

How Much?: An Interesting Typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast*



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One typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's 1988 novel *The Gold Coast* is so prominent as to merit consideration. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that it has ever come to the attention of readers before now. In chapter thirty-four, when Dennis McPherson's corporation Laguna Space Research loses a crucial military defence contract to a rival aerospace company, an announcer states that the "winning bid totaled six hundred ninety-nine million dollars" (2020: 456). However, when Dennis reflects upon that unfavourable verdict two paragraphs later—after having read a pamphlet outlining the proposal in detail—his ire is directed at Parnell Aviation Incorporated having undercut himself and his colleagues by submitting an "impossible" bid of "\$669 million" (2020: 456). Stranger still, when reflecting once more upon Parnell's winning bid another few paragraphs later, McPherson now believes that the bid was "\$699 million" (2020: 457), in line with the originally cited amount. In the time intervening between his cogitation of the latter two values, McPherson does not appear to have been corrected by any external source, and hence, his abrupt reversion to the originally cited figure appears incomprehensible.

Even if we were to presume that

McPherson had read the figure wrong, or that the booklet he reads is misprinted, there is no logical reason for him to have suddenly deduced that the figure of \$669 million is erroneous (if, indeed, it is). Nor does he appear to notice the \$30 million discrepancy between the announced figure (\$699 million) and the alternative total that the booklet ostensibly indicates (\$669 million). This narrative lacuna is rendered particularly conspicuous since McPherson has been working obsessively to develop LSR's alternate proposal for months, and so, it appears highly unlikely that he would be anything less than wholly attentive whilst analysing even the most minute details of the winning contract bid. Neither is the discrepancy likely to be either a ludic or postmodern move. Throughout *The Gold Coast* Robinson exclusively favours plain, declarative exposition, and accordingly, his narrative style is never wilfully obstructive.

Additionally, the typo is by no means exclusive to later editions of the novel; it has been present in the manuscript since *The Gold Coast* was first published. In its first edition, the same alternating interplay of the two different figures appears (1988: 180-1), and the 2015 audiobook edition narrates each of the

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relevant passages verbatim (cited at 7:01:42, 7:02:22, 7:05:38 respectively). Were chapter thirty-four related from a first person perspective, we might presume that either McPherson or the announcer had made an error, yet the passage is rendered in free indirect discourse. Hence, the error appears to be attributable to either Robinson, or the novel's original typesetter. Crucially, the exact value of Parnell's winning bid is highly significant at this stage of the novel's plot, as the extent to which the corporation has outcompeted LSR bears a considerable influence upon later events. Yet, since two vastly different figures have been erroneously cited, readers' perception of how audacious Parnell's bid

truly was is obscured, impairing our comprehension of precisely why a number of very important diegetic events subsequently become inevitable.

Works Cited

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