



the PARIS REVIEW

THE ART OF FICTION NO. 91 ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

When in Paris, Alain Robbe-Grillet lives in a third-floor apartment in an affluent residential area on the edge of the city, across the street from the woods of the Bois de Boulogne. You cross two courtyards to reach his building, where the spacious sitting room overlooks flower-beds and pots. It is extremely tranquil, furnished simply, with black and red the predominant colors, plenty of comfortable sofas and chairs, and piles of books everywhere. Robbe-Grillet comes to Paris for business (he is director of the publishing firm Les Editions de Minuit, his own publishers) and to see friends, but he writes in his large country house in Normandy, where he spends as much time as he can.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's first two novels, *The Erasers* (1953) and *The Voyeur* (1955), were ignored by the public and dismissed by the critics. But his third and most famous novel, *Jealousy* (1957), was enthusiastically reviewed by Roland Barthes—already one of the most serious and influential voices in Parisian literary circles—who called it “objective,” giving the word *Littre* dictionary's definition as “turned toward the object.” From then on, the word was used to designate a group of novelists working along the same lines: Michel Butor, Claude Ollier, Claude Simon, Robert Pinget,

and Nathalie Sarraute. Though varied in age, personality, and style, they shared certain preoccupations, chiefly a questioning of the old and the search for a new form of *récit*—narrative. In a series of essays published in *L'Express* magazine and later in a book entitled *For A New Novel* (1963), Robbe-Grillet outlined the ideas and methods of the New Novelists; he became the spokesman of the movement. With the international success of Alain Resnais's film *Last Year at Marienbad*, for which he wrote the script, Robbe-Grillet's reputation increased, and his books began to sell. He made his own films and wrote many more novels in the years that followed, becoming a favorite on American campuses. He now spends one term every year at an American university.

At the beginning of 1985, Robbe-Grillet's autobiography, *The Mirror That Returns*, appeared amid publicity and controversy, becoming an instant best-seller. That the spokesman of the "objective novel" should indulge in an eminently subjective exercise, an autobiography, seemed a provocation. Yet the book is vintage Robbe-Grillet, characteristically mixing fact and fiction, memory and imagination.

—Shusha Guppy, 1986

INTERVIEWER

You have just published your autobiography, *The Mirror That Returns*. Are you pleased with the response?

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

It has been received better than any of my other books, in the sense that it has become a best-seller. Usually my books are long-sellers, that is to say they sell in much greater numbers than many a best-seller, but over a long period. The impact of this one has been immediate. As a result I have trouble assessing its reception

because the reviews are full of contradictions. Some people have liked the autobiographical side, the description of family life. Some have appreciated the new way of speaking about the German occupation—the relationship of the French people with the occupiers—simply and without makeup. My parents were Germanophile. Well, they *were* Germanophile—so what? I don't hide it. I don't try to justify or condemn it—I tell the story. And this had never been done before.

INTERVIEWER

Some people like the theory of literature contained in the book above all.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Indeed! Which is the continuation of what is in my novels and my theoretical works. None of these points is indifferent to me, at the same time none *really* interests me. What *does* interest me is the weaving of all these different elements in the book; the way they mix in movement, constantly shifting and changing, as if they were fragments of me. When I think of myself, I feel that I am made up of fragments in which there are childhood memories, fictional characters I particularly care about—such as Henri de Corinth—and even characters who belong to literature and with whom I feel I have family ties. Stavrogin of *The Possessed* and Madame Bovary are related to me exactly as my grandfather is, or my aunt. So it is the way all these figures move and refuse to be fixed that excites me. Well, at least that is what I say today. Another day I might say something different!

INTERVIEWER

Henri de Corinth appears in several of your novels and now in your autobiography, where he is a family friend. Is he based on someone you knew?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I almost think that I have known him in real life; at the same time I can believe that my grandfather is someone I have invented. All these characters, whether real or imagined, make up the content of my imaginary world. It doesn't matter which has been born of experience and which belongs to the imagination. I would be sad if I had to differentiate—I don't live like that. But I can tell you how I arrived at his name. Goethe has a ballad called *The Fiancée of Corinth*. It is based on a famous Greek legend in which a man falls in love with a very beautiful, pale, slim girl; but he can't get close to her. "You must first ask my father's permission," she says. So he travels to Corinth, her home town, finds her house and knocks on the door. But the girl's mother informs him that their daughter has died many years ago. However, it is a dark, cold night and they give him shelter, putting him in their daughter's room. During the night the girl comes and lies beside him and sucks his blood. In the morning he is found dead, with a wound on his neck. This ballad of Goethe's is used by Michelet in his novel *The Witch*, in which a chapter is called "La Fiancée de Corinth." There is an ambiguity here: "the fiancée of Corinth" could mean either that the girl comes from Corinth or that she is Corinth's fiancée. My character, Henri de Corinth, is born out of this ambiguity. I have often said that my memories tend to become engravings, say by Honoré Daumier. I see with precision a scene I am trying to depict, and at the same time I see an engraving: a room with a large Napoleon III bed, and a young woman leaning over a child. Now in *The Mirror That Returns* I write, "My mother often watched over my troubled sleep with a paraffin lamp." I am certain that a novelist is someone who attributes a different reality-value to the characters and events of his story than to those of "real" life. A novelist is someone who confuses his own life with that of his characters.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean that memory is imagination, that we invent our own life in retrospect or indeed as we go along?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Exactly. Memory belongs to the imagination. Human memory is not like a computer that records things; it is part of the imaginative process, on the same terms as invention. In other words, inventing a character or recalling a memory is part of the same process. This is very clear in Proust: For him there is no difference between lived experience—his relationship with his mother, and so forth—and his characters. Exactly the same type of truth is involved.

INTERVIEWER

There is a very moving scene in *The Mirror* that illustrates your point: Henri de Corinth rides in the sea and nearly drowns in order to capture a mirror that is floating on the water and which recedes as he advances. It is a story within the story, what André Gide called *mise-en-abime*. Did you deliberately choose this method?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I never choose anything deliberately. I make references to all sorts of things—for example, to a novel by the Persian writer Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*. It seems an opposition to the Cartesian spirit; yet Descartes wrote, “If I dream of something with enough power, when I wake up I don’t know whether it was a dream or reality.” So you see, Descartes confers the same truth-status to a dream, if he has dreamed with enough power to turn it to reality.

