

# S/Z

## *Roland Barthes*

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## I. EVALUATION

There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting: to see all the world's stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure: we shall, they thought, extract from each tale its model, then out of these models we shall make a great narrative structure, which we shall reapply (for verification) to any one narrative: a task as exhausting (ninety-nine percent perspiration, as the saying goes) as it is ultimately undesirable, for the text thereby loses its difference. This difference is not, obviously, some complete, irreducible quality (according to a mythic view of literary creation), it is not what designates the individuality of each text, what names, signs, finishes off each work with a flourish; on the contrary, it is a difference which does not stop and which is articulated upon the infinity of texts, of languages, of systems: a difference of which each text is the return. A choice must then be made: either to place all texts in a demonstrative oscillation, equalizing them under the scrutiny of an in-different science, forcing them to rejoin, inductively, the Copy from which we will then make them derive; or else to restore each text, not to its individuality, but to its function, making it cohere, even before we talk about it, by the infinite paradigm of difference, subjecting it from the outset to a basic typology, to an evaluation. How then posit the value of a text? How establish a basic typology of texts? The primary evaluation of all texts can come neither from science,

for science does not evaluate, nor from ideology, for the ideological value of a text (moral, aesthetic, political, alethiological) is a value of representation, not of production (ideology "reflects," it does not do work). Our evaluation can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing. On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write: what is within the practice of the writer and what has left it: which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness—he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.

## II. INTERPRETATION

There may be nothing to say about writerly texts. First of all, where can we find them? Certainly not in reading (or at least very rarely: by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-

works): the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore. Further, its model being a productive (and no longer a representative) one, it demolishes any criticism which, once produced, would mix with it: to rewrite the writerly text would consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference. The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure. But the readerly texts? They are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature. How differentiate this mass once again? Here, we require a second operation, consequent upon the evaluation which has separated the texts, more delicate than that evaluation, based upon the appreciation of a certain quantity—of the *more or less* each text can mobilize. This new operation is *interpretation* (in the Nietzschean sense of the word). To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it. Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as*

*far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable (meaning here is never subject to a principle of determination, unless by throwing dice); the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal: it is not a question of conceding some meanings, of magnanimously acknowledging that each one has its share of truth; it is a question, against all in-difference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible. This necessary assertion is difficult, however, for as nothing exists outside the text, there is never a *whole* of the text (which would by reversion form an internal order, a reconciliation of complementary parts, under the paternal eye of the representative Model): the text must simultaneously be distinguished from its exterior and from its totality. All of which comes down to saying that for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure, a grammar, or a logic; thus, if one or another of these are sometimes permitted to come forward, it is in *proportion* (giving this expression its full quantitative value) as we are dealing with incompletely plural texts, texts whose plural is more or less parsimonious.

### III. CONNOTATION: AGAINST

For these moderately plural (i.e., merely polysemous) texts, there exists an average appreciator which can grasp only a certain median portion of the plural, an instrument at once too delicate and too vague to be applied to univocal texts, and too poor to be applied to multivalent texts, which are reversible and frankly indeterminable (integrally plural texts). This *modest* instrument is connotation. For Hjelmslev, who has

defined it, connotation is a secondary meaning, whose signifier is itself constituted by a sign or system of primary signification, which is denotation: if E is the expression, C the content, and R the relation of the two which establishes the sign, the formula for the connotation is: (ERC) R C. Doubtless because it has not been limited, subjected to a typology of texts, connotation has not had a good press. Some (the philologists, let us say), declaring every text to be univocal, possessing a true, canonical meaning, banish the simultaneous, secondary meanings to the void of critical lucubrations. On the other hand, others (the semiologists, let us say) contest the hierarchy of denotated and connotated; language, they say, the raw material of denotation, with its dictionary and its syntax, is a system like any other; there is no reason to make this system the privileged one, to make it the locus and the norm of a primary, original meaning, the scale for all associated meanings; if we base denotation on truth, on objectivity, on law, it is because we are still in awe of the prestige of linguistics, which, until today, has been reducing language to the sentence and its lexical and syntactical components; now the endeavor of this hierarchy is a serious one: it is to return to the closure of Western discourse (scientific, critical, or philosophical), to its centralized organization, to arrange all the meanings of a text in a circle around the hearth of denotation (the hearth: center, guardian, refuge, light of truth).

