

Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel La Belle Captive, which employs seventy-seven paintings by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte, is offered as a "collaboration," a playful interchange between word and image. Robbe-Grillet, who used the paintings variously as generative material and companion or counter-text to his written text after Magritte's death, provides in La Belle Captive an occasion to explore the relationships between verbal and visual text. The novel may be understood to demonstrate a fundamental relationship of inequality between word and image, a relationship of violation rather than collaboration between equal partners.

Magritte's Captivity in Robbe-Grillet's La Belle Captive: The Subjugation of the Image by the Word

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René Magritte's painted images have been a source of continual fascination for countless viewers, philosophers and authors, as well as for other image-makers.¹ Michel Foucault's essay, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, Heiner Müller's recent short text entitled *Bildbeschreibung*,² and even rock star Peter Gabriel's music video "Sledgehammer" rely at least in part upon Magritte's (or Magritte-like) images. Further allusions to the painter's work abound in marketing and advertising: the cover of a recent computer manual sports a large, immobile rock mysteriously suspended in an undefined space above the title; an advertisement for a men's cologne includes a reproduction of a painting which (ironically) is entitled *La reproduction interdite* (Reproduction Forbidden); and according to curator and Magritte scholar Uwe Schneede, an American television network uses *Le faux miroir* as part of its logo while a Belgian airline and a Scottish whisky employ *La Grande Famille* (René Magritte 64). Georges Roque has, in fact, conducted an entire book-length study on the appearance of Magritte images in advertising (*Magritte et la publicité*, Paris 1982).

Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Belle Captive* represents an especially interesting and complex example of an appropriation of the Belgian surrealist's work. Seventy-seven paintings from different periods in Magritte's career are reproduced—out of chronological order—in tandem with text composed by Robbe-Grillet. The relationship between image and verbal text cannot be simply characterized as a clear-cut case of illustration nor of *ekphrasis* (the literary rendering of a work of art), for the text and image are often widely divergent. Yet at times, despite notable tensions, differences or incongruities between text and image, the text seems almost indisputably to describe the paintings, and the paintings appear convincingly to illustrate the text. If these images serve neither purely illustrative purposes nor as the ground for the written text, what is their status in Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Belle Captive*? Do text and image illuminate one another, or on the contrary, do they serve, juxtaposed as they are, each to

limit the other's possible meanings? Do they enter into an exchange, a dialogue, or does one textual "partner" become dominant, shaping and controlling the reader's potential interpretation of the other?

Unlike Robbe-Grillet scholars whose prime concern lies in a careful investigation of the verbal text (thus, whose interest in the painted images of *La Belle Captive* fails to extend very far beyond considering their function as generators for the fiction), I am interested in examining the relationship between the two textual components of *La Belle Captive*, focusing as much on what Robbe-Grillet does for—or rather *to*—Magritte as on his claims about the way the written text be read in relation to the painted images.

Both artists' names appear in bold print on the cover and title page of *La Belle Captive*. However, this implication of co-authorship is misleading, for Magritte, who died before the project was begun, neither illustrated Robbe-Grillet's text, collaborated with him in any way nor authorized the engagement of his images. Robbe-Grillet furnishes no introduction or acknowledgment in the text which might explain how he came to use the images. On the back cover of the novel, he simply encourages readers to take part in a game of reading where meaning circulates between text and image: "*Ainsi le lecteur-spectateur est-il convié à prendre part (créateur à son tour d'un itinéraire) à cette circulation du sens parmi les organisations mouvantes de la phrase qui donne à voir et du tableau qui raconte.*" (back cover, *La Belle Captive*) (Thus the reader-viewer is invited to take part [creating, in turn, his own itinerary] in this circulation of meaning among the roving structures of the sentence, which shows, and the painting which tells.)³

Although Robbe-Grillet seems anxious to understand his project as a dialogue between image and text, or as a game of alternating similarity and difference for which he implies the equality of the members (*la phrase qui donne à voir and le tableau qui raconte*), I believe that the interplay established between image and text constitutes a struggle for power between members that are inevitably unequal.

