and authority are what is always at stake in theory and criticism of literature, as they are in literary discourse itself.

Stanford Friedman's "When a 'Long' Poem Is a 'Big' Poem: Selfing Strategies in Women's Twentieth-Century 'Long Poems'" (1990) closely at the workings of power in the discourse of literary criticism. In the example of a recently codified genre, the "long poem" usually written, Friedman shows how generic categories can either exclude women or alternatively, be appropriated by women writers, poets, and critics alike. "Discourse" appears in two guises in Friedman's piece, one referring to criticism itself to poetic writing. First, she speaks of the discourse of genre theory as it plays in maintaining "the authority of the dominant cultural discourse that designate men's "long poems" as "big," "important," "potent," "ying crucial "quest-ions" (here Friedman puns on that quintessentially masculine theme, the quest) about implicitly masculine concerns. Then Friedman shows how twentieth-century women poets writing long poems have challenged assumptions by introducing four new modes of poetic discourse into the text. Each mode is the "discourse of the satiric Other," an "aggressive and con­ nual" style not often found in women's literature but exemplified by Mina Loy's epic Anglo-Mongrel and the Rose. A second mode is a new "diso­ history," a "(her)story in which the inside is the outside and the out­ side inside," where traditional distinctions between public and private, and political break down in long poems like Alicia Ostriker's The Motherverse. The third strategy, a term borrowed from Adrienne Rich, is the "dis­vision," "in which the outsider immerses herself in the discourse of the text in order to transform it," as does Judy Grahn in The Queen of Wands. A fourth mode is the "discourse of linguistic experimentalism," associated with the feminine and found in Betsy Warland's serpent's "text." Friedman stresses the four categories, like all generic designations, are never mutually exclusive and that all four strategies may coexist in any long poem written by a woman. Her intention is not to impose a potentially hierarchical system of cate­ gory upon women's long poems, but rather to insist that the discourses of genre, like the discourse of the literary criticism that comments upon the necessarily gendered.

—RRW

CONSTRUCTING THE SUBJECT
deconstructing the text
(1985)

THE SUBJECT IN IDEOLOGY

One of the central issues for feminism is the cultural construction of subjectivity. It seems imperative to many feminists to find ways of explaining why women have not simply united to overthrow patriarchy. Why, since all women experience the effects of patriarchal practices, are not all women feminists? And why do those of us who think of ourselves as feminists find ourselves inadvertently colluding, at least from time to time, with the patriarchal values and assumptions prevalent in our society? Since the late seventeenth century feminists have seen subjectiv­ ity as itself subject to convention, education, and culture in its broadest sense. Now feminist criticism has allowed that fiction too plays a part in the process of constructing subjectivity. But how?

In his influential essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' Louis Althusser includes literature among the ideological apparatuses which contribute to the process of reproducing the relations of production, the social relationships which are the necessary condition for the existence and perpetuation of the capital­ ist mode of production. He does not here develop the argument concerning literature, but in the context both of his concept of ideology and also of the work of Roland Barthes on literature and Jacques Lacan on psychoanalysis it is pos­ sible to construct an account of some of the implications for feminist theory and practice of Althusser's position. The argument is not only that literature represents the myths and imaginary versions of real social relationships which constitute ideology, but also that classic realist fiction, the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century and arguably of the twentieth, 'interpellates' the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the reader as the position from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible, the position of the subject in (and of) ideology.

According to Althusser's reading (re-reading) of Marx, ideology is not simply a set of illusions, as The German Ideology seems to argue, but a system of representations (discourses, images, myths) concerning the real relations in which people live. But what is represented in ideology is 'not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those...
individuals to the real relations in which they live' (Althusser 1971, p. 155). In other words, ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world—real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them. It is not, therefore, to be thought of as a system of ideas in people's heads, nor as the expression at a higher level of real material relationships, but as the necessary condition of action within the social formation. Althusser talks of ideology as a 'material practice' in this sense; it exists in the behaviour of people acting according to their beliefs (ibid., pp. 155–9).

As the necessary condition of action, ideology exists in commonplace, as well as in philosophical and religious systems. It is apparent in all that is 'obvious' to us, in 'obviousnesses which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the "still, small voice of conscience"): "That's obvious! That's right! That's true!" (ibid., p. 161). If it is true, however, it is not the whole truth. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence in the interests of the social relations generated by and necessary to the reproduction of the existing mode of production.

It is important to stress, of course, that ideology is in no sense a set of deliberate distortions foisted upon a helpless working class by a corrupt and cynical bourgeoisie (or upon victimized women by violent and power hungry men). If there are groups of sinister men in shirt-sleeves purveying illusions to the public these are not the real makers of ideology. Ideology has no creators in that sense, since it exists necessarily. But according to Althusser ideological practices are supported and reproduced in the institutions of our society which he calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). The phrase distinguishes from the Repressive State Apparatus which works by force (the police, the penal system, the army) those institutions whose existence helps to guarantee consent to the existing mode of production. The central ISA in contemporary capitalism is the educational system, which prepares children to act consistently with the values of society by inculcating in them the dominant versions of appropriate behaviour as well as history, social studies and, of course, literature. Among the allies of the educational ISA are the family, the law, the media and the arts, all helping to represent and reproduce the myths and beliefs necessary to enable people to work within the existing social formation.

