

the novel's present, and also as it was in the past through Ruth's ruminations about her younger days. They are intended no doubt to keep the stage busy and particularly to emphasize the assimilative, buoyant spirit of Ruth who when the novel opens is already coping admirably with the loss of an arm, a daughter and, effectively, a husband, and who continues to absorb punishment like a sponge.

Her new boarder, Arthur, an American deserter, only just recovering from his trauma by means of Gladys's generous sexual ministrations, is seized by the "pigs" and unceremoniously turned over to the U. S. authorities at the border. Ruth's house, victim of villainous developers, is to be torn down, and the "family" is threatened with dissolution. Willard mans the ramparts, defying bulldozers and police with a gun. When Tom attempts to fetch him out he gets a bullet in the shoulder for his pains; Willard is shot down by the police. Ruth's shocked agony, as she cradles Tom's broken body, is splashed across the pages of the newspapers. An unwanted pregnancy allows us to confront the issue of abortion, which is resolved on the side of "life"; the result is the birth of twins, one of whom strangles in its umbilical cord. This, in turn, leads to the father's (Tom) breakdown; he attempts to rape his wife's (Gladys) lesbian girlfriend (Mavis) who succeeds in laying him out with a brandy bottle. Boy is wrenched out of the "family" when the police get on his track and he is forced to go into hiding. Ruth's father (in a flashback) is killed by a falling tree; her husband, crushed by one of the huge road-building machines he operates, dies of a heart attack on the operating table.

Characters are not developed in depth. Of them all, we know Ruth best; she is sensitive and understanding, practical and unworldly. But she is a victim rather than a heroine. She is exploited by her own tolerance; she has no dignity, only, we are led to understand, an unreasoning and unreasonable love. Ruth is sympathetically drawn, and because on occasion we are permitted glimpses of her inner reactions to the events that crash upon her so persistently, we can sometimes respond positively to her. None of the remaining characters is capable of eliciting the reader's sympathy.

The novel is written in a bright, brittle style which frequently displays the economy and impact of aphorism, and occasionally,

a brilliant blossom of imagery. The language of conversation varies from the exaggerated crudity of Gladys, and the self-parodying negro's patois of Boy, to the elliptical, sometimes enigmatic and affected expression of the other characters who seem to speak with an understanding of what the others are thinking, an insight perhaps shared by Jane Rule but not always by the reader.

In spite of the extravagances of events, characters, and style, the novel is eminently readable. The reader is given no time to be bored as might be the case with *Desert of the Heart*; there is a continuous flow through and past elements of interest and suspense. The principal defects of the novel are the failure to individualize and develop the characters and the excessive introduction of disaster. Consequently, we are not adequately engaged by the characters and disaster becomes so commonplace, that the human spirit of the reader is dulled into insensitivity. Rule's attempts in her own interpretation of events (through Ruth) to jerk the reader into a compassionate view of affairs seem consequently sentimental.

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JACQUES LEENHARDT
Lecture politique du roman: La Jalousie d'Alain Robbe-Grillet
Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,
1973. Pp. 280.

The novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet have, because of their innovative form, consistently forced critics to deal with the problematic relationship between aesthetic construction and human experience. Roland Barthes has praised what he perceived to be the impersonal dominance and nonsignificance of the external world in Robbe-Grillet's first four novels, of which *La Jalousie* is the third. In Barthes's view, Robbe-Grillet's objects portray man's physical world but break with the literary convention of revealing man's metaphysical vision of the world, of serving as anthropomorphic metaphors. This "déception du sens" or "silence de la signification" has

been seen by critics such as Olga Bernal and Lucien Goldmann as being a representation of a contemporary world which has been dehumanized because of its technological and political structure. Bruce Morrisette, on the other hand, has argued in his examination of certain techniques and images in *La Jalousie* that in spite of the absence of humanizing psychological analysis, the narrated and narrating behavior (the various chronologies and the varying levels of unconsciousness of the narration) are representative of a specific personality disorder ("une impuissance sexuelle psychique, accompagnée de la peur que sa femme ne l'abandonne . . . un cas classique de troubles psychosexuels) and are "des procédés que l'on peut attendre d'un jaloux" (*Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet* [Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963], pp. 133-135). Jean Ricardou's interest in the production of literary texts has enabled him to perceive to a greater degree than previous critics the intratextual allusiveness ("implicit allegories" and "structural metaphors") of the narration. However, he sees the function of this allusiveness as arbitrary since, according to him, it is related to the nature of language and not to the ambiguous relationship of the narrator to an objective reality.