#### IV. CONNOTATION: FOR, EVEN SO

This criticism of connotation is only half fair; it does not take into account the typology of the texts (this typology is basic: no text exists without being classified according to its value); for if there are readerly texts, committed to the closure system

of the West, produced according to the goals of this system, devoted to the law of the Signified, they must have a particular system of meaning, and this meaning is based on connotation. Hence, to deny connotation altogether is to abolish the differential *value* of the texts, to refuse to define the specific apparatus (both poetic and critical) for the readerly texts—it is to make the limited text equal to the limit-text, to deprive oneself of a typological instrument. Connotation is the way into the polysemy of the classic text, to that limited plural on which the classic text is based (it is not certain that there are connotations in the modern text). Connotation must therefore be rescued from its double contestation and kept as the namable, computable trace of a *certain* plural of the text (that limited plural of the classic text). Then, what is a connotation? Definitionally, it is a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text): we must in no way restrain this relating, which can be given various names (*function* or *index*, for example), except that we must not confuse connotation with association of ideas: the latter refers to the system of a subject; connotation is a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system. Topically, connotations are meanings which are neither in the dictionary nor in the grammar of the language in which a text is written (this is, of course, a shaky definition: the dictionary can be expanded, the grammar can be modified). Analytically, connotation is determined by two spaces: a sequential space, a series of orders, a space subject to the successivity of sentences, in which meaning proliferates by layering; and an agglomerative space, certain areas of the text correlating other meanings outside the material text and, with them, forming “nebulæ” of signifieds. Topologically, connotation makes possible a (limited) dis-



semination of meanings, spread like gold dust on the apparent surface of the text (meaning is golden). Semiologically, each connotation is the starting point of a code (which will never be reconstituted), the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text. Dynamically, it is a subjugation which the text must undergo, it is the possibility of this subjugation (meaning is a force). Historically, by inducing meanings that are apparently recoverable (even if they are not lexical), connotation establishes a (dated) Literature of the Signified. Functionally, connotation, releasing the double meaning on principle, corrupts the purity of communication: it is a deliberate "static," painstakingly elaborated, introduced into the fictive dialogue between author and reader, in short, a countercommunication (Literature is an intentional cacography). Structurally, the existence of two supposedly different systems—denotation and connotation—enables the text to operate like a game, each system referring to the other according to the requirements of a certain *illusion*. Ideologically, finally, this game has the advantage of affording the classic text a certain *innocence*: of the two systems, denotative and connotative, one turns back on itself and indicates its own existence: the system of denotation; denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature: doesn't a sentence, whatever meaning it releases, subsequent to its utterance, it would seem, appear to be telling us something simple, literal, primitive: something *true*, in relation to which all the rest (which comes *afterwards*, *on top*) is literature? This is why, if we want to go along with the classic text, we must keep denotation, the old deity, watchful, cunning, theatrical, foreordained to *represent* the collective innocence of language.

## V. READING, FORGETTING

*I read the text.* This statement, consonant with the "genius" of the language (subject, verb, complement), is not always true. The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it; I do not make it undergo a predicative operation, consequent upon its being, an operation known as *reading*, and I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This "I" which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost). *Objectivity* and *subjectivity* are of course forces which can take over the text, but they are forces which have no affinity with it. Subjectivity is a plenary image, with which I may be thought to encumber the text, but whose deceptive plenitude is merely the wake of all the codes which constitute me, so that my subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes. Objectivity is the same type of replenishment: it is an imaginary system like the rest (except that here the castrating gesture is more fiercely characterized), an image which serves to name me advantageously, to make myself known, "misknown," even to myself. Reading involves risks of objectivity or subjectivity (both are imaginary) only insofar as we define the text as an expressive object (presented for our own expression), sublimated under a morality of truth, in one instance laxist; in the other, ascetic. Yet reading is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority. It is a form of work (which is why it would be better to speak of a lexeological act—even a lexeographical act, since I write my reading), and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the "I":

in operational terms, the meanings I find are established not by "me" or by others, but by their *systematic* mark: there is no other *proof* of a reading than the quality and endurance of its systematics; in other words: than its functioning. To read, in fact, is a labor of language. To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept toward other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor. —With regard to the plural text, forgetting a meaning cannot therefore be seen as a fault. Forgetting in relation to what? What is the *sum* of the text? Meanings can indeed be forgotten, but only if we have chosen to bring to bear upon the text a singular scrutiny. Yet reading does not consist in stopping the chain of systems, in establishing a truth, a legality of the text, and consequently in leading its reader into "errors"; it consists in coupling these systems, not according to their finite quantity, but according to their plurality (which is a being, not a discounting): I pass, I intersect, I articulate, I release, I do not count. Forgetting meanings is not a matter for excuses, an unfortunate defect in performance; it is an affirmative value, a way of asserting the irresponsibility of the text, the pluralism of systems (if I closed their list, I would inevitably reconstitute a singular, theological meaning): it is precisely because I forget that I read.

