THE STRUCTURE OF THE TROPISM. A STUDY OF
LES FRUITS D'OR OF NATHALIE SARRAUTE.

by

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We accept this thesis as
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ABSTRACT

With her very first book Nathalie Sarraute insisted upon the importance of the tropism. Though most critics acknowledge its importance, only one has used it as a key to his study. This thesis proposes that the tropism is central to the structure of Sarraute's work and specifically to that of Les Fruits d'Or.

The study presupposes that the text of the novel is the ultimate, objective source of evidence. Following the suggestion of a number of French structuralist critics, a distinction is drawn between narrative and fiction, and the elements of each of these aspects of the novel are examined. In Chapter 1, "Narrative," are studied Narrative Point of View, Narrative Structure, and Style; in Chapter 2, "Aspects of the Fiction," appear the subsections, Plot, Character, Space, and Time. Because of the nature of Les Fruits d'Or, a further chapter was needed to explore the content of the work, so that Chapter 3, "Themathic Structure," deals with the principal themes and their interrelationship.

The word "tropism" describes the process of adaptation of an organism to its environment. Sarraute uses it to explore the interior movements which her characters experience in responding to events. Thus we find that the external event becomes no more than a catalyst to release those sensations which form the substance of the work. The narrative point of view enables the reader to experience the sensation simultaneously with the character, while the
structure reveals a cyclical pattern of conflict and harmony 
corresponding to that of the tropism. In the style we find both 
the attempt to create immediacy of dialogue and a language appropri­
ate to the expression of sensation.

With the vast expansion of the narrative, the fictional 
 aspects of Les Fruits d'Or become subsidiary. The plot is a skeleton 
 upon which to mould the flesh of the narrative, but it conforms, 
 with its pattern of action and reaction, to the tropism. The charac­
ters lose fictional individuality and become extensions of a uniform 
psychology, which is perceived in terms of stimulus and response. 
Space and time have lost almost all fictional existence and have 
become psychological determinants accounting for the pervading sense 
of enclosure and of mechanical recurrence within the vast, new 
 space-time of the tropistic movements.

The "mise en abîme" at the centre of Les Fruits d'Or creates 
a triple level of meaning which is illustrated in three themes. The 
first, "Art," corresponds to the plot and describes satirically 
the cyclical rise and decline of a novel. At the second level, 
"Appearance and Reality" illustrates the conflict, central to the 
 work, between the visible and the felt, the hard and the soft. The 
theme, "Individual and Society," reveals the common aspiration for 
a harmony which is eternally elusive. Relating these themes we 
find, once again, the pattern of the tropism, a cyclical movement 
of stimulus and response in which appear the basic rhythms of con­
lict and re-integration.

Our concentration upon the structure of the tropism leads,
in conclusion, to the highlighting of certain aspects of Sarraute's work. The tropism is both a vision of man's inner existence and a vehicle for its expression. It also presents, however, a pessimistic and deterministic view of the world. Demonic imagery predominates but the apocalyptic is seen as a mere sham. Authenticity is never more than a flickering hope.

The tropism is common to all Sarraute's work, and her exploration of man's psychological depths is not unique in literature. Her most important contribution to the novel lies in her vision of the inner world as man's true realm of action and in her provision of access to that world by means of the tropism.
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INTRODUCTION

"Tropism" is a scientific term which describes the reaction of an organism to stimuli from its environment. The title of Sarraute's first book is Tropismes,¹ and in her critical writings and interviews she is constantly returning to these interior movements, which are the foundation of all her works. The tropism describes figuratively Sarraute's vision of a world in which people react to one another as though in accordance with biological laws of adaptation, rather than in a free and rational manner.

Those who have written about Sarraute have always mentioned the tropism and its importance but have rarely studied its significance in the works. An exception is J. A. Fleming,² who finds in the tropism the psychological movements within the person and the emergence of sensation into speech. The main thrust of his article is the examination of the imagery, and specifically the animal imagery, as it is used to describe the double movement.

In this thesis the tropism is seen as the basic structural principle of Les Fruits d'Or, and its movement determines not only the choice of the imagery but every element of the novel, both its fiction and narrative. The movement of the tropism is not simple, however, and it is not unique. If we might assume an original state

of harmony—though, in fact, such a state never existed, as is made clear at the beginning and at the end of *Les Fruits d'Or*—a stimulus occurs to disrupt it, giving rise to anxiety, imbalance and conflict. A process of adaptation is then set in motion whose purpose it is to re-establish that assumed harmony between the organism and its environment. A state of balance, once achieved, can only last momentarily for the transformation of organism, or environment, or both, impinges upon other adjacent organism. Response or reaction is inevitable.

In the following pages we shall give our reasons for this claim, believing it to be based upon the evidence of the objective test. At the same time we recognize the partiality of the critic, for he is a translator who can only put into new words what he sees on the page. Jean Rousset, confident of his new criticism, acknowledges its limitation:

Même si la saisie des significations à travers les formes m'assure un maximum de possession, je sais bien que la relation de l'œuvre et de son lecteur, de créateur et de son "ombre" ne saurait se concevoir que sur le mode d'un va-et-vient infini et d'une consommation que l'œuvre seule rassasie.

Literary objective truth, if it exists at all, resides in the text, and it is to it that the reader must return as his source of final reference. Thus a dialogue is created between text and reader, a dialectic in which the reader is involved in a continuous process of discovery or, in Barthes's terms, "naming." The value of this concept

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2We enter *Les Fruits d'Or* on a note of anxiety as the old Courbet vogue declines and leave as a new vogue gathers momentum. Conflict is always there.


of literature is that it enables us to discern more clearly the mixture of subjective and objective operations that take place in literary communication. Both the author and the reader bring to the text an amalgam of personal attitudes and attributes, but there remains the text whose objective existence can never be dismissed.

Todorov, in an article in Communications, has attempted to establish objectivity by drawing a distinction between the functions of criticism and interpretation. Criticism is an objective study of the basic elements of the text, while interpretation judges it according to external and therefore subjective criteria. The distinction is made in the two following quotations in which Todorov uses the words "sens" and "interprétation":

Le sens (ou la fonction) d'un élément de l'oeuvre, c'est sa possibilité d'entrer en corrélation avec d'autres éléments de cette oeuvre et avec l'oeuvre entière. . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

L'interprétation d'un élément de l'oeuvre est différente suivant la personnalité du critique, ses positions idéologiques, suivant l'époque. Pour être interprété, l'élément est inclus dans un système qui n'est pas celui de l'oeuvre mais celui du critique.

Realistically, however, it must be objected to Todorov's argument that such a division exists only ideally and that the human agent, be he critic or interpreter, does not practise in this manner. An interpretation can never be totally subjective and, more important for our purposes, a critic is always involved to some extent in interpretation.

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7Ibid., pp. 125-26.
While we would argue for a much greater measure of subjectivity in criticism than would Todorov, we do not wish to deny textual objectivity, for this would seem to preclude all meaningful critical activity and communication. If the initial reaction to a work, the ultimate judgment of it, and the significance of relationships discovered are directed by criteria within the reader, yet, to the extent that these responses and criteria are communicable and can be tested, the text is objective. The nature of relationships may be subject to disagreement, but that there are relationships can hardly be in doubt.

These are the assumptions upon which we base our study. We do not claim universality for our findings but trust that they offer a possible, productive way of approaching the text. Meaning, as Barthes has said, is plural, and it is our purpose to reveal or provide access to at least some of the dimensions of meaning in *Les Fruits d'Or*. The reader approaches literary meaning from two points, conceptually separable, but which are inextricable, if not identical. If at first he is principally aware of incidents, characters, and ideas, later he becomes conscious of further relationships interwoven in the text.

The text has a double function: that of presenting objects to the reader, and that of directing his attention to them in a certain manner. The two aspects of meaning have traditionally been called "Content" and "Form," but recently other terms have been used.

8Barthes writes in *S/Z*, pp. 11-12, that the ideal text is plural, its meanings are infinite. "Posons d'abord l'image d'un pluriel triomphant, que ne vient appauvrir aucune contrainte de représentation (d'imitation). Dans ce texte idéal, les réseaux sont multiples et jouent entre eux, sans qu'aucun puisse coiffer les autres; ce texte est un galaxie de signifiants, non une structure de signifiés."
Todorov describes the difference using the words "histoire" and "discours."

Au niveau le plus général, l'oeuvre littéraire a deux aspects: elle est en même temps une histoire et un discours. Elle est histoire, dans ce sens qu'elle évoque une certaine réalité, des événements qui se seraient passés, des personnages que, de ce point de vue, se confondant avec ceux de la vie réelle. . . Mais l'oeuvre est en même temps discours: il existe un narrateur qui relate l'histoire; et en face de lui il y a un lecteur qui le perçoit. À ce niveau ce ne sont pas les événements rapportés qui comptent mais la façon dont le narrateur nous les a fait connaître.9

Ricardou in his book Problèmes du Nouveau Roman makes the same point more succinctly with yet different terms. "... la narration est la manière de conter, la fiction ce qui est conté; l'une et l'autre déterminant les deux faces du langage."10

Our own study will be structured about this same distinction and we shall usually make use of Ricardou's terminology. Thus our first chapter will be entitled "Narrative" and our second, "Aspects of the Fiction." One of the most important features of Sarraute's work is the decline of the role of fiction. To a large extent plot or story, character, time and place have become functions of the narrative, very much in the manner described by Rousset in his introduction to Forme et Signification, in which his main thesis is that the form, or structure, itself generates meaning. "C'est l'oeuvre, c'est la structure de l'oeuvre qui est inventrice: 'une forme est féconde en idées'."11 Sarraute herself has expressed this

11Rousset, Forme et Signification, p. vii.
in a number of critical essays, especially in relation to her discussion of plot and character. Perhaps we should not take Sarraute’s writings about literature too uncritically but see them rather as polemical introductions to her works. However, in this case, her judgment seems to be substantiated firstly by a reading of her fictional works and secondly by other critics. Wayne Booth, in his only reference to Sarraute in a footnote to his work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, places her at the limit of fiction. "Nihilism" is the word that Booth applies to a novel which might be written without illumination and resolution. While maintaining that there is an implied author in Sarraute's works, he nevertheless feels that her particular employment of the multiple point of view leads her to the verge of nihilism where nothing can be ascertained or stated with certainty.

In a work of this kind not only could the narrator and reader move together through the unanswered questions as they arise, but presumably the implied author would move with them; no one could be wiser for having read the book. The author of such a work must leave the action unresolved: any resolution would imply a standard of values in relation to which one situation would be more final than another. Only an unresolved sense of meaningless continuation could do justice to a full nihilism of this kind.

Bearing in mind this imbalance, or new balance, of narrative and fiction, we can proceed to an outline of chapter 2, "Narrative," in which we shall discuss first the point of view. Above all, we shall examine the relative roles and the relationship of author, reader, and

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character. The primary place of the narrative point of view is indicated, for it is the vision which directs and determines the disposing of the various elements of the text. Proust probably used the word "style" in the broadest sense of literary invention when he said "le style est une question non de technique, mais de vision."

The narrative structure evolves naturally from the point of view. It is this structure which provides the basic pattern of the work. Comprehending all its elements, it sets them in a certain rhythmical order, which becomes what might be called the law or the fate of the fictional world created. In Les Fruits d'Or we shall concentrate our attention upon the "tropism," the term that Sarraute has used to describe the underlying rhythm of her own works.

"Style" is the third subsection of this chapter, and in it we shall observe the movements of the narrative at the level of sentence and word. The same vision which determines the total structure of the work accounts for the structure of the sentence and the language. The point is made by Spitzer:

L'esprit d'un auteur est une sorte de système solaire dans l'orbite duquel toutes les choses sont attirées: le langage, l'intrigue, etc., ne sont que des satellites de cette entité, l'esprit de l'auteur.15

In examining the style, we shall attempt, then, to set our study in the context of our previous discussions. We shall look above all at the various devices that are used to imitate speech, the struggle to express oneself, and the variation in expression between thought or

sensation and speech.

In chapter 3, "Aspects of the Fiction," we turn to the fiction, to the "what" of the book. Roland Barthes distinguishes beneath the narrative two other levels of the "récit": "fonction," and "action."16 These could be broadly translated as plot and character. Related to these levels are time and space, the former being closely linked to the progress of the plot, while the latter can pertain to either level. In our discussion of the fictional aspects of the work we shall be constantly aware of the dominance of the narrative, of the process over the content, and the very deliberate effort made by Sarraute to de-emphasize what she sees as the distracting elements of the fiction.

The plot, according to E. H. Falk,17 is a "chain of coherent events in sequential order." This distinguishes it clearly from the narrative for, if the narrative provides relationships of necessity, the elements of the plot are linked by probability, by conformity to everyday norms. The plot does not have a prominent place in Les Fruits d'Or, and the sequential movement reflects the dominant pattern of the narrative.

Similarly, the character loses the primary position that he held in "traditional novels." Roland Barthes places the character, the "action," above the level of fiction, and both he and Todorov use the word "agent" for the character. This is particularly appropriate for the nameless people of Sarraute's world, in which character and incident


are so closely identified.

Two other aspects of the fiction reveal clearly the predominance of narration over fiction. Fictional space and time are remarkable by their almost complete absence. They have been reduced and encircled by the vast expansion of the time and space of the narrative.

Another approach to the content of a work is through its themes, and we shall examine three themes in chapter 4, "Thematic Structure." Of central importance in the structure of Les Fruits d'Or is the "mise en abîme." The juxtaposition and rivalry of the books creates a complex pattern of meaning, and this we shall illustrate by means of the themes of "Art," of "Appearance and Reality," and of "Individual and Society." We shall also study the thematic structure following the approach taken by E. H. Falk. He analyzes three books, each of which is decreasingly structured fictionally. In the last, la Nausée, he finds little story and his analysis is therefore based on the coherence of the themes of the plot. In his brief conclusion he outlines the approach to works like la Nausée, of which we might consider Les Fruits d'Or an extreme example. "... the more story and plot are under-emphasized the more does the unity of the structure depend upon the generic coherence of its themes."19

To conclude our introduction, we shall discuss the title, for it is either a catalyst or reflector of the work as a whole. Les Fruits d'Or are the first words of the book that we read and will inevitably

18Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).
19Falk, Types of Thematic Structure, p. 178.
raise questions and expectations. Some of these we shall try to make explicit. *Les Fruits d'Or* can be a title like *Mme. Bovary* or *Eugénie Grandet*. It is a book whose ostensible subject, or even hero, is a book called "Les Fruits d'Or." But there is an opacity and an ambiguity about this title, for it is not obviously a name, and the words conjure up a number of different images. There is the immediate suggestion of classical myth with the golden apples taken by Hercules from the garden of the Hesperides; there is Jason's Golden Fleece; there is the apple offered by Paris to Aphrodite, and R. M. Alberès links the golden fruit to the punishment of Tantalus. Each of these associations contains the concept of the "ideal," the quest for a distant goal. Gold usually has this connotation, and it is used in this way in the text when there is a reference to "les nombres d'or." The opposite interpretation is also possible. Gold can be thought of as money, and we could liken golden fruit to the golden calf of the wandering Israelites, finding in it the idea of the false or the artificial. This interpretation can be supported by the obvious conflict between the hardness of the metal and the softness of the fruit. The suggestion is made that the fruit is illusory, and we know that Sarraute is keenly interested in "trompe-l'oeil." The quest for an ideal and the conflict between the real and the false emerge as the main suggestions of the title, *Les Fruits d'Or.*

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22 See below, p. 98, for a discussion of "trompe-l'oeil" and the source of the title, *Les Fruits d'Or.*
The main focus of the thesis is the tropism whose basic movement is that of adaptation. At first this seems to be very far removed from the quest and the conflict of appearance and reality, but the organism is in a constant state of conflict with its environment, for the perfect harmony which it seeks, the ideal, can be realized only in a static condition, which, by definition, cannot exist where there is life, for life is movement.
I

NARRATIVE

--Oh écoute, tu es terrible, tu pourrais faire un effort. . .
j'étais horriblement gênée. . .
--Gênée? Qu'est-ce que tu vas encore chercher? Pourquoi
gênée, mon Dieu?
--C'était terrible quand il a sorti cette carte postale. . .
la reproduction. . .

The initial impression of Les Fruits d'Or is that of entering
a room, by mistake, in the midst of a conversation which is too personal
and too unfamiliar for us to follow. At the beginning of the book
there is no situation of the action, no description of the characters,
nothing which we can grasp or which will help us to identify where we
are, who the people are, and what it is that they are discussing. We
become, consequently, acutely aware of the language used and its
slightest inflections, as well as of the least gesture which will indi-
cate states of mind and relationships.

It becomes clearer, as we read further, that the subject of the
conversation is a previous conversation with a third person and that
this, in its turn, was about the painting of Courbet. But Courbet
himself is not important to our two speakers.

Et ce n'est pas Courbet. Il ne s'agit pas de ça. J'ai essayé
de les voir, les fameux Courbet, j'y suis allé à l'heure
du déjeuner pour n'y rencontrer personne. Regarder un peu
à tête reposée. Eh bien, pas de chance. Impossible d'échapper. . .
Sur l'escalier. . .

24Ibid., p. 11.
Courbet, as a subject, is dismissed, just as are "Les Fruits d'Or" and its author, Bréhier, throughout the rest of the book, never emerging from the obscurity of the oblique reference and the empty generality passed in the process of a conversation about something else. The apparent subject provides a vehicle for the true focus of attention, which is the relationships between people, and between people and objects. We become conscious of a constant interplay of differing points of view, a process of action and reaction which may be expressed in discussion or argument but, more frequently, is seen as a conflict within the mind of one character or another. The manner in which the reactions and relationships are perceived is crucial to the study of the meaning of the work and it is, therefore, to the question of the point of view that we turn first.

The Narrative Point of View

A beautiful infatuation this always, I think, the intensity of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature.—Henry James.

The most notable feature of the point of view in Les Fruits d'Or is the dominant role given to the characters. Beyond the words and thoughts of the characters nothing exists. The other and the object are perceived through the eyes or imagination of the people who inhabit this world that Sarraute has created. Such a point of view does not represent a complete break with the past, for previous writers, notably Virginia Woolf, have employed the same technique. It is to be noted that this enlargement of the character, to the point at which he occupies the whole foreground of the screen of reality presented to us, is not simply a formal device but is linked essentially to the content.
of the work. To see the world solely through the eyes of the characters is to see a world different from that described by means of the interventions of author or narrator.

Northrop Frye, in his theory of Modes,²⁵ has described an historical sequence which evolves from the divine, in early mythology, to the ironic, at the present time. This shift in the conception of the hero in literature is closely related to that found by Friedman in his "stages" of narrative point of view.²⁶ At one end of the continuum he sets "editorial omniscience," at the other the "dramatic mode" in which, of course, the author is invisible and the observer is aware only of the characters. While Friedman's continuum lies between non-fictional or discursive writing and drama, it is not difficult to place it in an historical perspective. The early modes of Frye's sequence, the divine and the heroic, would correspond to the omniscient stages of Friedman's model. Similarly, the later modes of "low mimesis" and "irony" would be associated with "Selective" or "Multiple Selective Omniscience," that is, the points of view that are prevalent today as never before. In short, the content, which is none other than man in his environment, is directly associated with the form in which that content is both perceived and presented.

The reality that Sarraste seeks is not that of the classical Greek hero nor even that of the bourgeois realists of the nineteenth century. It is the reality of the world of the middle of the twentieth century.


century, a reality that has been transformed by scientific and technological change, but also—and this is more important for our study—in the eyes of Sarraute, it has been transformed by the vision of the novelists, Dostoevsky, Proust and Joyce, as well as by the discoveries of Freud and by existentialism. Like Virginia Woolf, she wishes to plumb "les endroits obscurs de la psychologie" and she has clear affinities with the mainstream of French existentialism. No longer can she look at the world in the manner of the "traditional" novelist. In *L'Ère du Souçon*, she introduces the question of the point of view during her attack on the obsolete formulae used for indicating speech.

C'est qu'elles [the formulae] sont en quelque sorte le symbole de l'ancien régime, le point où se sépare avec le plus de netteté la nouvelle et l'ancienne conception du roman. Elles marquent la place à laquelle le romancier a toujours situé ses personnages: en un point aussi éloigné de lui-même que des lecteurs; à la place où se trouvent les joueurs d'un match de tennis, le romancier étant à celle de l'arbitre juché sur son siège, surveillant le jeu et annonçant les points aux spectateurs (en l'occurrence les lecteurs), installés sur les gradins.

The image of the tennis match enables us to see more clearly, by contrast with the point of view that she discerns in the "traditional" novel, the relationship that she herself has established between author, reader, and character.

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27 The similarities in the preoccupations of Sarraute and Woolf is astonishing. An essay of Woolf's like "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" is so close in content and style to one of Sarraute's that one could readily believe they were written by the same pen. In each the gently sarcastic tone is interspersed with sudden passages of bitter attack on the phenomenological obsessions of the "traditional" school.

28 Sartre did not write the Préface to *Portrait d'un Inconnu* simply to encourage a struggling, new novelist. What he wrote there shows that he found much in Sarraute's work that was akin to his own view of the human condition.

Firstly, Sarraute, as authoress, is no longer "umpire." In the sense that she selects and arranges every element in the work, she is no different from any other writer. But in the usual sense of the word "omniscient," when used in a literary context, she has relegated the authoress to a position in which, like the dramatist, she is invisible to the reader. She never intervenes in the action either in the form of a direct address to her reader, or even through a narrator. There is no "implied author," to use the terminology of Wayne Booth, nor is it possible to indicate with absolute assurance what Todorov calls the appreciative point of view, for Sarraute's own point of view in *Les Fruits d'Or* is a matter of speculation and preference on the part of the reader.

Towards the end of the work we hear, ever more insistently, a single voice involved in a personal struggle over its own view of Brehier's book and that of the literary circle, which is the population of the work. The echo of this voice has been heard earlier in similar, less persistent voices. Collectively, it is a voice which speaks in terms of immediate and personal sensation, of a natural or organic response to what is beautiful. M. Tison Braun in her study, *Nathalie Sarraute ou la Recherche de l'Authenticité*, identifies this voice as that of Sarraute, a view that can be supported by reference to the authoress's critical writing. But the text alone gives us no reason to believe this voice rather than another, since no indication is provided

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30Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction.*
by the authoress. Indeed, the language associated with authenticity, that of the imperceptible vibration and the unseen potential, is used by people whose evidence is clearly unreliable. In Section 2, one of the persona of the character speaking with Brûlé is that of the man who says of himself: "Je suis libre, je suis fort, je suis intègre et franc" (p. 38). Yet this same character is able to transform himself, Proteus-like, into the obsequious and attentive host or the arrogant master who banishes the servants to the pantry. In Section 4, a woman suddenly reverses her opinion of "Les Fruits d'Or" for the very dubious reason that the man she idolizes, Lucien, has contradicted her. She, too, employs the vocabulary of "authenticity" to describe the change: "Une onde tiède la parcourt, une douce vibration, l'exquise titillation de l'humilité, de la dévotion, devant ces signes--infaillibles, elle ne s'y trompe jamais--.