Only elsewhere does Robbe-Grillet admit to having appropriated Magritte's works in order, he claims, to do two things: first, to present "as a problem those elements that appear in images," and second, "to put the image in a state

of crisis.” It is especially remarkable that Robbe-Grillet goes on to discuss other instances where he worked with visual images as textual generators (he also wrote texts in relation to work by Paul Delvaux, Richard Hamilton, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg), stressing his interest in “dialogue,” in a “game of confronting images and text” (*Generative Literature* 39). Some of these other relationships, in fact, allowed for truer collaboration between writer and artist than did *La Belle Captive*. By admitting his goal of putting Magritte’s images in a state of crisis, Robbe-Grillet, however inadvertently, reveals the power he wields over them.

One can easily understand Robbe-Grillet’s attraction to Magritte. Even a cursory reading of each artist’s work exposes many common preoccupations, including the obsessive repetition and development of object-motifs. One could hardly overlook that the spaces constructed by Magritte and Robbe-Grillet are largely peopled with objects: in Magritte, the bowler hat, the oblong rock, the turned wooden object, the tuba, the statue-like woman (or portion of a woman); in Robbe-Grillet, the eraser, the shoe, the rock, the briefcase, the mannequin, the scalpel, the operating table, etc. These objects are insistently, fetishistically repeated from work to work. Voyeurism and *le regard*—fitting subjective counterparts to worlds portrayed in terms of objects—fascinate both artists. One need only consider, for example, Robbe-Grillet’s *Le Voyeur*, or in *La Belle Captive*, the eyes which repeatedly look through the *judas carré* (spy hole) and the Medusa motif whereby a look petrifies the narrator. Magritte frequently depicts eyes (*L’oeil*, *Le faux miroir*), placing some unexpectedly in the middle of objects (such as the eye in a slice of ham in *Le portrait*); he also repeatedly represents groups of men peering in through open windows (*Le mois des vendages*, *L’assassin menacé*).

Furthermore, through extreme self-reflexivity both artists violate traditional reader/spectator expectations, foiling apparent references in their works to the external world and continually calling attention to their respective media, particularly by means of *mises-en-abyme*. In narrative, the *mise-en-abyme* denotes the presence of “reduced models. . . of the narrative’s subject itself, such as myths or legends, portraits, paintings, inner plays and novels read by one or more of the [work’s] characters” (Morrissette, *Novel and Film* 141). Once a conservative device employed to strengthen the

connection between a work and the world external to it, the *mise-en-abyme* in Robbe-Grillet's work tends to enforce internal reference. The narrator of *La Belle Captive* attends an operatic production, *L'Idole*, whose subject matter becomes blurred with the action of the novel (28). In addition, the black notebook of the "*fausse étudiante*" (the fake student), an object which is itself an element of a main narrative line, proves able to "take up" the story—as we see when the narrator is forced by his captors to continue reading from the notebook (65).

In the visual image, a clear instance of the *mise-en-abyme* is the painting within a painting, a continual fascination for Magritte (e.g. *La belle captive*, *La condition humaine*, *La représentation*). In each case, Magritte includes in the field of his canvas a smaller painting which either re-presents or "continues" the space depicted in the painting surrounding it. The easy movement from primary subject or space of depiction into secondary, as well as the creation of a series which implies the possibility of endless repetition, serves in Magritte's paintings (as it does in Robbe-Grillet's narrative) to break the conventional notion of representation as reference to external reality. The reader/spectator's attention is focused instead on the work's relationship to itself and, intertextually, to other works of art (Foucault 45).

