

PETER WEISS AND ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET:
SOME ASPECTS OF COMPARISON

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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ELIZABETH G. HESSON

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Peter Weiss and Alain Robbe-Grillet:

Some Aspects of Comparison



Elizabeth C. Hesson, M.A. (Glas.)

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the degree of

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This thesis has been examined and approved by:

In this thesis it is proposed to consider how far the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Peter Weiss are akin to one another; whether thematic or structural resemblances are fortuitous or are to be expected, given each author's personality, "Weltanschauung" and conception of the artist's métier. There can be no question of influence or interaction, but as our investigation proceeds quite a startling rapport between the works of the two authors will emerge.

In an introductory chapter an attempt will be made to establish a working definition of the "nouveau roman" against which to measure Weiss's works. To enable the formulation of the terms of this definition one of Robbe-Grillet's early works, La Jalousie (1957), will be studied in detail and reference will also be made to his critical writings - mainly those contained in Pour un nouveau roman. In a similarly close fashion Weiss's early prose-work Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers (1953), will be examined and assessed to show to what extent Weiss might be said to be writing a "nouveau roman".

From this preliminary analysis of one specific work of each of the two authors, the two following topics will be developed at greater length, with reference to the authors' other works: the use of interior duplication and the question of narrative mode.

In conclusion, two other topics will be discussed, which may not have emerged with too great clarity in the main body

of the thesis, but which cannot be disregarded. The first of these is the problem of "engagement", linked with which is the question of how contemporary society is presented in the works of both authors. The second is the question of their relationship to Franz Kafka and the extent to which one might speak of his influence on their work.

PREFACE

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking Dr. John C. Hammer for acting as the supervisor of my thesis and for the valuable assistance which he gave me. I should also like to thank my husband for his meticulous proof-reading of both the first draft and the final version of the thesis.

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IN PARENTHESIS ARE THOSE USED IN THE FOOTNOTES OF THE THESIS.

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<u>Le Voyeur</u> , 1955.	: (<u>Voyeur</u>)
<u>La Jalousie</u> , 1957.	: (<u>Jalousie</u>)
<u>Dans le Labyrinthe</u> , 1959.	: (<u>Labyrinthe</u>)
<u>L'Année dernière à Marienbad</u> , 1961.	: (<u>Marienbad</u>)
<u>Instantanés</u> , 1962.	: (<u>Instantanés</u>)
<u>Pour un nouveau roman</u> , 1963.	: (<u>PNR</u>)
<u>L'Immortelle</u> , 1963.	: (<u>Immortelle</u>)
<u>La Maison de rendez-vous</u> , 1965.	: (<u>MR</u>)
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PETER WEISS: Publisher, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.

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- Die Ermittlung, Uraufführung 1965.
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"Dies hier ist Bühne", in Karl-Heinz Braun, Materialien zu Peter Weiss' "Marat/Sade", (232), 1967, pp. 91 - 92.

"Rede in Englischer Sprache gehalten an der Princeton University USA am 25. April 1966, unter dem Titel: 'I come out of my hiding place'", in Volker Canaris, Über Peter Weiss, (408), 1970, pp. 9 - 14.

CHAPTER I

La Jalousie and Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers

In Brief Chronicles, discussing Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers, Martin Esslin says:

"What is remarkable about this short but brilliantly conceived and written narrative, is that it anticipates the French 'nouveau roman' while following some of its most fundamental precepts. It is as though Peter Weiss from his own very personal experience had invented the 'nouveau roman' for himself independently of Robbe-Grillet and Butor." ¹

This thesis proposes to make a detailed study of this work of Weiss's (written in 1952 but not published until 1960) and to compare it with a similarly detailed study of Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie (published in 1957), in order to show to what extent Esslin's assertions are justified. Before doing so, an attempt must be made to establish just what are the "most fundamental precepts" of the "nouveau roman". Here I shall limit myself to Robbe-Grillet's theories, which differ in many respects from those of Butor and other "nouveaux romanciers". Whilst disclaiming that he is a "théoricien du roman" ², Robbe-Grillet has not been reluctant to express his views on various aspects of the novel, and on the task of literary creation. Although these views

¹Martin Esslin, Brief Chronicles (Temple Smith, London, 1970), p. 184.

²PNR, p. 7

are of vital importance to us in establishing a set of criteria against which to measure Weiss's work, they are not necessarily always applicable to Robbe-Grillet's own works, and indeed, he often seems to diverge in practice from the tenets of his theory:

"Qu'il n'y ait qu'un parallélisme assez lâche entre les trois romans que j'ai publiés à ce jour [i.e. Les Gommès, La Jalousie and Le Voyeur] et mes vues théoriques sur un roman futur, c'est l'évidence même." ³

He has on various occasions stressed the fact that the works came first, and were not written merely to illustrate or support his theories:

"Pour chacun de ces livres [i.e. Un Régicide, Les Gommès and Le Voyeur] j'obéis à un plan rigoureusement médité, mais absolument pas à une théorie littéraire. La théorie n'a été formulée qu'après." ⁴

And again in an interview of a later date:

JJB: "Vous n'avez pas non plus commencé par la critique. Vous avez commencé directement par le roman."

R-G: "Oui. C'est aussi une chose sur laquelle on se trompe souvent. On s' imagine que j'ai commencé par des textes théoriques sur le roman et ensuite des romans. Non, j'avais déjà écrit deux romans et même trois quand je me suis risqué à faire paraître mes réflexions sur la littérature." ⁵

Nevertheless, bearing such reservations in mind, it will considerably expedite our task if we can make reference to works such as Pour un nouveau roman.

³Ibid., p. 46

⁴André Bourin, "Techniciens du roman," Nouvelles Littéraires, 22.1.59, p. 1.

⁵J.J. Brochier, "Entretien avec Alain Robbe-Grillet," Magazine Littéraire, No. 6, April, 1967, p. 10.

One belief, to which Robbe-Grillet has remained constant, is that there is no room in the contemporary novel for what he calls, "la sacro-sainte analyse psychologique".⁶ As he points out in an interview, he does not reject psychology per se, but only the desire on the part of the writer to apply psychological analysis to explain character and motivation:

B : "Au nom de ce réalisme, vous bannissez toute psychologie..."

R-G: "Toute analyse psychologique, qui n'est pas la même chose!"⁷

However, the question of Robbe-Grillet's attitude to psychology is more complex than this seeming dismissal of it from his works would indicate. As Bruce Morrisette points out:

"... chaque roman de Robbe-Grillet est organisé ... autour d'un thème psychologique qui fonctionne d'une façon tacite pour supporter l'unité de l'oeuvre."⁸

Les Gommages centres on Wallas' Oedipus complex, in Le Voyeur Mathias is a sexual deviate, in La Jalousie the husband is suffering from a paranoiac obsession, and in Dans le Labyrinthe the soldier appears to be suffering from amnesia. Thus, while it is true to say that Robbe-Grillet is not writing a psychological novel in which an omniscient narra-

⁶PNR, p. 15

⁷Bourin, "Techniciens", p. 1.

⁸Bruce Morrisette, "Vers une écriture objective: Le Voyeur d'Alain Robbe-Grillet," Saggi e Ricerche di Letteratura Francese, II, (1961), p. 290.

tor applies Freudian principles to explain why a character acts in a certain way, he is nevertheless presenting us with what one might term a case-history, and is inviting us, the readers, to adopt a psycho-analytical approach to it.

Weiss also appears to reject psychological analysis, but for a different reason. Discussing Ingmar Bergman's production of Die Ermittlung, he said that it was a marvelous conception:

"... but we were working with opposite aims. Bergman is interested in the psychological relationships of characters, and this seems irrelevant to me to-day. I'm concerned with their social functions." ⁹

Nonetheless, in Weiss's works a similar situation arises to that found in Robbe-Grillet's works. His choice of the mad-house setting in Marat/Sade, Hölderlin's apparent lapsing into madness to escape the everyday world in which he is misunderstood, the various abnormalities of the characters in Der Schatten and Das Gespräch - all these indicate a pre-occupation with psychological interests. He may be more interested in the social function of his characters, but this does not preclude him from exhibiting a predilection for peculiarities in their psychological make-up.

Linked to the problem of the psychological content of Robbe-Grillet's works is his rejection of "les vieux mythes de la profondeur". ¹⁰ Things are simply there; there are no

⁹Eugene Archer, "Interview with Peter Weiss," New York Times, 9.4.67, II, 5.

¹⁰PNR, p. 22

psychological depths which must be plumbed.

This does not imply that he is rejecting myth as a basis on which to build his novels. Indeed, many of his characters would appear to be mythomaniacs! His first novel, Les Gommés, is based on the Oedipus legend, and Alter suggests that it is possible to detect the Andromeda legend in Le Voyeur.¹¹ Robbe-Grillet himself speaks of the "thèmes générateurs" which he finds in the mythology of everyday life:

"Je les prends volontiers, quant à moi, parmi le matériau mythologique qui m'environne dans mon existence quotidienne." ¹²

Weiss does not have this penchant for mythology, but he does employ the biblical story of the Prodigal Son on several occasions.

For Robbe-Grillet the contemporary novel is a "recherche", an act of creation which is simultaneously self-destructive. In his article, "Enigmes et Transparence chez Raymond Roussel", he speaks of, "... cette recherche qui détruit elle-même, par l'écriture, son propre objet", ¹³ and in the article entitled "Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui", when discussing description, he says that, "... elle s'est accomplie dans un double mouvement de création et de gommage...". ¹⁴ He

¹¹Jean Alter, La vision du monde d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, (Librairie Droz, Genève, 1966), p. 21.

¹²Article in Le Nouvel Observateur, 26.6.1970, used as "prière d'insérer" in Projet.

¹³PNR, p. 74

¹⁴Ibid., p. 127

cannot conceive of the writer as being "engagé" in any way. For him the novel is an art whose values lie not in political, ideological or social concerns, but in its form, in its structure:

"Il en va de même pour une symphonie, une peinture, un roman: c'est dans leur forme que réside leur réalité." ¹⁵

Each work of art will, of necessity, create its own form.

Let us consider in what way Robbe-Grillet's novel and Weiss's "Mikro-Roman" conform to or diverge from these formulations. Gerhard Schmidt-Henkel defines a "Mikro-Roman" for us:

"Man stösst auf die Bezeichnung 'Mikro-Roman' - vielleicht, weil der Text von der Romannorm ausgesehen relativ kurz ist (77 Halbseiten), oder weil ziemlich 'kleine' Dinge sehr genau, wie mit dem Mikroskop, betrachtet werden?" ¹⁶

The ambiguity of the title of the novel, La Jalousie, ("jealousy" or "the blind") might be already indicative of the ambivalent emotions which will be aroused in the reader as the narrative progresses. Lucien Goldmann suggests that:

"... le titre même du roman indiquant qu'il est impossible dans cet univers de séparer le sentiment de l'objet..." ¹⁷

it should prepare us for finding a social awareness in Robbe-Grillet, an aspect of his work to which Robbe-Grillet himself

¹⁵Ibid., p. 41

¹⁶Gerhard Schmidt-Henkel, "Die Wortgraphik des Peter Weiss," in Volker Canaris, Über Peter Weiss, (Edition Suhrkamp 408, Frankfurt, 1970), p. 16.

¹⁷Lucien Goldmann, Pour une sociologie du roman, (Collection Idées, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1964), p. 317.

seems to attach little importance. The novel is the account given by an "unidentified consciousness",¹⁸ in fact the husband of A., of the obsessive jealousy aroused in him by his suspicions of a relationship which exists, (in reality, or only in his distorted imagination), between his wife and a neighbouring plantation-owner, Franck. There would appear to be a chronological progression - the husband's suspicions are first aroused by the episode of the ice,¹⁹ and a letter, which he has seen A. writing and which seems to re-appear in Franck's pocket. Then there is the projected trip to the coast which A. and Franck are to undertake, the trip itself, the fact that they have to spend a night in the hotel because of car-trouble, during which time the husband's jealousy reaches a frenetic, climactic peak, their return the following day, certain ambiguous remarks which would seem to imply that A. has been disappointed in Franck, and an apparent cooling-off in the relationship. But this conjectured chronology of the novel is not so easy to establish. Referring to the novel Robbe-Grillet said:

"Le récit au contraire était fait de telle façon que tout essai de reconstitution d'une chronologie extérieure aboutissait tôt ou tard à une série de contradictions, donc à une impasse,"²⁰

¹⁸Jean Alter, "The treatment of time in Alain Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie," College Language Association Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1, Sept. 1959, p. 47.

¹⁹Jalousie, pp. 48 - 52

²⁰PNR, p. 132

and in similar vein:

"Vouloir reconstituer, par exemple, la chronologie de La Jalousie est impossible, impossible parce que je l'ai voulu ainsi." ²¹

He achieves this "déchronologie" in various ways. Certain events obviously took place after certain others, but are described as if they took place prior to the latter. References to times are always vague, perhaps deliberately so; for example, the "mille-pattes écrasé la semaine dernière, au début du mois, le mois précédent peut-être, ou plus tard." ²² In addition, events which are external to the narrator's prime concern of his wife's relationship with Franck, but which one would expect to proceed apace with this relationship, seem, paradoxically, to regress instead of progress - as is the case with the bridge-building, the harvesting of the bananas, and the reading of the "roman africain". Should this be regarded as a deliberate attempt on Robbe-Grillet's part to confuse the reader? Bruce Morrisette has suggested that the apparent discrepancies in chronology are due to the fact that everything is seen through the eyes of an observer, who, because of his obsession, cannot report events coherently but presents them - triggered usually by some sort of "objective correlative" such as the centipede - in a juxtaposition of past, present and future emerging from

²¹Bourin, "Techniciens", p. 1.

²²Jalousie, p. 27

his consciousness:

"La composition de La Jalousie est donc commandée par la vision d'un homme, d'un jaloux qui progresse dans le temps, c'est-à-dire vit les épisodes, mais aussi les ré-examine, les compare, les interroge et surtout les modifie, les change au gré de son imagination." ²³

It would also appear to tie in with the importance which Robbe-Grillet attaches to the present moment - the importance of "instantanéité", of "ce présent qui s'invente sans cesse".²⁴ Linked to this is the idea, first mentioned in the article "Joë Bousquet le rêveur" (1953) and taken up again in the article "Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui" (1963), of "gestes figés". In the former article he talks of the importance of dreams, in which objects appear, a chair, a pebble, a hand, "... la chute d'un débris quelconque (qui laisse cette impression bizarre qu'elle va de nouveau se reproduire, aussi souvent qu'on le voudra, comme si le fragment détaché s'était éternisé à l'état de chute)." ²⁵ In the latter article he says:

"Il ne s'agit plus ici du temps qui coule, puisque paradoxalement les gestes ne sont au contraire donnés que figés dans l'instant." ²⁶

It is in this respect that we begin to sense a rapport between Weiss and Robbe-Grillet. Weiss, too, seems to be presenting a

²³Bruce Morrisette, Les romans de Robbe-Grillet, (Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1963), p. 114.

²⁴PNR, p. 133

²⁵Ibid., p. 87

²⁶Ibid., p. 127

fusion of past and present. The events described in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers span, chronologically, a period of six days, but the narrator describes for us only the events of three days, starting on the morning of the first and ending late on the evening of the third, after the departure of the coachman. This reporting is, with one exception, invariably done immediately after the events described or simultaneously with them. As Helmut J. Schneider remarks:

"Seiner Grundstruktur nach aber verbindet dieses Beschreiben Beobachten, Beobachtetes und Niederschrift des Beobachteten in idealer Gleichzeitigkeit, wobei das grammatische Tempus das Präsens ist." ²⁷

There is, however, a lapse of three days, during which time the narrator is unable to describe what he has witnessed:

"Der Augenblick in dem der Fuhrmann die Zügel straffte und mit trommelnden Zungenlaut das Pferd zum Halten mahnte liegt drei Tage und drei Nächte zurück, drei Tage und drei Nächte in denen ich, einer umfassenden Gleichgültigkeit wegen nicht vermochte, meine Aufzeichnungen weiter zu führen..." ²⁸

The alleged reason for this inability to record the events of this evening is his preoccupation with the welfare of the horse which:

"... nach dem langen Weg den es den grössten Teil des Tages mit der Last von Kohlen zurückgelegt hatte, noch in der auf diesen Tag folgenden Nacht den gleichen Weg

²⁷Helmut J. Schneider, "Der Verlorene Sohn und die Sprache," in Canaris, p. 34.

²⁸Schatten, p. 92

noch einmal bewältigen sollte." 29

A more plausible reason would be that he was so overwhelmed by the emotions aroused in him when he witnessed the copulation of the housekeeper and the coachman that he needed to achieve a certain distance from the happening before he could write about it in a dispassionate and coherent way. There is no attempt on Weiss's part to depart from a strictly chronological account, but then there is no need for him to do so. The episodes are in themselves so banal that the order of their occurrence is relatively unimportant. The entire account given by the narrator would appear to be part of an unending cycle - the omission of the full-stop after the last sentence of the novel implies that there is no end. What we have here is a series of visual and auditive impressions of reality, a "collage" of impressions, with no causal connections, no reason for their being reported to us, apart from the fact that they are there. The narrator's account resembles his description of the scraps of newspaper which are used in place of toilet-paper in the outside dry-closet:

"... kleine, durcheinandergewürfelte Bruchstücke der Zeit, ... Ereignisse ohne Anfang und ohne Ende..." 30

At one point he claims that his literary activity is only a way of passing the time. He may be spending his time fruitlessly, but were he not engaged in writing, what would he

²⁹Ibid., p. 100

³⁰Ibid., p. 11

otherwise do? What he is doing is, making "... das Sehen zu einer Beschäftigung...",³¹ He simply reports to us what he sees and hears, and makes no attempt to analyse either his own emotions or to speculate on the motives or actions of those with whom he comes into contact. His is the closed universe of the "Landwirtschaft", which seems almost to be situated outwith time and space. Schneider calls it:

"... (eine) Art ländlicher Pension, in der sich eine Reihe von Personen aus unbekannten Gründen, mit unbekannter Vergangenheit aufhalten..."³²

Similarly, in La Jalousie, we are not told precisely where the husband's banana-plantation is located. Africa is a possibility: (A. and Franck are reading a "roman africain", the affairs of whose protagonists appear to mirror their own). It could be set in any of the French colonies. Robbe-Grillet himself spent some time as an agronomist in Martinique and Guadeloupe. What is common to the choice of milieu of the two authors is that it is relatively unimportant for the reader to know a precise geographical or spatial locality. There is no question of creating local colour. The only "real" geographical locations which Robbe-Grillet uses are Istanbul in the film L'Immortelle, Hong-Kong in La Maison de rendez-vous and New York in Projet pour une révolution à New York; but, as he is careful to point out in the "avant-

³¹Ibid., p. 48

³²Schneider, p. 33

propos" to La Maison de rendez-vous, the Hong-Kong which he describes might not be recognisable to anyone who knows the Far East. Likewise the New York of the Projet could be any metropolis of the 1970s. Weiss's choice of locale would appear to have its roots in an episode in his own life, when he spent a month on a farm as a day-labourer at the hay-harvest,³³ but even this reference does not help to particularise any geographical setting.

In a similar fashion temporal references do not assist us in pin-pointing any specific point in time. Mention has already been made of the distorted chronology of La Jalousie, of the time-span of six days in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. But do the events of La Jalousie unfold in the 1950s or ten, twenty years earlier? There is no reference to the world outside, and the "eternal triangle" situation is not peculiar to our contemporary world. The same holds good for Der Schatten, in which there would seem to be an even wider choice of time-location. In their own rather bizarre way each of the inhabitants of the house may be said to be representative of post-war European society - symbolising in the case of the family the break-down in family relationships, in that of the doctor who is unable to treat his own ailments the disintegration of the individual, and the total inability on the part of all of them to enter into meaningful relation-

³³Fluchtpunkt, p. 79

ships with the rest of the community. But then the figure of the coachman strikes a discordant note. With his wide leather coat and his broad-brimmed, feather-bedecked hat, his horn slung over his shoulder, he seems to have stepped from the pages of a Gothic or Romantic novel. The disquieting aura of mystery which attaches to his appearance finds concrete expression in the discrepancy between the amount of space in the interior of the coach and the number of sacks of coal which are unloaded by the coachman and the Knecht. But only the narrator is struck by this paradox and he receives no satisfaction from the coachman when he questions him about it - he implies that this is only an optical illusion.³⁴ Should one read an underlying symbolism into this figure? Does he represent the irruption of the irrational into everyday, banal existence? Do the coach and its driver suggest to Weiss death, and its threatened intrusion into our finite existences? Otto F. Best refers to the figure of the coachman swinging his whip and says that he will reappear later in Abschied von den Eltern, "... als Symbol der Folter, des Todes...".³⁵ In a later article Best again makes mention of the coachman in Abschied von den Eltern:

"Es ist der Totenwagen und auf ihm der Kutscher, die personifizierte Bedrohung, wie sie bei Peter Weiss immer

³⁴Schatten, p. 96

³⁵Otto F. Best, "Selbstbefreiung und Selbstvergewaltigung: Der Weg des P.W.," Merkur, Vol. 24, Heft 10, October 1970, p. 936.

wieder in Erscheinung tritt." 36

Karl-Heinz Bohrer attaches a slightly different significance to the figure of the coachman and considers him to be an archetypal figure in Weiss's work:

"Zweifellos steckt in der nur im Schattenriss deutlich werdenden Figur des 'Kutschers' sowie in der als unheimliches Gefährt auftauchenden 'Kutsche', in beiden Prosastücken verwendet, eine Art Weiss'scher Archetyp verborgen: der 'Kutscher' mit der Peitsche auf dem Bock ist die erste Figur des Dichters, die durch Schlagrituale gekennzeichnet ist, wie später Sade, der Revolutionshenker, und schliesslich die Schlägerfiguren und Folterer in der Ermittlung." 37

The reader may speculate along these lines; the narrator only reports what he sees. As in the case of Robbe-Grillet's novel, the temporal situation is again of little significance and, we are led to assume, it is a situation which will recur, unchanged and unchangeable.

It is quite illuminating to apply Robbe-Grillet's critique of Raymond Roussel to Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. 38 As Roussel may be regarded as a precursor of Surrealism, and both Weiss and Robbe-Grillet have admitted to Surrealist influences upon their works, it is not surprising that what Robbe-Grillet singles out as characteristic of Roussel should find a certain amount of illustration in

36 Otto F. Best, "Vermessung der Hölle oder Entseelte Realität als grotesque strip," Akzente, Heft 1, Feb. '71, p. 52

37 Karl-Heinz Bohrer, Die gefährdete Phantasie: oder, Surrealismus und Terror, (Reihe Hanser 40, München, 1970), p. 68.

38 "Enigmes et transparence chez Raymond Roussel," PNR, pp. 70 - 76.

Weiss's work. But a closer scrutiny will enable us to see that almost everything said by Robbe-Grillet of Roussel's writings is applicable to Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers.

The essay opens: "Raymond Roussel décrit; et, au-delà de ce qu'il décrit, il n'y a rien, rien de ce qui peut traditionnellement s'appeler un message."³⁹ Weiss does exactly the same in his novel, though he will later modify his views on political commitment. As far as language goes, continues Robbe-Grillet: "Son style est terne et neutre".⁴⁰ He uses banal imagery, he does not attempt to make an aesthetic appeal by the musical quality of his language - in short, he would seem to possess none of the qualities for which a novelist is generally admired. The same is true of Weiss. His language is stripped of all emotional overtones, it is terse, devoid of any embellishment, deliberately made matter-of-fact and unspeculative. In a potentially exciting, out of the ordinary situation (the housekeeper and the mother are accidentally locked in a closet), the tone of the description consciously underplays any drama. When the key cannot be found, the Hausknecht goes off to fetch an axe, and the narrator, instead of trying to heighten the tension in any way by, for example, describing the frantic attempts of the

³⁹Ibid., p. 70

⁴⁰Ibid.

women to escape a possible death by suffocation, follows in his mind's eye, step by step, detail by detail, the route followed by the Knecht from the housekeeper's room to the barn and back again.⁴¹

Robbe-Grillet then returns to the content of Roussel's works: "Comme il n'y a jamais rien au-delà de la chose décrite, c'est-à-dire qu'aucune sur-nature ne s'y cache, aucun symbolisme ... le regard est bien obligé de s'arrêter à la surface même des choses."⁴² However, too detailed a description often does not aid in clarifying matters for the reader, it has the opposite effect of making things more obscure. The same thing happens with Weiss. The narrator describes the minutiae of his daily life with a microscopic attention to detail, but is the reader any clearer in his mind as to the contents of the narrator's room, for example, or the lay-out of the house? As Robbe-Grillet says, stripping things to their essentials does not increase comprehension on the part of the reader: "... la signification trop transparente rejoint la totale opacité."⁴³

Robbe-Grillet goes on to mention that Roussel presents us with: "... un univers qui n'est pas donné comme réel, mais comme déjà représenté."⁴⁴ This point I propose to develop at

⁴¹Schatten, p. 82

⁴²PNR, p. 71

⁴³Ibid., p. 72

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 75

greater length when considering the technique of interior duplication in the works of Robbe-Grillet and Weiss. Robbe-Grillet continues: "Il [i.e. Roussel] aime placer un artiste intermédiaire entre lui-même et le monde des hommes",⁴⁵ and, "La vue ici est une vue imaginaire."⁴⁶ This technique can already be seen in Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs, and it will be used on several occasions not only by Weiss, but by Robbe-Grillet himself.

