Tutuola. The fantastic is given a catholic
definition by Eric Rabkin: that which offers
an alternative to the real world. Certainly
his selections “rejuvenate the familiar by
transplanting it to the wonderful soil of fan­
tastic worlds” (p. xi); and his book will
make an excellent class text as well as
offering stirring bedtime reading to the
general reader of fiction.

These three books are, as I say, either
collections or specialist studies. Of more
direct interest to students of the novel are
the books by Professor Lord and Professor
Kestner. The first links up to some extent
with Professor Oinas’s symposium, in that
it is concerned, in part at least, with the
Odyssey. Professor Lord concentrates his
attention, however, less on the heroic than
on “literature that criticizes and modifies
the heroic tradition or appeals from it to
other standards”—“standards that,” Dr
Lord specifies, “while often appearing to be
unheroic, attain in the long run a greater
validity than those they replace” (p. 13).
The scope is once more admirably wide,
sometimes almost perversely so; I was not
myself convinced by the detailed com­
parison and contrast between the spurious
games at Llanabba School in Decline and
Fall by Evelyn Waugh and the epic Homeric
and Virgilian games. Nor, to be candid,
did I feel that the topic merited book-
length treatment; Professor Lord clearly
took a lot of trouble over it (“Rarely has
a book so small incurred such a heavy
load of indebtedness,” p. 9), but the dis­
cussion lacks rigor and the conclusion
(“the most serious things are too serious
to be treated seriously,” p. 135), while
admirable in itself, does not—for this
reader at least—emerge with compelling
inevitability from the demonstration and
the examples. Perhaps the weakness of the
book is that it arose out of seminar teach­
ing at Yale. We have all, I am sure,
experienced disappointment at rereading
notes made after a particularly stimulating
class with bright undergraduates: somehow
the dazzlement we felt at the time evapor­
ates—like a heady perfume from an
uncorked bottle—surprisingly rapidly.

If some readers will feel that Professor
Lord is almost too urbane, others may
find Professor Kestner’s remorseless seri­
ousness disconcerting in a different way.
He uses diagrams, employs technical
language (“genidentic,” for example) and
peppers nearly every page with titles of
novels in italics, rarely doing more than
allude to a book he assumes all his readers
will be familiar with. Perhaps Dr Lord is
right, and the most serious matters—such
as the role of space in the novel—are too
serious to be treated seriously. There is
no doubt about the importance, even the
centrality of the topic; but there must
remain some doubt about Professor
Kestner’s success in handling it. My confi­
dence was a little shaken, for instance,
by finding what is for me the most astound­
ing, and the most puzzling, instance of
pictorial illusion in fiction—the sighting
of Chad and Madame de Vionnet by
Strether, “framed” (as it were) in a
Lambinet—despatched in a typically brisk
aside: “In The Ambassadors (1903), Strether
sees his quarry and its lure indelibly framed
on the river Seine” (pp. 77-78). Is that all,
I wondered, that one can say about such
an extraordinary passage, such a controlled
and sustained “pictorialization” of a ficional
episode? So for me, this was a disappoint­
ing book; but it will remain an important one,
if only for the admirable summary of pre­
vious theories of spatiality in narrative
given in the first chapter, and the fre­
quently challenging readings of passages
that one thought one knew well, such as
the famous “Il voyagea” (“He traveled”)
which opens the penultimate chapter of
Flaubert’s L’Education sentimentale, and
which Professor Kestner discusses—albeit,
it must be said, with tantalizing curtness
once again—in his penultimate chapter.

John Fletcher

DORIS Y. KADISH
Practices of the New Novel in Claude
Simon’s L’Herbe and La Route des
Flandres
Fredericton, N.B.: York Press,

Kadish treats L’Herbe and La Route des
Flandres as paradigmatic new novels. She
makes, moreover, a pertinent distinction
between the new novel and the new-new
novel (of Simon’s later period) in which
virtually all traditional elements are ex­
cluded. In L’Herbe and La Route, she studies
four elements: plot, character, description
and point of view; plot and character are
minimized to a great extent through the
means of blurring or the lack of details,
whereas description and the point of view are emphasized. This reversal of the traditional emphasis induces a more poetic effect in the novels.

Description, without moral or psychological implications, maintains an independent status as “a perceiving, recording consciousness sees and writes, as it were, the world” (p. 20). Temporal description is exemplified in L’Herbe by the T shape of the light entering the shutters in the aunt’s bedroom; it reveals the interaction of time and space (this geometric design is obviously akin to those precise mathematical descriptions of Robbe-Grillet). Literary description might assume the form of a mise en abyme, or “a miniature version of an entire work within that text” (p. 46). In L’Herbe, for example, the cover on the aunt’s biscuit box depicts a woman seated in the grass holding a box, just as the heroine (Louise) does in the novel. Finally, erotic descriptions (the grass in L’Herbe, the riding of horses in La Route) obscure the distinction between people and things (shades of Emile Zola’s La Terre or La Bête humaine).

In regard to the point of view, abrupt temporal shifts betray the fact that Simon is not adhering to strict, chronological time. In La Route, confusion enters with the shift in focus from the first to the third person narrator (actually the same person, Georges). Furthermore, the fact that Georges is fatigued, excited or inebriated influences the point of view.

In composing these two novels, Simon “creates a structure out of odds and ends from the past” (p. 27). This fragmentation, or bricolage, leaves the novel in an incomplete state; in terms of criticism, Kadish offers a bricolage by restricting her study to an exposition of the four elements (plot, character, description, and point of view). In the process, she eschews interpretation; in L’Herbe, she questions the generally held viewpoint that Louise derives a lesson from the aunt’s death (an interpretation which Kadish considers “incompatible with the underlying narrative conception of Simon’s new novel,” p. 34).

In the conclusion, Kadish outlines the essential features of Le Palace and L’Histoire, since these novels also belong to Simon’s “central period.” With the appearance of La Bataille de Pharsale (1969), however, Simon enters his new-new novel phase, a period wherein a novel strives “to reflect the complex workings of writing, not consciousness” (p. 95). Also in the conclusion, Kadish sets limits for interpretative criticism and she proposes certain values for the semiological approach to criticism, especially for the new-new novel. Aware of the excessive linguistic terminology used by practitioners of the semiological stamp, Kadish presents a modified approach, more à la portée of the general reader.

J. A. E. Loubère’s study of Simon is omitted in the bibliography (hurried proofreading or the Druckfehler?). L’Histoire is absent from the list of Simon’s novels and the date of publication given for Le Palace is 1967 instead of 1962. Kadish insists that the movement of the new novel begins in 1958 (in order to coincide with the appearance of L’Herbe); devotees of Sarraute, Butor, and Robbe-Grillet will no doubt not accept this position. Finally, Kadish relegated Le Vent (1957) to the category of the traditional novel; if this novel possesses many Faulknerian elements, then L’Herbe betrays certain affinities with As I Lay Dying. It must be stated that Kadish advances subtle, yet perceptive, reasons which support her choice of L’Herbe as the first of Simon’s new novels.

In order to appreciate La Route, the active participation of the reader is sought (“on the reader and on the reader’s artistic vision,” p. 84). In general the new novel has projected this author-reader intimacy (cf. the enigmatic “vous” of Butor’s La Modification); with the new-new novel, however, it might seem that this relationship has been repudiated. Kadish’s unpretentious but lucid treatment of Claude Simon, although restricted to two new novels, will help to overcome this estrangement, inasmuch as “narrowing the gap between Simon and his potential readers is the most urgent task of Simonian criticism” (p. 102).

Francis S. Heck