

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.
5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

**Xerox University Microfilms**

300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

---

7817896

COMBE, GUY PIERRE  
VARIOUS POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FABLE  
"LE VOYEUR" BY ROBBE-GRILLET AND THE LITERARY  
COMPOSITION DEVICES USED IN THE TEXT.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, PH.D., 1978

University  
Microfilms  
International 300 N. ZEEB ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48106

---

© 1978

GUY PIERRE COMBE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

VARIOUS POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FABLE  
LE VOYEUR BY ROBBE-GRILLET AND THE LITERARY  
COMPOSITION DEVICES USED IN THE TEXT

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
GUY PIERRE COMBE  
Norman, Oklahoma  
1978

VARIOUS POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FABLE  
LE VOYEUR BY ROBBE-GRILLET AND THE LITERARY  
COMPOSITIONS DEVICES USED IN THE TEXT

APPROVED BY

Bease A. Clement  
James D. Fife  
Melvin B. Tolson, Jr.  
Jani P. Artman  
Lowell Zandra

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

VARIOUS POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FABLE  
LE VOYEUR BY ROBBE-GRILLET AND THE LITERARY  
COMPOSITION DEVICES USED IN THE TEXT

BY: GUY P. COMBE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: BESSE CLEMENT, Ph. D.

This study is a pluralistic approach to Robbe-Grillet's roman LE VOYEUR. The first chapter concerns those influences which have led this writer to undertake the study. The main determinant was Repertoire I by Michel Butor, where two important elements are brought into focus, namely that "different realities call for different forms of fabulation," and that "new forms shall reveal new elements within reality, new relationships". It is those relationships and new forms which have been scrutinized here. We also claim, as Roland Barthes and Jean Ricardou have done, the right to use creativeness in the critical study of an author's work.

In chapter two we have tried to show the hero as a sadistic schizophrenic with emphasis on the idea that the root of his disturbance is to be found in an acute mother complex.

Chapter III analyses the work as a mild satire of the workings of technology in society.

Chapter IV is an attempt to establish that Robbe-Grillet could have consciously or unconsciously interpolated the Orestian theme deep within the narrative.

Chapter V, and by far the longest, is an in depth analysis of Robbe-Grillet's composition devices, with particular attention to modulations between the various narrative units, with special emphasis on the dual nature of those transitions which are not only stylistically effective but also thematically developed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor Besse Clement of the University of Oklahoma for the valuable suggestions offered in directing this dissertation. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to my colleague and friend, Dr. William R. Mitchell, who read the entire manuscript with such a clear critical eye. No less profound is my gratitude and love for my wife, Ruth Frailey Combe, whose patient sustenance and typing skill made everything possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. MATHIAS SEEN AS A SADISTIC SCHIZOPHRENIC .....	9
III. <u>LE VOYEUR</u> AS A PARODY OF THE WORKINGS OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIETY .....	38
IV. MATHIAS AS A MODERN ORESTES DOOMED TO FAILURE .	46
V. MATHIAS AND THE ISOLATION OF MAN IN SOCIETY ...	76
VI. LITERARY COMPOSITION DEVICES IN <u>LE VOYEUR</u> .....	83
VII. CONCLUSION .....	202
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	217

VARIOUS POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FABLE  
LE VOYEUR BY ROBBE-GRILLET AND THE LITERARY  
COMPOSITION DEVICES USED IN THE TEXT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The motive for writing this dissertation was triggered by a very attentive reading of Michel Buter's Répertoire I, more specifically the essays entitled "Le Roman comme recherche." In this piece of literary criticism, dating back to 1955, Michel Buter established that "à des réalités différentes correspondent des formes de récit différentes," and further in the article he defined a new approach for writing and reading a novel:

Non seulement la création mais la lecture aussi d'un roman est une sorte de rêve éveillé. Il est donc toujours passible d'une psychanalyse au sens large. D'autre part, si je veux expliquer une théorie quelconque, psychologique, sociologique, morale ou autre, il m'est souvent commode de prendre un exemple inventé. Les personnages du roman vont jouer ce rôle à merveille; et ces personnages je les reconnaitrai dans mes amis et connaissances, j'éluciderai la conduite de ceux-ci en me basant sur les aventures de ceux-là, etc.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Michel Buter, Repertoire I (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1960), p. 10.



In the same article Michel Butor insists on the importance of the form in the new novel, just as Flaubert, Mallarmé, and Valéry had often asserted when pontificating on the same subject. In this matter a second quote is very enlightening:

...il est évident que la forme étant un principe de choix (et le style à cet égard apparaît comme un des aspects de la forme, étant la façon dont le détail même du langage se lie, ce qui préside au choix de tel mot ou de telle tournure plutôt que de telle autre), des formes nouvelles révéleront dans la réalité des choses nouvelles, des liaisons nouvelles, et ceci naturellement, d'autant plus que leur cohérence interne sera plus affirmée par rapport aux autres formes, d'autant plus qu'elles seront plus rigoureuses.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect we feel also very much in agreement with Serge Doubrovsky who has stated in no equivocal terms his position on that matter:

The insignificant work has an essence, the master-work has an existence, that is to say an essence perpetually becoming, an essence that remains forever, as long as men exist, that is capable of extension. There is no such thing as a meaning given ~~once~~ and for all, a meaning hidden in the work that we ought to attempt to disinter; criticism is not a special branch of archaeology. There are various and contrary meanings already coexisting the moment the work is born; but then, with time, with history, other perspectives appear and cause other meanings to appear in the same object.<sup>3</sup>

Our close examination of Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur will be an attempt to bring into focus two of the elements

---

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>  
Serge Doubrovsky, New Criticism in France, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 105.

underlined by Michel Butor. We hold that the reading of a novel brings about the psychoanalysis of the characters of the work, and to new realities correspond new forms. These will be researched in Le Voyeur, with the main emphasis being placed upon the elements of liaison between the narrative units in this work.

We will not only attempt to show the form of mental illness with which our hero is afflicted, but also how Robbe-Grillet created his novelistic reality in order to make the reader participate in an experience which is both phenomenologically real and true according to the symptoms manifested in individuals who surround us in the so-called "real world."

As for the stylistic study of the form of this novel, we will attempt to show that Robbe-Grillet not only manages smooth transitions between his narrative units but that he also carries his stylistic integration to the point of having liaison through paragraphic sequences and also thematic sequences; that his liaisons go so far as to involve a geometric dimension, which will locate one unit on top of a cliff, whereas the following one will be located at the base of the same cliff. His transition will therefore be emphasized by a geographic change of level.

This pluralistic approach to the study of Le Voyeur will also be augmented with any pertinent remarks which will further enlighten the comprehension and add to the enjoyment of this work.

Like Joyce in Ulysses, Robbe-Grillet seems to show how the mind of his character operates. In more than one way, we could apply to the author of Le Voyeur the remark made by Judge John M. Wooley in his decision lifting the ban on Ulysses in the United States. We are quoting from "The Monumental Decision of the United States District Court Rendered December 6, 1933, by Hon. John M. Wooley Lifting the Ban on Ulysses":

Joyce has attempted--it seems to me, with astonishing success--to show how the screen of consciousness with its ever-shifting kaleidoscopic impressions carries, as it were on a plastic palimpsest, not only what is in the focus of each man's observation of the actual things about him, but also in a penumbral zone residua of past impressions, some recent and some drawn up by association from the domain of the subconscious. He shows how each of the impressions affects the life and behavior of the character which he is describing.

What he seeks to get is not unlike the results of a double or, if that is possible, a multiple exposure with a background visible, but somewhat blurred and out of focus in varying degrees.<sup>4</sup>

Beside the fact that Robbe-Grillet was born in 1922, which is the date of publication of Ulysses in Dijon, France, there seems to be a great deal in common between the two writers as has been brought out by many critics. Judge Wooley speaks of the interaction of objective observation and the residue of previous observations lying at the subconscious level in the character's mind. As we shall see, this is

---

<sup>4</sup>James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1961), p. ix.

precisely what Robbe-Grillet has achieved in Le Voyeur. In the same passage we are told that these impressions affect the life and behavior of the protagonist; so shall Mathias' behavior be affected in our novel. What seems to be extremely uncanny is the reference to cinematographic projection on two or more screens, with the result that the foreground is blurred or out of focus. We shall see that, in Le Voyeur, although the objective foreground merges with plastic neatness, the backgrounds in the mind of Mathias remain blurred and acquire a multiplicity which, as in Joyce's, often confuses and bewilders the reader.

Furthermore we have been struck by the many elements of the novel, either thematic like Mathias' sadistic neurosis or objectal like the presence of a statue of a woman on the square--here we should really say triangle--of the port town of the fiction, which can be construed as a reminder of the statue of Artemis in Tauri, an accumulation of elements which have led this writer to think that the Orestes theme is present in Le Voyeur, just as the Oedipus theme was used in Les Gattes.

We are in complete agreement with Jean Alter that the critique retains full freedom of interpretation beyond the limitations imposed by the theories of Robbe-Grillet, namely the lack of cosmic reality of the universe of the novel, the absence of symbols, and the intimation that the

"écriture" and the structure of the work are more meaningful than the anecdote.<sup>5</sup> But in the light of Roland Barthes' and Jean Ricardou's pronouncements that the activity of the critique is in itself a literary creation, and the personal conviction of this writer that reading a Robbe-Grillet novel is an act of creation which goes far beyond the avowed intentions of the author, it seems that any work of art, let it be in the fine arts or in literature, cannot escape being appreciated, understood, and interpreted in a variety of fashions by the public and posterity.

Our study of Le Voyeur is also an attempt to research Robbe-Grillet's novelistic processes structurally, in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss' anthropology, which he defined as "the interplay of purely relational forms," in order to establish their mode of functioning. These structures will be described in psychoanalytical terms since we are in the realm of the psychic when it comes to the dynamics of Mathias' effective obsessions. The descriptions will be confined to the objective relations of Robbe-Grillet's novelistic world, outside and beyond the hypothetical processes of the author's own unconscious.

In this context we also hope that a M. Picard will not accuse us of bringing in our research an "obsessive,

---

<sup>5</sup>Jean Alter, La Vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966), p. 2.

unbridled, cynical" <sup>6</sup> sexuality, and accept once and for all that Mathias is affected with a psychic personality whose deviant behavior rests in the realm of sexuality.

It could even be that the lack of symbolism in Robbe-Grillet's books might someday be interpreted as a symbol in itself--it seems logical that his works be studied not so much to verify how closely the author remains within the boundaries he has repeatedly outlined for himself in his essays, but rather to investigate what makes these works so attractive to a small fraction of the reading public and also what elements they suggest to the creative ability of those who are bold enough to study and experience Robbe-Grillet.

The organization of this research will proceed in the following order:

- Chapter I Introduction
- Chapter II Mathias seen as a sadistic schizophrenic
- Chapter III Le Voyeur seen as a parody of the workings of technology in society
- Chapter IV Mathias as a modern Orestes doomed to failure
- Chapter V Literary composition devices in Le Voyeur
- Chapter VI Conclusion

Because the use of quotation marks, or the absence of quotation marks in the text of the novel plays such an important role in its composition, we shall retain when necessary

---

<sup>6</sup>Raymond Picard, Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), p. 30.

the French marks within the English marks as follows:

" --Pour ça, craignez rien: elle est vive!>>". (LV, p. 120)

This also presupposes that when no French chevrons are used this is to be interpreted as showing that no quotation marks were used in the text when indirect dialogue was intended.

We shall also note that references to pages of the text will be given as follow within the body of the text: (LV, p. 120).

All page numbers refer to the following edition of Le Voyeur: Robbe-Grillet, Alain. Le Voyeur. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1955, Printed on October 15, 1963, No 2020.

## CHAPTER II

### MATHIAS SEEN AS A SADISTIC SCHIZOPHRENIC

Although we have in the course of this study tried to psychoanalyse the behavior and actions of Mathias, it must be stated emphatically that at no time in the scope of this novel did Robbe-Grillet intend to write a case study in the fashion of Emile Zola in La Bête humaine in order to present to the scrutiny of the reader the progress of a mental disease. With Robbe-Grillet the intent is quite different. His hero suffers from a mental disorder and the reader is led to participate and to enter his subconscious world. Like Kafka, Mathias, the hero of the absence, seems to find his reality in his traumatic flights of imagination, just as Kafka must have felt if we believe Claude Mauriac, when he says, speaking of Kafka's pathology:

Nous laisserons à un psychanalyste le soin de faire ici de départ entre raison et déraison, poésie et pathologie. Quoi qu'il en soit, il semble entrer quelque chose d'anormal dans l'acuité d'une vision qui accumule les détails précis enregistrés en une seconde. De ce grossissement de la réalité naît un sentiment d'irréalité dont Kafka semble moins inquiet que rassuré, comme s'il se sentait mieux à son aise dans le monde du songe. Nous trouvons dans son Journal de nombreux récits de rêves qui ne sont pas sans ressembler à la réalité telle qu'il la décrit dans ses romans. Et de non moins



multiples rêveries, images hypnagogiques, à mi-chemin entre la conscience et le sommeil, sortes de passages des rêves qui ressemblent à la vie ou à une vie dématérialisée. Un de ses plus grands besoins est de mettre la solidité du monde à l'épreuve. Il a autant de mal à se sentir concerné par son existence vraie, qu'à admettre son exclusion de ses vies imaginaires.

The relationship between the real or imaginary world of Kafka and the fictional world of Mathias is quite striking; but to enter the world of Kafka we need to read not only his Journal and Lettres à Milena, but also his novels and short stories. In Le Voyeur we are in the direct presence of the real world of Mathias and his imaginary states of fancy not only as informed spectators but as direct participants in the development of his sado-masochist drama. It is also relevant to point out that Kafka also suffered from masochism aggravated by fits of sadism. But our parallel with Kafka has to end here because Mathias does not carry the guilt complex of Kafka and does not believe in any kind of sin, least of all the original sin.

Commenting on La Jalousie, Siegfried Mandel wrote:

There is no trace in La Jalousie of Proustian introspection, no trace of the Gidian character-analysis in L'Immoraliste, no trace of the metaphysical anguish in Malraux' La Condition Humaine or in Sartre's L'Age de Raison.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Claude Maurias, L'Alittérature contemporaine (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Siegfried Mandel, Contemporary European Novelists (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 58.

And in conclusion he adds:

The novelist places us in a void, where all the ways lead to an impasse, where time is dislocated, where space is altered, where the world is a closed-in site, suitable as a place for man's obsessions to unfold, and where he lives through a truly Kafkaesque experience.<sup>9</sup>

For Henri Clouard and Robert Leggewie, the novels of Robbe-Grillet present the following characteristics:

Dans ses romans, il s'applique, en somme, à faire entrevoir une réalité voisine de celle de Kafka et qui nous entraîne au bord du néant. Il ramène l'homme à un minimum d'importance et le perd dans un certain désespoir du temps présent. Mais il a l'habileté de le suggérer au lieu de le dire.<sup>10</sup>

As far as Mathias is concerned we learn that "Les circonstances, à présent, le contraignaient au voyage." (LV, p. 27) This is a direct reference to an irregular or even criminal pattern of life, which could also be interpreted as the indication of failure in his business. But we have already been told that his business was not very good. We find no equivocation in the term "circonstances" used in the plural; what we are being told is that Mathias had to leave town, and not for being dishonest in the conduct of his affairs. Nowhere in the novel do we find the slightest hint that Mathias is dishonest; in his sales presentation he seems to follow the textbook if not writing it. We even know that he insists on paying for the use of the bicycle

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>10</sup>Henri Clouard and Robert Leggewie, French Writers of Today (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 150.

although the "buraliste" is not in the store and Mathias' ship is leaving; he could have tried to leave without paying:

Le voyageur s'élança sur la machine. Il la laisserait au bout du quai -- la confierait à n'importe qui -- avec le montant de la location. (LV, p. 160)

So we must deduce, as have many other researchers, that Mathias' feeling of failure and uncertainty is motivated by his psychosis. We will point out and develop in chapter IV the idea that Mathias has a mother complex. This theory was first brought out by Bruno Hahn in Les Temps Modernes.<sup>11</sup> The view of this critic can be summarized as follows: Mathias hates his mother and is trying to kill her overpowering memory when torturing and killing the young girl. That idea seems to be emphasized by the fact that he has a fixation on burning their genitalia. The mother complex could be inferred from the following quotation:

Ainsi il était de nouveau seul dans cette chambre où il avait passé toute son enfance -- à l'exception toutefois de ses premières années, depuis la mort de sa mère, survenue peu après sa naissance. Son père s'était remarié très vite et avait aussitôt repris le petit Mathias à la tante qui l'élevait comme son propre fils. L'enfant, adopté avec autant de naturel par la nouvelle épouse, s'était longtemps tourmenté pour savoir laquelle de ces deux femmes était sa mère; il avait mis plus de temps encore à comprendre qu'il n'en possédait pas du tout. On lui avait souvent raconté cette histoire. (LV, pp. 229-30)

In the cafe "A l'Espérance" Mathias asks for a bowl of coffee and milk and three slices of buttered bread. We

---

<sup>11</sup> Bruno Hahn, "Plan du labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet," Les Temps Modernes (Juillet 1960), p. 160.

see in this behavior an indication of his infantile turn of mind. A man in his late thirties does not call at nine or ten o'clock in the morning, in a cafe located in the harbor district, for a breakfast more suitable for a child at home. The owner of the cafe had suggested a black coffee. Jean Miesch states that Lewis Carroll, Raymond Roussel, and Mathias "ont le regard tourné vers l'enfance jusqu'à la névrose." <sup>12</sup>

We shall see also that when the store keeper shows him a card of unsold watches, exactly like the ones he is attempting to sell to her, he feels defeated, frustrated, impotent, and tries to compensate by buying candy, satisfying in that way his labial need for gratification which is a well known defense mechanism for individuals with an infantile need for their mother. Two more instances during which infantile behavior is to be noticed are the episode at the light house cafe when Mathias senses strongly the mother figure of the woman owner, and the final taunt of the mother figure personified by the buoy dancing in the surf as he leaves the island and the fiction forever.

On pages 92 and 93 we are told that Mathias is watching with apprehension the figure in black, old Mme Marek, who is approaching. As he looks at his hands he notices:

---

<sup>12</sup>Jean Miesch, Robbe-Grillet (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1965), p. 19.

Pourtant, sur la main droite, les traces de cambouis encore nettement visibles prouvaient qu'il avait été contraint d'y toucher, une fois au moins. Cet indice était d'ailleurs inutile: sitôt qu'il eut effleuré effectivement la chaîne, l'intérieur des dernières phalanges de ses quatre doigts fut graissé par d'abondantes taches bien noires, qui ôtaient tout éclat et toute importance aux anciennes -- qu'elles dissimulaient par surcroît en partie. (LV, p. 93)

Mathias' reaction is to plunge into a state of acute anxiety which is indicated by a long development in which he formulates his "emploi du temps" from the time he left the ship. But we must note the particular technique used here by Robbe-Grillet to make his character's hands soiled by the black grease of the bicycle chain the indicator of a state of mind which parallels Lady Macbeth's confusion after her crime, and also the tangible proof which explains his presence at this particular time in this specific location when he says:

Il avait loué une bicyclette, qui malheureusement ne marchait pas aussi bien que son propriétaire le prétendait. (Il montra sa main barbouillée de cambouis.) Aussi avait-il perdu beaucoup de temps jusqu'au tournant des deux kilomètres et quand il... (LV, p. 95)

Beginning with the famous "hole" in Mathias' schedule we are made aware of his propensity for lying in his vain attempt to block his memory of the act. He becomes the "fabricateur," and this clearly indicates a psychosis brought about by anxiety. This anxiety is also shown by Mathias' compulsive echolalia as demonstrated by the repetition of the word "photographie":

Tout le début s'était déroulé à une allure très vite: le frère qui travaillait ... , la photographie ... , la photographie où l'on voit ... la photographie où l'on

voit la photographie, la photographie, la photographie, la photographie... (LV, p. 117)

In this passage, which is very characteristic due to the fact that it encompasses eighteen lines before we reach the closing suspension marks, Mathias is trying to recapitulate his "emploi du temps" since he left the garage on his bicycle. He is now in the cafe of the lighthouse, standing at the bar, while the woman behind the counter, the coffee mill between her knees, is grinding on and on with an hypnotic motion, accompanied by the unnerving sound of the beans being pulverized.

If we read further on, we find the following notation:

Il ignorait même que ce fût justement l'endroit où la fillette était tombée... tombée... tombée... Il s'arrêta, Julien le regardait. ( LV, p. 216)

We have indeed two examples showing Mathias in the clutches of echolalia, which is a well known symptom of morbidity and mental alienation. If we add to this Mathias' constant autistic behavior, we are well on the way to defining a case of severe psychosis.

A further indication of Mathias' illness is the phenomenon called displacement or substitutive tactic. In chapter VI we discuss at length the fact that Mathias uses blocking when he transfers the identity of the little victim on the cliff to the bicycle which becomes the support for Mathias' autistic trauma. The sexual attack is reconstructed

in his mind up to the point that the violence and rape take place. Up to that time the description follows the normal course of his autistic fantasies. We have read all through the novel the many descriptions of a little girl standing with her legs spread apart and her hands tied behind her back. When Mathias' fantasy begins in the cafe we are led to a repetition of this image, but Mathias can't bring himself to develop the imagery further than the idea of restraint. This is well in keeping with his taste and liking for strings and chains:

Il attendait parfois plusieurs jours avant de pouvoir y placer une acquisition nouvelle; jusque-là, il gardait celle-ci [la ficelle] au fond de sa poche droite, où elle tenait compagnie à la petite chaîne en laiton qui, elle y séjournait à demeure. (LV. p. 30)

This last quotation brings out the fact that Mathias always carries a chain in his pocket. This emphasizes the notion of restraint to a sadistic dimension.

It is significant that the notion of chains appears twice in the novel, as the chain in his pocket and as the chain on the bicycle. This is not a fortuitous occurrence, Robbe-Grillet likes to establish correspondences, relationships which echo from unit to unit, and deposit in the subconscious of the reader those basic elements which will through small increments build up to the definitive synchronous imagery.

In the episode of the cafe "A l'Espérance" when Mathias' thoughts drift from the delicate wrists of the

waitress to the incident on the cliff, we definitely see various psychic phenomena presented in an utterly neutral fashion by Robbe-Grillet, who through objective descriptions reproduces the traumatic state of an individual under the assault of anxiety and his effort to erect barriers to his consciousness in order to keep out his anxiety-laden thoughts.

A first reading of the selection will show definitely how Robbe-Grillet permits the reader to participate in some kind of psychoanalysis or self-actualization of the subject. The imagery which at the time permeates the mind of Mathias leads us to follow a process of countertransference as it takes place.

This form of anxiety is characteristic of a mature ego, subjugated by the demands of the id, but we would not go as far as to see that the demands of the superego intertwines here, since Mathias seems to be devoid of moralistic attitudes and values and to react out of fear of being discovered by the police in their inquiry of the crime. Some could say that the police stand for parental dominance and Mathias has in fact an ego-ideal propensity, but too many instances in the novel have shown Mathias insensitive to that kind of demand. In this context many critics have established a parallel with Mersault in L'Etranger by Camus.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Ben F. Stoltzfus, "Camus et Robbe-Grillet," in Un Nouveau Roman?, ed. J. H. Matthews (Paris: revue des Lettres Modernes, 1964), pp. 153-166.



Before we re-examine the episode on the cliff, it seems appropriate to refer to the words of Irvin G. Sarason as he states and defines various aspects of pathological behavior which apply to Mathias in that scene:

Repression is directed at external trauma, such as fear-arousing events, and at internal processes, such as wishes, impulses, and affects. Freud believed it to be particularly prominent in the inhibition of unacceptable sexual impulses. Repression reduces anxiety by erecting barriers to consciousness keeping out anxiety-laden thoughts and impulses. If, for example, an individual has formed a strong positive cathexis to a particular object, but thinking of this object leaves an intrapsychic conflict or anxiety, then the anxiety may be reduced by the formation of what is called anti-or counter-cathexis. These counter-cathexis transpose thoughts about the object to the unconscious level. Repression helps a person to have no recall of certain anxious thoughts. Thus, a boy with incestuous thoughts about his mother and fears of retaliatory castration by his father could repress (render unconscious) both his thoughts and his fears. These repressed complexes might then be expressed indirectly in other ways.<sup>14</sup>

Sarason also states:

The emotion of anxiety thus serves a protective function, signaling the approach of danger and mobilizing defensive measures. Anxiety may arise because the individual has learned to recognize at a preconscious or unconscious level aspects of a situation which were once traumatic.<sup>15</sup>

The situation was so traumatic that it has been blocked in its expression by Mathias through his famous loss of memory, the "trou" or "hole" so aptly described by Bruce Morrissette.

---

<sup>14</sup>Irvin G. Sarason, Abnormal Psychology, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972), pp. 58-59.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 57

Freud viewed "anxiety as an organismic response to perceived danger"<sup>16</sup> Here, the perceived danger is the revelation to others that he, Mathias, is the author of the crime. We have seen him in his various attempts to cover up his traces. First, he lied to the woman on the dirt road about stopping at the farm house, a few minutes after the crime might have been or was committed. Let's remember that all the events of the novel take place or don't take place in the mind of Mathias and the reader.

We must also point out the contrast between the cafe in the harbor district and the cafe near the lighthouse. The contrast is not so much one of location and function but a difference in kind. Robbe-Grillet seems to have endowed each of these establishments with a pathological function, as two opposite poles in the eternal conflict between the various members of a Freudian family.

The harbor cafe is dominated by masculine characteristics found not only among the customers but above all in the person of the owner, who could very well represent the father figure in this context. It is he who interposes his violent presence between the desires of Mathias for the waitress' erotic presence -- the waitress here fulfilling the function of the mother image -- and his rights as the lord master of the locale. We could see here a father-son rivalry, the father opposing the incestuous desire of the son. It is

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 57

significant also to note that the owner is referred to as "le patron," a title which in Western European context implies a great deal more than managerial dominance.

If we examine the circumstances of the cafe near the lighthouse, we are struck by the difference in atmosphere. Here we have a master woman in charge, imposing but also receptive to Mathias' confidences, and presiding over a group of customers which reflects an organized society -- the keepers of the lighthouse and their families.

We have already noted the mother figure quality of that woman grinding coffee while Mathias succumbs to a fit of pathological origin.

Whereas the island in general presents:

...son travesti de communauté insulaire, ou, identiques en apparence, les maisons, les habitants, semblent des entités autonomes que seule la fatalité groupe par moments en attitudes figées d'un ensemble.<sup>17</sup>

the scene in the lighthouse cafe seems to represent one of those moments when the ensemble seems to have a life of its own and gives the impression of a social aggregate closer to a conventional human entity than does the opposite grouping of the harbor cafe.

In the environment of the town cafe, Mathias tries to escape his isolation by day-dreaming. Usually as soon as the pressure of his estrangement becomes too great he merges into one of his fictitious experiences, of which we have many

---

<sup>17</sup>Jean Alter, La Vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966), p. 103.

examples at the opening of the novel, but when his isolation is not only social but becomes erotic, he explodes into a traumatic state like the one he sustains upon gazing on the delicate wrists of the waitress. Isolated from the other customers in the cafe, stimulated by an erotic sight in the midst of an atmosphere heavily loaded with the same kind of physical desire (demonstrated by the attitude of the other customers, who are also aware of the girl's presence and charms), Mathias, not able to achieve a normal release, because of the locale and the presence of the cafe owner propels himself into one of his more acute traumatic states of erotic schizophrenia.

If we examine the situation in the cafe near the lighthouse, we infer the same motivation for his traumatic fit. Here we have the mother image, enhanced by the grinding of the coffee mill which perhaps brings back recollections of past family life. The erotic motivation is supplied here by a rather unveiled and direct erotic image, that of the woman, holding the coffee mill between her legs and cranking the handle on and on as Mathias watches, his mind already troubled by the absinthe and the events of the afternoon. Here instead of going into a simple erotic schizophrenic state, he is suddenly hit by a feeling of split personality which "blows his mind" and plunges him into an all disabling schizophrenic fit.

These two scenes, the one at the cafe in town and

the other near the lighthouse present the hero of the narrative in a state of estrangement, social and erotic. When Mathias sustains erotic estrangement he usually loses his rationality, but if his isolation is only social, as upon his arrival on the island, his fantasies remain organized and rational, like the imaginary scene in which he anticipates his sales approaches.

At this point the reading of the novel assumes a complexity which requires extremely close attention. On page 222 Mathias seems to come out of his fit and talks to a man who will take the chair back into the cafe. The cafe is referred to as "le café des Roches Noires"; this is an important detail which will be taken up again in this attempt to clarify the fable. On page 223, first paragraph, we are told:

Il chercha des yeux la malette, mais se rappela l'avoir laissée dans sa chambre, ce matin-là. Il remercia de nouveau, empoigna la chaise pour la rapporter dans la salle; mais l'homme la lui pris des mains et il ne resta plus au voyageur qu'à s'en aller -- par le chemin qui conduisait à la maisonnette solitaire, dans son vallon envahi de roseaux, au fond de l'étroite crique. (LV, p. 223).

From the preceding we learn two important bits of information. Mathias is not in his room but at the cafe, and he is walking to Jean or Pierre Robin's cabin. The meaning is extremely clear. Mathias is going to the cabin. The next paragraph achieves the transition between units and informs us that "Il s'avancait sans hésitation." (LV, p. 223). So we can infer that our hero has regained some of his stability and is able to function again. In the following pages

we are told that he is looking inside the cabin as Robin and his girl friend are having a scene, ending up with the woman crying. (LV, p.225). At that very moment Mathias begins to stare at the lamp and his vision blurs. Now we are on page 227, the third line:

Il approcha la tête du carreau et tenta de regarder au travers; mais on ne voyait rien du tout: ni la mer, ni la lande, ni même le jardin. Il n'y avait pas de trace de lune, ni d'étoiles. L'obscurité était complète. Mathias revint à son agenda de comptes, ouvert à la date du jour -- mercredi -- sur la petite table massive encastrée dans l'embrasure. (LV, p. 227).

We are still on Wednesday, the time is the evening because Mathias is going to bed, and he also writes that he has had a good night's sleep on the Thursday page of his journal, which will be the next day -- a wishful entry which will not be realized. After fussing with the electrical switch and other things, Mathias "se glisse entre les draps." (LV, p. 229) Now we are told:

Alors, seulement le voyageur sentit toute sa fatigue -- une très grande, une immense fatigue. Les quatre derniers kilomètres, parcourus à vive allure sur la grand-route, dans la nuit, depuis les Roches Noires jusqu'au bourg, avaient épuisé ses forces. Au dîner, il avait à peine touché aux plats que lui présentait l'aubergiste; celui-ci, par bonheur, n'ouvrait pas la bouche. Mathias s'était hâté de mettre fin au repas, pour rentrer chez lui -- face à la lande (LV, p. 229).

Nothing could have been made plainer. Mathias traveled from the "café des Roches Noires" to the cafe "A l'Espérance," had his dinner, and went to bed. Nowhere does the episode at Robin's cabin take place. Did Mathias walk to the cabin and then come back to the "café des Roches Noires" and

run all the way to town? Or did he invent that episode and is Robbe-Grillet launching us on a false itinerary? Our suggestion is that Mathias fantasized the episode at the cabin. He left the cafe still under the influence of the absinthe and returned to the town. While walking he was hit by another fit and imagined a replay of a scene he had witnessed previously, a very erotic scene where Robin, his girl friend and himself had eaten crabs called "Crochards," pulling on the legs, tearing them apart, while the girl stuck her tongue inside the shell, as Emma Bovary did at the dinner table or whenever Flaubert wanted to stress her erotic behavior. Meanwhile Mathias was looking at the nape of the girl's neck. (LV, p. 142) As we have said, remembering that scene, Mathias re-invents it in his alcoholic stupor but the scenario is deformed by the interpolation of scenes and impressions dredged from his childhood. What Mathias sees is not Robin and the girl, but his father and his new stepmother, the stepmother we are going to be told about on pages 229 and 230. Mathias, in bed in the room he rented because he missed the ship, imagines that it is the room where he slept as a child, and we learn, as we have quoted previously, that Mathias' mother had died while he was very young, that he had been taken in by an aunt and taken back to live with his new stepmother. The child had never been able to figure out who was his mother or if he even had a mother. We like to see here part of the explanation for his psychosis (LV, pp. 229-230).