## VI. STEP BY STEP

If we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text (however limited it may be), we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and by

secondary-school explication: no *construction* of the text: everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure. Whence the idea, and so to speak the necessity, of a gradual analysis of a single text. Whence, it would seem, several implications and several advantages. The commentary on a single text is not a contingent activity, assigned the reassuring alibi of the "concrete": the single text is valid for all the texts of literature, not in that it represents them (abstracts and equalizes them), but in that literature itself is never anything but a single text: the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances; to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures, a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes), whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) text is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing, of this difference which indefinitely returns, insubmissive. Further, to study this text down to the last detail is to take up the structural analysis of narrative where it has been left till now: at the major structures; it is to assume the power (the time, the elbow room) of working back along the threads of meanings, of abandoning no site of the signifier without endeavoring to ascertain the code or codes of which this site is perhaps the starting point (or the goal); it is (at least we may hope as much, and work to this end) to substitute for the simple representative model another model, whose very gradualness would guarantee what may be productive in the classic text; for the *step-by-step* method, through its very slowness and dispersion, avoids penetrating, reversing the tutor text, giving an internal image of it: it is never anything but the *decomposition* (in the cinematographic sense) of the work of reading: a *slow motion*, so to speak, neither wholly image nor

wholly analysis; it is, finally, in the very writing of the commentary, a systematic use of digression (a form ill-accommodated by the discourse of knowledge) and thereby a way of observing the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven; of course, the classic text is incompletely reversible (it is modestly plural): the reading of this text occurs within a necessary order, which the gradual analysis will make precisely its order of writing; but the step-by-step commentary is of necessity a renewal of the entrances to the text, it avoids structuring the text *excessively*, avoids giving it that additional structure which would come from a dissertation and would close it: it stars the text, instead of assembling it.

## VII. THE STARRED TEXT

We shall therefore star the text, separating, in the manner of a minor earthquake, the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface, imperceptibly soldered by the movement of sentences, the flowing discourse of narration, the "naturalness" of ordinary language. The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call *lexias*, since they are units of reading. This cutting up, admittedly, will be arbitrary in the extreme; it will imply no methodological responsibility, since it will bear on the signifier, whereas the proposed analysis bears solely on the signified. The *lexia* will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences; it will be a matter of convenience: it will suffice that the *lexia* be the best possible space in which we can observe meanings; its dimension, empirically determined, estimated, will depend on the density of connotations, variable according to the moments of the text: all we require is that each *lexia* should have at most three or four meanings to be

enumerated. The text, in its mass, is comparable to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks; like the soothsayer drawing on it with the tip of his staff an imaginary rectangle wherein to consult, according to certain principles, the flight of birds, the commentator traces through the text certain zones of reading, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcropping of codes, the passage of citations. The lexia is only the wrapping of a semantic volume, the crest line of the plural text, arranged like a berm of possible (but controlled, attested to by a systematic reading) meanings under the flux of discourse: the lexia and its units will thereby form a kind of polyhedron faceted by the word, the group of words, the sentence or the paragraph, i.e., with the language which is its "natural" excipient.

#### VIII. THE BROKEN TEXT

What will be noted is, across these artificial articulations, the shifting and repetition of the signifieds. Discerning these signifieds systematically for each lexia does not aim at establishing the truth of the text (its profound, strategic structure), but its plurality (however parsimonious); the units of meaning (the connotations), strung out separately for each lexia, will not then be regrouped, provided with a metameaning which would be the ultimate construction to be given them (we shall merely reconnect, as an appendix, certain sequences which might have become lost in the unraveling of the tutor text). We shall not set forth the criticism of a text, or a criticism of *this* text; we shall propose the semantic substance (divided but not distributed) of several kinds of criticism (psychological, psychoanalytical, thematic, historical, structural); it will then be up to each kind of criticism (if it should so desire) to come

into play, to make its voice heard, which is the hearing of one of the voices of the text. What we seek is to sketch the stereographic space of writing (which will here be a classic, readerly writing). The commentary, based on the affirmation of the plural, cannot therefore work with "respect" to the text; the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted without any regard for its natural divisions (syntactical, rhetorical, anecdotic); inventory, explanation, and digression may deter any observation of suspense, may even separate verb and complement, noun and attribute; the work of the commentary, once it is separated from any ideology of totality, consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, *interrupting* it. What is thereby denied is not the *quality* of the text (here incomparable) but its "naturalness."