The destination of all ideology is the subject (the individual in society) and it is the role of ideology to construct people as subjects:

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitution of all ideology in so far as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting concrete individuals as subjects.' (ibid., p. 160)

Within the existing ideology it appears 'obvious' that people are autonomous individuals, possessed of subjectivity or consciousness which is the source of their beliefs and actions. That people are unique, distinguishable, irreplaceable identities is 'the elementary ideological effect' (ibid., p. 161).

The obviousness of subjectivity has been challenged by the linguistic theory which has developed on the basis of the work of Saussure. As Emile Benveniste argues, it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I,' as the subject of a sentence. It is in language that people constitute themselves as subjects. Consciousness of self is possible only through contrast, differentiation: 'I' cannot be conceived without the conception 'non-I,' 'you,' and dialogue, the fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between 'I' and 'you.' Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as I in his discourse' (Benveniste 1971, p. 225). But if language is a system of differences with no positive terms, 'I' designates only the subject of a specific utterance. 'And so it is literally true that the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language. If one really thinks about it, one will see that there is no other objective testimony to the identity of the subject except that which he himself thus gives about himself' (ibid., p. 226).

Within ideology, of course, it seems 'obvious' that the individual speaker is the origin of the meaning of his or her utterance. Post-Saussurean linguistics, however, implies a more complex relationship between the individual and meaning, since it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. In reality, it is only by adopting the position of the subject within language that the individual is able to produce meaning. As Derrida puts it:

What was it that Saussure in particular reminded us of? That 'language [which consists only of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject.' This implies that the subject (self-identical or even conscious of self-identity, self-conscious) is inscribed in the language, that he is a 'function of the language. He becomes a speaking subject only by conforming his speech... to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences. (Derrida 1973, pp. 145–6)

Derrida goes on to raise the question whether, even if we accept that it is only the signifying system which makes possible the speaking subject, the signifying subject, we cannot none the less conceive of a non-speaking, non-signifying subjectivity, 'a silent and intuitive consciousness' (ibid., p. 146). The problem here, he concludes, is to define consciousness-in-itself as distinct from consciousness of something, and ultimately as distinct from consciousness of self. If consciousness is finally consciousness of self, this in turn implies that consciousness depends on differentiation, and specifically on Benveniste's differentiation between 'I' and 'you,' a process made possible by language.

The implications of this concept of the primacy of language over subjectivity have been developed by Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud. Lacan's theory of the subject as constituted in language confirms the dismembering of the individual consciousness so that it can no longer be seen as the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. Instead, Lacan proposes that the infant is initially an 'hommelette'—a little man and also like a broken egg spreading without hindrance in all directions' (Coward and Ellis 1977, p. 101). The child has no sense of identity, no way
of conceiving of itself as a unity, distinct from what is 'other,' exterior to it. During the 'mirror-phase' of its development, however, it 'recognizes' itself in the mirror as a unit distinct from the outside world. This 'recognition' is an identification with an 'imaginary' (because imaged) unitary and autonomous self. But it is only with its entry into language that the child becomes a full subject. It is to participate in the society into which it is born, to be able to act deliberately within the social formation, the child must enter into the symbolic order, the set of signifying systems of culture of which the supreme example is language. The child who refuses to learn the language is 'sick,' unable to become a full member of the family and of society.

In order to speak the child is compelled to differentiate; to speak of itself it has to distinguish 'I' from 'you.' In order to formulate its needs the child learns to identify with the first person singular pronoun, and this identification constitutes the basis of subjectivity. Subsequently it learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ('he' or 'she,' 'boy' or 'girl,' and so on) which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. 'Identity,' subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another.

Subjectivity, then, is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates. It follows from Saussure's theory of language as a system of differences that the world is intelligible only in discourse; there is no unmediated experience, no access to the real reality of self and others. Thus:

As well as being a system of signs related among themselves, language incorporates meaning in the form of the series of positions it offers for the subject from which to grasp itself and its relations with the real. (Nowell-Smith 1976, p. 26)

The subject is constructed in language and in discourse and, since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology, in ideology. It is in this sense that ideology has the effect, as Althusser argues, of constituting individuals as subjects, and it is in this sense that their subjectivity appears 'obvious.' Ideology suppresses the role of language in the construction of the subject. As a result, people 'recognize' (misrecognize) themselves in the ways in which ideology 'interpellates' them, or in other words, addresses them as subjects, calls them by their names and in turn 'recognizes' their autonomy. As a result, they 'work by themselves' (Althusser 1971, p. 169), they 'willingly' adopt the subject-positions necessary to their participation in the social formation. In capitalism they 'freely' exchange their labour-power for wages, and they 'voluntarily' purchase the commodities produced. In patriarchal society women 'choose' to do the housework, to make sacrifices for their children, not to become engineers. And it is here that we see the full force of Althusser's use of the term 'subject,' originally borrowed, as he says, from law. The subject is not only a grammatical subject, 'a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions,' but also a subject who submits to the authority of the social formation represented in ideology as the Absolute Subject (God, the king, the boss, Man, conscience): 'the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection' (ibid., p. 169).