The role of the authoress has been diminished, and she has concealed herself behind her characters. At the same time, the reader's part has grown in importance. No longer occupying the stand for spectators, he is expected to make his own judgments of the game, although his view of it and his understanding of the rules are limited. From his former position of passive observation, the reader has been projected into an active participation in the action and the incidents which take place before his eyes. This conforms to Sarraute's view of

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It can be claimed that, as last voice to be heard in the book, this speaker has greater authority and that his admiration of Bréhier is likely to be authentic. But however true his own feelings may be, if nobody listens to him, his personal authenticity is useless and perhaps meaningless. Neither he nor his opinions can survive in isolation, and he inevitably returns to his society.

Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 58.
of the reader's role expressed in L'Ére du Soupçon. The old lazy habits of reading are over, banished by the scepticism of the age:

Les lunettes et les gilets rayés, les caractères et les intrigues pourraient continuer à varier à l'infini sans révéler aujourd'hui autre chose qu'une réalité dont chacun connaît, pour l'avoir parcourue en tous sens, la moindre parcelle. Au lieu, comme au temps de Balzac, d'inciter le lecteur à accéder à une vérité qui se conquiert de haute lutte, ils sont une concession dangereuse à son penchant à la paresse—et aussi à celui de l'auteur—à sa crainte du dépaysement.35

The reader experiences the events simultaneously with the characters of the book, but this does not mean that he is totally identified with them in the way that is possible with the single person narrative of Portrait d'un Inconnu and Martereau.36 In the first place, the action is never situated in any clearly described environment, so we must suppose that the reader is privy to only certain selected areas of the characters' consciousness. Secondly, the reader has access to a number of different consciousnesses with the result that his attention is directed away from the subject to the object, from the individual character to the society or world in which the character is immersed. It also results in a greater demand for him to participate, that is, to judge and evaluate what he has witnessed from a variety of viewpoints. And thirdly, the reader is not, it seems, situated so much within the character as beside him or at his shoulder, as one critic remarked:

Le narrateur n'est pas dans la conscience de l'autre et ne prétend nullement à l'exactitude d'une transcription. Il dit ce qu'il sait de l'autre (entendons: ce qu'il

35Sarraute, L'Ére du Soupçon, p. 63.
imagine), et il le dit non pas sous la forme d'une analyse explicative ou d'une description objective, mais sous la forme d'un discours prêté, à travers lequel se forme le personnage de l'autre. 38

The effect of this is felt in the use of "je" and "il" or "elle" by the characters. It is a nice distinction, but one which is important to the point of view for it constantly changes the sense of distance between the reader and the character. If, at the end of the book, the first person becomes the dominant note, we find elsewhere that the third person is frequently used in the expression of intimate feelings, while on other occasions the first and third persons both appear in the same context. This is, for instance, the case of the writer who feels himself to be replaced in the estimation of the group by the meteoric rise of Bréhier to popularity (Section 4). His first cry of apprehension is in the first person: "C'est moi, moi qui suis touché, jeté à terre, moi que cette brute servile encore tout récemment encensait, moi devant qui elle se prosternait." 39 Immediately afterwards, however, there is a switch to the third person, though there is no indication of a change of narrator and, indeed, there is no reason to suppose that there has been a change. "Il est dépouillé, déchu, remplacé dans le rang, menacé de mort, la sueur perle sur son front, ses jambes mollissent, il se sent pâlir, il défaille..." 40 Sarraute's use of the first and third person pronouns well illustrates Roland Barthes's view that either can serve the purpose of personal narration. Nevertheless, the use of


40 Ibid., p. 80.
"il" and "elle" does create a greater distance between the character and the reader.

Already, in looking at the roles of authoress and reader, we have found ourselves discussing them in terms of the character, for it is this last role that has become most prominent. The characters, or the players, are no more to be viewed from off court, and the authoress, by intention, and the reader, by her design, if not actually players, appear adjacent to the players, watching every shot from the court itself. As if emulating Hamlet, Sarraute has made use of her book to trap the consciousness of her reader.

All that is known of the world and society, that we enter in Les Fruits d'Or, is known through the mediation of the characters. But there is no one identifiable person whom we can isolate as reliable and against whose view we can measure incidents of the work. Sarraute is not using the technique of "selective omniscience," as she did in her first two works, but that of "multiple selective omniscience." Friedman's terminology, however, is not too appropriate in Sarraute's case because the characters are very far from omniscient. Each individual view which the reader shares is, indeed, severely limited and personal. The only sense in which the reader can be said to have omniscience is in his access to many points of view. The narrative moves from character to character to group, each eye and mind providing a different dimension of the scene.

In the first section of the book there are three main points of

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41 Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," pp. 1176-78.
view, though one of these is a projection of the imagination of the two characters who speak. Frequently, we find two points of view in a section and the narrative alternates between them. In other sections—e.g., Sections 3, 5, 13, 14—there is only one voice, whether it be a single person, such as Bréhier in Section 3 or the collective voice of the group in Section 13. On two occasions there is a multiplicity of points of view. This is certainly the case in Section 4 in which the narration moves from person to person in the circle gathered to discuss Les Fruits d'Or. In Section 7, despite the variety of views expressed, it might be argued that they are all but minor variations on the single theme of Bréhier's genius.

One result of this use of the multiple narrator is that reality loses its objectivity or, rather, that the object is now defined by the collection of subjective views. In her second novel, Martereau, Sarraute has given us an image of an apparently objectively existing personality, that of Martereau, breaking down into a number of component, and often conflicting, facets, each of which is projected by a different character or reflected by a different situation. Le Planétarium certainly contains objects; we can think of the door in the apartment of "la tante Berthe," of the little settee bought by Alain and "Gisèle—mon amour, ma femme—," or of the person of Germaine Lemaire. But all these objects hold different meanings according to the situation of the viewer. In Les Fruits d'Or the object is nothing more than a projection of the subjective, an existence created by the consensus of subjective

views. The central object of the work, "Les Fruits d'Or," is never described and is encountered only in the judgments, often contradictory, passed on it. It is not established objectively and, at the end, in the terms of existence understood by the literary society, it is as though it never existed.

It is this subjective presentation of reality that accounts for the confusion of the reader, which we noted at the beginning of this chapter. Reality has been made infinitely complex by the use of a point of view which leaves the reader to find his own way through the conflicting testimony of the character-narrators. Sarraute has, by her absence, by her rejection of traditional omniscience, condemned her characters and readers to a reality without absolutes. The lack of the type of manipulation of character of which Sartre accuses Mauriac means the loss of an absolute referent. The result is that the reader's attention is turned to the process rather than to the content, to the narrative rather than to the story. He observes not the actions but the acting and the interacting that takes place between people and their environments. The similarity between the points of view adopted by Sarraute and Virginia Woolf reflects the similarity of the matter that both are seeking to uncover: "... let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness." In order to trace the pattern of these inner sensations, a point of view is required which will place

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the observer sufficiently close to the character to be able to sense and
record them. For Sarraute the point of view as "second conscience" arose naturally from a perception of reality which conformed to the pattern of the tropism.

The Narrative Structure

A consequence of the concentration of the point of view upon process rather than content is the increased role played by the narrative structure in the text. Participating with the characters in actions whose sequence he cannot comprehend, the reader is concerned with the immediate effect of incidents rather than with the incidents themselves. The rhythm or pattern that he discerns is not that of a linear progression of incidents advancing logically from cause to effect, but one of reactions and responses clustering about an action which acts upon them in the manner of an irritant or catalyst. To this pattern Sarraute gave the name "tropism," and her first book was a collection of short narratives, not stories, appropriately entitled Tropismes.

Roland Barthes, in his article "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits," offers a model which will assist us in analysing the structure of the tropism. Breaking down the narrative into elements, which he calls "unités," he divides them into "noyaux," or those elements which, operating horizontally, carry the action forward, and those which, lying between the "noyaux" and gathering about them,

45In an interview with Pierre Schneider ("... and the Novelist as Transmuter: Nathalie Sarraute talks about her Art," New York Times Book Review, Feb. 9, 1964, p. 5) Sarraute says: "I had to be a second conscience that would accompany the characters' subconscience."

are significant not at the level of the story but at the higher levels of "action" (character) and "narration."

Applying Barthes' analysis, we find that in Les Fruits d'Or there are few "noyaux" or, in other words, the moments of action are widely interspersed. The main body of the text is given to the expansion of those elements unrelated to the progress of the story. The narrative is extended at the expense of the fiction; the tropism not the story holds our attention.

The tropism is, as we stated at the beginning of this study, fundamental to Sarraute's vision. "What counts, always, is those movements, those hidden dramatic actions, those tropisms." What we observe throughout her works is the interaction of the human organism with the environment provided by its society. But there is, in the very choice of a biological term, the introduction of the element of necessity or determinism. The pattern of stimulus and response, a basic concept of behaviorism, is not merely an isolated or individual phenomenon but operates equally on all people. If the response is not always identical, people are subject to the same influences and forces, so that it is possible to perceive common patterns of action.

The basic narrative structure of Les Fruits d'Or is the tropism. We can see the work, as a whole, as a series of responses to the basic stimulus which is provided by the appearance of Bréhier's book in the society formed by the literary group. If we were to abstract the narrative from its spatio-temporal setting, we should find a circular

47 Sarraute; quoted by P. Schneider, "... Novelist as Transmuter," p. 36.
structure in which, with the book as central focus, the reactions to it would revolve about it in a ceaseless and circular argument for and against.

Time and space, however, introduce the aspect of linear or horizontal movement, so that the circle is broken and is transformed into the cycle with its pattern of rise and fall. In the cycle, of course, arguments for and against "Les Fruits d'Or" will not be evenly distributed. Those in favour are found in the rising curve of popularity (Sections 2-7), those against (Sections 8-13) on the side of its decline. Sections 1 and 14 do not form a part of the Bréhier cycle but belong to those of the preceding and succeeding vogues.

The literary society, which is caught up in the Bréhier vogue, cannot be isolated from other stimuli similar to that provided by "Les Fruits d'Or." At the beginning of the book the object to which the interlocutors react is the work of Courbet, and Bréhier's name emerges, as if accidentally, into the ongoing rhythm of the Courbet cycle.48 We hear, too, of the fate of earlier objects of literary adulation, of Robert Hunier whose popularity has waned with the rising of Bréhier's sun.49 At the end of the book another vogue is incipient. Bréhier's experience is not unique, but typical of an endless series of identical vogues that have preceded and will succeed it. One character, in Section 10, voices the question that has arisen with ever greater persistence in the mind of the reader:

48 It is not difficult to find a deliberate pun in the name Courbet when it is connected with expressions such as: "Il est tordant" (p. 8), and "Il se courbe en arc de cercle" (p. 13). It may not be too fanciful to link the name to the cyclical movement of the vogues.

49 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, pp. 79-82.
... eh bien, comment se fait-il qu’à tout moment on assiste à ces extraordinaires revirements sans que personne paraisse s’en étonner, sans que personne s’en préoccupe. ... c’est comme des hallucinations collectives, ces énormes engouements sans qu’on sache très bien pourquoi. ... ?

The answer to the question is that there is a structure that lies behind that offered by the pattern of responses to "Les Fruits d'Or." Bréhier's book is no more than one catalyst in an endless series, each of which provides the initial impetus to release a complex process of human interaction. It is essential to this structure that "Les Fruits d'Or" should be no more than an apparent object, a central transparency through which we can perceive the adaptation of the characters involved inextricably in a situation in which they, tentatively and fearfully, weigh the alternatives of opposition and submission to their society.

What we sense behind the Bréhier case is the dialectic between the individual being and his environment, the tropism as image of the human condition.

We can see this pattern more clearly as we dissect the structure of the work. *Les Fruits d'Or* is divided into fourteen sections, which correspond to the traditional chapter of the novel. Each of these sections represents a total movement, the focus of which is not Bréhier's book but statements or feelings about it. The fourteen sections, in their turn, are usually divided into two or more episodes. What emerges is a complex pattern of tropism within tropism, not arranged concentrically, but linked one to the other by the formal device of the plot.

The following table provides an analysis of the fourteen sections.

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Ibid., p. 167.
Columns 2 and 3 give the number and nature of the participants.

Column 4 shows us the stimulus or trigger which releases the action.

In column 5 there is an indication of the nature of the action, while column 6 presents the basic pattern of opposition or conflict.

**TABLE 1**

**ANALYSIS OF THE PATTERN OF ACTION**
**OF THE FOURTEEN SECTIONS (#)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section #</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
<th>Nature of Parts</th>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a) Il 1 b) Elle 1 c) Il 2</td>
<td>Action - la main dans la poche</td>
<td>Discussion of previous conversation</td>
<td>Accommodation with others vs Rejection of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a) Il 2 b) Brûlé c) Elle 1</td>
<td>Action - la longue tête s'incline</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Desire to join the elite vs desire to be one of the mass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Brûlé b) Future readers</td>
<td>Words - un livre admirable</td>
<td>Brûlé's literary views</td>
<td>Formalism vs popular taste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Critics b) People</td>
<td>Words - l'article de Brûlé</td>
<td>Rise of Popularity of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;</td>
<td>Submission to views of leaders vs resistance to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a) Narrator b) Orthil c) Woman of people</td>
<td>Words - la réalité</td>
<td>Story of inspired monologue by Orthil</td>
<td>Reality vs Illusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Elle 2 b) Group c) Mettetal</td>
<td>Words - statement by Mettetal</td>
<td>Challenge to Mettetal + results</td>
<td>Truth vs conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Number of People</td>
<td>Nature of parts</td>
<td>Stimulus</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Group b) Individual (Luc, Jean-P.)</td>
<td>Sacré bouquin - words</td>
<td>Climax of the cult</td>
<td>Group solidarity vs individual integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>a) Paysan b) Il 3</td>
<td>Words - &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; ne vaut rien</td>
<td>Discussion of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; and of other writers</td>
<td>Fidelity to group vs desire for harmony with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Parrot - critic b) Group</td>
<td>Action - Faiblesses/ générosité de Parrot</td>
<td>Parrot fails to prove greatness of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;</td>
<td>Esoteric individual vs sceptical group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>a) Il 4 b) Subj ectivist philosopher</td>
<td>Action - ces extraordinaires revirements</td>
<td>Discussion of changes in taste</td>
<td>Desire for certainty vs subjectivism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Wife + Jacques b) Group</td>
<td>Action - Jacques' imitation</td>
<td>Discussion of J's imitation of Bréhier</td>
<td>Imitation vs originality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Il 5 b) Group</td>
<td>Words - ceux qui admirent &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; sont des sots</td>
<td>Reactions to Bréhier of individual + group</td>
<td>Spontaneous individual judgment vs group assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>a) Bréhier b) Group</td>
<td>Words - génération spontanée</td>
<td>Group judges + categorizes authors</td>
<td>Individual spontaneous creation vs classification by popular taste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Il 6</td>
<td>Action - ignorance or forgetting of Bréhier</td>
<td>Reflection on what to do about admiration of Bréhier</td>
<td>Preservation of integrity of belief vs need to communicate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from this table that, despite the differences in action (Column 5), and in the numbers of characters involved in each section, there appear striking similarities. In column 3 we find the nature of the participants. If, in a majority of cases, this corresponds to the figure in column 2, there are nevertheless several marked differences for, however many persons are involved in the action, there are, in each section, only two points of view expressed, that of the individual and that of the group. In nearly half the sections a large number of people (counting members of the group as separate individuals) participates, but the role that each plays is determined by this basic relationship of individual to group. Thus we find, in column 6, that there lies, beneath the varied action of each section, a conflict reflecting this dialectic. At times the aesthetic nature of the action appears far removed from this basic social dynamic, but the most esoteric of topics is represented by a situation in which a solitary person finds himself, or herself, at odds with the collective opinion of the others. In Section 1, for example, no group enters the action, but the female voice expresses the desire to find accommodation with others while the male consistently advocates a doctrinaire individualism, which amounts to a scepticism of any view held by popular consent. The altercation between these two effectively introduces the conflict that is pursued throughout the book. In another case, Section 3, the character, Brûlé, is alone, but it is clear that others represent a threat against which he has continually to maintain an elaborate defence. The relationship between individual and group, which we have found to be essential to the narrative structure, does not always take the form of a conflict. There are several occasions
on which the individual, out of harmony with the group, desires to be reunited with it. Sometimes he or she is successful, as in the case of the woman who admired Lucien (Section 4); at other times individuality reasserts itself (Sections 6 and 12). At the end of the book we can only assume that the pattern perceived will be perpetuated indefinitely into the future.

The other common aspect of the structure of the sections is the initial stimulus which triggers the action (column 4). Just as the action of the book is caused by the appearance on the literary scene of "Les Fruits d'Or," so each section has as its point of departure some action, word, or even sensation. This stimulus arouses in the characters an anxiety and conflict which, throughout the tropism, seeks its resolution and is finally stilled or suppressed only to reappear under some new form in the next section.

Section 6 provides an excellent example of the structure of the tropism. Within the environment of the group, Mettetal, an eminent critic, declares that he has always recognized Bréhier's genius. This is the stimulus that releases an intolerable conflict in the mind of a woman listener. The effect of the statement is described by the woman as "un coup de feu."

Comme lorsqu'au milieu d'une foule qui déambulait paisiblement un coup de feu tout à coup a claqué et que, le premier instant de stupeur passé, on se bouscule, on s'interroge, on court, en elle, aussitôt, un branlebas se déclenche.51

This description is very similar to others occurring in other

51 Ibid., p. 119.
sections. In Section 1 the gesture of one man and the reaction of another are responsible for the woman's feeling "gênée." The proclamation that Brûlé's article is "de tout premier ordre. Parfait" (Section 4) releases the forces of order upon the rebel masses. Each section displays at least one such stimulus and in some there are several examples.

Following the initial shock comes the conflict which, in Section 6, is between Mettetal's statement and evidence to the contrary that the woman has seen with her own eyes. Certainty that Mettetal has lied alternates with doubts. Her resolution to reveal the lie is swiftly followed by her desire to conform to the group's acceptance of the statement and its admiration of Mettetal; her desire to uncover the scandal, by her fear of the consequences of such an action. Evidently, the struggle between the forces of individualism and those of conformism is very bitter: "Il faut absolument que cesse ce scandale, cette lutte qui la déchire."\(^2\) However internal the struggle appears to be, the pattern revealed is that of the constant confrontation of individual and group, for the individual has internalized the controls exerted by the society. The woman, because of her social conditioning, doubts her own eyes, is prepared to conform, and is afraid. Her fears are borne out for when, unable to restrain herself any longer, she finally accuses Mettetal of lying, the group turns upon her and expels her. On this occasion the conflict is resolved by the expulsion of the individual organism that could not adapt to its environment.

The pattern of the tropism, that we have found in the book as a whole and in the sections, reappears in the smaller movements of the

\(^{52}\text{Ibid., p. 121.}\)
episodes. Once again, there is the familiar sequence of stimulus, adaptation of conflict, resolution. The following table analyzes the episodes of Section 4 using the same format as that employed in the previous table, with the addition of another column, Column 0, whose purpose we shall discuss later.53

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF THE PATTERN OF ACTION
OF THE EPISODES IN SECTION 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Col 0</th>
<th>Col 1</th>
<th>Col 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
<th>Column 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grp</td>
<td>Epi</td>
<td>Nos.</td>
<td>Nature of Participants</td>
<td>Stimulus</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Critic &amp; 'honnêtes gens' b) Rabble</td>
<td>Words-de tout premier ordre. Parfait</td>
<td>Imposition of Authority Suppression of Rabble</td>
<td>Authority vs populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Dr. Legris b) Time</td>
<td>Action- L'article de Brûlé</td>
<td>Comparison of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; with classics</td>
<td>Old vs New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>a) Elle &amp; Lucien b) People</td>
<td>Words: un vrai miracle</td>
<td>Encouraging Lucien to speak</td>
<td>Belief in Lucien vs Disagreement with critics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>a) Elle b) Lucien</td>
<td>Words: un très beau livre</td>
<td>Shock at Lucien's remarks</td>
<td>Her beliefs vs Lucien's statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>a) Elle b) People</td>
<td>Words: un très beau livre</td>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>Belief in Lucien vs attraction of popular taste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>a) Elle-Lucien b) People</td>
<td>Action- souffle tiède</td>
<td>Rejoins Lucien and critics</td>
<td>Esoteric vs popular taste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Marcel b) Elle</td>
<td>Action- dislike of &quot;Elle&quot;</td>
<td>Affirmation of creativeness of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;</td>
<td>Desire for membership in elite of critics vs dislike of popular taste.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>a) Critics- Marcel b) Elles</td>
<td>Words- &quot;le geste&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Elles&quot; seize upon this certainty</td>
<td>Insecurity vs statement of certain view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

53 See below, p. 35, footnote 54.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Col 0</th>
<th>Col 1</th>
<th>Col 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
<th>Column 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grp Episode</td>
<td>Nos.</td>
<td>Nature of Participants</td>
<td>Stimulus</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 9 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Elle b) Marcel</td>
<td>Words—&quot;le geste&quot;</td>
<td>Shock at and rejection of Marcel's view</td>
<td>Fiction vs reality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Marcel b) Elle</td>
<td>Words—la fausse vérité des romans</td>
<td>Refutation</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Many (1)</td>
<td>Elles—People b) Elles—Aspiring to Elites</td>
<td>Words—la fausse vérité des romans</td>
<td>Brief flurry of scepticism amongst &quot;elles&quot;</td>
<td>Desire for proof vs readiness to submit to authority.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Henri b) Marcel</td>
<td>Words—le geste</td>
<td>Refuting Marcel</td>
<td>Justice vs Fraud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Henri 1 b) Henri 2</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Inability to say what he wants</td>
<td>Intention vs Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Many (2)</td>
<td>a) Henri b) Critics</td>
<td>Words—&quot;geste banal&quot;</td>
<td>Repression of Henri</td>
<td>Authority vs Dissent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 15 Many (2)</td>
<td>a) Ils—Critics b) Jean L.</td>
<td>Action—émansions invisibles</td>
<td>Jean L. is challenged</td>
<td>Authority vs Dissent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Jean L. b) Critics—judges</td>
<td>Words—J.L.n'aime pas du tout &quot;Les Fruits d’Or&quot;</td>
<td>Jean L. at bay</td>
<td>Group intolerance vs individual opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Many (2)</td>
<td>a) Critics b) Jean L.</td>
<td>Words—je l'aimerai</td>
<td>Submission of Jean L.</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 18 Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Critics b) Previously acclaimed authors</td>
<td>Words—le meilleur livre</td>
<td>Fall of previously acclaimed authors</td>
<td>Fear of group vs desire for admiration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Nous—le menu peuple b) The leaders</td>
<td>Actions—changing order</td>
<td>Keeping the status quo</td>
<td>Fear of events vs sense of helplessness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 20 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Elle b) Critics</td>
<td>Words—&quot;le meilleur livre&quot;</td>
<td>Refusal to accept the judgment</td>
<td>Authority vs reason</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Ils—group b) Leaders</td>
<td>Words—&quot;Le livre en main&quot;</td>
<td>Plea for enlightenment</td>
<td>Sense of inadequacy vs belief in ideal certainty.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grp</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Nos.</th>
<th>Nature of Participants</th>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Group b) Leaders</td>
<td>Action-Possibility of enlightenment</td>
<td>Dream of group as commanding knowledge</td>
<td>Sense of inadequacy vs envy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Leaders b) Group</td>
<td>Action-Potentially unified action of group</td>
<td>Nothing happens</td>
<td>What might have happened vs what occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>a) Group b) Les 2 pairs</td>
<td>Words-Le livre en main</td>
<td>The great critics speak</td>
<td>The promise vs the outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Many (1)</td>
<td>a) Group</td>
<td>Words-Pronouncement of Critics</td>
<td>Disillusionment</td>
<td>Hope vs reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Moi b) Leaders</td>
<td>Words-Pronouncement of Critics</td>
<td>Exhilaration at words</td>
<td>Own ignorance vs the wisdom of leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Il b) Leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attack on role and privilege of critics</td>
<td>False appearance of work vs reality beneath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Il b) Elle</td>
<td>Action-Need for another</td>
<td>Finding kindred spirit</td>
<td>Own weakness vs her apparent strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>a) Il b) Elle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Struggle to preserve his belief in her</td>
<td>Appearance 1 vs Appearance 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) Il b) 2 Pairs</td>
<td>Words-Ha ha!</td>
<td>Stigmatizing of individual</td>
<td>Conformism vs Individuality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparing this table with that presented above (pp. 27-28), we are struck by the overall similarity of pattern. There is, however, a notable difference. Column 2 indicates that in the majority of cases there is only one participant in each episode. In several cases, after "Many" we have written the numbers 1 or 2 in parentheses. If we see the group as plural, then there are often numerous participants in the
action. If, however, the group, either of people or of critics, is seen as a collective, then it is to be regarded as one participant.