#### IX. HOW MANY READINGS?

We must further accept one last freedom: that of reading the text as if it had already been read. Those who like a good story may certainly turn to the end of the book and read the tutor text first; it is given as an appendix in its purity and continuity, as it came from the printer, in short, as we habitually read it. But for those of us who are trying to establish a plural, we cannot stop this plural at the gates of reading: the reading must also be plural, that is, without order of entrance: the "first" version of a reading must be able to be its last, as though the text were reconstituted in order to achieve its artifice of continuity, the signifier then being provided with an additional feature: shifting. Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us "throw away" the story once it has been consumed ("devoured"), so that we can then move on to another story,

buy another book, and which is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere), multiplies it in its variety and its plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ("this happens *before* or *after* that") and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to "explicate," to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading, even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of *suspense*, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play (that play which is the return of the different). If then, a deliberate contradiction in terms, we *immediately* reread the text, it is in order to obtain, as though under the effect of a drug (that of recommencement, of difference), not the *real* text, but a plural text: the same and new.

#### X. SARRASINE

The text I have chosen (Why? All I know is that for some time I have wanted to make a complete analysis of a short text and that the Balzac story was brought to my attention by an article by Jean Reboul,<sup>1</sup> who in turn is supposed to have been inspired by Georges Bataille's reference; and thus I was caught up in this "series" whose scope I was to discover by means of the text itself) is Balzac's *Sarrasine*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean Reboul: "Sarrasine ou la castration personnifiée," in *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, March-April, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*.



(1) **SARRASINE** ★ The title raises a question: *What is Sarrasine?* A noun? A name? A thing? A man? A woman? This question will not be answered until much later, by the biography of the sculptor named Sarrasine. Let us designate as *hermeneutic code* (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution. Thus, the title *Sarrasine* initiates the first step in a sequence which will not be completed until No. 153 (HER. Enigma 1—the story will contain others—: question). ★★ The word *Sarrasine* has an additional connotation, that of femininity, which will be obvious to any French-speaking person, since that language automatically takes the final “e” as a specifically feminine linguistic property, particularly in the case of a proper name whose masculine form (*Sarrazin*) exists in French onomastics. Femininity (connoted) is a signifier which will occur in several places in the text; it is a shifting element which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols. Although every unit we mention here will be a signifier, this one is of a very special type: it is the signifier par excellence because of its connotation, in the usual meaning of the term. We shall call this element a signifier (without going into further detail), or a *seme* (semantically, the seme is the unit of the signifier), and we shall indicate these units by the abbreviation SEM, designating each time by an approximate word the connotative signifier referred to in the lexia (SEM. Femininity).

(2) *I was deep in one of those daydreams* ★ There will be nothing wayward about the daydream introduced here: it will be solidly constructed along the most familiar rhetorical lines, in a series of antitheses: garden and salon, life and death, cold and heat, outside and interior. The lexia thus lays the groundwork, in introductory form, for a vast symbolic structure, since it can lend itself to many substitutions, variations, which will lead us from the garden to the castrato, from the salon to the girl with whom the narrator is in love, by way of the mysterious old man, the full-bosomed Mme de Lanty, or Vien's moonlit Adonis. Thus, on the symbolic level, an immense province appears, the province of the antithesis, of which

this forms the first unit, linking at the start its two adversative terms (A/B) in the word *daydream*. (We shall mark all the units in this symbolic area with the letters SYM. Here—SYM. Antithesis: AB.) ★★ The state of absorption formulated here (*I was deep in* ) already implies (at least in “readerly” discourse) some event which will bring it to an end ( . *when I was roused by a conversation* No. 14). Such sequences imply a logic in human behavior. In Aristotelian terms, in which *praxis* is linked to *proairesis*, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action, we shall name this code of actions and behavior *proairetic* (in narrative, however, the discourse, rather than the characters, determines the action). This code of actions will be abbreviated ACT; furthermore, since these actions produce effects, each effect will have a generic name giving a kind of title to the sequence, and we shall number each of the terms which constitute it, as they appear (ACT. “To be deep in”: 1: to be absorbed).

(3) *which overtake even the shallowest of men, in the midst of the most tumultuous parties.* ★ The fact “there is a party” (given here obliquely), soon to be followed by further data (a private house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré), forms a pertinent signifier: the wealth of the Lanty family (SEM. Wealth). ★★ The phrase is a conversion of what might easily be a real proverb: “*Tumultuous parties: deep daydreams.*” The statement is made in a collective and anonymous voice originating in traditional human experience. Thus, the unit has been formed by a gnomic code, and this code is one of the numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which the text continually refers; we shall call them in a very general way *cultural codes* (even though, of course, all codes are cultural), or rather, since they afford the discourse a basis in scientific or moral authority, we shall call them reference codes (REF. Gnostic code).