Robbe-Grillet's summing up of Roussel's oeuvre is applicable in almost every respect to Weiss's novel:

"Enigmes vides, temps arrêté, signes qui refusent de signifier, grossissement géant du détail minuscule, récits qui se referment sur eux-mêmes, nous sommes dans un univers plat et discontinu, où chaque chose ne renvoie qu'à soi."⁴⁷
(my underlining)

The question of chronology in the two works has already been discussed and to this it may be pertinent to add some comment on the novelistic technique employed by the two writers. Weiss's novel is illustrated with a series of "collages", assembled by Weiss himself, and it is the technique of "collage" which he employs in the novel. We have here not a continuous piece of narrative but ten loosely connected segments of reality - "... durcheinandergewürfelte

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 75

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 76

⁴⁷Ibid.

Bruchstücke der Zeit", ⁴⁸ as Weiss describes the newspaper cuttings. But the seemingly arbitrary choice of each incident does give an integrated whole. Weiss's narrator describes at great length the device he uses in his "Erdenken von Bildern". ⁴⁹ He sprinkles grains of salt in his eyes:

"... meine Tränendrüsen zu reizen, und damit meinen Blick verschwommen zu machen; die entstehenden Tränenfäden, Lichtpünktchen und anschwellenden und zerfliessenden Lichtkeile legen sich über das deutlich in meine Netzhaut eingeätzte Abbild des Raumes." ⁵⁰

This technique corresponds very closely to the technique of "frottage" described by Max Ernst in Beyond Painting. He recounts that, while spending an evening in a seaside hotel in August, 1925, he became obsessed by the cracks and grooves in the floorboards. He placed sheets of paper on the floor and rubbed over them with black lead:

"In gazing attentively at the drawings thus obtained, 'the dark passages and those of a gently lighted penumbra', I was surprised by the sudden intensification of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed, one upon the other, with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories." ⁵¹

Is this not the reaction produced in the narrator by the irritating effect of the salt upon his eye-balls? Ernst enlarges on this technique:

⁴⁸Schatten, p. 11

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 18

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Max Ernst, Beyond Painting, (Wittenborn and Schultz, Inc., New York, 1948), p. 7.

"The procedure of 'frottage', resting thus upon nothing more than the intensification of the irritability of the mind's faculties by appropriate technical means, excluding all conscious mental guidance (of reason, taste, morals) reducing to the extreme the active part of that one whom we have called, up to now, the 'author' of the work, this procedure is revealed by the following to be the real equivalent of that which is already known by the term 'automatic writing'. It is as a spectator that the author assists, indifferent or passionate, at the birth of his work and watches the phases of its development." 52

Would it be too speculative to believe that Weiss, in his readings of Max Ernst, had come across this passage?

Robbe-Grillet does not employ such a physical stimulus as the "Salzkörner" or "frottage", but his "objective correlative" would appear to exercise the same function as these two devices. Running like a "leitmotif" through the novel, the centipede is referred to on ten occasions and becomes, not a symbol of the narrator's jealousy, (after all, such symbolism is highly suspect to Robbe-Grillet), but what Bruce Morrisette refers to as an "objective correlative", that is to say, a physical manifestation of a mental or abstract phenomenon. In an article Morrisette says that Robbe-Grillet wrote in a letter to him:

"Vous m'avez sauvé du symbolisme en inventant la corrélation objective." 53

That there is a close connection between the two, insect and emotion, is revealed in the penultimate reference to the centipede:

⁵²Ibid., p. 8

⁵³Bruce Morrisette, "Theory and Practice in the Works of Robbe-Grillet," MLN, Vol. 77, 1962, p. 263.

"Entre elle [la porte de l'office] et l'ouverture béante du couloir, il y a le mille-pattes. Il est gigantesque: un des plus grands qui puissent se rencontrer sous ces climats." ⁵⁴

From this obviously exaggerated description of the insect, the narrator proceeds to visualise Franck crushing it, but this time reality is distorted by the husband's obsessive emotion, and he sees Franck using his table-napkin, which then metamorphoses into a hand-towel. Franck then returns to the bed where A. is waiting. A., in turn, is clasping her fingers round a sheet and not crumpling her napkin, as she did when Franck actually killed the insect. The narrator's hallucinatory vision culminates in his seeing Franck's car, when he and A. are returning from the town, leaving the road and bursting into flames:

"Toute la brousse en est illuminée, dans le crépitement de l'incendie qui se propage. C'est le bruit que fait le mille-pattes, de nouveau immobile sur le mur, en plein milieu du panneau." ⁵⁵

What could more clearly indicate the close inter-relation in the husband's mind between the insect, crushed by his rival for his wife's affections, and his distorted view of reality? As he falls ever more a prey to his obsession, so the centipede assumes even greater physical proportions, until eventually he reaches a condition where dream is indistinguishable from reality. The noise of the brush-fire is, in his imagi-

⁵⁴Jalousie, p. 163

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 167

nation, the same as that made by the centipede, which is still alive on the wall. Just as the reader knows that for Weiss's narrator reality will undergo a transformation after he has sprinkled salt on his eyeballs, so the percipient reader of Robbe-Grillet will realise that for the husband the centipede assumes increasingly the function of a stimulus which eventually transforms, indeed distorts, everyday reality.

One cannot omit from a discussion of the two works reference to the strong current of eroticism which runs through both. In considering Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers it becomes obvious that there is a strongly erotic undertone in the novel, culminating in the copulation of the coachman and the housekeeper, observed by the narrator in the position of a voyeur. What is equally obvious is that it is Weiss himself, and not his anonymous narrator, who interpolates this theme. The narrator reports, but does not reflect upon what he has just said. In her essay on Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers,⁵⁶ Rose Zeller enumerates the four links in the chain of sexual motives, and I shall take the liberty of using her very clear analysis as a basis for my argument:

1. On several occasions reference is made to the housekeeper in what are obviously sexual terms; for example, the narrator

⁵⁶Rose Zeller, "Peter Weiss: Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers," Zt. für dt. Philologie, No. 87, 1968, pp. 643 - 660.

observes her down on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor, "... wobei sich das dünne, an den Lenden und Armen durchnässte Kleid prall über die schweren Buchtungen ihres Körpers spannte," ⁵⁷ and when the inmates of the house are at table, spooning up their potatoes and turnips, "... die Münder öffnen sich, der Mund der Haushälterin wie zu einem saugenden Kuss." ⁵⁸ She uses double-entendres, for example; in a conversation with the mother, of which the narrator can hear only snatches, she says in a sniggering tone, "... könnte man einmal, ein Mann einmal", ⁵⁹ and she is the only one to shake hands with the coachman on his arrival. No other character is described in such terms. The only other female character, the mother, appears almost as a negation of any qualities that might make her sexually attractive. We are given no indication as to the age of the narrator, but if he were an adolescent it might be natural to assume that he would fix any sexual preoccupation on the only unmarried female in the closed community of which he is a member. But, given the total lack of communication between the various individuals, even sex would appear inadequate as a form of liaison. In addition, we do not detect any evidence of sexual attraction to the housekeeper on the part of the tailor, the doctor, the captain or the Hausknecht. It would therefore appear that

⁵⁷Schatten, p. 14

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 25

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 72

these references are introduced by Weiss solely to prepare the reader for the dénouement of the kitchen-scene.

2. The conversation between the captain and the father about the sabre-sheath.⁶⁰ Their ambiguous references to "Säbelscheide" and "Scheide" are not clearly understood by the narrator, (the two men are speaking, perhaps deliberately, in a low voice), and obviously do not have the same significance for him that they do for the reader. In fact, the whole conversation appears completely gratuitous, unless it is seen in the light of being deliberately introduced by Weiss to create, or rather to maintain, an erotic undercurrent in the otherwise banal narrative.

3. The story related by the Hausknecht about the cow which was unwilling to mate with the bull, and which subsequently produced a still-born calf.⁶¹ For this reason it was slaughtered, not, as Zeller suggests, because of its unwillingness to be mated.⁶²

4. The dream-visions which are induced in the narrator's mind by the "Salzkörner" process are also strongly erotic in tone. In the first of these, the narrator conjures up the vision of a naked woman, which he describes in graphic detail. So real does his vision become:

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 32

⁶¹Ibid., p. 74

⁶²Zeller, p. 656

"... dass ich die Vorspiegelung mit einer Wirklichkeit verwechselte und eine heftige Bewegung mit meinen Armen vollführte, womit ich unmittelbar das Bild zerriss." ⁶³

In the second vision the narrator is himself present. He says: "... ich glitt in das Bild hinein." ⁶⁴ He is driving along in a vehicle of some sort, (he cannot determine exactly what it is, he is conscious only of the motion of being transported), and as far as the eye can see, there are nothing but mating elks and stags. But: "Während ich [i.e. the narrator] an der unendlichen Reihe der Tiere vorüberglitt zerfloss das Bild und die Umrisse des Zimmers schimmerten hindurch." ⁶⁵ The doctor's knock at the door dissolves the last vestiges of his vision and we get the impression of frustration and dissatisfaction aroused in the narrator by his inability to finish the dream, whether because of his own lack of visionary capacity or because of a physical interruption in the shape of the doctor.

What emerges from the above points, as Rose Zeller rightly concludes, is the feeling of sexual inadequacy and the inability to establish a satisfactory sexual relationship, which Weiss himself experienced. Of the several references in the two autobiographical novels, Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt, I have singled out only two. In Abschied,

⁶³Schatten, p. 20

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 56

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 59

he relates how his inability to establish contact with girls leads him to compensatory narcissistic dream-visions:

"... und immer tiefer halluzinierte ich mich in die Nacht hinein, bis ein Traumwesen neben mir entstand, bis ich ein Gesicht neben mir sah, ein Gesicht ohne Züge, ein Gesicht, das eine Zusammenballung meiner eigenen Gefühle war, und ich liebte dieses Gesicht, ich küsste die Luft, ich küsste mich selbst, taumelnd unter dem Bedürfnis nach Liebe..."⁶⁶

In Fluchtpunkt, he refers to the hero of Murnau's film Tabu, whose love has become "das Unerreichbare". He swims out to sea after the boat in which his loved one is being abducted, falling further and further behind: "... bis seine Kräfte erlahmen und er ertrinkt, zuletzt taucht nur noch seine Hand aus dem Wasser auf."⁶⁷ Weiss would appear to see himself in an analogous situation. The inadequacy of the narrator in sexual matters is underlined in the scene in the kitchen, where he is reduced to an impotent bystander, a voyeur of the sexual act, which is itself rendered even more inaccessible to him by being witnessed at one remove from reality - as a shadow-play on the kitchen-blind. This theme recurs in Weiss's other works and it seems obvious that his persistent use of eroticism has its roots in his own personal situation, that his inability to establish satisfactory relations with the opposite sex goes hand in hand with his feeling of being an "outsider", that his resorting to eroticism is a compensation for these seeming inadequacies in himself as an individ-

⁶⁶ Abschied, p. 54

⁶⁷ Fluchtpunkt, p. 30

ual.

A similar reason can be adduced for the use of erotic elements in the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet. A psychiatrist, Didier Anzieu, claims, in a very far-reaching article entitled: "Le discours de l'obsessionnel dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet",⁶⁸ that all Robbe-Grillet's creative writings are "phantasmes", wish-fulfillments conditioned by his psychological make-up. La Jalousie would seem to provide evidence as to the validity of this suggestion. In this "eternal triangle" situation, we never really know whether A. and Franck are actually having an affair, or whether their relationship is merely a figment of the jealous husband's imagination. He obviously feels that Franck could be (or is) a rival for his wife's affections. He attributes to Franck all the qualities in which he feels himself lacking, and which, presumably, if they make Franck attractive to A., must, correspondingly, make him unattractive to her. Franck and A. can discuss the "roman africain". The husband has not read the book, so feels excluded from their conversation and thus from their relationship. Franck and his wife Christiane have a child; he and A. have not. Franck has proved his virility; he has not. Franck appears to dress casually: "Il n'a ni veste ni cravate, et le col de sa chemise est largement

⁶⁸Didier Anzieu, "Le discours de l'obsessionnel dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet," Les Temps modernes, No. 233, Oct. '65, pp. 608 - 637.

déboutonné." ⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he gives the impression of suavity and urbanity, qualities which the husband would no doubt like to emulate:

"... mais c'est une chemise blanche irréprochable, en tissu fin de belle qualité, dont les poignets à revers sont maintenus par des boutons amovibles en ivoire." ⁷⁰

Even the manner in which he eats his soup seems to reveal a certain dynamism. ⁷¹ And, of course, it is Franck who rises from the table to crush the centipede, thereby seeming to the husband to usurp his role as protector of his wife. That the two men are completely different types emerges in Franck's dismissal of all A.'s hypotheses concerning the plot of the "roman africain":

"Rien ne sert de faire des suppositions contraires, puisque les choses sont ce qu'elles sont: on ne change rien à la réalité." ⁷²

The husband, however, keeps on trying to do precisely this, and especially with regard to his relationship with Franck. He projects his own inadequacies, imagined or otherwise, on to his (supposed) rival. If Franck and A. have had a sexual relationship during their trip to the coast, we are led to believe that Franck has proved himself unsatisfactory as a lover - the ambiguous references to his not being "un bon

⁶⁹Jalousie, p. 21

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 23

⁷²Ibid., p. 83

mécanicien".⁷³ The husband has not been able to achieve a satisfactory relationship with his wife, therefore, no one else will be able to do so either.

Another point made by Anzieu would seem to hint at a certain similarity in psychological make-up between Weiss and Robbe-Grillet. Anzieu says:

"Wallas, Mathias et Franck ... représentent le même type de héros ... Ce sont des ratés..."⁷⁴

The same is true of Weiss's characters. The theme of failure, of inadequacy, sexual or otherwise, runs through Weiss's writings, from the early prose-works to Hölderlin. Anzieu goes on to say:

"Du point de vue psychanalytique, le mari [in La Jalousie] illustre bien l'isolement de l'obsessionnel."⁷⁵

The theme of isolation, incorporated in the leitmotif of exile, predominates in Weiss's works. The physical fact of his exile from Germany seems to him only to give concrete expression to a feeling of isolation, to a sense of being cut off from his everyday surroundings, which he has experienced since childhood. He expresses this feeling quite unequivocally in Abschied von den Eltern:

"Die Emigration war für mich nur die Bestätigung einer Unzugehörigkeit, die ich von frühester Kindheit an erfahren hatte."⁷⁶

⁷³Ibid., pp. 198 - 199

⁷⁴Anzieu, p. 620

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Abschied, p. 143

And again in Fluchtpunkt:

"Es gab keine verlorene Heimat für mich und keinen Gedanken an eine Rückkehr, denn ich hatte nie einem Land gehört." ⁷⁷

The narrator in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers also suffers from this sense of isolation. He has no real contacts with the other inhabitants of the house, all of whom seem to be remote from real life, to be leading a hermetically sealed existence. The husband in La Jalousie is likewise an isolated figure. As has already been said, he feels excluded from the relationship between Franck and A., Christiane seems to visit increasingly rarely, and he obviously wants the minimum of contact with his native workers. La Jalousie might appear to be a slightly artificial illustration of the theme of isolation, given the paucity of characters and the relationship between them. But we shall find it recurring, in more easily discernible fashion, in Robbe-Grillet's other works. There is no single character who is not completely isolated from his fellow human beings, or who is able to communicate with them in a meaningful way.

The technique of interior duplication, which is used sparingly by Robbe-Grillet in La Jalousie, and not at all by Weiss in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers, will become increasingly popular with both authors. With Weiss it will manifest itself in the form of the "play within the play",

⁷⁷Fluchtpunkt, p. 8

the most notable examples being Marat/Sade and Hölderlin. Robbe-Grillet will adopt various versions of the device, for example, "dédoublement" of character, plot and situation, or the Gidean "mise en abyme", where a picture, a piece of music, or even the plot of a book being read by the characters in the novel, serve to underline or cast light on the themes of the novel itself. In La Jalousie we find three examples of the "mise en abyme". The first is the "roman africain", which is being read by A. and Franck. Reference has already been made to the fact that the characters in this book seem to mirror the protagonists in La Jalousie itself.⁷⁸ In another reference to the book:

"Il [Franck] fait ensuite une allusion à la conduite du mari, coupable au moins de négligence selon l'avis des deux lecteurs."⁷⁹

The last reference to the contents of the book is at one and the same time the most ambiguous and the most revelatory of the fact that the "roman africain" is being used as a mirror-image of the events of La Jalousie. The main character of the book seems to be a customs official, who is dishonest. At the same time:

"Il est honnête, il essaie de rétablir une situation compromise de son prédécesseur mort dans un accident de voiture. Mais il n'a pas eu de prédécesseur, car la compagnie est de fondation toute récente; et ce n'était pas un accident. Il est d'ailleurs question d'un navire

⁷⁸Jalousie, p. 26

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 193

(un grand navire blanc) et non de voiture." 80
(my underlining)

The mention of the "grand navire blanc" takes us on to the second example of "mise en abyme" - the calendar which hangs on the bedroom wall. It is, to all appearances, a photograph, or a painting of the harbour of the coastal town to which A. and Franck have gone. However, there is depicted on this calendar, "... un personnage vêtu à l'européenne..." 81 who is possibly the husband himself. A later description of him, in which he seems to fall into the water, might be suggestive of his falling prey to his obsessive jealousy. On the mast of the ship is perched, not a sea-bird, but a "vautour au cou déplumé". 82 The ominous tone created by the appearance of the vulture is added to by the reference to the "débris flottant" which the man in the white suit is looking at. Is this piece of material, "... un vêtement, un sac de toile, ou autre chose"? 83 On the surface these allusions seem fairly innocuous and it might appear that the link between the calendar and the events of the novel is somewhat tenuous. But that it is of great significance to the husband is revealed by the fact that in his hallucinatory vision during his wife's absence, he goes from the centipede, to A. brush-

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 216

⁸¹Ibid., p. 157

⁸²Ibid., p. 158

⁸³Ibid., p. 172

ing her hair, to Franck killing the centipede and going back to bed with A., to the car leaving the road and bursting into flames, to the centipede, to A.'s hair-brushing, to the calendar. That it is the culmination of his dream means that we should not simply look on it as an unnecessary appendage to the story, but is indicative of his fear that A. might leave him and go off with Franck. The third use of the technique is the "air indigène". In this instance the technique is serving a slightly different purpose, as it does not throw light on the novel, but on Robbe-Grillet's conception of the structure of the novel. The song, which is being sung by one of the native drivers is:

"... un air indigène, aux paroles incompréhensibles, ou même sans paroles." ⁸⁴

It has no beginning or end, it seems to be an unending cycle, it catches the listener unawares, he cannot quite come to terms with it. But the most crucial part of the description of the song is this:

"Si parfois les thèmes s'estompent, c'est pour revenir un peu plus tard, affermis, à peu de chose près identiques. Cependant ces répétitions, ces infimes variantes, ces coupures, ces retours en arrière, peuvent donner lieu à des modifications - bien qu'à peine sensibles - entraînant à la longue fort loin du point de départ." ⁸⁵

This is, in nuce, an outline of the structure of La Jalousie, and at the same time a résumé of Robbe-Grillet's novelistic

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 99

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 101

theory.

In this introductory chapter I have endeavoured to single out what may be regarded as the salient features of Robbe-Grillet's novelistic theory. These have been elucidated from one specific work, La Jalousie, and from Robbe-Grillet's theoretical writings, mainly those of Pour un nouveau roman. I have also endeavoured to show to what extent any of these themes or techniques used by Robbe-Grillet are present in Weiss's prose-work, Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. I intend now to proceed to a closer examination of the technique of interior duplication in the authors' other works.

CHAPTER II

Interior duplication

In this chapter it is proposed first to study the technique of interior duplication or "dédoublement" as it appears in the works of Robbe-Grillet, particularly in La Maison de rendez-vous. We shall then proceed to a consideration of Weiss's use of the same technique, from which it will emerge that both authors are using the device for the same artistic and technical end, though in slightly differing ways.

The technique is by no means peculiar to either author and manifests itself in various forms in the contemporary novel, both French and German. One example is Max Frisch's Mein Name sei Gantenbein, in which the "Ich" assumes and acts out various roles in the search for an authentic identity. With reference to Robbe-Grillet's works the majority of critics make allusion to the definition of interior duplication given by André Gide, in a diary entry of June 23rd, 1893:

"J'aime assez qu'en une oeuvre d'art, on retrouve ainsi transposé, à l'échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette oeuvre. Rien ne l'éclaire mieux et n'établit plus sûrement toutes les proportions de l'ensemble."¹

He cites several examples of what he means, mainly in the field of art, in the works of an artist such as Velasquez,

¹André Gide, Journal 1889 - 1939, (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1951), p. 41.

but also the play within the play in Hamlet, and the story told by Roderick in The Fall of the House of Usher. He then elaborates on this first definition by saying that what more closely corresponds to the result he was hoping to achieve in his own works, such as Les Cahiers d'André Walter, La Tentative Amoureuse, Le Traité du Narcisse, is:

"... la comparaison avec ce procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à en mettre un second en abyme." ²

The technique is used by Robbe-Grillet in all his works prior to La Maison de rendez-vous (1965). In every case his purpose is to reinforce the significance and underline the structure of the work itself. In Les Gommès (1953), the various references to the Oedipus legend, such as the drunkard's riddle, ³ and Wallas's swollen feet, ⁴ reflect the course of action pursued by the protagonist Wallas. In Le Voyeur (1955), the story is recounted by an old man of the sea-monster which must be propitiated by the sacrifice each spring of a virgin; ⁵ a summary, in the guise of a myth, of Mathias' rape-murder of Jacqueline and his throwing of her body into the sea. In La Jalousie (1957), (as was discussed in the previous chapter), the "roman africain" which is being

²Ibid.

³Gommès, p. 234

⁴Ibid., p. 259

⁵Voyeur, p. 221

read by A. and Franck contains the main themes of the novel itself,⁶ and the scene depicted on the calendar serves the same purpose.⁷ In Dans le Labyrinthe (1959), there is a picture entitled "La Défaite de Reichenfels", which portrays one of the central situations of the novel.⁸

Whilst this list is far from being exhaustive, the number of occurrences of this technique must lead us to ask ourselves why it appears so frequently in the works of Robbe-Grillet. It is an integral part of the structure of the novel, more especially in La Maison de rendez-vous than in any of the earlier works. For this reason, we shall concentrate on this one novel, making reference to the other works when appropriate. He is using it here, as in the instances cited above, to give a summation of the plot, (in the Robbe-Grilletian sense of the word), of the novel.

It would perhaps be appropriate to diverge here from the main topic of this chapter to interpolate some comments on Robbe-Grillet's conception of plot. For him the plot is one of the outdated notions in contemporary fiction. He goes so far as to assert that: "Raconter est devenu proprement impossible".⁹ However, he does admit that his own works have

⁶Jalousie, pp. 193 - 194 and p. 216

⁷Ibid., p. 155 and p. 172

⁸Labyrinthe, p. 26

⁹PNR, p. 31

plots:

"... je ferai remarquer que Les Gommès ou Le Voyeur comportent l'un comme l'autre une trame, une 'action', des plus facilement discernables, riche par surcroît d'éléments considérés en général comme dramatiques,"¹⁰

and qualifies his remark about the inability of the contemporary author to tell a story by saying:

"En somme ce n'est pas l'anecdote qui fait défaut c'est seulement son caractère de certitude, sa tranquillité, son innocence."¹¹

The story will still be there, but will no longer serve as a framework on which the novel is built, a guideline which will carry the reader forward as one event follows the other in a logical sequence. In his works we will find, generally, not one plot, but a multiplicity of plots, many of which will have no logical connection with what precedes or follows them. It is in this respect that "dédoublement" assumes such an important role. Even the most simple plot can become complex when it is fragmented by its being recounted by various narrators, each of whom sees events from an entirely different perspective. The plot will be further complicated by the use of the cinematographic technique of flashback, the use of interior monologue and hypotheses of what might have happened, presented in such a way as to give the impression that events did, in reality, take place in this way.

Weiss uses an analogous technique in Das Gespräch der

¹⁰Ibid., p. 32

¹¹Ibid.

drei Gehenden, in which the story-line of the purported conversation frequently appears self-contradictory as the three embodiments of the narrative consciousness present us with their respective views of reality or imagined reality. As there is an infrastructure of remembered time complementing the main narrative tense, which is the present, Weiss also uses the technique of flashback. The fragmentary nature of Weiss's "collage" technique is heightened by his use of "dédoublement", which for both writers serves the purpose of dislocating time, of achieving discontinuity. In a pamphlet issued by his publishers, but written by Robbe-Grillet himself, to help to explain Les Gommés, he draws a distinction between what he calls linear or clock time, and human time:

"On voit sans peine que le Temps joue ici le rôle principal: non pas le temps des horloges qui est, par convention, linéaire et sans surprise, mais ce temps humain que nous secrétons autour de nous comme un cocon, plein de retours en arrière, de répétitions et d'interférences, permettant ... de donner du même événement cent versions contradictoires." ¹²

This explains the different versions of the shooting of Dupont; Laurent, the chief of police, suspects suicide, Wallas has the same calibre gun as that which was used in the shooting, so that theoretically he could be the murderer, Bona, the leader of the band of assassins, accepts the newspaper report of Dupont's death, though Garinati, the assassin, is convinced that Dupont was only wounded. One could continue

¹²Pamphlet on Les Gommés, issued by Les Editions de Minuit.

almost indefinitely until one reaches the second shooting of Dupont, this time by Wallas, which gives the lie to those who were apparently right in their hypothesis of the first shooting (for example, Garinati), and proves correct those who made an erroneous assessment of the event, (for example, Bonaventure and the person who mistook Wallas for the assassin).