The significance of this change in column 2 is that the conflict which we have noted between the group and the individual has, at the level of the episode, become internalized. The nature of the struggle has not changed, but now we see the individual at war with himself, divided by pressures of conformity and integrity.

The structure of the work that emerges from this analysis is that of several levels of tropism operating within one another. There are, generally speaking, three levels: the book as a whole, the section, and the episode. The tropism has two basic rhythms: that of circularity and that of alternation or conflict. Thus, at whatever level, the tropism might be visualized as a circular form, and the internal conflict as the juxtaposition of tropisms within that form.

In Section 7, at the point at which Bréhier's book appears to be about to terminate, once and for all, all literary debate, the eternal movement of the tropism is threatened. Group solidarity is total; time must have a stop. At this moment Jean-Pierre is refused entry into the group. The plot provides no cause, and the most likely reason for this event is that the movement of the narrative has imposed itself upon the logical progression of the plot. If no further advance is possible, then there must be retreat. The movement of the tropism, which, we have seen, operates at all levels of the structure, is a law

54 In the long Section 4, however, another level is added. The episodic tropisms fall readily into groups associated by common stimulus, action, and conflict. Indeed, a number of episodes are more meaningful by association with others. This is true of Episodes 2, 13, 17, 19, 23, 25, and 26. The capital letters in Column 0 indicate the eight groups into which the episodes might be gathered.
that imposes its pattern upon the fiction.

Style

My intention was to render internal movement through the movement of the sentences.—Nathalie Sarraute.\(^5\)

The same vision that determines the structure of a work also creates its style. Indeed, in the case of Sarraute, it is difficult to distinguish between the two, for a typical Sarraute sentence will be totally integrated into the movement of its tropism.\(^6\) We shall not attempt here to differentiate between structure and style but, following the example of the authoress, shall rather look at some of the features of the writing which Sarraute has used to express her view of the world, and which give her work its unique quality.

In her criticism of other writers, Sarraute often takes as her point of departure the style. This is true of her article on Valéry as well as of that entitled "Flaubert le Précurseur."\(^5\) In this latter article, she finds that Flaubert's conscious artistry hampers the expression, the movement of reality, that the sentences by their very perfection imprison their content. Even time is 'bouclé à triple tour'. Such a style would quite evidently be unsuitable for the tropism. What we shall expect to find in Sarraute's work are elements which give the

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\(^5\)Sarraute; quoted by Schneider, "Novelist as Transmuter," p. 5.

\(^6\)M.S. the author of the article "Structure" in the Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (ed. by A. Preminger, Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 812-13, has difficulty in distinguishing between structure and style. He finally proposes his own solution along the lines of formal and informal associations.


maximum amount of freedom to the ineffable psychological movements.

Les Fruits d'Or is narrated throughout in the present tense. In discussing the point of view of the work we found that the action was related as it occurred, and that at no point were we able to withdraw from the arena and review the action in a broader perspective of time and space. A minimum of distanciation in the point of view means that the narrator has to use the present. The point is made by Gerda Zeltner:

La perte de la distanciation épique est si totale, qu'il [le narrateur] ne peut employer d'autre formule verbale que celle qui supprime l'écart temporel entre l'événement et sa narration: le présent.59

This sense of the continuous unfolding of the present into a future that is unknown and unknowable, away from a past that drops vertiginously into oblivion, is a key feature of Sarraute's style. She is enabled, by its use, to explore the twists and turns of the characters seeking to accommodate themselves to a constantly changing environment.

The text of Les Fruits d'Or is a continuous dialogue between character and character, or within the character himself. It is built of words which are spoken by somebody, and to somebody. Usually it is clear who is speaking, and to whom, even if the dialogue is internalized. On some occasions, however, it is not so apparent. At the beginning of Section 4 the first episode, which sets the scene for the whole section, is narrated by some unknown character. Yet it is not the conventional narration addressed to the reader, for it is a highly partisan attack

upon "les fortes têtes, vous tous là-bas." "Nous sommes délivrés," on the next page, tells us that the speaker is in the camp of "les honnêtes gens." It is, then, an example of internal dialogue between a righteous self, participating in the action, and a projected enemy.

It may be more difficult to decide to whom the words are addressed. Brûlé, alone in his study, appears to be speaking to himself, but his audience is, of course, the public that will read and admire his resounding phrases. The solitary character of Section 14 addresses himself to that select few who still admire, or will admire, "Les Fruits d'Or."

Because it is dialogue, the style imitates speech. Only rarely do we find a passage of self-conscious literary prose. Such a passage is found on occasions when an attempt is being made to create an impression on an audience, real or imagined. Thus Brûlé again provides an example, as does the man responsible for the image of the palace, and also Orthil. Generally, however, we are listening to people struggling with the expression of thought. It is this that accounts for the staccato and apparently unsequential texture of much of the book. Sentences may be short or long, but the words are usually clustered in small groups, which are divided by Sarraute's own style of punctuation. The main intervals she uses are the full-stop, the comma, and the three dots. Brigid Brophy has spoken of the breathless quality of Sarraute's work. 60 This is a misinterpretation, I feel, for

what is conveyed is the jerky nature of thought, which this style is attempting to imitate. Rather than logically developed prose that moves ineluctably to its conclusion—the type of prose that Sarraute finds in Flaubert—thoughts or feelings flash into the mind related not only by logic, but by similarity of sound or visual expression. We see minds working laterally as well as vertically. A device that will illustrate this feature is Sarraute's use of repetition. We can choose almost any passage in the book to serve as an illustration of repetition. The passage on pp. 106-107 we have chosen at random. ("Mais là, presque en face de lui. . . des pigeons voyageurs.") In the following table we list thirteen repetitions that we have found in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REPETITIONS; pp. 106-107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. a. il ne l'avait pas remarqué  
  b. elle se tient si effacée  
  c. toujours un peu à distance |
| 2. a. rien de louche. . . n'affleure  
  b. aucun de ces mouvements sournois |
| 3. a. vous donnait l'éveil  
  b. vous font vous élancer  
  c. une irrésistible poussée |
| 4. a. le regard. . . s'attarde  
  b. le regard. . . s'appuie |
| 5. a. à peine perceptible  
  b. légèrement |
| 6. a. elle a vu  
  b. elle a découvert le lieu secret  
  c. elle possède le talisman |
Table 3 (Continued)

7. a. trouver sans effort
   b. être amenée tout droit
   c. un mystérieux et sur instinct
   d. pigeons voyageurs

8. a. oiseaux
   b. pigeons voyageurs

9. a. Elle ne s'est pas laissée hypnotiser
   b. Elle a tenu bon

10. a. Voyez, vous n'êtes pas seul
    b. On se comprend
    c. Nous ne sommes pas seuls
    d. d'autres que nous... chaque jour plus nombreux

11. a. Pourquoi vous agiter
     b. Pourquoi vous tourmenter
     c. A quoi bon... se presser

12. a. rester indifférent
     b. laisser glisser
     c. laisser passer
     d. Qu'importe
     e. Il suffit d'attendre

13. a. amusez-vous
     b. le spectacle est distrayant

The same remarkable number of repetitions can be found in almost any passage in the text. The characters never seem to be satisfied with the simple expression of a thought but have to repeat it in another way. We shall note two different aspects of this stylistic device.

Firstly, repetition denotes hesitancy or doubt. The thought or feeling to be conveyed is not clear and has to be savoured, as though the character were trying to conjure it with the perfect verbal symbol. All our examples betray the characteristic of language seeking its object. It is here that Sartre's comment on Sarraute's style is most applicable.
Le meilleur de Nathalie Sarraute, c'est son style trébuchant, tâtonnant, si honnête, si plein de repentir, qui approche de l'objet avec des précautions pieuses, s'en écarte soudain par une sorte de pudeur ou par timidité devant la complexité des choses et qui, en fin de compte, nous livre brusquement le monstre tout baveux, mais presque sans y toucher, par la vertu magique d'une image.\footnote{Jean-Paul Sartre, "Préface," Portrait d'un Inconnu, p. 14.}

The sentences turn back on themselves as though constantly seeking reassurance while they tortuously pursue an object not clearly perceived. The three consecutive phrases of our first example provide a good illustration of this sense of insecurity. Each adds little to the meaning of its predecessor, but, for some reason, the narrator has to touch and retouch the sensation until satisfied he can move to new ground.

A second aspect of repetition is that of "gradation." The repeated words are not always precise similes, and the language is, in fact, following a sequence of thought that makes itself, by imperceptible steps, ever more precise. Our example 7 demonstrates this gradual evolution of thought from the initial "trouver sans effort" to the image "pigeons voyageurs" which sums up the whole concept. The gradation can also follow a logical sequence through time as thought develops. Number 10 will serve as an illustration: with each step the thought is advanced by slight but significant changes; "vous" becomes "on," then "nous," and finally "d'autres--eux." Alternatively, there is the movement of evolution which penetrates within the person, attempting to isolate and express the fundamental experience. Examples 2, 6 and 7 illustrate this type of gradation.
Here, however, we have uncovered a fundamental paradox, for repetition can stem both from a distrust of language and from a desire for precision. It can reflect a fear of communicating with others and a search for that very communication. The paradox can be better understood when we realize that there are two levels of language that are usually sharply distinguished. Sarraute, elsewhere, has called these two levels "sous conversation" and "conversation." What distinguishes them is the function of the words at each level: in the case of the former, the word is seeking to express an object, which is a sensation or experience, while in the latter its aim is to convey a message to another person. The problem with which the style is struggling is that of trying to translate raw sensation into communication, a problem which is faced equally by characters and by the authoress herself.

At the level of "sous conversation," the sensation is evoked, principally, by means of the images or, rather, by a series of images, for the total experience is too complex for any simple description. The experience is re-created in the manner described in Section 6, in which the woman gathers together those sensations appropriate to a fundamental feeling.

. . . autour de ce nom, comme les brins de paille emmêlés autour du pieu qui les rassemble et les soutient, les impressions, les sentiments qu'elle avaient éprouvés sur le moment viennent s'enrouler: un peu de pitié pour ce pauvre Bréhier, si sympathique, si fin, un peu de dédain, un vague apaisement, une douceur et un peu écoeurante satisfaction et, surtout, de l'étonnement: . . .

62 The essay bearing the title "Conversation et Sous-conversation" appears in L'Ere du Soupçon. In it Sarraute explains the terms.

63 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 120.
In this example the sensations have been reported in abstract language, "pitié," "dédain," etc. Generally, however, the sensations pertaining to a particular experience are conveyed by means of images. Again, almost any page will provide its example. We choose a short passage on pp. 7-8: "Face contre terre... Admirable. Regardez..." The experience to be expressed is that of scepticism before the adulation of a popular idol. The passage contains five images:

A. Religious reverence. ... Face contre terre; extases; choeurs.

B. Community or solidarity. ... au même moment; choeurs; synchronisme.

C. Flock of sheep ... ... bâlements.

D. Disease and medicine ... comme le médecin... la légère éruption.

E. Taste. ... ... Gourmand; savourant.

The effect of this imagery is to re-create for the reader the immediate experience, which cannot be satisfactorily conveyed by any abstract description such as that I have used above. In this respect, two features of Sarraute's style should be noted. Firstly, the images are, almost invariably, easily accessible to any reader.64 There are few esoteric or erudite references; only the pompous critics such as Marcel (pp. 58-68) with his literary and artistic allusions tend to obscurity. The most common sources of imagery are military terms, expressions related to law and order, animals, and religion. Other frequent images are related to buildings and to royalty, and a great

64 Fleming, in his article, "The Imagery of Tropism in the Novels of Nathalie Sarraute," remarks on the accessibility of the animal imagery. Apart from a few literary references, however, all the imagery can be grasped readily.
deal of vocabulary is drawn from the contrast of hardness and softness. The ready accessibility of the imagery means that the reader is able to draw as close as possible to the sensation to be conveyed. This brings us to the second aspect of the imagery, for Sarraute does not use her images for the purpose of stylistic embellishment or for comparison, but as the "objective correlative" of the sensation; they serve to translate experience directly. Tison Braun describes it as preconscious thought: "C'est la pensée même en train d'écloré, la matière 'mentale' avant son élaboration--et sa déformation--par l'intelligence." These two aspects of the imagery are closely related to the narrative point of view for, since the reader participates with the characters in the action, which is largely interior, he cannot be distanced from the scene by the use of rhetorical metaphor.

The imagery of "sous conversation" may be brief—that is, it may occur in a single word or as a small group of words—but it may also be extended into passages of sustained metaphor like that of the palace (pp. 95-106). In some cases a series of images continues for several episodes, clustering about some central catalyst. The images arising 

65 "Objective correlative" is a term coined by T. S. Eliot. It appeared first in an article entitled "Hamlet and his Problems" appearing in The Sacred Wood (7th ed.; London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 100. The first edition of the book appeared in 1920. The quotation of the full context will express, better than I can, the meaning of the term and reveal its appropriateness in describing the imagery of Nathalie Sarraute. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts which must terminate in sensory experience, are given the emotion is immediately evoked."

66 Tison Braun, Recherche de l'Authenticité, p. 22.
from the words "C'est très beau," in Section 9, is one example. In Section 12 it is the word "sot" that releases the series. But whether in the word or extended over several pages, the image serves the same purpose, that of recreating the actual sensation. By means of multiplication Sarraute is able to evoke the complexity and dynamic of experience.

At the level of "conversation" imagery is rarely used. When it does occur it is at moments of excitement. Thus, in Section 2, the character is carried away by his passionate partisanship. Another excitable outburst is seen in Section 10 where another character indulges in a violent attack upon the inconstancies of human taste. By and large, however, imagery is reserved for "sous conversation," for that level of being that is concealed from others. The image betrays too much of a person, too much of his reality. "Conversation" is, above all, a mask behind which the person can shelter, like Brûlé who retires behind his words: "Derrière l'écran protecteur des gestes, des mots... derrière le mince rideau de fumée, tout ce qui en lui, à l'arrivée de l'intrus avait fui, ... s'organise, rentre dans l'ordre." With spoken dialogue, the word acquires a social significance for it can unite or separate people. The word may be a weapon,

67 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 41.

68 Sarraute notes, in L'Ere du Souçon, the use of the word as weapon. On page 103 we find: "elles [les paroles] peuvent être... l'arme quotidienne, insidieuse et très efficace, d'innombrables petits crimes." The critic, J-L. Jaccard adds to this the importance of the word as a link between people. "Les mots sont le seul lien qui unisse les êtres, les uns aux autres." (J-L. Jaccard, Nathalie Sarraute [Zurich: Juris Druck Verlag, 1967], p. 23.)
as Sarraute states; its use is most certainly a risk, and the characters are keenly aware of this. The example of the woman (Section 6) who wants to call Mettetal to task is most apposite. Before saying anything she carefully moderates her words and selects her tone:

... elle va rogner leurs angles, moucheter leurs pointes, bien les emmailloter: des grosses boules un peu molles qui vont le bousculer gentiment, le chatouiller, juste pour rire, bon gros rire, bonne grosse voix, elle fronce les sourcils et plisse les lèvres d’un air de faite indignation.

The great prudence of the woman testifies to the power of the word. The word has largely replaced the gesture and it is the word, principally, that releases or triggers the action of *Les Fruits d’Or*. In the arena of the "salle commune," the word creates and the word kills. The words of Brûlé started the vogue of "Les Fruits d’Or"; the words of "le paysan" reversed the trend. The words of "les deux pairs" provoke the long image of the palace and destroy the ambitions of the group to find the promised land. Finally, the solitary character hopes to revive the fortunes of Bréhier by the use of the words "Et Les Fruits d’Or?"

The terrifying existential power of the word has an important consequence, which we can observe in the quotation above. The fact that the word is an action, which inevitably produces its reaction, leads to the impoverishment of language at the level of speech. Aware of the danger of speaking, people try to say something utterly inoffensive and innocuous. Sartre has described the role of the "lieu commun" in his preface to *Portrait d’un Inconnu*:

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69 See below, p. 53, for the use of the word "risque" by Barthes.

C'est le règne du lieu commun. Car ce beau mot a plusieurs sens: il désigne sans doute les pensées les plus rebattues mais c'est que ces pensées sont devenues le lieu de rencontre de la communauté. Chacun s'y retrouve, y retrouve les autres.\footnote{Sartre, "Préface," Portrait d'un Inconnu, pp. 8-9.}

The image is replaced by the cliché, and language, instead of communicating sensation, serves to reify it.\footnote{It is interesting that Sarraute should, on the one hand, see "conversation" as an uninterrupted continuation of the interior movement (L'Ère du Soupçon, p. 104), on the other, stress the characteristic "lieu commun" of communication. One explanation of this is that, to the extraordinarily sensitive Sarraute character, the slightest gesture or the most innocent word is capable of the wildest amplification. Another explanation is contained in a quotation from her interview with P. Schneider (New York Times Book Review): "It is the conversation that provides the apparent element. Unfortunately most of the readers and critics did not go beyond that appearance." Appearance for Sarraute is the equivalent of illusion or trompe-l'oeil; it is the everyday, "la gangue" that covers, conceals, and reifies the real substance of life. By comparison with the sensation of "sous-conversation," it is the "lieu commun" of "conversation," but within the "lieu commun," or through it, can be perceived the reality.}

"Les Fruits d'Or" employs all the commonplaces of literary criticism, even to the point of citing popularly-accepted classical models.

Sous cette chaude lumière, en lui la sève monte, les mots hardiment s'élèvent... "Admirable" Plus haut... "Une pure oeuvre d'art." Plus haut... "Rien dans nos lettres de comparable." Plus haut, encore plus haut... "Ce qu'on a écrit de plus beau..." toujours plus haut, les cimes immenses se déploient... "ce qu'on a écrit de plus beau depuis Stendhal... depuis Benjamin Constant."\footnote{Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 46.}

The irony of the passage lies in the enormous distance that separates the pretentious images of rising sap and mountain views and the utter banality of the literary comments. The language of criticism is studded with clichés, which usually pass unnoticed for the very good reason that they are clichés. They are the "mots de passe" or "talismans" by which the group maintains its identity, a process...
described by the cynical character of Section 1 (pp. 10-15). Obviously, expressions like those used by Brulé are vacuous. There is a continual stream of such literary cliché: "un vrai joyau," "un miracle," "très beau livre," "le meilleur livre depuis quinze ans." Such expressions are commented on by the character of Section 14 (pp. 222-223). "En ce moment, il faut les entendre... jusqu'au cent ans."

There is, however, a more esoteric language which makes use of technical jargon such as "galbe," "construction," "structure," "rapports des mots," "cohérence." "Les deux pairs," according to their detractor, developed their own language, which differs from the ordinary vocabulary insofar as it is comprehensible to only a few. It is not cliché in the sense that the words have been corrupted by overuse; rather it is language reified into formulae with the express intention of limiting communication to the elect. It is language divorced entirely from contact with experience, the mask without the face. While its conventions are accepted, as in Sections 2 to 7, such language will go unchallenged. With the introduction of scepticism, however, the emptiness of the words is revealed. Parrot cannot provide illustrations for his claims, and in Section 11 there is total confusion over the terms "Technique"... "Procédé"... "Forme."

In a work set in the salons of, presumably, Paris, it is natural that cliché should be found largely in conjunction with critical terminology. But the conversation is studded, too, with the sort of commonplace found in everyday speech. This type of cliché serves as a comment not so much on the language of the literary circle as on that used in the world outside the book. Thus, it is not underlined by continual
repetition in the text but is recognized by familiarity with the spoken language.

The cliché found at the level of everyday conversation is an expression which has lost its meaning or its metaphorical sense. As examples, one can cite expressions such as "je vous assure," "je l'avoue," "à tout prix," "impayable," "mourir de rire." Frequently, people are called "idiots," "brutes," or even "crétins," words which have lost all semblance of their original sense. Brûlé advises his visitor "de suivre son bonhomme de chemin." We twice find the expression "enfoncer des portes ouvertes" used to mean "stating the obvious."