In an article on Joë Bousquet, Robbe-Grillet stresses with great precision the importance of the state of awakened dream as the means to capture reality in its intrinsic value. Joë Bousquet was thankful for his infirmity which made him look upon reality with more attention, without his intellectual faculties being dissipated by the physical effort of action. Now he can really take the measure of the world and of himself. In this essay Robbe-Grillet quotes some revealing passages of the works of Joë Bousquet; the following passage is quite instructive to the extent that it permits us to appraise the intention of Robbe-Grillet when he launches Mathias into his traumatic states of fancy:

Il y a aussi le faux sommeil du rêve, qui nous donne de l'état idéal une approximation moins effrayante -- provisoire et réversible en tous cas -- et en même temps plus efficace. Comme beaucoup de ses amis surréalistes, Bousquet note avec soin ses rêves; il aime "la souveraine solitude du songe"; il redoute l'angoisse qui l'emprisonne à l'instant du réveil", "angoisse modèle qui nous pénètre jusqu'à l'écoeurement de tout l'espace que nous perdons". Il vient donc très vite à susciter lui-même ses rêves; il s'efforce "d'entrer, le visage haut, dans ce monde que l'on dit imaginaire". Les paupières à demi closes sur ses yeux "pétrifiés", il sent autour de lui l'étendue qui se métamorphose:<sup>18</sup>

In another article Robbe-Grillet speaks in detail of Raymond Roussel's images and their "instantanéité":

Un autre caractère frappant de ces images est ce que l'on pourrait appeler leur instantanéité. La vague qui s'apprête à déferler, l'enfant qui joue au cerceau sur la plage, ailleurs la statue d'un personnage en train

---

<sup>18</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un Nouveau Roman, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963) p. 86.



d'accomplir un geste éloquent (même si le sens en est d'abord absent, à l'état de rebus), où l'objet figure à mi-chemin du sol et de la main qui vient de le lâcher, tout est donné comme en plein mouvement, immobilisé par la représentation qui laisse en suspens tous les gestes, chutes, déferlements, etc., les éternisant dans l'imminence de leur fin et les coupant de leurs sens.<sup>19</sup>

These quotations bring home two points of extreme importance in the writings of Robbe-Grillet. First we have a direct and complete explanation of Robbe-Grillet's intentions when he uses the same process in Le Voyeur, but we also learn that such a behavior does not represent a mind in possession of all its normal or restrictive faculties. Joë Bousquet as we know lived a life whose reality was to be found in the consciousness of the individual, not in the physical reality of the body. Mathias seems to exist for us not as an individual of flesh and blood, but as a consciousness, and his mistake is to look upon objects as symbols, as carriers of a message, rather than signs of their reality to be perceived by his own consciousness. So we see that Robbe-Grillet follows Joë Bousquet when he involves Mathias in autistic thinking, but goes against his precepts when he lets his hero endow objects with significances outside of their signs.

In another context, Raymond Roussel's idea of "instantanéité" could very well have been at the origin of the frozen scenes we find in the novel, but it seems that Robbe-Grillet's intention in using these scenes is at

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

variance with Roussel's who used them in order to introduce real locations in his writings while draining them of their documentary reality. For Robbe-Grillet frozen scenes mark the separation between chronological time and affective time. He uses them also in our context to emphasize moments of deep anxiety, as we find in the episode when the sailor in the red coat seems to freeze when not observed, or again:

Toute la scène demeurait immobile. Malgré l'allure inachevée de son geste, l'homme ne bougeait pas plus qu'une statue. (LV, p. 28).

If we review the quotation on Raymond Roussel, we notice that while discussing "instantanéité" Robbe-Grillet mentions "la statue d'un personnage" which finds an echo in this last quotation from Le Voyeur. We could find many other examples of this technique in the course of the novel, but they are usually connected to heavily loaded situations during which the expression of tension, fear or anxiety is the prime reason of the scene:

La servante regardait le sol à ses pieds. Le patron regardait la servante. Mathias voyait le regard du patron. Les trois marins regardaient leurs verres. Rien ne révélait la pulsation du sang dans les veines -- ne fût-ce qu'un tremblement.

Il serait vain de prétendre évaluer le temps que cela dura: (LV, pp. 57-58).

Unlike Wallas in Les Gammes, who gets the feeling that the town he is visiting is his native city, Mathias knows that the island and the town are his birth place. Wallas pierces the secret of the myth which surrounds him, and realizes that fate has willed it so, and that he is

caught in the labyrinth of his destiny. As for Mathias, he has come back on his own free will, or at least goaded to return to his source in order to recapture his destiny and ward off the ultimate failure which his life on the mainland seems to lead him into. To Mathias, returning to his primeval source seems to be the answer to his problem, but fate wills it differently, because the monster within him can't be isolated from him by the water where it dwells in a novel like Les Gemmes. (LG, p. 37). Wallas falls victim to the Oedipus complex, and is led back to that point in time when his destiny is going to manifest itself, whereas Mathias goes back of his own free will to the island trying to escape his fate, not knowing that his own destruction was seeded many years ago, when he was a child drawing sea gulls in his room while his perverted little fingers were already itching to squeeze and tear apart the downy curve of that neck which already represented to him its erotic fascination. And this seems to be the ultimate fate of Mathias, to plunge headlong into the claws of his monster that he thought he had left on the mainland. Here Robbe-Grillet seems to want to indicate with Dr. Freud that deviant behavior can be traced back to the child's formative years. Robbe-Grillet takes particular care to focus his attention and the reader's on the harsh treatment inflicted upon the boy by a mother who did not permit him to keep his collection of strings. The same strings, symbol of restraint and inflicted torture upon

others, play as we know a tremendous role in the novel, but outside of the mythical use in the book, they also represent in the eyes of pathosociologists a desperate attempt by the rejected child to defend himself and affirm his own personality through the adjunct of collecting material things to fill the void in his life. They also point to a lonely child who has to play by himself, outside of the concert of his peers. Loneliness breeds dejection, introspection, undue attention to one's own body. Loneliness instills furtive pleasures, a wish to dominate others, if only some dumb creature. The many scenes suggestive of adult copulation trigger in the mind of Mathias a similar scene buried deep in his subconscious. We can even look upon the tavern owner as father figure who would trigger in the insecure mind of Mathias the vision of scenes he might have witnessed as a child, especially if we refer to the implied relationship between the waitress and the barkeep. Of tremendous importance is the meek, fearful, and subdued attitude that she displays in the presence of the "patron," while Mathias looks on. After being torn away from his aunt's care as a child, he might have watched his father making love to his new wife. These elements explain the constant and sustained traumatic state in which Mathias seems to be plunged at various moments of his days on the island. It is also noteworthy to observe that those traumatic states seem to be more frequent and of higher intensity when he finds himself

around people, especially father figures or weak erotic-looking feminine beings. If we follow him in his planned vagabondage we will see that he reverts to rigorous and mathematical thinking when he is by himself or in direct contact with a mechanical object like a bicycle.

As for the hole in his schedule, the lost moments which are the core of the novel, they mark an instance when Mathias lost complete touch with reality, to the extent that he can't remember anything. And this is the razor's edge of the novel, the decisive moment, the moment of truth so to speak, when Mathias' erotic fantasy and sado-masochist perversion takes complete control of his being and he crashes through the time barrier into the non-cosmic time of pure freedom for his mind when neither the taboos nor the constraints of realistic existence can reach him. In Camus' L'Etranger we witness a man who lives outside the bounds of organized society, but Camus' hero always remains conscious of the world and its demands, and claims the right to reject them, trying to forge for himself private moments, moments of freedom between those two posts which limit conscious, or cosmic time in the life of man, birth and death. In Le Voyeur we witness a man who has succeeded in escaping cosmic time and being entirely free, if only for twenty minutes. We have witnessed in the past characters in fiction or in real life who had escaped cosmic time through loss of memory or amnesia. Many of these victims can regain consciousness of

the lapsed interval of their existence, or their incapacitation can remain permanent and total. To these people the "hole" does not exist, they are not even aware that there is a hole in their cosmic time schedule. For Mathias the opposite is true. Mathias knows there is a hole, he is not sorry for it, he has been practicing for a long time cutting himself off from the rest of his fellow men, but this time the severance has been total. In the past those flights into the unconscious world had lasted only a few seconds, maybe a few minutes, and every time the real world had been there to bring him back. A case in point is the episode at the arrival of the boat and his many flights of fancy in the "café." Every time such a phenomenon had engulfed him he had been able to retain his hold on the cosmic time, on the time of those watches he carries, tries to sell, those watches which represent his function in life, his reality, in short those watches which are his anchor in life, his only means to preserve his sanity. But this time he has gone beyond those flickerings of his private "lanterne magique"; for the first time in his life he has parted the curtain and gone into the world of magic, he has stepped behind the looking glass. All the efforts of "nettoyage" of Mathias after that are only a desperate attempt to step back, to bring the curtain together again, to re-enter reality from behind the looking glass.

Maybe for the first time in his life, Mathias

experiences the feeling of real fear-- **Not** the fear of the "gendarme," but the fear of going insane. If he can erase all traces of that moment, it will mean that the moment never existed. He is not hiding clues from the **police**; his game is that if it is not there it never existed. So many times Mathias had played the game in his imagination that he wants it to work again. And here we have the source of his fascination with the removal of the material clues not of his crime, but of that lost moment.

Another incident relating to that same loss of cosmic time is found after the so-called crime has been committed. Mathias has reached the lighthouse hamlet and is standing at the bar drinking absinthe. ~~This~~ is a very significant fact since absinthe has been found to destroy memory functions and lead to insanity. Once again Mathias loses track of time as he collapses in an alcoholic fit, very similar to his sado-masochist lapse earlier in the day. Robbe-Grillet reinforces, by means of the effect of the strong liquor, the corrosive effect of the sickness in the mind of Mathias, his sado-masochist fascination. Mathias' deviant behavior acts upon his sanity in the same manner as "demon-rum" in conventional society.

Like the diseased mind of the jealous husband in La Jalousie counting the rows of palm trees, first in one direction, then in another--a symptom of mental derangement and self indulgence--or like Captain Hatteras in Jules

Verne's novel constantly walking in a northward direction, Mathias uses mathematics and a strict accounting of his time as a means to retain his hold on the rational world. In order to achieve this end Mathias adopts a series of idiosyncrasies. First he gives himself a strict schedule to sell his watches, a schedule which has no relation with the demands of salesmanship or realistic business behavior. Next he mechanizes his enterprise by renting a bicycle. Furthermore, he traces his itinerary in the shape of a figure eight. All three of these measures or strategic moves reveal a mind which wants to be organized, consistent, and methodical. But the reliance on strict methodical factors here again points to a lack of understanding of the demands reality places upon rational and methodological planning. Mathias wants life to be a game, and expects that if he touches all the bases he will be all right. This points to a juvenile behavior, to a primitive man's way of appeasing the gods. Here Mathias, like a little boy on his way to school, is trying to placate the monster within himself. If he plays the game according to the rules, if he touches the right telephone pole, or if he does not set his foot on the crack in the pavement he will obtain his wish or make a good grade on the test in school. The scene in the bedroom of the house which could be or is in his mind whenever he wants it, the house where he spent his childhood, leads us to think that he learned this behavior as a child in order to appease his



gods, who, at the time, were his parents.

We have put forth that Mathias, trying to escape his monster, runs to his native island where he finds the monster waiting for him, since the monster was created within him as a consequence of an abnormal or peculiar relationship with his parents during his formative years. A success in his business venture seems to be the only means to conquer the monster or at least to keep it in check. If Mathias can sell his watches he will have less time for introspection and traumatic flights of fancy. He will be engaged in a rational venture offering the chance of success through the use of rational methods and technology -- in this case the bicycle. This bicycle will break down like the machines upon which man places his reliance.

We witness Mathias' vain attempts at cleaning up the tangible proof of the reality he wants to erase. If you can't see it, it is not there. Everything seems to work for Mathias until he realizes that Julien has been a witness to the crime he does not want to remember. Julien completely destroys the spider web Mathias has painstakingly manufactured to hide, to obliterate the hole in his schedule.

As Doubrovsky has so ably expained and developed in his commentary on Roland Barthes' Racine, the use of the idea of "blood" and heredity in Racine is really a reference to the father. But for Barthes the father really means the authority of the law and from the law we pass to the idea of

God. The struggle of son against father is therefore construed as the revolt of man against God. Following the same stream of thought, it seems plausible to see in Le Voyeur in which the figures of father and mother emerge at all times, not only a revolt of Mathias against his father and a desire to destroy his mother, but simply a mythical reference to the revolt of man against his God. This would in a large way explain the title of the book and also the numerous references to the eye of the sea gull. Mathias would now become a sort of Prometheus who tries to conquer his freedom and break out of the infernal circle of subservience to his master. This would also give the figure eight symbols the sign of handcuffs and the circle the prison of man. The violent act of Mathias can be interpreted as the defiance of man, the destruction of the law, which remains unpunished since Mathias escapes from the island. Viewed under this light Le Voyeur becomes a mythical book describing the revolt of man, the assertion of his freedom through the murder of the mother figure, and his escape unpunished from the island which becomes the circle, the prison of man. Le Voyeur could therefore be the escape from the eye of God, the abandonment of the earthly bondage of man, escape from the island, and a new but uncertain life, cut off from the past. Mathias outside the island is alone without a past only a present, like a new astronaut of humanity.

When it comes to mythical interpretation, it seems that the possibilities are infinite, and it is well in keeping with

Barthian philosophy of criticism, that a book "en soi" does not exist, and that the book is not an "object"; that it needs a "subject" to read it, therefore the literary entity emerges only when the words on the page are interpreted by the consciousness of the reader. Literature is then fluid and interpretative, and in the light of French New Criticism and Russian Formalism we are presented with a supra form of art, which has no tangible reality, a form of art which can be accepted in one generation and denied in another, whose sole claim to being rests within the consciousness of the reader, even cut off from the consciousness of the original imprinter of the sign, who loses control of the referent. We see here a symbolic relationship with the actual position of man on earth. No man possesses the material of the planet and controls its destinies. No man on earth can say I possess this tree, that person, that animal, that stone. Ownership and control are relative. Objects are objects in themselves and man can't own them. When it comes to the work of art, the author also loses control of it, and no one can write a definitive work, or paint a definitive picture, carve a definitive statue. I think the most flagrant example of this is to be found in music, where the arranger-interpreter can change or modify the intentions of the composer and where ambiguity is at its utmost. In his discussion of Picard's criticism, Doubrovsky quotes from Picard's work on Racine (Oeuvres complètes, vol. 1, p. 233) and comes

to the following conclusions:

...as soon as the hero 'grasps that he no longer controls his own self,' as soon as he 'renounces his freedom,' 'the world is filled with gods, and the reign of fatal powers begins'.<sup>20</sup>

If the same reasoning is applied to the conclusion of Le Voyeur, we can say that Mathias, in spite of his torments, uncertainties, and deliriums, has not renounced his freedom, has not permitted the gods to control his destiny. This Orestes, in the character of Mathias, does not succumb under the hammer blows of a "Qui te l'a dit," but demonstrates man's isolation in the universe beyond retribution except that implacable fate which death represents. It is significant that the last sentence of the book should involve a reference to time:

Le voyageur pensa, de nouveau, que dans trois heures il serait arrivé à terre.

Time is the element which rules Mathias outside of any other restraint.

---

<sup>20</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, The New Criticism in France, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 95.

### CHAPTER III

#### LE VOYEUR, A PARODY OF THE WORKINGS OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIETY

Le Voyeur seems to be a long paraphrase of modern technological life, of man's activities in the economic world legislated by exacting laws promulgated by man or nature, which unceasingly interfere with his will and inclinations. Mathias, the traveling salesman, tries to conform to a world organized along strict and precise rules which have legislated mercurial activities among men within a consortium of premises introduced by the XIXth Century Industrial Revolution, which itself patterned its activities on the teachings of the physiocrats of the preceding century.

Mathias' activities can be perceived as the struggle of a lonely human being to integrate with the physical universe of society in order to become one with the realm of objects. But his human attributes, his freedom of action, his psychosis, keeps him from reaching his goal. The "hole" of the action represents for Mathias a significant break during which he existed strictly in a human confine rather than in the cosmic order of things. The "hole" marks one of Mathias' existential periods. During that lapse of time

he was perfectly free, responsible to no one but himself. The "hole" was a breakthrough for him. After having tried to isolate himself in a purely imaginative world of fancy where the rules of the world would have no power upon him, he finally succeeded in achieving that state of total freedom from the world. It seems that Robbe-Grillet anticipated the period of the sixties which saw young people, and some not so young, refute the validity of organized society to find an escape in idleness and drugs. Mathias does not represent, or cannot be compared to, that group of young people who wanted to reform society. Mathias does not possess that redeeming quality. His will to escape is purely egoistic and neurotic.

What are the features of organized society which lead Mathias to choose existentialism over a normal and conformist life style? First of all he is trying to sell watches at a time when technology has just exploded and rendered that commodity available to anyone who wanted one. Already, before World War II, Japanese watches were sold by the pound in Morocco. Having failed on the mainland, he came to the island where the living pace is much slower, and the need for keeping track of time much less important. Before being a watch salesman he had been a traveling electrician. This fact might very well refer to an activity which strongly characterizes the post World War One period, when technology at the common man's level was represented by

electric lighting and heating. So we are in the presence of a character whose life-sustaining activities relate directly to technology as it influences everyday life. But does that technology, work or is it even wanted by men? Various instances throughout the novel indicate that at least on the island, this cosmos of human society, few people trust in the effectiveness of modern living. On page 228 we hear the lady lodger say:

Les «pannes de secteur», dit-elle, étaient très fréquentes et quelquefois de longue durée; les habitants de l'île avaient donc conservé leurs anciens appareils d'éclairage, qu'ils entretenaient en état de service comme par le passé. (LV, p. 228)

A little further on she also adds:

«Ça n'était pas la peine de faire tant d'histoires avec leur progrès», avait conclu la dame en emportant une seule de ses deux lampes. (LV, p. 228)

The above remarks given by Robbe-Grillet, as direct and indirect discourse, not only exemplify the lack of appreciation of that lady for modern conveniences, but also and above all another transitional device to round up a narrative unit, which was introduced on page 223 when Mathias upon leaving the lighthouse cafe makes his way to the house of Jean Robin. As the text reveals, Mathias watches the occupant of the house from outside a window, and the scene of violence inside launches him into a traumatic state figuring as a central topic the fascination induced by the light inside, which turns out to be also the brass kerosine lamp of his rented room. We are never told that Mathias is using

the lamp because the power has been cut off in the little town, until he blows it out to go to bed: then we are told in a flashback that the lodger appeared with two lamps and left him one. In order to emphasize the unnerving features of modern technology, we are shown a Mathias fidgeting with the light switch because he can't remember whether he turned the ceiling light off and he does not want it to come on during his sleep.

In order to cull some of the instances denoting an ironic satire of technology we shall be obliged to discourse on questions of composition or of plot development, because those instances are not presented as separate units but integrated within other main developments.

The main instrument of Robbe-Grillet's ironic criticism of technology is indeed the bicycle. We point out in another chapter of this work the use of the bicycle as a vehicle for the psychological phenomenon of transference used by Mathias to reconstruct the actual rape scene. The bicycle has also been used as one of the many exemplifications of the figure eight sign, but it seems in the light of rationality that for Mathias using a bicycle makes sense; he will be able to cover greater distances in the least amount of time. On the other hand, as a fictitious character, as an anti-hero of literature, it seems also fitting for him to ride a bicycle rather than a steed. These seem to be the reasons why Robbe-Grillet introduced this mechanical device. It is interesting to note that Walla walked



in Les Gnomes; the mechanical device in that novel was the bridge. In La Jalousie, the vehicle becomes a car. In Dans le labyrinthe, the hero walks again. L'Immortelle and La Maison de rendezvous combine walking and riding in a taxi or in a private car. It is a fact that Robbe-Grillet usually does a great deal of walking; perhaps for a writer whose life fascination appears to be objects, this means of locomotion is more propitious to observing them. But it is also his own liking in life to explore on foot and to be by himself.

The great disappointment in Mathias' sojourn on the island is not to have committed a crime and risked being arrested, but the simple fact that he missed the ship back to the main land. The novel ends with this recurring sentence: "Le voyageur pensa, de nouveau, que dans trois heures il serait arrivé à terre." (LV, p. 255) To remain faithful to his schedule and so doing sustain the rational organization of his life and attain that ideal state of participant in a technological and mercurial society seems to be his purpose in life. And in this respect most of humanity fits that pattern: to fit, to be accepted, to do one's job right, in short to be successful. But what happens, because of mechanical breakdowns of his beautiful bicycle, is that he reaches the ship too late to board. The bicycle is also a factor in his downfall. At the end of chapter I we read: "Mathias n'a plus qu'à se laisser descendre " (LV, p. 87).

One wonders if Mathias would have walked all the way to the cliff, in so doing wasting precious time needed to bring his enterprise to a fruitful end.

To this reader, it seems that the "buraliste" said it very well when Mathias returned the bicycle and told him of his troubles with it:

Toutes ces fabrications nouvelles, ça brille, mais ça ne vaut rien. (LV. p. 168)

We would like to see in this statement the expression of Robbe-Grillet's own feelings on the matter.

With Robbe-Grillet we have in his previous writings an ironic view of progress and its technology, and we must wait for Projet pour une révolution à New York, to paint a more distressful picture of the evils of technology and the growth of metropolitan jungles. In this respect we heard him say during an interview with Thomas Bishop in New York:

New York joue en Europe, mais en Amérique aussi, ça c'est très curieux, un rôle comme ça, un rôle imaginaire. C'est une ville imaginaire. C'est ... là, c'est l'imagination à son maximum de ce que sera une ville plus tard. Euh ..., toutes les villes sont sales, New York est plus sale. Toutes les villes sont luxueuses, New York est plus luxueux. Toutes les villes ont des immeubles qui sont grands. New York a des immeubles qui sont plus grands. Dans toutes les villes ont a peur, à New York on a plus [E/ply/] peur, on a plus [ply/] peur encore que dans les autres endroits. C'est, c'est une sorte de superlatif ..., comme si c'était..., l'avenir de toutes nos villes, de notre civilisation.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Bishop, "The Novel and Theater of Contemporary France in Translation", Alain Robbe-Grillet's Project for a Revolution in New York, concluded: Where Does French Literature Go from Here? (New York: New York University, January 8, 1977, CBS Network, 5:30 Central Standard Time. ( Robbe-Grillet interviewed by Thomas Bishop)

It is to be noted that as Robbe-Grillet progresses in his task as a novelist, and as his universe becomes more and more fictitious, his irony addressed to society and our civilization seems to become more pronounced. In the same interview Robbe-Grillet indicated that as the writers of the New Novel reached the era of the sixties, there was a realization on their part that they no longer used reality as the basis for their books, but that the fictional locales were to be regarded as pure invention, even in books like Projet pour une révolution à New York, which does not concern itself with the real New York, but with the myth of New York as existing not only in the minds of foreigners but also in the minds of Americans at large, and the very inhabitants of that city.

And this is the crux of the characteristics of the irony of Robbe-Grillet in Le Voyeur. Because it is based on a universe which is still very close to reality, the criticism of society and the workings of technology remain incidental and on the level of a mild irony, but when Robbe-Grillet enters a new phase in his literary production with the publication of La Maison de rendez-vous, in which, as he said in this same interview,

Hong-Kong c'était l'image, l'imagerie de l'exotisme teinté d'erotisme de l'Extrême-Orient, cet Extrême-Orient que nous avons tous dans la tête,<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Interview.

and with the publication of L'Immortelle and Projet pour une révolution à New York, his moralist role becomes more important, since moral or scientific criticism of society springs from the consciousness of man rather than from a strict and enduring set of premises which legislate society. Any type of criticism of man and his society has to be subjective rather than objective. Now, when a writer creates a universe of his own, he will permit his subconscious to intervene more freely with the result that his own reactions to his physical universe and cultural milieu will prevail in a conscious or subconscious series of judgments and interpretations. Hence the richness and profundity of the works of writers like Proust and Faulkner.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATHIAS AS A MODERN ORESTES

#### DOOMED TO FAILURE

As is widely known, the credit goes to Bruce Morrissette to have been among the first to heed Robbe-Grillet's revelation of the presence of the Oedipal theme in Les Gommès. Bruce Morrissette reaffirmed this information in a preface to two novels by Robbe-Grillet published in English when he wrote:

The author himself, in a little-known brochure, revealed the presence of this "much older story which is reconstituted" in this novel;...<sup>23</sup>

This preface dates back to 1965, and the same year Jean Alter wrote in La Vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet:

...si on ne trouve rien à redire à l'explication de texte de M. Morrissette qui, d'une façon magistrale a su démontrer que les Gommès transposent la légende d'Oedipe dans un registre contemporain, on doit reconnaître qu'il serait surieux que Robbe-Grillet ait choisi, pour un coup d'essai, de remettre au goût du jour, fût-ce sous une forme révolutionnaire, un mythe

---

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Morrissette, Introductory Essay to Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet, Jealousy and In the Labyrinth, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 4.

pourri des significations qu'il récuise par ailleurs.<sup>24</sup>

We see that opinions are quite divided on the intentions of Robbe-Grillet as an author. It is also a well-known fact that his ideas on the novel have been slightly modified since he published his first essay. Nevertheless we must side with Bruce Morrissette's argument that the Oedipal theme was used, when he supports it by a reference to a written declaration to that effect by Robbe-Grillet.

In Les Gommés Robbe-Grillet had divided the novel into five chapters in the form of a classical play or a Greek tragedy, with a prologue subdivided into five parts, and an epilogue. Bruce Morrissette has also noted "the chorus transformed into an 'omniscient narrator'"<sup>25</sup> Or as expressed in Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet:

Les quelques passages qui semblent gouvernés par le monde de narration de l'auteur omniscient sont en réalité des sortes de chœurs, commentaire d'une "conscience observatrice" neutre, liée à la structure même du roman.<sup>26</sup>

We note also the ruins of Thebes depicted in a painting in a shop window, and the eraser Wallas is looking for has part of the word "Oedipus" or "di" showing on its side. We also have the design of a child discovered by a group

---

<sup>24</sup>Jean Alter, La Vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966) p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Morrissette, Introductory Essay to Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Bruce Morrissette, Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 42.

of shepherds on the curtains of the houses of the city, the statue of Laius' chariot, the figurines representing a blind man led by a little boy, the Sphinx' image floating on the top of the water in the canal, the quest for the murderer by Wallas and the discovery that he is, himself, the real murderer. Many other clues support the presence of the Oedipus theme in the novel.

As Bruce Morrisette brilliantly demonstrated for Les Gommés, we know that Robbe-Grillet interwove his fiction of the solving of a crime with the old myth of Oedipus, not in a chronological and continuous manner, but by including propitiously fragments of the legend in the course of his narrative. Even his main character at times becomes invested with characteristics and behavior which could be traced back to Oedipus. Nevertheless, the myth was never intended to be the core of the fiction. In a like manner we can say that Le Voyeur also presents mythological traits which are reminiscent of the many versions of that legend.

But a close reading of Sartre's Les Mouches cannot fail to bring into question the various similarities between certain traits and motives of Mathias and the figure of Orestes in that play. We do not mean to infer that there was any sort of plagiarism on the part of Robbe-Grillet; but it seems that as he was maturing and beginning to exercise his skill as a writer, he could not have failed to be greatly impressed by the play, like all writers of the post World

War II period, and since creation is in great part a re-organization of previous impressions and influences, it should not be strange that we find so many "points de contact" between the character and behavior of Mathias and the hero of Les Mouches. But beyond this similarity we have been struck by the parallel which seems to exist between Mathias of Le Voyeur and the Orestes legend in general.

At first, if we look upon Mathias as a modern Orestes it seems that the travails of this contemporary hero have little in common with those of the hero in the ancient legend. If we follow Greek mythology and Homer we learn that Orestes, having been absent from Mycenae when his father returned from Troy to meet his death at the hands of Aegisthus, his wife's lover, avenged his father upon reaching manhood by coming back from Athens and killing Aegisthus and his own mother, Clytemnestra. His act is viewed as exemplary and in accordance with the moral code of the time.

In Stesichorus we find Orestes as a mere child at the time of the crime against his father. Smuggled to safety by his nurse, he goes back as a man but not before his mother has been warned in a dream of her impending fate. Orestes himself is punished by being haunted by the Furies at Delphi where he had taken refuge.

In Aeschylus' trilogy the Oresteia, Orestes, under the injunction of the god Apollo, returns to the island, poses as a stranger and is all but overcome with compunction



when confronted with his mother; he kills her and is pursued by the Furies. But here the legend takes a new turn; in the third play of the trilogy, Eumenides, Athena, goddess of judicial wisdom, convenes a human court which finds Orestes not guilty by one vote, which had been cast by Athena herself to break a deadlock vote of six to six, ~~in so doing affirm-~~ing that there was a better type of justice ~~than~~ the wrath of the gods and the archness of legalistic justice. Wisdom and humanity replace brutal retaliation of early man.

The Oresteia introduces the idea of retribution and punishment for criminal past actions. The crime of Orestes is the consequence of his father's crimes against society. Although Agamemnon was the instrument of the gods in the ~~avenging~~ of the rape of Helen by the Trojans, his own crimes were the result of his disregard for the rights and lives of others, including his own daughter Iphigenia and the innocent Trojans he had sacrificed with the guilty ones. In this work, Orestes appears as the only righteous **character** of this ancient legend.

In Euripides' Iphigeneia in Tauris, Orestes, in order to pacify some of the Furies, is ordered by Apollo to bring back to Athens the statue of Artemis. He goes to Tauris with his close friend, Pylades, where they are arrested and condemned to death in sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. The priestess is none other than Iphigenia (q.v.) his sister, and they all escape, bringing back the statue. Having

married Hermione, Helen's daughter by Menelaus, after murdering her betrothed Neoptolemus, Orestes dies of snakebite.

Euripides also wrote Orestes and Electra, in which works he insists on the flawed characters of the protagonists, as the basis for their crimes. As to Sophocles' Electra, it is a new version of Homer's treatment.

Other interpretations of the theme are to be found in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Voltaire's Oreste, Goethe's Iphigenie au Tauris, Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra, Jean Giraudoux's Electre, and Jean Paul Sartre's Les Mouches.

In addition to these well-known theatrical productions and novelistic works, we would like to mention the following two German contemporary novels which have also used the myth of Orestes. The first dating back to 1957 is entitled Homo Faber and was written by Max Frisch. This novel also presents a reworking of two other myths, the Daedalus story and the Oedipus theme. The second, written in 1960, Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf by Alfred Doblin, also deals with the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, besides the Orestes. Every one of these writers reworks the material or changes the emphasis for moral, dramatic, or philosophical purposes, but the main theme has changed little from the time of the ancients.

In Le Voyeur, Robbe-Grillet seems to have integrated the Orestian theme as the unifying fabric of his narrative.

As we review the various interpretations of that theme through the centuries, from Homer to Sartre, we cannot help being intrigued by the many elements and variations found in Le Voyeur.

To open the research with a lesser point, we may be puzzled by the figure eight sign so prevalent all through the novel. This sign takes many aspects, from the imprint of two mooring rings on the face of the pier to the two wet circles left by drinking glasses on a table. Other manifestations of this sign are suggested by two rings on a door resembling eye glasses, the two wheels of a bicycle, the circuit in figure eight shape, and even the limbs of the assaulted victim forming two triangles joined at the apex in one of Mathias' sadistic fantasies about the scene on the cliff.

All those signs have in common the figure 0, already used in Les Gommés as the vicious circle which engulfs Wallas, the Oedipus of the novel. But in Le Voyeur we are faced with two circles instead of one. This might pose a problem if we try to interpret the circles as a representation of the word Orestes, and in fact this haunting sign could very well be the mark of the Orestian curse in the novel. Why two circles, and not one? First, those rings, figure eight shapes, and eye glasses signs perform an erotic function already pointed out by many critics as stimuli for Mathias' fantasies. Bruno Hanu sees in them the representation of feminine genitals:

Peut-être le 8 symbolises-t-il aussi la montée des flammes et un sexe de femme (ne serait-ce qu'à cause de la double brûlure de cigarette qu'il inflige au sexe de la fillette, ainsi qu'au papier journal qu'il veut détruire.<sup>27</sup>

Bruce Morrissette speaks of "les nombreuses images-suppôts qui jalonnent le récit du Voyeur donnant aux contours même de l'île, du roman et de l'action qui s'y déroule, une unité formelle toute géométrique."<sup>28</sup>

None of these interpretations has to be exclusive of the others and they can very well co-exist as manifestations of the evocative power and dynamism of Robbe-Grillet's "écriture." Indeed we can interpret in our turn the double O as an emblematic reference to Orestes. As to the juxtaposition of two letter O's, the explanation could very well rest with the schizophrenic condition of Mathias. If we look upon Mathias as a case of pathological neurosis, with a split personality, a man who phantasizes and oscillates between reality and dream, and if we furthermore remember his attack of schizophrenia as he looked at himself in the mirror in the cafe near the lighthouse, it seems fitting to regard the double O as Mathias' split personality. Mathias had undergone a tremendous stress during the day and had downed a glass of absinth before leaving the harbor district. At the cafe he asked for an absinthe but settled

---

<sup>27</sup>Bruno Hahn, "plan du Labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet," Les Temps Modernes, July (1960), p. 158.