As well as using the technique to help reinforce the plot, he also uses it to refer to episodes in his earlier works - not gratuitously, but to help consolidate the structure of La Maison de rendez-vous itself. Thirdly, he uses it to achieve "distanciation", the Brechtian "Verfremdungseffekt". I intend to study each of these uses of the technique in detail and to suggest a possible reason for its popularity with Robbe-Grillet, outwith purely practical and literary considerations, and then to study how Weiss uses the analogous technique of the "play within the play".

There are several ways in which Robbe-Grillet employs "dédoublement" in the novel, and each of these illustrations, is linked to the problem of point of view, as well as throwing into relief the structure of the novel itself. Bruce Morrisette, like several other critics, sees the problematic relationship of interior duplication and point of view emerging already in the work of an author such as André Gide:

"Lorsque le point de vue à l'intérieur du roman passe d'un personnage à un autre, la structure intentionnelle peut devenir très complexe. Ce problème de foyers différents, de champs et contre-champs, se posait déjà

chez des auteurs comme André Gide (on pourrait même appeler les rapports enchevêtrés entre l'auteur et des personnages tels que Edouard avec son roman intérieur, une sorte de 'je de miroirs'." ¹³

The problem of who is telling the story is one which has engaged the attention of Robbe-Grillet in all his works. In Les Gommès we are still conscious of the presence of an omniscient author, although there are interior monologues and attempts to place the reader inside the mind of various characters: in Le Voyeur, although, superficially, the narrator appears to be the omniscient author, and everything is narrated in the third person, we are in fact seeing everything through Mathias's eyes, interpreting events through his consciousness. In La Jalousie, there is apparently no narrator, only the "je-néant", as Bruce Morrisette calls him, ¹⁴ who turns out to be A.'s husband. In Dans le Labyrinthe, we find a "je" in the opening pages, who then disappears until about ten pages from the end, where, with the words: "A ma dernière visite, la troisième piqûre a été inutile", ¹⁵ we realise that the narrator is in fact the doctor, who was tending the wounded soldier (shades of La Peste!). Everything is recounted from his point of view, and scenes of which he can have no direct knowledge are presented in varying ways, as if

¹³Bruce Morrisette, "De Stendhal à Robbe-Grillet: Modalités du point de vue," Cahiers de l'Association des Etudes Françaises, No. 14, (1962), p. 156.

¹⁴Morrisette: Romans, p. 112

¹⁵Labyrinthe, p. 211

each were a hypothesis on his part. In other words, we seem here to be in the presence of a creative artist, engaged in the task of producing a work of art. This approach to point of view is carried a stage further in La Maison de rendez-vous, where the narrator seems to be Robbe-Grillet himself, who assumes various guises and recounts the story from varying points of view. One of these guises is that of R. Jonestone, the sculptor, the creator of the statues which are to be found in the garden of the Villa Bleue, and in miniature form in Lady Ava's room. On the first mention of these statues, the sculptor does not receive his definitive name: "quelque chose comme Johnson, ou Jonstone".¹⁶ The next mention of the statues, the one which most clearly brings out their function of acting as a synopsis of Robbe-Grillet's previous works and subsuming the plot of La Maison de rendez-vous, refers to them as:

"... des statues monumentales exécutées par R. Jonestone au siècle dernier, dont la plupart retracent les épisodes les plus fameux de l'existence imaginaire de la princesse Azy".¹⁷

The close similarity between the names R. Jonestone and Sir Ralph Johnson, the central character of the novel, is far from fortuitous, if we see in Jonestone, who, as well as being a sculptor, is also the author of the plays performed at the Villa Bleue, one of which is entitled, "L'Assassinat

¹⁶MR, p. 28

¹⁷Ibid., p. 57

d'Edouard Manneret",¹⁸ an incarnation of Robbe-Grillet himself. He represents Robbe-Grillet, creator of his earlier works, and elucidator of this novel as it progresses.

Johnson, on the other hand, represents a Robbe-Grillet who is actively involved in the creation of a new work of literature. Before turning to Johnson and the various other roles assumed by Robbe-Grillet in the novel, let us devote our attention to the statues alluded to, and consider in what way they are a reference to things past and a résumé of things present. It should be noted that there is in the novel a proliferation of "gestes figés", of people frozen, as it were, in certain attitudes. Dorrit Cohn considers that:

"These pictures in motion and immobile episodes ... effectively inject a dose of verticality into the horizontal time sequence of fiction. They act as microscopic mirrors, quintessential summations of the sequential narrative."¹⁹

It is sometimes difficult in the novel to differentiate between a person frozen in a certain attitude and a statue, between reality and imagined reality. Johnson undertakes to describe an evening spent at the Villa Bleue. He arrives by taxi at 9.10 p.m. and, considering that he is too early, he decides to walk through the grounds of the Villa and so delay somewhat his arrival at the house. En route, he catches sight of: "deux personnages immobilisés dans des attitudes

¹⁸Ibid., p. 84

¹⁹Dorrit Cohn, "Castles and Anti-Castles, or Kafka and Robbe-Grillet," Novel V, Fall 1971, p. 27.

dramatiques." 20 The man and the woman remain in the same position, almost as if carved out of stone, until eventually the man covers his eyes with his hand and the woman goes off towards the house, "d'un pas lent et régulier de somnambule". 21 A little further along the path, a man is seated on a marble bench. Nearby, a young girl, dressed only in a torn shift, is tied to a tree, menaced by a huge tiger. But this time we are in the presence of, "un groupe sculpté, grandeur nature". 22 The transition from reality to the plastic representation of reality was so smooth that we are brought up short by these words. As to the significance of the sculpture itself, it represents the plot of the play, (written by R. Jonestone), performed in the Villa Bleue, in which a Japanese servant-girl is stripped of her clothes by a dog. The fact that the statue shows the girl with her hands tied behind her back underlines a recurrent theme in the novel - the subservient role assigned to woman. She is an article of merchandise; (Johnson is searching for a large sum of money with which he can buy Lauren from Lady Ava); the red-faced man tells the man in the smoking-jacket of:

"... une jeune fille achetée vierge à un intermédiaire cantonnais, et revendue ensuite trois fois plus cher, en bon état mais après plusieurs mois d'usage, à un Américain fraîchement débarqué qui s'était installé dans

²⁰MR, p. 25

²¹Ibid., p. 27

²²Ibid., p. 28

les Nouveaux Territoires".²³

The Japanese servant, Kito, is used in his experiments by Manneret, and finally dies, either through an overdose of the drug which he injects into her, or because he is a vampire and necrophile. In a bizarre and rather grotesque adjunct to the story we are told that:

"... son [Kito's] corps exsangue, marqué seulement d'une miniscule plaie à la base du cou, juste au-dessus de la clavicule, fut vendu pour être servi à différentes sauces dans un restaurant réputé d'Aberdeen. La cuisine chinoise a l'avantage de rendre les morceaux méconnaissables."²⁴

Small wonder that certain critics have seen in La Maison de rendez-vous a prime illustration of "réification"! In addition to introducing this major theme of La Maison de rendez-vous, the sculpted group, entitled "L'Appât" also refers back to the rape-murder of Jacqueline by Mathias in Le Voyeur. She, too, was bound hand and foot by Mathias, before being mutilated and thrown into the sea. To make the reference more explicit, the hunter in the group is not mounted on an elephant, as would be customary in a tiger-hunt, but has: "... la main droite crispée sur le guidon d'une bicyclette",²⁵ an allusion to the bicycle hired by Mathias to enable him to go round the island and sell his watches.

The second mention of the statues is much more succinct,

²³Ibid., p. 19

²⁴Ibid., p. 167

²⁵Ibid., p. 28

and indeed is merely a list of the titles of the statues, but each title contains an implicit reference either to Robbe-Grillet's previous works, or to an element in the structure of La Maison de rendez-vous itself. The first statue mentioned is "Les Chiens", which refers to the two dogs owned by M. in the film L'Immortelle, and also to the dogs which participate in the plays performed at the Villa Bleue. There is also the dog which Kim has on a leash when she goes to Manneret's apartment. The second statue, "L'Esclave", could refer to the husband in La Jalousie, who is the slave of his obsession, or to the short story "La Chambre Secrète" in Instantanés, (published 1962). All the female characters in La Maison de rendez-vous, with the exception of Lady Ava, would appear to be very much the possessions of their owners, be they Lady Ava or Manneret, and even the relationship between Lauren and Johnson is conceived more on this footing than as an emotional involvement. The third statue, "La Promesse", refers to the promise made to his dying comrade by the soldier in Dans le Labyrinthe and also to Sir Ralph's pledge to Lauren that he will find the exorbitant sum which she has demanded as her purchase price. The title of the fourth statue, "La Reine", is perhaps not quite so easy to decipher. It could refer to Les Gommès, with its Oedipus legend, in which case the queen would be Evelyne Dupont, Wallas' supposed step-mother. In La Maison de rendez-vous, the queen is Lady Ava, around whom all the events of the

novel rotate. The fifth sculpture, "L'Enlèvement", is a fairly obvious reference to the film L'Année dernière à Marienbad, where X. convinces A. to go off with him, leaving M. behind. In La Maison de rendez-vous it refers to the Japanese servant-girl, carried off and sold into prostitution. The sixth statue, "Le Chasseur", refers to several of the earlier works. It could be Wallas, the detective in Les Gommès, engaged in the pursuit of the murderer of Dupont. It could be the husband in La Jalousie, pursuing single-mindedly his search for evidence of a liaison between A. and Franck. It could be Mathias, with Jacqueline as the object of his pursuit. In La Maison de rendez-vous it refers most probably to Johnson, searching for the money which will enable him to buy Lauren, his prey as much as the object of his desires. Then the final statue of the group, entitled, "La Mise à Mort", which refers to Les Gommès, with its political assassinations and the two "murders" of Dupont, to the murder of Jacqueline in Le Voyeur, to the killing of the soldier in Dans le Labyrinthe, and indeed, to Robbe-Grillet's first incomplete novel, Un Régicide. In La Maison de rendez-vous we have a proliferation of deaths, from the repeated killing of Edouard Manneret, to the suicide of Marchat, to the poisoning of Lady Ava. The way to this latter happening is, in fact, prepared for us by the introduction of yet another statue, entitled "Le Poison".²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 135

In addition to the device of the statues there are several other instances of the technique "en abyme". The first of these is, of course, Jonestone's play, "L'Assassinat d'Edouard Manneret". The second is the carving on a ring belonging to the red-faced guest at the Villa:

"... il porte une grosse bague chinoise en pierre dure; dont le chaton, taillé avec art et minutie, représente une jeune femme à demi étendue sur le bord d'un sofa...²⁷

Here we have a leitmotif which runs throughout the entire novel, namely, woman as the object of man's sexual desires. Another leitmotif, the use and abuse of drugs in this fictitious Hong-Kong society, is also introduced here:

"... la main droite, qui repose sur le lit défait, paume tournée vers le haut, retient encore mollement sous le pouce une petite seringue de verre garnie de son aiguille de piqûres."²⁸

The third use of the device is the comic strip being read by the Chinese streetsweeper.²⁹ The sub-titles of the three illustrations read as follows:

"La drogue est un compagnon qui vous trompe": "La drogue est un tyran qui vous réduit en esclavage": "La drogue est un poison qui vous tuera".³⁰

The street-sweeper cannot read and so does not understand the inscriptions; the perceptive reader does.

As well as the duplication and re-duplication of the

²⁷Ibid., p. 75

²⁸Ibid., p. 76

²⁹Ibid., pp. 78 - 80

³⁰Ibid., p. 80

plot, we also find repeated "dédoublement" of character. Mention has already been made of Jonestone-Johnson as incarnations of Robbe-Grillet. Edouard Manneret, Boris, the man in the smoking-jacket, and even Lady Ava also assume this role. Manneret himself is doubled, in that he is portrayed by an actor in Jonestone's play, and in the play Manneret is engaged in writing what would appear to be La Maison de rendez-vous:

"L'acteur qui tient le rôle de Manneret est assis dans son fauteuil, à sa table de travail. Il écrit. Il écrit que la servante eurasienne traverse alors le cercle sans rien voir..."³¹

In a later scene Manneret writes after the word "voyage" the adjective "secret".³² Later he carefully rubs out the word "secret" and substitutes for it "lointain".³³ On each of these occasions it is not clear whether it is Manneret or his actor-double who is doing this. But later in the novel, where Lady Ava seems to take over the role of narrator, her hypothesis of the murder would have the assassin adding to Manneret's unfinished sentence, "... voyage lointain, et non gratuit...", the two words, "mais nécessaire",³⁴ and the sketch of an oval fish, which is a leitmotif in the novel. The phrase itself is reminiscent of the words of the police-

³¹Ibid., p. 66

³²Ibid., p. 76

³³Ibid., p. 83

³⁴Ibid., p. 176

lieutenant, "... crime nécessaire, et non pas gratuit".³⁵

Manneret is also an artist and one of his pictures has as its subject Maia, goddess of illusion.³⁶ It would not be an exaggeration to see in this a "corrélatif" of the subject-matter of Robbe-Grillet's own works, namely, his investigation of the relationship between reality and unreality.

When Johnson goes to Manneret to try to borrow the money he needs to buy Lauren from Lady Ava, Manneret "commence par ne pas reconnaître Johnson, qu'il prend d'abord pour son propre fils".³⁷ Once again we are confronted with the Oedipus theme, with the added complication of the supposed father and son each being an objectification of Robbe-Grillet himself. The last enigmatic figure to assume the role of creative artist is Boris, who, in a somewhat Kafkaesque existence, lives "upstairs" in the Villa Bleue. He is in turn reminiscent of the king in Un Régicide and a "corrélatif" for what is over and done with in Robbe-Grillet's early works:

"Il [le vieux roi fou] cherche quelque chose, dans ses souvenirs, quelque chose de solide, et il ne sait pas quoi. La bicyclette a donc disparu, il n'y a plus de tigre en bois sculpté, pas de chien non plus, pas de lunettes noires, pas de lourds rideaux. Et il n'y a plus de jardin, ni jalousies, ni lourds rideaux qui glissent lentement sur leurs tringles. Il ne reste à présent que des débris épars: fragments de papiers aux

³⁵Ibid., p. 68

³⁶Ibid., p. 85

³⁷Ibid., p. 114

couleurs ternies..." 38

Thus Boris embodies the third side of Robbe-Grillet's creative consciousness. He casts aside the works of the past; Jonestone integrates them into the structure of the work in progress; Johnson acts out the hypotheses which Robbe-Grillet formulates.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the technique of interior duplication, of "dédoublément" of plot, character and situation, plays an integral part in this novel. Why Robbe-Grillet uses it is easily comprehensible, when we regard it from a novelistic point of view. It serves to tighten the structure of the novel, to give in essence its plot, and to relate its major themes very closely to those of Robbe-Grillet's earlier works. Another possible use is to achieve a result akin to that of Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt", that is, to place the reader at a distance from the work. In Morrisette's article, "Modalités du point de vue", he refers to the play within the play, which he sees as being closely connected with techniques of ambiguity - the narrator is present on stage, the audience sometimes does not know who is actor and who is spectator, and so forth.³⁹ This same effect is achieved by Robbe-Grillet. Mention has already been made of the difficulty of distinguishing between human

³⁸Ibid., p. 32

³⁹Morrisette, "Modalités", p. 159.

beings and statues, of knowing whether it is a question of Edouard Manneret or of an actor playing Edouard Manneret. As well as tightening the structure of the novel, "dédoublement" also presents the reader with a multiplicity of interpretations of the events recounted, offering a new approach to the problem of who is telling the story - not an anonymous "je" but Robbe-Grillet himself, or his doubles.

Stylistically, this penchant for "dédoublement" would appear to be quite justifiable on the grounds of the effectiveness of the technique as a structural element and also in breaking down the barriers between the real and the imaginary. The psychiatrist Didier Anzieu has suggested that there may be a certain psychological motivation in Robbe-Grillet's choice of this technique. He sees Robbe-Grillet's works as reproducing the interior monologue of someone suffering from a fixation:

"Ce discours comprend des défenses et des fantasmes. Dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet, le style exprime les défenses, tandis que l'intrigue est la transposition du fantasme." ⁴⁰

One defence-mechanism is that of isolation, which stylistically is effected by "dédoublement" and impersonality:

"Le dédoublement est constant pour les personnages, les événements, les paysages ... Ceux-ci ne sont pas décrits dans leur réalité vivante. Le narrateur a affaire aux reflets, aux images, aux doubles des êtres et des situations." ⁴¹

⁴⁰Anzieu, p. 625

⁴¹Ibid., p. 627

Anzieu goes on to say:

"Ce qui est raconté par le narrateur, c'est le souvenir ou l'anticipation ou la formulation d'une scène. La scène réelle n'est jamais là."⁴²

The only possible exceptions to this might be the attempted assassination of Dupont in Les Gommès and the shooting of the soldier in Dans le Labyrinthe. Although Anzieu's theory is not the only possible explanation for Robbe-Grillet's preference for this technique, it is none the less an attractive hypothesis, and one which could be illuminating in considering Robbe-Grillet's attitude to reality, to unreality, and his treatment of both in his works. Suffice it to say that the technique occurs so frequently that it would seem to be more than a stylistic device.

We have examined the use of interior duplication with particular reference to La Maison de rendez-vous, as it is used much more exhaustively here than in any other of Robbe-Grillet's works. We will now turn our attention to Weiss, and consider to what extent he employs the technique and compare and contrast his use of it to Robbe-Grillet's.

The technique of interior duplication appears in both Weiss's proseworks and dramas, most significantly in Marat/Sade, in the form of the play within the play. Basically, for Weiss the technique serves the same purpose as it does for Robbe-Grillet, namely to aid in the disintegration of

⁴²Ibid., p. 628

time, yet simultaneously to reinforce the underlying structure of the work. If we turn first to the proseworks, we find no evidence in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers of the use of the technique.

What might be regarded as a form of "dédoublement" is the use of an "alter ego". In Weiss's early drama, Der Turm, Carlo is Pablo's "alter ego"; each character is an embodiment of one side of Weiss's own consciousness. Pablo, "Niente", is searching for his own identity. Like the Prodigal Son, he returns to the Tower, to the family ties which he has tried in vain to shake off. When Pablo escaped from the Tower, Carlo chose to remain, to try to find his identity in his art, in aesthetics, just as Weiss himself had sought to do.⁴³ In Abschied von den Eltern, Jacques, who seems to be an "alter ego" of the narrator, has shaken off the "Lebensangst", by which the narrator is still tortured:

"Jacques hatte sich schon freigeschlagen, er hatte sich schon seine verzehrende Freiheit erobert."⁴⁴

In an enigmatic scene the narrator shoots Jacques with his brother's toy pistol as he is leaving on the train. Jacques pretends to have been killed, then disappears without trace from the narrator's life. All attempts to find him fail, and the narrator starts to torture himself with the thought that perhaps he has really killed him, and has dreams of himself

⁴³Dramen I, p. 113

⁴⁴Abschied, p. 109

involved in a life or death struggle with an "alter ego". This is the side of Weiss's character, a "Wunschbild" as he describes it,⁴⁵ which he despairs of ever bringing into harmony with his other side, the side which is plagued by self-doubts and fears as to his existential situation. In the novel Fluchtpunkt the figure of Hoderer emerges as the "alter ego" of the "Ich-Erzähler". He embodies political ideals, and a desire for social change: the narrator, involved only with his art, feels guilty that he lacks such a social awareness.

Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden, written in 1962, offers the first significant illustration of the technique being employed in a sustained fashion. This fragment purports to be a conversation between three itinerant persons, Abel, Babel, and Cabel, who meet fortuitously and just as fortuitously continue on their way together. Not only do their names bear a striking resemblance to one another, they resemble each other physically:

"Da sie einander ähnlich waren wurden sie von den Passanten für Brüder gehalten, sie waren aber keine Brüder, waren nur Männer die gingen gingen gingen..."⁴⁶

In reality, all three are manifestations or "dédouplements", (as the names would suggest), of the one consciousness, that of the author himself. It is never quite clear to us who is

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 113

⁴⁶Gespräch, p. 7

actually speaking, but a certain pattern does emerge: the "collage" of the anecdotes resolves itself into three main themes, to each of which would correspond one narrative voice.

The first series of anecdotes centres on the ferryman, his wife and their six strange offspring. The tone of these passages is strictly objective, akin to that of Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. The main difference between the two works is that in the former Weiss is attempting to achieve an effect of simultaneity, of events related in a continuous present, whereas in the latter work, the events related are centred on the past, and issue from the conscious or the unconscious memory. The narrator, recounting events from his past life, is sometimes confused, finds his memory defective, and re-tells the incident just described in completely different terms. Once the past has gone it can be recaptured only imperfectly. This is why the work remains a fragment. There can be no question for Weiss of the Proustian "temps retrouvé". The consciousness is a composite of time-layers, which seem at certain times to merge and at others to diverge: ultimately, to the narrator it appears that the past is irreconcilable with the present:

"Ich wollte in diesem Augenblick die unkenntlich gewordene Zeit noch überwinden, ich hielt immer noch meinen Zeigefinger gehoben, um diese verronnene Zeit für wichtig zu erklären, doch in der Geschwindigkeit des Abstürzens war jede Rückwärtsbewegung unmöglich, es zeigte sich nur, dass das was hinter mir lag nie wieder erreicht werden konnte..."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 39

Alternatively, he discovers that his memory of an event does not correspond to actual reality:

"Der Fährmann berichtete mir einmal von seiner Frau. Er beschrieb sie mir anders als ich sie in der Erinnerung hatte. Ich sah sie noch beleibt, behäbig, mit zurückgestrichenem Haar, mit einem Knoten im Nacken, mit einer Warze auf der Nase, und vernahm dann von dem Bild, das er von ihr hatte, da zeigte sie sich hager, fast einen Kopf länger als er, mit rotem Haar, wahrscheinlich eine Perücke, und von einer Warze auf der Nase wusste er nichts, dagegen vom Bartwuchs, der mir nicht bekannt war." ⁴⁸

Of the members of the family, only the ferryman seems not to be remote from everyday reality. The six sons all have some kind of physical peculiarity - one has only one arm, the other is a sword swallower, another has no teeth and goes on crutches, and the fifth son is so fat that he cannot walk. The sixth son, Jym, sleeps out in the yard in a box, surrounded by barbed wire - one of the situations in the book reminiscent of the universe of Samuel Beckett.

In the narratives of the other two voices there are even stronger overtones of Beckett. Both hide themselves away from the world: the first on account of marital problems, the second because of his relationship with his father. The marriage does not get off to a very auspicious start. The shaking of the bridge over which the bridal coach is passing causes the bride to vomit all over her white dress. One of the horses slips and falls, the other bolts and the bridge collapses under the weight of the traffic and the onlookers.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 97 - 98

The narrator is apparently deceived by his wife, and his reaction is to escape from the world and hide himself away from it:

"Neben der Wohnungstür stand eine Kiste auf der Schwelle, hatte einmal zur Verwahrung von Brennholz gedient, war jetzt seit langem leer, ich hob den Deckel und kroch in die Kiste, in der es nach modriger Rinde roch." ⁴⁹

He also has a hiding-place on the river-bank, which he describes as an "Abfallhaufen", an "Erdloch". ⁵⁰ In an interview with Werner Mittenzwei and Wilhelm Girnus, Weiss spoke of his admiration for Samuel Beckett, but also of his feeling that Beckett's pessimistic outlook on life corresponded to an earlier phase in his own development, in which he, too, could find no way out:

"Ich bewundere Beckett sehr als Autor, ... aber Beckett beängstigt mich, indem er mich allzusehr an der Zeit erinnert, in der ich keinen Ausweg sah, in der ich im Kreise lief und mich eigentlich mit dieser Situation abfand, indem ich sagte: So ist die Welt, es gibt keinen Ausweg..." ⁵¹

In the marital relationship the roles of the husband and the wife are reversed - he does the housework and looks after the child. She is the breadwinner of the family. He wants to work on his scientific papers, but cannot, because he feels that she despises him for not making a material contribution to the upkeep of the family. He resents the fact that she

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 33

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 59

⁵¹Werner Mittenzwei and Wilhelm Girnus, "Gespräch mit Peter Weiss," Sinn und Form, 17, 1965, p. 686.

exerts an inhibiting influence on him. She is stifling his potentialities. It is a truly Strindbergian ménage!

The third voice is seeking a way to escape from his father, and this voice is the most obvious "dédoublement" of Weiss's own situation, the only difference being that Weiss did eventually shake free from what he felt was a stifling, destructive environment for him, both as a human being and a creative artist; for the narrator here there is no way out, apart from cutting himself off completely from reality and living in a garbage can.