Finally, both Robbe-Grillet and Magritte turn to popular culture for generative material. Magritte's fascination with Feuillade's *Fantômas* series, with detective stories and with 1940s American film noir thrillers is well documented (Schneede, "Befreiende Enthüllungen" 57). And, likewise, as Morrisette puts it, Robbe-Grillet chooses "popular, 'ignoble,' even worn-out fictional situations and 'themes' from pornographic novels, detective stories, exotic action films, and Epinal engravings of sado-erotic tortures. . . ." (Morrisette, *Novel and Film* 9). Magritte's *L'assassin menacé*, the fifth painting reproduced in *La Belle Captive* and itself originally an illustration of a scene from a Feuillade film, serves as the point of departure for the sado-erotic detective mystery which constitutes a main story line of *La Belle Captive*. In the painting *L'assassin menacé*, Magritte allows us to look into a rather barren room where a nude woman lies dead on a divan, blood streaming from her closed mouth. A young and well-dressed man stands in the foreground, near a gramophone horn, with his back to the woman. The only other objects in the room are the table upon which the gramo-

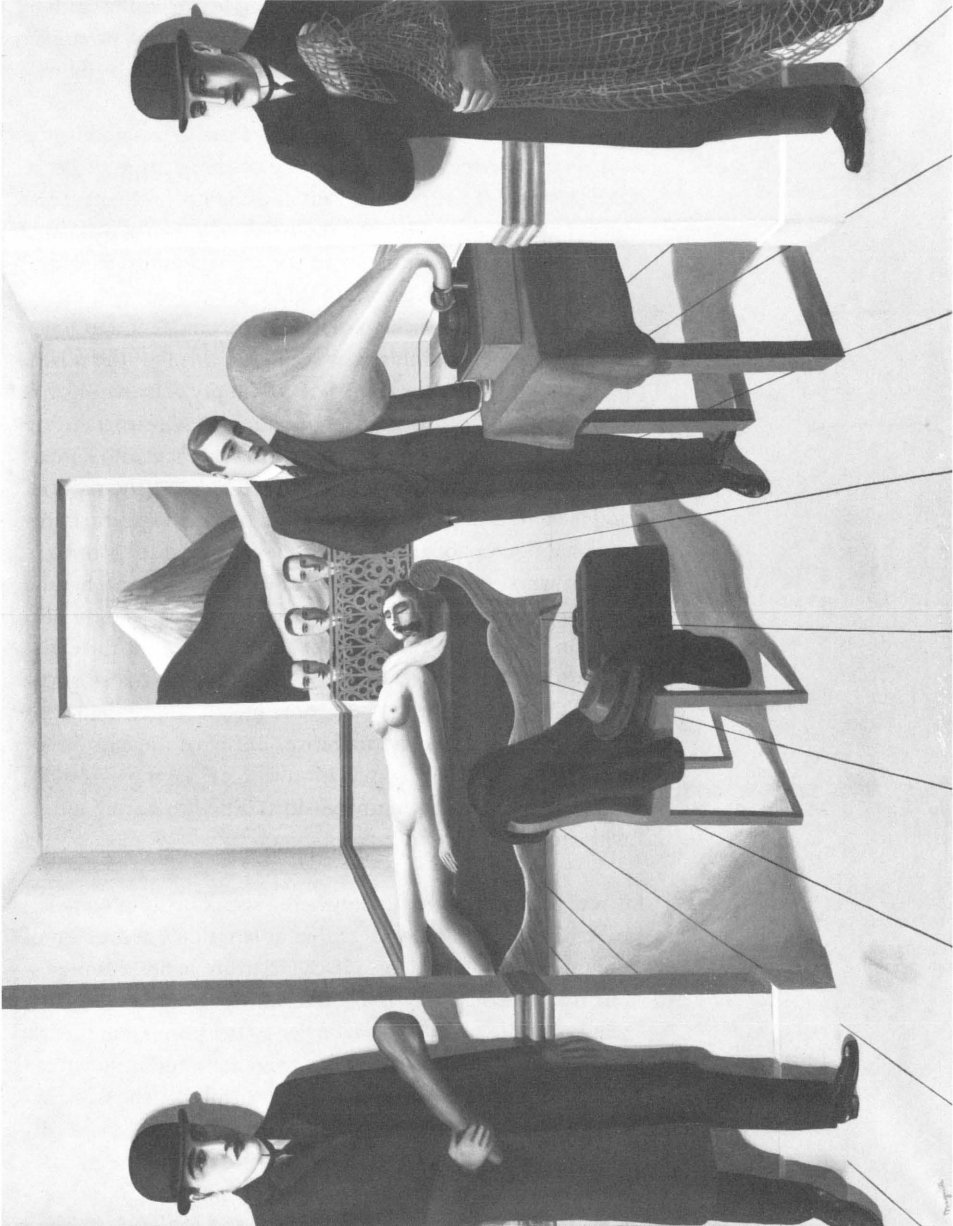
phone sits, the man's briefcase and a chair over which his coat and hat are draped. The far end of the room opens onto a balcony with an iron grate. Three expressionless male faces peer into the room over the edge of the grate. Behind them in the distance, mountains are visible. On either side of the entryway into the room in the extreme foreground stands a man in a suit and a bowler hat—again each with a passionless expression. One carries a large net, the other a club (figure 1).