## XI. THE FIVE CODES

As chance would have it (but what is chance?), the first three lexias—the title and the first sentence of the story—have al-

ready provided us with the five major codes under which all the textual signifiers can be grouped: without straining a point, there will be no other codes throughout the story but these five, and each and every lexia will fall under one of these five codes. Let us sum them up in order of their appearance, without trying to put them in any order of importance. Under the hermeneutic code, we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed (these terms will not always occur, they will often be repeated; they will not appear in any fixed order). As for the semes, we merely indicate them—without, in other words, trying either to link them to a character (or a place or an object) or to arrange them in some order so that they form a single thematic grouping; we allow them the instability, the dispersion, characteristic of motes of dust, flickers of meaning. Moreover, we shall refrain from structuring the symbolic grouping; this is the place for multivalence and for reversibility; the main task is always to demonstrate that this field can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic. Actions (terms of the proairetic code) can fall into various sequences which should be indicated merely by listing them, since the proairetic sequence is never more than the result of an artifice of reading: whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (*stroll, murder, rendezvous*), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given a name, it unfolds as this process of naming takes place, as a title is sought or confirmed; its basis is therefore more empirical than rational, and it is useless to attempt to force it into a statutory order; its only logic is that of the “already-done” or “already-read”—whence the variety of sequences (some trivial, some melodramatic) and the variety of terms (numerous or few); here again, we shall not attempt to put them into any order. Indicating them (externally and

internally) will suffice to demonstrate the plural meaning entangled in them. Lastly, the cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express.

## XII. THE WEAVING OF VOICES

The five codes create a kind of network, a *topos* through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text). Thus, if we make no effort to structure each code, or the five codes among themselves, we do so deliberately, in order to assume the multivalence of the text, its partial reversibility. We are, in fact, concerned not to manifest a structure but to produce a structuration. The blanks and looseness of the analysis will be like footprints marking the escape of the text; for if the text is subject to some form, this form is not unitary, architectonic, finite: it is the fragment, the shards, the broken or obliterated network—all the movements and inflections of a vast “dissolve,” which permits both overlapping and loss of messages. Hence we use *Code* here not in the sense of a list, a paradigm that must be reconstituted. The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; we know only its departures and returns; the units which have resulted from it (those we inventory) are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the sign of a virtual digression toward the remainder of a catalogue (*The Kidnapping* refers to every kidnapping ever written); they are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*. Referring to what has been written,

i.e., to the Book (of culture, of life, of life as culture), it makes the text into a prospectus of this Book. Or again: each code is one of the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is the network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven. Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect: the Voice of Empirics (the proairetisms), the Voice of the Person (the semes), the Voice of Science (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutisms), the Voice of Symbol.

(4) *Midnight had just sounded from the clock of the Elysée-Bourbon.* ★ A metonymy leads from the Elysée-Bourbon to the seme *Wealth*, since the Faubourg Saint-Honoré is a wealthy neighborhood. This wealth is itself connoted: a neighborhood of *nouveaux riches*, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré refers by synecdoche to the Paris of the Bourbon Restoration, a mythic place of sudden fortunes whose origins are suspect; where gold is produced without an origin, diabolically (the symbolic definition of speculation) (SEM. Wealth).

(5) *Seated in a window recess* ★ The development of an antithesis normally includes the exposition of each of its parts (A, B). A third term is possible: a joint presentation. This term can be purely rhetorical, if we are concerned to *introduce* or *summarize* the antithesis; but it can also be literal, if we are concerned to denote the physical conjunction of antithetical sites: a function which here devolves upon *recess*, an intermediate place between garden and salon, death and life (SYM. Antithesis: mediation).

(6) *and hidden behind the sinuous folds of a silk curtain,* ★ ACT. "Hiding place": 1: to be hidden.

(7) *I could contemplate at my leisure the garden of the mansion where I was spending the evening.* ★ *I could contemplate* means *I am going to describe*. The first term of the antithesis (garden) is introduced here from a rhetorical viewpoint (according to the code): there is a manipulation of the discourse, not of the story (SYM. Antithesis: A: introduction). We may note here, to return to it later, that *contemplation*, a visual posture, the arbitrary delimitation of a field of observation (the *templum* of the augurs), relates the whole description to the model of painting. ★★ SEM. Wealth (a party, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a mansion).