<sup>28</sup>Morrissette, Les Romans, p. 96.

for a glass of wine. The day was also terribly hot, and we note the numerous references to heat in the novel which is also an element of prime importance in Les Mouches. All these circumstances joined to bring about his fit of unconsciousness. An important factor could also have been the motherly appearance of the woman behind the bar and the sound and the whirling of the coffee grinder. These elements might have reinforced the mother complex in Mathias. On the one hand we have the mother figure and on the other hand the enervating sound of the grinding which could have reminded him of a familiar scene of his childhood and at the same time instilled in him a vertigo by the conjunction of the grinding sound and the whirling of the handle. Mathias becomes himself and "le voyageur" and loses consciousness. The double O could represent the splitting of his personality, or two Orestes, one incestuously in love with his mother, and the other the avenger of his father and represented by his desire to succeed. One is dominated by his sexual fixation, the other by the godlike injunction, in this case the concept of order, transposed here from Les Mouches, under the guise of the methodical sale of the watches.

In Les Mouches, upon arriving in Argos Orestes complains to his tutor of his weightlessness, his sense of treading "en l'air" (Act I, Scene I)<sup>29</sup> whereas there are

---

<sup>29</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, Théâtre, "Les Mouches" (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 24.

other men "qui naissent engagés..."<sup>30</sup> We could contrast this episode with the famous opening lines of Le Voyeur which present the rest of the passengers as "Une série de regards immobiles et parallèles, .....luttaient contre cet espace déclinant qui les séparait encore de leur but." This is to be followed by the notation: "...un voyageur restait étranger à cette attente." (LV, p. 9)

Like Orestes, Mathias is free whereas the rest of the world is committed either to their "actes" or their passions. This parallel is reinforced by Orestes' confession that at age seven he knew already that he was "exile." We note also that Mathias left the island quite young. Furthermore, Orestes bemoans the fact he does not have any "souvenirs" because only those who belong and possess people and things can have some; he, being free, did not own anything. Mathias is also in the same situation, even if he tried to possess his strings; even this humble token of wealth was denied him by his parents, who did not let him play with them if his lessons had not been done. Mathias acquired his freedom the day he neglected his lessons and instead drew the picture of the sea gull, an act which has been commented upon by Bruno Hahn as having as a consequence the estrangement of Mathias who became a "conscience solitaire au sein du monde hostile."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>31</sup>Hahn, "Plan du Labyrinthe...", p. 160.

In Les Mouches, Orestes is also rejected by the people of Argos, and by Jupiter who would like for him to go away and leave things as they are.

When in Act I, Scene V, Clytemnestra warns Electra that some day she too will drag along "un crime irréparable" she states to her:

...Tu te retourneras et tu le verras derrière toi, hors d'atteinte, sombre et pur comme un cristal noir. Et tu ne comprendras même plus, tu diras: "Ce n'est pas moi, ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai fait." Pourtant, il sera là, cent fois renié, toujours là, à te tirer en arrière. Et tu sauras enfin que tu as engagé ta vie sur un coup de dés, une fois pour toutes, et que tu n'as plus rien à faire qu'à haler ton crime jusqu'à ta mort. Telle est la loi, juste et injuste, du repentir. Nous verrons alors ce que deviendra ton jeune orgueil.<sup>32</sup>

This quotation from Les Mouches might explain in part the struggle of Mathias in his vain attempt to erase his crime. Being a free man, a stranger or even an indifferent being, he does not want to lose his freedom by being tied down by the certainty of his crime. As long as he can pretend that he was somewhere else during the time of the assault on the girl, and convince others that he was not there, he will be free, because as Sartre has stated in Huis Clos, "l'enfer, c'est les Autres."<sup>33</sup> Now when Mathias realizes that Julien has seen him in the perpetration of the crime, now that a foreign consciousness knows, Mathias understands that he has lost his freedom, which explains

---

<sup>32</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, Theatre, "Les Mouches" (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p.37.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 167

his ensuing breakdown and his leaving the island having failed in his commercial undertaking.

Another instance in Les Mouches seems to cast some light on Mathias' behavior after his crime. In Act II, Scene V, Jupiter explains to Aegistheus the value of his ~~crime~~ in reference to the grand scheme of the gods:

...Pas un instant tu m'as bravé: tu as frappé dans les transports de la rage et de la peur; et puis, la fièvre tombée, tu as considéré ton acte avec horreur et tu n'as pas voulu le reconnaître. Quel profit j'en ai tiré cependant! pour un homme mort, vingt mille autres plongés dans la repentance, voilà le bilan. Je n'ai pas fait un mauvais marché.<sup>34</sup>

The act committed by Aegistheus has enslaved him, because it was not an act "per se" but an obedience to the will of the gods. Aegistheus did not affirm his freedom but sealed his fate as slave of the accepted order. This Mathias does not want to do, and his obstinate struggle to deny his crime in the eyes of others is a futile attempt to retain his freedom, to escape being absorbed by the island and becoming an integral part of it. Mathias is no Thesus who wants to "faire sa ville" as Gide puts it, or as Orestes in Les Mouches expresses it to Electra (Act II, Scene IV):

...Comprends-moi: je veux être un homme de quelque part, un homme parmi les hommes. Tiens, un esclave, lorsqu'il passe, las et rechigné, portant un lourd fardeau, traînant la jambe et regardant à ses pieds, tout juste à ses pieds, pour éviter de choir, il est dans sa ville, comme une feuille dans un feuillage, comme l'arbre dans la forêt. Argos est autour de lui, toute pesante et toute

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 76.



chaude, toute pleine d'elle même; je veux être cet esclave, Electre, je veux tirer la ville autour de moi et m'y enrouler comme dans une couverture. Je ne m'en irai pas.<sup>35</sup>

It was never the intention of Mathias to stay on the island or to become part of it. The island was to him the last resort in his quest for financial success. Having failed everywhere else, if successful in his venture he would have used the money from the sale of the watches to live on for a while. Mathias shows no long range planning for his life. He is interested only in the present and what it brings to satisfy his appetites, let these be sexual or existential.

Another aspect of Le Voyeur seems to answer or to vibrate with the same intensity as the Sartrian idea that the desire for order in the world is what makes gods and kings. When Aegistheus asks Jupiter the reason why kings and gods are condemned to dance before the people in order to keep them from turning inward and discovering they are free, the following dialogue ensues:

Aegistheus.--Hélas! Mais qui nous a condamnés?

Jupiter.-----Personne que nous-mêmes; car nous avons la même passion. Tu aimes l'ordre, Egisthe.<sup>36</sup>

This passion for order we find also in the makeup of Mathias. Is it not a neurotic compulsion which makes

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

Mathias organize his tour of the island according to a strict and rigid schedule, a schedule which foresees to the minute how long every sale is going to take, and how many watches can be sold before he has to take the ship back to the mainland? The itinerary of Mathias is also geometrically organized, and the figure eight shape is the most rational he can conceive, in view of the shape of the island. No other form of circuit can cover so much ground at one time; this the Lionel Corporation understood a long time ago in suggesting this track plan to their customers.

We readily see that the character of Mathias is a great deal more complex than Sartre's Orestes, when we notice that he incorporates traits common not only to Orestes but also to Jupiter. As Orestes of Les Mouches remarks at first, he does not want to replace Aegistheus and has the firm intention of leaving the island once his purpose has been accomplished.

From all the preceding considerations and analysis, it emerges that Mathias is much more complex than he seems to appear at first. His dual characteristics render him more than a mere reflection of an Orestes or a stranger like Mersault, or a poor schizophrenic with sado-masochist tendencies, but full-blown representative of modern man. who is god-like oriented when he wants to be rational, free spirited and independent on the other hand, and above all a very sick individual floating around, belonging to no

particular place and going nowhere either. Could the island be a fictional representation of the universe inhabited by a humanity without past, present or future? In the realm of fictional speculations there are no limits, it seems.

In regards to the geography of the Orestian legend, in particular, and other legends in general, two facts seem to stand out. The location of the events depicted vary from one rendition to the other, and islands seem to be a favorite locale for the setting of the action. Although Argos is a city, it is nevertheless on the island of Arcadia, now known as the Argolis. Tauri, also a city, is situated on the island of Crimea. Crete is the locale for the legend of Theseus. All these geographic precedents seem to favor Robbe-Grillet's concept of strictly localizing the grounds of the action in order to limit the fictional existence of his characters. In Le Voyeur the action is localized between the arrival of Mathias on the island and his departure. In Les Gommages the existence of the character is confined to the city, and in La Jalousie to the grounds of the plantation, if not the hall of the house. In Le Labyrinthe we have another city and even merely one bedroom if we follow certain interpretations to the effect that the book is invented by a man closeted in a bedroom. But if all these considerations of general geography or exact location are of little importance when adapting or

incorporating a myth into a story which after all pretends to be an exercise in "écriture," nevertheless they bring another element of veracity to the thesis that the Orestian theme can be detected in Le Voyeur.

It is to be noted also that Aeschylus' Oresteia was a trilogy, made of Agamemnon, Choephoroi, and Eumenides. The first play tells of the story and death of Agamemnon; Choephoroi of the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; and the third play of the trial of Orestes in Athens and his acquittal. In Le Voyeur we also have the threefold division. The first chapter presents Mathias and sets up circumstances for the crime, which takes place between the first chapter and the second chapter.

Even the manner of dress of the women of the island seems to carry out the Greek theme:

Son costume--celui de presque toutes les filles de l'île--n'était qu'une extrême simplification de l'ancien costume local: une mince robe noire à manches longues, assez collante sur tout le buste, à la taille et sur les hanches, mais avec une jupe très large; l'encolure arrondie dégageait complètement le cou; la coiffure consistait en deux courtes nattes latérales tirant les cheveux sur la nuque, de part et d'autre d'une raie médiane et enroulées en petites pignons cachant la partie supérieure des oreilles... (LV, p. 179)

The black clothing is also worn as a sign of penance by the inhabitants of Argos in Les Mouches, as an expiation for the black deeds of their ruler which they tolerated and accepted. The women in Le Voyeur also wore black, and we are told that at one time the island was prosperous but was scorched by a terrible fire. In

Les Mouches Orestes describes to his sister Electra the joyous existence of the people of Corinthe where streets are full of happy, talkative people, in direct contrast with Argos where street are silent and people invisible. We cannot fail to note how few people Mathias meets on the street and, as we mentioned in another chapter of this work, the lack of street noises in the town or of traffic noises on the highway to the lighthouse. A pall seems to cover the island where fear and sarcasm reign. Mathias, "le nettoyeur," notices the filthy rejects of the sea on the beach where dead crabs clutter the grayish sand.

In Euripides' Iphigeneia in Tauris, we learn that Orestes must bring back the statue of Artemis to Athens. In Le Voyeur we have a statue of a woman in the middle of the triangular square of the town. This statue faces the sea and could be an indirect reference to the statue of Artemis of the legend. We also note the statue of Jupiter in Les Mouches.

In Aescnylus' trilogy the Oresteia, Giraudoux's Electra, and Sartre's Les Mouches, Orestes poses as a stranger. Here we have another point of contact between Mathias and Orestes. Mathias has been gone from the island for so long that nobody remembers him, and he reveals his identity to Mrs. Marek only after his deed has been accomplished. The reader will never learn the name of Mathias. Furthermore, he is also a stranger in the sense

of Camus' stranger; like Mersault he does not belong on the island or care to belong.

As for the injunction of the gods given by Apollo to Orestes, it seems to have a corresponding parallel in Le Voyeur. On various occasions we are made aware of the round eye of the sea gulls which silently cruise overhead and beam their glances upon him like the ghost of Hamlet's father-- a reminder of that famous sea gull Mathias tried to draw as a child. Bruno Hahn sees in the drawing of the bird the original crime of Mathias, who in so doing separated himself from "Nature, la Mère-Nature, pour essayer d'en avoir une représentation personnelle..."<sup>37</sup> This latter point is very interesting, if we refer to Les Mouches, in which Orestes states that man is outside nature and must stand alone.

...Etranger à moi-même, je sais. Hors nature, contre nature, sans excuse, sans autre recours qu'en moi...la nature a horreur de l'homme, et toi, toi, souverain des Dieux, toi aussi tu as les hommes en horreur.<sup>38</sup>

As for the Furies, they are everywhere, haunting Mathias-Orestes incessantly, demanding of his deranged mind that he explain the hole in his schedule. If he could only bring the two edges of the hole together he would be saved; but we know and he knows that the eye of Julien which has seen it all forever precludes this from happening, and we

---

<sup>37</sup>Hahn, "Plan du Labyrinthe---", p. 160.

<sup>38</sup>Sartre, Theatre, p. 101.

find at the end our Orestes ready to leave the island while the buoy tosses back and forth as if it were nagging him. Now if Furies must fly, the sea gulls have been noted several times during the narrative. It is to be noted here, in contrast to the Orestes of the legend, that Mathias leaves peacefully; we are tempted to say at peace with himself in the midst of total indifference on the part of the islanders. Even the sea gulls are absent. The only witness now is the three-tiered buoy, dressed in black, rattling its chains. Should we see here one last mother figure? Who knows?

Whereas in the Greek version of the theme Orestes knows at the start the truth about the murder of Agamemnon and the dramatic plot consists in finding out when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will be slain, in Giraudoux's Electre the chief characters have to test each other and the motives of their actions; the play becomes an argument rather than a mere unfolding of a taut situation once Orestes is back in Argos.

We see here a similar treatment in Le Voyeur. Upon the arrival of Mathias on the island we know very little of his past and of the other characters of the narrative. Character and events emerge slowly from the descriptions, giving a structure very similar to Electre of Giraudoux. The Eumenides of the legend could also have a counterpart in the "trois petites filles," daughters of Mme Merak.

In relation to the Orestes theme we would like to mention the fact that the town was at one time destroyed by fire. This fact could also be related to the hypothesis that Mathias burned his cousin Violette to death as a child and then left the island. In the legend of Orestes, Agamemnon, his father, burned Troy and offered Iphigenia as a burnt offering. These were construed as the crimes for which he was punished. It is quite evident that we cannot expect Robbe-Grillet to have used a chronological relation of the legend, if indeed this was his conscious or subconscious intention, but it seems clear to us that elements of the legend have been cemented in the "écriture" of the novel, like a pudding or a conglomerate rock.

If we examine the presence of the Orestes theme in relation to the fictional time elements we are led to discover that Robbe-Grillet wrote his narrative on two levels. On the one hand it is a simple anecdote concerning a horrendous crime committed by a schizophrenic, along a "neutral" time sequence; and on the other, a cleverly fabulated Orestian myth within the intermittent confines of "mythical" time.

Whereas Olga Bernal encompasses the mythical time in the twenty four hours "en trop" indicated by Robbe-Grillet in his "prière d'insérer" to the first editors of Les Gommés, it seems that if mythical time is present in Le Voyeur, it should be found in the famous hole and in those passages during which Mathias day dreams into the



past or into the future; the rest of the time belongs to the "anecdote" or elements located in the strict present of the novel. But as we have seen, the fabric of the "anecdote" is constantly punctured by the mythical elements to resemble the newspaper clipping after Mathias burned holes in it with his cigarette. But the Orestian theme is not restricted only to the mythical time sequence, since many elements which point to it, like the statue on the triangle square, are located strictly in the time of the "anecdote."

Therefore we must note here a new direction in the use of mythical time in Robbe-Grillet's novel. Concentrated in Les Gommages, it seems to be fragmented in Le Voyeur.

It is to be noted that in both novels these prop elements like the picture of Thebes or the statue of the island woman are distributed all along the core of the narrative, and in Le Voyeur the mythical elements and time are reduced to a bare minimum. This is done to the advantage of two new elements which are the traumatic schizophrenic visions of Mathias' subconscious mind and the "scènes pour rien" of his conscious mind. Because these traumatic states constantly interfere with his business oriented planning sessions, we do not have a clear division between the two. Whereas in Les Gommages, the various stages of the murder had been laid out beforehand, and the course of events was interrupted only by a purely human error on the part of Garinati, in Le Voyeur, the elaboration of an

orderly and ideal procedure to bring to a successful end the mercantile aspirations of Mathias on the island is constantly interrupted by unforeseen, subconscious motives which break and fragment it, and in so doing, affirm the dependency of his rational intellect upon purely human and primitive motivations. This constant struggle confronts the mythical elements in his nature with the rational cogitations of his mind. We have numerous examples of this, namely in the famous sequence of scenes when Mathias tries to establish the best procedure for his sales presentations on the island. These strictly rational and orderly projections are constantly interrupted by subconscious elements which invade his vision, like a ball of string in the briefcase---this string is really in the pocket of his mackinaw--~~or~~the baby doll design of the lining of the same briefcase, which injects erotic enticements into his thinking. Mathias is a mind at war with itself. (LV, p. 42)

One is tempted to refer to the famous hypothesis current a few years ago among social scientists concerning the "crocodile mind," the primitive and elementary, whose sole function was to satisfy the need for survival and instant gratification of the body. Evolution having provided man with a second, more complex mind, human beings were said to operate on two levels, one animal in nature, the other rational and methodical. Or again, the Marguerite Duras idea of the return to the primeval forest and a more

simple, more elementary mind void of all the complications centuries of evolution have cluttered it with. Here we more particularly refer to her novel, Détruire, dit-elle.<sup>39</sup> If this duality really exists in man's mind, Mathias would present a vivid example of this phenomenon. His sudden jumps from rational, organized fantasizing are cases in point, which underline what happens when the purely human element is injected into rational processes. The result is the emergence of the myth which the highly industrialized society tends to ignore. This phenomenon explains also the popularity of cinematographic productions like the Exorcist, the revolt of man's mind against excessive intellectuality and regimentation.

Furthermore, Orestes came back to the island of Mycenae as a mature man after having left it as a child, entrusted with a mission, a purpose. Mathias fits these characteristics, but he has a dual purpose, selling watches and killing his mother. Although the second purpose is not stated per se in the novel of Robbe-Grillet, it must be understood as emanating from a Freudian interpretation of Mathias' motives and behavior. In a very searching article published in Les Temps modernes and entitled "Plan du labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet," Bruno Hahn states:

Peut-être le 8 symbolize-t-il aussi la montée des flammes et un sexe de femme (ne serait-ce qu'à cause de la double brûlure de cigarette qu'il inflige au

---

<sup>39</sup>Marguerite Duras, Détruire, dit-elle (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969), p. 33-34. (See also "An Interview with Marguerite Duras..." in Destrey, She Said, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970), p. 91-133.)

sexe de la fillette, ainsi qu'au papier journal qu'il veut détruire). La forme Y que Robbe-Grillet décrit plus loin signifie embranchement et divergence d'une ligne droite, et pareillement sexe de femme.<sup>40</sup>

In the light of the preceding quotation we could assert that the main neurotic motivation of Mathias is to destroy by fire the image of womanhood; it remains now to find the compelling neurosis which is at the basis of such abnormal behavior. The answer can be found again in Bruno Hahn who said in the same article that Mathias separated himself from other men, from his mother, from society, and he sees this break in the scene of the drawing of the sea gull:

La première faille est apparue lorsque l'enfant ne s'est pas contenté d'une contemplation qui confondait regardé et regardant. L'enfant s'est séparé de la Nature, la Mère-Nature, pour essayer d'en avoir une représentation personnelle. Il a doublement trahi, et sa Mère et l'objet qu'il a voulu reproduire, car la vision n'est jamais totale ni entièrement fidèle. Ainsi l'enfant qui demeure près de sa mère est justifié: la fermière défend son fils accusé (ce n'est plus un enfant, mais il est un peu simple, innocent), et il suffit de se taire pour se confondre à la Nature, pour être justifié. Vérité-Mensonge se résorbe dans le silence près de la mère. Mais lorsque le fils s'en éloigne, il se met à parler et dans ses paroles apparaissent le désir, la vengeance et il devient un criminel en puissance. Ainsi la conscience malheureuse c'est d'être conscience solitaire au sein du monde hostile. De son côté Robbe-Grillet lui-même conte que son bonheur serait de cultiver, loin du monde, des plantes alpestres dans l'infractuosité d'une roche.... Le bonheur à l'abri des hommes. Mais éjecté dans la vie, au sein d'une société hostile, Robbe-Grillet forme

---

<sup>40</sup>Hahn, "Plan du Labyrinthe...", p. 158.

l'image symbolique d'un sexe de femme brûlé, détruit, qui n'est qu'une autre forme négative de l'amour maternel.<sup>41</sup>

And this is the crucial link between Mathias and the legendary Orestes.

In Chapter VI of this study a close examination of the text of Le Voyeur will also show the juvenile attitude of Mathias, not only when he fantasizes about his youth on the beach with his friends but also in the town cafe when he tells the barkeep that he likes to begin his day with a slice of bread and a glass of milk, a practice he should have discarded long ago to remain in the context of French habits.

All these elements tend to establish the fact that Robbe-Grillet could have had the Orestes theme in mind when writing Le Voyeur.

If we can recapitulate these elements, they are, in order of their treatment, the return to the island of his birth, the fact that Mathias is a stranger now to the island, the statue of the woman on the square which brings in the idea of the statue of Artemis in Tauri, the fact that the women wear black, which not only relates to a Grecian custom but also to the fact that this element has been used by Jean Paul Sartre in Les Mouches, and last of all, but not least, the neurotic impulse to destroy the mother image. We have also mentioned that Mathias'

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p, 160.

rigorous and methodical attitude in regard to his commercial expedition could be interpreted, if we follow Jean Paul Sartre, as a tendency to act in a godlike fashion.

It has been solidly established that in Les Gommès, Robbe-Grillet had "dès les premières pages" supplied the average reader with clues to perceive the parallelism between the Oedipus legend and the anecdote being related, although the myth was to remain outside of the narrative itself.<sup>42</sup>

Concerning Le Voyeur, few if any commentators have been able to state categorically that Robbe-Grillet could have used a mythic reference in this work, outside of the notation concerning the relation by the old man of the old legend of the island:

Une jeune vierge, chaque année au printemps, devait être précipitée du haut de la falaise pour apaiser le dieu des tempêtes et rendre la mer clément aux voyageurs et aux marins. Jailli de l'écume, un monstre gigantesque au corps de serpent et à la gueule de chien dévorait vivante la victime, sous l'oeil du sacrificeur. (LV, p. 221)

If our contention that the Orestes legend is to be found in this work is valid, how could we explain the presence of another myth related to the legend of the Ethiopian mythical princess Andromeda? It is to be noted here that when Mathias learns of the legend we are told that he did not remember having heard of it when he was a child on the island. Should we interpret this as an "erasure" on the

---

<sup>42</sup>Alter, La Vision du monde, p. 21.

part of Mathias? Or an attempt to hide his responsibility by covering it up with a myth, an attempt swiftly discarded by his conscious mind as too fantastic to be taken seriously by anybody on the island? Nevertheless the introduction of the legend infuses into this objectal fiction an element of mythical fantasy which could be an indirect clue to the subjacent Orestes legend of the tale.

On the other hand the repudiation of the legend by Mathias could also point to the fact that in Mathias' world old ~~mythological~~ and metaphysical interpretations are no longer relevant and only phenomenological explanations are completely satisfactory in this context.

It is difficult to assert that Le Voyeur is a mythological novel in the sense that James Joyce's Ulysses qualifies. According to John J. White, such novels are characterized as follows:

The two fundamental characteristics of such works are: first that the mythological parallel is suggested as an analogy or contrast to the contemporary world in which the main events of the novel occur; and second that the parallel is an extended one and could be described as a motif.<sup>43</sup>

Nowhere in the novel are we informed of the analogy between the story of Mathias and the fate of Orestes, nor is any real contrast established. Robbe-Grillet presents his character and informs us of what happens to him during those few days on the island. The relationship between the

---

<sup>43</sup>John J. White, Mythology in the Modern Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 7.

mythological character and the anti-hero of the book is one of circumstantial evidence, as we have pointed out before. The relationship exists only in the mind of the reader-writer who seizing upon the previously acquired notions of mythology and artistic significance is able to establish the parallel, as we have done when in our close reading and re-reading of the book it suddenly appeared that the Orestian theme was permeating the novel. With Robbe-Grillet we do not have a superimposition of the theme to the story, but an amalgamation of notions and elements which elicits in the imaginative mind of the reader-writer the evolving of the presence of the theme.

This technique is in direct contrast with the one used by Elizabeth Langgasser in Markische Argonautenfahrt, a symbolic quest-novel published in 1959. This author makes direct references to classical mythology and biblical images used as narrative elements whose function is to establish parallels between modern and classical characters not always, if ever, related to the central mythological motif of the Argonaut's quest. In the same manner, Ulysses not only establishes a direct analogy in its title but contains elements relating directly to the mythical theme. In Le Voyeur, all the elements which support the mythical analogy are presented outside of the mythological context, and only after having been collated and interpreted by the reader-writer do those elements relating to situations,



locales, objects, cryptic signs, and psychological motivations emerge into a mythological pattern which could be compared to a single thread weaving in and out of a tapestry surface representing an innocuous scene or a landscape, which when isolated and traced in its meanderings over the expanse of the canvas, reveals a hidden drawing or even a geographic map placed there by the weaver. When viewed or examined as a fragmentary section of the design, the thread blends in and supports the matrice of the purported graphic representation. In a similar fashion, the Orestian theme emerges only after a patient and laborious reading of the book, presenting a subjacent novelistic quality to a work already endowed with a rich surface and peripheral subject matter.

This technique is well in keeping with Robbe-Grillet's interest in puzzles and detective case solving practices as illustrated previously in Les Gommes, and later on in Dans le Labyrinthe, L'Immortelle, La Maison de Rendez-vous, and Projet pour une révolution à New York.

It is very interesting to go back to Robbe-Grillet's own affirmations on his intentions concerning his use of a plot in his early novels:

Il y avait dans mon premier livre, Les Gommes, une intrigue de convention, calquée d'ailleurs sur Oedipe-Roi, et qui n'avait pour moi aucune importance; elle ne visait ni à la vraisemblance ni à l'authenticité. Les lecteurs de La Jalousie n'ont pas eu, eux non plus, à se demander ce qu'un tel roman contenait d'autobiographique; mais cette fois, c'était pour une raison

encore plus évidente: il ne se passe rien -- ou à peu près....<sup>44</sup>

In the preceding quotation, Robbe-Grillet speaks of the existence of a plot in Les Gommès, and of the lack of a plot in La Jalousie. The fact is that between these two works, Le Voyeur was written and published. Why did Robbe-Grillet make no mention of this latter work in his article? Could we infer that he was not sure of not having a plot in this book, whereas he could not deny it for Les Gommès, and was quite certain that one could not be found in La Jalousie? This is one of the reasons we feel to be on safe grounds when we detect the disguised plot of Orestes in Le Voyeur. The plot is less definite than in the preceding work, but still noticeable.

---

<sup>44</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pretexte: Nouvelle serie, No. 1 (January 1958), p. 100.

## CHAPTER V

### MATHIAS AND THE ISOLATION OF MAN IN SOCIETY

It has already been indicated in Chapter IV that Mathias' sin had been to have separated from the innocence of childhood by wanting something else beside reality, in this case to capture the image of the sea gull, and so doing fill that craving which made him think "...qu'il lui manquait quelque chose." (LV, p. 22)

Isolation is a capital theme in Robbe-Grillet's works. If we examine his various "anti-heroes" we realize that alienation of the character in the world is a recurring notion. Wallas was a stranger among other consciousness which interpreted and deformed the image of reality; in Le Voyeur we are faced with the consciousness of one man in opposition with a microcosm of a society -- the island. In La Jalousie, the husband comes to grips with an act which took place or did not take place -- the adultery of his wife. In Dans le labyrinthe we meet an individual consciousness facing the four walls of a room and interpreting objectal realities, like dust on the floor as snow on the ground, or the picture of an imaginary historical

scene as a real battle field as genesis for an entire scenario evolving around a soldier returning from the front; a box on the chimney becomes the receptacle of a mystery, or a message to be delivered. In this last work the hero is not only confronted by social isolation, but also by physical incarceration. In L'Année dernière à Marienbad we are introduced to a consciousness -- the woman -- caught in the spider web of another consciousness -- the man -- in great danger of being completely annihilated, not in space, but in time. Even in Instantanés, "La Chambre Secrète" isolation is not only incarceration within society, but physical suffering and destruction. But it is in L'Immortelle that we witness isolation at its highest degree. The hero, an intellectual, isolated in the vast city of Istanbul, is also plunged and isolated into an Arabian Nights fantasy where the hero imagines the entire contents of the fiction within the few minutes he has left to live before the automobile reaches the impact and reduces his consciousness to naught. Here it seems that the hero's reality emanates from the city of Istanbul like a puff of smoke from Aladin's lamp. In La Maison de rendez-vous, the hero is also isolated as in L'Immortelle in an erotic fantasy doubled with a detective fiction, which reminds one of Les Gommés. In this work the hero finds himself adrift in a romantic fantasy "à la Claude Farrère," orchestrated by le Marquis de Sade, and directed by James Bond. Human consciousness floats along a torpid ebb of criminal-

ity, sadism, masochism, theatrical fantasy, no longer a consciousness but the deranged mind of a madman in the last phase of a syphilitic infection. We are reminded of Durer and some Dutch painters of the apocalypse, but an apocalypse bathed in eroticism and the sweet scents of a thousand and one nights but less violent and cruel.

Up to now we have looked at Mathias as the lonely hero or anti-hero of Le Voyeur. Without stating that Mathias represents Orestes and re-enacts his tribulations, we have been aware of the loose similarity with the legend and the disguised thread which seems to weave all the way through the novel. This first rapprochement would locate Mathias in the realm of what Georg Lukacs would have referred to as "le roman de l'idéalisme abstrait."<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, if we consider Mathias' eroticism, another aspect of his character seems to develop.

While analysing Malraux's novels and in particular Les Conquerants and La Voie royale, Lucien Goldmann wrote:

...les relations entre hommes et femmes sont, dans l'ensemble de l'oeuvre de Malraux, une reproduction des relations entre les hommes et l'univers, ...et si ...ces relations ont un caractère purement érotique, elles ont aussi dans leur vie une fonction complémentaire: chaque fois que la maladie prend le dessus et que leur relation avec la société et le monde se trouve mise en question, ils essaient de retrouver le sens de la domination et de l'existence sur le plan réduit et aussi plus immédiate de l'érotisme.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>Lucien Goldmann, Pour une sociologie du roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 25.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

Similarly we shall notice that Mathias goes into his erotic traumatic states every time his control of the situation at hand seems to escape him. For example, let's refer to the episode when he is trying to sell watches to Mme Leduc and her two daughters. His well rehearsed sale spiel breaks down and he ends up having visions of Violette tied to a tree while the grass burns around her. At the lighthouse cafe we witnessed a similar happening. Under the influence of the mother figure represented by the owner, and the pointed remark about the sale of watches ("Watches are to be sold in jewelry stores," a remark which is underlined by a printed sign behind the counter), Mathias has one of his most serious cataclysmic crises and passes out. Here again unable to affirm himself as a man and a bonafide salesman, and under the influence of other factors, Mathias goes into an erotic fantasy which continues even as he goes to the house of Jean Robin the fisherman. But the most striking example of this phenomenon is seen when Mathias, sitting at the table in the cafe, launches into a very erotic trauma which more or less instructs the reader on the modalities of his crime. In this particular situation, Mathias loses control because of the overpowering figure of the cafe owner who seems to have complete mastery over his establishment, his customers, and above all over the fearful little waitress whose slender wrists will trigger the flight of fancy in him.

Conversely, Lucien Goldmann brings up the point while analysing La Voie royale that the character Perken explains that his failure to sustain his "action" against Siam is due to a lack of fire power because he has not been provided with the needed machine guns. Claude, his friend, would rather believe that Perken's lack of combative courage really is due to his erotic "fiasco" in a bordello in Djibouti. The "fiasco" announces old age and impotence. We see therefore the relationship which exists between eroticism and action. A failure in action will be compensated by an erotic success; an erotic failure will also effect action.

In an homologous fashion we may notice that Mathias' erotic failure on the cliff -- his sadistic treatment of the little shepherd girl is a flagrant admission of the fact -- also brings about an end to his already poor showing as a salesman of watches. Mathias, whose sole ideal is mercurial success, an undertaking planned as a military conquest, ends up selling only a few watches out of the more than one hundred he had planned to liquidate. If we find in this novel some of the characteristics of the Malraux heroes, mainly action as a purpose for life before death comes, these characteristics are treated with a certain amount of irony and reduced to a lower scale of values. Mathias' salvation is tabulated on a desire to earn enough money to keep going. Like Malraux' characters he gives no

thought to the future; we could define his idealism as picaresque to say the least.

This treatment of the hero provides also an ironic commentary on the gladiator of the second half of the XXth century, the post-Malraux period as it is sometimes called.

Like many of Malraux' characters, Mathias is sick. Whereas in Les Conquerants and La Voie royale the hero is physically sick, with an illness which will eventually bring death and an end to action and existential life, Mathias is plagued with a disease which is more descriptive of the post war period and the great advances which were accomplished in the realm of medicine. This sickness is mental, psychophrenia, and although Mathias does not actually die, he rather ceases to exist. Like many of Robbe-Grillet's characters, he did not exist before the novel opened, and he will have no materiality after the close of the story. In order to confirm this we already have Robbe-Grillet's statement on the existence of his fictional heroes.