The first time we hear the voice of this narrator we immediately encounter the theme of the defectiveness, the unreliability of memory. He can place credence in it only if there can be documentary proof of what he thinks he has remembered. This self-doubt carries over even into present time:

"Mein Vater geht dort in das weisse Haus, das die ganze Strassenseite einnimmt. Ich sah ihn deutlich, es war mein Vater, ich kann euch ein Bild von ihm zeigen." ⁵²

The narrator seems to be arguing here on somewhat absurdist lines. Why should a picture of his father convince the other two that he saw his father going into the house, if they themselves did not see the person in question? How can a photo identify someone you have never set eyes on? This theme of one's identity being founded on paper documentation appears

⁵²Gespräch, pp. 24 - 25

in another part of the novel, in an obviously Kafka-influenced situation. The "Ich", (it is not quite clear which of the two "subjective" voices it is), is going through a city, a journey which lasts several days and nights. He is asked to leave the bus by the conductor, because he is unable to tell him his destination. A policeman asks him for his papers:

"Ich hatte sie bei mir, wusste auch wie ich hiess, obgleich es mir gleichgültig war. Ich hatte meinen Namen noch nicht vergessen, doch ich hatte vergessen, warum ich hier ging, und in welcher Stadt ich mich befand. Da meine Papiere in Ordnung waren durfte ich weitergehen." ⁵³

The last remark is symptomatic of our 20th Century world, in which bureaucracy runs riot, and whole lives can be altered by a rubber-stamp on a piece of paper. The narrator continues:

"Erst am Abend des dritten Tages war mir mein Name aus dem Gedächtnis geschwunden, ich zog meine Papiere heraus, las die verzeichneten Personalien, sie sagten mir nichts." ⁵⁴

The expressions: "ich hatte meinen Namen noch nicht vergessen" and "erst am Abend des dritten Tages" seem to imply a conscious effort on the part of the narrator to lose his identity, to become an anonymous being, in a world of equally anonymous beings. With loss of identity go isolation and lack of communication. This is why Das Gespräch is not

⁵³Ibid., p. 40

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 41

really a conversation after all.

The father-son relationship, just like the husband-wife one, is, on its first appearance, already indicative of hostility and lack of harmony. The narrator (the son) is describing how he was throwing darts at a board fixed on the door of his room. The door opened and the dart which he had just thrown:

"... traf meinen Vater mitten in die Stirn, stak da, mit den roten Schwanzfedern, in der weissen Stirn, und er hielt sich noch an der Türklinke fest." ⁵⁵

It is almost the reverse of the situation in "Die Verwandlung", where Gregor Samsa's father hurls an apple at his metamorphosed son.

Imperfect though Weiss's use of the technique of interior duplication may appear in comparison to Robbe-Grillet's handling of it, we must nevertheless acknowledge his attempt to use it and ask ourselves why. It centres mainly on his attitude to time and enables him to disrupt the linear flow of time, to "effectively inject a dose of verticality into the horizontal time sequence of fiction", as Dorrit Cohn remarks of Robbe-Grillet's use of the same technique. ⁵⁶ One episode is illustrative of this use of "dédoublement". One narrator describes for us in the first person the incident of

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 26

⁵⁶Cohn, p. 27

the runaway horse.⁵⁷ Later we are given an account of the same event, but from the point of view of a disinterested bystander. The bridge, a leitmotif as it were, also serves as a disruptive element in a continuous time-sequence, functioning in a similar fashion to the harvesting of the bananas or the building of the bridge in La Jalousie. At its first mention we are told: "Ich glaube, diese Brücke ist neu, ich habe sie vorher nie gesehen, sie muss über Nacht erbaut worden sein..."⁵⁸ Shortly afterwards, describing an encounter with the ferryman, the narrator says:

"Bei unserm letzten Gespräch schien er von der geplanten Brücke noch nichts zu wissen."⁵⁹

And on the third reference to the bridge, by a different narrator, he says: "Die Brücke besteht seit langem."⁶⁰

The fact that we have three voices whose anecdotes centre on different topics, which may or may not be taking place simultaneously, also contributes to the fragmentary nature of the work. This is heightened by the fact that inside each series of anecdotes there is no apparent continuity. In fact, each devolves into an almost incoherent merging of fantasy, fiction and purported fact. The narrator, in trying to recall

⁵⁷Gespräch, pp. 10 - 14

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 8

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 9

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 10

episodes from his past, seems unable to distinguish between reality and imagination. Reference has already been made to the prime importance of documentary evidence in establishing truths, a completely fallacious procedure which actually proves nothing. With seeming objectivity, the narrator, (probably the one with the marital problems), will set out to recount an episode from his past life, for example, his career in an office. The banality of his existence, the soul-destroying effects of his pointless occupation, (again betraying Weiss's kinship with Kafka), are described at length, until suddenly he says: "Nein, so war es nicht, ich sehe es falsch, es ist so lange her...",⁶¹ and proceeds to a description of his office existence which shows more affinities with avant-garde film than with Kafka.

Likewise, after recounting in detailed fashion how he used to visit the ferryman's house, help his wife to milk the cow and so forth, the narrator, whom we have considered the most objective of the three, suddenly tells us:

"Was ich über das ehemalige Haus des Fährmanns sagte, war falsch. Ich bin nie in dem Haus gewesen, ich stand nur am Zaun und glaubte, durch das Fenster die Küche zu sehen."⁶²

Where does reality end and fantasy begin? For Weiss, as for Robbe-Grillet, it becomes increasingly obvious that the one is as valid as the other. Reinhard Baumgart perhaps oversim-

⁶¹Ibid., p. 83

⁶²Ibid., p. 102

plifies matters when he says that in the first series of monologues:

"... wird immer nur zugeschaut, während fremde Personen, ein Fährmann, seine Frau und seine Söhne, agieren ... Der Erzählende, ganz Epiker alten Stils, beschreibt und resumiert aus sicherer Distanz." ⁶³

The tone of this portion of the narrative may be more objective than that of the other two sections: nevertheless, the narrator is himself involved in the events narrated, and the reader in turn must see them through his eyes. If by an "Epiker alten Stils" Baumgart means an omniscient author, he would do well to consider that the narrator describes to us only things which he himself has seen (or thinks he has seen), or about which the ferryman has told him. He makes no attempt to speculate on motives and seems to accept the various idiosyncracies of the ferryman's family without comment. In short, he adopts the same narrative mode as the narrator in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers.

It seems quite obvious that in this work we do not really have a conversation, but three monologues, or even one interior monologue, which appear to express three facets of Weiss's own personality. The episodes centred on the ferryman underline what he feels to be his role in society, his relationship to other people: a bystander, not overly involved in their problems, not concerned enough to speculate on the reasons for

⁶³Reinhard Baumgart, "Ein Skizzenbuch, spätgotisch," in Canaris, p. 55.

their actions, or on the singularities in their make-up. The second facet, embodied in the marital relationship, is Weiss's own relationship with the opposite sex, which here, as in the autobiographical novels, seems doomed to failure. The third facet, the father-son relationship, predominates in all Weiss's prose-works, and will emerge again, though less prominently, in Hölderlin.

The technique of presenting as dialogue what is in essence monologue will also be encountered in Marat/Sade. There is no real confrontation between the two protagonists: one has the impression of "Aneinandervorbeireden", the same inability to communicate meaningfully which has already been encountered in Weiss's prose-works. Luc Lamberechts expresses the situation in these terms:

"Denn alle Personen der Ermordung Marats stehen im Banne der Vereinzelung, ihre Monologe haben gerade die Bedeutung eines hoffnungslosen Versuchs, eine neue Kontaktgewinnung zu bewirken." ⁶⁴

In the "Anmerkungen zum geschichtlichen Hintergrund unseres Stücks", Weiss explained why he had chosen to base his play on an entirely imaginary meeting between the two central characters:

"Was uns in der Konfrontation von Sade und Marat interessiert, ist der Konflikt zwischen dem bis zum Äussersten geführten Individualismus und dem Gedanken an eine politische und soziale Umwälzung." ⁶⁵

⁶⁴Luc Lamberechts, "Peter Weiss' Marat-Drama: Eine strukturelle Betrachtung," Studia Germanica Gandesia, X, 1968, p. 149.

⁶⁵Dramen I, p. 267

That his choice for one of the protagonists should have fallen on Jean-Paul Marat, the most radical of the Revolutionaries, and a fore-runner of Marxism, is not surprising, in view of Weiss's own commitment to socialism, which came shortly after the production of the drama. If, as Karl-Heinz Bohrer says, the coachman is an archetypal figure for Weiss,⁶⁶ so too is the Marat-figure, not so much in terms of his political significance, but because of his human frailties. Already in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers we find the figure of the doctor, to all appearances the best-educated of the inhabitants of the farm-house, suffering from suppurating sores which he is unable to heal. It is a historically documented fact that Marat suffered from a disease of the skin, probably psychosomatic in origin, which necessitated long periods of immersion in a bath of water. A further example might be the figure of Hölderlin, who, although not suffering from any skin ailment, in addition to being restrained in a strait-jacket has also to wear a leather-mask, to prevent him from scratching his face to shreds. Moreover, in Hölderlin's hallucinatory vision, Suzette Gontard appears: "... ihr Gesicht von einer Hautkrankheit entstellt".⁶⁷ Why should Weiss display a predilection for this particular type of illness? Is it connected to the masochistic elements in

⁶⁶Bohrer, p. 68

⁶⁷Hölderlin, p. 144

his work, just as the figure of the coachman is symbolic of the streak of sadism which is also to be found running through it? This recurrent figure of a person suffering from a rather nasty kind of disease might almost be taken as an example of interior duplication within the cadre of Weiss's oeuvre, a form of indirect reference to his other works, just as the statues in La Maison de rendez-vous make explicit reference to Robbe-Grillet's previous works. Further examples of this kind of reference are to be found in Weiss's projected play about Marlowe. (As Helmut Karasek is able to give a résumé of the structure of the drama and quote extracts from it, one must assume that it will, indeed, near completion soon.)⁶⁸ In the play, Mary Stuart in conversation with Marlowe bares her bosom to him, as does Elizabeth later to Shakespeare. This reminds us of the scene in Hölderlin where Wilhelmine Kirms, who is described as being "emancipirt",⁶⁹ unfastens her bodice, but cannot arouse any emotion in Hölderlin other than confusion.⁷⁰ Similarly, a "britische Adlige" is to stab Marlowe in his bath, (the historical Marlowe was killed in a tavern brawl), just as Charlotte Corday stabbed Marat.

The choice of Sade as Marat's opponent seems at first sight rather strange. It can be explained in part for person-

⁶⁸ Helmut Karasek, "Peter Weiss Marlowe," Theater heute, Heft 11, 1971, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Hölderlin, p. 35

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 51 - 52

al reasons. Weiss sees incorporated in Sade many of what he now regards as his own political shortcomings:

"... denn Sade war auch ein Revolutionär auf seine Weise ... was wir heute den Vertreter des dritten Standpunktes nennen. Einerseits weiss er und sieht ein, dass die Gesellschaft verändert werden muss, andererseits hat er aber selbst nicht die Kraft, aktiv an dieser Umwandlung mitzuarbeiten. Dadurch entspricht er meiner eigenen früheren Welt, meinem Eingeschlossensein, der Unfähigkeit, den Schritt nach draussen zu tun."⁷¹

Sade had at first supported the Revolution, (though not to the extent of giving up his own private possessions!), but had become disillusioned with it, mainly because he felt that it had failed, and that power had merely passed from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, leaving the proletariat no better off than before. The second reason for Weiss's choice of Sade is that he discovered that Sade had written and directed several plays for the inmates of Charenton, where he was interned from 1801 until his death in 1814. The whole action of the drama centres on the play within the play, the drama of Marat's assassination by Charlotte Corday, written and directed by Sade and performed by the lunatic inmates of Charenton, before a fashionable Parisian audience. Why does Weiss choose the technique of the play within the play? The main reason is, as with the interior duplication of Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden, to fragment time, to set up a multi-layered time-structure. The Ausrufer tells us at the outset of the action:

⁷¹SuF, 1965, p. 682

"Nach dieser kurzen Introduktion
ist schon im Gang unsere Produktion
und Sie sehen heute am dreizehnten Juli
achtzehnhundert und acht
wie vor fünfzehn Jahren die immerwährende Nacht
für jenen dort in der Wanne begann." 72

The audience at Charenton in 1808 is seeing a re-enactment of Marat's assassination in 1793, so that the switch between Sade's play and the situation in Charenton is a change between two distinct levels in time. A further involvement of the temporal structure stems from the figure of the Ausrufer, a harlequin-type figure, who takes over the direction of Sade's play, enabling Sade himself to retire to the wings and insert instructions and advice only when he deems it necessary. The Ausrufer is obviously not one of the lunatics. He is an interpolation of Weiss's, fulfilling the same role as Brecht's "Spielleiter" or Frisch's "Heutiger" in Die chinesische Mauer, or the "Sänger" in his own Hölderlin. All are used to achieve "Verfremdung", as they speak directly to the audience, breaking their concentration, preventing them from becoming involved in what is going on on-stage, and explaining for them, and commenting on what they have just seen or are about to see. The Ausrufer's remarks introduce a third level of temporality, that of the contemporary theatre audience. He addresses the audience directly:

"So lasst es uns also in Ruhe betrachten
weil wir die Taten von damals verachten
Denn an Einsicht sind wir heute viel klüger

⁷²Dramen I, p. 163

als jene deren Zeit für immer vorüber." 73

His remarks at the end of Act I can only be directed at a 20th Century German audience:

"Erfreuen wir uns jetzt unsrer gegenwärtigen Tage und erwägen wir in der Pause dessen Lage den Sie bald wieder nach Kaffee und Bier sehen werden in der Wanne hier." 74

Some of Sade's remarks, too, have a peculiarly 20th Century flavour:

"Wie experimentierten wir nicht in unseren Laboratorien ehe wir zur letzten Behandlung schritten" 75

and he also talks about "Säuberungsaktionen". 76

East German critics tend to stress that it was for political reasons that Weiss used this very involved time-structure. Typical of these are the remarks made by Wilhelm Girnus in an interview with Weiss in 1965:

"Die Rhetorik wird aber auch durch das 'Spiel im Spiel' betont. Eigentlich handelt es sich ja um zwei historische Ebenen, die hier konfrontiert werden, wobei Marat die Vergangenheit darstellt, die eigentlich Zukunft hat, während de Sade die Gegenwart darstellt, die keine Zukunft hat. Ein sehr kompliziertes temporales System." 77

This may be true, but it is probably an over-simplification to consider this the prime reason for this particular type of

⁷³Ibid., p. 212

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 224

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 178

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 204

⁷⁷SuF, 1965, p. 682

structure. The question of political motivation in the choice of the play within the play will also concern us when we consider Hölderlin.

Thus the device of the play within the play enables Weiss to achieve "dédoublement", or better, multiplicity on a temporal level. Another use of the technique becomes obvious with respect to the characters. Again, it is a question of multiplicity rather than of mere "dédoublement". The historical figures, with the exception of Sade and the Coulmiers, are played by madmen, who in turn are played by actors. There is a certain amount of irony in the type of mental illness from which Weiss has made each of the main characters suffer. Corday, whom one would expect to be dynamic, and resolutely pursuing a course of action to its inevitable outcome, is played by a somnambulist, who cannot even come in on cue. Duperret, who with Corday acts out of idealist motives, is portrayed by an erotomaniac, who tries to use each encounter with Corday for his own personal gratification - a rather scathing comment by Weiss on the behaviour of the world's idealists. Jacques Roux, Marat's "alter ego", is a raving lunatic, who has to be forcibly restrained in a strait-jacket. Marat himself is played by a paranoiac, suffering from delusions, the very nature of his disease suggesting a certain "dédoublement" within the character himself.

When we discussed Robbe-Grillet's use of interior duplication, it was suggested that it enabled the reader to achieve

a certain distance from the events narrated. It is also true that Weiss is using the technique in the manner of a Brechtian "Verfremdungseffekt". How can the audience identify with a character whom they know from the outset is an actor and who may at any time within the drama be playing a lunatic, or a lunatic who has assumed the role of a historical personage, or better the role of an actor playing a historical personage? Sade is the only one of the main characters who does not fall into this category. He was interned in Charenton on account of sexual excesses, not for reasons of insanity. He appears to be performing the same function in the drama as does Edouard Manneret in La Maison de rendez-vous, author of a piece of creative writing, character in the work itself, doubled by an actor playing a character of the same name. It is a strange coincidence that the title of the play written by Jonestone in La Maison de rendez-vous, which is performed at the Villa Bleue, should have as its title, "L'Assassinat d'Edouard Manneret", an assassination which takes place in hypothetical fashion in "real" life on several occasions. Similarly Sade's play is entitled "Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean-Paul Marats", an assassination which is carried out only on Corday's third attempt. Already on her first visit she is prepared to kill Marat, and Sade has to intervene and say:

"Noch nicht Corday

Dreimal kommst du an seine Tür." 78

After her first visit we have a flash-back, a pantomime re-enactment of her arrival in Paris. This is again an interruption in the linear flow of time. On her third visit, she is just about to plunge her knife into Marat, when the Ausrufer stops her and says that:

"Es gehört zu Herrn de Sades künstlerischen Duktus dass er jetzt einschaltet einen Interruptus." 79

This is in turn a form of "dédoublement" of the plot, in that Marat's assassination is conceived not only in political, but also in erotic terms. The term "Interruptus" has overt sexual connotations, and Weiss's description of Marat's murder leaves us in no doubt as to its being sexually as well as politically motivated. Only after we hear from the four singers what will be the course of events after Marat's death, is Corday eventually able to carry out the assassination.

Our knowledge of historical fact lets us know the outcome of the play in advance. Weiss himself said in an interview that, "Das Ende ist von Anfang an gegeben." 80 Thus there can be no question of the classical drama structure with events moving inexorably towards their climax, the culmination of the play being unknown to the audience. Weiss

⁷⁸Dramen I, p. 172

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 248

⁸⁰Dieter Stér, "Gespräch mit Peter Weiss", in Karl-Heinz Braun, Materialien zu Peter Weiss' "Marat/Sade", (Edition Suhrkamp 232, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1967), p. 96.

disclaims any intention of using this type of structure. The interest in the play lies in the confrontation of the two protagonists, Sade and Marat, and as Sade says in the Epilogue, the intention of the drama is to test out these anti-theoretical positions and measure them against one another. The introduction of the play within the play provides the dramatic tension which is lacking in this confrontation. As Weiss said in the interview with Stér, in Marat/Sade it is not a question of "eine Handlung im herkömmlichen Sinn".⁸¹ Instead of action, we have a situation, a "Zustand", a type of plot which Weiss considers quite acceptable and which he uses both in his theatre and in his prose-works.⁸² In Marat/Sade there are two main narrative threads running through the drama, intermingling and overlapping. The "story" line is the assassination of Sade by Corday; Weiss's own point of departure is the imaginary confrontation of Sade with Marat. Thus the plot also provides a form of duplication.

No sooner has Corday managed to kill Marat than he is promptly resuscitated by the Ausrufer in an epilogue to the play, in order to underline for the audience the aims of the play itself:

"Eh Sie hinausgehn aus den Türen
lassen Sie uns kurz rekapitulieren
was wir versuchten auszudrücken

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²See Karl-Heinz Braun, p. 110.

in den gesprochenen und gesungenen Stücken." 83

Sade's commentary is quite enlightening, in as much as his aims seem to correspond very closely with those of Weiss:

"Es war unsre Absicht in den Dialogen
Antithesen auszuprobieren
und diese immer wieder gegeneinander zu stellen
um die ständigen Zweifel zu erhellen
Jedoch finde ich wie ichs auch dreh und wende
in unserm Drama zu keinem Ende." 84

The outcome of the play remains open, and Sade's words suggest that there is no real end to it. The fragmentary, cyclical nature of Weiss's writing has already been encountered in the prose-works and what we have here is another example of it. Robbe-Grillet's works also tend to be cyclical in nature, generally because he has deliberately constructed them on this basis. One need only think of Les Gommages with its two circular time patterns, or Le Voyeur, with its recurrent motif of the figure-of-eight design, for two examples of this.

On a purely technical level Weiss might be considered to be employing "dédoublement". As Peter Brook said in his introduction to the English translation of the play:

"One of the London critics attacked the play on the ground that it was a fashionable mixture of all the best theatrical ingredients around - Brechtian - didactic - absurdist - Theatre of Cruelty. He said this to disparage, but I repeat this as praise." 85

⁸³Dramen I, p. 251

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 253

⁸⁵Peter Brook, Introduction to Geoffrey Skelton's translation of Marat/Sade, (First American edition, Atheneum, New York, 1965).

Why should Brecht and Artaud be mutually exclusive? Brook goes on to say:

"The imaginative richness is the consequence of the amount of levels that are working simultaneously; this simultaneity is the direct result of Weiss's daring combination of so many contradictory techniques."⁸⁶

Weiss's latest play, Hölderlin, seems superficially to be very close to Marat/Sade. Both centre on the theme of revolution: the main characters either renounce the revolutionary struggle (Sade), fall victim to the forces of counter-revolution (Marat), or, convinced of the futility of the struggle in face of an unresponsive society, seek refuge in insanity (Hölderlin). Both dramas are constructed on a multi-temporal basis, following the principle of "collage", and one function of the play within the play is to dislocate the continuous flow of time. The action in Hölderlin spans the period from 1793, (significantly the year of Marat's assassination, the news of which is given to the students by Herzog Karl Eugen), until Hölderlin's death in 1843. The first six scenes span the years 1793 to 1799. Scene 7 is set in 1807, five years after Hölderlin's admission to the clinic, and the last scene covers the last forty years of his life, ending just before his death in 1843. There is a chronological progression, at least until the scene in the clinic, in which we have a flash-back to Hölderlin's visit to Paris in 1802. From the compression of the last scene two incidents emerge:

⁸⁶Ibid.

a visit to Hölderlin in his tower by Schelling and Hegel, and the imaginary visit of the twenty-five year old Karl Marx to Hölderlin shortly before the latter's death. However, this is a deceptively uncomplicated temporal structure. It becomes more involved when we consider that in it there is quite an obvious progression from an objective reality, (given credence by the use of actual quotations by Weiss, though historical authenticity is grossly distorted for artistic or political ends), to a state of hallucinatory visions and fantasy, imagined reality. For Weiss, as for Hölderlin, both realities are equally valid:

"nicht trennen will er [Hölderlin] aus dem Wirklichen den Thraum
es müssen Fantaisie und Handlung seyn im gleichen Raum." 87

In addition, we, the contemporary audience, are intended to see in Hölderlin a 20th Century figure - Che Guevara - just as Hölderlin's circle of friends in 1799 are meant to see in the Empedokles fragment a lesson for their times. As in Marat/Sade, there is a multiplicity of time-levels, with the figure of the Sänger, like the Ausrufer in Marat/Sade explaining and commenting on what is happening, making reference to the past and to the future. Hölderlin in the epilogue tells us quite explicitly that we are to see in his figure a model of certain 20th Century revolutionaries:

"als spiegle er [Hölderlin] nicht nur vergangne Tage

⁸⁷Hölderlin, p. 181

sondern als ob die gleichen Aufgaben er vor sich habe
wie sie sich manchen von den Heutigen stellen
welche nach Lösung suchend drann zerschellen." 88

The Empedokles fragment, the play within the play, also serves the purpose of broadening the temporal perspective of the drama. Empedokles is quite clearly a "dédoublement" of Hölderlin, and, simultaneously, in a somewhat allusive fashion, of Che Guevara.

The play, according to Hölderlin, is set:

"Fünfhundert Jahr eh
unsre Zeitrechnung begann
und heut." 89

Empedokles' retreat to the mountain stronghold of Mount Etna parallels Che's guerilla efforts in Bolivia. The vocabulary used in the play within the play seems more in keeping with 20th Century South America than with Ancient Greece: "Machetas", 90 and "Silberminen" 91 are but two examples of it. Empedokles was a doctor healing the sick; 92 so also was Ernesto Guevara. Che suffered from asthma; Empedokles is "von Athemnoth bedrängt". 93 Only in so far as their deaths are concerned is there slightly less of a parallel. Che

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 112

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 125

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 116

⁹³Ibid., p. 124

Guevara was betrayed and shot by a Bolivian army-unit. Empedokles threw himself into the crater of Etna; a closer parallel to Hölderlin, (at least to Weiss's interpretation of him), who chose a living death in his madness.

It must be admitted that on the whole the play within the play in Hölderlin is less well integrated into the main body of the drama than it is in Marat/Sade. Without Sade's play we would have been left with a somewhat sterile exchange of views between Marat and Sade, a very emasculated form of the drama. In Hölderlin we are left with the impression of gratuity as far as the Empedokles fragment is concerned - an aesthetic tour de force, motivated by a political end. Siegfried Melchinger suggests that the fragment loses its point because Weiss shied away from the ultimate conclusion which could be drawn from it, namely, that Marx saw in Hölderlin a communist:

"Das Stück hat unbestreitbare Schwächen. Auch in der 'Empedokles'-Szene kommt nicht heraus, was Hölderlin eigentlich durchsetzen will. Vor der einzigen Konsequenz, die den Auftritt Marx' logisch rechtfertigen könnte: dass nämlich Hölderlin Kommunist gewesen wäre, ist Weiss ausgewichen." ⁹⁴

Hölderlin's play serves Weiss's purpose; it offers a form of documentary theatre; the hero is a revolutionary figure - the forerunner of a line stretching through Marlowe, (who is to be the central character of the next play projected by Weiss),

⁹⁴Siegfried Melchinger, "Der Fall Hölderlin und der Fall Peter Weiss," Theater heute, November 1971, p. 28.

Marat, Hölderlin, Karl Marx, Trotsky, to Che Guevara. It also enables him to put over his political message; the time may not be ripe, but the revolt must be attempted.

In summing up: both authors employ the technique of interior duplication with a fair measure of success. Primarily, its use is intended to achieve discontinuity in the time-sequence, with its concomitant distancing of the reader or the theatre audience from the action or the characters. A secondary function is to achieve a more complicated narrative mode and this is the next topic which it is proposed to consider. That there will be some overlapping with what has just been discussed is, to a certain extent, inevitable. However, in our analysis of the technique of "dédoublement", we have restricted ourselves to certain works. Now we must broaden our perspectives to include other works, omitted up to this point, which nevertheless are crucial to any investigation of narrative viewpoint.