### XIII. CITAR

The *Party*, the *Faubourg*, the *Mansion* are anodyne data, seemingly lost in the *natural* flow of the discourse; in fact, they are touches designed to bring out the image of Wealth in the tapestry of the daydream. Thus, on several occasions the seme is "cited"; we would like to give this word its tauromachian meaning: the *citar* is the stamp of the heel, the torero's arched stance which summons the bull to the banderilleros. Similarly, one cites the signified (wealth) to make it come forth, while avoiding it in the discourse. This fleeting citation, this surreptitious and discontinuous way of stating themes, this alternating of flux and outburst, create together the *allure* of the connotation; the semes appear to float freely, to form a galaxy of trifling data in which we read no order of importance: the narrative technique is impressionistic: it breaks up the signifier into particles of verbal matter which make sense only by coalescing: it plays with the distribution of a discontinuity (thus creating a character's "personality"); the greater the syntagmatic distance between two data, the more skillful the narrative; the performance consists in manipulating a certain degree of impressionism: the touch must be light, as though it weren't

worth remembering, and yet, appearing again later in another guise, it must already be a memory; the readerly is an effect based on the operations of solidarity (the readerly "sticks"); but the more this solidarity is renewed, the more the intelligible becomes intelligent. The (ideological) goal of this technique is to naturalize meaning and thus to give credence to the reality of the story: for (in the West) meaning (system), we are told, is antipathetic to nature and reality. This naturalization is possible only because the significant data released—or summoned—in a homeopathic rhythm are carried, borne along, by a purportedly "natural" medium: language: paradoxically, language, the integral system of meaning, is employed to de-systematize the secondary meanings, to naturalize their production and to authenticate the story: connotation is concealed beneath the regular sound of the "sentences," "wealth" beneath utterly natural syntax (subject and adverbial object) which says that a party is being given in a mansion which is located in a particular neighborhood.

(8) *The trees, partially covered with snow, stood out dimly against the grayish background of a cloudy sky, barely whitened by the moon. Seen amid these fantastic surroundings, they vaguely resembled ghosts half out of their shrouds, a gigantic representation of the famous Dance of the Dead.* ★ SYM. Antithesis: A: the outdoors. —★★ The snow here refers to cold, but this is not inevitable, it is even rare: the snow, a soft, downy cloak, rather connotes the warmth of homogeneous substances, the protection of a shelter. Here the cold is created by the partial nature of the snow covering: it is not the snow but the partialness that is cold; the sinister form is the partially covered form: the plucked, the skinned, the patchy, everything left of a wholeness preyed on by a nothingness (SEM. Cold). The moon, too, contributes to this deficiency: frankly sinister here, forming a defect in the landscape it lights; we will come upon it again endowed with an ambiguous softness when, in the

form of an alabaster lamp, it will illumine and feminize Vien's Adonis (No. 111), a portrait which is the (explicit) reflection of Girodet's Endymion (No. 547). The moon is the *nothingness* of light, warmth reduced to its deficiency: it illuminates by mere reflection without itself being an origin; thus, it becomes the luminous emblem of the castrato, a deficiency manifested by the empty glitter he borrows from femininity while young (an Adonis) and of which nothing remains but a leprous gray when he is old (the old man, the garden) (SEM. Selenity). Furthermore, the fantastic designates and will designate what is outside the limits of the human: supernatural, extra-terrestrial, this transgression is the castrato's, represented (later) as both sub-woman and sub-man (SEM. Fantastic). ★★★ REF. Art (The Dance of the Dead).

(9) *Then, turning in the other direction*, ★ Here the passage from one term of the Antithesis (outside, the garden) to the other (inside, the salon) is a bodily movement; thus it is not an artifice of discourse (part of the rhetorical code) but a physical act of conjunction (part of the symbolic level) (SYM. Antithesis: mediation).

(10) *I could admire the Dance of the Living!* ★ The Dance of the Dead (No. 8) was a stereotype, a fixed syntagm. Here, this syntagm is divided, a new syntagm is created (the *Dance of the Living*). Two codes are simultaneously understood: a code of connotation (in the *dance of death* the meaning is universal, arising from a coded knowledge, that of art history) and a code of denotation (in the *dance of the living*, each word, according to its dictionary meaning, is added to its predecessor); this divergence, this sort of double vision, defines the play on words. This play on words is constructed like a diagram for an Antithesis (a form whose symbolic importance we know): a common stem, *dance*, is diversified into two opposing syntagms (*death/life*), just as the narrator's body is the unique dividing line between the garden and the salon (REF. Play on words). ★★ *I could contemplate* set forth the first part (A) of the Antithesis (No. 7). "*I could admire*" symmetrically announces the second (B). The contemplation had reference to an actual painted picture; admiration, bringing forth shapes, colors, sounds, and scents, makes the description of the salon (still to come) like a theatrical scene (the stage). We will



return to this subjection of literature (particularly in its "realist" form) to other representational codes (SYM. Antithesis: B: statement).