Ideology interpelles concrete individuals as subjects, and bourgeois ideology in particular emphasizes the fixed identity of the individual. 'I'm just like that'-cowardly, perhaps, or aggressive, generous or impulsive. Astrology is only an extreme form of the determinism which attributes to us given essences which cannot change. Popular psychology and popular sociology make individual behaviour a product of these essences. And underlying them all, ultimately unalterable, is 'human nature.' In these circumstances, how is it possible to suppose that, even if we could break in theoretical terms with the concepts of the ruling ideology, we are ourselves capable of change, and therefore capable both of acting to change the social formation and of transforming ourselves to constitute a new kind of society? A possible answer can be found in Lacan's theory of the precariousness of conscious subjectivity, which in turn depends on the Lacanian conception of the unconscious.

In Lacan's theory the individual is not in reality the harmonious and coherent totality of ideological misrecognition. The mirror-phase, in which the infant perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to is own perceiving self, necessitates a splitting between the I which is perceived and the I which does the perceiving. The entry into language necessitates a secondary division which reinforces the first, a split between the I of discourse, the subject of the utterance, and the I who speaks, the subject of the enunciation. There is thus a contradiction between the conscious self, the self which appears in its own discourse, and the self which is only partly represented there, the self which speaks. The unconscious comes into being in the gap which is formed by this division. The unconscious is synapsed in the moment of entry into the symbolic order, simultaneously with the construction of the subject. The repository of repressed and pre-linguistic signifiers, the unconscious is a constant source of potential disruption of the symbolic order. To summarize very briefly what in Lacan is a complex and elusive theory, entry into the symbolic order liberates the child into the possibility of social relationship; it also reduces its helplessness to the extent that it is now able to articulate its needs in the form of demands. But at the same time a division within the self is constructed. In offering the child the possibility of formulating its desires the symbolic order also betrays them, since it cannot by definition formulate those elements of desire which remain unconscious. Demand is always only a metonymy of desire (Lemaire 1977, p. 64). The subject is thus the site of contradiction, and is consequently perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a process lies the possibility of transformation.

In addition, the displacement of subjectivity across a range of discourses implies a range of positions from which the subject grasps itself and its relations with the real, and these positions may be incompatible or contradictory. It is these incompatibilities and contradictions within what is taken for granted that exert a pressure on concrete individuals to seek new, non-contradictory subject-positions. Women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal—humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in
the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition. The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject-position within these contradictory discourses, and in consequence to find a non-contradictory pattern of behaviour, can create intolerable pressures. One way of responding to this situation is to retreat from the contradictions and from discourse itself, to become 'sick'—more women than men are treated for mental illness. Another is to seek a resolution of the contradictions in the discourses of feminism. That the position of women in society has changed so slowly, in spite of such a radical instability in it, may be partly explained in terms of the relative exclusion of women from the discourse of liberal humanism. This relative exclusion, supported in the predominantly masculine institutions of our society, is implicit, for example, in the use of masculine terms as generic ('rational man,' etc.).

Women are not an isolated case. The class structure also produces contradictory subject-positions which precipitate changes in social relations not only between whole classes but between concrete individuals within those classes. Even at the conscious level, although this fact may itself be unconscious, the individual subject is not a unit, and in this lies the possibility of deliberate change.

This does not imply the reinstatement of individual subjects as the agents of change and changing knowledge. On the contrary, it insists on the concept of a dialectical relationship between concrete individuals and the language in which their subjectivity is constructed. In consequence, it also supports the concept of subjectivity as in process.

It is because subjectivity is perpetually in process that literary texts can have an important function. No one, I think, would suggest that literature alone could precipitate a crisis in the social formation. None the less, if we accept Lacan's analysis of the importance of language in the construction of the subject it becomes apparent that literature as one of the most persuasive uses of language may have an important influence on the ways in which people grasp themselves and their relation to the real relations in which they live. The interpellation of the reader in the literary text could be argued to have a role in reinforing the concepts of the world and of subjectivity which ensure that people 'work by themselves' in the social formation. On the other hand, certain critical modes could be seen to challenge these concepts, and to call in question the particular complex of imaginary relations between individuals and the real conditions of their existence which helps to reproduce the present relations of class, race and gender.