CHAPTER III

Narrative techniques

A certain imbalance now arises because not only is Robbe-Grillet's production in the field of prose-narrative greater than that of Weiss, he also employs a greater variety of narrative techniques. Even if one discounts the two "ciné-romans", L'Immortelle and L'Année dernière à Marienbad, one still has to weigh six full-length novels and a fragment against two autobiographical novels, a "Mikro-Roman" and a fragment. However, leaving such quantitative considerations aside, it is still possible to make a fruitful comparison of the authors' works, and also to make an assessment as to just how far the narrative mode employed by the respective authors is typical of the genre in which each is writing.

It is proposed, therefore, to adopt two different methods of approach. We shall first examine Weiss's two novels, Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt, with a view to establishing to what extent they are typical of that particularly German genre, the "Bildungs-" or "Entwicklungsroman". Then the narrative techniques employed in Le Voyeur and La Maison de rendez-vous will be studied. It is not intended to establish any comparison between the two sets of novels, but merely to consider the narrative techniques employed. Secondly, a further two pairs of novels will be examined,

Les Gattes and Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden, and La Jalousie and Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. In these it is possible to see a certain similarity in the techniques used.

The main point of contact between Weiss and Robbe-Grillet in their prose-writings is that each is working on the basis that the act of creative writing is contributing to self-knowledge. Robbe-Grillet expresses this conception of the writer's *métier* in terms somewhat reminiscent of Montaigne:

"... si je fais moi-même ces films, si je fais moi-même ces romans ... c'est que sans doute j'avais besoin de me chercher moi-même ... Ce que je pense de moi, c'est en somme ces livres que je vous ai donnés à lire."¹

He thus invites us to be aware of his presence behind the narration, which is normally recounted, with certain exceptions, in the third person. Weiss starts out from an analogous position. In a speech given at Princeton University he said:

"Bei meinen frühesten Versuchen zu schreiben, dachte ich nur an meine eigene Existenz."²

It is this search for his authentic self which forms the kernel of his early writings, and it was not until his conversion to Marxism that he was able to expand his horizons to include others as well as himself. Even Marat/Sade has a personal basis. His political sympathies lie with Marat, but Sade embodies many of his own personal traits of character,

¹"Table ronde sur l'Immortelle," Cahiers Internationaux du Symbolisme, 1965, p. 114.

²"Rede - unveröffentlichtes Manuskript", in Canaris, p. 9.

(which he feels he has now discarded); such as his desire to see a modification in the structure of society, but his inability to participate actively in such social reform:

"Dadurch entspricht er [Sade] meiner eigenen früheren Welt, meinem Eingeschlossensein, der Unfähigkeit, den Schritt nach draussen zu tun."³

Indeed, one critic has even suggested that Weiss's commitment to a political ideology is merely an attempt to escape from this all-pervasive problem of finding his own authentic self:

"Das Engagement des Peter Weiss ist eine Flucht vor sich selbst."⁴

One might compare his situation to that of Bertolt Brecht, who, according to some critics, appeared to find in Marxist dogma a curb for his unbridled talents, a form of self-discipline essential to prevent the dissipation of his creative energy.

When one considers Weiss's two autobiographical novels, Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt, one very soon realises that although chronologically the one complements the other, each is representative of a different genre of first person narrative. We use the term "autobiographical" to refer to these two works, although, strictly speaking, they are not wholly autobiographical in content, but merely based on certain details from Weiss's own personal history:

³SuF, 1965, p. 681

⁴Heinrich Vormweg, "Das Engagement des Peter Weiss," Merkur, 1965, p. 1099.

"... sie sind aufgebaut aus autobiographischen Stoffen. Ich habe darin versucht, die Situation der Emigration, die ja für meine ganze Entwicklung wesentlich war, auszudrücken..."⁵

When asked in an interview, to what extent Fluchtpunkt might be read as autobiography, Weiss replied:

"Of course one can't write about something one hasn't experienced oneself."⁶

This would seem to suggest that there is, indeed, a very close identification between Weiss and his "Ich-Erzähler", although it is certainly not the case that the one is synonymous with the other. Weiss makes it quite clear that the "Ich-Erzähler" is a fictitious creation:

"... I made the attempt in Fluchtpunkt to develop a very particular figure of the time and to embody in this figure what I felt was typical of that time."⁷

Both works were written at a fairly long interval from the events described in them. Abschied recounts the events of his childhood, boyhood, the emigration to England and then to Prague, and finally his joining his parents in Sweden. Fluchtpunkt starts with his arrival in Stockholm on November 8th, 1940, and ends in Paris in 1947. Both books were written during the period 1960-61, so that the lapse of time brings the forces of memory into play. Weiss himself was conscious of the distorting effects of the passage of time on

⁵SuF, 1965, p. 679

⁶Michael Roloff, "An interview with Peter Weiss," Partisan Review, XXXII, No. 2, Spring 1965, p. 227.

⁷Ibid.

one's recollection of past events. In Das Gespräch, the narrator speaks of "unkenntlich gewordene Zeit", and his attempts to recapture it prove fruitless:

"... es zeigte sich nur, dass das was hinter mir lag nie wieder erreicht werden konnte..."⁸

Yet this is what Weiss is attempting to do in Abschied and Fluchtpunkt, although he does express a certain dissatisfaction with the outcome. In the essay "Aus dem Pariser Journal", written in July, 1962, he mentions Fluchtpunkt, (implicitly, if not actually by name) and says:

"Als fertiges, herausgehobenes Stück entspricht es nicht mehr dem Gedankenmaterial, aus dem es entstanden ist, die Gedanken haben sich längst verändert, verschoben, und doch erhebt es jetzt, in seiner festen Form, Anspruch auf Gültigkeit... Es ist eine Fälschung, in seiner Begrenztheit, in seiner Konzentrierung des Stoffes..."⁹

What strikes one as significant is his use of the term "Fälschung". He does not mean to imply that he has deliberately distorted the facts, but rather that the selective process which he has employed to achieve condensation instead of panoramic spread has resulted in an end product which is "untrue". Being limited in scope it does not really correspond to an accurate picture of the period which he has depicted:

"Das unveränderliche Bruchstück, das nur eine einzige Möglichkeit unter vielen darstellt, muss sich jetzt als selbstständiges Ganzes beurteilen lassen, und seine

⁸Gespräch, p. 39

⁹Rapporte, p. 86

Teilwahrheit muss als absolute Wahrheit gelten." ¹⁰

Otto F. Best considers that Abschied and Fluchtpunkt belong to different genres of the autobiographical novel:

"Steht Abschied, so wir einen anspruchsvollen Vergleich wollen, eher in der Tradition der Confessiones und von Rousseaus Bekenntnissen, die Selbstanalyse mit Beichte verbinden, so knüpft Fluchtpunkt an bei Bildungs- und, vor allem, Entwicklungsroman, wobei allerdings die Auseinandersetzung mit der formenden Umwelt unter einem negativen Vorzeichen steht." ¹¹

Another predecessor in the field of the confessional novel whom Best might have named is André Gide, who in his autobiographical work Si le grain ne meurt (1926) broke through many of the same taboos which appear in Weiss's work. Gide seems to set out quite deliberately to paint the blackest picture of himself which he can (his onanism and homosexuality), just as Weiss recounts the hostility of his "Ich-Erzähler" towards his father, his ambivalent attitude towards his mother and his incestuous relationship with his sister.

The over-all tone of the novel is very factual, almost prosaic and banal. This makes the narrator's account of a dream which he has had all the more striking. He goes for a walk in the woods after his day's work in his father's factory. He is so depressed by the monotony of his existence, by his inability to communicate with his family, that he lies

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Otto F. Best, Peter Weiss. Vom existentialistischen Drama zum marxistischen Welttheater. Eine kritische Bilanz. (Francke AG Verlag, Bern und München, 1971), p. 25.

down to sleep, with the hope of never waking up again. In his dream he meets, "... ein(en) Mann in Jägerkleidung, eine Jagdtasche und eine Flinte über der Schulter".¹² He meets him a second time; then, in the waters of a lake, the figure again appears. The dreamer recognises him and awakes:

"Auf einer Ferienreise vor vielen Jahren, als Kind, war er mir in einem Wald begegnet."¹³

However, when one refers to a prior mention of the huntsman in the novel, when he is described in exactly the same terms, one finds that he was seen by the narrator, whether in reality or in his imagination, from the window of his bedroom in London. On seeing the figure he says, "ein weicher Schreck stieg in mir auf."¹⁴ He is unable to explain the significance of this dream:

"... (ich) fühlte nur, dass eine Wandlung eingetreten war, dass neue Kräfte mein Leben beherrschten."¹⁵

Otto F. Best suggests that a possible explanation is that the huntsman is the "Stimme des Sexus, eine Metapher der Leidenschaft wie der Zustand des Irrsinns später in Marat/Sade".¹⁶ This might well be so. His reaction to his first encounter with this figure is one of fear, and immediately following this incident he describes his abortive attempt to have

¹²Abschied, p. 45

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 98

¹⁵Ibid., p. 146

¹⁶Best, Peter Weiss, p. 31

sexual relations with Elfriede, a girl employed by his parents to help look after the children. Be that as it may, it is still noteworthy that this is the only time Weiss introduces this type of allegorical element in the novel.

The confessional tone of Abschied disappears almost completely from Fluchtpunkt. His family has inhibited his development both as a man and as an artist. He breaks free, but still faces the problem of being totally unequipped to face everyday life. Fluchtpunkt is the account of his education in living. Three main factors play an instrumental role in this development. The first is his contact with the works of writers such as Kafka and Henry Miller. These act upon him in two ways, each of which contributes to his further development. Kafka presents him with a mirror-image of his own existential situation, which for a time is adequate for his needs. Miller gives him the impetus needed in his further development: a more aggressive attitude towards life is coupled with a rejection of Kafka's passivity, (as Weiss sees it), in face of the injustices inflicted on him. The world of literature and his own attempts at writing and painting will contribute to the emergence of a more integrated personality. However, his concern with personal problems will predominate to such an extent that he will be completely indifferent to the problems of society. Here the second formative influence is brought to bear. The narrator's friend Hoderer, whose character is based on the figure of

Max Hodann and whose name might owe something to Sartre's Hoederer in Les Mains sales, endeavours, unsuccessfully, to make him aware of his social responsibilities. However, although at this particular period in his life he is unreceptive to Hoderer's teaching, the seed has been sown, and will later germinate on his contact with Marxist philosophy. The third significant link in his chain of development will be forged, not by a person, but by an event, namely the revelation of the extermination of six million Jews in the gas-ovens of camps such as Auschwitz. In 1947, on the banks of the River Seine, he realises that he has been sufficiently prepared by his experiences of the past few years to accept life on its own terms. The "Bildungsjahre" are over: at the age of thirty, he is about to embark on a new existence.

A reading of these autobiographical works establishes one basic fact: the experiences of the narrator's adult life have their roots in certain events, usually traumatic, of his childhood. His physical exile from Germany only confirmed the sense of not belonging which forced itself on his consciousness in early childhood. His sexual inadequacies might be traced to an incestuous relationship with his sister Margit. In somewhat similar fashion, one critic, Ben Stoltzfus, sees the reason for the behaviour of Robbe-Grillet's protagonists as being directly traceable to certain events in their childhood or adolescence:

"... the dominant theme of Dans le labyrinthe, that of a child leading a man through the labyrinth of existence,

suggests, in the same way as the statuette on Wallas' mantelpiece (child leading a man), that the behaviour patterns of Robbe-Grillet's adult protagonists have as their generative source childhood experiences." ¹⁷

In Le Voyeur, according to Stoltzfus:

"Numerous flashbacks reveal that Mathias' psycho-sexual infantilism has its origins in childhood behaviour..." ¹⁸

Several examples of this are his collection of pieces of string rolled into a figure-of-eight shape, (an "objective correlative" of the structure of the novel itself), the drawing of the seagulls, and a significant detail from his adult life, the fact that the display case for his watches is lined with material which has a pattern of dolls on it.

However, this psycho-analytical assessment of Mathias' character is not what has provoked most discussion about the novel itself. Critics have differed quite radically as to whether or not Mathias did kill Jacqueline, as the murder took place in the "creux" or "trou blanc" between the first two sections of the novel. Another source of controversy has been the narrative mode employed by Robbe-Grillet. Certain critics consider that there is a dual perspective, others that there is really only one narrator, Mathias. Jean Alter considers that the novel is "... organisé selon deux

¹⁷Ben Stoltzfus, "A novel of objective subjectivity: Le Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet," PMLA, LXXVII, No. 4, September 1962, p. 502.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 501

perspectives",¹⁹ and Bruce Morrisette would appear to agree with him:

"... some critics have found in the work only a single focus ... but ... there are large blocks of text wherein Mathias is very definitely seen from the outside, long 'neutral' passages and developments incompatible with the single viewpoint theory. It is from these scenes that the paradox or ambiguity of narrative mode arises, and not from the mixing of real and imagined scenes in the sections of the text which do render the world and mind of Mathias through techniques of objectified subjectivity."²⁰

Dorrit Cohn, on the other hand, finds only one narrative voice, which she identifies with Kafka's "K. perspective".²¹ Robbe-Grillet's own suggestion for an interpretation of the point of view which is employed is:

"Est-ce que ce héros n'est pas quelqu'un en train de décrire le monde comme il le voit, mais qui en même temps parle de lui-même à chaque instant en disant 'il', et même 'il fit cela', en réemployant le temps du passé historique cher à Balzac?"²²

Thus, for the author himself there is only one narrative voice, that of Mathias. It is almost the reverse of the technique employed by Camus in L'Etranger, where Meursault shelters behind the "je" and tells us the minimum about himself, and here Mathias, behind the "il", this objectified-subjective mode, reveals to us all the inner workings of his tortured

¹⁹Alter, Vision, p. 26

²⁰Bruce Morrisette, "The Evolution of Narrative Viewpoint in Robbe-Grillet," Novel I, Fall 1967, p. 27.

²¹Cohn, p. 25

²²"Table ronde", p. 106

personality.

La Maison de rendez-vous offers what is to date Robbe-Grillet's most consistent attempt at experimentation with narrative mode. It is, to a certain extent, a continuation of techniques employed in Les Gommès and Dans le Labyrinthe. In the former, shifting perspectives resulted in a many-faceted view of reality and a concomitant discontinuity in the sequence of time. In Dans le Labyrinthe a "je" narrator emerges in the opening pages then disappears until almost the end of the novel, at which point the reader realizes that this anonymous "je" is the doctor who was tending the wounded soldier. The fact that this "je" was the doctor escaped the notice of certain critics, for example, Bruno Hahn. In his article he said:

"... comme le roman commence par "je" et finit par "moi", il est évident qu'il s'agit de Robbe-Grillet lui-même." ²³

When Robbe-Grillet pointed out to him the phrase, "A ma dernière visite", on page 211, which he had overlooked, and which pointed to the doctor as the narrator, he claimed this did not invalidate his theory, and that the doctor was simply Robbe-Grillet's mouthpiece. In a discussion of his film L'Immortelle Robbe-Grillet said that its formal structure resembled that of Dans le Labyrinthe:

"... où justement il y a un narrateur qui a l'air de tout raconter, mais qui s'incarne momentanément au début du

²³Bruno Hahn, "Plan du labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet," Les Temps Modernes, no. 172, July 1960, p. 164.

livre et à la fin, et qui à l'intérieur de cette parenthèse se glisse dans une autre conscience, celle d'un soldat..."²⁴

In La Maison de rendez-vous we find shifting perspectives, as various characters assume in turn the role of the narrator. There is also a "je", who at times is obviously Johnson, at others, just as obviously is not. On one occasion he might even be Robbe-Grillet personally.²⁵

Morrisette claims that Robbe-Grillet is here establishing what amounts to a "state of viewpoint":

"... justification is not only abandoned, but distorted and negated so violently that the reader acquires or shares a kind of omnipresence similar to that of certain dreams."²⁶

That the reader assumes a much more active role in Robbe-Grillet's works than in a more conventional novel has been stressed by Robbe-Grillet on various occasions. To the question as to who the "voyeur" was in Le Voyeur - Mathias himself or Julien Marek - Robbe-Grillet replied:

"... le titre [du Voyeur] donne un mode de lecture du livre et indique que le personnage principal en est le lecteur. Le 'voyeur' ce n'est pas Mathias, c'est vous."²⁷

In La Maison de rendez-vous the reader must participate actively in the unfolding of the events of the novel. He,

²⁴"Table ronde", p. 106

²⁵MR, p. 141

²⁶Morrisette, "Evolution", p. 32

²⁷"Table ronde", p. 119

along with the novelist, creates whatever structures of time and space he wishes. In fact, in La Maison de rendez-vous we seem to be in the presence of a novelist actively engaged in creating a piece of literature. This conception of point of view emerged already in Dans le Labyrinthe. In an interview about the genesis of Dans le Labyrinthe Robbe-Grillet said:

"... je suis parti de cette idée: une forme d'itinéraire qui pouvait être également une forme d'écriture, un labyrinthe..."²⁸

What attracted him about the idea of a labyrinthine structure was the idea of the "impasses", the "retours en arrière" which such a structure would involve. As the interviewer in L'Express put it:

"Vous êtes parti du projet d'écrire un livre autour d'une certaine idée formelle de la construction de ce livre."²⁹

He employs the same technique in his film Trans-Europ-Express (1966). The impression of gratuity which emerges in some of Robbe-Grillet's later works is not fortuitous. He has always expressed the desire to write a book in the manner of Flaubert, "à partir de rien."³⁰ He stresses increasingly the importance of the "jeux de la création", the primacy of invention in his works. In an interview, when asked about the writing of his works, he said:

²⁸"Entretien", L'Express, October 8th, 1959, p. 32.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰PNR, p. 139

"Les Gommès était noté entièrement sur fiches avant d'être rédigé, alors que la Maison de rendez-vous a été écrit au fur et à mesure, comme cela se présentait... Comme je crois que le sujet même de tous mes petits travaux c'est l'invention, je trouve bête de la figer à l'avance dans une structure achevée." ³¹

He seems to be re-echoing the views of Edouard in Gide's

Faux-Monnaveurs:

"Vous devriez comprendre qu'un plan, pour un livre de ce genre est essentiellement inadmissible. Tout y serait faussé si j'y décidais rien par avance. J'attends que la réalité me le dicte." ³²

In Le Voyeur, by restricting the narrative perspective to one central character, Robbe-Grillet departed quite radically from the variety of narrative techniques which he had employed in his first novel, Les Gommès. In the earlier work, superficially, the narrative mode is that of the third person pronoun, whose range is extended by the use of indirect discourse and interior monologue. The narrative perspective switches around amongst eight or so figures, each of whom gives his account of the situation, either by way of flashback or conjecture as to how things might have happened. Robbe-Grillet's choice of the narrative mode is influenced to quite a large extent by his views on the function of time in the novel. This point has already been made in the previous chapter in the discussion of the use of interior duplication. He is attempting to break away from what he calls "linear

³¹J.J. Brochier, "Entretien", p. 20.

³²André Gide, Les Faux-Monnaveurs, Oeuvres Complètes XII, (Gallimard, Paris, 1937), p. 240.

time", and shifting narrative perspectives help in creating discontinuity. His "temps fictif" is not governed by any rules of everyday chronology:

"... il est évident qu'il ne peut être question de reconstituer un temps chronologique comparable à celui du calendrier, puisqu'il ne s'agit, de toute façon, que d'un temps fictif qui n'a pas du tout à répondre aux mêmes catégories que le temps réel dont nous nous servons quand nous prenons des rendez-vous pour le lendemain." ³³

Thus it is quite legitimate to interrupt the flow of time with flash-backs, hypotheses and similar procedures, but despite this the action moves quite inexorably forward.

One further point must be made about what would appear to be the intrusion of an omniscient narrator at certain points in the novel. Robbe-Grillet claims that the omniscient narrator, such as is found in the works of Balzac, is an anachronism, that he seems to aspire to the status of a god rather than a human being. In the traditional novel:

"... le narrateur semble le plus souvent extérieur à l'histoire qu'il raconte, extérieur au monde lui-même, une sorte de démiurge." ³⁴

He disclaims for himself any pretension to an objectivity of this kind. His works are subjective, and usually everything is seen through the eyes of one protagonist, who is intimately involved in the events which are being narrated. For this reason it seems strange to find on the opening page of Les

³³"Table ronde", p. 100

³⁴Claude Sarraute, "Entretien avec Robbe-Grillet," Courrier Littéraire, May 13th 1961, p. 9.

Gommes a remark like, "Un bras machinal remet en place le décor." ³⁵ But the reason for this insertion is to be found in the structure of the work itself. The division of the novel into chapters would appear to correspond to the division of Classical Greek drama into Prologue, five Acts and Epilogue. Further allusions, couched in stage terminology, confirm this hypothesis:

"La scène sera terminée." ³⁶

"D'ailleurs Wallas a déjà quitté le petit café pour rentrer en scène." ³⁷

"C'est ici, dans la capitale, que s'est joué le drame... que se joue le drame." ³⁸

As Bruce Morrisette quite correctly remarks:

"... in this regard, Robbe-Grillet has allowed formal, esthetic considerations to outweigh philosophical or metaphysical ideas concerning the relativity of time or viewpoint. Thus at the outset of his career he reasumes authorial privileges which should be theoretically excluded." ³⁹

Weiss does much the same thing, though not in quite such an obtrusive way, in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers. His interpolation of the chain of sexual motifs is also a form of authorial intrusion. Its inclusion may have been partly dictated by the dénouement of the novel: each of these

³⁵Gommes, p. 7

³⁶Ibid., p. 126

³⁷Ibid., p. 127

³⁸Ibid., p. 206

³⁹Morrisette, "Evolution", p. 26

incidents, (the sword sheath, the mating of the various animals, and so on), serves to engender and then to maintain an erotic undertone in preparation for the scene between the housekeeper and the coachman. Thus it serves as a structural element in the work as do Robbe-Grillet's insertions. It may also have its "raison d'être" in Weiss's penchant for the erotic, which sometimes even betrays a gratuitous concern, and which manifests itself in practically all his works.

Despite this link between Les GommeS and Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers there is a greater similarity of narrative mode between Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden and Les GommeS. Robbe-Grillet employs shifting perspectives to present the reader with a multiplicity of interpretations: Weiss uses only three narrative voices, three sides of the same consciousness, which appear to witness the same happenings, but offer varying and often conflicting accounts of them. They appear to be engaged in a conversation, but in fact what we have here is a series of monologues, which have absolutely no causal relationship with one another. The reader is further disorientated by the fact that transitions from one narrative voice to the other take place so abruptly that one can very rarely be sure of just which one of the voices is speaking. As in Les GommeS, further confusion arises in the reader's mind because of the use of flashback and hypotheses which are presented in such a manner as to make them only with difficulty distinguishable from the main

body of the narrative. Weiss, like Robbe-Grillet, is seeking to achieve the effect of discontinuity in the sequence of time, and thus uses narrative techniques which aid in achieving this effect. Jean-Claude Schneider suggests that Das Gespräch is, "une sorte de récit triple en forme de labyrinthe",⁴⁰ and one has to admit that a labyrinthine structure with its dead-ends, its forced retracing of steps, its forward progression in a series of detours to right and to left seems to hold a certain attraction for both Robbe-Grillet and Weiss.

The tone of the narrative in Les Gommages is strictly objective, in the sense that things are presented uncritically, without any authorial comment. The novel is built on a circular pattern, with two interlocking circles of twenty-four hours. Das Gespräch would appear to be cyclical, in so far as, when the reader reaches the end of the fragment, his only recourse is to return again to the beginning. The structure seems to correspond closely to Weiss's early attempts at writing:

"Da waren die Hefte mit den Schreibversuchen, die Anfänge, Ansätze enthielten, die niemals einen Abschluss erreichen würden, weil es keinen Abschluss gab, sondern nur ein einziges Strömen und Fliessen."⁴¹

It also corresponds to his conception of plot in his plays

⁴⁰Jean-Claude Schneider, "Peter Weiss," Mercure de France, No. 1213 (1964), p. 539.

⁴¹Fluchtpunkt, p. 55

and novels:

"Für mich ist da ein Geschehnis auf der Bühne, das braucht gar keine Fabel zu haben, sondern das kann auch ein Zustand sein. Es braucht nicht von einem Punkt auszugehen und sich zu einem ganz bestimmten Ziel, zu einem Ende hin zu entwickeln. Ich brauche den Stoff, den ich allgemein vor mir sehe, das gilt nicht nur für die Bühne, sondern auch für die Bücher, die ich schreibe."⁴²

Robbe-Grillet also considers that certain of his works are cyclical in structure:

"Après le mot 'fin', il ne se passe plus rien du tout, par définition. Le seul avenir que l'oeuvre puisse accepter, c'est la possibilité d'un nouveau déroulement identique: en remettant la première bobine du film dans l'appareil de projection".⁴³

Most of Weiss's works, apart from the documentary theatre, correspond to this definition; even Marat/Sade has an open end. Der Schatten is cyclical in its structure. The omission of the full-stop at the end implies that the fragment is merely a part of a continuing process. The "collage" of the incidents described, however, is not completely arbitrary, and there is a sense of progression, which is suggested by the arrival and subsequent departure of the coachman. The pattern of events in La Jalousie would also appear to be forward-moving, starting with the husband's suspicions of an affair between A. and Franck, their trip to the coast and the apparent cooling-off in their relationship. However, as we

⁴²Ernst Schumacher, "Gespräch mit Peter Weiss, August 1965," in Karl-Heinz Braun, p. 110.

