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**Robbe-Grillet, Alain (1922—2008)**

Born in Brest in a family of scientists and a trained agricultural engineer himself, Alain Robbe-Grillet is a French novelist, film director, and one of the leading figures of the Nouveau Roman (New Novel), a literary movement that aimed at revolutionizing the psychological tradition of the French novel.

After the publication of his first novel in 1953, he became the editorial assistant of Jérôme Lindon, director of the famous publishing company Les éditions de Minuit, and could devote most of his time to his writing as well as to the promotion of the new literature of his times (besides his creative work, Robbe-Grillet was also an important critic and polemist). His first novels, *Les Gommes* (*The Erasers*, 1953), *Le Voyeur* (*The Voyeur*, 1955), *La Jalousie* (*Jealousy*, 1957, his most radical book), and *Dans le labyrinthe* (*In the Labyrinth*, 1959), did not sell very well, but were heavily praised by key critics such as Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot, who considered them the forerunners of a new form of writing, deprived of the stylistic and ideological clichés of classic, humanist literature, and exploring a type of narrative that no longer focuses on plot and character, but on the meticulous description of an object-based reality. The numerous polemics that surrounded Robbe-Grillet's work and public interventions put the 'scandalous' New Novel at the centre of French literary life, where it took over, in a period of great political turmoil provoked by the colonial war in Algeria, the dominant position of Sartre and Camus's existentialism. The publication of an important essay collection, *Pour un nouveau roman* (*For a New Novel*, 1963), and the ubiquity of the author in all literary debates of the 1960s and 70s institutionalized the role of his new type of narrative. At that moment, however, the work of Robbe-Grillet was already shifting to new grounds, cinema, on the one hand (a logical choice for such a visually descriptive author), and autofiction, on the other hand (a more surprising move, given his violent attacks against the psychological novel in the 1950s). Alain Robbe-Grillet wrote the script for the Alain Resnais film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*, 1961), an experimental yet also highly successful reflection on the productive role of memory, and directed himself some ten other films, most of which were also published as illustrated cine-novels, a hybrid genre, half-script, half-novel, that fascinated also other New Novelists like Marguerite Duras. From 1965 on, with the publication of *La Maison de Rendez-vous* (TRANSLATION), Robbe-Grillet abandoned his objective, phenomenological style in favour of a more associative form of narrative that made room for the personal (erotic and sadistic) fantasies of the author, who liked to pose as a pervert. This subjective turn took the form of semi-autobiographical or autofictional writing with *Le Miroir qui revient* (*Ghosts in the Mirror*, 1984), which purportedly blurred the boundaries between the fictional and the real. The last works by Robbe-Grillet, both in cinema and in literature, radicalized the mix of semi-autobiography and phantasm, but did so with growing indifference towards the reading public.

References and further reading

Paratextual material