INTERVIEWER

But surely this is a far cry from your theories of the “New Novel,” in which reality has to be depicted exactly, to its minutest detail?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It seems to be the opposite of what has been said about the

New Novel in general and my work in particular. But I have been protesting against the idea of “objectivity” for thirty years. I have stated that I never describe something that exists in reality: I don’t look at a landscape or an engraving and then describe it. There is an engraving in my novel *In the Labyrinth* called *The Defeat of Rischenfelt*. Everyone believes that I have had this engraving in my hand. But never! Everything in my novels is pure invention. It may be seen with the precision of something that is there, in front of my eyes, but it never is! If it were, I would not wish to describe it. It is in my brain and not in front of my eyes. During the first years of my work people always wrote, “Robbe-Grillet means objectivity, the scientific eye.” Perhaps, but the scientific eye is looking at what is in the imagination.

INTERVIEWER

If you have something in mind that you wish to describe, it means that you have something to say. Yet you have argued vigorously against the idea that a writer ever has, or should have, anything to say.

ROBBE-GRILLET

When a novelist has “something to say,” they mean a message. It has political connotations, or a religious message, or a moral prescription. It means “commitment,” as used by Sartre and other fellow-travelers. They are saying that the writer has a world view, a sort of truth that he wishes to communicate, and that his writing has an ulterior significance. I am against this. Flaubert described a whole world, but he had nothing to *say*, in the sense that he had no message to transmit, no remedy to offer for the human condition.

INTERVIEWER

But did Dostoyevsky have nothing to say? Tolstoy?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Tolstoy yes. That is why on the whole he doesn't interest me.

INTERVIEWER

Not even *Anna Karenina*?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Especially not *Anna Karenina*! Among Tolstoy's books the one that interests me is *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Ivan is someone who hurts himself while unhooking a curtain, and one sees his death in that gesture. As for Dostoyevsky, perhaps there is a message in his work but for me it is a kind of parasite. In *Crime And Punishment*, I am much more interested in the first part which is the preparation for the murder. You remember the scene where Raskolnikov is getting the axe ready? And he is fascinated by the act he has to accomplish? The last part of the book, about guilt and moral responsibility and so on, bores me profoundly.

INTERVIEWER

Because you, or your characters, never feel moral responsibility or guilt?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Never!

INTERVIEWER

Aren't you lucky!

ROBBE-GRILLET

Perhaps. The book of Dostoyevsky's that interests me most is *The Possessed*. It is an enigmatic novel; the main protagonist is an enigma. I read it over and over again and find it tremendous—it has a concept of reality that escapes “significance.” That may be my reading of it; someone else might apprehend it differently. I am sure Camus would have said something quite different about it.

INTERVIEWER

Another writer who has had a great influence on you is Kafka. He is someone who has been interpreted in more than one way. What is his fascination for you?

ROBBE-GRILLET

He has been read as having a metaphysical and religious message—the relationship between the Jew and his God. This is the influence of Max Brod, his friend and first biographer. It doesn't interest me in the least. I read Kafka as the revelation of a world, which is much more important than yet another meditation on the Talmud. Brod's reading of Kafka is reductive and restrictive, as if his work could be reduced to metaphysical relations. What I find extraordinary is the actual presence of this opaque world.

INTERVIEWER

While we are on the subject of your influences, Flaubert seems to have had the strongest impact on you, and indeed he could be considered the father of the New Novel in general. At the moment he is enjoying a tremendous vogue—in England for example, where he is the most fashionable French author. Do you think it is partly because of the cool—not to say cold—eye he casts on the world, his somewhat cynical and detached relationship to his characters, which is seductive to the modern, analytical mind?

ROBBE-GRILLET

That is what some critics say. But of course, it isn't true at all. This myth of Flaubert's coldness and cynicism is incomprehensible to me. I read him as a warm, affectionate and generous novelist. He has, for all his characters, a kind of warm friendship, which is the same for Emma Bovary as for her unattractive husband, or even for the pharmacist Homais. One feels that he is not staying outside, but has tenderness and pity, and of course sometimes condemnation, for his characters. He *is* Charles Bovary, and Emma,

seulement de cinq ouvertures : une fente pour la bouche, deux petits orifices ronds pour les narines et deux trous ovales, plus larges, pour les yeux.

Sans s'arrêter à ces détails, qui il remarque à peine à cause de sa myopie, ~~est~~ rassuré en tout cas par la haute taille et la forte carrure du personnage, le ser-
 monier [REDACTED]-ci, tout en répétant avec volu-
[REDACTED], jusqu'à la maison qu'il
 retrouve sans peine, puisque sa bicyclette et sa
 boîte à outils sont restés devant. Là, il a vite fait
 de cocheter le mécanisme et d'ouvrir ^{la} porte en faux
 chêne à la ferronnerie passée de mode. Il se retrouve
 donc dans le vestibule mal éclairé, prudemment caché
 derrière Brown qui commence, lui, à deviner ce dont
 il s'agit. Mais le petit homme chauve ne voit plus
 rien, au fond du couloir, de la scène inquiétante
 qui il vient d'observer par le trou de la serrure. Il ne
 met pas longtemps à comprendre que le chirurgien en blouse
 blanche et la jeune patiente inanimée qui gît devant
 lui, sous le cône de lumière crue, sont en réalité
 glacés beaucoup plus loin qu'il ne l'imaginait à l'in-
 stant. Sa myopie lui joue souvent de ces tours : c'est
 dans la glace qui il regardait la scène, celle-ci se
 décollant de l'autre côté du couloir, au fond de la
 bibliothèque dont la porte est comme d'habitude restée
 ouverte.

Mais à présent il est gêné par la silhouette ma-
 sive de Brown qui a découvert tout de suite où
 se situait l'action et dont le costume noir, immu-
 bilité, occupe presque toute l'embrasure. Le petit
 homme est contraint de se pencher en avant, pour regarder
 par l'interstice laissé libre entre la chambraille et la
 taille cintrée de la veste du smoking. Étranger à

and Homais. I find his warmth superior to Balzac's, who speaks about warmth all the time but who is, for me, an icy writer.