THE SUBJECT AND THE TEXT

Althusser analyzes the interpellation of the subject in the context of ideology in general; Benveniste in discussing the relationship between language and subjectivity is concerned with language in general. None the less, it readily becomes apparent that capitalists in particular needs subjects who work by themselves, who freely exchange their labour-power for wages. It is in the epoch of capitalism that ideology emphasizes the value of individual freedom, freedom of conscience and, of course, consumer choice in all the multiplicity of its forms. The ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. It is in the interest of this ideology above all to suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity. Classic realism, still the dominant popular mode in literature, film and television drama, roughly conceives chronologically with the epoch of industrial capitalism. It performs, I wish to suggest, the work of ideology, not only in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and action, but also in offering the reader, as the position from which the text is most readily intelligible, the position of subject as the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding.

It is readily apparent that Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, from Wordsworth through the Victorian period at least to Eliot and Yeats, takes subjectivity as its central theme. The developing self of the poet, his consciousness of himself as poet, his struggle against the constraints of an outer reality, constitute the preoccupations of The Prelude, In Memoriam or Meditations in Time of Civil War. The 'I' of these poems is a kind of super-subject, experiencing life at a higher level of intensity than ordinary people and absorbed in a world of selfhood which the phenomenal world, perceived as external and antithetical, either nourishes or constrains. This transcendence of the subject in poetry is not presented as problematic, but it is entirely overt in the poetry of this period. The 'I' of the poem directly addresses an individual reader who is invited to respond equally directly to this interpellation.

Fiction, however, in this same period, frequently appears to deal rather in social relationships, the interaction between the individual and society, to the increasing exclusion of the subjectivity of the author. Direct intrusion by the author comes to seem an impropriety; impersonal narration, 'showing' (the truth) rather than 'telling' it, is a requirement of prose fiction by the end of the nineteenth century. Even the text effaces its own existence as text: unlike poetry, which clearly announces itself as formal, if only in terms of the shape of the page, the novel seems merely to transcribe a series of events, to report on a palpable world, however fictional. Classic realist dramas display transparently and from the outside how people speak and behave.

Nevertheless, as we know while we read or watch, the author is present as a shadowy authority and as source of the fiction, and the author's presence is substantiated by the name on the cover or the programme: 'a novel by Thomas Hardy,' 'a new play by Ibsen.' And at the same time, as I shall suggest in this section, the form of the classic realist text acts in conjunction with the expressive theory and with ideology by interpellating the reader as subject. The reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation. This model of inter-subjective communication, of shared understanding of a text which re-presents the world, is the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader's existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects. In this way classic realism constitutes an ideological practice in addressing itself to readers as subjects, interpellating them in order that they freely accept their subjectivity and their subjection.
It is important to reiterate, of course, that this process is not inevitable, in the sense that texts do not determine like the ways in which they must be read. I am concerned at this stage primarily with ways in which they are conventionally read; conventionally, since language is conventional, and since modes of writing as well as ways of reading are conventional, but conventionally also in that new conventions of reading are available. In this sense meaning is never a fixed essence inherent in the text but is always constructed by the reader, the result of a "circulation" between social formation, reader and text (Heselt 1977-8, p. 74). In the same way, "inverted subject positions are never hermatically sealed into a text, but are always positions in ideologies" (Willeme 1978, p. 63). To argue that classic realism interprets subjects in certain ways is not to propose that this process is ineluctable, on the contrary it is a matter of choice. But the choice is ideological: certain ranges of meaning (there is always room for debate) are "obvious" within the currently dominant ideology, and certain subject-positions are equally "obviously" the positions from which these meanings are apparent.

Classic realism is characterized by "illusionism," narrative which leads to "closure," and a "hierarchy of discourses" which establishes the "truth" of the story. "Illusionism" is, I hope, self-explanatory. The other two defining characteristics of classic realism need some discussion. Narrative tends to follow certain recurrent patterns. Classic realist narrative, as Barthes demonstrates in SIZ, turns on the creation of enigma through the precipitation of disorder which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying systems. Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey to love. But the story moves inevitably towards closure which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a restatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself.

The moment of closure is the point at which the events of the story become fully intelligible to the reader. The most obvious instance is the detective story where, in the final pages, the murderer is revealed and the motive made plain. But a high degree of intelligibility is sustained throughout the narrative. Narrative tends to follow certain recurrent patterns. Classic realist narrative, as Barthes demonstrates in SIZ, turns on the creation of enigma through the precipitation of disorder which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying systems. Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey to love. But the story moves inevitably towards closure which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a restatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself.

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By these means classic realism offers the reader a position of knowingness which is also a position of identification with the narrative voice. To the extent that the story first constructs, and then depends for its intelligibility, on a set of assumptions shared between narrator and reader, it confirms both the transcendental knowingness of the reader-as-subject and the "obviousness" of the shared truths in question.

DECONSTRUCTING THE TEXT

Ideology, masquerading as coherence and plenitude, is in reality inconsistent, limited, contradictory, and the realist text as a crystallization of ideology participates in this incompleteness even while it diverts attention from the fact in the apparent plenitude of narrative closure. The object of deconstructing the text is to examine the process of its production—not the private experience of the individual author, but the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work. The aim is to locate the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form. Composed of contradictions, the text is no longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. Instead it becomes plural, open to rereading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning.