Jacques Léénhardt's book on *La Jalousie* breaks with the approaches of both Ricardou and Morrisette in that it attempts to describe the narration as more than an exercise in language problems (Ricardou) by presenting the "psychopathological hysteria" (p. 146) of the narrator (Morrisette) in historico-sociological terms. Léénhardt divides his work into four sections. In acknowledging his debt to the work of Barthes and Goldmann, Léénhardt emphasizes the need to deal with both literary and political history in defining the functioning of the "vision of the world" (p. 24) presented in the novel. In the first and longest chapter, he identifies the ideology of the narrator. He describes the importance of various contrasting themes (ease of perceptibility/difficulty of perception; regularity/confusion; comprehensibility/unintelligibility; etc.) which are revealed by the structure, the content, and the style of the text. He links these themes to the political reality of a specific period of French colonial history by relating them to texts by psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, historians, and creative writers which describe the antagonistic forces within the colonial system in a period of transition

from expansion to decline. In the second chapter, Léénhardt argues that a psychoanalytical study of the work, such as that of Didier Anzieu, is useful if it reveals not only the neurosis (Oedipal impotence in this case) implicit in the work, but also the historico-sociological-ideological forces of which the neurosis is a manifestation. Léénhardt asserts, despite some evidence to the contrary, that what is remarkable about the anguish of the narration is its "total absence of aggressivity" (p. 131). Instead, the menaces or threats are transformed into libidinous or desirable objects: for example, the yam which the black cook is peeling or A... 's black wavy hair. This chapter is perhaps the weakest. We are not convinced that social reality, any more than mythical, archetypal reality, is the only metaphorical dimension of a fictional text. Further, the erotization which is said to replace aggression serves in fact to heighten the narration's aggression against realism—logic and intelligibility the very values he is seeking to defend.

In the third chapter Léénhardt discusses, in much greater detail than in the first chapter, the situation of the novel in relation to the various periods and their myths in French colonial history and literature. He uses literary and nonliterary texts to characterize its four periods: the conquest of a hostile nature (1860-1920); the exploitation of the African labor force (1920-1945); decolonization and the demoralization of the colonial class (1945-1960); and neocolonialism with its collaboration of African administrators and French technologists (1960-). *La Jalousie*, published in 1957 is seen as revealing the image of the planter of the second period with his distrust of African workers, his routinized existence, and the failure even of the younger Franck to overcome the degrading nature of the colonial situation. The narrator's summary of the African novel and his descriptions of the Post Office calendar are analyzed as images of the transition from the second to the third colonial periods, a menacing new period to be erased or modified. The first part of this chapter is indispensable for the readers of *La Jalousie* who are unfamiliar with these aspects of history or with their literary representation. Léénhardt's effort to demonstrate the social allusions of this work is convincing in relation to the setting and the roles of the characters, but occasionally his sociological interpretation of the dialogue and the description appears to contradict rather than comple-

ment the psychological situation. This is a weakness which could probably have been avoided with more attention to what he calls "the more formal" aspects of the text which are dealt with briefly in the final chapter of the work. Through a particular lexical selection, a metonymic use of language, word play, and the use of other structures which create or suggest uncertainty, the anguish of the "ménage à trois" situation for the narrator in fact represents the insecurity resulting from his threatened political self-image. Some of the examples here, as elsewhere in the book,

are beyond question; others are insufficiently elucidated and therefore less convincing.

Léenhardt's book demonstrates many of the strengths and a few of the weaknesses of sociocriticism. It constitutes a new and enlightening contribution to an understanding of the existence and the function of social questions in Robbe-Grillet's works in general and *La Jalousie* in particular.

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