INTERVIEWER

Poor Balzac! He is out of favor at the moment and everyone seems to have it in for him.

ROBBE-GRILLET

God be praised!

INTERVIEWER

Yet in his essays on Balzac and the novel, the Hungarian critic Georg Lukacs insists that Balzac is superior to Flaubert and *a fortiori* to Zola and other naturalists. He says that when Zola wants to write about an auditorium, he goes to the theater every night, looks around and takes notes, then describes minutely all he has seen. While Balzac may never set foot in the theater, but his description is more *real* than Zola's because it comes from the imagination. This tallies with what you were saying earlier about your own approach, which is to describe what is in the head rather than in front of the eye.

ROBBE-GRILLET

What troubles me about Lukacs is his insensitivity to literature. For him, Zola and Flaubert are the same thing, both naturalists! Actually, they're complete opposites. In Flaubert everything lives *in the text*; it is the text itself which is in the process of living, whereas Zola is a naturalist who describes the world and its minutiae. To put Zola and Flaubert in the same bag is to be completely insensitive to the text. I'll give you another example of Lukacs's misreading: when he presents Balzac as the Great Revolutionary Novelist, it is because he believes that Balzac's work is a denunciation of nascent capitalism and the fragmentation it will bring about—the fragmentation of work, conscience, family life, etcetera. So he makes Balzac a sort of precursor of capitalist alien-

ation. Now for me, Balzac denounces nothing at all; on the contrary, he creates a perfectly reassuring universe that is by no means a fragmented one. There is no *béance*, none of these gaps, as in Flaubert, where the text is a world and not a description of a world. In Balzac—and this has been said by some American critics like Leo Bersani of Berkeley—there is a discrepancy, a hiatus between the denunciation of fragmentation and a text which is the exact opposite: coherent and even compact to the point of reassurance and comfort. It is not an accident that he has become the great novelist of the bourgeoisie. Precisely all his rationalist ideas about the world's functioning are the same as those held by the middle-classes of his time. He says that there is room for improvement in the organization of the world, but that man's relationship to the world is basically fixed. There is never a gap, nor the slightest room for anxiety.

INTERVIEWER

This may be true of his most famous novels, like *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Cousine Bette* . . . But in certain marginal works, such as *Séraphita* or *Sarrasine* you find the Flaubertian “gap.”

ROBBE-GRILLET

Ah, but those are not the novels that are taught in schools! In Flaubert's novels no revolutionary ideas are propounded, yet his entire work is an appeal to question the world through the cracks in the space/time continuity, and particularly in the continuity of the causal chain. For example, at the end of *Sentimental Education*, in the last phase of the Revolution of 1848, a member of the National Guard kills Dussardier with his sword, and the text reads: “The guardsman drew a circle in the crowd with his gaze and Frédéric, gaping, recognized Sénécal.” Gaping! Then there is a blank space on the page, and the narrative continues with: “He traveled. He experienced the melancholy of boats, the cold dawns beneath the tent, . . . the bitterness of interrupted friendships.” In

that second when Sénécals looks at the crowd, we have ten years of Frédéric's life in one paragraph: "*La mélancholie des paquebots*" etcetera. And that is Flaubert's life. And it happens in the text. It is profoundly moving, and it is precisely what makes Flaubert a revolutionary writer. Lukacs doesn't see it. I mean he doesn't see the way it is made.

INTERVIEWER

When you say "the way it is made," or put together, could it not have been done just as well without evoking Frédéric's inner world? I mean was it not because Flaubert had "something to say," namely, to tell Frédéric's life, that he made it that way?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It is not a question of evoking, but of *piercing* the world. Suddenly a fundamental meaninglessness appears in the world. One is in the middle of a failed revolution in which the principal characters are involved, and one becomes aware that something much more serious is happening—namely, the world is not a sensible continuity that can be comprehensively explained, but a perpetual aspiration to sense, perpetually disappointed. It is human existence that has to create sense at every instant. Not to describe a sense that already exists, but to create a sense that doesn't exist yet. "The melancholy of boats, the cold dawns under a tent," etcetera, are stereotypes of travel. What is interesting is that it happens *there*, and suddenly digs a hole in Frédéric's life, in Flaubert's life, and in the Revolution of 1848.

INTERVIEWER

Are you attempting the same thing in *Jealousy*, where the tropical stereotypes—luxuriant vegetation, heat, create an atmosphere of tension and anxiety?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes. But I create it through the text, not by what is in the text. In fact you are right—there *is* atmosphere of anxiety. It is interesting what you point out about *Jealousy*, because it is the book of mine which has been described as the most dehumanized, where nothing happens; a serene, whitewashed world in which man seems perfectly reconciled with his environment. Yet it is exactly the opposite: it is an experiment with anxiety. The anxiety which Heidegger believes man must experience as the price of spiritual freedom. And that is the price Balzac does not want to pay, and that Flaubert pays at every moment.

INTERVIEWER

What about Stendhal? He must be even less fashionable than Balzac since he is not even discussed! Yet he seems to me the most authentic French romantic novelist, and he is closer to Flaubert than to Balzac, especially *The Charterhouse of Parma*. Fabrice del Dongo has the same vacillation in the battle of Waterloo as Frédéric has in the Revolution of 1848.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Quite so. There are passages in Stendhal that are highly important, such as all the first part of *The Charterhouse*, and the battle of Waterloo where the world begins to rock, when Fabrice leaves to join Napoleon without knowing what he is doing. He speaks with a foreign accent that is liable to brand him as a spy; he is put in prison, escapes, buys a horse, participates in battles he does not understand, then spends the rest of his life wondering whether he has *really* been to war. It is wonderful! Perfectly enigmatic since he does not know whether he has lived the experience or simply dreamt it. It is blurred. But I don't know Stendhal well. I read him a lot when I was young but feel that he did not leave a permanent impression. As for fashion, well, among the intellectuals Flaubert is now in vogue, but thirty years ago, when I started talking about him, Stendhal was the *auteur-à-succès*. For example, the New

Wave in cinema claimed him as a mentor, while academics preferred Balzac. Today it is Flaubert's turn, which is fine by me since it is the triumph of my own views.