It is the work of Derrida which has been most influential in promoting deconstruction as a critical strategy. Refusing to identify meaning with authorial intention or with the theme of the work, deconstruction tends to locate meaning in areas which traditional criticism has seen as marginal—in the metaphors, the set of oppositions or the hierarchies of terms which provide the framework of the text. The procedure, very broadly, is to identify in the text the contrary meanings which are the inevitable condition of its existence as a signifying practice, locating the trace of otherness which undermines the overt project.

Derrida, however, says little specifically about literary criticism or about the question of meaning in fiction. Nor is his work directly political. In order to produce a politics of reading we need to draw in addition on the work of Roland Barthes and Pierre Macherey. In SIZ, first published in 1970 (English translation 1975), Barthes deconstructs (without using the word) a short story by Balzac, Sarrasine, a classic realist text concerning a castrato singer and a fortune. The narrative moves on a series of enigmas (What is the source of the fortune? Who is the little old man? Who is L'Amintella? What is the connection between all three?). Even in summarizing the story in this way it is necessary to "lie" there are not "three" but two, since the little old "man" is L'Amintella. Barthes breaks the text into fragments of varying lengths for analysis, and adds a number of "divagations," pieces of more generalized commentary and exploration, to show Sarrasine as a "limit-text," a text which uses the modes of classic realism in ways which constitute a series of "transgressions" of classic realism itself. The sense of plenitude, of a full understanding of a coherent text which is the normal result of reading the realist narrative, cannot here be achieved. It is not only that castration cannot be named in a text of this period. The text is compelled to transgress the conventional antithesis between the genders whenever it uses a pronoun to speak of the castrato. The story concerns the scandal of castration and the death of desire which follows its revelation; it concerns the scandalous origin of wealth; and it demonstrates the collapse of language, of antithesis (difference) as a source of meaning, which is involved in the discourse of these scandals.

Each of these elements of the text provides a point of entry into it, none privileged, and these approaches constitute the degree of polyphony, the "parsimonious plural" of the readable (visible) text. The classic realist text moves inevitably and irrevocably to an end, to the conclusion of an ordered series of events, to the disclosure of what has been concealed. But even in the realist text certain modes of signification within the discourse—the symbols, the codes of reference and the "narrative"—evade the constraints of the narrative sequence. To the extent that these are "reversible," free-floating and of indeterminate authority, the text is plural. In the writable (scriptible), wholly plural text all statements are of indeterminate origin, no single discourse is privileged, and no consistent and coherent plot
constraints the free play of the discourses. The totally writable, plural text does not exist. At the opposite extreme, the readable text is barely plural. The readable text is merchandise to be consumed, while the plural text requires the production of meanings through the identification of its polyphony. Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural object is the work of criticism.

Barthes's own mode of writing demonstrates his contempt for the readable. S/Z is itself a polyphonic critical text. It is impossible to summarize adequately, to reduce to systematic accessibility, and it is noticeable that the book contains no summarizing conclusion. Like Sarrasine, S/Z offers a number of points of entry, critical discourses which generate trains of thought in the reader, but it would be contrary to Barthes's own (anarchist) argument to order all these into a single, coherent methodology, to constitute a new unitary way of reading, however comprehensive, and so to become the (authoritative) author of a new critical orthodoxy. As a result, the experience of reading S/Z is at once frustrating and exhilarating. Though it offers a model in one sense—it implies a new kind of critical practice—it would almost certainly not be possible (or useful) to attempt a wholesale imitation of its critical method(s).

It seems clear that one of the most influential precursors of S/Z, though Barthes does not allude to it, was Pierre Macherey's (Marxist) A Theory of Literary Production, first published in 1966 (English translation 1978). Despite real and important differences between them, there are similarities worth noting. For instance, Macherey anticipates Barthes in demonstrating that contradiction is a condition of narrative. The classic realist text is constructed on the basis of enigma. Information is initially withheld on condition of a 'promise' to the reader that it will finally be revealed. The discourse of this 'truth' brings the story to an end. The movement of narrative is thus both towards disclosure—the release of the story—and towards concealment—prolonging itself by delaying the end of the story through a series of 'reticences,' as Barthes calls them, snares for the reader, partial answers to the questions raised, equivocations (Macherey 1978, pp. 28-9; Barthes 1975, pp. 75-6). Further, narrative involves the reader in an experience of the inevitable in the form of the unforeseen (Macherey 1978, p. 43). The hero encounters an obstacle: will he attempt to overcome it or abandon the quest? The answer is already determined, though the reader, who has only to turn the page to discover it, experiences the moment as one of choice for the hero. In fact, of course, if the narrative is to continue the hero must go on (Barthes 1975, p. 135). Thus the author's autonomy is to some degree illusory. In one sense the author determines the nature of the story: he or she decides what happens. In another sense, however, this decision is itself determined by the constraints of the narrative (Macherey 1978, p. 48), or by what Barthes calls the 'interest' (in both the psychological and the economic senses) of the story (Barthes 1975, p. 135).