It is this scene which Robbe-Grillet's first-person narrator comes to describe extensively in the opening pages of *La Belle Captive* (14,17). Many central elements of the narrative, including the abduction and the death of a young woman, a suspected assailant, witnesses to the crime and investigators, are suggested by this painting. While the character of the narrator and the story he narrates are inconsistent and fragmented, elements of this early scene run through the novel, providing it with some thread of continuity. The narrator, it seems, is either many narrators or, alternately, witness to this criminal scene, the deliverer of a young woman who faints at the opera, a captive in a heavily-guarded cell, the sadistic and lecherous abductor (in the guise of a distinguished grey-templed doctor) of a young female student, and a retiring citizen who lives in a deserted area of town and who has, he claims, such modest habits that one might suspect he is an assassin in hiding. Robbe-Grillet's narrative works through intertextual references, redoublings and radical transformations. One may rightly expect more inconsistency than consistency in the narrator and narrative. But what remains constant in *La Belle Captive* is a fascination with sexual transgression, physical violence and captivity—in short, with power and with violation.

These preoccupations are nowhere as striking as in section two, where the narrator describes at length his abduction of the unsuspecting student. He calls her his victim, his prey. She has, he says, a face fit for the shiny pages of an erotic magazine. He pretends to take her to the hospital in his black Cadillac after she has passed out from a drugged cigarette which he calculatingly offered her. Fearful that she will awaken, he undresses her, preparing to give her a syringe of a more potent sedative (in the tender skin of her nipple, he explains, to make certain she is not feigning sleep). In heavily sexual language, he describes her reaction to the shot. The young student is clearly the narrator's "belle captive."

FIGURE 1

René Magritte, *The Menaced Assassin*, 1926
Oil on canvas, 59 1/4 x 6' 4 7/8"



It is also in this section that Robbe-Grillet includes Magritte's painting *La belle captive*, not a depiction of a captive female, as might be expected from the title, but rather one of Magritte's paintings within a painting. *La belle captive* presents a beach framed right and left by heavy, parted drapes. Through the gap between the curtains, we see a cloudy sky, the sea and a continuation of the sand from in front of the curtains. A ball lies in the opening. Partially obstructing the view of the sky "outside" the curtains and partially in front of the curtain on the right, stands a canvas on an easel. It depicts a cloudy sky and, in fact, appears continuous and indistinguishable from the sky to the left of it. What then, for Robbe-Grillet, is the importance and significance of captivity?

The relationship between Magritte's paintings and Robbe-Grillet's text can be more precisely described in terms of violation than collaboration. Admittedly, both artists are interested in violation: violation of readers' expectations and conventions of representation, violations of laws of physical reality, the violation of women, the "look" in the form of voyeurism as violation. But the most striking violation is clear in Magritte's captivity to Robbe-Grillet. By selecting and ordering seventy-seven paintings as well as juxtaposing them to suggest a narrative, Robbe-Grillet creates the illusion of a narrative order in Magritte's work and represses many of Magritte's own very different artistic concerns.