INTERVIEWER

This brings us to your theoretical work and its influence. When you published *For A New Novel*, a collection of articles published in the *L'Express* over a decade, it became a kind of manifesto of the New Novel. And you became the spokesman of the movement. Have you changed any of your positions?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No, I haven't, but I feel that the book has been read in a bizarre way. The other day a journalist told me that I was vindicating subjectivity by publishing an autobiography, and that this meant a radical change from my previous position. So I fetched *For a New Novel* and opened it at a passage I knew well, and there, in the middle of the page, was written, "The New Novel aims only at total subjectivity." Now why had he not read it? On the contrary, the book was read as a manifesto of objectivity, while in every page I denounce the idea of its possibility.

INTERVIEWER

Was it because of Barthes? In his review of *The Erasers*, which launched you, he wrote about "objective literature," preceding it with a definition from the *Littré* dictionary: "Objective means turned toward the object." Do you think everyone followed Barthes in his assessment?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Barthes, and then Maurice Blanchot. They presented two totally different Robbe-Grilletes. Blanchot's was a fantastic who was interested in a world at the limit of visibility. Barthes's was exactly the opposite—anchored in reality, speaking of the object. It is the latter Robbe-Grillet who was "launched," as you say.

Barthes was a very sly author who has been read in a simplistic way. When he uses the word “objective,” he does not mean impartial or neutral. In a microscope there are two lenses, one turned toward the eye and another toward the object; that is what Barthes means by “objective.” Or says that I mean! Now, reading the *Mirror*, they say I have changed. Those who like and understand my work realize that the *Mirror* is a step in the same direction. Others have liked it *because* it betrays me!

INTERVIEWER

There is a third category: those who, like Jean-Paul Aron, author of *Les Modernes*, maintain that Robbe-Grillet has never had any significance. Yet they like the *Mirror* because it has “meaning.”

ROBBE-GRILLET

Aron’s is a spiteful book. He wanted to be Michel Foucault and failed, so he is angry.

INTERVIEWER

Foucault did write about you in the sixties, in the magazine *Tel Quel*. He said that the whole modern movement in France originated in you. Yet Nathalie Sarraute had published her first book, *Tropisms*, as early as 1938, which would make it the start of the New Novel.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The New Novel is vast, and the aims of the New Novelists are varied. It was Sarraute who started the denunciation of “character” in the Balzacian sense, and tried to find the inner impulses of the hero at the moment he endeavors to express himself. What she calls “tropisms” are the tiny imperceptible interactions between people—the little games of aggression and retreat, the miniscule battles that constitute the present state of the psyche. Marguerite Duras, whom I consider a New Novelist although she does not

agree, wrote her first books, such as the popular *Dam on The Pacific*, in a conventional way. She changed direction with *Modérato Cantabile*. Claude Simon's early novels, before *The Wind*, were also conventional. But the New Novel encouraged these authors to go to the end of their own conception of the novel, to forget about pleasing publishers and critics, and trust their own personalities and fantasies. So these three had written before me but I hadn't read them. But when Foucault said that I was the father of modernity, he meant the modernity that led to *Tel Quel*. I met him when he was a cultural attaché in Hamburg and not yet a writer. I introduced him to Husserl and to a number of other things which he later wrote about. Eventually he lost interest in literature and became interested in social phenomena, such as sexuality and prisons.

INTERVIEWER

Michel Butor is a contemporary of yours, and it's a strange coincidence that although you had not read each other, you had both taken the same direction—one which was not yet formulated theoretically.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The New Novel has always been a very heterogenous movement. Everyone follows their own direction, but what has happened is that we've often had the same progenitors. For Butor and me, Joyce's *Ulysses* is a seminal work in our development. It is interesting to note that in the constellation of our "parents"—Kafka, Faulkner, Joyce—there are very few French names. There is Proust, of course, and in some ways Camus and Sartre.

INTERVIEWER

Joyce attacks language itself: syntax, vocabulary, and phrasing are all turned upside down. Whereas your language is very pure, not to say purified; it is almost a return to Madame de Lafayette and the limpid simplicity of the seventeenth-century prose.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Exactly. Those I call the New Novelists have not, on the whole, attacked the structure of the language, and certainly not the vocabulary. Simon has sometimes tampered with syntax, but not much. As for me, the language has remained pure. The result is that *Jealousy*, which was deemed unreadable by critics at the time of its publication, became a part of the school curriculum very rapidly, alongside Camus's *The Stranger* and St. Exupéry's *Night Flight*, because the language is perfectly correct. But I would like to emphasize the element of variety again. Although everyone followed their own way, the whole movement was supported by a publisher who was willing to produce and spread a literature which was the opposite of what the critics liked—namely, Les Éditions de Minuit. Even Duras, who was published by Gallimard, switched to Minuit with *Modérato Cantabile*.

INTERVIEWER

Minuit was established by Vercors during the Second World War and published Resistance writers. When did they change direction?

ROBBE-GRILLET

In the fifties. During the War they were above all political publishers. Afterwards, Vercors lost his influence and it became a literary firm. Georges Lambrichs, who became the Managing Director, signed Michel Butor and myself, and published my first novel, *The Erasers*, in 1953. Later Jérôme Lindon took over from Lambrichs and invited me to join the firm as literary adviser, which I did. I was very active in the fifties and sixties in that capacity, but since the seventies I have not had much time, as I travel a good deal and generally have too much to do. In the fifties the new literary movement—later called the New Novel—began to take shape in a series of weekly meetings at Lindon's house on the Boulevard Arago. It consisted of a very large and varied group of writers who all had the same aim: to denounce the false neutrality of the critics

in power. At the time, the critics who wielded real power were not Barthes, Blanchot, Georges Bataille, and Marthe Robert, but reactionary academics like Emile Henriot, Roger Kempf, Robert Canterce, Henri Cloy, et al., who wrote in influential newspapers such as *Figaro* and *Le Monde*, and who resolutely opposed any innovation in literature.