⁴³"La Littérature, aujourd'hui," Tel Quel, No. 14, Summer 1963, p. 43.

remarked in the introductory chapter, this apparently simple chronological structure is not easy to establish, because of the plethora of flash-backs, interior monologues, indirect discourse and the apparent illogicalities in which it is sub-merged.

One must ask why Robbe-Grillet chose the "je-néant" as his narrative mode in La Jalousie. By eliminating the narrator completely he has gone a stage further than Weiss, whose "Ich-Erzähler" in Der Schatten is still an anonymous presence. It was certainly not for reasons of greater objectivity. Robbe-Grillet himself, replying to a criticism that his works exclude a subjective element and are completely objective in tone and content, said:

"... ce personnage qui décrit le monde est en réalité le moins neutre, le moins impartial des témoins. Il est, par exemple, un obsédé-sexuel [Mathias] ou un mari dont la méfiance confine au délire. Et les passions qu'il éprouve sont à tel point contraignantes qu'elles vont jusqu'à déformer sa vision."⁴⁴

By eliminating the husband physically from the scene Robbe-Grillet is effectively inviting the reader to occupy his place, to see everything through his eyes.

What conclusions can one reach after this study of the various narrative techniques employed by the two authors? The first thing that emerges is their common belief in the cyclical nature of a work of literature and of their use of what might be termed "labyrinthine" structure. Their choice

⁴⁴Sarraute, p. 9

of narrative techniques is greatly influenced by their attitude towards the problem of time. Both wish to achieve the effect of discontinuity in the sequence of time and for this reason employ techniques such as flashback and "dédoublement". In this respect they might have been influenced by their contacts with the cinema; not only their own experiments in this field but, in Weiss's case, also by familiarity with, and admiration for, exponents of the "avant-garde" cinema, such as Buñuel, Man Ray and others. Certainly, Robbe-Grillet has employed a wider range of narrative techniques than Weiss and has gone far beyond him in his experiments with narrative mode. Both wish to exclude the omniscient narrator. Weiss in his works replaces him by an "Ich-Erzähler", who either, as in Der Schatten, has a limited knowledge of what is going on around him, and merely reports things which he can see or hear, or, as in Das Gespräch, splits the one consciousness into three, and so presents us with a multiple interpretation of reality.

That this problem of narrative mode should emerge so frequently in contemporary literature might be attributed to our complex 20th Century existence. For 19th Century authors such as Balzac, the world, and man's position in it, was not so problematic as it is for writers such as Weiss and Robbe-Grillet. The feeling of insecurity which is characteristic of this atomic age cannot help but be reflected in its literature. "Gott ist tot". So too is the omniscient narrator,

but who is to take his place? This is the question which these two authors are attempting to answer.

CHAPTER IV

The problem of "engagement".

It is on the question of political involvement and the role of the writer in society that the views of Robbe-Grillet and Weiss appear to be most radically divergent. The former claims to be committed only to his art; the latter, that the sole function of art is to try to change society, to re-model it along socialist lines. Nonetheless, a closer examination of their works, both theoretical and creative, will reveal that despite the apparent polarity of these points of view, there is a certain rapport between the two authors. In his most recent work, Hölderlin, Weiss seems to have retreated somewhat from his earlier extremely militant assertions on the role of the theatre as a socialising, revolutionary and political force, whereas Robbe-Grillet, in Projet pour une révolution à New York, seems more intent on castigating the vices and shortcomings of contemporary society than he ever was in any of his earlier works, even La Maison de rendez-vous. Let us now look more closely at their respective patterns of development and endeavour to ascertain what resemblances, if any, are to be found beneath these seemingly irreconcilable standpoints.

In Weiss's early works, Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers and Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden, he shows little

concern with social problems and even less with political thinking. He is experimenting with form and narrative techniques, and both works contain many thinly-disguised autobiographical details, such as the father-son relationship, the break-up of family ties, the problem of sexual relationships, and the individual as an outsider. Abschied von den Eltern is also mainly concerned with finding a solution to his personal problems: the outside world and its problems scarcely seem to impinge on his private universe. He is the "Fremdling", cast out by society. He is the "Opfer", the others are the "Henker". His only escape from the hell of his everyday existence is in his art:

"Von sozialen Argumenten wusste ich nichts, in der Kunst fand ich die einzigen Waffen, mit denen ich angreifen und mich verteidigen konnte." ¹

His political mentor seems to have been Max Hodann, a Communist and a sex-educator, who appears in Fluchtpunkt as Hoderer, a doctor and a radical socialist. In conversations with the "Ich-Erzähler" Hoderer tries to open his eyes to the sterility and the aridity of a life divorced from social commitment. At this stage in his development Weiss appears to be experiencing difficulty in converting from his complete self-absorption to a concern with the problems of others:

"Damals war ich aber persönlich noch nicht frei genug,
um aus seinen Erfahrungen meine eigenen Konsequenzen

¹Fluchtpunkt, p. 10

ziehen zu können." ²

However, despite its preoccupation with personal questions, certain critics detect a political awareness in Fluchtpunkt. Henning Rischbieter says:

"Fluchtpunkt, beim Erscheinen vor allem unter individual-psychologischen Aspekten gelesen, als Fortführung eines Entwicklungsromans, als Abwehr des Politischen, ist - von heute aus gesehen - schon ein deutlich politisches Buch." ³

Michael Hamburger makes a similar point:

"The extent of this stranglehold [of the narrator's family on his emotions] is brought out by his account of several erotic experiences, including an incestuous one, and these are treated with the same stark frankness as the political undercurrents. One is aware of the vital connection between the narrator's sexual and social behaviour - as between every aspect of his private life and the history of an era - but this effect is obtained without any deliberate attempt at social documentation." ⁴

On several occasions Weiss has stressed the fact that without these early works, his later plays, such as Die Ermittlung, could never have been written. In an interview with Jean Tailleur Weiss said:

"Si mes romans autobiographiques sont étrangers à ce qui m'intéresse aujourd'hui, il est tout aussi vrai que sans eux, jamais je n'aurais pu écrire L'Instruction, par exemple." ⁵

² SuF, 17, 1965, p. 680

³ Henning Rischbieter, Peter Weiss, (Friedrich Verlag, Velber, 1967), pp. 22 - 23.

⁴ Michael Hamburger, From Prophecy to Exorcism, (Longman's, London), 1965, p. 147.

⁵ Jean Tailleur, "Entretien avec Peter Weiss sur l'Allemagne, le socialisme et le théâtre," Les Lettres Françaises, 14/20.4.1966.

He had to come to terms with his own individual existence before he could become involved in, or exhibit concern for, the affairs of his fellow human beings:

"Ist man einmal aus der privaten Problematik herausgekommen - in meinem Fall die Verwirklichung des Ichs und die Frage nach der Identität -, hat man diese Sache zur Genüge durchgekaut, dann kann man sein Ich im Zusammenhang mit grösseren Kreisen sehen; zumal wenn einem die Weltgeschichte dabei so grosse Hilfe leistet." ⁶

The first work which has a political content is Marat/Sade. Sade embodies many of Weiss's own personal qualities: Marat is the mouthpiece of Weiss's political message. Manfred Haiduk, in his very illuminating article on the drama, analyses the various versions in which the play exists and detects in Weiss's treatment of the four "Sänger" from the earliest to the latest version an increasing awareness of the existence of the proletariat and their problems. One of the several examples which he cites is the following stage-direction from the first version:

"Einer [der vier Sänger] zieht sich die Stiefel aus und riecht an seinem Fuss." ⁷

This is omitted from the final version, from which fact Haiduk concludes:

"Die Beispiele zeigen, dass die vier Sänger aus lazzaronenhaften Volkstypen und clownhaften Posenreissern [sic]

⁶ "Spiegel-Interview mit dem Dramatiker Peter Weiss," Der Spiegel, 18.3.1968, p. 184.

⁷ Manfred Haiduk, "Peter Weiss' Drama Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats...", Weimarer Beiträge, XII, 1966, p. 191.

(von der Commedia dell'arte herkommend) zu echten Vertretern des Vierten Standes werden." ⁸

In Marat/Sade we find the first "revolutionary" hero of Weiss's works. His descendants will be Trotsky and Hölderlin and, if we are to believe Suhrkamp Verlag, the line will continue with the English poet Christopher Marlowe. ⁹ Weiss regards Marat as one of the forerunners of Marxism and it was shortly after the production of Marat/Sade that Weiss publicly admitted his conversion to Marxism and his relinquishing of the "dritten Standpunkt", which was a commitment to nothing at all. He replies affirmatively to the question:

"Kann ich den bequemen dritten Standpunkt aufgeben, der mir immer eine Hintertür offen liess, durch die ich in das Niemandsland blosser Imagination entweichen durfte?" ¹⁰

At this particular point in his political and theatrical development he is firmly convinced of the potentialities of the theatre in the field of social reform:

"... ich bin ... davon überzeugt, dass die grösste Qualität der Kunst in ihrer Fähigkeit liegt, in die Wirklichkeit einzugreifen, um diese zu verändern." ¹¹

Shortly before this, in an interview with A. Alvarez which was broadcast by the B.B.C., in reply to Alvarez's question:

⁸ Ibid., p. 192

⁹ Helmut Karasek, "Peter Weiss Marlowe," Theater heute, November, 1971, p. 68.

¹⁰ Peter Weiss, "10 Arbeitspunkte eines Autors in der geteilten Welt," 1.9.65, in Rapporte 2, p. 18.

¹¹ Brief an Wilhelm Girnus, 28.10.65, in Rapporte 2, p. 26.

"You mean you see your work as in some way an agent in the change of society?"

Weiss said:

"I see it's a necessity because I don't think it's enough just to write, and it's not enough to write my individual stuff. I think it's absolutely necessary to write with the point of trying to influence or to change society." ¹²

Weiss's apparent misgivings as to just how much the theatre can in fact achieve in the field of social reform may be due, in part, to the failure of his play Trotzki im Exil, in 1970. However, he had modified his statement to Alvarez as early as 1968, in an interview published in Der Spiegel:

"Das Theater selbst kann die Gesellschaft nicht verändern. Das ist unmöglich. Die beste Wirkung, die ich erhoffen kann, ist, dass ein Stück Anlass gibt zum Weiterdenken." ¹³

Three years later he is even more dubious about the ability of a work of literature to achieve any reform of the social conditions:

"Wie wenig wir mit Stücken, mit Büchern erreichen können, das ist mir natürlich bewusst." ¹⁴

Weiss has wrestled, unsuccessfully, it must be admitted, with the problems of the documentary theatre, and seems to have failed to attain the standards of objectivity he had earlier set himself. He claims that documentary theatre is "ein

¹² "Peter Weiss in conversation with A. Alvarez," Encore, XII, August 1965, p. 18.

¹³ Der Spiegel, 18.3.68, p. 184.

¹⁴ Volker Canaris, "Interview mit Peter Weiss," Die Zeit (Canadian edition), No. 38, 21.9.71, p. 10.

Theater der Berichterstattung".¹⁵ "Es legt Fakten zur Begutachtung vor."¹⁶ But at the same time it is "parteilich".¹⁷ Thus the objectivity implied in the first two descriptions is completely negated by the third. Subjectivity cannot be eliminated, even in the report of historically documented facts, for although facts may be presented, they have passed through the screening process of the author's consciousness. Whilst they are not deliberately falsified, a strong bias in favour of the author's political message is certainly also present. The impression obtained from plays such as the Lusitanischer Popanz and Viet Nam Diskurs is that Weiss has deliberately sacrificed his undoubted theatrical gifts for the sake of his political convictions, and that the only people he is likely to convince are those who are already committed to the same political beliefs as himself. That Weiss himself is aware of the shortcomings of the documentary theatre is illustrated by his latest play, Hölderlin, in which he reverts to Marat/Sade as his model and creates figures for which a theatre audience can evince some interest, and which are not merely embodiments of some political dogma, like those of the Popanz or the Viet Nam Diskurs. A political content is still there - Empedokles is an Ancient Greek

¹⁵Peter Weiss, "Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater", March, 1968, in Rapporte 2, p. 91.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 97

¹⁷Ibid., p. 99

predecessor of Che Guevara. Just as the time is not ripe for Empedokles' revolutionary struggle, so, according to Weiss, the central committees of many communist parties are against guerilla warfare in South America: "Sie sind der Ansicht, die Zeit sei noch nicht reif dafür." ¹⁸ Hölderlin, the hero of the play, retreats to a self-imposed exile, in the guise of madness, because contemporary society is blind and deaf to his revolutionary struggles. The figures of the Establishment, Goethe and Schiller, are strongly censured by Weiss, though neither treated Hölderlin in the way described by Weiss. He is apparently going to adopt the same attitude towards Shakespeare in his projected drama about Marlowe. Marlowe will reproach Shakespeare for his failure to preach revolution in his works: "Mit deiner Poesie endest du die Königsherrschaft nie", and Shakespeare will steal Marlowe's drama and publish it as The Merchant of Venice. ¹⁹

Weiss's position vis-à-vis orthodox communism is somewhat analogous to that of Bertolt Brecht. Neither is regarded with any great favour by Moscow, and one would not be wrong in saying that the two dramatists enjoy greater popularity in the Western capitalist countries, whose politics they are attacking, than in the countries of the communist bloc. This truth was brought home to Weiss by the reception of his play

¹⁸ Peter Weiss, "Che Guevara!", 14.11.67, in Rapporte 2, p. 82.

¹⁹ Karasek, p. 68

Trotzki im Exil, which met with scant approval from Western critics and downright condemnation from Communist ones. Lew Ginsburg, for example, accuses Weiss of distorting historical truth in the play, of writing a work which is hostile to the Soviet Union, and in which he gives evidence of befuddled political thinking:

"Mit anderen Worten, Weiss schafft einen bestimmten Mischmasch aus Trotzismus, Maoismus, Antisowjetismus und Marcusianismus." 20

This must surely be anathema to the orthodox Marxist-Leninist!

In his reply to Ginsburg's attack, Weiss insisted that his attempt to rehabilitate Trotsky was undertaken in defence of the truth, which he places above party politics:

"Aus diesem Grund stellte ich die Forderung nach Wahrheitsfindung höher als zeitbedingte parteipolitische Rücksichtnahme." 21

Though the play is again, like its immediate predecessors, a "Dokumentarstück", (many of Trotsky's speeches are almost verbatim translations of the historical speeches or writings), Weiss has succeeded in creating characters of flesh and blood and not merely lifeless figures propounding political rhetoric or lengthy anticapitalist diatribes, as was the case in the Popanz and the Viet Nam Diskurs. In fact he has made Trotsky almost too sympathetic a figure, eliminating the arro-

²⁰Lew Ginsburg, "Selbstdarstellung und Selbstentlarvung des Peter Weiss", in Canaris, p. 138.

²¹Peter Weiss, "Offener Brief an die Literaturnaja Gaseta, Moskau", in Canaris, p. 142.

gance which rendered him unacceptable to the leaders of the Communist party after the death of Lenin, and caused them to suppress Lenin's will, which named Trotsky as his successor. In Weiss's drama Trotsky appears only as the tireless revolutionary, preaching the gospel of world-wide revolution. Unfortunately, the positive effects of more successful characterisation on the theatrical quality of the drama tend to be negated by the unwieldy nature of the plot and also by the sheer weight of the numbers of characters involved. As Gideon Shunami says:

"The form of the play is that of an extended epic, covering a period of forty years, from 1900, and ranging geographically from Siberia to Mexico City. Although many of the scenes could be presented separately as documentary one-acts, they are held together by the theme of the Russian Revolution and by the character of the central figure, Trotsky. The historical chronicle has become an epic play. Still, the frequent shifts of time and place are often not very clear. Weiss frequently announces them in an obscure, accidental, or allusive way, so that a reader or spectator who does not know well the events of Trotsky's life and of the revolution in Russia may miss the connections between scenes." ²²

According to Shunami, ²³ one German critic, Rudolf Lange, suggested that a film be projected in the background to clarify the changes. ²⁴ Whilst the use of films, posters, etc., is not

²²Gideon Shunami, "The mechanism of revolution in the documentary theatre: a study of the play, Trotzki im Exil, by Peter Weiss," GQ, XLIV, No. 4, November, 1971, pp. 509-10.

²³Ibid., p. 517

²⁴Rudolf Lange, "Der gefährliche Mechanismus der Revolution," Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung, 13. Februar, 1970, p. 23.

foreign to documentary theatre, there would seem to be a certain structural weakness in a drama which requires such devices to enable the audience to follow the action on stage.

With Trotzki Weiss appeared to reach a water-shed in his theatrical development. None of his plays posterior to Marat/Sade had achieved anything like its success. The documentary theatre failed to convince, convert or entertain. The political theatre was attacked by friend and foe alike. It was obviously time for Weiss to change his tactics - perhaps for financial considerations as much as anything else! He reverted to the formula used so successfully in Marat/Sade - historical figures, Knittelvers, plenty of action on stage, the alienating effects of madness - all the ingredients which had combined to achieve an international reputation for the Marat-drama. In the documentary plays artistry appeared to be sacrificed to political ends; in Hölderlin, as in Marat/Sade, the drama is theatrically effective and the political message still comes through.

Weiss's path towards political commitment was a somewhat sinuous one. As he himself says:

"Meine eigene Entwicklung zum Marxismus hat viele Stadien durchlaufen, vom surrealistischen Experimentieren, von Situationen des Zweifels, der Skepsis und der absurdistischen Auffassung aus, bis zur radikalen Stellungnahme." ²⁵

It culminated in his open embrace of Marxist doctrine and his

²⁵Peter Weiss, "Brief an den Tschechoslowakischen Schriftstellerverband," 10.9.67, in Rapporte 2, pp. 78 - 79.

attempts in his documentary theatre, to convert the uninitiated. His failure to achieve this aim, coupled with the obviously restrictive effects on his artistic powers of his political proselytising, has led him to a position which appears to be an attempt at compromise. His first form of commitment was to art as a liberating force from personal problems, totally exclusive of social or political concern. He then assumed the diametrically opposed position of total commitment to a political ideology, which was then given a position of precedence over the art of the creative writer. That Weiss was aware of the dangers inherent in this position is illustrated by this remark:

"Denn ein dokumentarisches Theater, das in erster Hand ein politisches Forum sein will und auf künstlerische Leistung verzichtet, stellt sich selbst in Frage." ²⁶

Hölderlin would appear to be his solution to this problem. It is effective as a piece of theatre, but also contains a political message, which, however, is not so intrusive as those of the documentary plays.

Starting from entirely the opposite premiss as Weiss, namely that art is totally exclusive of politics, Robbe-Grillet, in his most recent works, seems to be moving towards a somewhat similar compromise position. If Weiss could say, at one point in his development:

"Ich gehöre nicht zu den Autoren, die ihre Kunst von

²⁶Peter Weiss, "Das Material und die Modelle," Dramen 2, p. 467.

ihrem gesellschaftlichen Leben trennen, und die der Kunst eine autonome Existenz zusprechen", ²⁷

Robbe-Grillet was able to assert a diametrically opposed viewpoint:

"Le seul engagement possible, pour l'écrivain, c'est la littérature." ²⁸

He had stated this belief at greater length four years earlier:

"Mais pour l'artiste... en dépit de ses convictions politiques les plus fermes, en dépit même de sa bonne volonté de militant, l'art ne peut être réduit à l'état de moyen au service d'une cause qui le dépasserait, celle-ci fût-elle la plus juste, la plus exaltante; l'artiste ne met rien au-dessus de son travail, et il s'aperçoit vite qu'il ne peut créer que pour rien - quel que soit son attachement au parti ou aux idées généreuses, l'instant de la création ne peut que le ramener aux seuls problèmes de son art." ²⁹

Nevertheless, Robbe-Grillet is far from being an exponent of "l'art pour l'art", the embodiment of the artist in the ivory tower. There is never any didactic intent in his works, no attempt to write a "roman à thèse", because in his eyes the novel is itself a "recherche", so cannot set out to be an illustration of truths already known. In this respect he is perhaps more far-sighted than Weiss, more aware of the dangers inherent in trying to fuse political dogma with literary creativity:

"Certes, l'idée d'une conjonction possible entre un

²⁷ Letter to Wilhelm Girnus, 28.10.65, in Rapporte 2, p. 26.

²⁸ PNR, p. 120

²⁹ Ibid., p. 35

renouveau artistique et une révolution politico-économique est de celles qui viennent le plus naturellement à l'esprit. Cette idée, séduisante dès l'abord du point de vue sentimental, semble de plus trouver appui dans la plus évidente logique. Cependant les problèmes que pose un tel accord sont graves et difficiles, urgents mais peut-être insolubles." 30

In his opinion socialist realist literature is a failure because its characters have been created merely to illustrate a belief:

"... il s'agit pour eux, [socialist realist writers] avant tout, d'illustrer, avec le plus de précision possible, des comportements historiques, économiques, sociaux, politiques." 31

Already in 1957 Robbe-Grillet realised something which dawned on Weiss only in 1970, after the poor reception of Trotzki im Exil by communist critics:

"... la Révolution socialiste se méfie de l'art révolutionnaire et, qui plus est, il n'est pas évident qu'elle ait tort." 32

However, Robbe-Grillet does not totally exclude the possibility of the creative artist's contributing, however indirectly, to the social revolution. Dedication to his art, striving to solve the problems inherent in it:

"C'est là, pour lui, la seule chance de demeurer un artiste et, sans doute aussi, par voie de conséquence obscure et lointaine, de servir un jour peut-être à quelque chose - peut-être même à la révolution." 33

³⁰ Ibid., p. 33

³¹ Ibid., pp. 37 - 38

³² Ibid., p. 35

³³ Ibid., p. 39

For this reason, the title of his latest novel, Projet pour une révolution à New York, must strike us as significant.

John Sturrock makes two statements which I feel are very relevant to any discussion of the problem of commitment in the "nouveau roman", especially in Robbe-Grillet's works:

"The 'nouveau roman' seems to me to be revolutionary in the very best sense, being committed to producing a change in the structure of consciousness rather than any direct change in this or that institution or practice,"³⁴

and:

"The apparent indifference of the New Novel to public events or to particular political attitudes masks a genuine moral commitment."³⁵

If one agrees with Sturrock's view, it must strike one as somewhat anomalous that Marxist critics, such as Lucien Goldmann, can find in Robbe-Grillet's works a prime illustration of the Marxist doctrine of "réification". This doctrine, also referred to by Goldmann as "fétichisme de la marchandise", sets out the belief that in the capitalist world crass materialism is so rampant that individuals have been reduced to objects, and are of value only in financial terms. Goldmann does set forth quite a convincing argument, but his interpretation of Robbe-Grillet's works seems to be based on a somewhat dubious hypothesis. Discussing the works of Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, he says that

³⁴ John Sturrock, The French new novel: Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, (Oxford University Press, London, 1969), p. 39.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 40

he considers them to be, "des phénomènes particulièrement importants". He adds:

"Je pense toutefois que l'oeuvre de Robbe-Grillet ... l'est peut-être moins par ce qu'il a voulu y mettre que par ce qu'il y a mis effectivement." ³⁶

In other words, Robbe-Grillet's "Marxism" lies in the eye of the beholder! Goldmann considers that, whatever Robbe-Grillet's intentions were in writing, he was able to incorporate them in his works only:

"... dans la mesure où elles pouvaient se relier à une analyse autrement essentielle des structures globales de la réalité sociale." ³⁷

Here Goldmann is on much less controversial ground, inasmuch as it is true that Robbe-Grillet's works do have their point of departure in everyday reality, within a social framework. However, he is not creating works which give value judgments of this situation.

Goldmann offers yet another solution, in Marxist terms, to the problem of just who is the "voyeur" in Le Voyeur. For him it is the inhabitants of the island who are the "voyeurs", in the sense that they are content to remain onlookers and will not intervene actively to bring to justice the murderer of Jacqueline:

"Ainsi l'univers est constitué uniquement de voyeurs passifs qui n'ont ni l'intention ni la possibilité d'intervenir dans la vie de la société pour la trans-

³⁶Goldmann, pp. 302-03

³⁷Ibid., p. 303

former qualitativement et la rendre plus humaine." 38

Another Marxist critic, Jacques Dhaenens, presents a philological-sociological interpretation of La Maison de rendez-vous. (Goldmann's interpretation is based on Robbe-Grillet's first three novels and on L'Année dernière à Marienbad.) He takes as his point of departure Goldmann's hypothesis:

"... l'oeuvre de Robbe-Grillet exprime une société dans laquelle le projet individuel ou collectif d'un sujet libre est devenu impossible à cause des mécanismes d'auto-régulation que produit la société formée ('Formierte Gesellschaft'), capitalisme d'intervention étatique et auto-régulateur." 39

In his analysis of La Maison de rendez-vous he points to the reduction of woman to an object of barter, prostitution being a commercial activity. The relationship between Johnson and Lauren is a venal one; he is searching for a large sum of money, with which he can buy her from Lady Ava. The most gruesome example of the reduction of the individual to an object of merchandise is Kito's body being served up in a Hong Kong restaurant. 40

The weakness of Dhaenens' arguments, as of those of Goldmann, is that they are based on a somewhat controversial

38 Ibid., p. 313

39 Jacques Dhaenens, "La Maison de rendez-vous" d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, Archives des Lettres Modernes, No. 113, Paris, Minard, 1970, p. 5.