"Faire marcher" is a common cliché, and its use offers a sharp contrast to the powerful, militaristic imagery of "sous-conversation." The cliché and the epigram are examples of the tendency of speech to fall into habitual patterns. They are key words of a society that seeks security in conformity, and thus serve the purpose of enabling the individual to speak without provoking a reaction. They reflect the movement that we found in the tropism, the desire of the organism to conform to its environment.

The pattern of the narrative is clearly imprinted upon the style. The use of the present tense and of the dialogue form is appropriate to the point of view. In the repetition we noticed both hesitancy and gradation, which correspond to the paradoxical relations between individual and group, while the levels of "conversation" and "sous-conversation" are those of plot and narrative, respectively, with the wealth of imagery of the latter becoming reified into the cliché of speech. The style presents a pattern of constant struggle between the deep and
individual experience of a sensation and the effort to express that sensation in a language that is constantly petrified by social conformity. "... je le sens très bien, mais je ne sais pas l'exprimer.... je n'ai à ma disposition que de pauvres mots complètement usés à force d'avoir servi à tous et à tout...." The character is struggling with the same problem as his creator. It is a persistent theme of Sarraute's reflections on writing, that the reality that she has experienced beneath the mask of customary appearance requires a new style and a new form.

La réalité pour le romancier, c'est l'inconnu, l'invisible. Ce qu'il est, lui semble-t-il, le premier à saisir. Ce qui ne se laisse pas exprimer par les formes connues et usées. Mais ce qui exige pour se révéler, qui ne peut se révéler que par un nouveau mode d'expression, par de nouvelles formes.

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74Ibid., p. 128.

ASPECTS OF THE FICTION

In turning now to discussions of plot, character, space, and time, we are moving from narrative into fiction, from "discours" into "histoire." The plot, or story, is "what" is related,\textsuperscript{76} while the character is developed as an individual personality. Space is created by means of descriptive passages and time, by its chronological verisimilitude, adds to the aura of realism. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the golden age of the novel, the fictional aspects were generally predominant. Plots were tortuous, full of incidents, often unexpected, and characters were made, either through subtleties of psychology or through detailed visual description, to take on the illusion of reality, to be life-like. If we think of the work of Balzac or of Dickens, no detail is spared in recreating the physical space in which the action takes place, while time is constantly used to create tension, or suspense as Barthes calls it. We have only to think of the lethargic pace of the good by comparison with the frenetic activity of evil in a Dickens novel to see the way in which time served to intensify the story. At the beginning of the \textit{Heart of Midlothian}, Walter Scott delays the arrival of the coach while bringing out the details of background necessary for an understanding of the action, action that will only begin when the coach, discerned already far in

\textsuperscript{76}See above, pp. 4-5.
the distance, finally, after slowly navigating the tortuous road, 
reaches those waiting in the foreground of the scene.

All this Sarraute has consciously attempted to eradicate from 
her work. The plot and the character are the main targets of continual 
attack. Description, too, is dismissed as appearance, and if time is 
not subjected to open comment, it is because its fate is understood 
to be sealed with that of the plot. This, however, does not mean that 
those four aspects of the novel are not present in Sarraute's work. 
They all have roles to play, but they are minor compared with their 
past significance. The fictional element has been subordinated to the 
narrative.

Rousset identifies the emphasis on the creative role of the 
form as a principal difference between modern and earlier writing. 
In the context of a discussion of the ideas of Henry James, he says: 
"C'est l'oeuvre, c'est la structure de l'oeuvre qui est inventrice; 
'une forme est féconde en idées'."77 Earlier, the form was seen as a 
way of expressing a pre-existing idea. Sarraute has ventured further 
than most writers towards the opposite pole where the fiction is 
subordinated to the narrative, where the meaning arises from the form.78

Plot

In discussing the narrative structure of Les Fruits d'Or, we 
have already touched upon the plot, for it is the plot which triggers

77Rousset, Forme et Signification, p. xii.
78These comments are only true in the broadest sense. In the 
nineteenth century some writers, most notably Flaubert, were already 
seeking form purified of content. Sarraute's article "Flaubert 
le Précurseur" shows that she is fully aware of this.
the tropisms with their long digressions into the psychological element, the very substance of the work.

In Barthes's analysis of fiction,79 which we touched upon in our introduction, the plot is seen as certain "unités" ("fonctions cardinales" or "noyaux") linked together horizontally into a sequence. Such a sequence might be: entering a restaurant, being shown to a table, ordering a meal, being served the courses in sequence and paying the bill. The "noyaux" are further described as being moments of risk which we should no doubt interpret in the sense of existential acts, for they effectively determine future events though their results cannot be foreseen.

Ces fonctions peuvent être à première vue fort insignifiantes; ce qui les constitue, ce n'est pas le spectacle (l'importance, le volume, la rareté ou la force de l'action énoncée), c'est, si l'on peut dire, le risque: les fonctions cardinales sont les moments de risque du récit.80

Between the "noyaux" lie other "unités" called "catalyses" which, at the level of the plot, serve mainly to fill in space and take on significance at the higher levels of "actions" or "narration."

This analysis is particularly useful to us in our study of Sarraute's work for it helps us to identify clearly the role that she has assigned to the plot. We know, from her own critical writings, that Sarraute is very consciously attempting to divert the reader's attention away from the plot to what she sees as the important functions and relationships of literature. Plot in the past has only served to distract

79 Barthes, "Analyse structurale des récits."

80 Ibid., p. 10.
the reader.

Ce sont ces gros mobiles, ces vastes mouvements très apparents et eux seuls que voient d'ordinaire les conteurs et les lecteurs, entraînés dans le mouvement de l'action et talonnés par l'intrigue, des romans behavioristes. Ils n'ont ni le temps ni le moyen—ne disposant d'aucun instrument d'investigation assez délicat—de voir avec exactitude les mouvements plus fugitifs et plus fins que ces grands mouvements pourraient dissimuler.81

The plot, then, became so prominent and so mechanical that it concealed, rather than revealed, the reality that Sarraute is seeking.

In Les Fruits d'Or, there is a plot, but it has been relegated to the background behind the subtle movements of the human psyche. Stripped of its distracting colours, it nevertheless plays the mechanical role of creating the sequential links upon which the narrative hangs. The plot is conveyed to the reader, not in a series of events, for there are few actions in the book, but in dialogue. The grossness that Sarraute finds in overt action has given place to the greater sensitivities of the word,82 and it is through what people say to each other that we learn of the current fortunes of "Les Fruits d'Or." Barthes's "noyaux" are found in the responses that the characters make to one another, and, if we look again at Section 6, we see how limited a role the dialogue and the plot have. In this section the


82 Sarraute has this to say of the contrast between deed and word: "Les actes, en effet, se déploient en terrain découvert et dans la lumière crue du grand jour. Les plus infimes d'entre eux, comparés à ces délicats et minuscules mouvements intérieurs paraissent grossiers et violents: . . .

Mais à défaut d'actes, nous avons à notre disposition les paroles. Les paroles possèdent les qualités nécessaires pour capter, protéger et porter au dehors ces mouvements souterrains à la fois impatients et craintifs." (L'Ere du Soupçon, pp. 100-102)
dialogue covers twelve lines of text and is presumably continuous, but between statement and response Sarraute has inserted six pages of narrative which plumb the psychological depths of the individual without furthering the story. With few exceptions this is the pattern that is found throughout the book. Even in Section 1, in which a great deal of information has to be conveyed to the reader without resorting to a single narrator, the dialogue scarcely exceeds the narration. In terms of Barthes’s analysis, what this implies is that his lowest level of significance, that of fiction, has been reduced to no more than the merest outline.

There is, however, a plot and it is briefly described in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUTLINE OF THE PLOT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 1**  
A conversation is in progress between two persons concerning a previous discussion with a third. The ostensible subject is Courbet but the source of disagreement lies in the different attitude displayed to changes in taste. "Les Fruits d'Or" is mentioned to heal the rift, but its introduction causes greater misunderstanding.

**Section 2**  
The third person visits the eminent critic, Brûlé, to ask his opinion of "Les Fruits d'Or," since he cannot make up his own mind. Brûlé is convinced that it is admirable.

**Section 3**  
Brûlé composes an article in praise of "Les Fruits d'Or."

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83 Two exceptions will be mentioned later. See below, pp. 77-78.
### Table 4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 4</th>
<th>The article is the first shot in a long battle between formal critics and the literary circle, the result of which is the establishment of Bréhier's popularity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sections 5 and 6</td>
<td>Success now being assured for the book, reality and truth can be safely ignored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 7</td>
<td>&quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; becomes the standard by which all is to be measured, time as well as reality and truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 8</td>
<td>The intervention of the outsider, &quot;le paysan,&quot; is the signal for doubts to spread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 9</td>
<td>Parrot, a critic, is unable to substantiate his enthusiastic praise of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 10</td>
<td>Formalist criteria give way to subjective judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 11</td>
<td>Imitation can be demonstrated to be better than the original.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 12</td>
<td>Admirers of Bréhier are now as rare as were, previously, his detractors, and must face ostracism if they declare their views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 13</td>
<td>The group denies claims to spontaneity in art, for all art can be categorized and artists pigeon-holed according to those whom they have imitated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 14</td>
<td>The isolated admirer at the end can rely only upon his personal response to Bréhier, though he cannot avoid the attempt to re-introduce the title &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; into the continuing ferment of the literary group which has, by this time, embarked on the crest of a new vogue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This outline shows the cyclical pattern of rise and fall that we have already mentioned in discussing the narrative structure. The fourteen sections divide equally, with seven belonging to the climax and seven to the anti-climax. It is the seventh section that the popularity of Bréhier reaches its peak. "Une limite a été atteinte. Là, en tout cas, dans cette direction-là, le chemin est barré."\(^{84}\) Preceding and

\(^{84}\) Sarraute, *Les Fruits d'Or*, p. 130.
following this moment are two episodes, the one involving Guy, the other Jean-Pierre. Both wish to become true disciples of Bréhier and both abase themselves appropriately before the very miracle of his genius. Guy is admitted into the group, while Jean-Pierre, one page later, is rebuffed. The balance is perfect. The peak has been passed, and further movement will be in the opposite direction.

If the pattern of the plot is not usually as symmetrical as the two episodes in Section 7, there is a recurrence of incident and idea which creates a balance between the two halves of the book. Firstly, of course, there is an obvious affinity between the first and the last sections, the declining vogue of Courbet corresponding to the new star that is rising at the end. The correspondence is underlined by the "minuterie" and the "horlogerie," mechanical devices which are mysteriously responsible for the turn of events.

The group, which is uniformly imminent and immanent throughout the work, changes its role at mid-point, for, at the first, it is content to be guided by its leaders, the critics, while in the second half it becomes the arbiter of taste. The autocratic hierarchy of the first half becomes, later, the revolutionary council. The difference is revealed by the images of the palace and of the sacking of the palace. In the first episode of Section 4 critical acclaim of Brulé's article is like the invasion of an army of occupation which drives out the rebels and re-establishes order and true authority. Order and authority are, during the decline of the vogue, to be challenged; critics and authors are no longer objects of adulation but of attack, as in the case of Parrot, and of categorization. The
popular will prevails where, before, the people were moulded by their leaders. Brûlé, who expounds the elitist aesthetic of the formalists, is replaced by the philosopher of Section 10, who denies the possibility of any absolute judgment. Similarly, Valéry, the epitome of reason, gives place to Rimbaud, the inexplicable genius.

Parallel situations and incidents can be multiplied. The woman in Section 4, who seeks proof of Bréhier's genius "le livre en main," sees herself as a martyr in the cause of truth, in much the same way as does the man in Section 12 upholding Bréhier against a hostile group. He thinks of himself as a revolutionary of missionary. He refers in his eulogy of Bréhier's merits to Watteau, a name that is scoffed at by the group. Earlier (p. 64) Watteau was considered a paradigm of aesthetic genius. The eulogy itself is reminiscent of Marcel's remarks (pp. 60-63), and of the virtuoso panegyric of Orthil (pp. 114-118), especially his discussion of the conclusion of Bréhier's book. The remarkable difference of response accorded these opinions in the two halves of the book is made yet more startling by the similarity of their content. While Orthil is warmly acclaimed for his brilliance, the character in Section 12 moves to protect himself as though he fears he will be stoned by the group.

The plot, then, describes a regular cycle whose peak is reached in Section 7. The upward and downward movements of that cycle are balanced through corresponding situations, incidents, and arguments; the one is the reverse of the other as values swing over to the opposite pole. But the process behind the cyclical movement remains constant. Whether Bréhier's vogue is rising or falling, the
fundamental pattern of the plot is the same, for it concerns the relationship of individual to group.

Todorov has been above all concerned with the reduction of the "récit" to its basic elements, both by attempting to establish a limited number of plot patterns, and by using the "micro-récit," or incident within the novel, as an illustration of the total structure. "... on suppose que le récit représente la projection syntagmatique d'un réseau de rapports paradigmatisches." Following "le modèle homologique" offered by Todorov, we shall select a number of incidents from "Les Fruits d'Or," arrange them in the following table, and attempt to draw from them a common pattern. Obviously we cannot list all the incidents in the book but we believe that our findings are generalizable.

TABLE 5
THE PATTERNS OF TEN SELECTED PLOT INCIDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Persons Involved</th>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Description of Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3; anon. (A,B,C.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C offers a reproduction to A and B; B ignores it; C is offended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A asks C's opinion of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;; C replies without conviction; A feels estranged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2; C and Brûlé</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C praises Courbet; Brûlé flinches; C feels out of his class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>C asks Brûlé's help in judging &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;; Brûlé responds by giving his opinion; C concurs with Brûlé.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;Elle&quot; and Orthil</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;Elle&quot; claims Bréhier is not realistic; Orthil crushes her; &quot;Elle&quot; is an object of derision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85 Todorov, Catégories du récit, p. 130.
Table 5 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Persons Involved</th>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Description of Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2; &quot;Il₁&quot; and &quot;Le Paysan&quot;</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&quot;Il&quot; wants &quot;le Paysan&quot; to justify his argument; &quot;le Paysan&quot; does so; alliance formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&quot;Il&quot; déprecates Varenger; &quot;le Paysan&quot; disagrees; conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2; &quot;Il₂&quot; and group</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&quot;Il&quot; praises Bréhier; group denigrates Bréhier; &quot;Il&quot; is &quot;stoned.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3; &quot;Il₂&quot; Bréhier and group</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&quot;Il&quot; feels sympathy with Bréhier; uncertain response; dissatisfaction—incompleted movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&quot;Il&quot; broaches subject of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot; in group; scoffing response; &quot;Il&quot; alone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the ten incidents, which we have used as illustration, present themselves in triadic form. The first term of each is a proposal or offer; this is either accepted or rejected in the second term. Finally, we are presented with the outcome, which is either alienation or integration. We can formulate the pattern in the following way:

ACTION + REACTION — OUTCOME

This pattern fits the majority of incidents in the book, but there are exceptions. Section 3, Brulé's scene, would appear to be a case in point; but, in fact, this section conforms to our model, and the explanation is given in Section 4, when we are told how "les deux pairs" managed to achieve such eminence. Having cut themselves off long ago from contact with others, they interact only with an idealized image of themselves. "Ils se sont enfermés à triple tour. Seuls avec une autre image qu'ils n'ont plus cesse de contempler, une image d'eux mêmes
aux proportions gigantesques, toujours plus énorme, se déployant de
tous côtés. Incident 9 in our table, however, does seem to be an
exception. "Il," certain that he is right in his judgment, aspires to
an individual, unmediated contact with "Les Fruits d'Or" and their
author which cannot be reciprocated. He is unable to maintain his
uncompromising stance for long since he gets no support: his environ­
ment is silent. Like earlier, similar individualists, except perhaps
Jean Laborit, he returns to the group, as we see at the end of the
book (Incident 10).

If we turn our attention again to the overall pattern of the
plot, we can now see better the reason for the parallelism of incident
and situation, and also for the opposition. The ascending curve is
started by the critic Brûlé, who states that "Les Fruits d'Or" is
admirable. Any "action" thereafter is either a reaffirmation of this
initial blast, or a "reaction" to it. Brûlé's words establish the
pattern until the intrusion of "le paysan," the outsider, speaking with
the voice of the common man. His equally absolute statement: "Je crois
que ça ne vaut absolument rien. . .," made in the context of the same
literary society, will produce the same pattern of reactions but with
the opposite effect. Nothing remains after the cycle has been com­
pleted, except perhaps a lone voice in the wilderness of new activity.

Despite the fact that the plot plays a consistently subordinate
role in the test, we have devoted several pages to it since Sarraute's
use of it is of interest. The plot is important in that it provides a

86 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 98.
bare skeleton upon which to hang the narrative but it is not allowed to intrude upon the real substance of the work contained in the movements. It is, of course, no accident that plot and narrative structures show close resemblances. The action-reaction-outcome sequence of the plot is, indeed, the emergence on the surface of the stimulus-response-harmony that was the fundamental structure of the narrative. If the plot and narrative are always related to the same paradigm structure, which has its source in the vision of the writer, it is unusual for the plot to become, so evidently, a function of the narrative.

Character

The discussion of plot structure leads directly to another aspect of the fiction, that of character, for it is the character who effects the incidents of the plot. Structural critics, indeed, use the word "agent," instead of "character" in order to direct attention to the fact that it is the acts, rather than the psychological depth of the individual, that are significant. According to Barthes, the character should be seen as "... non comme un être, mais comme un participant." This may indeed be, as Todorov remarks, a feature of modern literature which in its limitation of the importance of character is reverting to medieval forms. Most of the history of the novel, however, has been dominated by the character.

Nathalie Sarraute reacts to the well-rounded character of fiction with the same ferocity that she displayed in her attack on the

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87 Barthes, "Analyse structurale des récits," p. 16.
well-built plot. The arguments are similar. The individual character
presents a distracting surface to the reader as well as a dull repetition
of ready-made people reminiscent of the displays in a waxworks. "Musée
Grévin" is, for Sarraute, an epithet of no little force:

Tel le chien de Pavlov, à qui le tintement d'une clochette fait
secréter de la salive, sur le plus faible indice il [le lecteur
ou le romancier] fabrique des personnages. Comme au jeu
des "statues," tous ceux qu'il touche se pétrifient. Ils vont
grossir dans sa mémoire la vaste collection de figurines de cire
que tout au long de ses journées il complète à la hâte et que,
depuis qu'il a l'âge de lire, n'ont cessé d'enrichir d'innom-
brables romans. 89

What Sarraute is seeking, like Virginia Woolf before her, is "les endroits
obscurs de la psychologie." Well drawn characters, some of which do
appear in her books, present impenetrable surfaces which stop the eyes
of readers like breastplates. The point of view that she has taken and
the tropism are, precisely, the forms necessary for the penetration
and expression of the interior movements, subjacent to all human inter-
action. Proust noted, as from afar, the bubbles that burst to the
surface of society and people, arising from some unknown slime beneath.
It is the slime that Sarraute is after. 90

There is, then, an apparent paradox. On the one hand, as we
stated in chapter I, the character has been placed in the very fore-
ground of the action; on the other, he has been demolished. The
paradox is resolved, however, as soon as we realize that the character,
like the plot is a function of the narrative and not the fiction.

89 Sarraute, L'Ère du Souçon, p. 70.

90 Only once in Les Fruits d'Or does this shifting, unstable world
of human interaction appear attractive (pp. 56-57). The assumption that
what lives in "les endroits obscurs" is nasty pervades the entire book
and gives Sarraute's work its overall tone of sickness.
Psychology has been disassociated from the fictional person and has become identified with the way in which the world is seen and expressed. Barthes makes the same distinction using the terms "personne psychologique" and "personne linguistique":

... la "psychologie" ne peut en effet—paradoxalement—s'acccorder d'un pur système de la personne, car en ramenant tout le récit à l'instance seul du discours, ou si l'on préfère à l'acte de locution, c'est le contenu même de la personne qui est menacé: la personne psychologique (d'ordre référentiel) n'a aucun rapport avec la personne linguistique, qui n'est jamais définie par des dispositions, des intentions, des traits, mais seulement par sa place (codée) dans le discours.91

Not surprisingly, then, the first feature of characterization to note in Les Traits d'Or is the absence of readily identifiable characters. Most people are anonymous; others are named only after they have spoken, such as Brûlé, Marcel and Henri. A few, however, are clearly identified, as in the case of Jean Laborit, or Jean-Pierre whose naming by the group serves as an accusation. Jean-Pierre is the only name to occur twice, but we do not know if it is the same character, for not only are names little used, but there is little characterization. With a few exceptions there is no attempt made to individualize the characters by description or by distinctive habits of speech. Everybody displays the same psychological features, or, if there are differences, they are insignificant ones of degree or detail rather than of kind. In Sarraute's view, stated in L'Ere du Soupçon, and confirmed by her novels, people are psychologically identical. In the depths she has

found "une matière anonyme, identique chez tous."  92

Some characters, however, are clearly drawn. "Brûlé," "les
deux pairs" and "Orthil" are all figures which stand out in our
memories 93 and whom we could describe with some accuracy. Less prominent,
but still describable, would be "le petit Dulud" in Section 1, and Guy
from Section 7. What is common to all these characters is that they
are caricatures, faceless masks, objects of admiration. Indeed, an
image closely associated with Brûlé is that of the machine. These few
instances serve to prove Sarraute's rule that the well-constructed
caracter is unrelated to reality. In Section 12 Bréhier's character
is spread out for our scrutiny and analysis. He is garrulous and has
bad taste, we learn, but the accumulation of evidence fails utterly to
bring him to life, for his detractors are, like almost everyone else
in the book, belligerently partisan. Bréhier's traits are artifacts of
evidence which reveal nothing within the context of such a court.

Sarraute's view of the identity of human psychology clearly owes
a great deal to Dostoevsky. In his work she has observed the startling
twists and turns of the characters as they confront others, at one
moment fawning in humility, at the next rebuffing with pride; and she
finds behind this confusing movement the attempt of human creatures to
make contact with others: "... ils se modèlent sur l'image d'eux-mêmes,

92 In his socio-psychological study of Sarraute's work, Nathalie
Sarraute, J-L. Jaccard sees the characters as members of the reviled
bourgeoisie: "Ils sont tous semblables, cette carapace qu'ils ont
revêtue est pareille à toutes les autres carapaces; rien ne nous permet
de distinguer un individu de l'autre." (p. 30)

93 The memory is specifically mentioned by Sarraute (L'Ere du Soup-
çon, p. 70) for it has the tendency to fix or petrify images which
obstruct future perception.
que les autres leur renvoient." Not only, however, does Dostoevsky offer her an example of human identity, he also shows that outward actions are simply the symptom of the real drama that is taking place within the person. By way of example Sarraute discusses the scene in The Brothers Karamazov between Father Zossima and old Karamazov:

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

The continuity between interior movement and outward action, and the identity of mankind are the fundamental principles of Sarraute's psychology, as we shall see in studying the structure of relationships between people, the motivation for action.