At this point, let us turn to an analysis of the structure of *La Belle Captive* and to a consideration of the way the verbal text guides the reader's apprehension of the images. Superficially, the Magritte paintings seem to be granted positions of power. As the novel both opens and closes with reproductions, the text seems subordinated to, or humbly embedded in, a series of visual images. Robbe-Grillet appears to give the paintings the opening and closing position of power, granting them, as it were, both the first and last "word." Image and text alternate throughout the novel, most often appearing on opposing pages; occasionally, both occupy the same page. Several paintings appear on double-page spreads with no accompanying text. Written text, on the other hand, stands alone only twice. One might be inclined to argue from the structure of the *La Belle Captive* that the image is repeatedly placed in privileged positions and is permitted to be independent of written text more than text is allowed to stand without image. Robbe-Grillet, however, is able to

allow the images this apparent freedom because the words with which he surrounds them strongly direct the reader's apprehension of the image.⁴

The novel is composed of four sections of unequal length. Image and text seem most closely related in sections one, three and four, where one finds indisputable allusions to the paintings included in *La Belle Captive* as well as the development of narrative motifs from the motifs present in the paintings, interpretations of visual elements from the paintings and the inclusion of titles from several paintings in the text of the narrative. The rock, the woman-statue, the rose, the gramophone, the piece of turned wood—all objects from Magritte's work—become key motifs for Robbe-Grillet's fiction. The narrator assigns these motifs definite symbolic values: the rose, which is associated with various women in the narrative (the little girl who sells roses near the bridge, the violated and drowned woman), unsurprisingly comes to stand for Woman: *Inutile de revenir encore une fois sur. . . le viol proprement dit. . . ou sur l'image métaphorique de la fleur saignante.*(24) (Unnecessary to return again to. . . the actual rape. . . or to the metaphorical image of the bleeding flower. . .)

The wooden piece is correspondingly assigned the value of “*un objet de bois phallomorphe*” (a phallomorphic wooden object, 23). A similar case occurs with the painting *Les objets familiers*, in which five men are depicted facing different directions; each stand regarding an object which floats before him at eye-level: a sponge, a pitcher, a seashell, a bow and a lemon. The narrator treats each of these objects as an element belonging to a sacrificial ritual. When the interrogators ask about the objects, he explains:

L'éponge imbibée d'acide est introduite dans l'ouverture du coquillage. . . La table à sacrifices figure depuis longtemps dans l'inventaire, ainsi que le jouet phallique, le cigare du faux voyeur, la bougie, le tampon enflammé, etc. (119)

(The sponge soaked in acid is introduced in the opening of the shell. . . The sacrificial table has long figured in the inventory, along with the phallic toy, the cigar of the fake voyeur, the candle, the burning plug, etc.)

Thus the text reduces objects from Magritte's paintings to the story's *pièces de conviction* (courtroom exhibits) as well as to a crude symbolism which serves the narrative interests.

In section two, the correspondence between image and text is

least clear. This accords with Robbe-Grillet's statement that this portion was written independently of the Magritte images which it contains.⁵ Nevertheless, there are correspondences: soldiers fill the corridor outside the narrator's cell while the painting *La gravitation universelle* depicts a lone man in uniform with a gun; the narrator describes his experience of looking in the mirror in his cell while the painting *La reproduction interdite* presents a man who apparently sees only a reflection of his back in the mirror before him; the narrator, who tries in the café near the beach to catch the attention of the female student, mentions his stiff leg while the painting *Le vieux canonier* depicts a nude woman near the sea with a creature—half man, half fish—who sports a conspicuous peg-leg. In this section, the images have, perhaps, more opportunity than anywhere in the novel to contradict the text and assert their independence. Yet Robbe-Grillet has carefully selected paintings to accompany his text. Furthermore, by section two, the primacy of the written word is so clearly established that the reader is prepared to see even these images as somehow illustrative of the described narrative space.

From the outset, the reader/spectator is confronted with both painted image and linguistic text. In the initial encounter of word and image, the image is free to establish expectations with its visual immediacy. The text, in turn, confirms or denies the original expectations and may establish new ones. In his essay on Magritte, Michel Foucault points out that although plastic representation and linguistic reference may be simultaneously present in a work:

"the two systems can neither merge nor interact. In one way or another, subordination is required. Either the text is ruled by the image (as in those paintings where a book, an inscription, a letter, or the name of a person are represented); or else the image is ruled by the text (as in books where a drawing completes, as if it were merely taking a short cut, the message that words are charged to represent). . . What is essential is that verbal signs and visual representations are never given at once. An order always hierarchizes them, running from the figure to discourse or from discourse to the figure." (33)

It is over this order that Robbe-Grillet asserts his control.

