

## BRUNO HILLEBRAND

Theorie des Romans

(Theory of the Novel)

München: Winkler, 1972. Pp. 530.  
DM 29.

There are, according to Professor Hillebrand, two ways for dealing with the theory of the novel. The first is the one taken by novelists who, relying on their own subjective experience, try to sum up their conceptions of the novel. The second is the one followed by theorists and non-writers of fiction who, after reading, analyzing, and examining different novels, attempt to recapitulate their observations as objectively as possible in the form of a theory of the novel that will always be valid.

Mr. Hillebrand rejects this "ahistorical" attitude, for, when theorists try to "x-ray" different novels, they are usually preoccupied by purely extrinsic aspects and neglect important elements like themes, characters, and subject matter which are all significant parts of the content.

After expressing his doubts about the possibility of laying down a theory that is valid for all novels, the author notices that theories about the novel show some recurring patterns that might enable us to go beyond the generic analysis and understand more about the novel as a literary object. For instance, the novel is more "inter-communicative" than other genres; it is aimed in the first place at entertaining and enlightening the reader; also, the novelist's main endeavor is to project "a panorama of the human scene" and to depict the "condition humaine."

The author is not interested in reproducing and rearranging well-known theories of the novel; he is primarily concerned with the "practical" aspects of the novel, but not without taking the different theories into consideration. He observes closely the development of this genre from its very beginning (the Hellenistic novel) to the present time (the so-called "anthropological responsible novel"). He thoroughly examines the themes, the styles, and the *zeitgeist* of each historical epoch and literary movement and—calling upon novelists and historians for proof and evidence—he presents a very clear and comprehensive history of the novel and its theories.

S.K.

## STEPHEN HEATH

*The Nouveau Roman:*

*A Study in the Practice of Writing*

Philadelphia: Temple University Press,  
1972. Pp. 252.

Heath's book is itself a Robbe-Grilletian labyrinth. A study in the practice of writing, the major authorities cited to combat the theories of Robbe-Grillet are linguists and semioticians, exponents of Russian formalism (Roman Jakobson, Julia Kristeva, etc.). Although Russian formalism is theoretically opposed to Marxist socialism, Heath views their position as essentially in harmony with Philippe Sollers and the staff of *Tel Quel*, who severed their relations with Robbe-Grillet in 1968 on the publication of their *Théorie d'ensemble* ("the theoretical work of the review that is seen as a contribution within Marxism-Leninism," p. 220). This political commitment is in stark opposition to Robbe-Grillet's single commitment, namely to literature itself.

It is remarkable, moreover, that in a review of the *New Novel* no attention is paid to the work of Michel Butor. The chapters on Nathalie Sarraute and on Claude Simon are concise and free of the "dialectic" of the longer chapters on Robbe-Grillet and on Sollers.

Heath emphasizes the fact that the "concept of *société*" has been abandoned by Robbe-Grillet (p. 95). By extension, Robbe-Grillet's denial of a rapport between persons and objects draws a more caustic comment: ". . . innocent relationship Robbe-Grillet wishes to establish is nonsense" (p. 104). The latter's "naïve materialism" is opposed to "dialectical materialism," and a passage from Marx, originally directed against Feuerbach, is now directed against Robbe-Grillet (p. 107). By undermining the importance of Robbe-Grillet, of course, Heath is magnifying the social role of Sollers, who continues and perfects, according to Heath, the practice of writing.

Because of a complicated sentence structure, Heath will alienate some readers, who might already be disappointed in the disproportion of space allotted to citations from critics (the formalists, Lévy-Strauss, Barthes, etc.) as opposed to space devoted to the novels themselves (only