This is the reason why we believe that in Le Voyeur we can find an ironic parallelism with the legend of Orestes and a second parallelism with many of Malraux's heroes for whom action is their "raison de vivre;" Mathias has been called a "passive" hero by Lucien Goldmann. Sartre thought that Orestes conquered his freedom through action. Malraux' heroes are all action, this is their defense



against death and an absurd, aimless life. Where does Mathias stand and with him the post-Malraux hero? We see him as a near relative of Camus' "stranger," an individual whose intellectual faculties have taken over, and whose forceful activist impulses have been sidetracked towards the realm of erotic fantasies, which would to a certain extent explain why pornography has replaced the eroticism of the pre-World War II period.

## CHAPTER VI

### LITERARY COMPOSITION DEVICES

#### IN LE VOIYEUR

Speaking of L'Année Dernière à Mariendad, Bruce Morrissette states:

Une étude détaillée des liaisons de scène -- il y en a peut-être deux ou trois cents dans le film -- exigerait un ouvrage plus long que le scénario lui-même.<sup>47</sup>

This statement equally describes the transitions or "modulations" between the scenes or narrative segments of Le Voyeur, and this research can only attempt to define, analyze, and comment on the most significant ones.

The various sections will be set off by a page notation, and when possible by a descriptive title to facilitate references to the section.

Due to the fact that Robbe-Grillet's transitions are both textual and thematic, it will be necessary at times to expound on topics which are treated in other chapters of this dissertation.

Because Robbe-Grillet undertakes to create an autonomous fictional universe, the various descriptive clues given to the reader do not permit him to pinpoint

---

<sup>47</sup>Morrissette, Les Roman de Robbe-Grillet. p. 207.

the exact location of the island to which Mathias has returned. Here, as in every one of his novels, except his two "cinéma roman" works of L'Année Dernière à Marienbad, and L'Immortelle, we see a return to the older technique of the fable and the tale, the creation of a fictional world similar to "behind the looking glass," or even a Walt Disney movie universe like the one in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" or "Bambi." The only clue to the approximate location is given by the often mentioned rainy weather, the sea gulls, two notations which imply a northern Europe location, maybe the English Channel. Elements like the drinking of wine and absinth narrow the geographic location not in the sense of where it is, but where it could not be. Africa, China, Japan, the United States are definitely out. The fact that the island is not very far from the continent further limits or excludes certain areas. At this point, we would like to mention the researches of Jean Alter and his study, La Vision du Monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, and more particularly chapter I, page 4 in which Jean Alter discusses the absence of the religious element, and more specially the lack of references to edifices of the cult, of any cult for that matter in Robbe-Grillet's works. Nowhere on the island are we informed of the existence of a church building or a calvary, or any structure relating to a cult. The only exception to this absence of religious awareness could be found in the

mention of the legend of the island according to which a young maiden used to be sacrificed to the sea monster every year, a long time ago. This reference, which could be construed as a revival of the legend of the Ethiopian mythical princess Andromeda, could be said to be the sole religious notation in Le Voyeur. (LV p. 221)

Other elements like a movie house, a lighthouse, houses with four rooms at each corner divided by a long central hall, with square windows, all these elements further restrict the possible location of the island without giving any tangible clues to its real geographic location.

We also note the absence of any political indicators. The only sign of authority on that island seems to be the "vieux garde civil," the "gendarmes" on the mainland, and an indirect reference to the custom office under the guise of "le sentier de douane" and the custom officers (LV, p. 219). It is strange that Mathias never meets or passes by a custom officer in his wandering on the island, even in the various drinking places where he stops we do not find any reference to these ever-present civil servants in small port communities. We also notice the scarcity of cars and trucks on the island. We hear that the people from the farm Merak went to town, but we are not told if they walked, used a bicycle, or a car.

The fact that so many buildings and sights, familiar on any small island, have been omitted could be explained if we adopt as an established finding the remark of Bela

Balaz in his Theory of the Film, and quoted by Bruce Morri-  
ssette in Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet.

Les plans authentiques de la réalité "réelle" sont  
les plus subjectifs de tous. Tout ce que voit le  
héros par son "ciné-oeil" exprime sa propre person-  
nalité. 48

The absence or presence of objects and buildings  
would therefore reflect Mathias' vision of the world around  
him. In his quest for gratification, let it be physical or  
affective, he concentrates his attention only upon those  
elements which will give him his kind of reward. We could  
say that his not being interested in religion accounts for  
the lack of religious edifices, his political unawareness  
for the absence of city or governmental agents and build-  
ings. But this does not quite explain the fact that cars  
and trucks are nonexistent. It's a little difficult to  
accept that while pedaling along the highway Mathias has  
never been passed by a car or a truck; maybe if he did not  
pay attention to the piercing sound of a steam whistle on  
the ship, perhaps the rumbling of a heavy truck would not  
catch his attention either. The reason should therefore be  
found with Robbe-Grillet himself and the kind of atmosphere  
and novelistic milieu he is attempting to establish.

And again this is what B. F. Stoltzfus declares  
when he says, speaking of Robbe-Grillet's objective style:

...Mais le style objectif de Robbe-Grillet cache en  
réalité des richesses non soupçonnées de profondeur psycho-  
logique. L'oeil du héros qui voit, choisit, et revoit, est comme

---

48Ibid., p. 78.

une fenêtre, qui donnerait à la fois sur la réalité matérielle et sur la vie psychique du héros. Ainsi, la vie affective de Mathias est une synthèse des objets qui l'entourent et du jeu de son imagination. Tout ce que Mathias voit et imagine, le lecteur le "voit" aussi et le lecteur, en général, ne voit qu'à travers les yeux de Mathias.<sup>49</sup>

This remark seems correct as far as those passages which reflect only Mathias' psychological cogitations, but cannot be ascertained when Robbe-Grillet presents his vision of the scene:

Légèrement à l'écart, en arrière du champ que venait de décrire la fumée, un voyageur restait étranger à cette attente. La sirène ne l'avait pas plus arraché à son absence que ses voisins à leur passion. Debout comme eux, corps et membres rigides, il gardait les yeux au sol. (LV, p.9)

The preceding passage is descriptive and deductive. Robbe-Grillet tells us that Mathias is absent. We have a description and the assertion that the hero is in a state of psychic "réverie."<sup>A</sup> Ben F. Stoltzfus in the same article mentions the fact this is not the rule: "...le jeu de mémoire, de réalité et de fantaisie est celui de Mathias et, à part quelques passages, le lecteur ne voit que ce que voit Mathias."<sup>50</sup> Our contention is that we find many passages in which Robbe-Grillet's optic is given rather than Mathias'. In fact, Robbe-Grillet creates a new Voltairian Eldorado, or a Rabelaisian universe as visited by

---

<sup>49</sup>Ben F. Stoltzfus, "Camus et Robbe-Grillet: la connivence tragique de L'Étranger et du Voyeur," in Un Nouveau roman?, ed. J. H. Matthews (Paris: Lettres Modernes. 1964), p. 158.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 164-65.

Panurge; he does not intend to supply our vision with a narrative landscape in which tragedy could occur and vitiate our creative reading of the book. This is not a new technique and we have already been exposed through the ages to Homeric myths, Shakespearian fantasies, and Cervantes' reality. To deal with the more recent past, we have for years as readers collaborated with the cartoonists in creating a universe apart from our daily environment where the concept of time and place are subordinated to the ideas. In this regard, Robbe-Grillet is not a precursor but a continuator; his universe is related to those of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Flaubert, Alain Fournier, Gogol, Kafka, and many other writers past and present. The difference rests, of course, in the manner in which he uses his novelistic universe. His purpose is not to create a fairy tale like Walt Disney or an atmosphere of boredom like Gogol, or of fear like Kafka, but rather to clear away a setting in which his anti-hero's mind can function or malfunction, and for the reader's mind to objectify reality "au niveau zéro" of his consciousness, to paraphrase Roland Barthes.

From this careful laying of clues results, not a clear vision and an exact locale as the old city of Saumur in Eugénie Grandet by Balzac, but a stage setting upon which a real drama will unfold as in the theater where we find an economy of props, namely Beckett and Ionesco's presentations.

Mathias seems to spend more time in his imaginary

world than on the island itself; but we, the readers, need a material world of some kind to retain our bearings and sanity, and the writer needed it also to effectively set apart his narrative units through the use of objective and descriptive sequences to punctuate and emphasize Mathias' imaginary universe; and as already noted by Roland Barthes in his preface to Bruce Morrisette's analysis of Robbe-Grillet novels:

...Robbe-Grillet produit donc des descriptions d'objets suffisamment géométriques pour décourager toute induction vers le sens poétique de la chose; et suffisamment minutieuses pour couper la fascination du récit;...<sup>51</sup>

These geometrical descriptions punctuate the narration at various intervals but are more numerous at the beginning of the faole when Mathias is still on board and is looking at the pier. We would refer the interested reader to the descriptions on the following pages: 13, 14, 16, 17, and 21, to mention only these instances. It is true also that a geometric description can also contain thematic elements which blend in with the narration, as on page 16 when Mathias discovers the figure eight signs on the side of the pier; but by and large it can be said that geometric analyses of objectal fixtures often play a structural role in the narration and are not always directly related to the theme.

On the other hand, in order to launch Mathias into

---

<sup>51</sup>Roland Barthes, Preface to Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet, by Bruce Morrisette (Paris: les Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 9.



traumatic states of consciousness, the author needed the impulse supplied by trigger words and erotic imagery which must come from outside the hero's libido. It is to be noted that those stimuli are not always outside of Mathias' consciousness; on page 42 we will see how in a purely imaginary scene he opens a suitcase to find in it a piece of string. Let's remember that this passage deals with one of Mathias' fantasies and the suitcase has no objectal reality as far as the narrative is concerned, but is to the hero as real as the suitcase he is holding at that very moment. There are two types of strings in the novel, those which are actually seen and handled by the hero, as in the opening scene on page 10, and those which he remembers from his childhood or the ones he fancies in this "scène pour rien." At this juncture Mathias actually visualizes a piece of string or "the piece of string" he picked up on the deck of the ship, although the reader knows for a fact that this particular piece of string is in the right pocket of his Mackinaw:

Mathias venait de fourrer la cordelette dans la poche de sa canadienne. Il aperçut sa main droite, vide, avec ses ongles trop longs et trop pointus. Pour donner à ses cinq doigts une contenance, il y accrocha la poignée de la petite mallette qu'il avait tenue jusque-là dans la main gauche. (LV, p. 23)

In these few lines Robbe-Grillet not only tells us that the string is in the left pocket but he also introduces a sadistic characteristic of the hero when referring to the long pointed finger nails. This last quotation brings to the

fore Robbe-Grillet's novelistic ability which permits him to offer the reader several narrative elements at the same time. Here we know where the string is without being told in so many words,--a very rewarding experience for the reader, who is given the opportunity to discover that fact rather than to be told by an omniscient author. This technique compares more than favorably with Zola's dry and minute descriptive developments.

It is to be noted that in Robbe-Grillet's novels, sounds also seem to have less primacy than concrete forms which strike the eye. Even a high intensity vibration like the steam whistle of a ship brings the remark that it seemed that nobody had heard it: "C'était comme si personne n'avait entendu." This famous quotation opens the narrative. The next paragraph reiterates the fact, and the following one brings into focus the role played by the eyes of the passengers:

Une série de regards immobiles et parallèles, des regards tendus, presque anxieux, franchissaient -- tentaient de franchir -- luttèrent contre cet espace déclinant qui les séparait encore de leur but. (LV, p.9)

Even the sea gulls are silent, a condition hard to believe for anyone familiar with those rather obnoxious and loud creatures. The importance of the sea gull is not its cry but the trajectory of its flight and the ominous look of its round eye to fulfill an erotic symbol. When noise intrudes upon the scene it is reported for our benefit, not as concerning the participants:

Il y eut un appel de timbre électrique. Les machines se remirent à fonctionner. Le navire amorça une courbe qui le rapprochait avec précaution du débarcadère. Le long de son autre bord, la côte défila rapidement: le phare trapu à bandes noires et blanches, le fort à demi en ruine, l'écluse du bassin, les maisons alignées sur le quai. (LV, p. 12)

This last paragraph represents the author's description of the locale and not necessarily what Mathias sees and hears. Even the direct quotation which follows this passage does not concern Mathias:

"Il est à l'heure, aujourd'hui", dit une voix. Et quelqu'un rectifia: "Presque." Peut être était-ce la même personne.

Mathias regarda sa montre. La traversée avait duré juste trois heures. De nouveau la sonnerie électrique retentit; puis encore une fois, quelques secondes plus tard.... (LV, p. 12)

Although the name of Mathias is mentioned in the paragraph, it is still Robbe-Grillet describing what is going on at the time, not a "prise de conscience" on the part of our hero. The following paragraph still represents the author letting the reader know what is going on. But here we observe a subtle passage from the purely descriptive motif to the moment when Mathias begins to look at the side of the pier, rather than just rest his eyes upon it. The last sentence in the paragraph brings the transition from descriptive to affective prose: "En regardant avec plus d'attention, on voyait le bord de pierre qui se rapprochait insensiblement." Next we have a clever device to show how Mathias begins to scrutinize the side of the pier:

"Le bord de pierre -- une arête vive, oblique, à l'intersection de deux plans perpendiculaires:..."

and in the same paragraph again:

"...la rampe qui rejoint le haut de la digue se prolonge à son extrémité supérieure..."(LV, p. 13)

In order to indicate the moment Mathias begins to look at the side of the pier instead of just seeing it, we have this short phrase; "Le bord de pierre," followed by a dash "--" followed by "une arête vive." The dash represents the precise moment when Mathias becomes fascinated by the geometric elements of the side of the pier. This state of hypnotic trance continues for several pages and after a paragraph already quoted from page 37 ("Les fibres y formaient...on aurait pu guère y nouer que des cordelettes ") Mathias snaps out of his "rêverie" just for a while, and again on page 38 ("Il s'aperçut qu'il marchait trop près du bord,...") he comes back to reality, and then goes back into his "rêverie" to wake up again on page 42 with the paragraph ending in: "Mathias s'écarta de l'eau, en direction du parapet." During this long development we notice that Robbe-Grillet has included a paragraph which seems to repeat a previous one which initiated this long development in the first place:

Une voix, derrière lui, répéta que le bateau était à l'heure, ce matin. Mais cela n'était pas tout à fait exact: il avait accosté, en réalité, avec cinq bonnes minutes de retard. Mathias fit un mouvement du poignet, pour jeter un coup d'oeil à sa montre. Toute cette arrivée était interminable. (LV, p. 39)

If we refer back to page 12 when a voice said; "Il est à l'heure, aujourd'hui," it seems that the time elapsed

between these two remarks is very short, because Mathias is now walking up the ramp to the docks; but the mental activity of Mathias has taken from page 12 to page 39, and is not yet finished, since it will continue to page 42. The insertion in the narrative of two parallel remarks, or two repetitious short developments, points to Robbe-Grillet's technique of contrasting cosmic time and affective time. Miss Bernal has noted the "temps en trop" in Les Gommages, a novel which seems to take place between the time a bullet leaves a gun and the fraction of a second it takes to reach its target and kill a man. As in Les Gommages, we have here the same device, on a smaller scale. Robbe-Grillet develops his narrative and affective elements within a time frame of a few minutes as far as cosmic time is concerned, and an undetermined length of affective time or reading time which is directly dependent on the ability of the reader to register the message as he participates in the elaboration of the fable.

This lengthy affective development which runs from page 12 to page 49 is to be contrasted with the affective response Mathias will give when he tries unsuccessfully to reconstruct and to sandbag the void created by his subconscious repression of the events which took place on the cliff. Here psychotic repression creates the lapse of memory, and we notice that his vain attempts to create an alibi in order to account for the twenty minute hole in his

time table have none of the free-flowing ease Mathias demonstrates in this unit (page 12 to 49) when no psychological blocking takes place. The contrast is between the amount of affective material he can crowd in five or ten minutes, from the arrival to his crossing the village square, and the two and a half days it takes him to apply his rational mind to the task of explaining his actions during the twenty minutes which encompass the hole in the novel.

In the first instance, Mathias lets his unrepressed mind create a fantasy which explains to the reader-participant the main conflicts which keep his affective life in a rather mild turmoil, namely his erotic fascinations, his fear of failure, and a vain struggle to lead a so-called normal life. This first period is marked by the absence of any traumatic states, but characterized by spurts of sado-masochist fantasies and desires which he keeps under control as when his subconscious makes the piece of string appear in the virtual suitcase during his fictitious sales presentation. During that period Mathias is always able to control himself. We will see that after the incident on the cliff his affective behavior will be governed by repression and trauma.

As reader-participant we partake of those two stages in Mathias' affective life. We observe both the rather free flowing and unrepressed life and the traumatic, strongly repressed state of mind. This second state of mind will

subside as the ship leaves the island with Mathias on board.

On page 12 we have for the first time the mention of the sea gull. Although sea gulls are rarely seen one at a time, but usually several flying around, Robbe-Grillet has only one sea gull at a time. The grey sea gull reappears on pages 16 and 17; but it is only on page 18 that the significance of that lone bird is made plain. As the sea gull makes her last horizontal pass, emphasis is made again upon the roundness of her eye, lacking expression or sensitivity. Here we should mention the fact that in French a sea gull is referred to as a "she"; this linguistic characteristic might have its importance later on. As we said, the last pass of the sea gull marks the beginning of a narrative development. As usual the author begins his unit mid-paragraph, but here we have a transitional paragraph which links the previous objective and conscious state of Mathias looking about him and the state of "rêverie," of subjectivity into which Mathias plunges frequently. The paragraph begins on page 17 and continues for seven lines on page 18. We still have the objective references to the figure eight objects, in this case the imprint of the mooring rings in the sea wall, but the decisive element is the mention of the rope which would be too big to thread the ring. Of course the idea of rope connects in Mathias' mind with the idea of string, which will be an important element in the next narrative unit. But in this particular

paragraph we have another very interesting composition device in the following sentence: "Mathias tourna son regard de quatre-vingt-dix degrés, en direction de la foule des voyageurs, puis il l'abaissa vers le pont du navire." (LV, p. 18) Here the passing from one unit to the other is made also through this gesture of turning the head in another direction, a device which will be used more extensively in La Jalousie. Now we are still in the transitional paragraph but on the other slope, so to speak; we are going to drift into the next unit of narrative; and this is accomplished by the second sentence in the paragraph, which is: "On lui avait souvent raconté cette histoire." So instead of a sentence which can be applied to the material which precedes and to the following narrative material, we have the indication of a gesture which marks the ridge line between the two units. We don't want to leave this transitional paragraph without pointing out that it contains in a summary most of the elements of the next unit. The summary begins with: "C'était un jour de pluie;..." This same clause is going to be taken up again in the next paragraph, and again in the next but slightly changed to: "Dehors il pleuvait." In this unit of development we learn that one rainy afternoon, Mathias as a child, sitting on two dictionaries in front of the window, was drawing a sea gull perched on a post outside. His parents were out and he was supposed to work on his math problems. We have a description of the room and the mention of the shoe box full of his string



collection. This unit includes also many other elements of value, since the same room is going to reappear in subsequent chapters, described in the same geometric manner. We are going to be told that this room could also have been his place of birth.

This unit is going to be interrupted on page 20 by a brief return to reality, at which time Mathias will be looking at the hypnotic vertical motion of the cigarette wrapper in the water. It is noteworthy to mention that this brief return to consciousness for Mathias takes place right after the subjective image of the shoe box full of strings. Perhaps the idea of string acts as a trigger, as a link back to reality. A close reading of the text will show the use of the string as a means to bring Mathias back to reality, but here his period of consciousness does not last very long; we have no mention of the girl, but the figure eight object design is again present and developed to the full in one paragraph on page 21. The next paragraph reintroduces the violent slapping of the water, and then all is peaceful again. Mathias looks for the cigarette wrapper; it has disappeared. Here we have the snap back to subjective "rêverie;" and to mark the suddenness of the transition, the author brings in this sentence at the end of the paragraph: "Il est assis, face à la fenêtre, contre la lourde table encastrée dans l'embrasure." The tie-in to the next paragraph is accomplished with this

sentence: "La fenêtre est presque carrée--..."

Before commenting of this next fragment of the narrative unit under discussion, let's mention the fact that the image of the rope started this unit of narration, that it was interrupted by a subsequent mention of the strings. The unit resumes again after the image of the pack of cigarettes and it stops again at the tactile sensation of the string in Mathias' pocket.

This reference to the big string in his pocket closes the unit of narration concerning the bedroom where as a child he drew a sea gull and which contained a large wardrobe with the shoe box full of strings. Mathias again takes notice of life about him. He sees the passengers, the little girl against the post; but this time he seems to notice her longer and to pay closer attention to her. This is rendered by a minute description of the way she stands with her hands behind her back, her legs spread and stiff. This time Mathias notices that she looks cute and she reminds one of a good student in school. A trait to bring out here is that since he saw her for the first time she has not shifted her position. How can we explain this static scene? It is a little difficult to conceive that the girl would have remained in the same position for so long. It seems that we have here what is called "le temps en trop" of the narrative as compared to "le temps nécessaire" as was mentioned by Robbe-Grillet in his remarks on Les Gomme

which were published in "prière d'imprimer!" So far the narration of events has covered thirteen pages; we are on page 22 and the novel started on page 9. The "temps nécessaire" during which these events have taken place should not be more than ten minutes, if we start counting from the time the ship started banking towards the pier until the passengers begin to disembark; but the "temps en trop" of the narrative has taken thirteen pages to be related. So the vision of the girl should be understood in the context of the "temps nécessaire" not of the "temps en trop," and it is quite possible that during these ten minutes or less, because the girl was not noticed by Mathias right from the beginning, the said girl would have maintained the same position. Mathias' mental activities and his direct observations of his surroundings are spread over a short period of time, and it takes the author longer to relate them than for Mathias to experience. What is a flash in the mind of Mathias takes two or three pages to relate. We have the same thing happen in the cafe on page 242 when Mathias looks up at the figure of a sailor walking on the docks toward him. Every time he looks up the sailor is in the same position and location as before.

As we continue our close reading of the text, we should remember this relationship between the "temps nécessaire" and the "temps en trop."

Beginning on page 31 we have what we could call the mercurial side of Mathias. Up to now his mind has been

preoccupied by an abnormal fascination with strings and his youth on the island. The articulation from this section to the next, which will be dealing with his desire for success in his commercial venture, and the proper way to implement it, is brought about by using the box of strings as a means to reintroduce reality into Mathias' mental processes. As Mathias day dreams about his strings and his past, he cannot ignore the physical reality of the suitcase he carries, and this will be the cutting off point of this section.

...Malheureusement la mallette des montres n'était pas la boîte à chaussures; il évitait de l'encombrer d'objets douteux, risquant de produire une mauvaise impression sur la clientèle au moment où il étalerait sa marchandise. (LV, p. 31)

Within this paragraph we find an extremely interesting element, the use of the conditional after the imperfect. This marks a resurgence of the thoughts of Mathias. Here is how we explain it. Mathias suddenly becomes conscious of his suitcase,--return to reality; thought of the real reason for his trip. This last point is brought out by the phrase: "...il évitait de l'encombrer d'objets douteux...". Then his thoughts drift into the near future, the actual sale of his watches, and this is marked by the change of mood to the conditional: "...au moment où il étalerait sa marchandise." We see in this technique one of the many devices Robbe-Grillet employs to establish transitions from one section to another.

As we have seen, a new unit seems to open on page 31. A little further, on page 32, we discover an example

of Robbe-Grillet's technique in describing Mathias's propensity to weave reality with day dreaming and to modify reality or supplement it with his own fiction. The case in point concerns Mathias' thinking that it would be expedient if he could relate to a prospective customer through the device of mentioning a relative whom he had known previously.

In order to accomplish his purpose he remembers an event which had taken place the same morning before boarding the ship.

After telling us in the imperfect of the indicative what he learned from the sailor, he shifts to the present conditional and says:

"Il connaîtrait le frère de longue date; au besoin, il lui aurait vendu une "six rubis", que le marin utilisait depuis des années sans qu'elle ait eu besoin de la plus petite réparation." (LV, p. 33)

Mathias has interspaced his recall of the morning event with a speculation he will use on the sister when telling her about her brother. The true facts are related in the imperfect, but the speculative parts are rendered in the conditional. We shall see that such sequences of tenses is very frequent in the writings of Robbe-Grillet and parallels a technique used by La Fontaine in the fable of La Laitière et le pot au lait. In that fable La Fontaine has Perette refer to past events in the imperfect and switches to the future when her imagination overtakes her and she assumes that what she is dreaming about has become reality. One or two verses will demonstrate that technique:

Il était, quant je l'eus, de grosseur raisonnable:  
j'aurai, le revendant, de l'argent bel et bon.<sup>52</sup>

We notice the difference with Robbe-Grillet which consists in using the conditional instead of the future. But whereas La Fontaine writes a direct discourse, Robbe-Grillet is using the indirect discourse approach. R. Radouant, in a footnote, points out that the technique was already in direct imitation of Rabelais who had Picrocole say:

Que boirons-nous par ces déserts? ... -- --  
Voire mais, dit-il, nous ne bumes point frais. (I, 33)<sup>53</sup>

We see that as far as questions of style are concerned, the new novel remains on certain points very classical.

As Mathias composes his little scenario, it becomes evident to him that the brother was not wearing a watch. How is Mathias going to reconcile this fact, which represents reality, with his fable of the "six rubis" watch which is pure invention? The fact that the watch was not visible will be explained by its being at the watchmakers for repairs. But this will not be in keeping with another fact--his watches are of the best quality. Did he say that the sailor had been using the watch for years "sans qu'elle ait eu besoin de la plus petite réparation?" Having reached an impasse, Mathias finds another reason. He left it at

---

<sup>52</sup>La Fontaine, Fables, ed. R. Radouant (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1929), p. 248.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

home because he did not want to damage it at work. Intellectually the facts are in agreement and Mathias is satisfied. Even when fabricating, Mathias requires that his reasoning be rational. Here we already have a sample of the technique he will use to explain the twenty minute "hole" in his schedule. It never occurred to Mathias that in no way could the sister know that her brother was not wearing a watch that morning. The important thing is that Mathias does know and if the speculation is not rational his mind will not accept it. When Mathias meets Julien on the cliff he has almost perfected his alibi, and to him, through his reasoning and his destruction of facts and clues, the crime on the cliff did not take place. But his intellectual argument will be destroyed by the re-emergence of reality and the tangible fact, the irrefutable reality of the eye of Julien who saw him. Mathias is definitely a mental case, he can change a fable into reality through rational speculation, but he insists on complete correlation between reality and his fictional reality.

Now, if we study the passage as an illustration of Robbe-Grillet's concept of reality, we might go back to Marcel Proust's concept of past and present reality. Whereas Marcel Proust attributes true reality to existence after it has been decanted by memory, Robbe-Grillet intertwines reality and imagination. Proust re-examines the past to endow it with the seal of reality. Robbe-Grillet's hero "fabricates" the

past and the future, constantly reorganizing the facts and weaving them with the demands of the present. Proust's works could be compared to those German-made globes representing a snow scene. As we agitate the liquid, the minute specks of snow begin to fly around and obscure the subject; but as their motion slows down and stops, the scene becomes real and very well defined. With Proust the memory renders past observations real by the action of the intellect which searches and dissects past events for their true reality. When the motion of all those specks, in this case, unrelated elements and ideas which prevailed at the time the experience being remembered occurred, when the motion stops and so doing clears the true nature of the past event or experience; the intellect, remembering, comes into full command of the past as a reality as tangible as the present. With Robbe-Grillet we are faced with an entirely different process. The imagery is kaleidoscopic, the past and the future can be changed at will, just by shaking the tube, and Mathias -- representing the intellect at work -- can rearrange the glass slivers representing the events of the past, or those not yet formulated of the future, and create or destroy his own reality. Proust recaptures true reality; Mathias manufactures it at will. When the latter does not like a past or future situation he invents a new one, the only requirement being that the new reality must be a rational fable. Usually, the present does not intrude on Mathias, because like the past and the future, he can change



it at will, or even ignore it by launching himself into a traumatic state of mind of variable intensity. There is one instance in the book when he can neither erase it or reshape it, and this instance establishes the turning point in the novel. We wish to refer here to the scene on the cliff when Mathias meets with Julien face to face. Up to that time Mathias had been able to play with the past, rearrange, even erase it -- didn't he recover some of the cigarettes and candy wrappers and destroy them? -- but now as he sees Julien standing there, with the rope in his hand, an enigmatic smile on his lips -- irrefutable proof that "le Voyeur" has seen him -- he can no longer erase the truth because the eye of Julien has seen and frozen the deed into reality. Many readers will wonder here why did not Robbe-Grillet let Mathias erase Julien by killing him. With the elimination of Julien, Mathias could have regained his composure and gone on as if nothing ever happened. The reality of Julien would have been destroyed as the reality of the half burned cigarette was erased, by smoking it and throwing away the butt. The killing of Julien would have destroyed part of the "écriture." The reality of Julien in throwing Mathias into a state of near panic permitted Robbe-Grillet to bring his hero to a paroxysm of delirium at the cafe, and to continue with the Celine-like fantasmagoric flight of fancy which takes place after we went to Jean Robin's fishing shack. One must always remember that Robbe-Grillet was not interested in telling the story of a psycho-

path called Mathias, but in writing and in so doing communicating to the reader the state of mind of Mathias, whose mistake was to have looked at objects not as objects, but in order to use them to motivate his imagination, as repository and stimulant of his ideas. Mathias can't look upon a sea anemone as just an object of the sea, but as a representation of a sexual concept.

This introduction to the narrative unit shows clearly how carefully Robbe-Grillet communicates to the reader the pathology of Mathias' faulty mental processes.

Further examples of Mathias' thought processes are to be found in the second section of the narrative unit.

On page 32 we notice a shift of moods and tenses of the verb in the main paragraph beginning with "Le succès paraissait..." down to "...ou n'importe quoi."

Reviewing in his mind what he should say to establish or re-establish contact with the people on the island, Mathias begins by using the conditional and the subjunctive. Reproducing the entire paragraph would add too much length to this discussion; so we shall refer the reader to the text and mention only the significant phrases and their verb forms. We notice the first verb, "Il faudrait qu'il ait joué..." and we note present conditional and perfect subjunctive; then we meet with "...qu'il n'en avait connu..." pluperfect indicative; next, "...Ensemble ils auraient exploré..." perfect conditional. So far we are

within the language of supposition or invention. Mathias is building the scenario. The next verb form is very interesting because it marks a shift in Mathias' mind. There it is: "il apprenait aux autres..." and then again "...il ramassait...", "Ils surveillaient...", "...l'eau qui s'élevait et s'abaissait...", "...se soulevaient et se couchaient..." "...il leur confiait..." We have the imperfect indicative, suggesting that Mathias believes that those events have actually happened. The next verb is in the present: "Les gens n'ont pas tant de mémoire..." Mathias is overtaken by doubt and reassures himself that he can put it over, but he is no longer so sure because he continues with the conditional: "...il leur fabriquerait...", "...qui les conduirait...", "...cela serait encore plus commode d'avoir..." Mathias has reverted to the conditional because he is coming back to reality after a brief escape into fantasy. And the next paragraph brings this home to us. Mathias suddenly remembers what happened to him in the morning before boarding the ship. Here we would be tempted to think that the following information is contributed by the author, but this is another way to present Mathias' mental processes. Robbe-Grillet uses here a shortcut to communicate Mathias' thinking through a listing of earlier happenings. Although they are presented in an informative fashion, as compared to a discursive fashion when Mathias is cogitating, this is Mathias remembering and

associating the events of the morning. The clue seems to be phrases like the following: "Dans son métier, il n'y avait pas de détail superflu." Here Mathias is talking to himself, and as to make this fact more evident, we read the very next sentence, which says: "Il connaîtrait le frère de longue date; au besoin il aurait vendu..." (LV, p. 33). We are back to the conditional that we started with at the beginning on page 32. The following paragraph then represents the author's notation of what happened in the morning. In this paragraph we notice the use of the past definite. This tense will be used in the next paragraph, "L'employé en casquette...", also alternating with the imperfect. It seems, from this cursory examination, that when the conditional or the subjunctive is used, we are made to participate in the cogitative thinking of Mathias, and when the imperfect of the indicative is used we participate in the flights of fancy of Mathias at times when he construes imagination as reality-- as was the case when, thinking of inventing a childhood for himself on the island, he soon plunged into a dream-like fantasy with all the attributes of reality. To Mathias this is not "time remembered" but invention of things past.