40 MR, p. 167

premiss. Dhaenens asserts that:

"... ce qu'un écrivain affirme 'ex cathedra' hors de son oeuvre est une chose, autre chose l'oeuvre elle-même." ⁴¹

This would seem to invite us to believe that despite Robbe-Grillet's protestations of "non-engagement", we must nevertheless find evidence in the works themselves of an attempt to convince us of his political views. This is, in my opinion, a certain over-statement, if not a falsification of the situation. I think Dhaenens comes closer to an apt summing-up of Robbe-Grillet's position when he says:

"Reste que même si un écrivain refuse dans son art un engagement politique (ce qui correspond à notre avis à la fétichisation de ce métier parmi d'autres qu'est l'écriture dans l'histoire des hommes) cet art peut être - involontairement et non consciemment - une expression médiatisée de la classe à laquelle il appartient ou à laquelle vont ses sympathies." ⁴²

Robbe-Grillet has never made any secret of the fact that politically he inclines to the left - though not too far! In September, 1960, he was one of the 121 "intellectuels de gauche", (including Sartre and André Breton) who signed the "Déclaration sur le droit de l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie", affirming the right of French soldiers to refuse to fight against Algerians. In an interview in L'Express, when asked if he was an "intellectuel de gauche", he replied,

⁴¹Dhaenens, p. 44

⁴²Ibid., p. 46

"Non, pas tellement." ⁴³ He went on to say:

"Je m'intéresse à la politique étrangère beaucoup plus qu'à la politique intérieure... Il y a des choses plus scandaleuses sur terre que la condition ouvrière en France." ⁴⁴

Later in the interview, when asked his opinion of life in the United States, he said he found it:

"Passionnant. Néanmoins, posant plus de problèmes moraux. Quand je vous ai dit que la guerre du Vietnam me tracassait plus que le sous-emploi en France, je n'en dirais peut-être pas autant pour les ghettos noirs aux Etats-Unis. Je serais américain, je m'occuperais peut-être de la politique intérieure." ⁴⁵
(my underlining)

This is how Robbe-Grillet feels himself committed, (as Sturrock suggested). He is concerned not with man as a political being but with man as a social being. The themes which emerge from his works, irrespective of any political coloration, stress this concern: man is a solitary being, unable to establish contact with his fellow-men (Wallas, Mathias and the soldier in Dans le Labyrinthe): organised society is bureaucratic, (Roi-Dauzet in Les Gommages): the mass of humanity are indifferent by-standers (the islanders in Le Voyeur): the individual has degenerated to an object, important only for its commercial value, (Lauren, Kito).

In an article which appeared in Le Nouvel Observateur on

⁴³"L'Express va plus loin avec Alain Robbe-Grillet", L'Express, No. 876, 1^{er} - 7 avril, 1968, p. 44.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 46

June 26th, 1970, and which is used as a form of "prière d'insérer" in Projet pour une révolution à New-York, Robbe-Grillet says:

"Bâtir un roman est une activité solitaire, mais non pas innocente ni coupée du reste de l'univers."⁴⁶

Every work must have what he terms, its "thèmes générateurs", which he finds, "parmi le matériau mythologique qui m'environne dans mon existence quotidienne".⁴⁷ When reading newspapers, looking in shop windows or travelling in the Métro:

"... je me trouve assailli par une multitude de signes dont l'ensemble constitue la mythologie du monde où je vis, quelque chose comme l'inconscient collectif de la société, c'est-à-dire à la fois l'image qu'elle veut se donner d'elle-même et le reflet des troubles qui la hantent."⁴⁸

Two attitudes are possible in face of these myths. One is moral condemnation, which for Robbe-Grillet is merely a means of escape, of avoiding the real issues. The other is acceptance of their existence, and instead of pretending to ignore them: "Il me reste la possibilité de jouer avec elles".⁴⁹ This concept of "play" appears to Robbe-Grillet to be the only solution possible to the problems of contemporary society:

⁴⁶ Le Nouvel Observateur, 26.6.1970

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

"Après la faillite de l'ordre divin (de la société bourgeoise) et, à sa suite, de l'ordre rationaliste (du socialisme bureaucratique), il faut pourtant comprendre que seules les organisations ludiques demeurent désormais possibles." ⁵⁰

Thus, whilst the Marxist critics Goldmann and Dhaenens appear to read into Robbe-Grillet's works a meaning which it may not have been Robbe-Grillet's intention to give, it is nevertheless true to say that social problems concern Robbe-Grillet much more deeply than he is willing to admit. Whilst one can by no means speak of his being "engagé" in a political sense, he is very much aware of the abuses and the injustices of organised society and of the precarious position which man occupies in it. Unlike Weiss, he does not claim to offer a solution to these ills in political terms, and even if he could suggest a solution, his theory of art completely excludes any didactic intent. His position seems very close to that of Eugène Ionesco, whose "Anti-théâtre" is often regarded as the complete antithesis of the Brechtian didactic and politically activated theatre. Ionesco also denies any political involvement, claims to be committed only to his art, yet shows awareness of, and concern for many of society's most acute problems. Two examples of this would be the inability to communicate meaningfully with one's fellow beings, as seen in La Cantatrice Chauve, and suppression of individual liberties by political ideologies, such as Nazism,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

or, by implication, any form of totalitarianism, as seen in La Leçon, Rhinocéros and Tueur sans Gages. Like Robbe-Grillet, Ionesco cannot offer any solution to these problems, and like him he feels that it is not the duty of the creative artist to preach a political message in his works. For this reason he is highly critical of Brecht, who, he claims, because of his narrow political outlook is blind to problems of wider social concern.

Whilst it seems unlikely that Robbe-Grillet and Weiss will ever hold exactly the same view on the role of politics in art, one gains the impression that their respective attitudes are not mutually exclusive. Robbe-Grillet, while claiming primacy for art over politics, manifests an acute concern for certain problems which beset our contemporary society. Weiss, whilst wishing to express a political message in his theatre, seems to be wavering slightly in his conviction of the ability of the theatre to achieve political or social reform. He has not renounced a political theme in his plays, but has relegated it to a position subordinate to his artistic and theatrical aims. What both writers have in common is their left-wing sympathies, which must, of necessity, be it consciously, as in the case of Weiss, or unconsciously, as in the case of Robbe-Grillet, influence their choice of subject-matter and their treatment of certain topics in their works. Thus it was an easy matter for Goldmann to find evidence of "réification" in Robbe-Grillet's

novels, and it might well be that an orthodox Marxist critic would be more sympathetic to the works of Robbe-Grillet than to Weiss's attempt to rehabilitate Trotsky!

CHAPTER V

The problem of the influence of Franz Kafka.

The question of the degree of influence which can be exerted on one creative artist by another is one of the thorniest issues which the literary critic has to tackle. Robbe-Grillet and Weiss have both admitted to certain influences which have been brought to bear on them in the course of their literary development. Of these, the influence of Franz Kafka is one which merits a close investigation, and one which will emerge as perhaps the most controversial. Critics, on the whole, tend to generalise on the entire matter, especially critics of Weiss. One is left with the impression that such links as may exist between the author in question and Kafka are rather tenuous and that it is simply a case of referring to a "Kafkaesque ambiance" in the works themselves. To select only a few examples of this type of criticism: discussing Der Turm, Ian Hilton says:

"... (the) dreamlike atmosphere and bizarre imagery of the play ... hints at Strindberg, Wedekind and Kafka..."¹

He also claims that Mockinpott is in a "Kafkaesque situation".² Similarly, John Milfull finds that Der Schatten des Körpers

¹Ian Hilton, Peter Weiss: A Search for Affinities, (Oswald Wolff, London, 1970), p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 60

des Kutschers, "is still very Kafkaesque in atmosphere".³

Critics of Robbe-Grillet have not been quite so summary in their treatment of the influence of Kafka in his works. Bruce Morrisette presents quite a long list of points which Kafka and Robbe-Grillet have in common, (most of which will be discussed in this chapter):

"The stylised simplification of the central characters, their reduction to mysterious initials ... the absence of knowable 'truth' in their motives and situations, their innocence or guilt of implied crimes, the realistically but neutrally described backgrounds: all these relate Robbe-Grillet to Kafka."⁴

Olga Bernal goes so far as to claim that, "le roman de Robbe-Grillet est inconcevable sans Kafka".⁵ Why Kafka appears to have exerted a stronger influence on Robbe-Grillet than on Weiss is perhaps due to the fact that for each writer Kafka represented something different, and it is this differing attitude towards Kafka which is reflected in their works.

André Gide expressed very succinctly what he regarded as the role of influences on the creative writer:

"... les influences agissent par ressemblance. On les a comparées à des sortes de miroirs qui nous montreraient, non point ce que nous sommes déjà effectivement, mais ce

³John Milfull, "From Kafka to Brecht: Peter Weiss's development towards Marxism," German Life and Letters, XX, No. 1, October 1966, p. 62.

⁴Bruce Morrisette, "International Aspects of the 'Nouveau Roman'," Contemporary Literature, XI, Spring 1970, pp. 158-59.

⁵Olga Bernal, Alain Robbe-Grillet: le roman de l'absence, (Gallimard, Paris, 1964), p. 117.

que nous sommes d'une façon latente." ⁶

Robbe-Grillet expresses a similar conception of this correspondence between the source of the influence and the recipient of it:

"Si j'aime l'oeuvre de Kafka, par exemple, c'est vraiment parce que j'y ai retrouvé la façon dont je voyais le monde autour de moi; c'était comme si je la connaissais avant de la lire." ⁷

However, even at the outset of his encounter with the works of Kafka, he looked upon him as someone who could guide him in his own attempts at writing:

"Lorsque j'ai découvert Kafka et la littérature américaine d'entre les deux guerres, j'ai eu le sentiment qu'il fallait avancer dans cette voie." ⁸

Weiss, on the other hand, adopts a more ambivalent attitude towards influences which are exerted on him. Some act as stimuli on his own creative powers:

"Selbst wenn jedes Buch mir einen Reichtum von neuen Bildern schenkte, so lag das Wesentliche doch immer im Auftauchen der eigenen Gedanken, die durch die Konfrontation geweckt wurden." ⁹

In this category are to be found the Surrealists, perhaps the strongest and most lasting influence which Weiss will undergo.

⁶André Gide, "De l'influence en littérature," in Prétextes, (Mercure de France, Paris, 1947), p. 14.

⁷André S. Labarthe and Jacques Rivette, "Entretien avec Resnais et Robbe-Grillet," Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 123, September 1961, p. 15.

⁸Bourin, op. cit.

⁹Fluchtpunkt, p. 57

In Fluchtpunkt, speaking of the literary and artistic productions of the 1920s, he says:

"Die Bilder und Skulpturen, die Dramen, Tänze, Filme, Dichtungen und Kompositionen standen nicht abgesondert da, sie verkörperten Werte, an denen weitergearbeitet werden konnte." ¹⁰

In "Aus dem Pariser Journal", when he meets André Breton personally, (July, 1962), he says:

"... ich sah eine ganze Epoche in ihm verkörpert, eine Epoche, die meiner Fantasie Nahrung gegeben hatte..." ¹¹

With other influences, such as Hermann Hesse, he identifies on a more personal basis:

"Das Lesen von Hallers [i.e. Hesse's] Werken war wie ein Wühlen in meinem eigenen Schmerz. Hier war meine Situation gezeichnet, die Situation des Bürgers, der zum Revolutionär werden möchte und den die Gewichte alter Normen lähmen." ¹²

This is the type of affinity which he feels toward Kafka, and it would appear to influence him over a limited period only. He shares with Kafka his Jewish background, his social milieu, (prosperous bourgeoisie), and his father fixation. His realisation of his affinities with Kafka came, significantly, only in 1941, when he was living in Sweden, and not when he was living in Prague, during the years 1936 to 1938. He explains this by saying that at this time he was too much involved in his own Kafka-like situation to be able to ana-

¹⁰Ibid., p. 70

¹¹"Aus dem Pariser Journal", July 1962, in Rapporte, p. 85.

¹²Abschied, p. 119

lyse his position:

"Als ich in Prag wohnte, der Stadt, in der Josef K. um sein Leben kämpfte, war mir der Prozess zu nah, als dass ich ihn hätte erkennen können. Was ich erfuhr, war nur die Unmöglichkeit und Ausweglosigkeit, obgleich mir scheinbar jede Freiheit gegeben war."¹³

Why should Kafka's works suddenly assume such significance for him? He has had the books Das Schloss and Der Prozess in his possession for at least three years, and has made only half-hearted attempts to read them. Now he discovers:

"Plötzlich war ich wach für die Eröffnungsworte des Prozesses."¹⁴ Josef K., guilty of no apparent crime, is suddenly arrested and thrown into prison. Weiss has suffered from a persecution complex, from a sense of not belonging, and has been unable to understand the reason for it. Now his reading of Kafka's writings forces him to the realisation that there is no explanation. He reads the entire novel in one night, and the result is:

"Alles was ich bisher gelesen hatte, trat in den Hintergrund... Hier war alles Aussenwerk abgeschält, und das Ich des Buches stand schutzlos und entkleidet da."¹⁵

His reading of Kafka's work has started him on the process of self-realisation; Josef K. is, as it were, a mirror-image of Weiss's own "Ich". That his feelings of inadequacy, of being cut off from family and society, should crystallise at this

¹³Fluchtpunkt, p. 57

¹⁴Ibid., p. 56

¹⁵Ibid., p. 57

particular period of his life, is perhaps due to the fact that it occurs shortly after his attempt to re-assume family relationships, an attempt which the "Ich-Erzähler" of Fluchtpunkt describes in terms of the return of the Prodigal Son to the bosom of his family. After the failure of his art-exhibition in Stockholm, (his mother's diary dates it March 15th, 1941),¹⁶ his pecuniary needs force him back to the family, but this sojourn lasts only until September 15th of the same year, when he returns to Stockholm. In this short time he has realised just how high a barrier divides him from his family - an insurmountable wall of mutual misunderstanding. This identification with Kafka in terms of being an "outsider", alienated from his family and the rest of society, lasted until 1946:

"Obgleich es kein Fliehen und kein Exil mehr gab, obgleich ich Bürger eines verschonten Landes war, wurde ich die Vorstellung nicht los, dass ich nirgends mehr hingehörte."¹⁷

However, just as Kafka's works had seemed to him to be a concrete expression of his own existential situation, so another piece of literature, Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, was going to provoke a reaction to this situation and a rejection of those affinities which he had sensed between himself and Kafka. He was given the book by a friend in 1941 and so powerful was the impact of Miller's liberating influence on him that: "Die Welt, in der ich mit Kafka im Zwiegespräch

¹⁶"Aus dem Kopenhagener Journal", in Rapporte, p. 52.

¹⁷Fluchtpunkt, p. 161

stand, erhielt den Todesstoss." ¹⁸ He now reproaches Kafka with his passive acceptance of the injustices meted out to him, his inability to free himself from his father's pernicious influence, his feelings of inadequacy in his relationships with the opposite sex.

In an interview in 1965, discussing his admiration for Henry Miller, Weiss said:

"Miller made such a positive impression on me because he presented such a wonderful contrast to the Kafkaesque world, a wonderful contrast to this entire twisted, guilt-laden, doomed and damned bourgeoisie." ¹⁹

For Weiss, Miller will be the key which unlocks the door to a new mode of living: revolt will replace passivity, chaos will replace organized existence, sex will assume a role of primordial importance. This is a heady, intoxicating mixture for Weiss, but it appears to him to offer the guide-lines for his future development:

"Noch blickte ich als der verbrauchte, übermüdete Europäer in diese Welt eines wilden Lebenshungers, und mir schwindelte noch vor den Möglichkeiten, die vor mir lagen." ²⁰

Must one conclude, therefore, that Kafka was merely a transitory phase in Weiss's personal development, a phase which came to an end in 1941, and brought no influence to bear on his literary works? It certainly was not the case

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164

¹⁹ Roloff, p. 221

²⁰ Fluchtpunkt, p. 165

that Kafka's works were completely cast aside by Weiss. In "Aus dem Kopenhagener Journal", written in 1960, amongst his reading material he mentions Kafka's Tagebücher.²¹ That Kafka's influence persisted even after his encounter with Miller would appear to be indicated by this remark made in an interview in 1966:

"Je n'aurais pu le [Die Ermittlung] faire, il y a dix ans, parce que je n'avais pas alors cette ouverture sur le monde que je possède aujourd'hui. Je n'aurais pu l'écrire que dans la ligne du monde de Kafka, le cauchemar subjectif. Je me serais identifié aux prisonniers. Aujourd'hui, je peux avoir une vue objective."²²

Thus it would appear that even in 1955 Weiss had still not broken free of his identification with Kafka, despite his apparent rejection of Kafka's pessimistic outlook on life fourteen years earlier. His ability to take a more objective view of reality no doubt stems from his reading of Marxist literature and his commitment to a political cause, with individual problems taking second place to issues of wider concern.

At this point it might be appropriate to study Weiss's works prior to 1965 and try to ascertain in how far one can detect Kafka's influence on them. In Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers, one might speak of a Kafkaesque situation. The "Landwirtschaft" is isolated in time and space. The inhabi-

²¹Rapporte, p. 51

²²Tailleur, op. cit.

tants, of whose lives prior to this period we are told nothing, lead completely self-contained lives and are unable to communicate with one another. The father-son relationship would appear to be modelled on Weiss's own relationship with his father, and by extension, on Kafka's with his. In Abschied von den Eltern the narrator refers to his parents as "Portalfiguren" in his life,²³ and his "leave-taking" is an attempt to break free from their stultifying influence on his development as an individual and as an artist. An incident which is described at some considerable length is one in which he is punished by his father for some misdemeanour which has been reported to the father by his mother:

"Qualvoll bis zum Brechreiz war nur die demütigende Gemeinschaft in der wir uns befanden. Er auf mich einschlagend, ich jammernd, lagen wir in einer schreckhaften Umarmung übereinander. Ich schrie um Verzeihung und er schrie unzusammenhängende Worte, und weder wusste er, warum er mich schlug, noch wusste ich, warum ich geschlagen wurde, es war eine Ritualhandlung, von unbekannten höheren Mächten aufgedrängt."²⁴

This incident is paralleled by the scene in Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers in which the father chastises the son. He lays the boy across his knees, striking him and pouring a flood of imprecations over him. However:

"Seine Worte wurden, wie auch die Schläge, immer kraftloser, bis sowohl die Worte als auch die Schläge versiegten und nur ein röchelndes Stöhnen aus seinem Mund

²³Abschied, p. 7

²⁴Ibid., p. 89

drang." ²⁵

The father's sadistic treatment of the son has brought on a heart-attack. This suggestion of the desire on the part of the son for the death of the father re-appears in Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden in the incident, which has been mentioned previously, of the son striking the father in the forehead with a dart. Strangely enough, in Kafka the roles of the father and the son would appear to be reversed. In "Das Urteil" it is Georg Bendemann who is condemned to death by his father; in "Die Verwandlung" it is Gregor Samsa who is metamorphosed into a bug and treated brutally by his father. Weiss cannot become a fully-integrated person until he breaks free from his family: Gregor Samsa's family appear to be happy only after his death.

Robbe-Grillet's use of the theme of father-son relationships does not appear at first sight to have its roots so deeply in Kafka. The Oedipus complex is there: Wallas ends up by accidentally shooting his alleged father. However, in the other works, it is usually a question of the absence of the father. Mathias has apparently no father: the soldier in Dans le Labyrinthe is without a family and death frustrates him in his efforts to become a father to the boy. The husband in La Jalousie is jealous of the fact that Franck and Christiane have a child whereas he and A. have not. In La

²⁵Schatten, p. 44

Maison de rendez-vous the situation becomes even more complex, when there is a suggestion that Johnson and Manneret are linked in a father-son relationship, whilst being at the same time incarnations of Robbe-Grillet himself.²⁶ In addition, one hypothesis of the murder of Manneret would have Johnson, the son, as the killer.²⁷ However, as Robbe-Grillet has denied any conflict with his family, one must ask oneself if the idea of this schism between father and son might not, in fact, be directly traceable to Kafka?²⁸

The psychiatrist, Didier Anzieu, has also remarked on this trait which is common to practically all of Robbe-Grillet's central characters, namely, their being without a family, or at least, having an unknown or absent father. The ambivalent nature of the father-son relationship he considers characteristic of "l'obsessionnel", which he believes Robbe-Grillet to be:

"... là gît le désir de l'obsessionnel, l'espoir de l'accident qui provoquerait la mort du père. L'obsessionnel ne veut pas tuer; il souhaite seulement la mort du père et il attend cette mort pour vivre libre de réaliser ses désirs."²⁹

²⁶ MR, p. 114

²⁷ Ibid., p. 211

²⁸ Cf. Bruno Hahn: "Robbe-Grillet lui-même dit n'avoir jamais eu de conflit avec ses parents, même sur des points qui semblaient devoir les opposer.", in "Plan du labyrinthe de Robbe-Grillet," Les Temps Modernes, No. 172, July 1960, p. 166.

²⁹ Anzieu, p. 633

We can see an illustration of this in Wallas, who eventually accidentally kills his alleged father, and also appears to be motivated by the subconscious desire to have an incestuous relationship with his step-mother, Evelyne Dupont. This in turn brings us back to the problem of sexual relationships; in Kafka's case, the involved relationship with Felice Bauer, and his reproach to his father that he had prevented him from founding a family; in Weiss's case, his ambivalent relationship with his mother and an implied incestuous relationship with his sister. Anzieu's explanation of the father-son relationship in Robbe-Grillet would appear to be equally valid for Weiss and Kafka. The death of the father, (or in Kafka's case, in a convoluted way, the son), will act as a liberating force, though this death, in fact, may only ever be a sort of wish-fulfilment.

A point of contact between Kafka and Weiss outwith this personal identification might be the admiration which both profess for Strindberg. According to the Tagebücher Kafka was reading Strindberg in the years 1914-15, years which also saw him working on "In der Strafkolonie", "Die Verwandlung" and the start of Der Prozess. On May 4th, 1915, he makes the following diary entry:

"Besserer Zustand, weil ich Strindberg (Entzweit) gelesen habe... Ich lese ihn nicht, um ihn zu lesen, sondern um an seiner Brust zu liegen. Er hält mich wie ein Kind auf seinem linken Arm. Ich sitze dort wie ein Mensch auf einer Statue. Bin zehnmal in Gefahr abzugleiten, beim elften Versuch sitze ich aber fest,

habe Sicherheit und grosse Übersicht." ³⁰

A previous entry on January 20th of the same year indicates to us just how he approached Strindberg's writings:

"Schwarze Fahnen. Wie schlecht ich auch lese. Und wie ich mich bösartig und schwächlich beobachte. Eindringen kann ich scheinbar in die Welt nicht, aber ruhig liegen, empfangen, das Empfangene in mir ausbreiten und dann ruhig vortreten." ³¹

Weiss's admiration for Strindberg manifests itself concretely in his translation of two Strindberg plays, Fräulein Julie (1961) and Ein Traumspiel (1963), and in his essay, "Gegen die Gesetze der Normalität" (1962). In the essay, Weiss speaks of his reading Strindberg at the age of 15-16 and of the effect which it had on him:

"Was damals aus der Welt dieses Umstürzlers, dieses Anarchisten Strindberg in mich eindrang und auf welche Weise ich es verarbeitete, lässt sich kaum mehr feststellen." ³²

In 1940, on his journey by train to Stockholm, he was reading Das rote Zimmer:

"Dies war eine geeignete Lektüre für meine erste Konfrontierung mit der neuen Stadt." ³³

For Weiss, Strindberg personifies the "Aussenseiter", a role common to him and Kafka. More important, he considers him to be a forerunner of 20th Century avant-garde writers:

³⁰ Franz Kafka, Tagebücher 1910-23, (S. Fischer Verlag, Lizenzausgabe von Schocken Books, New York, 1948), p. 475.

³¹ Ibid., p. 458

³² Rapporte, p. 72

³³ Ibid., p. 74

"Unsere heutige Poesie und Kunst hat den Dingen, die Strindberg stückweise noch unvollständig ausdrückte, ihre Namen gegeben. Ein halbes Jahrhundert vor Kafka, vor Joyce, Sartre und Genet, konnte er im Endstadium seiner Inferno-Zeit nur in eine pseudo-religiöse Krise geraten." ³⁴

One thing which these writers have in common is their attitude towards character. Quoting from Strindberg's preface to Fräulein Julie in 1888, Weiss says that the character as conceived by Strindberg:

"... war gehetzt, nervös, hysterisch, zerrissen, hin- und hergeworfen zwischen Altem und Neuem." ³⁵

The "collage" technique in characterisation is still valid for modern drama (and for modern prose, if one thinks of Der Schatten.) In Strindberg's words:

"Meine Gestalten sind zusammengesetzt aus vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Kulturphasen, aus Bücherseiten und Zeitungsblättern, aus Stücken anderer Menschen, aus Kleiderfetzen und Lumpen, und ihre Ideen entnehmen sie wechselweise voneinander." ³⁶

What strikes one as significant is the fact that Weiss's interest in Strindberg coincided with the writing of Abschied and Fluchtpunkt, so that in Strindberg it is possible to see not only a sense of personal identification but also a very strong literary influence.