An examination of the first few pages of *La Belle Captive* will help demonstrate the hierarchy set up between verbal text and visual image. The written text subtly guides the reader's perception and interpretation of the images. The novel

opens thus: on the left, the reader sees the Magritte painting entitled *Le château des Pyrénées*; on the right, the text asserts: “ça commence par une pierre qui tombe, dans le silence, verticalement, immobile. Elle tombe de très haut, aërolithe, bloc rocheux aux formes massives, compact, oblong, comme une sorte d’œuf géant à la surface cabossée.” (9)

(It starts with a rock that falls, in silence, vertically, immobile. It falls from a great height, an aerolith, rocky mass, compact, oblong, like a kind of giant egg with a bashed-in surface.)

Because the text and image are juxtaposed and seem superficially concerned with the same things—a rock which may appear to be both falling and immobile as though captured by a snapshot, also a rock which is oblong like an egg and whose surface is jagged—the reader is teased into adopting the familiar habit, established in childhood, of looking for a relationship of identity between the two members, recognizing the re-presentation of the same material from one medium into another. Compelled by his or her desire to make sense of the narrative, the reader is inclined to overlook incongruities: the incongruity between that which the image would like to assert in spite of the words’ contrary assertions (for example, that the surface of the water in the painting is rippled and wavy although the text asserts that it is “smooth and calm”), omissions or repressions (for example, the text’s omission that this “rock” is capped by a massive stone castle, a fact which is stressed again in the painting’s title), or the incongruity between the capacities of the image alone and those capacities which the words add to or impose upon the image, for example, to clearly invoke senses other than sight (*dans le silence*) or to describe change through time.

The image may contribute to the written text a presence of visual and spatial relationships which have only a partial and suggested presence in the words. (The rock of the painting is firmly planted in its implied spatial context in relation to blue sky, white clouds and water—and is immediately perceivable *in* this relationship.) But the text, moving through time, has the power to suggest change in the relationships of objects to one another and to their environments which tend in the painting to be presented only as if in a frozen instant, reified.⁶ Fixed in its apparent stasis in *Le château des Pyrénées*, the massive, oblong rock with its castle crown seems to defy the law of gravity, demonstrating the capacity of painting to transcend such a law of physical reality by means, in this case,

of its assertive and traditional tromp-l'œil technique.

The written text, however, has the power to place the image back inside the system of traditional representation from which the painter may have allowed it to escape. The text implies that the unnatural frozenness of this presented moment will be succeeded by the motion of other moments, and furthermore, that the laws of physical reality only appear to be disturbed (i.e. that an object which falls into the water causes a displacement—a “splash”—upon impact, that concentric circles will form around the spot where the object entered the water, that the equilibrium and stillness of the water will be provisionally restored):

Il est difficile de dire, en raison de son altitude sans doute considérable, si la pierre va terminer sa chute sur le sable blond, ou bien va crever la nappe liquide où son engloutissement, une fois retombées les gerbes soulevées par l'impact, ne laissera plus qu'une série indéfinie de cercles concentriques, de nouveau suspendue dans une totale fixité provisoire. (9)

(It is difficult to say, because of its altitude which is undoubtedly considerable, if the rock will end its fall on the blond sand, or rather will burst the sheet of liquid where its engulfment [once the spray raised by the impact has fallen back again] will leave no more than an indefinite series of concentric circles, once again suspended in a total provisional fixity.)

Here the written text has the same power over the painted image that a voice-over commentary has on the images of a film to control and guide the reader/spectator's interpretation. The image is forced into silence. It is unable to deny the text's implication that it has been rendered during one moment of a fall and to assert instead, for instance, that it is not in the process of falling but rather is floating mysteriously and defiantly above the surface of the water. From the outset, the text, which pretends to some extent to “describe” the image, instead subtly directs the reader's interpretation of it and establishes the word's ability to place the image in a larger context.