INTERVIEWER

Was it not Emile Henriot who first coined the expression New Novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I believe it was. He condemned Sarraute's *Tropisms*—written before the War and reprinted in the fifties—and *The Voyager*. Now, Sarraute's work is very different from mine, but he condemned them both in the name of Balzacian laws. So we had the idea of forming a group to analyze the analyses of the critics. That is to say, to analyze their vocabulary. We even intended to make up a dictionary of their language—a project that didn't materialize but provided a good deal of amusement. We started to demonstrate that their words did not belong to literature but simply constituted an ideology—their ideology.

INTERVIEWER

Going back to the beginning of the movement, you said that Barthes's patronage of your work was adopted rather than Blanchot's. One aspect of Blanchot's reading of your work makes you a kind of precursor of what is called Fantastic Realism—novels such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and a score of others, mostly Latin American writers.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Perhaps. But I am not interested in Márquez. For me, the great South American writer is Guillermo Cabrera Infante. But he

is not much spoken of these days because he is no longer on the Left and the Left still holds sway. Yet politically he is much more honorable than Márquez whose career is based on a kind of leftism that is in fact Stalinist. I can't bear all this communist chic! Neruda, Márquez, etcetera . . . At any rate, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is like Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*—an exception.

INTERVIEWER

The fantastic element in your work—for example the whole episode of Henri de Corinth—is not insisted upon but blurred; it vacillates, as in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, where the magic is not indicated but intimated.

ROBBE-GRILLET

That I accept. I have long admired and enjoyed certain novels of Henry James's, especially *The Turn of The Screw*. But the writer who influenced me even more, in the same sense, is Kipling, especially the Indian short stories: "The Phantom Rickshaw," "Forty-Two Degrees, in the Shade," "The Lost Legion." The relationship of officers with ghosts.

INTERVIEWER

In your autobiography you mention Kipling as a very early influence, and also Lewis Carroll and other English children's books, which you read in translation. Who were the authors you read as an adult who influenced your work? You mentioned Camus as a great influence. How do you assess him now?

ROBBE-GRILLET

The two most influential books of the war years were Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus's *The Stranger*. Other novels by the same authors—for example Sartre's *The Roads to Liberty* or Camus's *The Fall*—are of little interest. I feel that I decided to become a writer when I read *The Stranger*, which appeared in 1942, during

the Occupation. It was published by Gallimard, a firm very much connected with the Occupiers. By the way, Sartre himself finally confessed that the Occupation hadn't bothered him much. But my reading of *The Stranger*, as I explain in the *Mirror*, is very personal. The murder committed by Mersault was the *result* of a situation, which is the situation of relationship to the world.

INTERVIEWER

Reading *The Stranger* gave you the desire to become a writer. Yet you went to University to study agronomy and became an engineer. Why?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have always been interested in living things, plants, animals, and I was happy working as an agronomist for ten years.

INTERVIEWER

When did you decide to give up your job and devote yourself entirely to writing?

ROBBE-GRILLET

At the beginning of the fifties. I had no financial resources at all, and I lived in a garret. That is when I met Catherine. I had written a couple of books which no one wanted to publish, and later no one wanted to read. So she rightly refused to marry me. A husband is someone with a job, capable of supporting his wife and children. I felt condemned to obscurity and to celibacy. But when one is driven by a passion, one can live on almost nothing, and I was driven by passion for writing. One does not starve in modern, Western societies, and one can do without such amenities as the telephone, a car, entertainment. I lived in nine square meters for ten years. Then I was given this apartment by Jean Paulhan, so things began to look up; Catherine had consented to marry me on the condition that I find somewhere to live.

INTERVIEWER

Did things improve with *Jealousy*?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No, *Jealousy* was much later, in 1957. It sold five hundred copies in one year. You can imagine what that meant by way of royalties! It belongs to a period when I still had no readers.

INTERVIEWER

Readers began to come with the success of *Last Year at Marienbad*, didn't they? Did Alain Resnais ask you to write the script for his film, or did you intend to enter the film world anyway?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It was Resnais's producer. After *Jealousy* I wrote *The Labyrinth*, which sold a few more copies. Resnais's producer asked me to write a script for him. Resnais himself wanted to make a film with Françoise Sagan, so he was not interested, but the producer said perhaps I could persuade him. I immediately wrote three synopses, two pages each, and handed them over to Resnais. He liked them and said, "go ahead." It didn't cost him anything since the producer had agreed to pay me without any commitment on Resnais's part. I produced not a scenario but a finished script: shot by shot, frame by frame, with all the camera movements, and ready to shoot. It is rare that a director would accept such a script, but Resnais did, and the film was done in two months.

INTERVIEWER

Was *Marienbad* your first attempt at scriptwriting?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No. *The Immortal One* was my first script. In 1960, a producer asked me if I wanted to make a film of my own. I said, "Yes, but I don't have a large readership as a writer." He said, "Never

mind—you are fashionable.” The only condition was that the film be shot in Istanbul. “Why?” I asked. It was a dark story—as it always is in the film industry—about some Belgian money locked up in Turkey to be used on an exportable product. It so happened that I had met Catherine in Istanbul; therefore the city was part of my own imaginary world. I accepted immediately and left for Turkey where I wrote the script. Then came the revolution against Menderes and the country was plunged into bloodshed. As a result the film didn’t happen. When Resnais was shooting *Marienbad* I went back to Istanbul to negotiate with the new Turkish government. I made *The Immortal* myself a year later. The joke is that no one wanted to buy *Marienbad*! The producer decided that the film would never be shown, that it insulted and mocked the public, that it meant nothing. I was in a particularly awkward position, since I was “the *bad* Alain Robbe-Grillet” who had corrupted “the *good* Alain Resnais.” So for a year the film lay fallow. By chance, the Venice Film Festival saved it, and the absurd, idiotic film became a roaring success overnight.