In the psychological structure we find repeated the pattern that we saw in the plot and the narrative, the structure of the tropism. The person is always "en situation," always forced to adapt to an environment that changes and which he changes. Both determined and determining, though rarely consciously, the individual being forms one of the terms of a continual dialectic with his society. Ideally, there exists repose, but in the present there is only movement.

Conceptually, the movement begins with a stimulus, an act, which

94Sarraute, L’Ère du Soupçon, pp. 34-35. It is interesting to note the similarities in the psychology of Sarraute’s work and of that described by René Girard in his book Deceit, Desire, and the Novel; Self and Other in Literary Structure (trans. by Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965). Sarraute’s characters continually find themselves in mediated relationships, and their most prominent aspiration is that of direct contact. It is not, perhaps, surprising to find that both Sarraute and Girard are students of Dostoevsky.

95Sarraute, L’Ère du Soupçon, p. 29.
upsets the ideal harmony. We have already noted the nature of this stimulus and given examples. What is important is that it creates, between individual and environment, a tension or dissension which demands resolution. The first pronouncements of Les Fruits d'Or create this tension, as though winding up a spring. "... Oh écoute, tu es terrible, tu pourrais faire un effort... j'étais horriblement gênée." The word "gêner" occurs several times in the book, and is supplemented by its synonyms, "inquiéter," "froisser," "déranger."

Situations denoting anxiety, sometimes of an extreme nature, are frequent. There is the woman who feels she has just had an electric shock: "Un choc la fait sursauter, une douleur la déchire." Judgments have the power of blows to create intolerable feelings of tension. "C'est fait exprès" is an example in Section 8; "ceux qui admirent les fruits d'or sont des sots" is another from Section 21.

We have already noticed the effect of Mettetal's statement on the woman narrator of Section 6; she panicked like a stampeding crowd. The continuous interaction between people in the ceaselessly evolving present means that there is a constant tension. We shall call this first step of the psychological structure "anguish."

The response to anguish is, naturally enough, to attempt to escape it, so that, to use Sartre's expression, we can call this second step "flight." The contradiction created between the individual and

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96 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 7.
97 Ibid., p. 64.
98 Sartre, "Préface," Portrait d'un Inconnu, p. 11. We shall consider the third step, "harmony," simultaneously with "flight," for, if the individual seeks to avert anguish, he seeks also to return to a condition in which he imagines himself at peace with his environment.
his society must be terminated, for life is evidently not possible in such conditions. It is impossible to sustain for any length of time an individual opinion without the support of at least one other person. Total isolation is unbearable, except perhaps for the man in Section 1 who rejects groups on principle. Examples to the contrary, however, are ubiquitous. In Section 1 the woman seeks to heal the rift between herself and the third person, while he in his turn (Section 2), has to choose between two separate societies, the elite, with Brûlé, or the commoners, with his interlocutors from Section 1. Section 4 contributes the example of the woman who misjudges her master, Lucien, finds herself isolated, and has rapidly to reverse her opinion; the man who would like to contradict her is obliged by the prevailing mood of society to agree. At the end of Section 4 we find the man who, having demonstrated the hollowness of the claims and pronouncements of the eminent critics, needs the support of, at least, one other person for him to feel reassured.

Que quelqu'un entende son appel, qu'un seul d'entre eux veuille bien venir se ranger à ses côtés... Qu'un seul autre regard que le sien perçoive ce qu'il voit... Il n'en demande pas plus. Pour qu'il puisse se sentir absolument sûr, invincible, pour que puisse triompher la vérité, il lui faut juste cela: un seul témoin.99

The very same need appears again at the end of the book, in Section 14, when the solitary admirer of Bréhier, even against his will, is driven to share his conviction with others in the hope of finding sympathizers. However, the conflict is not always resolved by the submission of individual to environment. On a number of occasions the individual

99Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, pp. 105-06.
refuses to submit and, seeing himself as a martyr, revolutionary, or pariah, is willing to take the consequences of his action. He or she is figuratively eliminated in images of expulsion or even of stoning (Sections 5 and 12).\textsuperscript{100} The character in Section 14 has come to terms with his banishment but is nevertheless planning to win the group over to his opinion. Bréhier's career summarizes the interaction between individual and environment, for while his book pleased the group there was no tension; once "Les Fruits d'Or" becomes unacceptable, however, it creates a situation only to be resolved by the execration of the book and the figurative death of its author.\textsuperscript{101}

It should be noted that the group cannot always be identified with the environment for its nature changes and, at times, it acts like an individual, even to the point of taking on the role of narrator.\textsuperscript{102} The environment of the first half of the book is controlled by the critics. The group, like the individual, has to adapt itself to the current pronouncements of its leaders of taste, though it does offer, initially at least, an alternative, formless and slimy environment to those who are apprehensive of the barren world of the aesthetic elites. We hear of the feelings of "Nous, le menu peuple...," and we learn that the group, too, seeks harmony in its vision of a promised land.\textsuperscript{103} From

\textsuperscript{100}The most violent movements in Les Fruits d'Or are probably those made by the eyes, but the interpersonal conflict, experienced within the character and expressed in banal language, takes on the emotional proportion of physical action, even action of a violent nature. In the cases here the emotional context is equivalent to that of actual physical expulsion and stoning.

\textsuperscript{101}See above, footnote 100.

\textsuperscript{102}See, for examples, pp. 82-83 and 86-90 of Les Fruits d'Or.

\textsuperscript{103}Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 87 and p. 94.
Section 7 onwards the group's role changes. Jean-Pierre is expelled, not because he did not submit, but because the group made a collective decision about this particular individual. Thereafter the group is no longer guided by the critics. It is its own master and becomes, in effect, the environment to which individuals have to conform. The "Promised Land" in which the masses are the arbiters of taste has been found, and the masses attack the critics, such as Parrot, and make the decisions as to who is to be considered great.

Submission of the individual to his society is, of course, an abnegation of life itself. The individual becomes an object, something to be moulded. Jean Laborit sees himself as empty and sterile: "un réceptacle vide que remplira entièrement ce qu'ils vont y déposer."

Similarly, the character of Section 12, momentarily opting for harmony, becomes viscous matter that will take any shape whatsoever: "Dans ce moule que vous m'avez donné, que je sais, comme vous, manier, la substance invisible se coule, s'adapte parfaitement."

Absorption into the environment is a process of reification in which the individual loses the ability to act. But it is not the only possible means of escape from anxiety. Brûlé, "les deux pairs," and Orthil illustrate another direction for "flight." The individual can avert anguish by becoming inaccessible to others. He can put up a smoke-screen of words like Brûlé, play the role of virtuoso like Orthil, or baffle the audience with jargon like "les deux pairs," all devices which allow the person to see without being seen, to attack without fear.

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104 Ibid., p. 195.
of being attacked. The process is best described in the analysis of "les deux pairs."

... ils se sont barricadés en eux-mêmes, ont bouché toutes les issues, la plus fine fissure, pour empêcher de pénétrer en eux, de s'insinuer en eux douloureusement ce qui filtrait de chaque regard posé sur eux, de chaque intonation de voix.  

But the protective devices, the masks, become in fact moulds. The individual is once again reified, this time into a role which he has chosen, but which is defined by others, by the society. He cannot contradict society, as Lucien finds when called upon to pronounce judgment upon "Les Fruits d'Or." Nor can he let slip his mask for a moment and reveal his humanity, as Parrot did. The critic, the author, even the King are roles in which the individual can find protection just so long as he recognizes that it is the society, the environment, which defines those roles. This individual is no freer than he who seeks anonymity within the group.

In summary, we can create a triadic structure of characterization using the three terms that we selected earlier:

ANGUISH -- FLIGHT -- HARMONY

This is, of course, not an isolated sequence but one link in an endless chain of such sequences. Each and every individual is submerged in a continual cycle of movements from harmony-to-anguish-to-harmony. His attempts to escape by submission to the environment, or by elaborate self-protection are no more than brief moments of harmony to be disrupted by the ceaseless flow of time.

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105 Ibid., p. 98.
Another unusual feature in *Les Fruits d'Or* is the lack of situation for the action. Only once in the book is a setting described. At the end of Section 1, the woman is upset because the third party of the conversation gave a non-committal answer to her question about "Les Fruits d'Or." She goes back to see him to get a more satisfactory response. From outside in the street she sees the light in his apartment, and we follow her up the stairs to his door and inside: "Dans la salle commune des femmes échevelées aux longues mèches rêches se frappent la poitrine, ..." This appears to be the initial impetus that releases the Bréhier vogue. "Les Fruits d'Or" is led from the dark into "la salle commune," which, we gather from the image, is the setting for extraordinary events. In the first two sections (pp. 8 and 25) there are brief indications, in the descriptions of furniture and pictures on the walls, that the action takes place in a study. Apart from this, there is no description of place.

On the other hand, however, the reader is very much aware of space. Without being specifically indicated, the space in which the events occur exerts a constant pressure upon them. Even without the scene in Section 1, the reader is conscious that he is in a room and, probably, in quite a small room, which creates a sense of isolation from the outside world as well as a feeling of claustrophobia. Despite the

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107 The image cannot, of course, be taken literally but it can be ambiguous, both evoking the woman's sensations as she enters the room, but also suggesting to the reader the idea of insanity which will pervade the scenes he is to witness in just such rooms as this.
fact that vicious assaults are launched from one armchair to another, nobody gets up and leaves, for this is the salon society of the literary coterie whose weapons are words and whose wounds bleed only internally. Open animosity would, of course, lead to immediate expulsion from the desirable elite.

Such a description is speculative since it is never written. As with plot and character Sarraute has repressed the fictional aspect, the aspect of space which would allow us to create an objective, illusory world, with the result that our concept of space is a function of the relationship between characters. Space, like action, belongs to "les endroits obscurs de la psychologie," which we have associated with the narrative. Man is no longer determined by physical circumstances against which he struggles in overt action, but by his interaction with an environment which he only apprehends in his inmost depths. Visible space is replaced by the psychological space of interpersonal relations.

The fundamental structure of this space is that of a tightly enclosed form. We sense, behind the episodic conflicts from which there is no escape, the closed room. This same feeling of being shut in is found again in the concept of the group as a completely unified body: "une seule masse," "un seul bloc." In Section 2 Brûlé's study is seen as a little haven of civilization entirely encircled by barbarity.

The circle is the paradigm of the enclosed form and it recurs frequently in descriptions of space in the text. The palace image (Section 4), which is employed specifically to create the sense of inclusion and exclusion, presents society as a series of concentric circles about the central person of the monarch. The fortress (Section 9)
is described as "l'enceinte fortifiée," deliberately exploiting the idea of circularity. On several occasions the group itself is clearly referred to as a circle. In Section 1 the group is seen as an exclusive club, both closed and circular. "On est, n'est-ce pas, entre gens du même monde. Mêmes clubs fermés, mêmes cercles." Elsewhere the group is the howling pack that surrounds its prey and is held at bay by lighted matches. "... ces allumettes que l'homme cerné en pleine nuit par une meute de loups frotte en toute hâte." The woman who challenged Mettetel is figuratively stoned and expelled by the group described as the "cercle des fidèles."

Relationships between people are also perceived in terms of circularity, of proximity to some dimly-perceived centre. Marcel, annoyed that a woman he dislikes has somehow insinuated herself into a position protected by general opinion from his attack, decides that he cannot remove her:

Mais comment se retenir de la pousser, de la bousculer un peu, allons, il y a place pour les autres ici, n'est-ce pas?. . . pour moi aussi, voyez. . . allons, poussez-vous donc, je m'installe, je m'étire. . .

The image is of a small enclosed space to which everyone seeks entry, a central object of desire.

More explicit is the anguish experienced by the man in Section 12 who feels his alienation from the group in terms of displacement from

109 Ibid., p. 181.
110 See above, p. 69, footnote 100.
111 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 59.
This image is the key to the concept of space that is implicit in *Les Fruits d'Or*. The only space that pertains to the fiction is that of "la salle commune" of Section 1, and it may well be that this is, indeed, the setting of later sections and episodes. But space is psychological rather than physical, the sense of being confined by one's society or group, and the sense of one's relative position in it, by which is meant one's proximity to the centre of the circle.

**Time**

The distinction that has been made between narrative and fiction has been used by Ricardou to analyze the function of time in the novel. There is a time pertaining to the fiction and another to the narrative, and the two are unlikely to be co-extensive. The narrative may refer to fictional past or future; there may be different episodic durations and each may be interrupted without affecting the continuity of the other.

The difference between narrative and fictional time in *Les Fruits d'Or* is both illuminating and significant, for it shows yet again the predominance of narrative over fiction, of interior movement over overt action. We can illustrate this by making use of the diagrammatic approach suggested by Ricardou. In all of the following diagrams the

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two parallel axes represent narrative and fictional time, and in this first figure we see that they are almost co-extensive.

1 year (approx.)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Narrative} \\
\hline \\
\text{Fiction} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Conversation preceding Section 1

Fig. 1—Comparison of Narrative and Fictional Duration

We learn (p. 175) that the duration of events is about one year. This total period is divided, in the book, into fourteen sections which, in terms of time, are very short. Clearly, there is a break in both narrative and fiction between one section and the next, but there is never any indication of its duration. The episodes, on the other hand, seem to be associated in continuous time, though some of the interior monologues (Sections 12 and 14) could well be seen as extracts from diaries at different dates.

The fiction of Les Fruits d'Or extends slightly longer than the narrative because of the previous conversation referred to in Section 1. The shortness of the time span distinguishes Sarraute's work from that of many earlier novelists, but what is more important is that, within that duration, there is little reference to periods beyond the most immediate past and future. The admirer of Lucien (pp. 50-54) recalls her past, even her childhood, but it is a brief incident and is not repeated. Not only the whole work, but the sections
and episodes too, tend to temporal co-extension.

The difference between narrative and fictional time becomes most apparent when we look, not at the duration, but at the relative amounts of time devoted to the relation of an action and its analysis, for here we see the narrative extended far beyond the duration of the event. Section 6 once again provides the example, but it is a paradigm for the whole work.

![Diagram](image)

Even this diagram inadequately conveys the lengths of time of narrative and fiction, for the fiction consists merely of Mettetal's statement, the responses of "Elle," and of the group. This is the general pattern that we find, but there are two exceptions which serve to illustrate the change that Sarraute has effected in her novels. In Sections 5 and 11 two characters report events that occurred; that is, they tell stories in the traditional manner. An anonymous speaker tells of Orthil's panegyric of Bréhier in Section 5, and in Section 11 Jacques's wife recounts, with much attention to style, the grand tale of Jacques's imitation of Bréhier. Both episodes reveal the desire of their
narrators to capture the attention and passive admiration of their listeners—an artistic goal which Sarraute deplores.

![Diagram of Narrative and Fictional Time in Section 5]

The narrator needs only four pages to relate the events of the entire evening on which Orthil displayed his talents as a critic. This pattern of time in Section 5 and in the first part of Section 11 resembles that employed most frequently by writers; dialogue, which is co-extensive, is supplemented usually by action and by the association of present events with those in the past. With the elimination of the major aspects of plotting, and with her analysis in depth of each incident, Sarraute has reversed the usual relationship of narrative to fiction.

When we attempt to show diagrammatically the total pattern of time in Les Fruits d'Or, we find that the parallel axes of narrative and fiction, in order to reveal, even approximately, the extension of the former, have to be curved. (See Fig. 4, p. 79.) The diagram illustrates that Sarraute has indeed reversed normal priorities. The time of action, which usually dominates the foreground of a novel, has been reduced to a minimum and has been replaced by the psychological preoccupations of the narrative. The faintest visible movement is the result of an almost indescribably long process by which the organism becomes aware of, and finds how to respond to, its environment.
Chronologically, the time-lapse between stimulus and response may be infinitesimal. To evoke the process, however, requires a greatly expanded narrative time.

The concept of time that regulates *Les Fruits d'Or* is the pattern of movement that we have discerned in the tropism, the ceaseless process of the organism's effort to establish harmony with its environment. Time, as chronology, is mentioned only once in the text. Jacques's wife tells her audience that her story could not have been told a year previously. "Pour rien au monde, n'est-ce pas, il y a seulement un an, on n'aurait pas pu raconter cela..." We learn that the vogue of "Les Fruits d'Or" lasts slightly longer than one year, a period that we can link to the cycle of seasons. But apart from this one reference, time, like space, lies beneath the surface of the text, constantly urging the action forward but never intruding overtly upon the scene.

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We, as readers, participate in the action as it occurs. We are plunged into a continuous present, cannot see the future, and the past is the pages of the book that we have already read. Time is not perceived chronologically but as the sequence of thoughts and actions that we experience, and the relationship of necessity that it establishes between stimulus and response. Necessity is well-illustrated by the image of "la minuterie."

Allons le sort en est jeté... La porte cochère s'ouvre, voilà la minuterie, les deux marches, la porte vitrée, l'escalier, quatre à quatre, mais pourquoi quatre à quatre? quelle idée... qui a jamais?... C'est deux à deux qu'il faut dire, deux à deux, très bien, ne penser à rien, ne pas penser, deux à deux, une à une... Le doigt se tend vers le bouton de la sonnette. Appuie. Sonnerie. C'est déclenché. Les pas se rapprochent... Mais je ne veux pas, arrêtez... la porte s'ouvre... 115

The button of the "minuterie" is like the stimulus in that it releases an action which seeks completion. The woman going upstairs is increasingly unwilling to carry out her intention but is in the grasp of something more powerful than herself. "Le sort" is a useful cliché to describe this force. There is the sense of a mechanism at work to which the individual has to submit. The "horlogerie" of the final episode of the book evokes the same sense of ineluctability, though in the latter case the individual is conscious of the process, if not in control of it.

The individual (including the group-as-individual) would like to halt the movement of time, to establish a static relationship between himself and others. This could be achieved by complete disassociation with society as seen in the case of Brulé:

115Ibid., p. 21.
Maintenant tandis qu'il s'assoit à sa table, il sait que les heures vont commencer à se détendre lentement, docilement, à s'épendre loin devant lui dans le silence, dans la solitude de la nuit, soulevant, gonflant en lui le sentiment de sa liberté, de sa puissance, de sa durée—un avant-goût d'éternité.\textsuperscript{116}

But Brûlé provides the best example in the book of reification. Isolated from others, he has ceased to live.

The alternative to isolation is total harmony, the aspiration of the group in Section 4 which, like the wandering tribe, seeks eternal rest in the Promised Land. The woman of Section 1 sees, in the confirmation of her opinion, a salvation one of whose attributes is the cessation of time.

Juste un petit signe, je n'en demande pas plus, un simple clignement, un cillement... Et ce sera la sécurité. La paix. Je serai sauvée. Nous serons sauvés. Pour toujours. Salut éternel. Dans la lumière réelle. Au ciel. Contemplant la face de Dieu.\textsuperscript{117}

But the movement in time cannot stop; the woman's plea is neglected.

The great, both authors and critics, like Robert Hunier and Parrot, fall as time moves on. The vogue of Courbet gives way to that of Bréhier. For a moment it seemed that "Les Fruits d'Or" was the ideal, that it would once and for all put an end to movement, that time would be measured in relation to "Les Fruits d'Or": "Il y a ceux d'avant Les Fruits d'Or et il y a ceux d'après.\textsuperscript{118}

Immediately after this point of stasis the tide begins to turn. Indeed, the image of the tide is used at this point: "C'est un tremblement de terre, Les Fruits d'Or."

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p. 129.
C'est un raz de marée." In Section 13 the image of the tide returns in connection with the episode describing the dead authors laid out by category. When the cycle nears its completion, we learn that even the great are subject to the tide of time: "... ils étaient eux aussi ballottés au gré des courants, rassemblés par bancs et poussés par le flux et reflux régulier des marées." A character in Section 10 asks how it is that taste undergoes this constant process of change. The sanguine reply is that people follow the fashions. But the fashion of Brehier, like that of Courbet or those that will follow, pursue a regular course that begins, ultimately, to reveal its structure. The time of Les Fruits d'Or is dictated by the movement of the tropism. The incidents of the plot do provide a probable sequence of events through time, but the logic of those events is determined by the pattern of stimulus and response. The individual is trapped in an endless sequence from which he can escape only briefly, for separation from his society creates intolerable tension, while total harmony cannot last. A rhythm of opposition is thus created which, for the work as a whole, is the vogue of "Les Fruits d'Or," but which also appears in the movement of the individual episodes. If the Brehier fashion represents a year, then the episodes are the days and hours within that year. Time is not identifiable with chronology, however, for it pertains to the narrative rather than to the fiction. Time, like space, character, and plot in Les Fruits d'Or is part of the way of looking at the world, not the world itself.

119 Ibid., p. 130.
120 Ibid., p. 212.
They are all aspects of the subject and his point of view rather than of the object reified by fiction.
Introduction: La Mise en Abîme

The study, to this point, has dealt mainly with the formal aspects of Les Fruits d'Or principally because of the prominent role given to the narrative. Another approach to the content of the text would be through a study of its themes, and Eugene Falk, in his book Types of Thematic Structure, suggests a methodology appropriate to Sarraute's novel. By analyzing and then integrating three themes, we shall attempt to uncover the meaning of the work. Before this, however, we should observe that the meaning of Les Fruits d'Or is not simple for it is related to a complex aspect of the structure which we have not yet considered, "la mise en abîme."

We have seen that, as part of the tropistic structure, the novel, "Les Fruits d'Or," is the stimulus which sets in motion the Bréhier vogue. Indirectly, of course, it is responsible for the lesser tropisms of the sections and episodes. But it has another structural role, for in Les Fruits d'Or the presence of the book within creates a continual ambivalence of meaning.

Ricardou sees the "mise en abîme" as a revolt: "la mise en abîme est avant tout la révolte structurelle d'un fragment du récit..." 

121 Falk, Types of Thematic Structure.
contre l'ensemble qui le contient. It is a means of alerting the reader to the illusion of the story, causing him to reflect upon it. Indeed, it is a mirror at the centre of the book which, by its very presence, challenges the reader to examine closely the images presented to him, to compare them for similarities and differences, to plunge deeper into the text.