An additional power of the written text lies in its ability to imply the existence of a world—a space and time—outside the frame of the painting. This other space, the text implies, is continuous with the representation of the space of the painting.⁷ Although no “blond sand” is visible in the painting (without the text's suggestion of contiguous beach, we could easily believe the rock was suspended over the open

seas, far from land), the reader may infer that the sand in question lies slightly outside the boundary provided by the frame. The images represented in the painting become merely a portion, a glimpse of a larger world. When the next paragraph abandons the rock and the sea, the reader/spectator is primed to attempt—no matter how difficult it is—to go outside the frame of the painting to find a connection between its space and the next space presented in the written text or represented in the following paintings.

Such an attempt is aided by the repetition of the rock motif in the next two paintings selected by Robbe-Grillet: *Portrait de femme* and *Le monde invisible*. In his reading of *La Belle Captive*, Jean-Pierre Vidal, in fact, connects each of these occurrences of the rock with other appearances of the motif in the novel as he discusses the workings of the narrative (222). The spaces are diverse, but the repetition of the rock in the series of paintings, accompanied by text which connects the spaces, convinces the reader that they are diegetically related. Offered as partial visions of the world of *La Belle Captive*, Magritte's discrete images, unable finally to frame the text, are framed by it.

The philosophical and semiotic concerns of many Magritte paintings—concerns which were certainly not limited to narrative consideration—are ignored in *La Belle Captive*. Robbe-Grillet locates the Magritte paintings firmly in relation to his constructed narrative, so firmly, in fact, that Vidal concludes Robbe-Grillet merely brought a “polyptych”—of which Magritte himself had been unaware—to light:

“Le polyptyque que Magritte ne soupçonnait pas avoir produit se trouve ainsi remis à jour, relancé dans l'espace du discours de Robbe-Grillet dont il devient complice.” (221)

(The polyptych which Magritte did not suspect he had created is thus brought to light, recast in the space of Robbe-Grillet's discourse to which it becomes an accessory.)

Morrisette, too, mentions this apparently natural order, positing Magritte's “premonitory preparations for a future link with Robbe-Grillet” (Morrisette, *Intertextual Assemblage* 35) and asserting Robbe-Grillet's near mystical apprehension of the “presence” of a diegetic series in Magritte's work. Morrisette explains that Robbe-Grillet ordered the paintings not chronologically but referentially:

“in accordance with their visual or verbal relevance to the nearby text. . . [thus] Robbe-Grillet has created within the Magritte works themselves a diegetic order, previously unus-

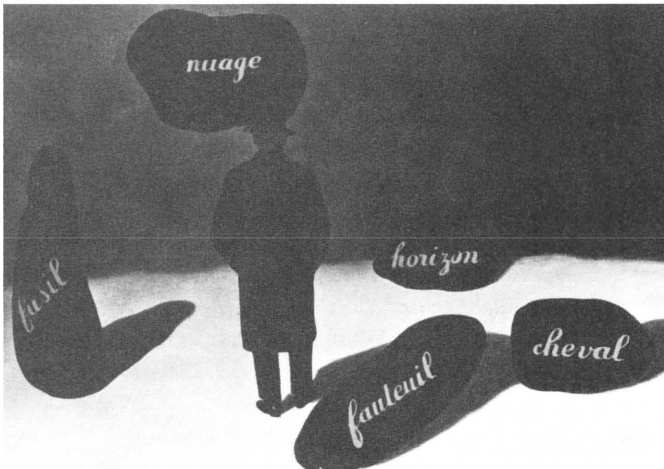
pected, illusionary yet convincing. It is almost as if Magritte, over a period of many years, had continued to develop and extend his early theme of the threatened assassin, or that Magritte had somehow become the illustrator of Robbe-Grillet's fiction." (40)

And finally, Georges Raillard, in expressing his desire to read the series of Magritte's images in *La Belle Captive* as a story of "unmasking" (*dévoilement*), even anticipates the reproach that it was Robbe-Grillet who ordered Magritte's images in such a way that they read like an unmasking (207). Robbe-Grillet's choice and placement of the images in *La Belle Captive* is far from an innocent endeavor.