(11) *a splendid salon decorated in silver and gold, with glittering chandeliers, sparkling with candles. There, milling about, whirling around, flitting here and there, were the most beautiful women of Paris, the richest, the noblest, dazzling, stately, resplendent with diamonds, flowers in their hair, on their bosoms, on their heads, strewn over dresses or in garlands at their feet. Light, rustling movements, voluptuous steps, made the laces, the silk brocades, the gauzes, float around their delicate forms. Here and there, some overly animated glances darted forth, eclipsing the lights, the fire of the diamonds, and stimulated anew some too-ardent hearts. One might also catch movements of the head meaningful to lovers, and negative gestures for husbands. The sudden outbursts of the gamblers' voices at each unexpected turn of the dice, the clink of gold, mingled with the music and the murmur of conversation, and to complete the giddiness of this mass of people intoxicated by everything seductive the world can hold, a haze of perfume and general inebriation played upon the fevered mind.* ★ SYM. Antithesis: B: indoors. ★★ The women are transformed into flowers (they are wearing them everywhere); this seme of flora will later be attached to the woman the narrator is in love with (whose outlines are "verdant"); further, *flora* connotes a certain conception of life in its pure state (because organic) which forms an antithesis with the dead "thing" the old man will represent (SEM. Flora). The rustling of laces, the gauzy floatings, the haze of perfumes, evoke the seme vaporous, antithetical to *angular* (No. 80), to the ~~geo-~~metrical (No. 76), the wrinkled (No. 82), all of which are forms which will be semes for the old man. In the old man, by way of contrast, what is intended is the *machine*; can we conceive (at least in readerly discourse) of a *vaporous machine*? (SEM. Vaporous.) ★★★ SEM. Wealth. ★★★★★ Allusively, an adulterous ambience is designated; it connotes Paris as an immoral city (Parisian fortunes, the Lantys' included, are immoral) (REF. Ethnic psychology: Paris).

(12) *Thus, on my right, the dark and silent image of death; on my left, the seemly bacchanalias of life: here, cold nature, dull, in*

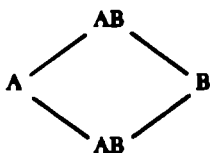
mourning; there, human beings enjoying themselves. ★ SYM. Antithesis: AB: résumé.

(13) *On the borderline between these two so different scenes, which, a thousand times repeated in various guises, make Paris the world's most amusing and most philosophical city, I was making for myself a moral macédoine, half pleasant, half funereal. With my left foot I beat time, and I felt as though the other were in the grave. My leg was in fact chilled by one of those insidious drafts which freeze half our bodies while the other half feels the humid heat of rooms, an occurrence rather frequent at balls.* ★ *Macédoine* connotes a composite, the mixture without combination of disparate elements. This seme will move from the narrator to Sarrasine (No. 195), thus weakening the notion that the narrator is merely a secondary, introductory character: symbolically, the two are equals. The *composite* is set against a condition which will have vast importance in Sarrasine's story, since it will be linked with the discovery of his first pleasure: the *lubricated* (No. 213). The failure of the narrator and of Sarrasine is the failure of a substance which does not "take" (SEM. Composite). ★★ Two cultural codes make their voices heard here: ethnic psychology (REF. "Paris") and popular medicine ("an easy way to catch cold is to stand in a window recess") (REF. Medicine). ★★★ The narrator's participation in the profound symbolism of the Antithesis is here made ironic, trivialized, minimized by reference to a physical causation which is vulgar, contemptible: the narrator pretends to reject the symbolic, which in his eyes is a "draft"; however, he will be punished for his disbelief (SEM. Asymbolism).