The formal constraints imposed by literary form on the project of the work in the process of literary production constitute the structural principle of Macherey's analysis. It is a mistake to reduce the text to the product of a single cause, authorial determination or the mechanics of the narrative. On the contrary, the literary work 'is composed from a real diversity of elements which give it substance' (Macherey 1978, p. 49). There may be a direct contradiction between the project and the formal constraints, and in the transgression thus created it is possible to locate an important object of the critical quest.

Fiction for Macherey (he deals mainly with classic realist narrative) is intimately related to ideology, but the two are not identical. Literature is a specific and irreducible form of discourse, but the language which constitutes the raw material of the text is the language of ideology. It is thus an inadequate language, incomplete, partial, incapable of concealing the real contradictions it is its purpose to efface. This language, normally in flux, is arrested, 'congealed' by the literary text.

The realist text is a determinate representation, an intelligible structure which claims to convey intelligible relationships between its elements. In its attempt to create a coherent and internally consistent fictive world the text, in spite of itself, exposes incoherences, omissions, absences and transgressions which in turn reveal the inability of the language of ideology to create coherence. This becomes apparent because the contradiction between the diverse elements drawn from different discourses, the ideological project and the literary form, creates an absence at the centre of the work. The text is divided, split as the Lacanian subject is split, and Macherey compares the 'lack' in the consciousness of the work, its silence, what it cannot say, with the unconscious which Freud explored (ibid., p. 85).

The unconscious of the work (not, it must be insisted, of the author) is constructed in the moment of its entry into literary form, in the gap between the ideological project and the specifically literary form. Thus the text is no more a transcendent unity than the human subject. The texts of Jules Verne, for instance, whose work Macherey analyses in some detail, indicate that 'if Jules Verne chose to be the spokesman of a certain ideological condition, he could not choose to be what he in fact became' (ibid., p. 94). What Macherey reveals in Verne's The Secret of the Island is an unpredicted and contradictory element, disrupting the colonialist ideology which informs the conscious project of the work. Within the narrative, which concerns the willing surrender of nature to improvement by a team of civilized and civilizing colonizers, there insists an older and contrary myth which the consciousness of the text rejects. Unexplained events imply another mysterious presence on what is apparently a desert island. Captain Nemo's secret presence, and his influence on the fate of the castaways from a subterranean cave, is the source of the series of enigmas and the final disclosure which constitute the narrative. But his existence in the text has no part in the overt ideological project. On the contrary, it represents the return of the repressed in the form of a re- enactment of the myth of Robinson Crusoe. This myth evokes both a literary ancestor—Defoe's story—on which all subsequent castaway stories are to some degree conditional, and an ancestral relationship to nature—the creation of an economy by Crusoe's solitary struggle to appropriate and transform the island—on which subsequent bourgeois society is also conditional. The Robinson Crusoe story, the antithesis of the conscious project of the narrative, is also the condition of its existence. It returns, as the repressed experience returns to the consciousness of the patient in dreams and slips of the tongue and in doing so it unconsciously draws attention to an origin and a history from which both desert island stories and triumphant bourgeois ideology are unable to cut themselves off, and with which they must settle their account. The Secret of the Island thus
reveals, through the discord within it between the conscious project and the insis­tence of the disruptive unconscious, the limits of the coherence of nine­
teenth-century ideology. The object of the critic, then, is to seek not the unity of the work, but the mul­
tiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings, its incompleteness, the omissions
which it displays but cannot describe, and above all its contradictions. In its ab­
sences, and in the collisions between its divergent meanings, the text implicitly
critizes its own ideology, it contains within itself the critique of its own values, in the sense that it is available for a new process of production of meaning by the
reader, and in this process it can provide a knowledge of the limits of ideological
representation.

Macherey's way of reading is precisely contrary to traditional Anglo-American critical practice, where the quest is for the unity of the work, its coherence, a way of repairing any deficiencies in consistency by reference to the author's philoso­phy or the contemporary world picture. In thus smoothing out contradiction, clos­
ing the text, criticism becomes the accomplice of ideology. Having created a
pretense of acceptable texts, criticism then provides them with acceptable interpre­
tations, thus effectively censoring any elements in them which come into colli­
sions with the dominant ideology. To deconstrUct the text, on the other hand, is to open it, to release the positions of its intelligibility, including those
which reveal the partiality (in both senses) of the ideology inscribed in the text.

**THE CASE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES**

In locating the transitions and uncertainties of the text it is important to remem­
ber, Macherey insists, sustaining the parallel with psychoanalysis, that the prob­
lem of the work is not the same as its *consciousness* of a problem (Macherey 1978, p. 93). In 'Charles Augustus Milverton,' one of the short stories from *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, Conan Doyle presents the reader with an ethical problem. Milverton is a blackmail, a crime not easily brought to justice since the victim is inevitably unwilling to make the matter public; the text there­fore poses the question of how the reader can achieve justice. Holmes plans to burgle Milverton's house to recover the letters which he has secured information about the layout of the house. While Holmes and Watson are both men of science, Holmes, the
sciencist, is a scientific conjuror who insists on disclosing how the trick is done.