Before leaving this section of text we would like to point out in the main paragraph of page 32, the intensely suggestive image of the following sentences:

Ensemble ils auraient exploré, a marée basse, les régions rarements découvertes que peuplent des formes à la vraisemblance équivoque. Il apprenait aux autres l'art de faire s'épanouir les sabelles et les anémones de mer. (LV, p. 32)

We have three key phrases in these two sentences: "formes à vraisemblance équivoque," "s'épanouir les sabelles," "les anémones de mer." Robbe-Grillet refers in an enigmatic way to sex games among children of both sexes. The full impact of the imagery emerges if one refers to the zoological, scientific description of "sabelle" as a tubular sea organism and "anémones de mer" as a purse-like organism with vibrating cilia. In this instance, hurried and careless reading causes the reader to miss the intention of the author. The real meaning in Robbe-Grillet's "écriture" is not to be found in the syntactic form of the sentence but in the surrealistic power of his vocabulary which has a marked tendency toward being drawn from the natural sciences. To understand Robbe-Grillet the reader must not only seize the grammatical meaning but also receive the full impact of the vocabulary and its associative quality.

This sentence we just analyzed emphasizes the degree of fascination these matters have for Mathias, the schizophrenic. Sexual imagery colors his thinking, not only in the present and the future but also when he invents the past. We could call this retroactive fantasy.

On page 35 begins a unit we could call an exercise in anticipated sales presentation. Mathias, the salesman, like any good member of that profession, prepares in his mind the sales strategy he will use during his tour of the island; and since it is easier to work on a concrete ex-

ample than none at all, he will use as an anchor for his calculation a family he has heard of this very morning on the mainland, the widow with three daughters, prospects which should interest Mathias, given his propensity for situations involving women and above all young girls -- didn't the sailor tell him that the youngest one was a real little devil?

Then we find Mathias figuring his second sale of the day. This state of mind has been brought about not only by the remark of the sailor, but also by his calculations concerning the number of watches he must sell and how much time he should invest in each prospect; and as he stands, ready to disembark with the side of the pier in his field of vision, an ~~overactive~~ imagination goes to work. The key element in this development is the following statement: "...il vit bien que tout était encore à faire..." (LV, p. 36).

Here, we are witnesses to a typical Robbe-Grillian technique of transition, the famous "joint" of Flaubert.

Mathias, having imagined his first approach and found it wanting in rigorous technique, desires to run it through again as he stands with the pier in front of him. Still in a state of "réverie;" he turns around in his affective state and knocks on the door to replay the sales pitch with the widow and her two daughters. Why two daughters and not three? Why is Mathias keeping the "little

devil" out of the scene? Perhaps Mathias unconsciously establishes a difference between his purely practical fantasies and his erotic traumatic states. In this situation, Jacqueline does not belong.

Here we are entitled to wonder what is happening. Does Mathias' imagination see a fictitious door while his eyes focus on the scratches and designs on the side of the pier, and the virtual merges with the real, or rather the real recedes into the imaginary like a movie fade-away? We are inclined to accept this explanation. Mathias, "le voyeur," endowed with a tremendous power of imagination, can actually see in his mind what his thoughts crystalize around.

On page 36 "La peinture vernie..." starts the paragraph which will lend itself to the transition. We have a minute description of the various geometric figures he sees on the door. They all are in the shape of spectacles or figures of eights.

On page 37, the paragraph beginning with "Les fibres y formaient deux cercles foncés..." is the transitional segment within which the subtle passages from the door to the side of the pier takes place. Let's quote from the text:

Les fibres y formaient deux cercles foncés, épaissis l'un comme l'autre sur leurs bords inférieurs et supérieurs et munis chacun, en son sommet, d'une excroissance dirigée vers le haut...

So far, the description applies to the door. Now the next sentence is the "joint":

...Plutôt qu'une paire de lunettes, on croyait voir deux anneaux peints en trompe-l'oeil, avec les ombres qu'ils projetaient sur le panneau de bois et les deux pitons qui servaient à les fixer...

This sentence refers both to the design on the door and the tie-rings affixed to the side of the pier in direct visual contact for Mathias.

The next sentence in the paragraph forms the other element in the link:

...Leur situation avait certes de quoi surprendre et leur dimension modestes semblaient peu en rapport avec la grosseur des filins utilisés d'ordinaire; on n'aurait pu guère y nouer que des cordelettes. (LV, p. 37)

With this sentence the paragraph is brought to an end, and we are back looking at the pier before Mathias gingerly threads his way across the landing, slippery at low tide, and up the incline leading to the docks. But strangely enough, if Mathias' feet are dodging the traps set by the encumbrances on the docks, his mind is still in a state of "rêverie" and he continues with his imaginary presentation at the farm. (LV, p. 38)

Here again, the passage from the waking state back to an imaginary one is effected by means of a "joint" sentence. As Mathias struggles in the jostle of the passengers leaving the ship, as he tries to walk faster in order to save time and start sooner on his round, he becomes impatient at the hindrance others oppose to his progress. The "joint" paragraph follows:

...Bousculer ses voisins n'avancait à rien, vu l'exiguité et la complication du passage. Il n'avait qu'à se laiss-



ser porter. Néanmoins il se sentait gagné par une légère impatience. On tardait trop à lui ouvrir... (LV, p. 38)

The last sentence brings us back to the affective world of Mathias.

Reading onward, we partake of the second approach to the sale. Right from the start things go wrong and he is not able to formulate his opening spiel. For those who have had experience in door-to-door canvassing and selling, this sudden stop or false start will be so much more significant because this is the most important point in the technique of approaching a prospective customer. In Mathias' case he freezes, and all he can say is: "Bonjour, Madame,... Comment allez-vous?" (LV, p. 38) The result is dramatically expressed by Robbe-Grillet in a few well chosen words: "La porte lui claqua au nez." (LV, p. 38)

A too hurried reading of the next passages could confuse some readers:

La porte n'avait pas claqué, mais elle était toujours fermée. Mathias éprouva comme un début de vertige. (LV, p.38)

This notation must be interpreted as Mathias changing the scenario of his little play. He did not like the first ending; so he modifies it to permit himself to continue with the second try, but for a fraction of a second, the thought had entered his mind that it could very well happen that way, and as his mind fluctuates between dream and reality, a physical element affects his thinking. Not paying attention, he suddenly realizes that he is walking

too close to the edge of the pier, and maybe totters on the brink for a fraction of a second. So his vertigo is brought about by the door slamming in his face, very real to him although it happens only in his mind, and this vertigo is further reinforced by the actual sensation of being too close to the edge of the water. Mathias' consciousness gets hit by a double charge of stimulations, one physico-mental, the other physico-motor. The shock is so strong that in the next paragraph Mathias is back into the world of concrete reality: "Une voix, derrière lui, répéta que le bateau était à l'heure, ce matin.... Toute cette arrivée était interminable." (LV, p. 39)

The impression of panic on the part of Mathias is communicated to the reader by a clever use of the compound noun "garde-fou." The notion of peril is reinforced by that word which is usually associated with cliff-hanging situations and perilous driving in mountain terrain. But the connotation goes further because Robbe-Grillet introduces at the same time the idea of madness his character could very well be said to suffer from. Thematically it also carries out the notion of brinkmanship, which is the position Mathias will retain in his mental cogitations which follow. As if to emphasize this element, the next paragraph, "Quand il put enfin pénétrer dans la cuisine,..," brings a sudden, and unprepared by any thematic or calligraphic device, recurrence of the previous mental state of

the character. He will remain in this posture for the next few pages, from page 39 to page 42, without any break or return to consciousness.

This long scene "pour rien" continues the process started on page 35 where Mathias fancies "cette vente idéale qui ne durerait que quatre minutes:..." Within this narrative unit appear flashes of sadistic thought processes. These flashes could disrupt Mathias' imagining, and twice he succeeds in overcoming them, but the third recurrence breaks the stream of thought and Mathias finds himself fully conscious where we had left him after his perilous brush with vertigo and the unguarded edge of the pier with the harbor water ready to engulf him, and being swallowed by the mass of the passengers.

Let's examine the modalities of these sadistic re-surgences. As Mathias resumes his fantasy, he passes in review the various gestures he would perform during his presentation. We note here that he skips his approach to the door and starts right off with the suit case being open on the kitchen table. (LV, p. 39) His lack of success twice before must have been responsible for not repeating it a third time. Is Mathias influenced by the saying, "Jamais deux sans trois?" The fact remains that he moves right off to the display of his wares. This behavior is also an indication of Mathias' neurosis; what he does not like, or cannot manage to his own satisfaction, he buries or forgets.

As he opens the case, the contrast between the floral pattern of the oil cloth and the baby doll pattern of the lining of his suit case for a brief moment disrupts his thought processes: "...Aussitôt qu'il eut ouvert celle-ci, il prit l'agenda pour le placer vivement au fond du couvercle renversé, dans l'espoir de dissimuler les poupées à sa cliente." (LV, p. 39) But as he takes out the watches a ball of string appears with its figure eight shape; this rattles Mathias, he loses his continuity and the next sentence shows that he has to start again on his little play:

...Mathias était devant la porte de la maison, en train de contempler les deux cercles aux déformations symétriques, peints côte à côte au centre du panneau. A la fin, il entendit du bruit dans le vestibule et la porte s'entre-bailla sur la tête méfiante de la mère. (LV, p. 40)

Then follows a very long paragraph, one of the longest in the book, describing the difficulty Mathias has to establish contact with his client. As he tries to regain control of his fantasy he says: "Elle n'avait pas l'air de le voir. Il fit un effort qui lui parut considérable: << Bonjour, Madame, dit-il. J'ai des nouvelles pour vous...>>" We become aware that the preceding lines mark a new direction for Mathias, who has just thought of a device to break through to his opponent, a well-worn tactic known to any good salesman; he will distract her to make her talk to him. But as he tells her of her brother he met in the morning, Mathias' thoughts rushing ahead make him anticipate a reaction of his client which would foil his clever trick. This is how

Robbe-Grillet manages this figuration. We are told that the woman moves her lips but no sound comes out. Then with a few seconds delay the following words are heard: "Je n'ai pas de frère!" Then as an echo to the preceding words, Mathias hears, as if coming out of a defective phonograph, the answer he really wants: "Quel frère? Tous mes frères sont marins." (LV, p. 41) The first answer Mathias hears represents, again, our hero's thoughts running ahead of each other. As he imagines a situation in which the woman would answer, "yes, I have a brother, a sailor on the main land, when did you see him, how is he, etc." his overactive imagination perceives that he could be disappointed and that the answer could be negative. The fact that the negative answer is expressed first tends to show how swiftly his thoughts run and how his mind can superimpose several scenarios at the same time. But even then, she does not look at him, and Mathias is still desperately struggling to control his imagination.

Mathias sur le point d'abandonner, reprit l'explication à son début: il s'agissait du frère qui travaillait à la compagnie des vapeurs. La voix se fit plus régulière pour lui répondre: "Ah bien, oui, c'est Joseph." Et elle demanda s'il y avait une commission.

A partir de là, heureusement, la conversation prit de la vigueur et s'accéléra... (LV, p. 41)

At this point Mathias has regained control of his "rêverie" and the scene proceeds as he wants it to go. He starts talking about the watches and praises their good quality. Here we note a slight interference with the flow of

his thinking, when it occurs to him that this is taking a great deal of time, and a random idea crosses his mind as he wonders if the brother was wearing a watch and if he did, how long had he been wearing it.

...Il aurait fallu se rendre compte du temps que cela représentait, mais à ce moment la question de savoir si le frère portait une montre -- et depuis quand -- menaçait d'amener une nouvelle rupture. Mathias eut besoin de toute son attention pour passer outre. (LV, p. 42)

Here again we have further stressing of the overactivity of Mathias' mind. Although the presentation is going well now, Mathias anticipates objections and questions which could be raised by his prospect. What goes on is not idle dreaming on his part; it is a fantasy syncopated by a rushing in of situational possibilities and contingencies. In a normal intellect we would call it a rational analysis of the problems. In Mathias' case these anticipations do not help him in problem solving, but rather add up to his fears, his confusion, and can sometimes plunge him into a traumatic state, as we have seen when he anticipated that the door would slam in his face with a sound Robbe-Grillet describes as "claque!" This imagined incident brought about a state of vertigo.

Now let's study that word "claque." It should be related to the word "gifle" used to describe the action of the sea against the sides of the pier. (LV, p. 21). Understood within this realm of relationships, the significances and appropriateness of that verbal acquires its full relevancy. Like the reference to the slap "gifle," the past

participle "claqué" brings to mind the word "claque" which is a synonym for "gifle." The phonetics of that verbal is very effective also: as for the other connotations arising from the word "claqué," the idea of dying or being drained of energy, I do not think they intervene here in the consciousness of a fluent reader.

In the last quote we are told that Mathias had to concentrate very hard to keep control and to let the fantasy flow in the direction he wanted it to continue. The presentation resumes and we are witness to the tactile sensations Mathias feels at that moment; but as he opens the suit case and takes out the contents, the ball of string reappears and Mathias loses control again, and we find him again among the passengers. Mathias abandons his imagined presentation for good.

Upon reading these preceding paragraphs, one has the impression of being inside the mind of Mathias and registering the various fluctuations of his thought process. We have seen how erotic thoughts interfere with his determination to preview his second sale of the day, how his mind wanders when he has thoughts about his thoughts. We are treated to a very complicated mental process which a traditional presentation would not communicate with the same impact and fullness. This intention to show the workings of Mathias' mind explains why we find so many statements which are either repetitious, unconnected or unrelated to the

story; why situations are repeated and seemingly incongruous elements crop out at the most unexpected moments. But if one realizes that we are exploring a mind in turmoil most of the above-mentioned difficulties become integral fragmental aspects of a mind in danger of mental amnesia.

Upon abandoning his imagining of his second sale of the day the transition to a new unit of narration is accomplished again through a "joint" toward the end of the following paragraph:

...Il y eut l'impression des doigts sur la fermeture de la valise, le couvercle qui s'ouvrait largement, l'agenda reposant sur la pile des cartons, les poupées dessinées au fond du couvercle, l'agenda dans le fond du couvercle, sur la pile des cartons le bout de cordelette roulé en forme de huit, le bord vertical de la digue qui fuyait tout droit vers le quai, Mathias s'écarta de l'eau, en direction du parapet. (LV, p. 42)

In this passage we notice a repetition of the word "agenda." On close observation one will see that the word "poupées" appears after the first mention of the agenda. Although the word "poupées" has an erotic impact on Mathias' consciousness, reinforced later by the appearance of the string, the reiteration of the location of the agenda does not indicate that Mathias has registered a psychological blow at the image of a feminine form, but rather, without Robbe-Grillet having to say it, that Mathias has lifted the book and has placed it in the open top of the case, in so doing uncovering the ball of string which is the element which destroys the continuity of his stream of thought and brings him back to reality, object of the following narrative unit.



In conclusion of this unit we would like to point out that Robbe-Grillet has very effectively expressed to the reader-participant the mental physiognomy of Mathias during one of his most sedate moments. We see him trying to tend to business and preparing himself for his first client on the island. Many normal traveling salesmen do that, but in the case of Mathias his neurosis and the abnormal characteristics of his mind constantly intrude upon his most rational mental processes.

Robbe-Grillet makes us understand the workings of that mind, its switching from the waking state to the imagining of events still to come, but within a mind which behaves like a computer receiving contaminated signals and data or experiencing electrical crossovers. Mathias is beyond the surrealist world of Breton or Céline, his illuminations are aphasic. In Voyage au bout de la nuit, the flights of fancy are curvilinear; with Mathias, his fancy and conscious mental processes alternate in a series of zigzag patterns. Although everybody is inclined at some time to day dream, very few people, except mentally deranged ones, present the symptoms of Mathias, this alternate flicking on and off, these abrupt passages from rational consciousness into subconsciousness. And this is only one aspect of Mathias' mental activities; we shall see further on that he can also lapse into traumatic states of schizophrenic character verging on the sadistic, as on page 246.

On page 42 begins a unit which intends to show Mathias acting as a normal individual. Although he received objectal stimulations, his mental behavior remains composed.

The transitional modulation is to be found in the paragraph beginning with "Il parvint ainsi sans encombre jusqu'à la cuisine et sa table ovale..." and ends with the actual transitional sentence "Mathias s'écarta de l'eau, en direction du parapet." The first sentence relates to Mathias' constructing a scenario for his sales presentation, whereas the last one marks the return to reality.

The last we heard of Mathias, he was walking up the inclined path towards the top of the pier in the midst of passengers making their way to the town. In order to tie in with the last passage depicting reality, Robbe-Grillet invests twenty lines of text to describe in geometrical terms what Mathias sees. This juncture is brought to a very effective conclusion through the use of a paragraph which seems to play the role of a marker in the narrative, by repeating an observation which was made in the middle of the preceding unit, and marking a brief return to reality by Mathias. We refer here to the following paragraph:

De ce point à celui où il se tenait, l'espace en principe réservé à la circulation était tellement embarrasé d'objets de toutes sortes qu'il se demanda comment la foule des passagers et des parents venus à leur rencontre avait fait pour s'y frayer un chemin.  
(LV, p. 43)

We are no longer in the realm of imagining, and the text is quite clear about this. In the next paragraph we

are told that Mathias sees men and women and a brief description is given:

...Les hommes portaient tous des pantalons de toile bleue, plus ou moins passés et bigarrés de rapiécages, et l'ample vareuse des pêcheurs. Les femmes étaient en tablier et tête nue. Les uns comme les autres avaient aux pieds des sabots...(LV, p. 43)

Having sketched out the human fauna around Mathias, Robbe-Grillet passes to an objectal description of the town square which in reality is a triangle -- with the statue in the middle. Before examining the importance of this unit we must mention an obvious fact which springs from the page as the reader-participant follows Mathias through the town: this fact is that Mathias does not pay much attention to people; he is more interested in objects and things. We will not be informed of the presence of human beings until page 47 when Mathias asks a woman if she knows where the garage owner is; thus there are three pages of text during which Mathias relates to objects about him and endows them with ideological significance.

On page 44, where the statue is scrutinized by Mathias, we have a definite reference to the idea of death, the death of a woman. Her body is represented by the shadow cast by the statue on the sidewalk. Mathias is very careful not to walk on it. The idea of death is also emphasized by the use of evocative phrases like "...monument aux morts," "dalle rectangulaire...", "...Buter contre un corps solide," "...il posa le pied en plain milieu du corps." (LV, p. 44)

The next image which tricks his imagination during that morning, which has all the earmarks of a beautiful day, is the movie billboard which represents a Cavalier throttling a young woman in a white night shirt, with a four poster bed in the background draped in red. This scene of violence repeats or echos the vision Mathias had on the mainland while making his way to the ship that morning, a vision of a man striking a woman. On page 46 we are told Mathias had already seen the same poster a week before. But a significant detail is then brought out; Mathias sees a mutilated doll at the feet of the "heros." The word hero is important, because it tells us something of Mathias' thinking. To him the man on the movie poster is a hero, not a murderer or a sadist.

The following paragraph shows Mathias inspecting the architecture of the houses around the square. This section of the unit started with a geometrical description of the square. It is followed by two powerful images, one of death, the other of violence, and Robbe-Grillet closes the section with another description of the houses around the square.  
(LV, p. 47)

The modulation to the next unit is quite brief. Robbe-Grillet uses the light of the sun to establish a separation between the units, but here it does not seem we have the usual transition from last paragraph to transitional paragraph to new paragraph. Instead the commentary starts again on a different tack. The human element returns to the

narrative under the guise of a woman who will tell Mathias where he can find the "buraliste." To Mathias this woman is almost a thing, an object which has not the smallest effect upon his psyche. When the man, pointing to the departing woman, says: "Belle fille! Hein?" Mathias remembers only one detail about her, she was wearing a ribbon around her neck. Should we see here again Mathias' strange psychosis which always concentrates on violence, since the neck would be indicated in strangling a woman, or is it a remnant of the image of the poster showing strangulation of a young girl?

This unit could be entitled Mathias meets M. Homais out of Flaubert's Madame Bovary. We find him revealed in the figure of the "garagiste-buraliste," a priest-like figure who manages technology, represented here by the bicycle.

His remarks are sarcastic when it comes to the town people or the chances of Mathias' success in selling his watches. Alluding to the watches he says: "Vous n'en vendrez pas une, dans ce pays d'arriérés." When Mathias retorts that he will sell his watches to the country folks, his comment is: "--Ah bon! La campagne? Parfait!" We are told that the real meaning of "parfait" is in the intonation and the mannerism of the "buraliste." The attitude of the man is plainly stated in the following comment:

...Son interlocuteur avait une façon curieuse de répondre, commençant toujours par abonder dans son sens, répétant au besoin les propre termes de sa phrase d'un ton convaincu, pour produire le doute une seconde plus tard et tout détruire par une proposition contraire, plus or moins catégorique. (LV, p. 49)

Upon hearing that Mathias was born on the island, a very compact and subjective sentence given in the text as an indirect discourse, the "buraliste" confirms his lack of enthusiasm at being a temporary part of that society: "Lui du reste, n'était pas né dans l'île -- certes non -- et il ne comptait pas y moisir."

Although we have dealt with the satire of modern civilization in chapter III, we must underline the last paragraph on page 49 which describes a situation often confronting the modern customer. When Mathias asks about renting a bicycle the man insists that he has an excellent one, but unfortunately there is a slight difficulty which is narratively expressed by a "mais" followed by "elle n'était pas ici en ce moment." The explanation which follows is also a mild satire of the business practices of some French shop keepers and in this instance the idea of shop keeper is stressed as we become aware of the insistence of the author in calling the man a "buraliste:!" The shop keeper tells Mathias that he would procure the bicycle "pour rendre service," as if turning a profit was not very important. But the "buraliste" should not be taken at his word; on page 50 we find this significant passage:

D'autre part il devait se dépêcher pour ramener à temps la bicyclette promise. Dans sa hâte, il poussait presque le voyageur hors du café. (LV, p. 50)

which makes it clear that renting a bicycle is important to him after all.

Upon being left alone by the shop keeper, Mathias, who had been showing him watches, closes his suit case and looks at the panorama of the town from the shop, and as he does so, he begins to reflect upon the cynical attitude of the shop keeper who did nothing to help him feel more confident in his enterprise. He did not fail to see the sign in the shop, put out by the Association of Watchmakers which says: "Une montre s'achète chez un Horloger." As Mathias reflects, his inner feelings on the matter are transmitted to us through sentences like the following: "...il sentait en réalité vaciller sous lui l'entreprise," or "Autant valait abandonner tout de suite, puisqu'il n'avait même pas assez de temps pour se libérer de tous les refus." (LV, p. 52)

The rest of the narrative unit which will end on page 52, having started on page 42, reemphasizes Mathias' depressed feelings about his success on the island. Through a relation which must be attributed to Robbe-Grillet, author, we learn the history of the island, which used to be an important naval base. After losing the fleet and suffering a terrible fire it has been reduced to a second rate fishing port where even "les araignées de mer" -- another image suggesting violence -- do not sell well. Mathias sees also the dirty harbor and the refuse on the muck which has accumulated in the harbor now that the navy does not take care of it. Among the rotting debris he can see claws which are too long, a little bit like his finger nails of

which he makes numerous mentions throughout the novel, and all sorts of monstrous looking objects. All these descriptions are found in the last line of the unit which also contains the transitional imagery which will link to the juncture paragraph, which in turn will bridge the gap with the next unit. This paragraph shows Mathias still walking along the edge of the water, and ends with a sentence which indicates that Mathias is now near the shopping district of the town.

This unit has also been used as a preparation for the events and states of mind which are going to be developed in the following unit. Mathias is shown in a state of mental depression, although quite rational and observant, and he is also confronted by the filth of the harbor which carries over to him images of violence. It is in this frame of mind that he will sit down in the cafe "A l'Espérance" and drink absinthe and be subjected to even stronger motivators to violence.

The main purpose of this narrative section, page 54 to 69, is to convey to the reader two characteristics which will trigger Mathias' sadistic tendencies. One is an atmosphere of eroticism, the other a pervading mood of implied violence.

As Mathias enters the hardware store (LV, p. 54) he sees on the counter knives arranged in a circle on a display stand with the picture of a "Y" shaped tree with a tuft of foliage in the center of the circle. The phallic and feminine genitalia connotations retain his interest.



Upon leaving the store, as he looks in the display window, balls of fish line and silk ribbons assail him with their masculine and feminine message. This last image is well in keeping with Robbe-Grillet's liking for surrealist devices. In Jules Romain's Les Hommes de bonne volonté, we have Jerphanion and his friend cruising along deserted Parisian streets at night with the express purpose of looking into the store windows to see if they could discover an arrangement which would transmit to them a message or an idea, especially those windows in stores which had gone out of business and where the arrangement might have been disturbed for one reason or the other.

Leaving the store and entering the apartment house, he meets with a mother figure in the person of the deaf old lady. And we read: "... , ils se séparèrent sur une poignée de mains pleine d'affection; pour un peu elle l'aurait embrassé." (LV, p. 55) Mathias' next stimulation comes from the butcher shop, where he was "chassé par l'odeur froide de la viande." (LV, p. 56) This experience stimulates his leanings towards violence.

Bombarded by objects into an erotic and violent state of mind, and depressed by the fact he has not yet sold a watch, he enters the harbor cafe, where he will receive a double dose of eroticism and violence.

In this passage the figure of the victim goes through another metamorphosis. We have seen that at first it was

represented by the little girl on the ship; then we had the scene of violence the same morning as he made his way toward the ship, a scene which will reoccur many times during the course of the fiction. Now the waitress will come into focus and give Mathias a vehicle for his imagination to work on. The name of the cafe is revealing: "A l'Espérance." It is also ironical, since we are going to see there is very little in the atmosphere of this establishment to warrant such a name.

Before we go any further, it is important to notice that Mathias orders an absinthe. This pernicious and deadly beverage, which was outlawed in France in 1915 and was still manufactured in northern Spain as late as 1936, injects into the narrative an element which brings to mind the ghosts of Verlaine and Rimbaud, the alcoves of Baudelaire, the sado-masochist extravagances of Huysmans, L'Assommoire by Emile Zola, and in the more recent past the poems of Apollinaire. We shall see that absinthe will be mentioned again in the novel. Here Robbe-Grillet has elected to use the most vicious alcoholic substance to emphasize or to bring about the psychosis of Mathias. Because a person under the influence of this drink can have delirium, hallucinations, it is a clever device to validate Mathias' behavior at the time of the crime and above all after the crime when he is seized by a fit.

Mathias swallows some absinthe as he gazes for a fraction of a second at the "grands yeux sombres de la

fille". (LV, p. 59) Even to refer to this brief happening, Robbe-Grillet indulges in a composition device which reinforces the idea of Mathias observing and taking in the scene through his eyes: "L'espace d'un battement de cils, Mathias aperçut les grands yeux sombres de la fille." As if this powerful imagery were not sufficient, we are told that the girl, in order to regain her poise, puts her hands behind her back as if tying her apron strings -- image of the girl on the ship, forecast of the victim's tied hands on the cliff. But the traumatic atmosphere keeps building up with the explosion of the words: "Le fouet!" pronounced by one of the three men who hisses between his teeth an implied threat. Mathias looks at his drink, his eyes move to his hand and his unkept fingernails, claw like. Thrusting his hand in his "canadienne" he feels the presence of the string, remembers his suit case and snaps back to reality. During the entire scene, Mathias has been in a daze, interpreting objects, remarks, and sights in terms of his sadistic turn of mind.

Here we reach the end of the unit which affords us a typical example of Robbe-Grillet's technique of communicating to the reader the full impact of a traumatic state of the hero without having recourse to the omniscient point of view of the author. The reader is made to detect and interpret for himself the workings of Mathias' mind. Every image, remark, and part of the discourse is significant, and

nothing is "de trop."

The idea of absinthe is re-emphasized several times. On page 59 we read. "...Mathias regarda le fond d'alcool jaune et trouble,..." and again on page 60, "Mathias acheve son absinthe..."

At this stage of the narration, while Mathias is feeling the glow of the absinthe (LV, p. 59), a long development is presented the main purpose of which is to inject into the narrative an atmosphere of violence. This development is masterfully conducted and relies for its main effect upon the use of key words and images.

On the previous pages an aura of erotic feelings and fear has been assaulting Mathias as he watched the waitress, the drinkers at the table and above all, the "patron" standing in the back of the establishment. On page 59 we overhear the three men at the table talking about how deserving of punishment a certain party referred to as "elle" is. The use of the conditional tense is significant, since we are in the realm of future happenings or strong possibilities. As one of the men lets out nissing sounds he says: "...mériterait...", "Elle mériterait...", "Je ne sais pas ce qu'elle mériterait." The second drinker agrees with the first, and the third suggests that she deserves "des claques ...Et toi aussi ." The meaning is clear. Violent action should be undertaken against a woman and also against the offended party for not avenging himself. The mention of

this conversation is intended not as a narrative device to advance the elements of the plot, but rather as a deliberate suggestion of violence intended to nudge Mathias closer to an act of violence. The image of a slap had already been used by Robbe-Grillet to relate the reaction of Mathias on hearing the action of the waves against the shore, but then the word "gifle" had been used. The introduction of the word "claques" in the plural greatly reinforces the idea of violent action. A "gifle" can be given under spontaneous motivation, but "claques" implies beating up a person with little restraint, with the firm intention either to punish or to hurt. Robbe-Grillet had already used the verbal form of the word in the following sentence: "La porte lui claqua au nez " (LV, p. 38). In order to underline the atmosphere of violence which permeates the conversation of the three sailors, Robbe-Grillet tells us that the third sailor has slit his eyes, and is looking at a "billard chinois." In this passage Robbe-Grillet is using the device of self association to create his effect. Threats are accompanied by a snake-like sound; the image is further reinforced by the mention of the Chinese-like eyes of the speaker who is looking at a Chinese pool table. In order to achieve this effect of implied Chinese torture, or should we say, in order to communicate to the reader how Mathias interprets those signals, Robbe-Grillet had to change the name of the "billard japonais" to "billard chinois."

On page 65 begins a section of narrative relating to Mme Robin, wife of M. Robin owner of the cafe "A l'Espérance." Mathias goes upstairs, but the apartment is deserted and he leaves without showing his watches to that lady. The passage ends on page 69. In this section we find a few of the motivators which periodically stimulate Mathias' libido. On page 66, we are told that the door Mathias has just knocked on shows a variety of patterns upon its painted surface:

Il attendit. Le palier n'était pas assez clair pour qu'il put distinguer si la peinture de la porte imitait les veines du bois, ou bien des lunettes, des yeux, des anneaux, ou les spires en forme de huit d'une ficelle roulée. (LV, p. 66)

Here we have a ~~replay~~ of the same geometric elements previously imagined by Mathias and suggested now by the surface of a real painted door. On pages 36 and 37 we already had: "...deux noeuds arrondis, peints côte à côte, qui ressemblaient à deux gros yeux," and again, "Les fibres formaient deux cercles foncés;" and further on in the same paragraph, "Plutôt une paire de lunettes, on croyait voir deux anneaux."

Before Mathias had also knocked on the door with his large finger ring, but this time the narrative form is different. The first description of the door and the patterns thereon was purely imaginative, as Mathias fancied his first sale of the day; now it is given as a description of what Mathias actually sees on the door. To him this occurrence

must have all the characteristics of "déjà vu."

In the same section we also notice the statement that the premises had a slight abnormal characteristic, but this notation seems to be purely descriptive rather than reflect Mathias' mental state. But further on two objects are pointed out which definitely have a close relationship to Mathias' psychic imagination. We are told that there is a picture on the wall representing a little girl praying, kneeling near an unmade bed, a scene which has many similar characteristics to the scene Mathias is actually observing. We also learn of a bedside table with a lamp, upon which rests a blue pack of cigarettes. Because of the role played by framed pictures in the fabulations of Robbe-Grillet, it seems that we should investigate the possible part assigned to this object. Here we want to mention the picture in the window in Les Gattes and the battle scene in the bedroom of Dans le Labyrinthe to refer to only these two instances. The emergence of the girl's picture follows directly a passage in which Mathias is trying to explain to himself the "caractère anormal du lieu," and the reason why the black and white tile floor is not the floor of the living room but of a bedroom, which is not quite in keeping with the tradition of having the nicest appointment in the company room. Here Mathias ceases to observe the room as such and begins to reflect, and as is prone to happen with a person endowed with his propensity for imagining situations and objects, his thoughts start drifting and scenes he has

witnessed in the past merge with reality. This is the reason why the picture appears, and as his "rêverie" takes hold there re-appears the image of the bedside table with the lamps and, underneath, the blue pack of cigarettes. Definitely the picture scene and the paragraph in which the cigarettes are mentioned do not represent a straightforward description of what Mathias sees as he stands on the threshold of the now open door, but what the atmosphere -- "anormal du lieu"-- precipitates in his consciousness. Both the scene of the girl and the bedside table had invaded Mathias' consciousness in the past, and once more we notice an almost word-for-word replay of the scenes. If we refer to page 29 we shall see that on the morning of his departure, Mathias heard a woman scream and saw the shadow of a man seemingly striking the woman. This memory provides the elements for Mathias to add the picture of the girl to the room. The room he sees is very much like the one he saw in the morning. The violence he witnessed establishes the climate for him to place the image of the girl which has been on his mind all morning long. As he progresses into his "rêverie," the text repeats the notations which were used to describe the bedside table of the Saint Jacques district house:

Sous la lampe il y avait, posé sur la table de nuit, un petit objet rectangulaire de couleur bleue--qui devait être un paque de cigarettes. (LV, p. 29)

On page 68 we find:

Juste au-dessous brillait un petit objet rectangulaire de couleur bleue---qui devait être un paquet de cigarettes. (LV, p. 68)



Mathias is a man who not only invents the past, the present and the future -- the famous image of "le fabricant"---but he also invents objects or transposes objects buried in his memory into the concrete present. This could be credited to a touch of hallucination, and let's not forget that Mathias had been drinking absinthe before he went to the apartment.

