

Jealousy

A. Robbe-Grillet

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This is experimental writing. It is an exercise in objectivity, or at least ostensibly so. It tries to evoke a scene, an unfolding narrative, simply by recording what meets the eye, no matter how trivial. It is realism *par excellence* and in the process making this real world of our senses strange. Ultrarealism is the accepted terminology. By the systematic documentation of a camera it attempts to appropriate the world. It does not work, or as far as it works, it makes for estrangement. The visual world cannot really be caught on paper, pixel by pixel, language simply does not work that way. A photograph is pixel by pixel, then the mind has to reconstruct what is being shown, to make sense. The written description needs to go at least halfway in interpreting the visual scene. While in a picture, you may or may not choose to make out a trapezoid, in the written word, or at least as it is laid down by Robbe-Grillet, you have no choice, a trapezoid is pointed out to you, you have no choice. The author is telling you what to see, what to make of it. Reading the story is both mesmerizing and tedious. Mesmerizing as you may choose to be caught up in the meticulous description, tedious because the description is indeed meticulous. You feel that if you close your eyes and read on you will probably not miss very much. Still even if the author puts the visual word down your eyes with very little choice, and reading the story makes you feel that you are watching an actual movie, with the camera slowly making its rounds, there is plenty of opportunity for the reader to assemble those pixels of written data and make up something larger, understanding on an even higher level of abstraction. This might very well be intentional. Simulating the visual construction we all engage in when making sense of visual data in a story. You are not told what it all means, but you have to reconstruct it from fragments. The story is a succession of fragments and by retreating back, as you do while looking at an impressionistic or pointillistic painting, it all starts to make sense, disparate fragments blend together into something not present at the local level.

So what is all about? The title if anything should give you a clue. A husband silently and obsessively watching his wife with a neighbor on the plantation. The wife and the neighbor seem to share an intimacy, be it only of a book they have both read, or trips together to the port. But those visits are a bit too frequent, and last too long, sometimes even overnight, and there is too much of an easy intimacy, always sitting together, always having their heads so close. And all that talk of the man, focused on driving and engines. This preoccupation of mobile power, of thrusting ahead, of being frustrated, of getting stuck. Is that not sexual, a metaphor for what is really going on? And the wife, the cold woman, always looking for ice for that drink. Her hair always being combed, unruly, overflowing, curling in the most complicated patterns, forced into knots and braids, then unknit and loosened. A constant repetition of invitation and consummation.

There is no real narrative, time does not have an arrow. It is hard to know what comes before and what comes after. Preparations tending to be made after the event.

Some things happening over and over again, such as the squashing of the centipede. Then there is a spot of red, maybe blood. Could the wife have been killed? It turns out that this blot has been there all the time. A bloody herring. It all peters out, in the end nothing has happened, come to a conclusion, it just goes on and on. The eternal present, that just revolves without getting ahead. The eternal present which allows you to marvel at the strangeness that is our world, our reality, because it is a well-known fact that if you stare at something long enough, even if it is familiar to you, in the end it becomes really strange. In order to make the world strange, you have to look at it a long, long time. Every aspect of it, and time better not enter be kept out. There can be no time, only a now, an ever present now. Now, now, now. Everything frozen, nothing happening, only the being of the strangest of worlds.

Why indeed is there something rather than nothing?

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