Although Weiss has never in his critical writings made direct reference to the type of character found in Kafka's

³⁴ Ibid., p. 76

³⁵ Ibid., p. 79

³⁶ Ibid.

works in the way he does for Strindberg, it is obvious that he sees a close affiliation between their respective conception of character, and that his characters are, to a certain extent, an amalgam of those of his two predecessors. In Der Schatten we find the anonymous "Ich" narrator, and the other characters are referred to as "der Kutscher", "die Wirtin" and so on. Weiss does not use Kafka's device of referring to his characters solely by an initial, but his characters are just as much anonymous entities as are Kafka's. In Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden the alliterative choice of names for the ferryman's six sons, Jam, Jem, Jim, Jom, Jum, Jym,³⁷ results in a merging of identities, even though each son does have a physical peculiarity which distinguishes him from his brothers. For Robbe-Grillet this anonymity of character in the world of fiction is symptomatic of the increasing anonymity of the individual in our 20th Century universe. The characters in the works of 19th Century writers such as Balzac were fully-integrated personalities, corresponding to the emergence of a bourgeois ethic, which saw man firmly ensconced in his position at the centre of the universe. As Robbe-Grillet expresses it:

"Le roman de personnages appartient bel et bien au passé, il caractérise une époque, celle qui marqua l'apogée de l'individu."³⁸

³⁷Gespräch, p. 19

³⁸PNR, p. 28

However, according to Robbe-Grillet, for writers such as Kafka, Proust, Joyce and James, this conception of character is no longer valid. In their works:

"... le personnage n'est déjà plus du tout le même que chez Balzac; par exemple, chez Kafka le personnage principal ne porte pas de nom; il s'appelle simplement K." 39

Robbe-Grillet also employs initials to designate his characters. These vary from "X", the unknown quantity in L'Année dernière à Marienbad, who may or may not have had an affair with "A.", to "M.", who might be the husband ("mari") in Marienbad and L'Immortelle, to "N.", the narrator in L'Immortelle. The initial "L." for female characters in the various books and films, (Laura, Lauren, Leila, and so on), would appear to be a more involved use of the technique. It may be a reference to "elle", in the sense of the eternal feminine, an interpretation which might be reinforced by the other feminine name which occurs frequently in varying forms, that of Eve.

When one considers the narrative point of view in Kafka and Robbe-Grillet, one is struck by the similarity which exists between them. Though Kafka does not make use of the "Ich" narrative mode, his use of K. or Josef K. to designate his central character suggests that there is a close relationship between author and character. Martin Walser speaks of

39 "Table ronde," Le Figaro Littéraire, 29.3.58.

"total congruence" between the narrator and K.,⁴⁰ and the same narrative perspective appears to exist in Le Voyeur. Although the narrative mode is that of the third person, it is clear that the events narrated are filtered through Mathias' consciousness.

In "Das Urteil" the name of the central character is Georg Bendemann, a name which does not appear to bear much resemblance to Franz Kafka. However, as Kafka himself was at pains to point out, Georg is a "K."-figure, albeit in disguise:

"In Bendemann ist 'mann' nur eine für alle noch unbekannten Möglichkeiten der Geschichte vorgenommene Verstärkung von 'Bende'. Bende aber hat ebenso viele Buchstaben wie Kafka und der Vokal e wiederholt sich an den gleichen Stellen wie der Vokal a in Kafka."⁴¹

It is unlikely that it was Robbe-Grillet's familiarity with this passage which prompted him to use the same technique in his works, though he has read the Tagebücher.⁴² In Les Gommages we find Wallas' superior bearing the name Roi-Dauzet, which has the same number of syllables as Robbe-Grillet, the "Roi" referring perhaps to the king in Robbe-Grillet's first unpublished work, Un Régicide, or to the author who rules over the characters he creates. Applying Kafka's

⁴⁰ Martin Walser, Beschreibung einer Form, (Hanser Verlag, München, 1961), p. 47.

⁴¹ Kafka, Tagebücher, p. 297, (entry for 11th February, 1913).

⁴² PNR, p. 11

method the parallel is fairly obvious. Similarly, Ralph Johnson, in La Maison de rendez-vous, has the same number of syllables as Robbe-Grillet, and the consonants R and J of English have the same sounds as the consonants R and G in French. Thus, though one cannot speak of influence, it is either a remarkable coincidence to find both authors employing a similar technique or else it is highly indicative of the degree of affinity which exists between them.

The "discontinuity", both spatial and temporal, which has been remarked upon in the works of Weiss and Kafka is also to be found in the works of Robbe-Grillet. Be it the "Landwirtschaft" of Der Schatten or the city of Les Gommès with its "Boulevard Circulaire" and its "Rue des Arpenteurs" (an allusion, perhaps to Kafka's K.); be it the circus-setting of Der Turm or the island of Le Voveur; these settings are just as intangible for us as is the village in "Ein Landarzt" or the castle and the village in Das Schloss. Dorrit Cohn suggests that this "discontinuity" in Robbe-Grillet's created world makes for a close point of contact between him and Kafka. As she says:

"... fictitious sites are not unusual in more traditional fiction; but even though Flaubert's Yonville, Mann's Kaisersaschern, or Sartre's Bouville cannot be found on any map, they exist in recognizable national regions: from Yonville one can travel to Rouen, from Kaisersaschern to Munich, from Bouville to Paris. Such voyages are no more conceivable from Robbe-Grillet's fictional cities and villages than they are from Kafka's."⁴³

⁴³Cohn, pp. 21 - 22

Precisely the same applies to Weiss's settings, (with the exception of those in the autobiographical works). Prose-works and early dramas alike are characterised by this vague, imprecise location. Not that these are in any way unreal situations. We feel that they exist, but where?

Another point of contact between the three writers is the point of departure of their works. There is no long introduction, no peripheral account of the events leading up to those of the work itself. There is no long delineation of character. From the outset, the reader finds himself "in media res". One need only compare the introductory sentences of "Die Verwandlung" and Der Prozess with the opening scene of Mockinpott to see how close a resemblance exists. "Die Verwandlung" begins:

"Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt." ⁴⁴

Without any preliminary explanation as to the whys and the wherefores of the situation, the reader is presented with the fact of Gregor's metamorphosis. It is perhaps attributable to Kafka's powers of realistic description, which Robbe-Grillet so much admires, that the reader accepts this highly unlikely occurrence without demur and does not query the possibility of such a thing ever happening.

⁴⁴ Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung," in Das Urteil und andere Erzählungen, (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1959), p. 23.

Der Prozess begins with the following words, (which Weiss will mention in Fluchtpunkt):

"Jemand musste Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne dass er etwas Böses getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet." ⁴⁵

Mockinpott's opening words in the drama are:

"Gibt es denn keine Gerechtigkeit
hab nie begangen keine Schlechtigkeit...
und da wird man einfach aus sein Leben gerissen
und mir nichts dir nichts ins Gefängnis geschmissen." ⁴⁶

Thus the two characters, Josef K. and Mockinpott, find themselves in prison, for no apparent reason, and having, to the best of their knowledge, committed no crime.

Robbe-Grillet's novels may not open quite so abruptly, there may not be the same sense of injustice, but both Wallas and Mathias return, the one to investigate a crime, the other to sell his watches, to surroundings in which they have spent a part of their childhood. Nonetheless, they are outsiders. Try as he may, Mathias cannot establish contact with the islanders, and Wallas is mistaken for the assassin Garinati. Similarly, K. arrives, apparently unexpectedly, in search of the castle, and tries, unsuccessfully, to break through the indifference and mistrust of the villagers. Just as K. stands on the wooden bridge leading from the highway to the village, so Wallas stands leaning against the handrail of the bridge

⁴⁵Franz Kafka, Die Romane, (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1962), p. 310.

⁴⁶Dramen I, pp. 115-16

over the canal⁴⁷ and Mathias stands on the boat that links the island and the mainland.⁴⁸ This is symbolic of the fact that all three are outsiders, and our first sight of them is just when they are leaving their familiar surroundings and entering a world which they will disturb with their presence and which will remain hostile to them, try as they may to break down the barriers.

One great difference which exists between Robbe-Grillet and Weiss in their attitude to Kafka is that the former is less concerned with Kafka as a man than with Kafka as a literary artist, of whom he forms his own personal interpretation. As Max Brod remarked in the "Nachwort" to the second edition of his Kafka biography in 1946:

"Die Kunst Kafkas ist auch sonst in vielen Punkten stilbildend geworden, ohne dass ihre religiöse Tiefe und verwandelnde Kraft jedem, der unter Kafkas Einfluss zu stehen glaubt oder der über ihn schreibt, klar wäre. Ja oft hat man den Eindruck, dass da und dort nur Ausserlichkeiten der Methode Kafkas nachgeahmt oder analysiert werden, nicht aber sein wesentliches Streben, dass vielleicht einigen, die so viele Worte über ihn und seine Kunst machen, ganz unzugänglich ist."⁴⁹

The Surrealists saw in Kafka a writer of oniric literature; someone who escaped from everyday reality into another world. The Existentialists saw him as an exponent of the philosophy of the Absurd. Robbe-Grillet regards Kafka as a realist

⁴⁷Gommes, p. 45

⁴⁸Voveur, p. 9

⁴⁹Max Brod, Franz Kafka: eine Biographie, (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1962), p. 310.

writer, one in a line stretching from Flaubert to Robbe-Grillet himself:

"De Flaubert à Kafka, une filiation s'impose à l'esprit, qui appelle un devenir... Au-delà du naturalisme de l'un et de l'onirisme de l'autre, se dessinent les premiers éléments d'une écriture réaliste d'un genre inconnu, qui est en train maintenant de voir le jour." ⁵⁰

This rapprochement of two such apparent opposites is not so startling as it might seem at first sight. Kafka was also a great admirer of Flaubert. Several mentions are made in the Tagebücher of his reading Flaubert over a period of years.

In an entry for June 6th, 1912, Kafka says:

"Jetzt lese ich in Flauberts Briefen: 'Mein Roman ist der Felsen, an dem ich hänge, und ich weiss nichts von dem, was in der Welt vorgeht.' - Ähnlich wie ich es für mich am 9. Mai eingetragen habe." ⁵¹

The entry referred to is the following:

"Wie ich mich gegen alle Unruhe an meinem Roman festhalte, ganz wie eine Denkmalsfigur, die in die Ferne schaut und sich am Block festhält." ⁵²

One of his "livres de chevet" on a journey from Weimar to Jungborn in 1912 is Flaubert's Education sentimentale. He makes three references to it:

15. Juli: "Die Seite in Flaubert über die Prostitution." ⁵³

16. Juli: "... die Education Sentimentale war im Kopf-

⁵⁰ PNR, p. 13

⁵¹ Kafka, Tagebücher, p. 280

⁵² Ibid., p. 277

⁵³ Ibid., p. 673

kissen..." 54

20. Juli: "Vormittag Dr. Sch. das erste Kapitel der Education vorgelesen." 55

As late as 19th October, 1921 he is making reference to Flaubert's work:

"Dieses Ende der fünf Bücher Moses hat eine Ähnlichkeit mit der Schlussszene der Education Sentimentale." 56

Because of these references, Marthe Robert cannot understand why a phenomenologist like Merleau-Ponty refuses to believe that such an admiration existed:

"... Merleau-Ponty, dem ich einmal sagte, wie sehr Kafka Flaubert bewunderte, und der sich ganz einfach weigerte, mir Glauben zu schenken, obwohl er sicher die Tagebücher gelesen hatte." 57

The reason for this, of course, is that for the Existentialists Kafka was primarily a philosopher who had no literary predecessors. Robbe-Grillet has frequently stressed in his theoretical writings the importance he attaches to his powers of invention, to the primacy of the imagination. This is a trait which he also finds in Kafka and Flaubert:

"Il suffit en réalité de lire le journal de Kafka par exemple, ou la correspondance de Flaubert, pour se rendre compte aussitôt de la part primordiale prise, déjà dans les grandes oeuvres du passé, par la conscience

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 677

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 678

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 545

⁵⁷Marthe Robert, "Kafka in Frankreich," Akzente, No. 13, 1966, p. 317.

créatrice, par la volonté, par la rigueur." 58

Nevertheless, the imaginative side in Kafka's writings is not divorced from a strongly realist basis. It is with precisely this disregard of Kafka's realist elements and over-emphasis on the metaphysical content of his works that Robbe-Grillet reproaches those who claim to be continuing the Kafka tradition:

"On a pu juger depuis vingt ans le peu qui restait de l'univers kafkaïen dans les oeuvres de ses prétendus descendants, lorsque ceux-ci ne faisaient que reproduire le contenu métaphysique et oubliaient le réalisme du maître." 59

He attempts to define what he means by Kafka's realism, and by so doing, defines his own particular brand. He sees Kafka as the "créateur d'un monde matériel, à la présence visionnaire." 60 He refuses to admit an allegorical content in Kafka's works:

"Le monde visible de ses romans est bien, pour lui, le monde réel, et ce qu'il y a derrière (s'il y a quelque chose) paraît sans valeur, face à l'évidence des objets, gestes, paroles, etc." 61

The most he will allow is that, even if Kafka's stairways lead somewhere, in the works themselves they are merely there:

"Peut-être les escaliers de Kafka mènent-ils ailleurs,

58 PNR, p. 11

59 Ibid., p. 142

60 Ibid., p. 141

61 Ibid., pp. 141-42

mais eux sont là ... Dans toute l'oeuvre, les rapports de l'homme avec le monde, loin d'avoir un caractère symbolique, sont constamment directs et immédiats." ⁶²

Dorrit Cohn suggests that whilst Kafka's stairs might not lead "elsewhere" in the sense of other-worldliness:

"... (they), like Robbe-Grillet's, certainly do lead beyond their own concretion: to inner chambers, mirror images of the forces that drive the fictional selves along their escalated, labyrinthine and circular itineraries." ⁶³

From a study of the works of Weiss and Robbe-Grillet one must conclude that traces of direct Kafka influence are barely discernible in the works themselves. The only character of Robbe-Grillet's who may be said to resemble K. is Wallas in Les Gommès; of Weiss's characters, only Mockinpott, though he, by means of the simple expedient of changing over his shoes to the proper feet, triumphs over his adversities. The only plots which might be said to resemble those of Kafka would be those of Dans le Labyrinthe and Der Turm. Where we find analogies is in the domain of fictional space, fictional perspective and fictional time, all of which have been treated above. Thus it might be more accurate to speak of affinities rather than influence. In Weiss's case a more fitting term might be "self-identification": an awareness of the close parallel which existed between him and Kafka in their existential situation. He was able, eventually, to develop beyond

⁶²Ibid., p. 142

⁶³Cohn, p. 24

this particular outlook on life, but he did not cast aside Kafka's problematic point of view until long after he felt that he had done so. As regards the importance of the role of Kafka in Weiss's life and in his works, it is outranked only by that of the Surrealists. They usurped Kafka's position because they revolted against what they felt to be unacceptable, whereas he accepted passively the status quo: their political outlook was similar to that which Weiss eventually adopted: in short, Kafka's "Weltanschauung" could lead only to an impasse, whilst theirs was an indication to him of a path which could be fruitfully followed. Robbe-Grillet's relationship to Kafka does not seem to be based on a feeling of personal identification. Kafka for him was much more a literary mentor. Weiss was attracted by Kafka's metaphysics, Robbe-Grillet by his literary techniques, and this shift in emphasis is quite definitely perceptible in the works themselves.

CONCLUSION

After a close examination of two of their works, a study of their narrative techniques and their attitude to political "engagement", and an attempt to assess the influence of Kafka on their writings, an answer can be formulated to the question, "Just how much do Weiss and Robbe-Grillet have in common?" An important corollary is, of course, the question, "In what respects must one speak of divergent points of view and attitudes?"

If one considers first the aims of the two authors and their attitude towards the work itself one finds slightly diverging approaches. For Robbe-Grillet, at least in his early period of writing, the work itself is of prime consideration, and the main criterion of the work of art is its form:

"Le projet d'écrire est plus ou moins un projet de forme... C'est toujours dans cette forme que réside l'apport spontané du créateur, en même temps que l'objet de sa recherche. C'est elle qui constitue l'oeuvre d'art: car le vrai contenu de l'oeuvre d'art, c'est sa forme."¹

Weiss does not appear to attach such importance to the form of his works and has, on occasion, spoken rather disparagingly of their aesthetic content:

"I am at odds with my own estheticism, you see; one is

¹"Entretien," L'Express, 8th October, 1959, p. 32.

easily tempted to put too much effort and time into fiddling with form. In my plays, I think I manage to overcome that quite a bit, at least more than in my so-called autobiographical books." ²

Nevertheless, a number of his works, such as Abschied and Die Ermittlung, are very dependent on their form, and this is a possible source of correspondence with Robbe-Grillet's works. Weiss says that Abschied:

"... is a very subjective book because the various experiences are highly subjective. And because this was the case the form became very important; one brings everything into this form, and that is why this great closed block is so important as the main form; also the manner in which the themes are treated and varied, that certain themes recur, that certain situations keep recurring. As far as I was concerned, the book was very carefully planned and worked out, also from the subjective point of view, thinking of it as a whole, a closed composition with very definite themes and a very definite development of individual themes..." ³

However, Robbe-Grillet seems to be adopting a more ambivalent attitude to form. In his later works, such as La Maison de rendez-vous and Projet pour une révolution à New York, he appears to attach much less significance to aesthetic qualities. He speaks of the former work as being written "au fur et à mesure". ⁴ The form is not pre-determined, inasmuch as the work itself appears to be in the process of being created. It was precisely this quality of work in progress which attracted Weiss to the paintings of Surrealists such as Dali

²Roloff, p. 230

³Ibid., p. 227

⁴Brochier, p. 20

and Chirico. As opposed to classical paintings which portrayed something which had already happened, these works presented a stage of development, "... in dem etwas im Entstehen begriffen war...".⁵

Both writers show a preference for the technique of interior duplication, or, as Ludovic Janvier calls it, "L'Esthétique du Redoublement".⁶ As we have seen, their use of the technique is partly determined by their attitude towards time, which they conceive of as being no longer linear but discontinuous. Robbe-Grillet says:

"... dans le récit moderne, on dirait que le temps se trouve privé de sa temporalité. Il ne coule plus. Il ne s'accomplit rien."⁷

When discussing his use of the "Spiel im Spiel" in Marat/Sade, Weiss said that it was connected to an idea that seemed to be prevalent in contemporary literature, that of "... Vielseitigkeit (Rückblende, Blende in die Zukunft und Gleichzeitigkeit von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit)".⁸

Both writers would term themselves realists, but each according to his own definition of realism. One has the impression that their respective attitudes to reality owe much

⁵Rapporte, p. 84

⁶Ludovic Janvier, Une parole exigeante, (Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1964), p. 52.

⁷"La Littérature, aujourd'hui," Tel Quel, No. 14, Summer 1963, p. 44.

⁸Stér, p. 94

to their contacts with Surrealism, though both stress that their works are firmly anchored in everyday reality. Even a work such as Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers, described by certain critics as a piece of surrealist prose, is for Weiss a piece of realistic writing:

"Fluchtpunkt is a purely realistic book while Kutscher is not immediately commensurate with an outer reality. It is for most people more of a fantastic book while for me it is just as realistic as Fluchtpunkt." ⁹

Robbe-Grillet claims to have been disturbed by the "côté onirique" which he had given to Marienbad and:

"... il me semble qu'un de mes projets, en m'attaquant à un deuxième film [L'Immortelle], avait été d'ancrer dans une réalité quotidienne, dans une réalité qu'on peut appeler 'objective', cette vie imaginaire, qui n'était pas pour moi la vie du rêve, mais ce qu'on peut appeler la vie du 'rêve éveillé', c'est-à-dire précisément notre vie quotidienne." ¹⁰

This same idea of reality being a synthesis of the real and the imaginary also appears in his article on Joë Bousquet:

"Dans le rêve, dans le souvenir, comme dans le regard, notre imagination est la force organisatrice de notre vie, de notre monde. Chaque homme, à son tour, doit réinventer les choses autour de lui. Ce sont les vraies choses, nettes, dures et brillantes, du monde réel. Elles ne renvoient à aucun autre monde. Elles ne sont le signe de rien d'autre que d'elles-mêmes. Et le seul contact que l'homme puisse entretenir avec elles, c'est de les imaginer." ¹¹

Weiss expresses a similar idea of this fusion of the real and the imaginary in the following terms:

⁹Roloff, p. 228

¹⁰"Table ronde", p. 99

¹¹PNR, p. 94

"Wenn mit Realismus die genaue Abbildung der Aussenwelt gemeint ist, dann ergibt sich allerdings etwas sehr Fadenscheiniges. Je mehr die Bühne versucht, die äussere Realität vorzuspiegeln, desto mehr wird sie zum Illusionstheater und damit unwirklich. Die Bühne hat ihre eigene Realität und der Eindruck, den sie weckt, ist am realistischsten, wenn sie sich ganz an die Gesetze dieser Realität hält." ¹²

For Robbe-Grillet there is never any doubt as to the fictitious nature of this reality:

"Les personnages sont des fictions; ils ne sont que des fictions et ne vivent que comme fictions, et c'est leur caractère fictif qui est justement le sujet même de l'oeuvre." ¹³

Weiss would appear to be offering a similar situation to the audience of his Marat/Sade:

"Es ist besser, der Hauptvorgang geht auf, und man blickt in dieses Milieu hinein, das ja aufgebautes Theater ist, für uns aber eine Wirklichkeit vorstellen soll. In dieser Wirklichkeit spielt sich dann das Spiel im Spiel ab, so dass von vornherein offen gezeigt wird: es ist Theater, wir spielen Ihnen eine Wirklichkeit vor, und in dieser Wirklichkeit wird Theater im Theater gespielt." ¹⁴

Reinhold Grimm sees this interplay of illusion and reality as being fundamental to revolutionary theatre:

"Die Struktur des Spiels im Spiel und die Dialektik von Spiel und Wirklichkeit gehören wesentlich zum Revolutionsdrama." ¹⁵

This is certainly true of Weiss, but it is true not only of

¹²"Dies hier ist Bühne", Antwort auf eine Umfrage der Zeitschrift Theater heute, August 1963, in K-H Braun, p. 92.

¹³"Table ronde", p. 100

¹⁴Stér, p. 95

¹⁵Reinhold Grimm, "Spiel und Wirklichkeit in einigen Revolutionsdramen," Basis. Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur, Band I, 1970, p. 83.

his theatre but also of his other works. Two remarks he made when discussing the avant-garde film producer, Jean Vigo, in an essay written in 1963, are already indicative of this conception of realism as being an admixture of what he terms inner and outer reality:

"Die Wirklichkeit ist das Rohmaterial für die Phantasie",¹⁶
and:

"Vigo ist in vielem Buñuel verwandt. Er ist Realist. Ein Realist, für den innere und äussere Wirklichkeit eine Einheit bilden."¹⁷

I have quoted at length from both authors, because I feel that it is precisely in their attitude to the relationship of the real and the imaginary that they display almost identical views. Their methods of portraying this reality in their works also show quite marked affinities. The mixture of the objective and the subjective, the matter-of-fact, at times banal tone of the narrative, language devoid of emotion and embellishment; both writers display a remarkable degree of correspondence in each of these respects. The only aspect of their work in which they would appear to hold divergent views is their attitude towards political commitment. Robbe-Grillet does not exclude the possibility of the artist's contributing to a political or social revolution, but in an unconscious rather than a conscious fashion. Weiss, despite

¹⁶"Avantgarde Film," Rapporte, p. 33

¹⁷Ibid., p. 31

his lack of success with his documentary theatre, is obviously reluctant to remove a polemical content from his works. Robbe-Grillet has expressed an interest in writing for the theatre.¹⁸ It would be interesting to see if such a play, were it ever written, would show any affinities with Weiss's theatre.

What strikes one as most significant in a comparison of the works of the two authors is the fact that, working independently of each other, they have created works which bear such a marked resemblance to each other. These similarities are not attributable to the fact that each was writing as a member of a school or movement, which, like Romanticism or Classicism, was a European phenomenon. Both claim to be, like many of their literary creations, "outsiders", as far as literary trends go. Robbe-Grillet has several times denied belonging to an "école", and says that among the so-called "nouveaux romanciers" there are very few, if any, unifying qualities. Comparing himself to Nathalie Sarraute, he said:

"Nous avons plus de refus que de projets positifs communs."¹⁹

Weiss, when asked about his relationship to other writers writing in German at the present time, and if the differences in the approach to language make for a difficult relationship,

¹⁸ L'Express, No. 876, 1^{er} - 7 avril 1968, p. 45.

¹⁹ Brochier, p. 13

replied:

"I have of course had an entirely different development, which can be disturbing at times and at other times is taken for granted." ²⁰

There certainly was little possibility of inter-relationship or inter-action in their early works. As Robbe-Grillet has said, his first novels were not very warmly received, and Weiss was comparatively unknown until the success of Marat/Sade. Admittedly, one cannot speak with such certainty of the later works, by which time the "nouveau roman" had become internationally known and Marat/Sade had been performed at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. However, there are no direct references to Weiss in any of Robbe-Grillet's critical works, and to the best of my knowledge Weiss has made only two references to Robbe-Grillet, or really to Alain Resnais, the director of Marienbad. The first of these references is in his "Pariser Journal" (1962), in which he speaks of meeting Resnais and Delphine Seyrig, who played A. in the film. In the interview with Roloff, when asked what he thought of Marienbad, Weiss replied:

"Well yes, visually very beautiful, very beautifully made, but as far as I am concerned the film gets stuck in the esthetic. I prefer Buñuel's films which are laden with content and emotions, and I also like socially critical films." ²¹

Whilst one cannot exclude the possibility of direct contacts,

²⁰Roloff, p. 222

²¹Ibid., p. 230

it is probably more true to say that the affinities which have been detected are, in fact, coincidental, and stem from two main sources. The first is their identical conception of the relationship between real and imagined reality, and the second, the admiration which they share for certain of their literary predecessors, and which they express in the structure and content of their works.

This thesis does not make any claim to be an all-embracing study of the two writers in question. Further research is needed in areas such as their work in the cinema, the influence of Surrealism in their works, their attitude towards reality and their treatment of time. However, the inclusion of such topics was outwith the scope of this thesis because of their magnitude, but hopefully they might provide material for further research in a study of the relationship between the two authors.

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