Robbe-Grillet is quite fond of painted panels of wood as motivators of scenes, and in the opening section of Pour un projet de révolution à New York, he builds an entire scene of violence around a door panel painted "en faux bois."

We would be derelict if we did not mention the fact that the description of the mussed bed which immediately follows the description of the bedside table could also be part of Mathias' hallucination at the time. This is the description:

~~Alors que tout le reste paraissait en ordre, le lit~~ présentait au contraire un aspect de lutte, ou de ménage en cours. Les draperies d'un rouge sombre censées de recouvrir étaient défaites, bouleversées même, et pendaient d'un côté jusque sur le carrelage. (LV, p. 68)

This paragraph could have been inspired by the image on the movie billboard Mathias had seen previously:

Sur l'affiche aux couleurs voyantes un homme de stature colossale, en habits Renaissance, maintenait contre lui une jeune personne vêtue d'une espèce de longue chemise pâle, dont il immobilisait d'une seule main les deux poignets derrière le dos; de sa main libre il la serrait à la gorge. Elle avait le buste et le visage à demi renversés, dans son effort pour s'écarter de son bourreau, et ses immenses cheveux blonds pendaient jusqu'à terre. Le décor dans le fond, représentait un vaste lit à colonnes garni de draperies rouges. (LV, p.45)

If we compare the two passages with each other and the second with the general description of the scene Mathias is supposed to witness in the apartment, several relationships can be established. The most flagrant one is the color red which is mentioned in relation to the bed covers. We also notice that the girl on the poster wears a "longue chemise pâle," as does the girl in the picture (...un petite fille en chemise de nuit...) The description of the poster is given in very definite terms, but when Mathias reuses the elements to evoke again the same scene he seems to hesitate and adjust his propositions. For instance we read: "...le lit présentait au contraire un aspect de lutte, ou de ménage en cours." Further on we read: "Les draperies d'un rouge sombre...étaient défaites, bouleversées même,..." The first image invading Mathias' mind was that a struggle had taken place on the bed. He is still under the strong impression the previous scenes of violence have made upon him. But his rational mind rectifies the vision, and he says: "...ou de ménage en cours." This last interpretation is closer to actuality than the first. But in the same paragraph an accurate explanation is rectified to introduce the idea of violence. Mathias says that the bed covers are "défaites," then he adds "bouleversées même." This last notation of "bouleversées" re-introduces the sadistic interpretation. This careful "écriture" by Robbe-Grillet emphasizes the constant flux in Mathias' mind, from reality

to fancy, back to reality, and once more retreating into his own private world.

This section of narrative is not used by Robbe-Grillet to launch Mathias into a flight of erotic imagining, although he could have very well done it, and shown us a Mathias emerging into the sunlight of the street in a daze. Instead he seems to have indulged here in his avowed liking for "écriture" rather than trying to concentrate the motors of the fable to bring the denouement closer as in a traditional novel. His intent is to write not to tell an anecdote, but just write, and the author seems to tarry intentionally along the narrative since getting there is not as important as making the trip.

So we leave Mathias for the time being as he steps into the street in order to enter the next place of business to peddle his wares.

On page 69 we note another modulation effected around the phrase "la porte vitrée." Here we see a different type of transition set off by a textual phrase rather than a sentence or a snatch of direct discourse.

Upon leaving the apartment above the cafe, Mathias re-enters the establishment and leaves through the street door, referred to as a "porte vitrée." The transitional material is again two short paragraphs, the first dealing with a sunny April day which marks Mathias' return to reality, and the other paragraph which could very well have led

to a development concerning an idle walk along the pier; but instead Mathias feels the pangs of his professional conscience and leaves the mucky edge of the water strung with dead crabs to go back toward the rigorous alignment of facades of the houses. We see here again Robbe-Grillet's use of imagery to express states of mind. The edge of the water refers to his imaginative mood, and the alignment of the houses to his rational thinking process which for once wins over his propensity toward fantasizing. Or again we could construe the two images as a contrast between his deranged mind and his rational mind.

From the second paragraph the linkage to the next narrative unit is initiated by the reappearance of an objectal signal which closes the ring and brings Mathias back to another "porte vitrée." Here we must notice that the closure element appears in the first line of the narrative unit rather than in the last line of the transitional paragraph. On page 127 we shall see that the same technique has also been used. The sentence which links the transition paragraph to the next unit and which parallels a sentence used in the first few lines of that paragraph is also included in the first line of the new narrative unit. These two elements are "il ferma les yeux" and "il ouvrit les paupières." (LV, pp. 126-127)

The opening sentence, "Porte rougeâtre...Porte vitrée..." presents in itself a special characteristic: it is punctuated with suspension marks intended to suggest

affective thinking on the part of Mathias. It also presents a reverse sequence of visual impressions. In the first mention of the "porte vitrée" we had as reinforcement the image of "l'eau scintillante du port," indicating that Mathias' eyes were attracted by the mesmerizing effect of the sun reflecting on the water, which as we mentioned before could have brought about a period of affective thinking. The second mention of "port vitrée" is preceded by "devanture rougeâtre..." indicating that because Mathias has been subjected to the strong rays of the sun his vision is blurred, or again the sun has intensified the effect of the absinthe he had been drinking. Whatever the case, Mathias emerges again into reality, signified by the "porte vitrée," which will give him an escape from the intense light and heat of the outside. To emphasize this novelistic element Robbe-Grillet mentions that the shop is "plus obscure que ses voisines." (LV, p. 69)

The episode in the "boutique" contains various elements which contribute directly to the development of the fable, and also to Robbe-Grillet's self-indulgence in objectal serial descriptions. The scene is very meticulously set up. In order to give Mathias time to inspect the shop at his own leisure, the author uses the character situation of the lady shop keeper and a lady customer poring over an interminable calculation of the lady's purchases often repeated and disrupted by mistakes. All of page 70 can be attributed

to the author's indulging in a riotous inventory of the contents of the store. Having given us all those details, Robbe-Grillet shifts the point of view to Mathias by means of a transitional sentence which indicates that now the character will express his reactions to the setting:

Et il y avait encore une quantité d'autres choses, de nature si disparate que Mathias regretta de ne pas avoir regardé avant d'entrer ce qui pouvait être indiqué sur l'enseigne de la boutique. (LV, p. 70)

If we compare the objectal description which preceded this sentence with the one following, it is to be noted that Robbe-Grillet's point of view is void of erotic references, whereas when Mathias' vision is given the description froths with them. The text exploits this erotic element in order to give an insight into Mathias' mind; but it also, and this is the important element from the point of view of literary composition, prepares a modulation from the dummy to the customer's body. This is accomplished by referring to the dummy not as "il" but as "elle." To Mathias it is "un corps de jeune femme." Then a physico motivator appears when the shop keeper shouts: "Quarante-cinq!" (LV, p. 71) The loud voice causes Mathias' eyes to shift from the underwear-clad back of the dummy to the flesh and blood back of the customer. This explains the following paragraph:

Au-dessus de la mince ligne de soie barrant le dos, la peau dorée et lisse des épaules luisait doucement. La pointe d'une vertèbre formait sous la chair une légère éminence à la base fragile du cou. (LV, p. 71)

Mathias is looking at the woman customer now. Another exclamation by the shop keeper disturbs him as he is being assaulted by erotic visions. He starts looking at rows of bottles and a row of multicolored jars. We see in this detail an indication that Mathias is erotically disturbed, since counting rows of glasses, banana trees and other objects is viewed by psychiatrists as an indication of mental disturbance and sexual deviation. His eyes must return to the back of the woman, who turns around and peers at him through her glasses. We note in passing one more reference to the figure eight. To be observed by the eyes of a stranger is a definite existentialist characteristic. This scene of voyeurism is presented indirectly, suggested rather than described.

Before leaving this section we must bring up a very disturbing element which might lead many readers to a different interpretation of this scene. The element in question is the word "elle" found in the following paragraph:

Le regard de Mathias parcourut une rangée de bouteilles, puis une autre de bocalx multicolores, et s'arrêta sur elle après avoir décrit un demicercle. (LV, p. 71)

We note a great ambiguity in assigning an antecedent to that personal pronoun. Who is "elle"? The dummy, the shop keeper, the lady customer? If "elle" refers to the dummy, then we shall have to construct the scene differently. Mathias is not looking at the back of the customer but has transformed his visualization of the dummy from an erotic object to an erotic state of mind in which the papier-mache has become real flesh. And this interpretation would also

make sense. When the lady turns around and looks at him it could be that she is intrigued by his absent look rather than having intuitively felt the scrutiny of his eyes between her shoulder blades. Or again, if the "elle" refers to the shop keeper then we have the same scenario; but this time resting his eyes upon her would close the circle and return Mathias to his entrance upon the scene when we were told that after greeting him and asking him to wait,

Elle se replongea aussitôt dans son opération. Elle allait si vite que Mathias se demanda comment l'autre faisait pour contrôler. D'ailleurs elle devait se tromper tout le temps car elle recommençait sans cesse les mêmes séries de nombres et ne semblait pas en venir à bout. (LV, pp. 69-70)

There is a fourth possibility if one strictly follows rigid grammatical and syntactic interpretation. Because this "elle" is found in a sentence in a single paragraph, it should refer to the closest antecedent; in this case it should be "une autre de bocaux multicolores," which stands for the word "rangée."

This examination of the scene reveals the openness of Robbe-Grillet's "écriture." The reader is free sometimes to rewrite the scene his own way. In all fairness to honest criticism we must also raise the possibility that Robbe-Grillet did not clearly spell out the antecedent, which is rather unusual in view of the painstaking care he brings to his craft as a writer.

The rest of the unit which is mainly developed on page 72 continues to emphasize Mathias' sexual frustration,



Here we must go back to Malraux's hero, for whom success equates sexual gratification and defeat impotence. When the shop keeper opens the drawer and confronts Mathias with a card of ten unsold watches, similar to the ones he is trying to sell her, he hastily withdraws and closes his suit case, defeated, impotent. At this juncture we read the notation:

Avant de refermer la couvercle, il eut le temps de jeter un coup d'oeil aux petites poupées de couleurs vives couchées dans le fond. (IV, p. 72)

This marks a desperate effort on the part of Mathias to regain his feeling of sexual potency, or at least to trigger his imagination to find solace in one of his famous erotic fantasies. But he must not be successful, for he retreats into one of his moments of childish gratification and says, "Donnez-moi donc un quart de bonbons."

We shall note numerous instances when Mathias exhibits this symbolic return to the womb in the course of this work, a response well in keeping with his Orestian complex.

The candy ends up in his pocket next to the piece of string, where together they represent elements of his main preoccupations, sex and violence.

The purchase of the candy provides also a very important prop for the development of the fabulation. It is indeed these same pieces of candy which will provide the discarded wrappers which Mathias will hunt so desperately at the scene of the crime.

On page 73 we are again led into a parallel development when Mathias, after leaving the shop where he gazed at

the limbless display dummy outfitted with a brassiere and a garter belt, enters an apartment house and goes upstairs. Here the modulation was effected through a short paragraph intended to show Mathias' vain quest for customers. But here instead of a long development to underline his tribulations from shop to shop and apartment to apartment, Robbe-Grillet uses a short cut which is initiated in the last paragraph on page 72. We are told in a few words that he liked to visit shops, but that unfortunately he spent too much time there and his efforts were always disappointing. This paragraph not only summarizes the preceding unit but also prepares the modulation to the next unit. The transitional passage opens at the top of page 73 and mentions that fortunately no more stores were located in the block, but instead a row of apartment houses. The last sentence, "...il passa aux suivantes," establishes the modulation to the narrative unit, which begins with this statement:

De couloirs obscures en portes closes, d'escaliers étroits en échecs, il se perdit de nouveau au milieu de ses fantomes. (LV, p. 73)

This last quotation deserves to be analyzed closely, because it is very frequent with Robbe-Grillet that seemingly bland statements often contain a great deal of novelistic importance. What this sentence proposes to develop besides its transitional effect is to launch Mathias into limbo, which is in fact the overall purpose of this unusually short unit. The effect is produced by using conjointly an

objective image which brings in an abstract idea, and ends the sentence with the word "fantome" which is wholly in the realm of the affective. This sentence will be divided into three segments in order to bring out the composition process involved.

The first segment reads as follows: "De couloir en portes closes:" Here we start out with a concrete image of the hall, entrance into a state of mind which is revealed by the phrase "portes closes"; "portes closes" is intended to convey an objective idea and also an abstract idea of rejection. Here we move from the objective to the abstract. In the second segment; "d'escaliers étroits en echecs," we have a further step into the abstract; now we pass from the concrete object "escaliers" to the abstract concept of "echecs." In the first segment we had objectal significance transmuted into affective meaning through the use of a phrase which referred both to an objectal fact and to an abstract idea, the closed door and rejection. In the next segment the passage from the object to the abstract idea is effected without the help of the second objectal element. Now if we bring in the third segment; "il se perdit de nouveau au milieu de ses fantomes," we have total affectivity. The end result of this is a linear progression, from the state of consciousness into a traumatic state; Mathias loses contact with reality and lets his chimeras overtake his mind. We mentioned the fact that this was another parallel development, because if we now study the content of this unit we will see that this is a

repetition of a traumatic state Mathias experienced not so long ago when he left the cafe to go upstairs and look for Mme Robin, (LV, pp. 66-68) We have again the idea of knocking on the door with Mathias' big heavy ring. The door opens and a suspicious head appears; Mathias expects to see the black and white tiles on the floor, but the vision blurs and the floor is grey. As he looks around expecting to see the disorderly bed with the red draperies, the sheepskin rug, the bedside table with a lamp and a blue pack of cigarettes, a picture on the wall, none of these visions appear. Instead he finds himself in a kitchen, with a table covered with oil-cloth, and the clicking sound of his suit case latch "en faux cuivre" -- this last detail to render the vision more vivid -- strikes his ears and Mathias, completely overwhelmed, floats away on the "etc" and the three suspension marks which leave the paragraph unclosed.

What is, after all, the intended meaning of this unit? It seems that Robbe-Grillet wanted to show a Mathias completely disoriented, utterly confused, having reached a point of extreme psychosis unable to separate his erotic visions and his more sedate imaginary anticipations of sales. Mathias' disorientation must have lasted a long time, because when we tie in again with the factual narrative we are told that he emerges from a "ultime boutique." If we refer to the paragraph at the top of page 73 we find that he was near "une suite de maisons sans magasins." This notation is intended to widen

the gap between the "etc..." and the beginning of the next paragraph. Here again we have a "hole" which engulfs the wanderings of Mathias until Robbe-Grillet takes him in hand for the long sequence on the beach.

With the words "émergeant d'une ultime boutique " begins the first transitional paragraph out of three which will establish the link between Mathias' visit to the shops and his disoriented hiatus on the rocky beach near the center of the town. (LV, p. 73) The second paragraph at the top of page 74 describes and summarizes Mathias' position in regard to his commercial venture and his spatial location midway between the shop he just left and the beach to which he will walk afterwards. Here we have a vertical transition, from one level, the town street, down to the next level of the beach. This transition marks also a passage from a troubled affective state described on page 73 to a more disturbed condition of schizophrenia; in other words he is sinking deeper into his neurosis.

The third paragraph, very short, offers the perspective of that lower level of the rocky beach. We have a subdued allusion to Mathias' condition in the description of the slabs of stone as "larges bancs à peine inclinés de pierre grise qui se dégradèrent jusqu'à l'eau, sans ceder la place au sable, même à marée basse." (LV, p. 74) We can see the emphasis upon the gravity of his condition, which is not to be relieved.

We shall not go into a thorough examination of this new unit, it has been done before quite expertly by Bruce Morrisette and many others, but we shall point out some significant composition devices which merit attention. On page 76 we note the following exhortation:

Il fallait réinventer la scène d'un bout à l'autre à partir de deux ou trois détails élémentaires, comme l'âge ou la couleur des cheveux. (LV, p. 76)

In this passage Mathias or Robbe-Grillet refers to the newspaper story about Violette as he re-reads the clipping he carries in his wallet. Here the author uses a device which will be exploited more at length in Projet d'une révolution à New York. In this recent work we are made to witness the elaboration of a fable. The word scene is used many times, and at the end of the novel we have indications urging that the scene be shot again as if a movie were being made. Here the intent is for Mathias to titillate his imagination with more vivid details of the possible scene.

In this unit Robbe-Grillet uses the device of the pounding of the waves against the rocks not only to inject the idea of violence into the narrative, but also to set off the various scenes of Mathias' fantasizing. The first such indication occurs on page 76. "Une vaguelette vint frapper le roc," and Mathias breaks his train of thoughts to observe the houses of the town, which is the stimulus for him to start on the fantasy of the man assaulting the little girl in the room with the black and white tiles. As the fingers

of the man are going to crush or caress the girl, the pounding of the waves brings this fantasy to an end: "Une vague plus forte frappa contre le roc, avec un bruit de gifle,..." (LV, p. 78) The reference to the noise not only interrupt and modulate the scene, it also introduces an element of violence with the word "gifle."

This last reference to the wave comes at the beginning of the transitional paragraph which will show Mathias emerging from his fantasy and walking back up to the street. We have a physical motion upward and a return to normalcy on the part of Mathias.

From now on the narrative assumes a more direct course. Mathias picks up the bicycle and gets started, not without having received a few more erotic stimuli upon viewing the movie poster which advertizes the program of the previous Sunday. Here again Robbe-Grillet has recourse to suspension marks to indicate Mathias' fantasizing.

Sur le sol, à leurs pieds, gisant en travers du carelage noir et blanc...(LV, p. 80)

The introduction of the phrase "carelage noir et blanc" is very significant, because it indicates that Mathias upon seeing the poster superimposes his fantasy upon the reality of the image. At this juncture we know for a fact that the black and white tile floor belongs to his fantasy and not to reality.

This flight of affective thinking is interrupted by the words of the "buraliste," which are reported as direct

discourse. We have seen previously how Robbe-Grillet uses snatches of direct discourse to jolt Mathias out of his reveries. When discourse is reported indirectly as in the unit when Mathias has to listen to the mother of the three girls, (LV, pp. 84-85) Mathias usually continues to drift along in his private little world. On the same page we again have a sentence of direct discourse: "«Je serai de retour vers les quatre heures,»" (LV, pp. 80-81), which indicates that Mathias is no longer fantasizing, and has regained some kind of normalcy. Of the segment of text from page 79, "Dès qu'il eut tourné le coin..." until page 81, the end of the third transitional paragraph "...très satisfait de sa machine," we can say that Mathias has come out of his drunken and erotic stupor to a certain degree of rationality. In the next narrative unit he will function as he did when we first met him upon his arrival at the harbor. He will remain in that state of mind until he drinks absinthe again in the lighthouse cafe.

This subsequent narrative unit will, in a sense, prime the fabulation, or non-fabulation, of the famous "hole" in the novel. In effect we see Mathias entering the house of a mother with three daughters. This situation had been anticipated by Mathias, who early in the morning on the main land had talked to a sailor brother to that woman, and had already been warned that one of the girls was "un vrai démon." Furthermore Mathias had been thinking and looking at the newspaper clipping relating to the rape of Violette. By this



time Mathias' subconscious is strongly saturated with erotic sights, the girl on the ship, the waitress in the cafe "A l'Espérance," not forgetting the scene of violence in the "quartier Saint Jacques;" so much more impressing that he did not really see the act clearly, nor the participants. He has also been deeply affected by a series of images, like the movie poster, the display dummy in the shop, the picture of Violette, and all the figure eight signs which for him have as much evocative power as an erotic picture. He has spent the entire morning reassessing all these elements in his poor diseased mind Baudelairized by the absinthe. Now, faced with the feminine reality of that family, shown a picture, avidly commented upon by a mother who cannot stop talking about the hellish behavior of her younger daughter, who though absent is nevertheless present in the enlarged snapshot taken of her by a "voyageur" who remained on the island only one day, the implication being that the thirteen year old might have had sex with him. All those elements entice Mathias to confuse the picture of Jacqueline with the idea of dead Violette.

As is customary with Robbe-Grillet, we are not told what is in the mind of Mathias, but we can very easily follow the modality of the fable. Mme Leduc, whose name we are not told until much later in the narration, concludes her diatribe against her daughter and we read:

La mère, sans sourire, parlait de "pouvoir magique" et assurait qu'on l'aurait brûlée comme sorcière "pour moins que ça, il n'y a pas si longtemps". (LV, p. 85)

This last remark triggers Mathias' imagination and we read immediately after the preceding quotation:

Au pied du pin les herbes sèches commençaient à flamber ainsi que le bas de la robe en cotonnade. Violette se tordit dans l'autre sens et rejeta la tête en arrière, en ouvrant la bouche. ~~Cependant~~ Mathias réussit enfin à prendre congé. (LV, pp. 85-86)

The meaning of the indirect narration is quite clear. Mme Leduc herself supplied Mathias with the image of torture by fire. Mathias looking at the picture of Jacqueline who is leaning against a tree, her feet in tall grass, suddenly sees in his mind Violette burning and screaming with atrocious pain. Now why do we find the sentence beginning with "Cependant Mathias..." juxtaposed to this scene of horror? It is Robbe-Grillet's device to indicate that Mathias is overwhelmed by the vision and feels the need to be by himself. But the author indirectly tells us that before Mathias could leave he had to reassure Mme Leduc that he would tell her brother about Jacqueline. To accomplish this the conditional is once again used in a series of indirect discourse sentences --a very effective composition device.

The intensity of Mathias' vision of Violette burning is rendered through a shift in tenses. First we read that "les herbes sèches commençaient à flamber!" The imperfect is used to denote a description of the scene, or a passive image in the mind of Mathias. Then comes a sudden change to the past definite. --"Violette se tordit...rejeta la tête..."--in order to intensify the mental representation.

In the next paragraph, which describes Mathias as riding away on his bicycle, we are very vividly made aware of the mental state of Mathias. He is actually running away from the vision he just had. But there will be no respite for him: "Le soleil et la chaleur devenait en outre excessifs." (LV, p. 86)

Now Mathias has only one thought in mind, that is to join Violette-Jacqueline on the cliff where she is guarding her sheep all alone. But suddenly Robbe-Grillet substitutes his vision for Mathias'. We are told that the sea is pounding against the shore and cascades over the rocks. We are shown Mathias' location in relation to the lighthouse and to the cliff. The landscape is described in detail, and the unit and the first chapter end under the control of the author who tells us: "Mathias n'a plus qu'à se laisser descendre."

With this last sentence Robbe-Grillet assumes the role of a Mephistopheles. He is looking at his creature on the verge of destruction. It is easy to bicycle down to the cliff, but it is even easier for Mathias to go down to his doom. "La pente douce" is really the route to destruction.

On pages 121 and 122 we have another example of Robbe-Grillet's ability as a writer and technician of the novel through the use of the cinematographical device of the "fondu" to pass from one scene to another.

At this point in the novel we find Mathias at the

counter of the lighthouse cafe talking to the owner about the disappearance of Jacqueline. Mathias has just said, "«N'im-  
porte qui peut faire un faux-pas,»" upon hearing the comments  
of the cafe owner on Jacqueline's disappearance. This last  
utterance marks the beginning of a scene during which Mathias  
pays for his drink and the woman washes drinking glasses.

In reality this scene must have been very short, but  
it takes four pages to cover it, and it is brought to an end  
when Mathias says:

"Alors, Maria...Qu'est-ce qu'elle me voulait? Vous  
avez dit, tout à l'heure...A propos de quoi a-t-elle  
parlé de moi?" (LV, p. 123)

Before we study the content of this scene we must  
point out the structure of the last sentence in the above  
quotation: "A propos de quoi a-t-elle parlé de moi?" The use  
"en rejet" of the phrase "de moi" which seems to combine two  
phrases into one is quite interesting. The two phrases are:  
"de quoi a-t-elle parlé" and "a-t-elle parlé de moi." This  
peculiarity in the speech of Mathias reveals a state of con-  
fusion which is the direct result of the silent scene we  
are going to discuss now.

This particular scene starts on page 120 with "il  
prit son portefeuille..." and ends on page 123 with the  
information:

Il leva les yeux vers la grosse femme aux cheveux  
gris et vit qu'elle le regardait -- depuis longtemps  
déjà, peut-être.

We shall not study all the features of that scene  
but concentrate on a passage which is to be found at the

bottom of page 121. Mathias has been thinking about the news of the disappearance of Jacqueline and in particular of the fact that Maria, her sister, has asked if he had not seen her on his way to the lighthouse cafe. Mathias is afraid that she might have seen him near the cliff and is trying to construct a rationale to prove that he did not go near the cliff and see the girl, as her mother had also mentioned he could before he left their house. By now he has more or less convinced himself that his going near the cliff does not make sense and no one would expect him to have been there. The following passage is quite significant as far as Robbe-Grillet's technique of transitions is concerned, but even more significant of his use of cinematographical fade-away used in soap operas to indicate that a character suddenly becomes introverted and remembers past events. The technique consists in slightly blurring the image of the character and superimposing a flashback. In the novel this is accomplished by the use of a punctuation mark, the phrasing of the text and the rhythmic quality of the phrases. The following quotation is necessary to understand the process involved:

...L'idée certes était saugrenue. Que serait-il allé faire sur ce sentier incommode et dépourvu de maisons, qui ne menait à rien? -- exépte à la mer, à des rochers abrupts, une étroite dépression abritée du vent et cinq moutons broutant au piquet, sous la surveillance superflue d'une enfant de treize ans. (LV, pp. 121-22)

The first two sentences down to the question mark represent Mathias' rational thought process and is an attempt to establish rationally that no one would think of using that

itinerary, but as our character is formulating this defense he cannot prevent images from crowding into his mind and obliterating his natural thought processes and launching him into a vision of what actually happened or could have happened. Here we must consider two alternatives. On the one hand he is guilty and was there, or on the other hand he was not guilty, as many critics have maintained, and he imagines what the scene could have been. Either of those instances makes sense and Robbe-Grillet's treatment could have been the same. Now let's study how this passage from rational thought to a remembered vision or an imagined vision is done.

The point of departure is the dash.--Before the dash rationality, after the dash affective thinking. Mathias passes from one state to the other in a gradual process, a crescendo of affective life, accomplished by means of four phrases of unequal length and rhythmic quality. The progression is as follows:

a. exep~~t~~e à la mer, a short phrase, casual, with very little affective content, whose rhythm gives the impression of a matter-of-fact remark

b. à des rochers abrupts, the phrase is longer, the phonetic content is louder with a check vowel at the end; the rhythm is more rapid, giving an overall impression of violence

c. une étroite dépression abritée du vent et cinq moutons broutant au piquet, the vision intensifies, the imagery becomes erotic, the rhythm more rapid, indicating more involvement on the part of Mathias

d. sous la surveillance superflue d'une enfant de treize ans, now emerges the haunting image of the child,

punctuated by longer rhythm sequences which imphasize contemplation and enjoyment of the vision; the selection of the word "treize" is very important here, any other numeral between ten and fifteen would not have produced the same effect, and "seize" which would have been phonetically and rhythmically equivalent would have destroyed the idea of a child.

This passage establishes the linkage between two sections of the silent scene. The first one is made up of all the rational reasons why Maria could have seen him, and in the second part Mathias abandons himself to the vision of Jacqueline on the cliff. There is a third part to that scene where Mathias is looking at the glasses drying on the counter and focuses his attention on the geometrical disposition of the glasses. This preoccupation with alignment and counting objects will be featured again in La Jalousie when the husband counts banana trees. This preoccupation has been described by psychiatrists as an indication of mental illness and sexual deviation.

Upon finding out that Maria had only casually asked about him, not to inquire about her sister but because she might have wanted to see his watches, Mathias regains his composure and sells watches to the woman and her customers. This passage marks a return to rationality on the part of Mathias.

On page 126 we note a very interesting development which serves as transition between the scene in the cafe we just discussed and a new unit built around Jean Robin. Once more the transition is effected through a paragraph

showing what the participants in the previous scene are doing now.

The sailors pay for their drinks and leave; Mathias puts his watches back into his suit case, locks it, and seat himself at a table while the "patronne" disappears into the back room.

This transition is worked out like a short dramatic scene in a classical play, one of those scenes intended to clear the stage of characters who were protagonists in the previous scene and prepare the entrance of the participants in the following scene. Many of these transitional scenes are only a few lines long, a condition paralleled by this modulation.

As is also customary, the character left on stage sometimes indulges in a soliloquy or addresses the audience directly. If this takes place a new scene opens and is developed. This is precisely what happens subsequently after the transitional paragraph, and Robbe-Grillet lets us peer into Mathias' mind as he falls into a half-sleep sequence. But such developments have been encountered before in this work and this one would not rate mentioning if it did not possess unusual characteristics, namely a rhythmic counter-punctal accompaniment to the fact described, and provided by the phonetic values of the syllabication of the phrases used to express such factual information.

The passage under analysis here is to be found on page 126 and extends to page 127, and opens with "Seul dans



la salle, à present, il regarda devant lui," and ends with "ils s'étonna de ne pas l'avoir remarqué plus tôt."

The factual information contained in this passage is as follows. Mathias, sitting at the table, closes his eyes and indulges in a mild type of "rêverie." He sees himself making his way to the harbor on the main land. As he walks along a narrow street of Saint-Jacques district he witnesses a famous scene of violence, but he is soon torn away from this vision and begins to think about his business on the island, and slowly he becomes conscious again of the life of the cafe. Aside from the factual content of the passage, we are also made to see a man who is dozing off, wakes up and dozes off again to wake up again. This process is syncopated by the variations in Mathias' "rêverie" and short dream sequences. But let's refer to the text, since this mechanism is implemented through a phonetic and stylistic process.

The first five lines are extremely significant. They will bring in the soporific element which will induce Mathias to close his eyes. We have the notation on the road crossing the village: "elle était très large, poussiéreuse -- et déserte." The dash just before the last phrase is intended to underline a hypnotic trance which is settling over Mathias. The rhythm of those three phrases seems to accompany the wobble of his head toward sleep, but the head comes up again with the next sentence, beginning with the phrase "de l'autre côté" which by its rhythmic content reproduces Mathias' upward

motion of his head, to be followed by a long sequence of sounds whose falling quality lulls Mathias back to sleep. We have the word "dressait" whose double "s" sound linked to the falling tones of "sans ouverture," and reinforced by the deep tonality of "plus haut qu'un homme," represents Mathias progressively nearing sleep, then to be drawn into slumber by the Chateaubrianesque phrasing of "abritant sans doute quelque dépendance du phare." Hypnotized by the reflection of the sun on the dusty road, and his analytical faculties defeated by the bland surface of the high wall, Mathias dozes off. The next sentence therefore falls into the sequence naturally and with its full impact: "Il ferma les yeux et pensa qu'il avait sommeil." This last sentence has also another function which is to prime his "rêverie." The idea of being sleepy brings in the rational explanation, "Il s'était levé de bonne heure," and the rest follows suit by free association of ideas, a surrealist device often used by Robbe-Grillet.

Reality suddenly re-enters Mathias' consciousness as he thinks of the "agenda." Now Mathias is no longer asleep but conscious of his surroundings, but his eyes are still closed. The passage from sleep to semi-consciousness is effected by the short sentence: "Il pensa qu'il était fatigué."

Now we have the third paragraph of the modulation, and as usual there is a link to the second paragraph in the

device of the opening sentence: "Il ouvrit les paupières." This sentence brings to an end the state of semi-consciousness and prepares the return to sunlighted reality for Mathias and the introduction of Jean Robin which will launch the narrative into the next unit. This paragraph also presents special characteristics. First it opens with a parallel sentence which answers the sentence of the second paragraph: "Il ferma les yeux." The rhythm of the third paragraph is rapid whereas the second paragraph had a slow, lumbering pace. We especially note the following sentence:

Un pêcheur se tenait derrière la vitre et regardait à l'intérieur du débit--une main sur la poignée de la porte, dans l'autre le goulot d'une bouteille vide.  
(LV, p. 127)

The entire sentence is built with short, clipped syllables, with a preponderance of checked vowels and front vowels. The rhythm of the paragraph is rapid, emphasizing the forward motion of the sailor coming up to Mathias, and culminating with the loud clash of the sailor's greeting, reported, for better effect, as direct discourse: "«C'est bien toi? J'ai pas la berlue?»" The rest of the paragraph, referring to Mathias' reaction, is slow paced, with few commas, ponderous to reflect his bewilderment and also his recoil from the sudden materialization of a character whom he had invented in the first place. His answer, "«Eh oui! dit-il; c'est bien moi.»" is quite appropriate in its halting phrasing, rendered even more halting by the insert, "dit-il."