The stories begin in enigma, mystery, the impossible, and conclude with an ex­
planation which makes it clear that logical deduction and scientific method ren­
der all mysteries accountable to reason:

I am afraid that my explanation may disillusionize you, but it has always been
my habit to hide none of my methods, either from my friend Watson or from
anyone who might take an intelligent interest in them. ('The Reigate
Squires,' *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*)

The stories are a plea for science not only in the spheres conventionally asso­
ciated with detection (footprints, traces of hair or cloth, cigarette ends), where they have been deservedly influential on forensic practice, but in all areas. They reflect the widespread optimism characteristic of their period concerning the
comprehensive power of positivist science. Holmes's ability to deduce Watson's train of thought, for instance, is repeatedly displayed, and it owes nothing to the supernatural. Once explained, the reasoning process always appears 'absurdly simple,' open to the commonest of common sense.

The project of the stories themselves, enigma followed by disclosure, echoes precisely the structure of the classic realist text. The narrator himself draws attention to the parallel between them:

"Excellent!" I cried. "Elementary," said he. "It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbour because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your remaining in your hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader. Now, at present I am in the position of these same readers, for I hold in this hand several threads of one of the strangest cases which ever perplexed a man's brain, and yet I lack the one or two which are needful to complete my theory. But I'll have them, Watson, I'll have them!" ('The Crooked Man', Memoirs)

(The passage is quoted by Macherey [1978, p. 35] in his discussion of the characteristic structure of narrative.)

The project also requires the maximum degree of 'realism'—verisimilitude, plausibility. In the interest of science no hint of the fantastic or the implausible is permitted to remain once the disclosure is complete. This is why even their own existence as writing is so frequently discussed within the texts. The stories are alluded to as Watson's 'little sketches,' his 'memoirs.' They resemble fictions because of Watson's unscientific weakness for story-telling:

'I must admit, Watson, that you have some power of selection which amazes me for which I deplore in your narratives. Your fatal habit of looking at everything from the point of view of a story instead of as a scientific exercise has ruined what might have been an instructive and even classical series of demonstrations.' ('The Abbey Grange,' The Return of Sherlock Holmes)

In other words, the fiction itself accounts even for its own fictionality, and the text thus appears wholly transparent. The success with which the Sherlock Holmes stories achieve an illusion of reality is repeatedly demonstrated. In their Foreword to The Sherlock Holmes Companion (1962) Michael and Mollie Hardwick comment on their own recurrent illusion 'that we were dealing with a figure of real life rather than of fiction. How vital Holmes appears, compared with many people of one's own acquaintance.'

De Waal's bibliography of Sherlock Holmes lists twenty-five 'Sherlockian' periodicals apparently largely devoted to conjectures, based on the 'evidence' of the stories, concerning matters only hinted at in the texts—Holmes's education, his income and his romantic and sexual adventures. According to The Times in December 1967, letters to Sherlock Holmes were then still commonly addressed to 221B Baker Street, many of them asking for the detective's help.

None the less these stories, whose overt project is total explicitness, total verisimilitude in the interests of a plea for scientificity, are haunted by shadowy, mysterious and often silent women. Their silence repeatedly conceals their sexuality, investing it with a dark and magical quality which is beyond the reach of scientific knowledge. In 'The Greek Interpreter' (Memoirs) Sophie Kranides has run away with a man. "Though she is the pivot of the plot she appears only briefly: 'I could not see her clearly enough to know more than that she was tall and graceful, with black hair, and clad in some sort of loose white gown.' Connotatively the white gown marks her as still virginal and her flight as the result of romance rather than desire. At the same time the dim light surrounds her with shadow, the unknown. 'The Crooked Man' concerns Mrs. Barclay, whose husband is found dead on the day of her meeting with her lover of many years before. Mrs. Barclay is now insensible, 'temporarily insane' since the night of the murder and therefore unable to speak. In 'The Dancing Men' (Return) Mrs. Elsie Cubitt, once engaged to a criminal, longs to speak but cannot bring herself to break her silence. By the time Holmes arrives she is unconscious, and she remains so for the rest of the story. Ironically the narrative concerns the breaking of the code which enables her former lover to communicate with her. Elsie's only contribution to the correspondence is the word, 'never.' The precise nature of their relationship is left mysterious, constructed of contrary suggestions. Holmes says she feared and hated him; the lover claims, 'She had been engaged to me, and she would have married me. I believe, if I had taken over another profession.' When her husband moves to shoot the man whose coded messages are the source of a 'terror' which is 'wearing her away,' Elsie restrains him with compulsive strength. On the question of her motives the text is characteristically elusive. Her husband recounts the story:

'I was angry with my wife that night for having held me back when I might have caught the skulking rascal. She said that she feared that I might come to harm. For an instant it had crossed my mind that what she really feared was that I might come to harm, for I could not doubt that she knew who this man was and what he meant by those strange signals. But there is a tone in my wife's voice, Mr. Holmes, and a look in her eyes which forbid doubt, and I am sure that it was indeed my own safety that was in her mind.'