INTERVIEWER

But it was for your own film, *The Immortal One*, that you won the Leduc Prize.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Despite the prize the film had no success at all. But the following film, *Trans-Europe Express*, did very well, and I could go on making other films, such as *The Man Who Lies*, and *Play With Fire*. I am planning another film—I can’t talk about it for superstitious reasons—but I have no trouble finding the money since I can make films very cheaply, with tiny resources.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the French New Wave directors? Those who came from *Les Cahiers du Cinema* and made films at the same time as you did? Did they influence you?

ROBBE-GRILLET

There is one director I admire enormously, and that is Jean-Luc Godard. Apart from his latest film, *Hail Mary*, all his output is important to me. But the really successful directors, like Truffaut and Chabrol, I consider completely insignificant. They make good traditional films, based on novels that worked very well before they were filmed, but they can't be compared with the formal inventiveness of Godard. Truffaut is famous as an avant-garde director, while he is the rear, rear guard! As for Eric Rohmer, he is the fellow who writes dialogues and then gets actors to speak them in front of the camera. Often the most successful film of a director is the least interesting: Truffaut's *The Last Metro* was a piece of commercial rubbish in all its horror, yet it was a big hit.

INTERVIEWER

What about other great names of the cinema: Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, and so on . . . Who influenced you as a director?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Fritz Lang, Erich von Stroheim, Orson Welles—*The Lady of Shanghai* more than *Citizen Kane*. Bergman doesn't interest me at all.

INTERVIEWER

After *Marienbad* Your success spread to America and the Americans took you to their generous bosoms. Why do you think they did and the English, to this day, have not?

ROBBE-GRILLET

The Americans and the English are two very different peoples, except for their language—though even there! The English are insular and turned towards America; they do not like the Continent and European culture. The Americans, on the contrary, are alert to what is happening in Europe. The English are wary of seri-

ousness; the Americans are more earnest. They have accepted Derrida, Foucault, Barthes—all difficult thinkers. I was first introduced to Americans by Bruce Morissette, a university professor, and a specialist in fake Rimbauds. In 1955, he heard a radio discussion about *The Voyageur* and found it interesting. Since I was not translated into English and no one had heard of me, his interest was genuine, he was not trying to jump onto a bandwagon. Barney Rosset, who had published Beckett and was interested in the avant-garde, took *The Voyageur*. He and my British publisher, John Calder, have been very loyal and keep my books in circulation despite scant sales.

INTERVIEWER

Later the New Novel became fashionable and some university professors began to write the same sort of novels. You became a guest on American campuses . . .

ROBBE-GRILLET

Oh, much later. First, I was invited to a Modern Language Association congress in Chicago. It was after a plane crash in which we had survived and Catherine refused to travel by air or let me do it. So we crossed the Atlantic by boat and took the train from New York to Chicago. The lecture was a success and the Americans liked the way I spoke about literature. There are writers who hate speaking of their work—like Beckett—but I don't.

INTERVIEWER

Do you lecture on French authors only, or Americans too?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I often speak about William Faulkner, and Vladimir Nabokov whom I consider a great New Novelist. *Pale Fire* is a marvelous book. Among the American New Novelists, who are very different from their French counterparts, I like Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, and a few others. They are far less famous than Saul Bellow

or William Styron, who belong to the pre-Faulknerian era of American literature. They belong to the New York psychoanalytical, often Jewish, school. I am very friendly with some of them, Styron in particular, but their work doesn't excite me. Last year in Japan, Styron and I had a television dialogue. We spoke through interpreters, with earphones, and got on very well.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from your own theoretical work on the New Novel, have you been involved in the other currents of these last decades: structuralism, deconstructionism? The changing literary fashions in France?

ROBBE-GRILLET

The literary *haute-couture*! I was interested but not involved. There were exchanges between structuralism and the New Novel through Barthes, who was considered a structuralist.

INTERVIEWER

What about Jacques Lacan, who was very fashionable for a while? As Simone de Beauvoir said, one can never find anyone—not even a Lacanian—who can explain what he was all about. He seems to have given French intellectual movements a bad name.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I agree with you entirely as regards the last phase of his work, when his reputation was at its height—he really talked nonsense. By contrast I think that in the thirties and forties—at the beginning of psychoanalysis in France—he contributed something of importance to it. His first articles, such as “The Mirror Stage,” were very interesting. He became boring as he became worldly. But the Freudian dogma is finished in France—no one takes it seriously.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking about worldliness, when you became famous, did you begin to frequent literary salons?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It was the end of the era of salons in Paris. There were only two: La Comtesse de Fals's and Suzanne Pezenas's. The latter had done a great deal for Boulez. I only went to meet people I liked, such as Jean Paulhan.

INTERVIEWER

Earlier you mentioned *Nausea* as one of your early influences. Did you ever meet Sartre and his circle?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Oh yes. He was an extremely generous man in his personal relationships. He had a great desire to please, but he was not really interested in literature and art, although he could talk about them at length. Do you know Boris Vian's sentence which sums him up? "How can you not admire a man who is capable of saying anything about any subject!" Sartre became aware of the New Novel for strange reasons—because of the Algerian War. There was a manifesto written by Maurice Blanchot and signed by the New Novelists against the war, and Sartre asked, "Who are these people?" He then decided to make an effort and help us, but he never did. I remember that when *Marienbad* was a condemned film, there was a private screening for André Breton, and Sartre came too. But only because Resnais and I had signed the manifesto for an independent Algeria. He loved the film and said to me, "I will back you." But he did nothing. When the film finally got released he wrote a very generous review in the *Temps Modernes*. Alas, he was surrounded by horrible people—a petty, claustrophobic clique, against everything that was not connected with them. I remember another episode: after the Khrushchev Report against Stalin's crimes, there was a cultural *détente* and the Russians had

invited a delegation of French intellectuals to Leningrad. I went with Nathalie Sarraute, Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. It was a bizarre and awkward situation because of Simone de Beauvoir's personal hatred of Sarraute. She hated Sartre having intelligent female friends (though she didn't mind actresses and secretaries) and Sarraute, who was much more intelligent than she, was particularly abhorrent to her. Anyway, in Leningrad Sartre represented the Existentialist Novel and he said that after *Nausea* he had been wrong to write *The Roads to Freedom*, and that the real existentialist novel in which everything happens within the textual movement was the New Novel. I was very pleased because I had always maintained that I was heir to *Nausea*, yet I knew he was saying that only to please us. So you see, he was anxious to be generous.