How can we explain in rational terms the emergence of this character as a real participant in the narrative after having been informed that Mathias had invented him? Two solutions seem possible. Either Mathias went to sleep at the table in the cafe and dreamed the entire sequence of Jean Robin and his girl friend, or Robbe-Grillet used the author's privilege and his own conception of "écriture" to bring into the narrative a character and a sequence which seems to have no rational basis; or again, since reading a Robbe-Grillet novel calls for the reader's participation, can't we say that we will ignore the statement that he invented that character and proceed from there?

From then on, Mathias is caught up in a whirl of words underlined by revealing sentences like the following:

Mais il fallait d'abord qu'une certaine accalmie permette d'interrompre cette émission de phrases et de gestes enchevêtrés, qui prenait au contraire de minute en minute une intensité plus alarmante. (LV, p. 129)

Mathias, overwhelmed by his friend's glibness, stunned by the memories of his past recalled to him by Jean Robin, the vapor of the red wine helping, gropes his way to the cabin while the furious sea impairs his efforts to regain his composure until his friend says: "«On y est»." (LV, p. 134) This exclamation is interesting to trace because it is repeated several times during the narration and is used to frame a development during which a description of Jean Robin's cabin and his girl friend is given. The first "«On y est» "

appears on page 132.

On page 171 we encounter what seems to be unusual in the writings of Robbe-Grillet, the passage from one unit to the next without modulation. The fact is that what seems to be a lack of transition is in itself a transition. Midway through page 171 we pass from a paragraph in which Mathias sees himself in Mme Leduc's house going up to his room to be confronted by Violette on the landing, and the next paragraph shows him pushing open the door of the cafe "A l'Espérance." Confusing as it may appear, we again have a modulation from the preceding unit and again it is done in three paragraphs.

Mathias having missed the boat returns the bicycle to the "buraliste" (LV, p. 168) and after inquiring about a room to rent learns that Mme Leduc rents a room once in a while, but today would not be indicated because her daughter has disappeared. This reference to Mme Leduc and Jacqueline launches the "buraliste" into his own views of Jacqueline's disappearance. Mathias is caught and made to listen to the "buraliste." The following quote is very revealing as to Mathias' lack of conversational ability:

Mathias n'osait plus s'en aller, à présent. Il avait encore trop attendu. Et voici qu'il était obligé, de nouveau, de lutter contre les blancs qui risquaient à chaque phrase de trouer la conversation. (LV, p. 170)

Mathias' inability to sustain a running conversation also explains why he fantasizes so much. Here we are shown Mathias' behavior under such circumstances and how he can

fantasize while engaged in a conversation with others. In order to express this side of Mathias, Robbe-Grillet uses the following device, a transition which could be regarded as a unit of fabulation in itself. We are again faced with three paragraphs. In the first one:

Il n'y avait pas de raison que cela finisse. Mathias parlait, l'homme répondait, Mathias répondait. L'homme parlait, Mathias répondait. Mathias parlait, Mathias répondait. La petite Jacqueline promenait le long des chemins, dans les rochers, sur la falaise, sa fine silhouette scandaleuse. Dans les creux à l'abri du vent, sur l'herbe des prairies, à l'ombre des buissons, contre le tronc des pins, elle s'arrêtait et passait d'un geste lent le bout des doigts sur ses cheveux, son cou, ses épaules...(LV, pp. 170-71)

We are witnessing the mechanical participation of Mathias in the conversation rendered very clearly with the sentences: "L'homme parlait, Mathias répondait. Mathias parlait, Mathias répondait." While he is talking, Mathias' mind is drifting into a fantasy, which is underlined by the suspension marks at the end of the paragraph.

The second paragraph relating Mathias' vision of Violette on the stair landing at Mme Leduc's shows Mathias building upon the information given him by the "buraliste" to construct a fantasy twice removed from reality, since Violette is a fictional character in Mathias' fabulation. We are here in the domaine of a fiction within the fiction, the box within the box technique of André Gide. But the second paragraph has another function. It represents Mathias in a daze walking away from the bicycle shop to the cafe "A l'Espérance."

The third paragraph marks Mathias' arrival at the

cafe and his sudden return to reality, the connecting link with the new unit, but the connection is not made at once. Mathias is still in a daze: "Mathias se passa la main sur les yeux." (LV, p. 171) So we have a fourth paragraph before the unit of narration really begins: "Il demandait une chambre..." (LV, p. 171) In this paragraph we have a replay of paragraph number two featuring Violette. In this one the main feature is "la fille au visage apeuré" (LV, p. 171), adorned with some of the elements which sustained his previous fantasies like "la pièce au carrelage noir et blanc," "le lit défait," "la lampe de chevet," "la table de nuit," "l'étoffe rouge," "la peau de mouton." But in this particular fantasizing Mathias adds a new element: "le cadre en metal chromé contenant la photographie." This last touch comes from his remembering the picture of Jacqueline in Mme Leduc's kitchen. Mathias' thinking process is made clear by repeating the following sentence: "Mathias se passa la main sur les yeux." This indicates that he has just had a moment of "réverie" and that he is recovering his senses. This is made even clearer in the next paragraph which begins with: "La jeune fille avait enfin compris qu'il désirait une chambre pour trois jours." A careless reading of the previous paragraph might lead one to think that Mathias and the girl are upstairs and she is showing him the room.

Now if we refer to page 174 we notice an instance where the passage from one unit to the next is accomplished

without the benefit of a modulation or even the most tenuous linking. The new unit explodes on the scene like a movie, through a shift of locale by the camera. We were immersed in a serial description of Mathias' room, a description which parallels the description of Mathias' bedroom found on page 20. Although this second description is more elaborate than the first it has many of the elements already found in the first, like the dark lighting of the room, the "armoires" against the wall, and the shelf where his cardboard box with the strings inside is kept. If we compare the two indicators we shall have:

C'est dans la troisième que se trouvait, à l'étagère inférieure, dans le coin droit, la boîte à chaussures où il rangeait sa collection de ficelles. (LV, p. 20)

and in the second description:

C'est dans cette dernière armoire, la plus imposante, toujours fermée à clef, que se trouvait, à l'étagère inférieure, dans le coin droit, la boîte à chaussures où il rangeait sa collection de ficelles et de cordelettes. (LV, p. 174)

Suddenly the description stops, a new paragraph opens up and we are hit again by a second shift of the camera:

Le corps de la fillette fut retrouvé le lendemain matin, à la marée basse. Des pêcheurs de tourteaux-- ces crabes à carapace lisse, encore appelés "dormeurs"-- le découvrirent par hasard en fouillant dans les rochers, sous le tournant des deux kilomètres. (LV, p. 174)

The next paragraph reads:

Le voyageur apprit la nouvelle alors qu'il buvait l'apéritif, au comptoir du café " l'Espérance". (LV, p. 174)

The last time we heard of Mathias he was looking over the room he was going to rent somewhere on the waterfront. Now we find



him drinking at the cafe. The normal modulation from one locale to the other was not made; instead we have a blockbuster crashing into the narration which is the news of the discovery of the body. Robbe-Grillet uses this device in order to forward his narration in a very effective way.

With Robbe-Grillet the normal modulation could be represented as follows: "A" is the preceding narrative unit; "a" is the first paragraph which initiates the modulation; "b" is the second paragraph which actually establishes the link between units; "c" is the third paragraph which is the linkage to "C" which is the next narrative unit. So we could diagram the modulation as a passage from "A" to "C" with the intervening elements "a," "b," "c," or A,a,b,c,C. In the last transition from the description of the room to Mathias sitting in the cafe, we have the following arrangement: A,a,c,C.

In this modulation "A" ends in a reference to strings, therefore to violence; "a" is the news of the discovery of the body which ties in with the idea of violence expressed by the strings in "A"; "c" is the paragraph in which Mathias hears of the news; and "C" the narrative unit unfolds with the explanation of the discovery and all the gruesome details. This unit will end on page 177.

With the last paragraph on page 177 opens the transition to a new unit. Mathias has been listening to the comments made by the patrons of the cafe "A l'Espérance" concerning the murder of Jacqueline and he becomes unnerved.

He drinks his glass of absinthe and sets it up on the counter. This sentence marks the end of the unit, the closure line.

Mathias vida son verre d'absinthe et le reposa sur le comptoir. (LV, p. 177)

In this particular instance Robbe-Grillet uses an object as contrasted with an idea or a description to establish the modulation to the next unit.

The first paragraph shows Mathias hiding his hand-- whose finger nails are growing longer all the time--in his mackinaw where he grabs his pack of cigarettes, takes one out, lights it, and looks again at his finger nails. The author has brought the cigarettes into the narration in a logical way. The second paragraph on page 178 deals more particularly with the idea of trimming his finger nails, which indirectly introduces the idea of violence and the commission of the crime, and above all and through association the fact that he has left three cigarette butts at the scene which he must recover at once. Here we have a direct admission that he was on the cliff.

The third paragraph will usher in the search for the cigarette butts and the visit to the cliff.

When the narrative unit begins in the next paragraph, Mathias is shown already there, and remembering how the locale looked when he came the first time. The transition from the cafe to the cliff was ~~effected~~ without actually stating that Mathias left the cafe and walked to the cliff. In a movie production of those events, the camera would have

panned the counter, his hands, the cigarette, then abruptly cut away to a flash back of the crime, and shown the three cigarette butts left behind. Then Mathias would have been seen looking for the cigarettes, while the search was interrupted at brief intervals by short flashes of the crime as he remembers how the scene looked. This is exactly what Robbe-Grillet has accomplished here. It would not be irrelevant to note in passing the frequent use of groups of threes -- three paragraphs, three cigarette butts, three stakes on page 246, three daughters of Mme Leduc. Even when the actual number three is not used we find a town square in the shape of a triangle, the triangle formed by the legs of the victim on the cliff (LV, p. 246), and many other instances of that geometric figure.

Another important feature of this narrative is found in the resolve to pay a visit to the Mareks. This visit is very important to him because it is a device to establish the veracity of his statement that he went to the farm and found no one. Here Robbe-Grillet contrives to show how devious Mathias' thought process can be. If the hero is successful in impressing upon the people at the farm that today he is coming back to see them, and if they accept the idea that this is his second visit, it will establish the proof that he was there the first time. Here Mathias is not only constructing an alibi, but he is also trying to convince himself that he actually went to the farm, and if

he did he could not have been on the cliff. This strange thought process is part of his habit of erasing unpleasant facts, just as he will smoke the cigarettes he will retrieve to erase the first use of the cigarettes as instruments of torture. Furthermore, his visit to the Mareks will also be a cover for his search on the cliff. He will be able to construe later his absence from the cafe as having been motivated by the visit. We see here again how devious Mathias' mind can be. He lies to others but also to himself.

This narrative unit reveals that instead of going to the Mareks he goes to the cliff in search of the cigarettes. It also indicates that Mathias murdered the girl. We learn for instance that he stuffed Jacqueline's hair in her mouth to keep her from crying out for help. He even indirectly informs the reader that he burned her with the cigarettes:

Personne, raisonnablement n'irait imaginer l'usage qu'on en avait fait. (LV, p. 178)

The sudden appearance of Jean Robin's girl friend startles Mathias, who for a split second believes he is seeing the ghost of Violette. The fact that the name Violette is indicated is a composition device to underline how disturbed Mathias is at that very moment. Any other criminal would have thought of Jacqueline, but to Mathias reality and fiction are one, and in his poor sick mind the characters of fiction and those of reality have a tendency to intermix. Violette belongs to his sadistic cogitations, and Jacqueline became the victim of that fantasy.

From this encounter with the young woman, the time of the crime is rendered more precise. We learn that Jacqueline was with her at eleven-thirty, and this reinforces the temporal boundaries of the "hole:!" We are told on page 98: "Il regarda sa montre: il était plus de midi." This information given in chapter two, after the "hole;" is part of the fabulation Mathias is inventing in order to explain his whereabouts to old Mme Marek. His location is given as being just before reaching the cross road near the Marek's farm.

We also learn from old Mme Marek that the children did not return from school until twelve-thirty (LV, p. 96), which places Mathias at the farm or at the cross road between a few minutes after twelve and twelve-thirty, since old Mme Marek tells him through an indirect discourse device:

Le voyageur venait sans doute de manquer de peu le père et les trois plus jeunes des enfants qui rentraient en général vers midi et demie. (LV, p. 102)

And a few lines further on, "Peut-être, ajouta-t-elle, étaient-ils arrivés à présent." This last quote establishes that Mme Marek and Mathias met at or about twelve thirty. Now we remember that Mathias had told the "buraliste" he would bring back the bicycle at four o'clock that afternoon. (LV, pp. 80-81), and that he had five hours left before the departure of the ship. We also know that the ship leaves at four fifteen: "«Quatre heures un quart, exactement.»", dit la femme." (LV, p. 253) Mathias also figured out it

would take him one hour to cover the distance out and back. (LV, p. 81) From the preceding we may conclude that he left the town at eleven-fifteen. He must have spent twenty minutes at Mme Leduc's house, and twenty minutes to visit two houses. Mathias had calculated that he had ten minutes for each presentation. (LV, p.81) Counting some time to pedal from town to the cross road we effectively are left with the impression that he indeed arrived at the cross road at a few minutes after twelve. The time span of the "hole" should therefore be around twenty minutes, provided the author and Mathias are telling the truth concerning Mathias' use of his time.

Now if we read along and examine Mathias' own recapitulation of his time on page 202 we see that we have been given clues which are not in agreement with his reasoning. In essence Mathias tells us that he left at eleven-ten or eleven-fifteen, ~~and that he spent~~ less than fifteen minutes at Mme Leduc's house, having arrived there at eleven-fifteen. Next we are told that the two sales he made did not take more than three minutes at the most. We are also told that the distance between the town and the cross road, two kilometers, did not take more than five minutes. Mathias himself calculates:

... "Cinq et trois, huit; et quinze, vingt-trois... Une durée inférieure à vingt-cinq minutes s'était ainsi écoulée depuis le départ, sur la place, jusqu'à l'endroit où le voyageur avait rencontré Mme Marek. Cela faisait par conséquent onze heures quarante, au maximum, et plutôt onze heures trente-cinq. Or cette entrevue avec la vieille paysanne se situait, en réalité, près d'une heure plus tard. (LV, p. 202)

On the next page we are told that:

La rencontre avec la vieille femme devait donc dater de midi vingt, au moins, et plutôt midi vingt-cinq.

Le temps anormal, en trop, suspect, inexplicable, atteignait quarant minutes -- sinon cinquante. (LV, p. 203)

Whom should we believe? Mathias or the Mathias-Robbe-Grillet on page 102? This discussion of the time element does not purport to be exhaustive. There are many more instances when time references are given, but this incomplete collation shows the difficulty facing the reader as soon as he tries to leave the mythical time of the novel for the synchronic time of the chronological events supposedly described.

One could wonder why Robbe-Grillet did not include more clues concerning the time frame. The reason seems obvious; if Mathias' actions had been shackled by an exact schedule it would have limited the fabulation and by the same token Robbe-Grillet's freedom of "écriture." It would have also followed the pattern of a conventional novel.

Robbe-Grillet has objected many times that the novel creates its own reality and that it is useless to try to relate to temporal reality. When we read that Mathias takes infinite care to smoke the cigarette butts to a length of "un centimètre et demi," for the reasons which have been explained before, namely that cigarettes on the island are usually smoked that short, one may very well ask point blank why smoke the cigarette butts rather than flushing them

down the lavatories or dumping them in the water of the harbor? As far as temporal reality is concerned, such an act is the only sensible one, but Mathias does not act within the realm of reality as we know it. First he is a fictional character creating his own reality, and also, and this is the capital point here, Mathias' reality is an inner reality, a psychological reality. To destroy the butts would be to abide by our reality; his reality is all subjective and introspective. In order to conduct his cleansing process he must reshape temporal reality to his own idea of reality. To destroy the butts would be an admission that he had been on the cliff at the time of the crime, that he had used the cigarettes to torture the girl, that he had retrieved them and destroyed them, so admitting the facts of temporal reality. In smoking the butts to a shorter length and throwing them outside the window, he recreates not only a new temporal reality but also he establishes for himself a subconscious reality. In his mind he is now able to diminish the intensity of the memory of the facts as they really happened -- torture of the victim, incriminating clues left behind and recovered -- and to intensify a new scenario, a new reality. By blanking out of his mind events preceding the second smoking of the cigarettes, he is able to forge a new reality supported by temporal facts -- the cigarettes were actually smoked, and discarded in his room. Here again we witness one more trait of his childlike behavior, very similar to the boy playing hopscotch, stepping on the line,



and contending this does not count. We will start again, and if he successfully finishes the run he remains convinced that he has won fair and square. To Mathias as with a young child, reality is what you make it.

All this, as a final note on this particular point, is to underline Robbe-Grillet's masterful technique of composition. Here we are dealing with reality twice removed. First there is temporal reality which Robbe-Grillet refutes, then the fictional reality of the novel, and within that reality a third reality, the one Mathias creates unceasingly for himself. We are even tempted to say that there exists a fourth reality, the one of the reader which could at times compete very favorably with Mathias'.

Here we recognize a process which has been referred to by many critics, as the boxes within the boxes technique. Robbe-Grillet uses it in an objectal fashion when dealing with things, or as here with circumstances and events. The same process will be used later, on a larger scale, in Dans le labyrinthe and in La Maison de Rendez-vous.

We would like to point out a particular composition device employed by Robbe-Grillet. Whereas in La Modification Michel Butor uses object notations like the crumpled ball of paper which rolls back underneath the seat of the train compartment, or a black vehicle stopping next to a building as an opening for a unit development followed a few pages later by another black vehicle pulling away from another

structure to mark the conclusion of that narrative unit, Robbe-Grillet uses instead minute and exacting descriptions of geographic structural features like the various sides of the pier in the harbor of Le Voyeur. We also cannot omit the descriptions of the bridge in Les Gommés.

If Robbe-Grillet uses an object which keeps reappearing at regular intervals, it is not to make it into a punctuation device as does Michel Butor, but rather as an element of mental relaxation, a short intermezzo in the course of the development of the myth. A striking example is the use of the blue pack of cigarettes floating between the dock and side of the ship. We shall recall that this particular object first appeared in the consciousness of Mathias during his walk through the harbor district on his way to the ship earlier that morning, and that the circumstances surrounding this first appearance were in an atmosphere of violence punctuated by the loud screams of an invisible feminine victim who could have been assaulted by a man. A close reading of the text will reveal that the successive mentions of this object, either as a pack of cigarettes or as a blue ball of paper, are always closely connected to the emergence of a psychic state of mind of Mathias. We see therefore that the objective descriptions of objects have a double purpose, first to separate and prepare the emergence of narrative units, but also, and this seems to us the most important factor, as a thematic notation which unifies and solidifies the tissue of the work,

in this case the psychotic neurosis of the character. This does not mean that the mediating factor, in this case the pack of cigarettes, is the only one; Robbe-Grille uses several in the course of the book, namely the piece of string, which like the cigarette wrapper has sadistic implications, or the figure of the sea gull relating to Mathias' childhood. Here we see a direct contrast with the use of objectal references in Michel Butor's Modification. There is no thematic relationship between the ball of paper rolling back under the seat, the black cars stopping and starting off, and the theme of the novel. They are strictly punctuative or unit separators.

In this case we note that the afore-mentioned paragraph ends on the following sentence: "Il se demande si les crabes aiment les bonbons" (LV, p. 239). Two short intercalary paragraphs follow. The first one begins with "Ce sont bientôt à ses pieds..." and ends with "...l'ancienne cité royale." The second one begins with "Mathias descend dans les rochers..." and concludes with "et rectiligne vers le fanal." (LV, p. 240)

The first paragraph brings to a conclusion the scene located on top of the cliff, and the second moves the site of the action to the lower level at the foot of the cliff.

These paragraphs act as two heavy lines which separate units of development. Furthermore, Robbe-Grille is

so in control of his art and so meticulous in his composition, that he even establishes a linkage between the second paragraph and the next unit of narration. This progression is achieved thanks to a third paragraph which begins with "Il gravit la dernière pente, puis les quelques marches....," and ends with "...se les passent de mains en mains avec des gestes d'automates." (LV, p. 240)

In accordance with Robbe-Grillet's often-noted practice, we find in the next two paragraphs a thematic transition from the previous unit, dealing with the "nettoyage" of Mathias' pockets which brings a psychological relaxation of Mathias' anguish. When he walks along the jetty he notices that the muck and trash in the harbor have been removed by the city and the tide has left "une plage lisse et nette d'où n'émergent plus ça et là, solitaires, que de rares galets arrondis." (LV, p. 241) This clean and quiescent surface parallels Mathias' state of mind at the time, after his little "nettoyage."

This state of mind is not to last. As soon as he steps into the cafe "A l'Espérance" other motivators will assault him.

One of Robbe-Grillet's favorite techniques is to use, at some strategic point in the narration, key words or remarks made by other participants which will invade Mathias' psychic inner world and either spread confusion or launch him into one of his many traumatic or strongly erotic fantasies. A careful reading of this unit will

reveal two examples of this psychological triggering. The first one is to be found on page 244, and is a component part of an indirect dialog. The innkeeper is talking about the filth on board the fishing trawlers and summarizes his invective -- in indirect discourse -- with "il est impossible de toucher un bout de corde sans se couvrir les mains de cambouis." The trigger elements are "bout de corde" and "se couvrir de cambouis," and we underlined the important words.

The following paragraph shows Mathias on the alert. This emotional stage subsides when Mathias realizes that the innkeeper did not attach any double meaning to his remarks. But nevertheless this brief incident causes him to have conscious or subconscious reflections on the crime committed. Since the throwing of the candy in the crack of the rock on the cliff near the harbor, his mind has been busy with the viewing of objects which had no direct relationship to his troubled consciousness -- the cliff near the harbor, the harbor itself, the fishing trawler -- or the thought of leaving the island, although some of those objects like the crabs and other crochety sea creatures kept his latent sadistic mind on the alert. But it is only when trigger words overwhelm his consciousness that his thoughts revert to the crime itself. In this state of receptive readiness, Mathias receives a second assault of psychic motivators such as the episode of the static scenes which will face him

while he is sitting in the cafe "A l'Espérance."

Static scenes or "scènes figées" are in Le Voyeur a structural device which permits the author to present a variety of concepts and produces striking effects in order to transfer to the printed page what words often cannot express.

Concerning the "scènes figées" involving the image of the young girl on the ship during the first few pages of the novel, this seems to be an attempt not only at manifesting Mathias' erotic yearnings but also at fragmenting and separating his traumatic states and phantasmatic escapades. Mathias' imagination is so active that a great deal of written prose fills split-second periods and gives the impression that motion is suspended. A case in point is Mathias' notice of the fisherman's non-progress as he watches him through the glass door of the cafe. To Mathias the figure on the pier seems to remain always positioned in the same location it was in when last seen walking; in other words its motion stops when not observed to start again when observed. How can this be explained in rational terms? The truth of the matter is that we are here faced with a composition device to express the proliferations of phantoms which erupt in Mathias' mind. This psychic activity is extremely rapid and does not last more than split seconds. It reproduces the mental activity taking place and, as Bruce Morrissette has suggested, it indicates the fear of Mathias who does not

want to sound eager to leave the island and tries to abate the suspicions of others by his refusal to leave on the trawler. Bruce Morrissette further comments:

Evidemment, il ne s'agit que de l'objectivation d'un état psychique lié à quelque désordre fondamental affectant l'esprit de Mathias. Ce n'est pas pour rien que l'auteur met en scène un protagoniste qui ne cadre pas avec lui-même.<sup>54</sup>

We are in complete agreement with Bruce Morrissette concerning the exteriorization of fear and the objectivation of a psychic disorder, but it would be hard to explain this particular instance only as the objectivation of thoughts in turmoil denoting the superabundant mental activity of Mathias as was the case when Mathias was looking at the girl on the ship deck. Here we have a very well organized dialogue which parallels the occurrence of the phenomenon. Every time Mathias turns his eyes away from the fisherman a unit of indirect or direct dialogue intervenes. If we refer to page 241 we shall notice that the unit begins with the following words:

Dès son entrée dans la salle du café, Mathias est interpellé par le patron: une occasion s'offre à lui de retourner en ville sans attendre le vapeur de lendemain soir.....  
A travers la porte vitrée, Mathias regarde là-bas le petit bateau bleu dont le chargement se poursuit, toujours aussi vif et mécanique.  
"Le patron est un ami à moi, dit le patron. Il fera ça pour vous rendre service.  
--Oui, je vous remercie. Mais j'ai mon billet de retour qui est encore valable, ça m'ennuie de le perdre.

---

<sup>54</sup>Morrissette, Les Romans, p. 101.

--Ceux-ci ne vous demanderont pas bien cher, soyez tranquille, et peut-être que la compagnie vous remboursera." (LV, p. 241)

The unit starting with an indirect discourse or summarized dialogue is fragmented by the "scènes figées" which separate the various segments of the conversation. Right after the above quotation we have a second interruption stating that Mathias is gazing at the fisherman walking toward the cafe. This short paragraph is immediately followed by another section of direct conversation dealing with a different topic. Whereas the indirect dialogue indicated that Mathias could go back at once to the mainland, the following direct dialogue introduces the matter of the financial aspect of the undertaking. After the next "scène figée" the matter deals with the nutritional aspect of Mathias' dilemma. Let's pause here to point out the puerile inflection intended by Robbe-Grillet when he has Mathias say:

"Si je n'ai pas un bon café au lait, ou sans me presser avec deux or trois tartines, je ne suis bon à rien."  
(LV, p. 242)

The next paragraph brings up a third interruption when Mathias "tourne la tête vers la vitre..." In this same paragraph we are told of the phenomenon Mathias notices, namely that the fisherman seems to be at the same place as he was when last observed.

This brings us to another segment of direct dialogue, and Mathias worries about having to settle the price of his room.

Then again he looks through the door and notices the



same fisherman at the same place but walking as he saw him last. At this point, Robbe-Grillet -- some critics would say the narrator -- tells us what the phenomenon is really like, without however explaining why this is happening. The rest of page 242 and all of page 243 is filled by a lengthy direct dialogue involving Mathias, the owner of the cafe and the fisherman who has entered the cafe and remains a silent participant in the conversation and whose sole contribution is a faint smile.

If we recapitulate we shall observe that the psychic phenomenon taking place during this unit is also used as a composition device just as the lengthy and precise descriptions of the sides of the pier through geometrical analysis of its various planes was used to separate various units of composition or elements in the psychological portraiture of Mathias.

We shall observe again Robbe-Grillet's dual utilization of "scènes figées" for the objectivation of psychic states and as composition or better punctuation device.

The remainder of the unit on page 244 is done mainly in indirect discourse or as a narrator's summary of the action. In this last section we observe how the author permits his character to regain his mental balance, although a mention by the "aubergiste" of the rope covered with bunker oil will launch Mathias into the next unit in which the young waitress makes her entrance. Here again we have a

transitional paragraph beginning with:

L'aubergiste reproche encore à ces bateaux leur saleté: quoiqu'on passe son temps à les laver à grands seaux d'eau, il reste éternellement des déchets de poissons dans les coins, comme s'ils repoussaient au fur et à mesure. Et il est impossible de toucher un bout de corde sans se couvrir les mains de cambouis. (LV, p. 244)

This paragraph is the bridge between two units of narration; it is also a beautiful example of Robbe-Grillet's mastery as a composer. Here we are tempted to evoke Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and its beautiful leitmotiv of the love theme which haunts the hero in his walk to the gallows. We have stated that Mathias was brought to a state of repose as far as his fears of being discovered were concerned. The unit ends with the "aubergiste" saying that he did not blame Mathias for not wanting to cross in rainy weather on a small craft. The last line reads as follows:

....le voyageur aurait été trempé jusqu'aux os, bien avant d'atteindre le port. (LV, p. 244)

The paragraph just quoted continues, in a way, the conversation of the cafe owner, but it brings back references very significant to Mathias. First we have "leur saleté," second the idea of "laver à grands seaux d'eau," and thirdly the notion of the "déchets de poissons" emphasized by the notation: "~~comme~~ s'ils repoussaient au fur et à mesure." And as if this were not enough, the rope reappears soiled with bunker oil. These are powerful signals to the diseased mind of Mathias. Robbe-Grillet brings back to the fore several powerful generators, the idea of filth -- Mathias' crime;

the idea of "nettoyage" --Mathias' destruction of incriminating clues and objects, like the cigarette butts, and the candy wrappers; the idea that some clues pointing toward his crime might still be in existence or found -- the dead fish which seems to regenerate. But the last generators and most powerful ones are the rope and the bunker oil notations -- the string he has lost, and his dirty fingers after touching the bicycle chain on the cliff. All those generators have a powerful impact upon him.

The next paragraph shows Mathias' reaction; although he realizes that the "aubergiste" did not mean anything by his last remarks, Mathias nonetheless has registered the blow. So we find our hero once more in turmoil in the next episode. Here we must underline the theatrical, or cinematographical, technique of Robbe-Grillet. We visualize Mathias deep in his thoughts, seated at the table, and suddenly the waitress appears from behind the bar carrying a tray with his breakfast. Robbe-Grillet who grew up in the thirties must have consciously or unconsciously remembered the typical scene in a "B" picture when the Pacific island heroine used to appear to the hero carrying a tray of fruits, or again the entrance of Carmen on stage. This will explain this first sentence in which the imagery and even the rhythm of the period gives this impression:

La jeune serveuse fait son entrée, par derrière le bar, marchant à pas menus en portant sur un plateau les ustensiles du petit déjeuner. (LV, p. 245)

This long paragraph, which also intimates that the waitress is more at ease with Mathias and even gives him a faint smile, should be considered as a transition to the next unit of the narration.

But here the transition is accomplished, not in three paragraphs, but through a device used before in this novel, the device of the modulating sentence within a single paragraph:

...après une ultime inspection circulaire de la table servie, elle tend un peu son bras en avant, comme pour déplacer un objet -- la cafetière, peut-être -- mais tout est en ordre. La main est petite, le poignet presque trop fin. La cordelette avait marqué profondément les deux poignets de traces rouges. Elle n'était pas très serrée pourtant. La pénétration dans les chairs devait être due aux efforts inutiles faits pour se libérer... (LV, p. 245)

As Bruce Morrissette has already commented, and a close reading will not fail to reveal, we have here another example of those sentences which can be read as part of two contexts. "La main est petite, le poignet presque trop fin." This description applies not only to the wrists of the waitress of the cafe "A l'Espérance," but also to the body of the victim, Jacqueline. This sentence is so much more interesting because it describes both an object seen by Mathias and an image originating from a subjective state.

The twofold use of this sentence is well in keeping with the marked tendency of the writings of the New Novel School to give images derived from subjective states as much value as, if not more than, images origination from the viewing of reality. It can be said that visions emanating from

affective states and from imagination have as much reality as those produced by life display, or again reality and dreams are equal in producing "la réalité consciente." We are once again brought back to Marcel Proust, and above all to Ferdinand Céline and Voyage au bout de la nuit, in which scenes actually lived by the character establish a continuity with the states of delirium.

The above quoted passage from Le Voyeur presents another particularity, to the extent that the Freudian phenomena of free association, basis of any estology of the subconscious, are neatly outlined.

Now to enter further into this very interesting narrative unit, let's describe briefly the modality of the action. Mathias recreates in his mind the circumstances of the episode on the cliff. This series of "flashbacks" concludes with a development built around the bicycle itself representing a new form of the figure eight. This bicycle also establishes a transition back to the world of reality, of objects, a world in which Mathias feels more at ease.

This bicycle presents many human characteristics or traits -- it is endowed with organs, it reclines on the grassy slope. What happened to Robbe-Grillet's dictum that objects are -- why does Robbe-Grillet use the term "couchée" rather than a neutral locative term? Is it because of a need to humanize that object, or does he have a purpose in mind? We know that Robbe-Grillet leaves very little to chance in his composition; "écriture" is for him close to sacerdotal. In

this instance the author willfully attributes to the bicycle human characteristics because he is going to use it as a surrogate for Jacqueline. But first let's go back to the text:

...Elle, en revanche, se tenait bien sage désormais, les mains cachées derrière le dos--sous elle, au creux de la taille--les jambes allongées et ouvertes, la bouche distendue par le baillon. (LV, p. 246)

We have a geometric description of two triangles joined at the apex, genital center of the human body. This description is reinforced by erotic phallic, vaginal allusions. The two stakes are "tiges pointues dont la tête est recourbée en forme d'anneau." Let's note the term "tige" which in French slang means phallus and the terms "tête" and "anneau" which complete the allusion, or if not, carry enough evocative force to bring in the connotation.

In the next paragraph we notice the sheep "qui décrivent des cercles précipités au bout de leur cords raidis," injecting two images, one vaginal and the other phallic.

Now if we compare the description of the young girl on the ground with the one of the bicycle "couchée [dont] les lignes sont parfaitement pures," one can only conclude that there is an unconscious transposition by Mathias of the feminine and erotic characteristics of the woman to the bicycle. Psychologists call it blocking, a phenomenon which obliterates a painful memory with one less painful. It is the same blocking mechanism which has caused the famous "hole" in the narration. Mathias has suppressed in his mind the horrible

memory of the crime. The "hole" represents blocking during states of consciousness. What is very interesting here is the fact that Mathias also uses blocking during his affective or fantasizing moments.