The confrontation of the two books, Sarraute's and Bréhier's, is different from the usual "mise en abîme" in that it is not episodic. It lasts throughout the book, so that the reader is at once involved in the fate of Bréhier and in judging Sarraute. After finishing the book, or upon second reading, he is bound to make comparisons and to discover continually his own duality: at one and the same time, he is reading about criticism and being critical of his reading.

A second difference tends to the same end, for the "mise en abîme" generally draws the reader further into the book by raising a question about the story, while in Les Fruits d'Or the process is reversed. It is Sarraute's book that is critical of Bréhier's so that the reader is drawn out of the book and it is his own opinions that are challenged.

This central structure of Les Fruits d'Or creates a triple level of meaning, and we can describe it in terms of Ricardou's image of the mirror. At the first level there is a single image. When we read the book we are aware of the object, albeit transparent, which is "Les Fruits d'Or." At this level there is no reflection, and the focus is, in fact,

122Ricardou, Problèmes du Nouveau Roman, p. 181.
123Brigid Brophy ("Halfway to a Happening") recognizes this constant ambiguity of meaning but, somewhat cynically, suggests that Sarraute is merely trying to spike the guns of her critics.
upon the plot. The next level reveals two images, the object and its reflection; that is, the two books of the same name. What we perceive is that the images are reversed, that the outer and inner books are different, the one critical of the other. At the third level, however, we notice the similarities of the two images, for despite their apparent differences they belong to the same world.

We shall illustrate these three structural levels of meaning by means of three themes which are central to the work. We do not maintain that each of these themes belongs uniquely to the level on which it serves as an example. On the contrary, after having discussed the three themes individually, we shall attempt to show their fundamental integrity.

Our definition of theme we have taken from E. H. Palk. Palk distinguishes between theme and topic. While a topic "marks out a salient feature of the materials," the word "theme" is equivalent to ideas that emerge:

... from the particular structure of such textual elements as actions, statements revealing states of mind or feelings, gestures or meaningful environmental settings. Such textual elements I designate by the term "motif"; the idea that emerges from the motif by means of an abstraction, I will call theme.\(^{124}\)

The three themes we have chosen correspond to the three levels of meaning created by the structure of the "mise en abîme." At the first level, that of plot, we shall use the theme of "Art," at the second, where the images are reversed, "Appearance and Reality," and at the third, "Individual and Society." This correspondence of formal structure and

\(^{124}\)Palk, *Types of Thematic Structure*, p. 2.
thematic content can be presented in tabular form.

**TABLE 6**

**THE THREE LEVELS OF MEANING IN *LES FRUITS D'OR***

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<th>Thematic Content</th>
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**Themes**

*Art:*--The first level of meaning, corresponding to the single unreflected image, we have called the level of the plot. In our discussion of the plot we noted that it described a cyclical movement, that of the rise and decline of the Bréhier cult. It is a movement that appears to have no rational foundation, even though we know that such vogues do occur. At the level of plot the book is a satire. Using the theme of art, we see a satire of the literary circles which lionize the latest writers, supporting their fluctuating tastes with esoteric theories.

The theme of art is that of the validity of artistic judgment. Tison Braun notes that "le problème était celui de l'authenticité du jugement."\(^{125}\) Two theories of art appear in the book, which correspond to the pattern of the cycle. Each theory has its own vocabulary and images and each has its idols and prophets.

The theory that dominates the first half of the book is that of

---

Formalism. Nathalie Sarraute gives her own interpretation of the formalists in L'âge du Soupçon:

Il est bien clair pourtant que la réalité n'est pas leur principale affaire. Mais la forme, toujours, celle que d'autres ont inventée et dont la force magnétique les empêche de jamais pouvoir s'arracher. Tantôt cette forme est celle, aux lignes harmonieuses et pures, où les écrivains dits "classiques" emterraient si étroitement l'objet fait d'un seul bloc de cette matière dense et lourde sur lequel ils concentraient leurs efforts. ... C'est la simplicité élégante de la forme classique qu'avant tout ils s'efforcent d'atteindre. ... Tantôt abandonnant l'harmonie et la sobre élégance, ils adoptent une forme dont la caractéristique essentielle est celle de faire "ressemblant."  

Formalism proposes the notion of the ideal form that, in art, is to be imposed upon the basic matter of life. This ideal, in Les Fruits d'Or, is generally found in classical models, by which is meant those authors who, by the passage of time, have created works considered worthy of emulation, authors such as Stendhal and Constant. Formalism is traditionalism, but it is also the judgment of literature by preconceived, aesthetic rules which under the guise of objectivity are imposed upon works of art. In his preface to Portrait d'un Inconnu Sartre has described this approach to literature as "la subjectivité de l'objectif." Not only is this objectivity illusory, it fails also to respond to "reality" by concentrating upon the superficial.

The art vocabulary of the first half of Les Fruits d'Or is evocative of this superficiality. A work of art is an "objet" or "une petite chose" or "un joyau." A completed form, it is not to be penetrated: "pas une fissure" says one character. Adjectives used to

126 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 128.

describe art are "parfait" and "admirable" and "pur," while the qualities to be admired are the "grâce," "ligne," or "galbe." Thus art is to be looked at from a distance; it belongs to the realm of "l'œil," a realm full of synonyms. If it is touched, it should be only lightly; "caresser" is a word used several times to describe the touch that seeks only to flatter the form.

The imagery of formalism evokes the traditional as well as the idea of beauty as something superficial. It evokes, above all, the quality of the "manufactured," the imposition by man of conscious form upon the basic stuff of life. There are, in Section 3, images of the garden, of the aristocracy and its manners, of tasteful fashion, all images suggesting not only the past but the cultivation of man. This imagery is extended into the distinction drawn between the refined and the pure and its opposite, the vulgar and the sticky. In Section 4 this contrast of hard and soft recurs as we find characters choosing between the morass of popular taste and the pure but forbidding, even morbid, values of the elite. On the two occasions on which reference is made to the title "Les Fruits d'Or," it is the contrast between the hardness and the softness which is emphasized. The dominant image, however, is that of the building or the town. Closely associated with the garden, those images evoke the domination of a chaotic nature by the orderliness and the rational proportions imposed by the human brain.

... eh bien, l'art justement consiste à assécher tout cela, à en faire une terre solide, dure, sur laquelle on puisse construire, créer une œuvre. Un roman, pour moi, c'est comme

128 It should be noted that much of the imagery used here to illustrate the theme of art is drawn from the two other themes. See below pp. 97-116.
Saint-Pétersbourg bâtie sur des marais, comme Venise gagnée, au prix de quels efforts, sur les eaux troubles de la lagune.\textsuperscript{129}

This is the clearest statement of the image of the universe ordered by man, but it recurs in various modifications throughout the text.\textsuperscript{130}

Another group of images is associated with the veneration that we have already found in association with royalty or aristocracy. On a number of occasions we find religious images used in connection with literature. For the formalists literature is a "lieu saint," and a work of art an "objet sacré" before which the masses should make obeisance:

\ldots unités anonymes de cette foule capable tout juste de défiler en silence dans les lieux saints remplis des reliques que vous leur avez données à vénérer, que vous leur avez offertes, imposées à leur piété, \ldots\textsuperscript{131}

Another group of images entirely is that of the literary or artistic reference. Each cult will have its idols, and for the formalists there are a number. Shakespeare is no more than a distant figure of great stature who serves as an ultimate standard, but Baudelaire is regarded with disapproval because of his descent into numerous sloughs of despond. Watteau, with his nostalgic classicism, and Fragonard, with his "resemblance," are clear choices for the formalists amongst the painters, while the literary models are Stendhal and

\textsuperscript{129} Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{130} The image of the building will be studied in detail below. See pp. 116-126.

\textsuperscript{131} Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 52.
But the paradigm for the formalists is Valéry. His name is mentioned only once, significantly in the episode in which the image of the building is developed:

Plus réelle que la vie. Organisé. Ordonné. Savamment construit. D'admirables proportions. . . Un style souple, puissant qui soutient, comme ces colonnes, filles des nombres d'or, chantées par Valéry, les grands, les vrais sentiments. . .

Valéry's presence fills this part of Les Fruits d'Or, and we can see his importance by referring to Sarraute's article on Valéry, "Paul Valéry et l'enfant de l'éléphant." Nathalie Sarraute, like Kipling's insatiably curious elephant child, asks embarrassing questions about Valéry and gets the habitual responses. She then sets herself the task, "seule en face de l'oeuvre," of examining the great man's work, attempting to ignore the critical eulogies that have been poured upon it. Some of this critical acclaim is worth noting for it re-echoes words and passages that we find in Les Fruits d'Or.

... un poétique qui nous ouvrira un si royal domaine. Nulle faille! Nulle lacune! Le voilà le vrai classicisme! Quelle leçon de rigueur et de sévérité envers soi-même! ... le Cantique des Colonnes, poème des lignes, des formes purses... Édifice qui chante, harmonieux à la fois pour les oreilles et les yeux. . .

132 Stendhal and Constant appear frequently in Sarraute's works in this context. We find one or both of them mentioned in "Flaubert le précurseur," and in L'Ère du Soupçon (pp. 84, 94, 149). In "Nouveau Roman et Réalité" we read: "Chaque jour vous voyez certains critiques et leurs lecteurs se féliciter que, en 1961, surgisse un jeune homme qui possède cette chance d'avoir le tempérament de, disons Benjamin Constant ou de Stendhal, et de voir, des lors, le monde comme ils le voyaient et d'écrire des œuvres analogues aux leurs."


135 Ibid., pp. 612-14.
La Jeune Parque is a "lieu sacré," and only in "Narcisse parle" does Sarraute find that indescribable element which signifies, for her, inspired art. The words she uses are like those that characters in Les Fruits d'Or use for similar experiences: "... ce quelque chose d'ineffable, ce rayonnement, cette vibration à peine perceptible."\(^{136}\)

It is not impossible to see in Brûlé a caricature of Valéry, the self-styled "Penseur," working in solitude through the night. The "cérébral" Brûlé, rejecting the spontaneous, is described in terms of a machine, and for Valéry art is mechanistic. Sarraute quotes from Variété:

"... (écrire devant être, le plus solidement et le plus exactement qu'on puisse, de construire cette machine de langage...)..."\(^{137}\)

A final indication of Valéry's importance appears in the name of the poet Varenge, which is a mixture of "Valéry" and "Beranger." Béranger's importance, at least for Sarraute's article, is that, universally admired at the time, his work has since disappeared from sight. Varenger's poetry is surely a pastiche of Valéry, and we even find mention of "sources scellées" which, unrelated to the text, is a thinly disguised "fontaines scellées" from La Jeune Parque.

Formalism dominates the theme of art until Section 8 and the appearance of "le paysan." It stands for order, refinement, tradition, and reason and resists the viscous and disorderly. Brûlé is the first great prophet of the school. He assiduously avoids contact with others and admires the esoteric, the refined, the "pur objet d'art." He is

\(^{136}\)Ibid., p. 616.

\(^{137}\)Ibid., p. 616.
followed, in Section 4, by a series of critics who, sharing his admiration of "Les Fruits d'Or" offer conflicting interpretations of it: Dr. Legris, Lucien, and then Maroel who finds the book true because it is "un tout cohérent." The critics with the prestige and authority of their theory are able to subdue any argument until all doubt is removed with the mystifying words of "les deux pairs." The greatness of "Les Fruits d'Or" is so certain that Orthil can dismiss "reality" with the vocabulary typical of the formalist schools:

Regarder. Ne pas se nourrir. Joie des yeux. Pas de "réalité." C'est la politesse parfaite. Aucune familiarité, pas de contact d'haleines tièdes, pure contemplation de dessins aux sujets surannés et délicats.\textsuperscript{138}

The formalist theory finally collapses by very reason of this lack of contact with "reality." In Section 7 we see a limitless number of interpretations of the book being offered, all of them justifiable by appeal to the objective theory, but none of which can be sustained against attack, first by "le paysan," and then by the group, which demands proof from the critic, Parrot, of the claims that he made in his article on Bréhier. With the emergence of scepticism, the objectivity of the formalists is revealed as vacuous, and we find a new theory appearing according to which art is the inexplicable product of the genius.\textsuperscript{139} The genius is, of course, recognized by popular consent.

We have moved, in Sartre's terms, from "la subjectivité de l'objectif" to "l'objectivité du subjectif."

The vocabulary of subjectivism is diametrically opposed to that of

\textsuperscript{138}Sarraute, \textit{Les Fruits d'Or}, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{139}It is tempting, and to some extent appropriate, to see in the two theories in \textit{Les Fruits d'Or}, the contrast of classicism and romanticism with their respective emphases on society and individual, human order and nature.
formalism. Whereas the formalist view centred upon the eye, the basic perception of the latter half of *Les Fruits d'Or* is "la sensation," by which is meant a direct experience: "contact," "vibration," "tintement," "résonnance," "modulation," "ondulation" are some of the nouns which recur. Adjectives or adjectival phrases to qualify these nouns are "frais," "neuf," "direct," "spontané," "léger," "à peine perceptible," while typical verbs could be "vivre" or "vibrer." In the subjectivist school the artist becomes "le génie" whose work is "inexplicable."

Images of the subjectivists are few, but those there are oppose the rational orderliness of the formalists with the organic and the latent. The vocabulary itself represents the imagery of the movement which distinguishes it from the solid, object-oriented imagery of the formalists. The principal images are those of flowers (Sections 13 and 14) and of the child's hand (Section 14). They are images evoking not only nature, but also growth.

The subjective theme appears sporadically in the first half of *Les Fruits d'Or*. The character in Section 2, speaking to Brûlé, responds to "Les Fruits d'Or" with all the vibration appropriate to a subjectivist. Like other characters in Section 4, he is reminded that personal judgments are not necessary. "Faites donc comme moi. Ne vous en occupez pas," says Brûlé. Other people, responding personally to Brehier's book, are not let down so lightly by the critics, like the woman who is

\[^{140}\text{We might add to our list electricity. On two occasions it is a terrible shock (pp. 64-65), but elsewhere it is used to evoke the idea of a current that activates or revives in the manner of a stream of water (pp. 37, 51).}\]
shocked by the reality of the gesture cited by Marcal (pp. 64-67). It is, however, "le paysan" who, entering the literary set from outside, introduces the subjectivist counter-attack upon formalism.

On ne doit se fier qu'à soi. Il appuie son poing sur sa poitrine. ... A soi, vous m'entendez. À sa propre sensation. Et moi, moi, il se frappe la poitrine, moi, je vous le dis, riez tant que vous voulez, vos "Fruits d'Or," c'est un beau navet. ¹⁴¹

The emphasis of "le paysan" is upon individual judgment, while the other character appeals to the collective authority of the eminent critics. Parrot, in Section 9, has to admit, finally, that he might be wrong, and fallibility is expanded, in the next Section, into the credo of the subjectivist theory. The philosopher of Section 10 corresponds to Brûlé in Sections 2 and 3; both are the spokesmen of their schools.

Faced by the character who indignantly attacks the whole "édifice" of literary judgment, the philosopher asks, in contrast to Brûlé, why he should look for certainty.


In Section 11, in an argument which defies logic, genius is established as the main criterion of great literature, and, in Section 12, it is Bréhier's lack of genius which condemns him.

It is at this point that subjectivism divides. As a theory it would seem to deny the possibility of a society achieving consensus,

¹⁴¹Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 135.
¹⁴²Ibid., p. 170.
but the closed society, that seemed to have been dispersed by the
arguments of individualism, suddenly reappears to pronounce its judg-
ment as to who is, and who is not, a genius. The character who cannot
hide his admiration for Bréhier is stoned by the others. Subjectivism
has been objectivized.

Ils se redressent tous ensemble, durcis, serrés les uns contre
les autres, formant une seule masse: "Cui, mais ça, dites
donc. . . Je protège mon visage, je courbe le dos. . . Ça
c'était Rimbaud.143

As Valéry was the paradigm for the formalists, so Rimbaud provides the
model for the subjectivists. Conforming to no preconceived rules,
exhibiting allegedly appalling taste, he writes inexplicably great
poetry. Art, according to the subjectivists who have objectivized their
views into a theory, is an accident, even a sickness, as we see in the
central statement of the new school in Section 12.

Nous sommes bien tous les mêmes au fond, quand on y regarde
de près, tous des hommes en fin de compte, bien pareils,
malgré ce détail—leur œuvre. . . nous ne songeons pas
à y toucher, nous la leur laissons bien volontiers. . .
c'est là un accident, une excroissance curieuse, c'est
là une maladie, c'est là, nous l'accordons, un petit miracle. . .
on ne peut pas l'expliquer. . .144

"L'objectivité du subjectif" finally, in Section 13, reaches the point
of denying subjective experience. To prevent a situation in which no
two people can reach agreement, the school of subjectivism is driven
to impose its models according to which each author can be categorized.
Each writer is allotted his appropriate portion of genius, and literary
judgment becomes a process of arid historicism. But beneath the school

143Ibid., p. 205.

144Ibid., pp. 202-203. It is startling how closely this passage
resembles the image of the club on p. 12.
of subjectivism the recurrent theme of individual response to art persists. In Section 14 it appears again to proclaim its personal faith in "Les Fruits d'Or," opposing the vocabulary of pure subjectivism to that of objective theory, and its images of natural growth and potential to those of supernatural buildings, of resurrection and renaissance to death and forgetfulness.

What we see at this first level of Les Fruits d'Or is a pattern of rise and fall corresponding to the cycle described by the plot. Using the theme of art as an illustration, we found that the pattern was one of artistic judgments which built themselves to a peak of unreality on the basis of an illusory objectivity only to collapse in a welter of subjective dissension, and a theory which denied to art any validity beyond popular consensus. It is a satire upon literary cliques and upon the pretensions of all theories of art, for they must all inevitably lose contact with the immediate sensation sparked by the word of the writer in the breast or bowels of the reader.

Appearance and Reality:—It is this illusory aspect upon which we wish to concentrate our attention at the second level of meaning we have defined. At this level we perceive not a single image, that of "Les Fruits d'Or," but two images, those of the books bearing the same title. And we remark the differences between the two books; the image is reversed. The outer book, that of Sarraute, becomes a critique of the inner, and we, as readers, are aware of the superficiality of the judgments passed by Bréhier's readers. The relationship of the two books is equivalent, then, to the contradiction of appearance and reality.
In our preceding chapters we have frequently referred to Sarraute's opinions on "traditional" novels and their reliance upon illusion in order to create a resemblance to reality. It is not surprising, then, to find that this is a major theme of Les Fruits d'Or, a book with literature or, at least, literary judgment as its subject. In the fourth essay of L'Ere du Soupçon, "Ce que voient les oiseaux," Sarraute begins by outlining the subject matter that she later used in Les Fruits d'Or. She also indicates the meaning of the title. Writing of the disillusionment often experienced at the second reading of a popular novel, she says:

... non seulement les nouveaux lecteurs de ces romans mais leurs plus grands admirateurs eux-mêmes, quand par malchance ils commettent l'imprudence de les rouvrir, éprouvent à leur contact la même sensation pénible que devaient éprouver les oiseaux qui tentaient de picorer les fameux raisins de Zeuxis. Ce qu'ils voient n'est plus qu'un trompe-l'oeil.

Zeuxis was a Greek painter of the late fifth century B.C. whose claim to fame was his perfection of the technique of "trompe-l'oeil," and the story is recorded of the birds attempting to eat the grapes in his painting "Enfants aux Raisins." The two references to the title in the text of Les Fruits d'Or call our attention to this aspect of illusion. On both occasions the image is of people who, expecting

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145 This does not imply that this is the only significance of the title Les Fruits d'Or, but merely that "trompe-l'oeil" is a major theme. The essay "Ce que voient les oiseaux" was published at least seven years before Les Fruits d'Or.

146 Sarraute, L'Ere du Soupçon, pp. 131-132.

147 "Zeuxis," La Grande Encyclopédie, 1886-1902, 1314. The following quotation about Zeuxis appears: "Il s'attacha à perfectionner la technique, chercha à rendre les jeux de lumière et d'ombre, poussa parfois le souci de l'exactitude jusqu'au trompe l'oeil."
soft fruit, break their teeth on metal.

Et puis, il a trouvé "Les Fruits d'Or." C'est le côté trompe-l'œil qui l'a séduit. Il m'a dit: "Je voulais que le lecteur crève de faim devant ça." Comme la brave dame... "Il faut que ceux qui veulent croquer les pommes juteuses, les affamés, se cassent les dents là-dessus." 148

The opposition of appearance and reality is, then, of first importance in Les Fruits d'Or. Again this theme is defined by its own vocabulary and images and we shall start our study of the theme by looking at them.

Central to the theme of appearance and reality is, of course, the question of perception. In Les Fruits d'Or the vocabulary of perception is sharply and clearly divided. There is first the realm of perception dominated by the eye and the largest word group in the book is associated with sight. We find continuous reference to sight with the words "œil," "regard," "voir," "regarder," "observer," "montrer," and others. But there is another common group associated with inner perception; here we find such words as "sensation," "instinct," "éprouver," "sentir," and "percevoir." The two modes of perception correspond to two contrasting worlds which we shall call the hard and the soft. On the one level, then, we shall find words related to the material presence of things such as "objet," "chose," and even "cela," and with them will be associated verbs containing the same suggestion; there is principally "saisir" but also "s'accrocher," "s'agripper," "attraper," "tenir." Adjectives, as might be expected, suggest solidity: "solide," "dur," "sec," "lourd," or, in more abstract contexts,

"sûr," "vrai," "absolu"; people will be "pur," "intègre," "franc," and "honnête." On the side of softness the words evoke instability: "substance," "masse," "mouvement" for the nouns; amongst verbs we shall find "glisser," "remuer," "couler," and more abstractly "vaciller," "hésiter," "balancer." The appropriate adjectives for this world are "mou," "moite," "gluant," "tiède," "douteux." There is a further group of words which denote a slightly different sort of movement, words that we have already mentioned in connection with the theme of art. These are "vibrer," "palpiter," "vivre," "modulation," "ondulation," "léger tintement," etc., a vocabulary suggesting almost imperceptible tremors of life. This group is, in its turn, opposed by a pejorative vocabulary of reification with such words as "pétrifier," and "couvrir," "pacotille," and "camelote."

