

relationship comes to an end, the children's laughter is "pour personne. Des rires dans le vide" (p. 223). In this vacuum it cannot continue and silence descends at last.

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Non-Functional Contradictions in Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*

With its small but nonetheless labyrinthine setting, minute descriptions, notations of spatial relationships, numerous and sudden shifts from one time period to another, incremental repetitions, transformations and mergings of events, and series of contradictory time markers, Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* demands to be read with nearly the same obsessive attention to detail with which the narrator studies the objects and persons within his range of vision. In this elaborately, carefully, and cleverly constructed novel, a few purposeless contradictions seem to have escaped the watchful eye of its creator.¹ These tiny lapses probably would go unnoticed in a novel focusing less on minutiae and requiring less exact visualization.

A reader of *Jealousy* soon becomes aware that the narrator views A... through three bedroom windows, two facing south (toward the central portion of the veranda and the valley) and one west. These windows, however, are numbered in an inconsistent way. Shortly after the novel commences, the narrator indicates that A... 's "little work table" is "near the second window, against the partition separating the bedroom from the hallway" (p. 41), and within the same sequence he refers to the window on "the west gable-end of the house" as the "third window" (p. 42). In part three again the narrator identifies the windows by number. While sitting at her dressing table, which is located in front of the west window, A... 's gaze is reflected "behind her, toward the bedroom's third window, the central portion of the veranda and the slope of the valley" (p. 67) — toward, in other words, the window close to the "little work table" and nearest the partition separating the bedroom from the hallway. The next paragraph of the text indicates that "the second window, which looks south like this third one, is nearer the southwest corner of the house..." (p. 67). Later on the same page the narrator calls "the first window, that of the gable-end" (that is, facing west). Thus, the window originally called the "second" becomes the "third," the window (west) originally called the "third" becomes the "first," and the window originally unnumbered but presumably the first becomes the "second." By p. 93, near the conclusion of part five, the confusion becomes even worse. The window near the "little work table" is now the "first window" (p. 93), not the "second" or "third" as in the previous cases; and the window which "overlooks the west gable-end"

once again becomes the "third window" (p. 93). Other references occur later (pp. 121-23, 134) and agree with the numbering system established on p. 93. The numbers assigned to the windows do not appear to be dictated by the narrator's different points of observation, and, in fact, could have been avoided because of other reasonably clear details. Satisfactory explanations may be offered for other changes or contradictions in the novel (say, the enlarged centipede in the climactic sequence, or the concluding comments on the African novel), but the confusing numbering system noted here seems to be an example of a non-functional modification, the result either of carelessness or of downright perversity.

Difficulties also arise if a reader attends closely to the narrator's comments about the dining room window which contains flaws in its glass. In part three a clear explanation is presented: "The windows are perfectly clean and, in the right-hand leaf, the landscape is only slightly affected by the flaws in the glass, which give ["*simplément*," translation omitted by Richard Howard] a few shifting nuances to the too uniform surfaces. But in the left leaf, the reflected image . . . is plainly distorted, circular or crescent-shaped spots of verdure the same color as the banana trees occurring in the middle of the courtyard in front of the sheds" (pp. 70-71). Other passages clearly identify the "left leaf" of the first or more westerly window as being flawed (pp. 60-62, 131). Also, the narrator explains that the truck is usually parked in a precise spot: "that is, it is framed between the lower and middle panes of the right-hand window-leaf, against the inner jamb, the little crosspiece cutting its outline horizontally into two masses of equal size" (p. 80). But when a few paragraphs later the narrator plays one of his optical games by viewing the distorted image of the truck (p. 81), and still later when he plays the same type of game with an oil spot which marks the usual location of the truck (pp. 95-96), the extended descriptions give the impression that what the narrator sees is "plainly distorted."² If the explanation presented on pp. 70-71 is accepted, then such distortions should appear through the left leaf of the window and not through the right leaf, which supposedly frames the truck.