Remarkable, above all, is the absence of any of Magritte's paintings which explore the tensions and contradictions between linguistic signs and visual images (e.g. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, *L'homme marchant vers l'horizon*, *La clef des songes*). In some of these works, Magritte exposes the arbitrary nature of the linguistic signs which stand for objects. For example, in *La clef des songes*, he labels the likeness of an egg "acacia"; of a shoe, "moon"; and of a candle, "ceiling." Or in *L'homme marchant vers l'horizon*, several amorphous shapes share the space of the canvas with a lone figure who walks into the space of the painting (figure 2). Each shape is labeled variously "armchair," "rifle," "cloud," "horizon" and "horse."

FIGURE 2

René Magritte, *L'homme marchant vers l'horizon*, 1928/29



By permission of the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

The reader/spectator of such a Magritte painting is forced into playing the sort of game Robbe-Grillet had intended for readers of *La Belle Captive*. But Magritte's works, in forcefully disconnecting the relationship of identity between image and linguistic sign, are infinitely more radical in their effect than Robbe-Grillet's narrative, which ultimately attempts to hide the difference between image and written text, subordinating image to text. Foucault locates the power of Magritte's paintings precisely in their play with painted image and contradictory painted word—in their ability to shake highly representational depictions free from an affirmative relationship with arbitrary linguistic signs and with external reality. Robbe-Grillet yokes Magritte's paintings to his narrative, repressing their original interests.

The only concession Robbe-Grillet makes to Magritte's concern with the juxtaposition of image and linguistic sign is the inclusion of the paintings' titles next to the reproductions. Magritte's titling provided an additional way to explore the relation and tension between image and linguistic sign. But even in including the titles, Robbe-Grillet eases the tension between image and sign, bringing both under his control by integrating many titles into the body of his text. For example, *L'Idole*, the name of the opera production which the narrator attends, comes from the title of the Magritte painting which faces the corresponding text. The positioning, in this instance, causes the painted image of the bird of *L'Idole* no longer to be read as a work in its own right but as an illustration of a scene from this opera. Even the final words in the novel, *à la rencontre du plaisir* (toward pleasure), stem from a Magritte title.

If the paintings found in *La Belle Captive* in any way "illustrate" the written text, one can only look to Robbe-Grillet, who chose the paintings, ordered them and composed text in or out of relation to them. An unequal partnership is clearly established from the outset; Robbe-Grillet is free to manipulate Magritte without recourse or even response from him. (Just as the assailant/narrator of section two is able to abduct and investigate his drugged female captive, who cannot resist him.) The silent image with its potential proliferation of meanings is subjugated by the written word which directs interpretation and tries jealously to control the image's play of meaning outside the narrative world of the written text. Regardless of Robbe-Grillet's stated intentions, a hierarchy is established between image and language.

Endnotes

- 1 I wish to thank Claudia Gorbman and Claude Gandelman for their encouragement and their helpful suggestions for the revision of this paper.
- 2 I am indebted to Ingeborg Hoesterey for this connection.
- 3 All translations given in the text are mine.
- 4 Both Roland Barthes (*Image, Music, Text*) and John Berger (*Ways of Seeing*) discuss the relationship between image and text demonstrating that their juxtaposition often produces a new meaning for the image, limiting it, making it subservient and anchoring it to the authority of the words which surround it.
- 5 Although the visual images existed prior to the written text, Robbe-Grillet maintains that only some portions of the text were generated in relation to the images: all of section two of *La Belle Captive*, for example, was composed before he had even conceived of the project with the paintings and contains no explicit references to Magritte's images or titles (Morrissette, *Intertextual Assemblages* 9).
- 6 A painting may, of course, attempt to present more than a single moment as is clear in the case of much of the work of cubism or futurism, or in a painting such as Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*.
- 7 The space the narrative creates outside the frame of the painting is analogous to offscreen space in the cinema. We understand that the spatial world in a film extends beyond the boundaries of the image visible to us on the screen. Presented with a series of discrete images onscreen, we "reconstruct" in our minds a sense of a whole and continuous space (which comprises both on- and offscreen space).

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