This outline of the vocabulary of Appearance and Reality is far from exhaustive. It is intended to show the dualism of Sarraute's view of the world. On the one hand, there is the solid world perceived by the eye and subject to the grasp of the hand; this is the superficial world to which we are accustomed in everyday life, and the reproduction of which, Sarraute would claim, is the aim of the "traditional" novelist. On the other hand, there is the subterranean world, "les endroits obscurs de la psychologie," which is in a constant state of movement, and which she is attempting to uncover.149 The hard and the soft correspond to appearance and reality, respectively, since it is this surface

149 The opening paragraphs of two articles by Sarraute, "Nouveau Roman et Réalité" and "Les Deux Réalités" (Esprit, juillet, 1964), clearly show the distinction we are making here between the two realities.
which masks the true level of action of the world as Sarraute sees it. At times the ripples on the surface betray what lies in the depths, but usually it is a screen whose purpose is to conceal. André Comtesse has pointed to the dialectic of hardness and softness in an article which examines Sarraute's first three novels.\footnote{André Comtesse, "L'Imagination chez Nathalie Sarraute: la Dialectique du Fluide et du Solide," Études des Lettres, VI (juillet-septembre, 1963), pp. 192-205.} He finds that she is involved in what he calls existential psychoanalysis:

En définitive, cette "psychanalyse existentielle," si l'on peut nommer ainsi la méthode de Nathalie Sarraute, ne dévoile pas une essence de l'homme comme la libido ou la volonté de puissance, mais révèle un va-et-vient continu entre fluidité et solidité, dont la libido et la volonté de puissance ne sont que des moments, un projection de soi-même sans cesse manquée.\footnote{Ibid., p. 204. It should be noted that other critics do in fact find a psychological essence. Sarraute herself indicates that fundamental to her characters is this "terrible desire for contact." For Gerda Zeltner it is the need for reassurance.}

This same dialectic is at work in Les Fruits d'Or, and we can best uncover the pattern by looking first at the individual consciousness of its own modes of existence.

At the end of Section 1 the woman who returns to the apartment to ask again her question about "Les Fruits d'Or" has the sensation of standing on the brink of a chasm. She is conscious of two levels of being; overtly she wishes to ask her question, concealing it behind the subterfuge of looking for her gloves, but subliminally she is experiencing vertigo and even madness. She clutches at the question to save herself, using the vocabulary of hardness with which we are familiar: "Mais je dois saisir, retenir du brasier, je dois sauver..."
This same consciousness of the dichotomy of existence appears again in Section 2. Here the character distinguishes between "la patrie retrouvée," where he finds "la sécurité," and "les contrées barbares." The distinction is underlined by the image of the "fils débauché qu’impregnent encore les moûters" set in contrast to his mother, who is pure and with "un regard confiant."

Section 4 provides us with a number of examples. The woman, for whom stability is provided by her admiration of Lucien, is suddenly faced with a choice which is described in an image of two worlds, the one hard, the other soft. Later a group of women, "elles," described in terms of a flood of water, seek confirmation of a hypothesis in the solid examples of antique, classical sculpture. Similarly, the group, wanting proof of what has been said of "Les Fruits d'Or," perceives of itself as fluid, "modelables à souhait," and in search of something solid which it can grasp with assurance: "un seul point d'appui," "quelque chose de stable sous leurs pieds," "quelque chose de stable à quoi s’accrocher," "juste une parcelle, mais dure, solide. . . ."

A final example should serve to confirm the pattern. In Section 10 a character assails the changeability of taste in art. Accused of wanting absolute truth, he suddenly feels as though he has stepped into the very quagmire that he was hoping to reclaim: "Inquiétants clapotis. . . On s’enfonce. . . C’est vers ces terres spongieuses qu’il s’était élancé, c’est elles qu’il avait voulu défricher,

152* Sarraute, Les Fruits d’Or, p. 23.
The consistency of this dichotomy between the hard and the soft does not in itself justify regarding it as equivalent to a contrast between appearance and reality, but this connection can be established by reference to other incidents and images. We have already cited the two references in the text to the title. The images of soft fruit and hard gold clearly indicate the contrast between the appearance of the object and its actuality. Throughout the book we encounter this same illusion.

In the first episode there is an image of a doctor who is pleased by the appearance of a rash: 

"... mais il aurait fallu être satisfait comme le médecin qui hésitait encore et qui voit surgir à point nommé le petit bouton, la légère éruption, ..." This image testifies to an internal and external level of existence, only one of which is accessible to the eye. The surface is an impenetrable mask which conceals the face behind, but it can, at times, with the appearance of almost invisible symptoms, indicate what lies beneath.

An image similar to this occurs in Section 6. The woman who has caught Mettel lying (and a lie is a type of "trompe-l'œil") evokes her sensations by using the image of a respectably-dressed gentleman committing indecent acts behind the bushes of a public park. On this occasion the superficial characteristics totally conceal the reality that lies beneath. In Section 4 a woman who claims to know the true nature of a man, realizes that he is playing a role:

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153bid., p. 171.
154bid., p. 8.
The central image of this dual existence of the individual is 
the mould. The individual sees himself as an ill-defined, fluid exis-
tence which seeks some solid form into which to pour himself. The image 
appears three times with slight variations. Jean Laborit (p. 78) is 
prepared to adopt any shape that will suit the group; the character in 
Section 12, in a sudden fit of humility, will conform to the views of 
the majority: "Dans ce moule que vous m'avez donné, que je sais, comme 
vous, manier la substance invisible se coule, s'adapte parfaitement... 
elle prend forme, je la vois..."156 In this image we see the total 
integration of hardness and softness and of appearance and reality as 
the man prepares to take on the appearance that society wishes to give 
him. In the third example it is the group itself, as individual, 
which is seeking the reassuring, solid form offered by the mould.

Society, like the individual, displays this same duality of 
appearance and reality, though it is society itself which is the 
appearance, the superficial form that is imposed upon groups of people 
with living and vital relations between them. Thus, in the first 
section, we find the image of the club with all its superficial symbols 
of membership in a community. The long fourth section recounts the 
establishment of one such society, and in the first episode we see all 
the trappings of the state imposed upon chaos described in terms 

155 Ibid., p. 84.
156 Ibid., pp. 194-95.
suggestive of, if not fluidity, instability. The rebels are a "brute barbare, jaillie on ne sait d'où," and are guilty of "tous les dérègle-
ments, foisonnements, grouillements, magmas informes, . . . ." By contrast the new order is seen in images suggesting all that is struc-
Les facultés. . . ."\textsuperscript{157} The images of the palace and the fortress, which we shall discuss later in detail,\textsuperscript{158} also present a view of society in which the external appearance no longer corresponds with the reality beneath. By Section 13, where we find the image of the morgue, the life has departed the corpse of society; here art and artists are categorized according to the authors whom they are believed to have copied. "Génération spontanée," which would testify to a reality that can be contacted, is dismissed. "Tout est dit," and it remains only to lay out in order the bodies of yesteryear. Sarraute seems to be suggesting that the institution of society, whether aristocratic like the palace or egalitarian like the morgue, must necessarily petrify the reality of human relationships. The first reference to the palace appears in Section 1: "Vous me faites tous penser à cette pièce de Pirandello où les infirmiers jouaient le rôle de courtisans."\textsuperscript{159} This image projects a sense of illusoriness upon the subsequent developments of the palace society; people are not, in reality, what they seem. The converse is true at the end, for in the dismemberment of Bréhier, and

\textsuperscript{157}Ibid., p. 49.

\textsuperscript{158}See below, pp. 116-26.

\textsuperscript{159}Sarraute, \textit{Les Fruits d'Or}, p. 10.
in the slogan "Tout est dit," it would appear that people are only what they seem.

We have already discussed the theme of art, so we can very briefly indicate its incorporation of the concept of Appearance and Reality. The formalist school clearly advocated the imposition of hardness and illusion upon the soft matter of reality. Brulé extols Bréhier's style which "tamise, raffine, épure, resserre entre ses contours fermés" and rejects "ce qui est mou, flou, baveux, gluant." The same is true of Marcel who sees art as the "drying up" of the fluidity of the "processus obscurs." "Joie des yeux. Pas de 'réalité'," proclaims Orthil to his delighted listeners. If the formalist school is consciously in search of illusion rather than reality, the subjectivists are no less guilty. In the development of an objective theory they deliberately suppress "génération spontanée" and any claim to an individual contact with reality, for art itself is a process of the reproduction of timeworn themes which bear no relation to life. The final image of art presents the contrast of the crocus and the building: "Qu'importent les bâtiments et les constructions aux dimensions du monde si elles ne contiennent pas le crocus encore fermé, la main d'enfant... Est-ce là ou non?" This statement in the form of a hesitant question contrasts the imposing appearance, with its suggestion of massive solidity, to the miniscule or unrealized potential of life, the reality which forms the basis of art.

In this treatment of the theme of Appearance and Reality and

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160 Ibid., p. 219.
its different manifestations in *Les Fruits d'Or*, we have attempted to show that Sarraute has consistently opposed an artificial and petrified appearance, to a reality whose principal characteristic is movement or life. In doing this we might seem to have digressed considerably from our original purpose, which was to illustrate the contrast between the two images of a book bearing the title "Les Fruits d'Or"; yet Bréhier's book, and the judgments made about it by its readers, is the subject of reflection of Sarraute's book and of ourselves as its readers. We are challenged to compare the fictional experience with our own, to question the validity, not only of artistic judgments, but also of the psychological and social circumstances in which these judgments are made.

**Individual and Society:**—This brings us to the third level of meaning which we have identified, the level at which the similarities rather than the differences of the two images are perceived. The outer and inner books are seen as expressions of, and occurring within the same environment. The suggestion at the end of the book that the vogue is not fictional but belongs to an eternal pattern creates an immediate link between reader and character. Meaning, at this level, appears as the representation of the human condition, and it is for this reason that we have chosen to illustrate it by means of the theme of Individual

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161 Tison Braun goes so far as to maintain that Bréhier's book is "traditional" according to Sarraute's terminology. We have really no reason to believe this, and indeed such an assumption makes *Les Fruits d'Or* difficult to understand. Sarraute has deliberately made no comment about "Les Fruits d'Or" because, while a "traditional" novel would be appropriate in the first half of her book, she is scarcely likely to present such evident devotion to a "traditional" novel as that seen in the last section. The inner book must necessarily remain an enigma. Tison Braun's claim is the more strange, since she sees the last long soliloquy as being the utterance of authenticity.
and Society.

The theme is established in the first section of the book in which three characters go through the motions of what is almost a ritual dance. One of the three represents a society in which all values and opinions are held in common. The two other characters, a man and a woman, discuss, in alternating and balanced dialogue and "sous-conversation," the nature of their relationship," to this third person. The man recoils from the society which he pictures as a herd (p. 7), an insane asylum (p. 10), a club whose members are remarkable for their identical tastes and apparel (p. 12), and a sect involved in dubious religious practices (p. 13). He rejects all contact with such a society, while the woman seeks it, seeing the third person firstly as a genuine believer wishing to share his faith ("Je vous apporte le pain bénit.") and then as a lost soul seeking help from them. She is also afraid, however, that he will abandon them, leaving them outside the society of which he is a part. Her "pitié" is, thus, partly fear, and it is fear which dominates her effort to re-establish contact when she returns to the apartment. Her vision is of a society in which true understanding exists, a vision contained in an image of paradise (pp. 23-24). It is a vision which is dashed and the image of paradise is transformed into a composite metaphor of condescending wealth, of alien lands, and counterfeit coinage. This analysis of Section 1 provides the basic elements of the theme of Individual and Society, for the individual is always found to be seeking definition of himself in terms of the group.

Society is seen, usually, as closed or as a solid object. It
is described by words such as "cercle," "bloc," and "masse." Its principal task appears to be that of protecting itself against attack from within and without, so we find a number of words associated with militarism: "défendre," "protéger," "vaincre," together with military titles and an assortment of weapons. The vocabulary associated with the civil order is very rich. There is first of all "ordre" with a range of synonyms, "authorité," "droit," "règle," and the verbs that normally accompany them: "juger," "ordonner," "imposer," "exiger."

"Même" and "ensemble" are words that recur continuously throughout the work and point again to society's continual drive for solidarity. He who fails to conform is variously described as "paria," "étranger," "forte tète," "halluciné," "fou." "Résistance" appears on a number of occasions, but more frequently we find the words "se soumettre," "subir," "renoncer." Key words in the vocabulary associated with the individual are "rassurer" and "contact." The individual is often anxious: "gêné," "inquiet," "mal à l'aise," and he is always uncertain: "vaciller," "douter," "hésiter," "balancer," "se débattre." His relationships are dominated by a vocabulary of contradictory movement: "abandonner," "approcher," "écarte," "se tendre," "arriver," "s'éloigner," "offrir," "repousser," etc., and by conflicting emotions: "pitié," "dédain," "confiance," "peur," "respect," "mépris," "amitié," "haine." And there is a vocabulary suggestive of a continuous state of searching: "errer," "tâtonner," "se perdre," "fouiller," "chercher." We have already noted many of the main images related to the society \(^{162}\) and have also discussed

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\(^{162}\) See above, pp. 104-106.
the psychological aspects of the individual in our section related to character. Our purpose here is not to repeat that work but to indicate the fundamental link between the individual and his society. It is a link which the individual cannot reject, and which the society is constantly seeking to strengthen.

In our discussion of Section 1 we saw how two characters had, perforce, to take a stance vis-à-vis society. One adopted the position of resistance, the other sought integration. In Section 2 the character does not even contemplate resistance; his dilemma is which of two societies to choose, the civilized or the barbaric, that of the pure mother or the world of the prodigal son; at one moment he is humble host, at the next despotic master; he is torn between God and the devil. His final decision leads him to advocate the extermination of those in the society he has rejected, but he can only do this when safely ensconced within the reassuring framework of its rival. The woman who admires Lucien finds herself faced with the same dilemma, but her choice is made for her by Lucien, and we observe the slow process by which she adapts herself to her new society until finally she is totally absorbed. At first the change is seen as a sacrifice, the paradigmatic social act, but then the forbidding landscape of her new country begins to look more accommodating, less like a graveyard:

Et voilà que des mornes et grises étendues, des formes pétifiées qui se dressent dans le jour blafard, quelque chose peu à peu se dégage. . . C'est comme un souffle tiède, un familier, intime, rassurante bouffée. . . quelque chose qu'elle reconnaît. . .

163 See above, pp. 62-71.
The pattern of the dilemma which the individual seeks to resolve by adapting and being absorbed into a new society appears throughout the book. We see it in the group's search for the promised land and, at the end of Section 4, in the case of the man caught between the society of the palace and the bizarre woman. The woman of Section 6, at one point, seems willing to accept Mattetal's society—"La justice n'a pas été bafouée, l'ordre n'a jamais cessé de régner"—but finally her convictions force her to speak out. She still believes that her words will usher in the true society. Section 8 offers the example of the character attempting to accommodate his views to those of "le paysan" as he tries to replace his old, discredited values by a new set. In Section 12 the man who was once at the centre of the circle, which is society, finds to his horror that he is now a pariah because of his liking for "Les Fruits d'Or," and he desperately attempts to reimmerse himself in the group, describing his vain submission by means of the image of the mould.

The overwhelming need of the individual to find definition in terms of a society is prompted by the individual's sense of floundering in a bog or of being lost in a trackless waste whenever he finds himself alone. Such images crop up throughout the book. In Section 1 it is the third person who is imagined as lost in the night. He himself, in Section 2, is afraid of returning to the chaos of "la barbarie." The disappointed group of Section 4 sets out once more across "toundras glacées." In Section 10 the character, when faced with the ill-defined philosophy of subjectivism, feels himself sinking into the bog. For a person so lost the support of just one other is
seen as reassuring, for two people already form the nucleus of a society to which others can rally. "Une seule personne" is a cry that is uttered on several occasions. The man who has seen, to his own satisfaction at least, the falseness of the formalist school is incapable of resisting it alone, but looks for support from another: "Pour qu'il puisse se sentir absolument sûr, invincible, pour que puisse triompher la vérité, il lui faut juste cela: un seul témoin."165 In Section 8 "le paysan" and the other character come close to forming the nuclear society. It is depicted in the image of the horse and rider, the couple in complete harmony: "Collés l'un à l'autre, ne faisant qu'un seul corps comme le cheval de course et son jockey, ils s'élèvent, ils planent..."166 The image changes abruptly when there is disagreement and is mocked by a series of new images evocative of different types of society. There is the "roi de cirque couronné de carton" and also the "faux prophète." The ideal couple is transformed into a pair of vulgar drunks: "Rires obtus de brutes, bavardages d'ivrognes... Grosse tapes sur l'épaule, penchés l'un vers l'autre, titubant, enlacés... Ho, ho..."167 The couple appears again at the end of the book. The solitary character sees himself, the reader, in perfect union with the author, Bréhier. But this in itself is not sufficient, and he is forced to seek his reassurance in society. Again just one other person will

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165 Ibid., p. 106.
166 Ibid., p. 149.
167 Ibid., pp. 154-55. These two images from Section 8 are preceded by another of two men fighting. It would seem to be related to the battle between David and Goliath, the champions of two distinct societies.
The individual, then, from the instability and insecurity of his solitude, revealed in images suggestive of fluidity, seeks reassurance in society, whether it be that of one other person or of the group whose paradigm is the solid form of the circle. If we reverse our gaze and look at the relationship from the point of view of the group, two patterns emerge. There is firstly the response of the society to changes arising within it, a process of internal reorganization, and secondly there is the pattern of reaction to dissent.

In the first pattern we find the example of the writer who finds himself displaced in the popularity of the society by Bréhier. He feels as though his throne has been usurped: "Comment, au cours de quelle nuit, tandis qu'il dormait paisiblement, s'est opérée la prise du pouvoir? Quand le traître est-il passé du côté de l'usurpateur?" A second example is Parrot who, having allowed himself to be trapped by the group into a discussion on an even footing, falls from his position of power like a dethroned king. The character of Section 12 also regrets his change of status from a central position in the society to pariah. These examples indicate that, while the structure of the group may remain static, there is a constant process of change and

168Ibid., p. 216.
169Ibid., p. 80.
readjustment as author succeeds author, and eminent critic loses favour and is replaced by another.

The other pattern we observe is that of the treatment of the dissenting individual by the society. On the one hand, he may submit and be reabsorbed, as happens in the case of Henri in Section 4. His slight demurral to the unqualified praise of Bréhier brings all the power of the state to bear upon him: "Les forces de l'ordre alertées, interviennent aussitôt. . . Une main se pose sur lui. . . 'Ah non, Henri, . . .'" 170

Jean Laborit is another example of a person who buckles before the authority of the inquisition. Guy, in Section 7, confesses his previous doubts and is admitted into the group as a result of his abject repentance. In Section 12 the group is eager to readmit to membership the man who was once a prominent member.

More frequently, however, the dissenter is expelled. The demands of self-preservation call for extreme action to be taken against those who threaten the solidarity of the group, and the motif of the pharmakos is prominent in the theme of Individual and Society. The first to be dismissed is the woman who challenged the critics to substantiate their claim "le livre en main." She is dismissed as "cette folle, cette tête brûlée." The woman of Section 6 is not only regarded as mad but is figuratively stoned and excluded: "On l'entoure. Leurs regards la lapident. Elle est repoussée, expulsée. Le cercle des fidèles se referme. Le calme un instant trouble, revient." 171 In Section 7 it is

170 Ibid., p. 74.
171 Ibid., p. 124.
Jean-Pierre who suffers expulsion and later the character of Section 12. It is, indeed, the ultimate fate of Bréhier who is tossed into the "fosse commune."

As we can see in the quotation above from Section 6, the crime committed by these individuals is that they have disturbed the order in the society. Society acts, therefore, in the interests of harmony, but the individual, too, acts out of the very same motivation. His relationship to his society is disturbed by some circumstance, something which strikes him as false, like the gesture of drawing a reproduction of Courbet from a pocket or a lie by Mettetal. He reacts with the intention of re-establishing the previous state of harmony that existed before the disruption. The women of Section 1 and of Section 6 hold visions of an ideal society restored by their timely intervention in a world that no longer rings true. But they, inadvertently, become catalysts in a process that ends with their own symbolic death or banishment. It is a vicious circle, an eternal pattern which transcends the book and becomes part of the reader's consciousness of his own world. This is the force of the end of Les Fruits d'Or when the solitary character, conscious of the process by which vogue succeeds vogue and action produces its reaction, is nevertheless driven into attempting to direct the course of the movement. This, too, is the significance of the image of the machine which, without our assistance, moving in step with time, drives incessantly forward. At the end of Section 1 it is the "minuterie" that leads the woman upwards to the "salle commune" as though against her will. It is the machine that causes the downfall of Parrot and the machine again, this time a clock,
which produces the inevitable reaction to the question "Et les Fruits d'Or?" The question has long echoes, for, however much we feel the effects of Les Fruits d'Or, it is, after all, just another book like "Les Fruits d'Or" and subject to the same changes of taste through time.