After her husband's death Elsie remains a widow, faithful to his memory and devoting her life to the care of the poor, apparently expiating something unspecified, perhaps an act or a state of feeling, remote or recent.

'The Dancing Men' is 'about' Holmes's method of breaking the cipher. Its project is to dispel any magic from the deciphering process. Elsie's silence is in the interest of the story since she knows the code. But she also 'knows' her feelings towards her former lover. Contained in the completed and fully disclosed story of the decipherment is another uncompleted and undisclosed narrative which is more than merely peripheral to the text as a whole. Elsie's past is central and causal. As a result, the text with its project of dispelling mystery is haunted by the mysterious state of mind of a woman who is unable to speak.

The classic realist text had not yet developed a way of signifying women's sexuality except in a metaphoric or symbolic mode whose presence disrupts the
realist surface. Joyce and Lawrence were beginning to experiment at this time with modes of sexual signification but in order to do so they largely abandoned the codes of realism. So much is readily apparent. What is more significant, however, is that the presentation of so many women in the Sherlock Holmes stories as shadowy, mysterious and magical figures precisely contradicts the project of explicitness, transgresses the values of the texts, and in doing so throws into relief the poverty of the contemporary concept of science. These stories, pleas for a total explicitness about the world, are unable to explain an area which none the less they cannot ignore. The version of science which the texts present would constitute a clear challenge to ideology: the interpretation of all areas of life, physical, social and psychological, is to be subject to rational scrutiny and the requirements of coherent theorization. Confronted, however, by an area in which ideology itself is uncertain, the Sherlock Holmes stories display the limits of their own project and are compelled to manifest the inadequacy of a bourgeois scientifi city which, working within the constraints of ideology, is thus unable to challenge it.

Perhaps the most interesting case, since it introduces an additional area of shadow, is 'The Second Stain' (Return), which concerns two letters. Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope does speak. She has written before her marriage 'an indiscreet letter...a foolish letter, a letter of an impulsive, loving girl.' Had her husband read the letter his confidence in her would have been for ever destroyed. Her husband is none the less the present as entirely sympathetic, and here again we encounter the familiar contradiction between a husband's supposed reaction, accepted as just, and the reaction offered to the reader by the text. In return for her original letter Lady Hilda gives her blackmailer a letter from 'a certain foreign potentate' stolen from the dispatch box of her husband, the European Secretary of State. This political letter is symbolically parallel to the first sexual one. Its contents are equally elusive but it too is 'indiscreet,' 'hot-headed; certain phrases in it are 'provocative.' Its publication would produce 'a most dangerous state of feeling' in the nation. Lady Hilda's innocent folly is the cause of the theft: she knows nothing of politics and was not in a position to understand the consequences of her action. Holmes ensures the restoration of the political letter and both secrets are preserved.

Here the text is symmetrically elusive concerning both sexuality and politics. Watson, as is so often the case where these areas are concerned, begins the story by apologizing for his own reticence and vagueness. In the political instance what becomes clear as a result of the uncertainty of the text is the contradictory nature of the requirements of verisimilitude in fiction. The potentate's identity and the nature of his indiscretion cannot be named without involving on the part of the reader either disbelief (the introduction of a patently fictional country would be dangerous to the project of verisimilitude) or belief (dangerous to the text's status as fiction, entertainment; also quite possibly politically dangerous). The scientific project of the texts require that they deal in 'facts,' but their nature as fiction forbids the introduction of facts.

The classic realist text insinuates itself in the space between fact and illusion through the presentation of a simulated reality which is plausible but not real. In this lies its power as myth. It is because fiction does not normally deal with 'politics' directly, except in the form of history or satire, that it is ostensibly innocent and therefore ideologically effective. But in its evasion of the real also lies its weakness as 'realism.' Through their transgression of their own values of explicitness and verisimilitude, the Sherlock Holmes stories contain within themselves an implicit critique of their limited nature as characteristic examples of classic realism. They thus offer the reader through the process of deconstruction a form of knowledge, not about 'life' or the world, but about the nature of fiction itself.

Thus, in adopting the form of classic realism, the only appropriate literary mode, positivism is compelled to display its own limitations. Offered as science, it reveals itself to a deconstructive reading as ideology at the very moment that classic realism, offered as verisimilitude, reveals itself as fiction. In claiming to make explicit and understandable what appears mysterious, these texts offer evidence of the tendency of positivism to push to the margins of experience whatever it cannot explain or understand. In the Sherlock Holmes stories classic realism ironically tells a truth, not the truth about the world which is the project of classic realism. The truth the stories tell is the truth about ideology, the truth which ideology represses, its own existence as ideology itself.

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