At this stage of the narrative, Mathias refuses even the remembered vision of the crime in his psychic "rêveries."

In this same paragraph the narrative takes on a neutral and objective tone, rendered through exact notations on the bicycle. Let's examine the following passage:

...Le métal poli ne brille d'aucun éclat intempestif, sans doute à cause de la très fine couche de poussière--à peine une buée--qui s'est déposée au cours du chemin. (IV, p. 246) (We have underlined two words.)

The words "intempestifs" and "buée" seem to be the key elements in this passage. The word "intempestif" brings to mind the idea of violent struggle, and the word "buée" evokes the idea of wetness, which could also be construed as seminal fluid.

The rest of the sentence, "qui s'est déposée au cours du chemin," represents for Mathias an escape from the vision through a return to a time period preceding the act, and out of his subconscious horror. It is to be noted that in general, Robbe-Grillet does not actually describe scenes of violence or erotic scenes in a straightforward manner, but contrives to let the reader perceive the scene by injecting into his text enough motivators to permit him to reconstruct on his own accord the intended scene. To suggest is more effective than describing all the gruesome details.

This description "en creux" of the sexual attack by Mathias, the fact that it remains outside of the narration, has an intended purpose, which is to prevent the novel from acquiring ambivalence, from being in the tradition of the conventional novel and merging phenomenological observation and markings with naturalistic developments as we find in La Nausée<sup>55</sup> by Sartre. On that particular subject Renato Barilli has written:

Les choses vont bien autrement chez Robbe-Grillet; ici en effet, les premières difficultés surmontées, le lecteur peut accepter de s'engager au niveau de Mathias; beaucoup d'indices lui disent sans doute, que ce niveau est inclus dans un cadre pathologique, mais celui-ci n'est pas présent à chaque pas, ne le pose pas vis-à-vis de faits univoques et tranchants qui l'obligent à un choix difficile; au contraire, même les faits plus explicites conséquents à l'état aliéné de Mathias tels que par exemple le viol et le meurtre de la jeune fille surprise dans un coin éloigné de la falaise, sont tenus "hors champ", indirectement évoqués. Ce qui reste au premier plan, ce que le roman me présente en concret à travers son "courant de perceptions", c'est à dire le relief macroscopique accordé à de petits faits, à de petits événements, et à la présence des choses dans leur "être là", me semble parfaitement partageable; je dois même reconnaître que cette aventure perceptive est la même qui remplit pour une grande partie mon existence, que c'est le tissu primaire dont elle est faite.<sup>56</sup>

This careful writing by Robbe-Grillet, the immense care he takes to maintain those aspects of the narration which are observed, excluding his own interpretation and moralization, has produced a work which illustrates the phenomenological

---

<sup>55</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, La Nausée (Paris: Gallimard, 1938) p. 76.

<sup>56</sup>Renato Barilli, "De Sartre à Robbe-Grillet," in Un Nouveau roman?, ed. J. H. Matthews (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1964), pp. 122-23.



precepts Sartre tried to present in La Nausée, but Robbe-Grillet did not fall in the naturalist trap as did Sartre. It is also the difference between eroticism and pornography, between art and poor writing.

The paragraph and the unit is brought to an end through a closure line represented by a sentence, which is also pregnant with psychic content: "Mathias boit tranquillement le rest de café au lait dans son bol." This sentence is rendered so much more effective, due to the fact it is the next sentence after his return to reality with "qui s'est déposée au cours du chemin." But if we study the various elements of the sentence we find the following segments:

- A. Mathias boit tranquillement, return to normalcy after an affective turmoil
- B. le reste de café au lait, this stresses Mathias' purity, as a grown man, in a cafe he drinks "café au lait"
- C. dans son bol, another element stressing his infantile character. Usually in France coffee and milk is served in a steamed glass, or a coffee cup. A "bol" is used at home for breakfast.

But this particular sentence is not an isolated example in the novel. Earlier in the narrative on page 241 we read:

-- Je peux vous servir un café noir en vitesse.>  
Le patron se penche aussitôt vers le placard ouvert, pour y prendre une tasse, mais Mathias l'arrête d'un geste de la main et dit en faisant la moue:

«Si je n'ai pas un bon café au lait, ou sans me presser, avec deux ou trois tartines, je ne suis bon à rien.»  
(LV, pp. 41-42)

It is to be noted that the innkeeper proposes a cup of black coffee. Mathias wants a "bon" coffee and milk. The word "bon" explains the use of the word "bol" on page 246. The innkeeper gave him a bowl of coffee and milk as Mathias used to drink it as a child. Mathias asks also for "deux or trois tartines"; this element emphasizes not only the gluttony of Mathias but also his childishness. A grown man eating three slices of bread and butter and drinking a bowl of coffee and milk in the middle of the morning in a cafe in the harbor district sounds rather strange. If we also refer the reader to all the instances in the text when Mathias is supposed to remember events of his youth, we definitely see that allusions to his puerile nature are quite clear and sustained all through the book. This childish immaturity in a man who is nearing forty seems to justify the theory that Mathias' sadism has deep-rooted causes in his hatred of his mother. This would also confirm Ben F. Stoltzfus' contention that:

...Mathias' psychosexual infantilism has its origins in childhood behavior, as, for instance, the reference to bits of strings used for games with algae and sea-anemones,...<sup>57</sup>

But in the long run the important thing here is not so much the psychological profile of Mathias, but rather the indirect

---

<sup>57</sup>Ben F. Stoltzfus, "A Novel of Objective Subjectivity: Le Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet," PMLA 77, (September 1962): 501.

way Robbe-Grillet expresses those things without ever stating them openly. It must have taken a great deal of writing and rewriting to achieve it.

We have seen how cleverly and subtly Robbe-Grille has formulated the remembrance of the hero's violent act and even implied that the sexual act had been consummated, at least on the part of Mathias by a direct reference to the humid mist covering the frame of the bicycle. This device of linking ambiguous images and notations of acts, which taken at face value have nothing to do with the intended narrative, will be taken up again in La Jalousie and L'Immortelle. Bruce Morrissette has shown how the author proceeds in La Jalousie:

...This hallucinatory, agonized image of the lovers flagrante delicto is then transformed through ambiguous verbal linkings, such as "haste to reach his goal," "Franck accelerates his pace," and "the movements become more violent," into a vision of Franck's car as it crashes against a rigid tree. "Flames" then spring up and "illuminate the thick shrubbery," and in the crackling of the fire the husband hears "the noise of the centipede, once more motionless on the wall," making a noise that "sounds like breathing as much as crackling," or like the sound of "A...'"s brush being stroked down along undone hair. The reference to "A...'"s brushing her hair joins to this complex objectification of tortured jealousy still another thematic scene repeated often in the text.<sup>58</sup>

The treatment of this scene in La Jalousie, intended to objectify the jealousy of the husband, is in direct parallel with the figuration of the rape scene in the mind of Mathias. In La Jalousie the focal point is the burning

---

<sup>58</sup>Bruce Morrissette, Alain Robbe-Grillet (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 27.

of a car; in Le Voyeur the main imagery derives from the bicycle. It is interesting to note that Robbe-Grillet has a tendency to use means of transportation as "generators" rather than items of descriptive developments.

In the same manner, the seduction scene in L'Immortelle is described by means of "ambiguous verbal linkings."

Another composition device which emerges at the end of the unit on the recreation of the assault on the cliff is the framing of several units of narration within the compass of a larger one not as well developed as these inner units. Here we more particularly refer to the reference to the trawler in the harbor making ready to put out to sea. We have seen the importance of this image in bringing to the fore various elements in the narration. First, it is a possible means of escape for Mathias, which he refuses for fear of seeming too eager to leave. Also, it is a source of generators like the filth on board, the rope sticky with black grease, the dead fish, etc. We want also to mention the fact that we see the reappearance of the trawler on page 247. This paragraph ends:

...Malgré la distance on peut lire les chiffres peints en blanc sur la coque. (LV, p. 247)

This last reference to the trawler comes only after the owner of the cafe has once more mentioned the ship and the possibility it could offer Mathias for his return to the mainland. If we examine the text carefully we have the

following sequence: First, the mention of the trawler in the harbor, then the conversation with the "aubergiste" and "the scene figée," followed by the appearance of the waitress which brings in the traumatic state of the recreation of the scene on the cliff. The "aubergiste" alludes again to the trawler, and a final paragraph tells of the trawler heading out of the harbor.

In regard to the many passages which repeat the same scene, sometimes in exactly the same words, and the many sentences which are carbon copies of each other, it seems that Robbe-Grillet, by juxtaposing independent verbal blocks is using the old medieval techniques of paratactic construction. The parataxis was widely used in the Alexis and in the Chanson de Roland, and Le Voyeur presents many instances of this paratactic formulation. The best example, of course, is found on page 40 where Mathias three times seems to approach a house where he wants to display and sell his watches, and we note three examples of the same sentence in another instance:

--On a du mal, avec les enfants>>, dit le voyageur.  
(LV, p. 111)

<<Oui, on a bien du mal avec les enfants>>, répéta Mathias. (LV, p. 118)

<<On a du mal avec les enfants.>> (LV, p. 141)

Up to now we have been dealing with narrative elements, imagery, style, and structures. We have emphasized one character, Mathias, and compared his behavior with

characters of the past in literature, mainly Orestes and Malraux's heroes. It seems fitting at this juncture to comment briefly on the names of two characters in Le Voyeur, Julien and Jacqueline, and to Violette who can be understood as Jacqueline's other figuration.

When it comes to Julien, we have been struck by the fact that Stendahl used the name in Le Rouge et le Noir, and Flaubert wrote a tale entitled La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier; and although Julien is not the main character of Le Voyeur he has been found to be the voyeur by a few critics. But what seems to be more significant is the fact that when analysing the characteristics which the protagonists of those three novels have in common, we find that in Stendahl's work Julien is devoured by the will to succeed at any price, a representative of the energetic hero devoid of scruples. In the legend of Saint Julian we find the uncontrollable impulse, a psychotic compulsion toward violence and cruelty. The character of Mathias contains these two elements, intense wish for success coupled with psychotic cruelty. Because Julien has observed or seen Mathias, it seems as if he could be the embodiment of both Julian Sorel and Saint Julian watching themselves act in Mathias.

Many writers have created characters or at least have used names of characters based on those of other works. In this novel we have the name of Jacqueline used for the tortured victim of our sadist. In La maison de rendez-vous

the name is used again for a young woman who will be sadistically used. In Le Voyeur we are not at all surprised to see the name Violette used as nominant for a victim of sadism; most readers will readily establish the relationship between Violette and viol, meaning rape in French.

In the last analysis we discover that Robbe-Grillet has accumulated an enormous amount of descriptive material in order to tell a very simple anecdote and to develop through imagery the psychosexual infantilism of Mathias' state of mind. Some readers might be tempted to decry this characteristic. Why use so much material to build such a small construction? But here lies the crux of the matter. The important element is not to be found in the completed building, but in the planning, the organization of the materials and the workmanship in the finished product. The building is, in a way, just an excuse for such activities, the anecdote counts for very little in regard to the "écriture" and the establishment of objectified subjectivity. It seems that men of the past, like the ancient Chinese and Egyptians, would readily understand what Robbe-Grillet's intentions were, they who spent so much time in fitting the dressed stones in the Great Wall and the Pyramids, and who lavished so much care and time on an object as insignificant as a brooch. Here again we seem to detect Robbe-Grillet's irony directed at a utilitarian society which builds its pyramids for a price, for a function, but at the expense of its artistic and humanistic qualities, a society which looks upon work as a means to produce, a

society which has lost respect for the craftsman, whose aspirations are to be rational, utilitarian, forever fascinated with the future, ignoring the present.

We could not close this chapter on the structure of Le Voyeur without quoting from Betty Rahv when she writes as a conclusion to her incisive and lavishly documented analysis of the fictional techniques and basic characteristics of the New Novel:

The French novel from Sartre to Robbe-Grillet, then, has evolved from simplicity and clarity to complexity and ambiguity; from a clear temporality of the récit to a spatial series of scenes; from prosaic and narrative to poetic and theatrical modes; from the socially committed to the esthetically challenging pose; and finally from the être to the paraître.<sup>59</sup>

And Betty Rahv further emphasizes these elements by quoting John Sturrock:

What is at stake at present is the authority of a liar in a society swarming with people accepted and even revered for telling the truth.<sup>60</sup>

Although Mathias is not the liar just mentioned, it remains nevertheless that Robbe-Grillet assumed this role for over 250 pages to the delight of the reader-participant.

---

<sup>59</sup>Betty T. Rahv, From Sartre to the New Novel (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), p. 33.

<sup>60</sup>John Sturrock, The French New Novel (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 40.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The writings of Robbe-Grillet are posited on the assumption that positive truth is a very dubious concept, due to the inability of man's intellect ever to achieve a complete and rational picture of reality. Like the Sceptics, he feels that man can only ascertain the appearance of the world, not the world in its intrinsic nature, meaning, and philosophical or theological destiny. Unable to understand, explain or predict nature, its creation and ultimate purpose, Robbe-Grillet localizes his research upon the only seemingly understandable aspect of it, its physical, geometrical manifestations in a juxtaposition of contradictory planes whose reality is enhanced by overly exact measurements of surfaces and angles to the detriment of temporal elements; whose chronology is no longer reckoned by the rotation of the second hand on a watch, but through unceasing projections on the retinal surface of the intellect of the reader of events and descriptive items tabulated outside of any kind of temporal sequence. Any attempt at understanding the Robbe-Grilletan kaleidoscopy is akin to sifting through piles of photographic posi-

tives trying to classify and organize them in a semblance of topical and chronological order to place them in an album. Such an experience, if at all attempted, leaves the collator with a strong linear impression of the subject in a limbo like centrifugal motion of the various components, similar to those snow scene landscapes enclosed in a plastic ball. But whereas the lines of the painted background are neatly defined when the snow storm settles, in Robbe-Grillet's descriptive sequences the image never settles and the real fictional landscape never appears, unless the reader, cutting away from the fiction, lets those elements organize in his mind into a new reality which is neither Robbe-Grillet's nor the fictional intended one, but a genuine and personal reality which exists only for one person, the reader. This explains why so many people have put forward so many contradictory interpretations concerning these fictional structures.

This does not ~~imply~~ that Robbe-Grillet's themes and images do not strike the imagination in a forceful fashion; "au contraire," the imprint is powerful, even overwhelming at times, but the design is never the same twice in a row. And every reading and rereading stirs the imagination anew toward fresh visions, interpretations, and a renewed enjoyment of creativity on the part of the reader, who becomes the spinner of his own reality, individual and unique.

This is one of the main contributions of Robbe-Grillet

to literature, books which can be read several times, and like Montaigne's Essays or El Quijote, bring new challenges, new perspectives and new pleasures with each perusal.

In his essay "Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui," Robbe-Grillet states that in L'Année dernière à Marienbad the main characters neither have a past or a future:

... Cet homme, cette femme commencent à exister seulement lorsqu'ils apparaissent sur l'écran pour la première fois; auparavant ils ne sont rien; et, une fois la projection terminée, ils ne sont plus rien de nouveau. Leur existence ne dure que ce que dure le film. Il ne peut y avoir de réalité en dehors des images que l'on voit, des paroles que l'on entend.<sup>61</sup>

And he concludes further on:

Encore une fois, l'oeuvre n'est pas un témoignage sur une réalité extérieure, mais elle est à elle-même sa propre réalité. Aussi est-il impossible à l'auteur de rassurer tel spectateur inquiet sur le sort des héros après le mot "fin". Après le mot "fin", il ne se passe rien du tout.<sup>62</sup>

In order to reinforce his position he again states in the same essay, taking his novel La Jalousie as an example:

... Celui-ci n'était pas une narration emmêlée d'une anecdote simple extérieure à lui, mais ici encore le déroulement même d'une histoire qui n'avait d'autre réalité que celle du récit, déroulement qui s'opérait nulle part ailleurs que dans la tête du narrateur invisible, c'est-à-dire de l'écrivain, et du lecteur.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un Nouveau Roman (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 131.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

In view of such affirmations, it is fitting to wonder how these statements apply to the hero of Le Voyeur. Would it be permissible to research the novel in order to show that Mathias represents a striking example of a man haunted by the fear of failure, steadfastly trying to succeed, and to explain which previous experiences could have led to this neurotic craving for success? The answer must be in the affirmative. Robbe-Grillet has said that authors should help the critic by being a theoretician of the novel, and contribute "leur contribution 'théorique' à cette recherche."<sup>64</sup> But he also stated that the writing of a novel is a personal experience, an exercise in "écriture" which calls for complete freedom, even from the theories the author might have concerning his art. Writer and theorist are not necessarily one, and the literary task does not have to verify the theories.

So we can accept the idea of Mathias<sup>1</sup> having no past and no future, only a present, the present of the reader, but a close examination of the text reveals that it is easier to affirm that he has no future within the confines of the book, although he might have one or several in the imagination of the reader-participant long after

---

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

the "durée de lecture" has come to an end; but to say that Mathias has no past, only a "présent de l'indicatif" duration of the reader-book relationship seems harder to accept in view of the numerous clues and bits of information the reader receives on Mathias' past, either through indirect discourses or the author's stated point of view. A similar situation does not seem to exist in La Jalousie and Dans le labyrinthe, and if it does exist in Les Goumes, it is to a lesser degree when we learn that Wallas could be the son of Dupont and Mme Evelyne Dupont. But the fact that Wallas could have known his parents does not really establish a past upon which the imagination of the reader can construct an "anecdote."

In Le Voyeur, on the other hand, through the faulty memory or the various fantasies and "rêveries" of Mathias, we learn, bit by bit, a large amount of details about his past; and this would allow the reader-critic to speculate on those antecedents in order to understand, if not explain, Mathias' strange behavior and psychotic symptoms.

As the reader enters the uncommon world of Mathias, as he tries to orient himself, not only in the physical universe of the novel, but also in the mental sphere of the hero, he is slowly, although imperfectly, made aware of Mathias' past life on the continent and on the island. From those thin clues, disseminated in the narration, we can establish a possible history for Mathias. As a child he must

have been subjected to or become involved with environmental stimuli which intermittently dot his fantasies and at times his conscious behavior. As the author-narrator-reader intellectual creation unfolds, within the time confine of several hours, several days, or even years, a creation which does not always require on the part of the reader-participant the stimuli of the text, these factors become more and more evident.

As John Gassner appropriately states while discussing Eugene O'Neill's schematization and lack of totality in his characters:

...In other words, the activity of his characters produces the illusion of life. People who allow their neurosis or their abstruse quest to lead them into physical crime and violent expiation are too immediate to be dismissed as the automata they may be. A Neurosis may be an abstraction, but a neurotic who commits a murder or becomes otherwise troublesome becomes a reality; he is too close to permit the comfort of merely rationalizing about him...<sup>65</sup>

In the light of this statement the character of Mathias should impose itself upon the reader with force and violence; but the truth of the matter is that nowhere in the fiction does Mathias overwhelm the reader with his personality or even his crime. We remain the observer, for that matter the "voyeur", in this narrative. Captive of the landscape and the object of the fiction, the attention of the reader leads him into an intense intellectual effort which restrains him from looking upon Mathias as a complete character with a history and longevity.

---

<sup>65</sup>John Gassner, Masters of Drama, (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 644.

In other words, the reality of Mathias is more objectal than antropomorphic, whose consciousness ceaselessly interacts with the author's and reader's to produce a phenomenological interplay in which "ne brille plus qu'une lumière froide, celle d'intelligences plus habiles à décomposer les rapports humains qu'à donner l'illusion de la vie..."<sup>66</sup> Pierre De Boisdeffre characterized the treatment of fictional characters by some post World War II novelists.

Several critics have pointed out the similarity of such works with abstract paintings. Whereas conventional novels place characters in locales in a definite and detailed technique in order to lead the reader toward accepting the fable as a true depiction of reality, to be embraced as a mirror image of that reality, in so doing curtailing and frustrating the imaginative power of the reader -- here we think back to the naturalist novel-- Robbe-Grillet's fictions are kaleidoscopic and create their own reality for a public which has been trained by Proust, Joyce, and Céline to endow imagined reality with equal or even more reality than actuality. In this regard, this technique is not very much removed from the thought process of the great mystics of the past who tried to create their own reality and vicarious experiences within the confines of a monastic cell, which in this context is what takes place in the bedroom of Dans le labyrinthe.

To the often-voiced criticism that Robbe-Grillet

---

<sup>66</sup>Pierre De Boisdeffre, Dictionnaire de la littérature contemporaine, (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963), p. 36.

dissolves the human elements or reduces them to mere optical outlines, this writer would like to contend that in Le Voyeur, when all has been said, examined, classified, measured, reconstructed or interpreted, the importance of objects fades, the contours become hazy, only a sketchy impression of the objectal landscape remains, but the unwonted figure of Mathias survives, not as a physical character with distinctive features, but as a human entity, a mind or a consciousness at work. After every door knob, every plane surface, every section of harbor pier has been described horizontally and vertically, once the last brad on the brief case has been accounted for, the object as a physical reality vanishes, having been destroyed by the very descriptive process which had brought it into focus in the first place. The object as an element of narration drifts away out of the reader's consciousness as so many pieces of flotsam on the blackish water of a sleepy harbor. And if the reader remembers them, it is as objects in general whose individual characteristics have been destroyed by a superabundance of descriptive elements, repeated ad infinitum.

But the human frailty and helplessness of Mathias remains, haunting and obsessing like a bad dream. Those attributes which have set him apart from nature, even from his own physical nature, remain forever in the intellect of the reader. Although we don't even know the color of his eyes or of his hair, we have the deep feeling that we have met him, lived with him, watched him, and even suffered with



him, because Mathias suffers in Le Voyeur, not so much from physical pain, but from the torments of the damned, the torment of a Kafka or a Dostoevski, although he has not been endowed with a moral conscience, but suffering, nonetheless, as he grapples with his frustrations and his mathematical obsession for logic and rationality. The relief comes only at the end of the novel as Mathias leaves the harbor on his way back to the mainland, as he passes near the buoy clanking its chain and tolling its bell, its woman-like shape dancing in the surf, the ultimate nagging of the mother figure which haunts him. And as Mathias stands looking at that last symbol of his curse, we know he has stopped living as a character. Long before this last taunt to him, he had regained his composure. We recall that we had left Mathias the day before showing his watches to a woman customer, a scene underlined by the minute and precise descriptions of the hand of Mathias holding the display card with the watches. At that precise moment Mathias, as a consciousness, no longer exists; all we have is a machine, a robot which tries to sell watches. We no longer partake of his desires, of his sexual arousals, of his obstinate quest for the rational and methodical. He accomplishes only gestures, we have lost him, he has already left the island, his part has been played. Mathias becomes a non-person. In the last three pages of the novel only one sentence points out that any mental activity is still going on in Mathias' mind, and

characteristically enough it is the very last sentence of the novel:

Le voyageur pensa, de nouveau, que dans trois heures il serait arrivé à terre. (LV, p. 255)

Notably enough, Robbe-Grillet did not call him Mathias, but "le voyageur."

Robbe-Grillet is careful to let us know that the other passengers are still mentally tied to the island:

La plupart d'entre eux [les passagers] ne s'étaient pas encore installés pour la traversée; ... d'autres se tenaient le long de la coursive, du côté de la digue, voulant adresser un ultime geste d'adieu aux familles demeurées à terre. (LV, p. 253)

As for Mathias "il s'acouda lui-même au plat-bord et regarda l'eau" (LV, p. 254). Here we almost have a replay of the opening of the novel, including the sound of the ship whistle and the eye which measures the distance between the pier and the hull of the ship. The first paragraph of page 255 could have been the last of the novel. But here again Robbe-Grillet uses a device he is very fond of, namely repetition of a key sentence, in the same exact form each time. The last two sentences of this first paragraph: "Il pensa que dans trois heures, il serait à terre. Il recula ... à ses pieds." could have been the last of the novel, but Robbe-Grillet very cleverly inserts two paragraphs describing the buoy as a feminine figure in its black dress: "Toute cette construction était peinte d'une belle couleur noire." (LV, p. 255)

The description of the buoy plays a dual role. First

it is used as a full stop for the novel. We are completely outside of the island and the narrative scene, since this buoy was never described at the opening of the novel which begins as the ship is nearing the dock. This description coming after references to the ship whistle and the attitudes of the passengers on board -- a replay of the opening of the novel -- brings to a close the geography of the book. The second use of the buoy has already been mentioned: it is the last reference to the mother image in the novel.

The description of the buoy covers two paragraphs which are framed on the one hand by the following sentence which is found in the first paragraph at the top of page 255:

...Il pensa que dans trois heures, environ, il serait à terre. (LV, p. 255)

and the last sentence which repeats it:

Le voyageur pensa, de nouveau, que dans trois heures il serait arrivé à terre. (LV, p. 255)

It is to be noted also that the second paragraph describing the buoy ends with suspension marks in order to indicate that the motion and the taunting is continuing.

Once the last sentence has fallen like a theater curtain, the narration is finished, the island has disappeared, Mathias has ceased to exist. If we want to resurrect him we must follow Robbe-Grillet's advice given about L'Année dernière à Marienbad, which is to start reading the novel all over again.

Perhaps according to Robbe-Grillet the life of the character stops at this point, but the memory of the human being, Mathias, will forever linger in the minds of attentive readers, not as a type like Grandet, who after all never comes to life as a human being with an inner life of his own, but remains in the memory of the reader as a cartoon by Daumier. If the reader walks the streets of Saumur and enters the house of Grandet during the relatively brief time it takes to read Eugenie Grandet, the reader of Le Voyeur receives a more penetrating impression of the little harbor town and of the countryside from the extended reading this novel requires; the landscape representation is achieved not because of an exact description of the locale but because of the extensive mental labor supplied by the reader as he obstinately tries to understand and figure out things, and in the long run creates the locale himself by piecing together bits of aforesaid landscape and locales under the constant prodding and enticement of Robbe-Grillet's "écriture." We wonder how many islands have been created in the imagination of the readers of Robbe-Grillet. Saumur, frozen in its true reality and the Balzacian realist prose, cannot exist as intensely as this non-island can in the imagination of so many author-readers.

The facts are that Balzacian reality has its beauty and effectiveness, but Robbe-Grillet's and the reader's reality has a more intense life. Balzac's reality remains as

an external type of reality whereas Robbe-Grillet's reader's reality acquires an inner life of its own, which is unceasingly renewed and present.

At this juncture we can say that we understand what Robbe-Grillet means when he said that the reality he is concerned with is the reality within the work, not outside.

A conclusion which emerges after close scrutiny of Robbe-Grillet's work is that such a novelistic approach could lead to a rebirth of spirituality in literature. Because objects have been dehumanized and bear no more relationship or sense of the tragic, as the author would say, with the intellect of man, the thought process has to turn inward and concentrate its impact upon a search for the solution of the riddle of man instead of dissipating its energy and talent in a vain attempt to relate to a bountiful or cruel nature. Man's idea of beauty will also be reinforced because signals like clothings, perfumes, sunrises, and moonlights will have been cleansed of their humanistic connotations. Love and hatred will no longer be dependent upon exterior appearances, but surge from spiritual relationships between intellects. Man's task will be then to recreate himself as a spirit and so doing will come nearer to the often called God, Buddha, or Allan.

Robbe-Grillet has said in Pour un nouveau roman:

Enregistrer la distance entre l'objet et moi ... et les distances de objets entre eux ... cela revient

à établir que les choses sont là.<sup>67</sup>

Robbe-Grillet excludes any type of pananthropism from his novelistic world when he affirms: "Les choses sont les choses, et l'homme n'est que l'homme".<sup>68</sup>

But what of the use of symbols as the spot left on the wall by the centipede in La Jalousie, or the figure eight in Le Voyeur and the eraser in Les Gommes, do they not imply a relationship between man and objects? Not necessarily; they are used only to focus the thought of the characters involved upon spiritual relationships and meanings outside of the conventionality of existing language and the misleading actions of the anthropomorphic context of words. When this stage is achieved man will no longer need his body to express himself or to understand other beings. Eyes will be used only to guide the body and no longer to express sentiments, as in Racine, or courtship in the streets of Seville. The understanding of the present, actual world, will consist in strictly private and egocentric cogitations. Man will become isolated from other beings, who will become mere objects to the observer, and this spirituality will be regressive and tend to become primitive of the kind advocated by Marguerite Duras in her work, Détruire dit-elle. This may seem extreme, but these are the only conclusions one can

---

<sup>67</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 65.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

deduce from the study of Le Voyeur and La Jalousie. The consciousness of the hero is all wrapped up in itself. Mathias, like the husband in La Jalousie, lives in a world apart, spiritual because it owes little to human or objective reality. They are in a state of limbo. Should we see here a further satire of contemporary life when man isolates himself more and more from his fellow men in a society ruled by computers and frozen dinners? It is quite possible today to be sustained, fed, and clothed in our society and to live outside of it in a world of one's own, completely detached from the turmoils of life. Although this state of things is difficult to achieve completely, the possibility exists for man to lock himself up in his own consciousness and be a stranger among his peers. A century ago, such behavior would have been stigmatized as insanity; today it is a real possibility. In final conclusion this is the moral we could glean from reading Robbe-Grillet's books: humanity is in danger of destroying itself, not through an atomic explosion but through the refusal to participate in an organized, though imperfect community, in order to become so spiritual and intellectual that bodily functions will be atrophied and rendered nil. We would hate to see humanity go back to the "forest" enticed by the urging of Marguerite Duras of " -- Détruire, dit-elle." 69

---

<sup>69</sup>Duras, Détruire, dit-elle, p. 34.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Alter, Jean. La Vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966.
- Barthes, Roland. Preface to Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet, by Bruce Morrissette. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963.
- Butor, Michel. Répertoire I. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1960.
- Clouard, Henri, and Leggewie, Robert. French Writers of Today. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- De Boisdeffre, Pierre. Dictionnaire de la littérature contemporaine. Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963.
- Döblin, Alfred. Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf. Berlin, 1960.
- Doubrovsky, Serge. New Criticism in France. Translated by Derek Coltman. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Duras, Marguerite. Détruire, dit-elle. Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Destroy, She Said. Translated by Barbara Bray. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970.
- Frisch, Max. Homo Faber. Frankfurt A. M.; 1957.
- Goldmann, Lucien. Pour une sociologie du roman. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964.



- Gassner, John. Masters of Drama. New York: Random House, 1963.
- Joyce, James. Ulysses. New York: Random House, 1961.
- La Fontaine. Fables. Edited by René Radouant. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1929.
- Langgasser, Elisabeth. Markische Argonautenfahrt. Hamburg; 1959.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. The Savage Mind. Translated by George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Mandel, Siegfried. Contemporary European Novelists. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968.
- Mauriac, Claude. L'Alittérature contemporaine. Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1958.
- Miesch, Jean. Robbe-Grillet. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965.
- Morrisette, Bruce. Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Introductory Essay to Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet, Jealousy and In the Labyrinth. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Alain Robbe-Grillet. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.
- Picard, Raymond. Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture. Paris: Pauvert, 1965.
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain. Les Gommés. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Le Voyeur. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. La Jalousie. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Dans le labyrinthe. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1959.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. L'Année dernière à Marienbad. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. Instantanés. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. Pour un Nouveau Roman. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. L'Immortelle. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. La Maison de rendez-vous. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. Projet pour une révolution à New York. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1971.

Rahv, Betty. From Sartre to the New Novel. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennika Press, 1974.

Sarason, Irvin. Abnormal Psychology. New York: Appleton-Century-Groft, 1972.

Sartre, Jean Paul. La Nausée. Paris: Gallimard, 1938.

\_\_\_\_\_. Théâtre. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

#### Articles

Barilli, Renato. "De Sartre à Robbe-Grillet." In Un Nouveau roman?, pp. 153-66. Edited by J. H. Matthews. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1964.

Brooke-Rose, Christine, "L'Imagination baroque de Robbe-Grillet." In Un Nouveau roman?, Edited by J. H. Matthews. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1964.

Hahn, Bruno. "Plan du labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet." Les Temps Modernes (July, 1960): 150-68.

Stoltzfus, Ben F. "Camus et Robbe-Grillet: la connivence tragique de L'Etranger et du Voyeur." In Un Nouveau roman?, Edited by J. H. Matthews. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1964.

Interview (Published)

Rivette, Jacques, and Narboni, Jean. "An Interview with Marguerite Duras." In Marguerite Duras. Destroy, She Said, pp. 91-133. Translated by Helen Lane Cumberford. New York: Grove Press, 1970.

Interview (Unpublished)

Bishop, Thomas. "Interview with Robbe-Grillet." In The Novel and Theater of Contemporary France, Alain Robbe-Grillet's Project for a Revolution in New York, (Concluded): Where Does French Literature Go From Here?. New York: New York University, Sunrise Semester, CBS, Oklahoma City Channel 9, 5:30 a. m., Central Standard Time, January 8, 1977.