Another object in the novel mysteriously changes shape. At first A . . . 's "dressing table" is said to be "provided especially with a vertical mirror" (p. 67). A little later an additional piece of information is supplied: "The back of the mirror is a panel of rougher wood, also reddish, but dark, oval in shape and with a chalk inscription almost entirely erased" (p. 68). Considerably later in the novel A . . . sits at her dressing table and looks at herself "in the oval mirror" (p. 92; also, p. 102).

A few other peculiarities need to be noted. In one case the narrator declares that the walls of A . . . 's bedroom, "like those of the whole house, are covered with vertical laths two inches wide separated by a double groove" (p. 110). No evidence definitely contradicts this statement, but various passages give the general impression that the wall against which the centipede is crushed is smooth, that is, without any striped effect or without laths and grooves breaking the outline of the centipede. It is also odd that the office (p. 58), hallway (pp. 58, 77, 111, 117, 132, 136), and dining-living room (pp. 65, 71, 82, 96, 112) have tiled floors ("*le carrelage*" or "*les carreaux*"), presumably all with grooves forming chevrons (pp. 111, 112, 136), and that A . . . 's bedroom has a floor of wooden laths (pp. 41, 110).³ Also, in several instances it is difficult to understand how the narrator, positioned on the veranda, sees or hears some of the things noted in A . . . 's bedroom; for

instance, when A... is "stretched across the wide bed," with "her face... turned upward toward the ceiling," the narrator observes that "her eyes are made still larger by the darkness" (p. 92). Finally, during one of the dining scenes when, as usual, Franck is the only visitor, surely a reference to "the guests" (p. 63; "les convives," p. 35) is an error rather than a subtlety.

Even tiny inaccuracies are surprising and jarring when they appear in the work of a master of minutiae, a novelist whose "concern for precision... sometimes borders on the delirious."⁴

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NOTES

¹Richard Howard's translation (New York: Grove Press, 1965) is responsible for several flaws not present in the French text, *La Jalousie*, ed. Germaine Brée and Eric Schoenfeld (New York: Macmillan, 1963). (Quotations are from these eds.) For instance, a description of A... 's photograph is introduced with "on the corner of the dressing-table" (p. 72) — a notation which perplexes the attentive reader, for it suggests that the narrator has moved from his office to A... 's bedroom. The French text reads: "Sur le coin du bureau se dresse un petit cadre..." (p. 43). Careful reading allows one to dismiss other apparent difficulties. For instance, when in A... 's bedroom after his anxious night of waiting, the narrator refers to "the chest to the left of the bed" (p. 117). Viewed from the narrator's usual position on the veranda, the chest is to the right of the bed; in this case the "left" (and it is the clearest clue) indicates that the narrator is in A... 's bed.

²Apparently the narrator presents the first description when seated at his usual place at the dining room table; from this position he should have difficulty seeing the truck at all. His position is less certain when he describes the distorted oil spot.

³On p. 116 in Howard's trans. the narrator refers to the "chevrons of the floor tiles" in A... 's bedroom; the French text reads: "les raies du plancher" (p. 88).

⁴Robbe-Grillet, "Time and Description in Fiction Today," in *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 148.

MICHEL BUTOR

Où, le Génie du lieu, 2

Paris: Gallimard, 1971. Pp. 392.

Où, written with a slash through the *accent grave* over the letter "u," expounds the idea of the *génie* or the soul of a locale, an idea that Butor put forward in 1958 in *le Génie du lieu*. That work described Egypt and cities located in the Mediterranean area, while *Où* (where? when? or?) describes Korea and Cambodia, the western United States, and Paris. The form of the poetic verset, interspersed with one-word lines and prose paragraphs, might recall the technique of his *Mobile* (1962). Actually, however, *Où* differs widely from *Mobile*, proof that Butor is constantly seeking innovations in terms of literary expression. A few pages of *Où* evoke the *génie* of Seoul in Korea, and of cities in Cambodia, primarily by means of descriptions of their people, their tombs, and to some extent, their myths. Another section of the work deals with an actual incident at the University of Santa Barbara in California, that of the explosion of a time bomb. These pages come closest to the "new