), V.


Following the "happy articulation of the whole and the freedom of individual members" of Renaissance architecture, the baroque, Wöllflin observes, "implied a reversion to a more amorphous state" (p. 50). The unarticulated mass of *La Route des Flandres* is divided into three parts (no short chapters). Even these divisions appear somewhat arbitrary since there is no break in the continuity of the flow of thought from one part to another. Wöllflin's description of the massive quality of the baroque suggests comparison with the effect on the reader of the proliferation of detail in *La Route des Flandres*:

"The sense of massiveness was largely effected by omitting the framing members which enclose and subordinate the material. In this respect baroque is the extreme opposite of the gothic style. Gothic emphasises the framing members. It has firm structural supports, lightly filled in, whereas the baroque puts the emphasis on the material, and either omits the frame altogether or makes it seem inadequate to contain the bulging mass it encloses. The Renaissance follows a middle course, keeping a perfect equilibrium between the filling and the enclosing structural members. The decorated pilaster of the Renaissance is inconceivable without its frame; in the baroque this enclosing frame is abandoned and the ornament allowed to luxuriate unchecked." (pp. 54-55)


The following passage is typical of the verbal counterpoint frequent in *La Route des Flandres* between absolute participial clauses (which we have underlined) and clauses containing finite verbs in past tenses. The alternation between verbs in the past indicative and present participles conveys the dual existence of scenes on two planes in time: the past in terms of chronological time, the present in terms of mental or phenomenological time, the time of imaginative re-creation of scenes from the past:
Ou peut-être n'avait-il fait que fermer les yeux et les rouvrir aussitôt, son cheval manquant de buter sur celui qui le précédait, et alors se réveillant tout à fait, se rendant compte qu'à présent le bruit des sabots avait cessé et que toute la colonne était arrêtée si bien que l'on n'entendait plus maintenant que le ruissellement de la pluie tout autour, la nuit toujours aussi noire, déserte, un cheval renâclant parfois, s'ébrouant, puis le bruit de la pluie recouvrant tout de nouveau et au bout d'un moment on entendit des ordres criés en tête de l'escadron et à son tour le peloton s'ébranla pour s'immobiliser de nouveau après quelques mètres, quelqu'un descendant le long de la colonne au grand trot, la monture ferrant légèrement, faisant entendre à chaque foulée un tintement clair, métallique, et, noire sur noir, une forme surgit du néant ....

(pp. 37-38)


41 Simon, L'Herbe, p. 18.

42 A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel, p. 28.

43 Simon, Le Vent, p. 45.


47 As an artist conscious of the tools of his craft, Simon himself has commented upon the contrasting values of the past definite and the present participle with respect to
suggestion of reality versus image or appearance:

"En bien, si un romancier écrit: 'Il ouvrit la porte,' c'est affirmer que cette action s'est bien produite, qu'elle s'est produite à un certain moment, bien défini, et qu'elle ne se reproduira plus. Or, voit tout ce que cela postule: l'histoire racontée est présentée comme bien 'réelle' et le romancier prétend la rapporter fidèlement. Si au contraire j'écris: 'Ouvrant la porte,' ce qui sousentend 'Je le revois—ou: je l'imagine—en train de...,' je n'affirme rien d'autre qu'une vision, une image, et non pas quelque chose qui s'est passé un certain jour, dans une prétendue 'réalité', mais qui se passe très précisément au moment où j'écris. Et qui peut se reproduire plusieurs fois puisque l'image se présente autant de fois que ma mémoire ou mon imagination la suscitent..."


53 Simon, L'Herbe, p. 214.
54 Simon, La Bataille de Pharsale, p. 48.


56 Claude Simon, "Entretien: 'Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée du monde'," Le Monde (des Livres), no 6932 (26 avril 1967), V.


59 Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature, p. 79.


61 Ibid., p. 100.


64 Ibid., p. 14.


66 Ibid., p. 72.


68 Fry, p. 20.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 89.


CHAPTER III:


3 Ibid., p. 174.

4 Claude Simon, Histoire (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), p. 10. (Subsequent references to this edition from which we quote frequently will appear in the text of the paper.)


8 Ibid., p. 226.

9 Ibid., p. 223.

10 Ibid., p. 227.

11 Ibid., p. 230.

12 Ibid., p. 231.

13 Ibid., p. 232.

14 Ibid., p. 234.


18 Ibid., p. 149.


20 Ibid., p. 71.

21 Ibid., p. 58.

22 Ibid., p. 55.


25 Ibid., p. 21.


27 Ibid., p. 20.


30 Ludovic Janvier, "Réponses de Claude Simon à quelques questions écrites de Ludovic Janvier," *Entretiens*,
No. 31 (Rodez: Subervie, 1972), p. 17.


NOTES

CONCLUSION:


6Ibid., pp. 328-329.


10Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in Guy Michaud, Message Poétique du Symbolisme, p. 176.


17 Marcel Proust, quoted in Blondel, *La Psychographie de Marcel Proust*, p. 68.


32 Simon, La Bataille de Pharsale, p. 172.

33 Ibid., p. 160.


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