INTERVIEWER

Some people might say that he was also very conscious of trends and afraid of missing out on the latest fashion.

ROBBE-GRILLET

And to please *everybody*! In Leningrad he gave a lecture—he had an astonishing facility with words—in which he explained that the existentialist novel, the New Novel, and Socialist Realism were all the same thing! We had been invited by a group of Stalinist swines, such as Ehrenburg and Fiedin, who had survived everything, and Sartre was defending their doctrine, just to please!

INTERVIEWER

Did you meet Anna Akhmatova when you were there, or any other dissidents?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I saw her once. We met writers who were not yet dissidents but became so later, like Aksenov.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to discuss certain recurrent themes in your work. For example, there are similarities between your books and detective novels. Is that a deliberate choice?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Do you know Borges's preface to Adolfo Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Moral*? In it, Borges maintains that all the great novels of the twentieth century are detective novels, and he mentions Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, Kafka's *The Castle*, and many others. Then he explains why. It seems that the structure of police investigation is very close to the technique of modern novels, in particular the nonresolved investigation, as in *The Castle*. The difference is that in the traditional detective novel there *must* be a solution, whereas in ours there is just the principle of investigation. Detective novels are consumer products, sold by millions, and are made in the following way: there are clues to an event, say a murder, and someone comes along and puts the the pieces together in order that truth may be revealed. Then it all makes sense. In our novels what is missing is "sense." There is a constant appeal to sense, but it remains unfulfilled, because the pieces keep moving and shifting and when "sense" appears it is transitory. Therefore, what is important is not to discover the truth at the end of the investigation, but the process itself.

INTERVIEWER

That is one aspect of your novels. Another one is the *mise-en-abîme*—the use of the story-within-the-story. For example, in *The Voyeur* there is a poster that reproduces the rape scene in the novel.

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes, I suppose in various forms I have used it. But I never used the expression myself. It was an American critic who mentioned it, quoting Gide.

INTERVIEWER

You often use cinematic techniques, such as the flashback, and the repetition of specific scenes. Does it come from your work as scriptwriter?

ROBBE-GRILLET

One can always find references to the cinema, even in books that were written before its advent. I have never consciously used cinematic techniques, and if cinema didn't exist you would not think of it when reading my novels.

INTERVIEWER

In *Marienbad*, and some of your other films, certain shots are repeated throughout. Is it a way of emphasizing a particular incident, or image?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No. It is the other way round; it is not because a scene is important that it is repeated, but by being repeated it becomes important. In general, nothing really important happens in my films—it is the *way* certain scenes recur. As I said, there is no “significance.”

INTERVIEWER

So you keep saying! In *For a New Novel* you denounced “the myth of significance,” and “the myth of profundity.” But why myth? After all, we qualify a thought as being deep, so why not a novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

If you ask that question it is because you yourself are a victim of the myth! Profundity or depth in a novel is a mythical dimension.

INTERVIEWER

Yet some of your books attain precisely a depth of feeling that

points to a creative and poetic imagination at work; a charm that may be “senseless,” if you wish, but still seductive. Nevertheless, doing away with classical novelistic devices such as characterization, plot, denouement, morality . . . is in general a cop out, a way of making it easier for the writer. I am thinking of some very famous and highly successful novels, where a man delivers a monologue to his psychiatrist, or writes a series of letters. How very handy—you save your skin by avoiding thorny problems! There is no imagination, and without imagination you can create a thousand theories, but they won’t work. Whereas some of your novels work *despite* your theories—or so it seems.

ROBBE-GRILLET

How pleased I am to hear you say that! I entirely agree with you. It is not often that anyone speaks about the imagination in my work, nor of the sense of poetry. Rather, the idea has spread that my books are dry, lacking in poetry, depth, humor, that I write “novels of statement.” It is only in the last few years that these elements in my books have been noticed by a few critics—mostly in America. In England, critics have been very hostile. When *The Voyeur* was published, Philip Toynbee wrote in *The Observer* that it was one of the two most boring novels he had ever read. I wrote to him asking what the second one was. He never replied.

INTERVIEWER

Is there not a contradiction between the importance you attach to imagination and your condemnation of classical novelists like Balzac?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I am not against contradiction—I am all for it! Contradiction is one of the engines of fiction. But though Balzac invented everything, he imagined nothing. Now I believe that imagination is what motivates one to write and that it is the fundamental necessity of art.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you have said recently that because the New Novel has become fashionable, it has to be questioned in order to stir the imagination?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I said that at the time when theoreticians such as Jean Louis Cardiou had tried to create a dogma of the New Novel, while I had always insisted that novelists had the right to reinvent the New Novel at every moment, and that there should be a *new* New Novel. There should never be fixed rules. As soon as rules become fixed, they should be broken, because the imagination must constantly renew itself. But then things began to go very fast in the opposite direction, and what happened was a return to traditional form: chronological, flawless, without contradiction. It was like an earthquake that shook the New Novel and produced a reaction in some people who became dogmatic in order to preserve the acquisitions of the New Novel. That in turn produced a third reaction, as if the New Novel had never happened, a return to well before Flaubert and Joyce, practically back to Zola. There is at the moment a tremendous antimodern movement in all the arts: against abstract painting, and new music.

INTERVIEWER

Could it be because the New Novel caught on too quickly and became fashionable?

ROBBE-GRILLET

That is true. Although all the articles written about us at the beginning were condemnations, they paid us the compliment of talking about us constantly. We became famous without having any readers. Paradoxically, we began to have readers from the moment the tide of fashion turned—in the seventies. I even began to live on my earnings as a writer. Now everyone reads us: not only has my autobiography become a bestseller, but last year Nathalie

Sarraute's *Childhood* did equally well; this year Duras's *The Lover* has sold nearly a million copies in France alone—just like a *roman de gare*. At the same time we are beginning to become fashionable again, thanks to the antimodern movement. To be antimodern one has to speak about the modernists in order to condemn them! It is the same for painting and music: in the fifties there was a great deal of invention and innovation—Pierre Boulez's *Domaines Musical*, the New Realism in painting, the New Wave in the cinema . . . Now we are told that invention and innovation are over. So the creative artists of the fifties have become exceptional and are enjoying a new vogue.