**Thematic Coherence**

At the beginning of this chapter we noted that the themes we were to use as illustrations were by no means restricted to a single level of meaning. Each could be used at either of the other levels. There is considerable interconnection between the themes, as we have found in the case of Appearance and Reality which we developed in the context of Art and of Individual and Society.\(^\text{172}\)

In his work, *Types of Thematic Structure*, E. H. Falk has proposed a method for analyzing the interrelationship of themes. In Les Fruits d'Or, which exhibits so little plot, the coherence of the work depends largely upon the thematic structure. Falk perceives that themes run parallel but converge at points which he calls "component motifs." These may be incidents or episodes which display similarities and which may be indicated by the presence of a leitmotif, a linking word or phrase or image. In applying this analysis to Les Fruits d'Or, we shall not attempt to analyze the entire work but shall take as leitmotif "le bâtiment" both in its occurrences as a word and as an image. In the table below we shall examine the episodes in which a

\(^{172}\)See above, pp. 97-107.
building appears and determine its significance in terms of our three themes. We have stretched "le bâtiment" to include other closely linked images: "le palais," "la ville," "la maison," "la forteresse." We also note references to other themes in order to indicate the close integration of the text.
### Table 7

**"Le Bâtiment" as Leitmotif**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Appearance and Reality</th>
<th>Individual and Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>&quot;...le soldat immobile défile dans la rue de la ville occupée.&quot;</td>
<td>A notable critic proclaims his opinion of &quot;Les Fruits d'Or&quot;</td>
<td>Art is the imposition of order on chaos. Images: Religion, Mystery, Esotericism.</td>
<td>Solidity of army vs fluidity of resistors.</td>
<td>Repression of people by institutions of society. Images: Military, class, religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>&quot;un bloc de ciment grossier ne peut s'intégrer, sans le déparer, à un édifice en balle pierre de taille.&quot;</td>
<td>Henri believes that Marcel is fooling them and that he can prove the fraud.</td>
<td>Each detail to be as perfect as the whole.</td>
<td>The fallacy of Marcel's argument. Image: hallucination.</td>
<td>Marcel seen as outsider; Henri in fact the outsider. Image: Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>&quot;pays...qui se déploie dans le lointain avec ses maisons, ses rues,&quot; etc.</td>
<td>The group senses the possibility of discovering the truth.</td>
<td>Artistic truth exists like an orderly town.</td>
<td>A vision only-'qu'on leur fasse voir.&quot; Image: mould.</td>
<td>Prospect of perfect harmony. Sense of present inadequacy. Images: children, pupils.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>&quot;des portes bien gardées, des hautes grilles de la demeure royale ou ces princes de l'esprit vivaient enfermés...les vastes cours de palais royaux...&quot;</td>
<td>The vogue reaches its highest point of organization.</td>
<td>The critic as sovereign. Art as an esoteric mystery.</td>
<td>The frailty of the palace and the fraudulence of the mystery. Images: hallucination, magic, religious transe.</td>
<td>Division of society. Exclusion of people. Need for defence. Images: royalty, defence, religion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>&quot;Il a été attiré hors de la protection de cette enceinte fortifiée où il se tenait, de cette place forte...&quot;</td>
<td>The old elite can no longer defend itself as before.</td>
<td>Artistic truth cannot be demonstrated objectively.</td>
<td>Revelation of fallacy of formalist theory. Only an impressive surface. Images: bubbles, electro-plating, magic.</td>
<td>Individual at odds with society. Need for defence. Image: wolves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example</td>
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<td>Reference</td>
<td>Context</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>&quot;le palais est vide, le roi détroné est en fuite...&quot;</td>
<td>Re-established group destroys last vestiges of old society.</td>
<td>Replacement of formalist pretension by total scepticism.</td>
<td>The fraudulence of the palace finally revealed. Empty, or containing only the vulgar.</td>
<td>New harmony seen in identity of all people.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
It will be readily seen from our table that the selection of other leitmotifs would be equally fruitful. The images and themes appear so intimately linked that we could begin our analysis from any point. In our examples we have stretched "le bâtiment" to include images of the palace, the fortress, the house and the town. We could very easily have considered royalty, religion and the garden as motifs that are equivalent to the building. Inclusion of the military could have led us to look at the animal imagery, while "vibration" introduces motifs from vegetation, motifs that serve as a contrast to the meaning of the building. The denseness of Sarraute’s text can be seen in this extraordinary interrelationship of imagery and theme. Even the vocabulary used is not applicable to one theme rather than another; words denoting hardness and softness are common to all our themes. One of the notable features of Sarraute’s work is this relentless concentration of vision, reminiscent of Racinian tragedy.

We can read our table horizontally and vertically, the vertical dimension being that associated with continuous or chronological progression through the book, while the horizontal is the dimension of the component motif, the transverse view of the parallel themes at any one selected point in the text. In the vertical columns 4 to 6 we find again the development of the three themes which we analyzed in the preceding section of this chapter. Of the other columns, Column 2 ("Reference") situates the leitmotif of the building in its immediate textual context, and we can see, by reading down the column, the variations in meaning. At first the building is regarded positively; "la ville occupée" is associated with order and "honnêtes
" gens," and in the second example we find "nobles villes," "Venise gagnée. . . sur les eaux troubles," a vocabulary underlining the virtues of the building. Until the long image of the palace, the building is always admirable, a classical model, an harmonious form not to be destroyed by banal details, and a vision of a distant land. The example of the palace associates the building with centrality, authority and exclusion, this latter being developed in Example 7 where the building is a fortress. The building can be toppled (Ex. 8) and is empty (Ex. 9). Finally it is pluralized to act as a symbol not only of Bréhier's book but of all books that enjoy or suffer the same fate. Thus the building can mean "Les Fruits d'Or," or books (including Les Fruits d'Or), or the vogues associated with new books, or literature in general. Always it brings us back to art suggesting each time an added dimension. The gradation of the motifs can be found in Column 3. Here "le bâtiment" is situated in the broader context of the plot, and we can observe its rise and decline from the occupied town, through the splendid city, to the palace, whence it declines to the fortress and finally to the empty shell that is ransacked and totally devoid of life.

If we now read the table horizontally we can see how our three themes intertwine within the context of each component motif, and how each derives additional significance by its correlation with the others. Example 1 is the moment at which the new author is introduced into the literary society. It opens with blunt and unsubstantiated proclamations of excellence. The speaker, a critic, is assumed to know. The theme of art is expanded by the use of the imagery of
hardness and softness ("soldat immobile," "l'ordre règne" vs. "puanteurs et sueurs," etc.) and the point of view of the narrator is clearly favourable to the former. It is the theme of the Individual and Society that is most prominent with the images of military force, of sacred symbols, and of the elite and the rabble. The episode evokes the imposition of an orderly form upon the chaos of matter, doing so simultaneously within the framework of Art, Perception and Society.

In our second example the "nobles villes" and palaces, etc. are Marcel's projected view of art. Once again the solid form of the building is imposed upon the fluid substance of life. But a broader dimension is added. Marcel closes his eyes to see his idealized city of art and does so very deliberately. He is clearly acting, and we know from the beginning of the episode that he wants to upset the previous speaker. There is in Marcel's whole attitude something which does not ring true, a feeling which is reflected back on to the motif of the building. Another important suggestion in this episode is that of the sense of integration between the individual and his society. Marcel is not necessarily deliberately lying; it is possible that he believes in this vision of the city, and it is clear that he regards it as the appropriate setting for himself: "là, il s'est toujours promené." Clearly he belongs to the elite as shown in the images of royalty.

The building is the ideal classical model in Example 3. On the one hand, it offers security because of its familiarity, the reassurance that the woman of this episode lack, for they are the
water which breaks the dam; on the other hand, the resort to Greek
harmony is associated with the opening of the sales at a department
store. Again, by association, the image of the building acquires
overtones that debase it and render it suspect. Henri, in Example 4,
suspects Marcel, compares him to Rasputin, and accuses him of
drugging and hallucinating the group. He claims to have seen the
fallacy of the argument, but he also sees Marcel as a criminal, some­
body to be condemned or expelled from society. In effect, of course,
it is he himself who is not in touch with his society, who is in
conflict with it just as the "bloc de ciment grossier" conflicts with
"un édifice en belle pierre de taille." Harmony is the vision of the
group (Ex. 5) as it pleads to be admitted to the esoteric mystery
known only to the critics. Again the motif of the eyes--"qu'on leur
fasse voir"--suggests the blindness of the vision, underlining its
unreality. Later the group describes itself in terms of fluidity,
a condition which it seeks to remedy by finding something solid. The
image that summarizes its situation is that of the mould (p. 88).
Thus the vision of the orderly city is cast into doubt. The promised
land, which is perceived as a realm of incontrovertible artistic
judgment, does not really exist, we suspect. The group that aspires
to it is likened to the pupils submissive to their teacher, or to
the child deceived by its parents. What is evidently experienced
in the present is lack of harmony between the group (or individual) and
its circumstances.

The image of the palace occurs at the moment when the formalist
school of art has reached its highest peak of organization, but the point of view clearly indicates to the reader the fraudulence of that whole society, the palace. The lengthy episode opens once again with a reference to eyes and to hallucinations:

Rêveillez-vous, des passees magnetiques vous ont plonges dans le sommeil, on vous a suggestionnes, revenez à vous, regardez, voyez-les, ces deux compères qui viennent d'exécuter sur vous un de leurs tours. Observez-les attentivement...173

Images of magic and religious transe add to the impression that the society of the palace is more apparent than real, depending for its survival upon the blindness of the people. No longer does the building present an image of harmony; it now is seen to exclude, to be deliberately designed to keep people from the truth. The images of royalty and religion, added to the description of the palace, suggest a divided society and one which promotes the fraud of a central and esoteric mystery. Objective artistic judgment and expertise is under strong attack. The palace appears all powerful but its illusory foundations have been revealed and the images of defence ("barricades," "gardes," "enfermés à triple tour") add to the sense of instability.

In Example 7 the building has become a fortress. It is simply there for the protection of those inside. Parrot wrongly assumes a state of harmony in the world outside the fortress and is trapped and falls from power like a king dethroned. The building/fortress is a superficial covering which has been shown to bear no connection with reality. Like "Les Fruits d'Or" it has lost its magic, the bubble has burst. There is nothing beneath the electro-plated exterior that

173 Sarraute, Les Fruits d'Or, p. 95.
so appeals to the eye.

By the time we reach Example 8 "Les Fruits d'Or" has been discredited. The building image has acquired the extra dimension of the vogue and it is this that is now under attack. Again we find the image of hallucination and the literary fads are described as "la frime." At this point the individual is clearly at odds with his society, to such an extent that he wishes to destroy it. (The other describes him as "le terroriste.") The whole process of judging art is under attack and is countered by subjectivism. Our last view of the palace is at the moment that it is being ransacked (Ex. 9). It is revealed to be empty, to contain nothing of value but only the cheap and the vulgar, which, in terms of this new form of society, is reality. The pretensions of the palace, of the formalists, and of Bréhier are displayed in all their falsehood, and the new harmony is proposed "dans la mesquine réalité" (p. 204) where nobody is revered and nothing is sacred.

In the final Example it is the emptiness of the building that is compared with the vitality and promise evoked by the image of the crocus. It is clear from what the motif has acquired in the previous examples that the building is the appearance compared with the reality of the flower. It is the size and grandeur of the building that is stressed, but also the fact of its emptiness. It is related through the immediate context to the turmoil and noise of society, which is contrasted to the isolation of the solitary individual seeking words to express his sense of contact with the aesthetic reality.
This concurrent analysis of our themes raises three points. Firstly we note that there is a difference between the theme of art and the two other themes. We used art to illustrate the level of meaning of the plot, the simple mirror image, but its movement conforms closely to that of the plot with its overall cyclical pattern. Actions arise from the controversy about art, so that however far we plunge into other thematic material we are always brought back to comments about "Les Fruits d'Or" and about aesthetics. The context of the themes of Appearance and Reality and of Individual and Society are, however, different. In the former case, we have consistently found in each of our exemplary motifs the fraudulent or the sham. The two levels of existence, the hard and the soft, are always present in the image of the building, but there is a frequent association within the motif, with images of hallucination or magic, or with "l'oeil." The suggestion is constantly there that reality is not only what it seems, and we are conscious of a tension between Appearance and Reality. There is tension, too, between the Individual and Society. We noticed the sense of harmony or disharmony that existed in all the examples and the desire of the individual as well as of the society for the re-establishment of that ideal condition, their ultimate integration.

Our study of the themes has brought us back to the tropism, for their content recalls the movement of the tropism described in our previous chapters. We find a distinction between the three themes,

— See above, pp. 85-86.
for while Art illustrates principally the level of the fiction, the other two reflect the rhythms of the narrative, the rhythms of conflict and the cyclical movement from harmony through disharmony and back again to harmony. It is to the tropism that we turn our attention in our concluding chapter.
CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been the tropism. We have described the tropism as the process of adaptation of the organism to its environment, a process which comprises both conflict and the desire for harmony. It is a process which takes place, for the most part, within the individual, the external and visible signs being merely the results of long internal movements. The overall pattern of the tropism is circular in the sense that the sequence of the seasons, or the daily response of plants to the movement of light or, indeed, the cycle of life and death are circular. For Sarraute the tropism is the description of the condition of man placed ineluctably in a society in which, on the one hand, he continually seeks to immerse himself while, on the other, he finds in it endless sources of friction. But there is no escape and, like it or not, he must define himself in terms of his society.

The tropism is a literary device by means of which Sarraute presents her vision of the world. It is this literary usage that we have attempted to analyze in this study and which we shall review in the first half of this chapter.

The point of view adopted by Sarraute enables her and her reader to participate as immediately as possible in the multiple and complex movements that arise between the individual and his society.
Actions and events are not mediated by a narrator or implied author, and the reader experiences the slings and arrows of fortune as they are recorded by the various characters. He is enabled to pierce the surface of action and character, entering into the "fonds obscurs de la psychologie," which is, in Sarraute's opinion, the true realm of fiction in our present age.

The expansion of the inner world of Sarraute's characters involves an expanded role for the narrative elements of the work. Action is displaced by extensive reflection and complex responses to events, which fall into the circular pattern that we have described above. From an assumed condition of harmony a stimulus releases a conflict whose desired outcome is the re-establishment of harmony. It is a structure which can be seen at the level of the work as a whole, in the fourteen sections, and in the episodes within those sections. Tropisms exist within tropisms; one releases another to create an infinite series, and they can be juxtaposed and mutually conflicting.

In the style we can trace how Sarraute is able to achieve her effects. In the use of the present tense and in the imitation of realistic dialogue with all its unexpected jerkiness, she presents her world in all its complexity, not as a thing ordered and subject to an holistic description, but as a process, continually unfolding and eternally incomprehensible. More precisely she is able to express the conflict between the two views by means of the distinction that she draws between "sous-conversation," with its wealth of imagery, and "conversation," with its clichés. Sarraute has thus distinguished,
stylistically, between the external world of action (speech being considered as action) and the inner world in which occur the movements of the tropisms.

The fiction of *Les Fruits d'Or* is notable for its limited role. The expansion of the narrative has restricted the plot to a mere skeleton, a few statements and gestures which form a sequence and from which stem the dramatic conflicts of the inner world. The role of the plot is largely mechanical but it, too, conforms episodically to the pattern of the tropism with its regular triadic structure of Action-Reaction-Outcome. Character, like plot, has lost its prominence. There are few well-built characters in the sense in which we usually understand these words; those that there are appear as caricatures, masks without faces. Character has come to mean a psychological orientation of the individual to his environment, an orientation which, with a few minor variations, is common to all men and women. The individual aspires to harmony with his environment and any disruption of that harmony provokes a struggle for its recovery.

Space and time, usually considered as aspects of the fiction, show, in *Les Fruits d'Or*, the predominant influence of the narrative. Space is not described but is apprehended by the reader through the words and feelings of the characters. The isolation from society, the sense of claustrophobia, and the circular structure of space is a condition, not significant at the level of action and fiction, but only in the psychological relationships between people. Similarly, time is not chronology, related to the sequence of the plot, but the ineluctible law of movement which lies beneath the tropism. The time
of action is limited and interrupted, but the time of the interior world that Sarraute is exploring is potentially limitless.

The "mise en abîme" creates a triple level of meaning in *Les Fruits d'Or*. At the first level the meaning is satirical and can best be illustrated in the theme of Art which conforms closely to the movement of the plot. Two other meanings, however, arise from the opposition and, then, the identification of the two books bearing the same title. Throughout the book there are tendencies to both conflict and integration. The conflict is best seen in the theme of Appearance and Reality while integration is the ultimate goal of both individual and society. While running parallel to one another, the three themes frequently touch, lending to each other, upon contact, a greater dimension. The interaction of the themes creates a coherent thematic structure which, once again, reflects the movement of the tropism. The rise and decline of the vogue, whence emerge the various artistic pronouncements, provoke conflicts within the society, conflicts which turn fundamentally upon what is true and what false, what is real and what apparent. But the persistent and repetitious conflicts appear within theme of the Individual and the Society, where they alternate with the opposite desire for integration. Sarraute's vision of the world as tropism implies that any topic (e.g., the plot) will be worked out within a literary context in which the distinction between appearance and reality is subject to the laws governing the mutual needs of individual and society, of organism and environment.
Thus far in this chapter we have done no more than summarize what we have demonstrated at greater length in the body of the thesis. We have attempted, however, to underline the presence of the tropism in every aspect of "Les Fruits d'Or and to see the book's significance in the light of that predominant structure. But our attention has been concentrated on the internal significance of the work, and we have not, except in parenthetical comment, looked at the broader meaning of the tropism. We have, in Todorov's terms, studied the "sens" and not attempted "interprétation." In turning now to interpretation, we can see two areas for comment; firstly, we shall discuss the tropism in terms of its ability to represent reality and secondly we shall consider its contribution to literature.

There can be no doubt in the mind of any reader that the interior movements, which Sarraute has called tropisms, form part of his experience of life, and, especially, part of his relationship with others. Constantly, we respond with keen sensitivity to remarks, and the speaker may well be unaware of the effect that his, perhaps offhand, comment has made. We can nurse for a long time internal wounds or carefully guarded hopes, but when we finally reveal them to the person responsible, he views what he has produced with incredulity. Sarraute is right in assuming an inner realm of experience which is invisible, rich, and can be brought to light only with the greatest difficulty.

The tropism, however, goes further than this. As we noticed

175 For discussion of these terms, see above, pp. 3-4.
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at the beginning of our study the word itself is drawn from biology
and thus implies a condition which is inescapable. Man is totally
determined by his environment. Even consciousness does not lead to
liberation as we see at the end of Les Fruits d'Or, for the character
is aware of his and mankind's situation but is still unable to release
himself from it. The image of the machine, that appears on four
occasions in Les Fruits d'Or, testifies to this sense of an inevitable
and mechanical law that guides our destiny. For Sarraute the indivi­
dual is a prisoner of his society, and any society will seek the
submission of the individual. Jaccard bases his study of Sarraute
on the premise that her characters are members of the bourgeoisie,
revealing the conventional attitudes of that class, but there seems
no reason to believe that Sarraute is restricting her vision to it
alone. Though Proust described the aristocratic circles and those
who aspired to them, we do not therefore assume that his vision of
society is restricted to that relatively minute class. Sarraute is
describing human relations and her view displays an extensive pessimism
for not only is man trapped, but the interior movements, which he

176 Jaccard, Nathalie Sarraute.

177 It is almost impossible to give any totally satisfactory
definition of "bourgeoisie." We find, however, in Sarraute's works
more than one class represented. Clearly, in Martereau, the family
of the narrator and Martereau himself belong to different classes.
While Alain Guimez and family in Le Planétarium would certainly be
part of the bourgeoisie, it is doubtful if Germaine Lemaire can be
placed in the same social group for one of her attractions is her
apparent freedom from such problems as door knobs and sofas.
Germaine Lemaire, however, provides the answer to the problem, for
she turns out to be no different from the other characters. Sarraute
is not describing one class but "une matière anonyme, identique chez
tous."
experiences continuously, are largely responses of fear and suspicion. Her people appear unable to react positively to one another, or if, as occasionally happens, they do, they are soon sorely disillusioned.¹⁷⁶

The purpose of our comments is not to plead for optimistic literature but to indicate the type of world that Sarraute appears to be portraying. It is a world that Northrop Frye would describe as "demonic." Some of the features of that world are noted in this quotation from Anatomy of Criticism:

Opposed to apocalyptic symbolism is the presentation of the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion; the world as it is before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden has been solidly established; the world also of perverted and wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly.¹⁷⁹

Frye might almost have drawn his examples from Les Fruits d'Or so appropriate are they to it. But this is not all, for he sees the circle as a significant symbol of the demonic world and the pharmakos as its archetypal character. Sarraute, however, does not even offer us the alternative of the apocalyptic, for the garden and the building and the city which Frye, like a good formalist, sees as creations of man's divine spirit, are for her mere sham, "de la frime."

Within this hopeless environment or society there is one little

¹⁷⁶We may cite as examples of disillusioned hope the experience of the woman who returns at the end of Section 1 seeking a positive answer, only to be rebuffed once again. The group in Section 4 is sorely deceived in its faith in the critics. The woman of Section 6 believes that frankness will prevail. The man of Section 12 hopes that his stirring eloquence will sway the group. Further examples of misplaced optimism could be added.

¹⁷⁹Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 147.
gleam, but it is so small that we must beware of building any theory about it. It is expressed in the images of the crocus and the child's hand and in the language associated with vibration and the imperceptible rustle of life. Like the flame it is sensitive and can easily be extinguished. Its principal attributes are its tenderness and its potentiality but it seems incapable of development or growth. In *Les Fruits d'Or* there is no example of any authentic value or sensation beyond the level of these feeble suggestions. The crocus and the child's hand flicker weakly in the vast and ominous mass of demonic and falsely apocalyptic imagery that fills the book.

The first thing to mention in considering the literary importance of Sarraute's tropistic vision is that its use is not restricted to *Les Fruits d'Or*. It is the fundamental pattern of all her works as she herself reiterates whenever she discusses her own writing. The title of her first book *Tropismes* is evidence enough in itself. It was written at a time when Sarraute believed that novels were obsolete and that writers could only record those localized and immediate sensations that are the tropisms. Through the single narrator, however, she found a way of recording a continuous experience, as events and opinions of others transformed the narrator's world. In *Martereau* it is the attitudes expressed by the narrator's family which shatter the solid, reliable appearance of Martereau, provoking continual changes in relationships. With *Le Planétarium* Sarraute begins to use the multiple narrator and we already find those group scenes in which action or word produces its inevitable response. In the latest novel,
Vous les Entendez, it is the giggles of the children that continually disrupt the aspirations of the two men for a world of security based on universal aesthetic values. Sarraute's work, as a whole, can be seen as a continuous attempt to express with even a greater precision and clarity her fundamental concept, the tropism.

This view of the world is, however, not without precedent. Sarraute herself points to a large number of predecessors to whom she recognizes her obligation. She cites, in L'Ère du Soupçon, Kafka and Dostoevsky, who have had such an influence on her conception of character. Ivy Compton Burnett appears to have helped her to clarify her concept of "conversation" and "sous-conversation." Proust recorded the symptomatic eruptions on the surface of society of the sickness and trouble beneath. Virginia Woolf comes closest to being a direct predecessor with her desire to record the experience of the inward eye, her use of the multiple narrator, and her attacks upon the conventions of novel writing. But Sarraute differs from these other writers and has a vision which she has discovered and developed alone. There is always the feeling, in reading Virginia Woolf, that the interior movements are somehow an aberration, a sign of incipient madness in Mrs. Dalloway, or a blemish upon the objective eternal beauty of the English country garden in The Waves. For Sarraute the inner world has become reality, and it is the outer, visible world that is false. It is this that Sarraute has above all contributed to literature. Writing of mankind in the mid-twentieth century she has

seen, like so many others, his alienation from his environment, but she has discovered his escape into "les fonds obscurs de la psychologie."

What Sarraute has revealed to us, and is constantly struggling to express, is that in a world in which mankind is prisoner of his environment and society, in which all overt, authentic action has become impossible, the true realm of man's adventure lies within himself.

The heroes, martyrs, despots, and revolutionaries of today struggle beneath the bland and false appearance of modern life, and the tropism is both Sarraute's perception of the inner reality, and the literary means by which she draws that tumultuous life out of the depths, to display it before the mind's eye of her reader.
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