INTERVIEWER

To go back to your themes: one of your central subjects seems to be eroticism, for example in *La Maison de Rendez-vous* or *Project for a Revolution in New York*. Though subtler, less explicit, than the eroticism of certain Anglo-Saxon writers, you have said that your own erotic tendencies are rather unconventional, that you have been influenced by de Sade.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I never said that! Others said that I had said that. I find de Sade an interesting writer, but I can't claim that he has influenced me, though I have to admit that my own erotic tastes are rather sadistic. I can't give you more details but you can have fun with the idea!

INTERVIEWER

What is the difference between eroticism and pornography, except that the one is considered "good" and the other "bad"?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have proposed a definition that has been adopted. A French cabinet-minister has quoted it and mentioned me as its provenance; the sentence is now famous: "Pornography is the eroticism of others." Which means, as you said, that pornography is bad and

eroticism is not. But there is perhaps a more general difference: pornography is direct and eroticism is indirect. In eroticism, there is a critical distance and a judgement on sexual impulses, while pornography is the absence of judgment. When the crudity of the sexual act goes through the imagination it becomes eroticism, and when it doesn't, it is pornography. At least that is what I think.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to go back for a moment to your precelebrity days, when you lived in dire poverty. How did you work? And has your work routine changed radically?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I work less now because I do too many things. In those days I worked long hours as I had nothing else to do. I read a fair amount, traveled very little, and went out seldom, since going to the cinema or the theater required money which I didn't have. I lived rather miserably, in a minuscule room where there was no room for a table, and I wrote on my knees. But I did not suffer. I was very content living like that.

INTERVIEWER

And now that you have a comfortable flat in Paris and a house in the country, how do you work?

ROBBE-GRILLET

In France, I work in the country. I am a professor at New York University, and lecture at other colleges too. I teach only three hours a week, which means I spend the rest of my time writing. But I don't write in Paris, nor on lecture tours.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still read a great deal?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I am a slow reader; as a result I read very little these days because I have too much to do.

INTERVIEWER

What do you read nowadays? Do you still read philosophy? You said that you had introduced Husserl and Heidegger to Foucault.

ROBBE-GRILLET

I have no training in philosophy proper. I have not read the great basic works. I have read secondary works: for example, Heidegger's *What Is Philosophy?* but not his *Being and Time*. The same goes for Hegel, whose *Phenomenology Of The Spirit* I have not read, but I know him through Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, translated by Raymond Queneau. As for Husserl, I read Sartre's essay on him, *L'Intentionnalité*. In fact I have learned a bit about German philosophy through Sartre. Incidentally, the knowledge of philosophy among the French critics is nil! One critic used the word "phenomenology" in reference to my work, in total ignorance of what it meant! As if phenomena were things that exist *per se*, independent of the human eye and consciousness. While Husserl maintains the very opposite view. Of course, I believe that *The Stranger* and *The Voyeur* are phenomenological novels insofar as they present a perception of human consciousness that is of phenomenological order. But when a critic uses this word and changes its meaning, he discards completely the consciousness of the narrator, or the observer, as if there was nothing but "things," which is completely antinomic with Husserl's thinking. I am certain that I change these philosophers—as indeed Sartre did.

INTERVIEWER

Now that you have less time to read, do you choose more carefully? What do you read now?

ROBBE-GRILLET

You see all these piles of books? They all arrived since January. Some three hundred in four months! I can't read them all. I pick them up, look at them, read a bit at random, and that is that.

INTERVIEWER

What about systematic reading—things you want to, or have to read?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Did you know that until very recently there was not a complete edition of *Being and Time* in French? I hope that I can find an old edition in an American university. I intend to read it right through. When one is a teacher, one becomes a student again.

INTERVIEWER

Are you disciplined? Do you keep regular working hours?

ROBBE-GRILLET

No. I am not very disciplined but it usually works out that I do things at the same time. I get up late, have breakfast slowly, and start work at eleven A.M. I work through till three or four, and then I have a meal, perhaps a nap, start again around eight, and work through till midnight. So, twice four hours. At the moment I am writing the sequel to the *Mirror*, entitled *Romanesque*. It has taken me a month to write seven pages!

INTERVIEWER

Do you have an idea of what is going to happen when you start a novel? You said about *The Stranger* that it was the situation that dictated the act of murder.

ROBBE-GRILLET

It is not the situation that dictates the act of murder, it is the *text*. In *The Stranger*, it is linked with the use of the past participle and

the rhythm of the sentences. The text is the carrier of this Husserlian phenomenology, and that is what will produce the crime. One has to be wary using the word “situation,” for it has Sartrian connotations of social situation, whereas I mean the situation *in the text*.

INTERVIEWER

Nevertheless you must have a general idea, otherwise how do you start a novel?

ROBBE-GRILLET

It is hard to describe. I have an idea of the beginning. I write the first line and continue to the last. I correct a great deal, work hard and write several drafts, but I never question the finished work. So I start with the first words that will be the first words of the book, but I never know how it will develop or end. The first idea is vague, but I know that it is the generating force—later everything can change. I can well imagine Proust writing: “For a long time I used to go to bed early . . .” and not knowing what story he was going to tell.

INTERVIEWER

I bet he knew!

ROBBE-GRILLET

Of course he did!

INTERVIEWER

If you have written only seven pages in one month, are you anxious about it going so slowly? Hemingway said that he always left something for the next morning so as not to start the day staring at a blank page and not knowing what was going to happen.

ROBBE-GRILLET

The excitement is in *not* knowing. And you mustn't write if you don't feel like it.

INTERVIEWER

What gives you the desire to write every morning?

ROBBE-GRILLET

I don't know. The difficulty is the first page of the novel; afterwards one is pushed by an energy in what one has already written.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been tempted to write for the theater?

ROBBE-GRILLET

Yes, but I haven't been able to. I can't fulfill *all* my temptations, can I?