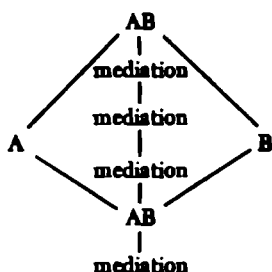
#### XIV. ANTITHESIS I: THE SUPPLEMENT

The several hundred figures propounded by the art of rhetoric down through the centuries constitute a labor of classification intended to name, to lay the foundations for, the world. Among all these figures, one of the most stable is the Antithesis; its apparent function is to consecrate (and domesticate) by a name, by a metalinguistic object, the division between

opposites and the very irreducibility of this division. The antithesis separates for eternity; it thus refers to a nature of opposites, and this nature is untamed. Far from differing merely by the presence or lack of a simple relationship (as is ordinarily the case with paradigmatic opposites), the two terms of an antithesis are each *marked*: their difference does not arise out of a complementary, dialectical movement (empty as opposed to full): the antithesis is the battle between two plenitudes set ritually face to face like two fully armed warriors; the Antithesis is the figure of the *given* opposition, eternal, eternally recurrent: the figure of the inexpiable. Every joining of two antithetical terms, every mixture, every conciliation—in short, every passage through the wall of the Antithesis—thus constitutes a transgression; to be sure, rhetoric can reinvent a figure designed to name the transgressive; this figure exists: it is the *paradoxism* (or alliance of words): an unusual figure, it is the code's ultimate attempt to affect the inexpiable. Hidden in the *recess*, between outside and inside, installed at the interior limit of adversation, spanning the wall of the Antithesis, the narrator brings this figure into play: he induces or supports a transgression. This transgression is in no way catastrophic, for the moment; ironized, trivialized, tamed, it is the object of an innocuous word, without relationship to the horror of the symbol (to the symbol as horror); and yet its outrageousness is immediately clear. How? Rhetorically, the antithesis of garden and salon has been saturated: the whole (AB) has been stated, each term has been individually introduced and described, and then once again, to sum up, the whole antithesis has been recapitulated in a harmoniously closed loop:



Now an element has thrust itself into this group which has been (rhetorically) completed. This element is the narrator's position (encoded as "mediation").





























Mediation upsets the rhetorical—or paradigmatic—harmony of the Antithesis (AB/A/B/AB) and this difficulty arises not out of a lack but out of an excess: there is one element in excess, and this untoward supplement is the body (of the narrator). As supplement, the body is the site of the transgression effected by the narrative: it is at the level of the body that the two *inconciliabilia* of the Antithesis (outside and inside, cold and heat, death and life) are brought together, are made to touch, to mingle in the most amazing of figures in a composite substance (without *holding together*), here whimsical (the macédoine) and later chimerical (the arabesque created by the old man and the girl when seated side by side). It is by way of this excess which enters the discourse after rhetoric has properly saturated it that something can be told and the narrative begin.

#### XV. THE FULL SCORE

The area of the (readerly) text is comparable at every point to a (classical) musical score. The divisions of the syntagm (in its

gradual movement) correspond to the divisions of the sonic flow into measures (one is hardly more arbitrary than the other). What stands out, what flashes forth, what emphasizes and impresses are the *semes*, the cultural citations and the symbols, analogous in their heavy timbre, in the value of their discontinuity, to the brass and percussion. What sings, what flows smoothly, what moves by accidentals, arabesques, and controlled *ritardandos* through an intelligible progression (like the melody often given the woodwinds) is the series of enigmas, their suspended disclosure, their delayed resolution: the development of an *enigma* is really like that of a *fugue*; both contain a *subject*, subject to an *exposition*, a *development* (embodied in the retards, ambiguities, and diversions by which the discourse prolongs the mystery), a *stretto* (a tightened section where scraps of answers rapidly come and go), and a *conclusion*. Finally, what sustains, flows in a regular way, brings everything together, like the strings, are the *proairetic* sequences, the series of actions, the cadence of familiar gestures:

LEXIAS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Semes													
Cultural codes													
Antithesis													
Enigma 1													
"Deep in"													
"Hidden"													

The analogy can be carried even further. We can attribute to two lines of the polyphonic table (the hermeneutic and the

proairetic) the same tonal determination that melody and harmony have in classical music: the readerly text is a *tonal* text (for which habit creates a reading process just as conditioned as our hearing: one might say there is a *reading eye* as there is a tonal ear, so that to unlearn the readerly would be the same as to unlearn the tonal), and its tonal unity is basically dependent on two sequential codes: the revelation of truth and the coordination of the actions represented: there is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence. Now, it is *precisely this constraint which reduces the plural of the classic text*. The five codes mentioned, frequently heard simultaneously, in fact endow the text with a kind of plural quality (the text is actually polyphonic), but of the five codes, only three establish permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time (the semic, cultural, and symbolic codes); the other two impose their terms according to an irreversible order (the hermeneutic and proairetic codes). The classic text, therefore, is actually tabular (and not linear), but its tabularity is vectorized, it follows a logico-temporal order. It is a multivalent but incompletely reversible system. What blocks its reversibility is just what limits the plural nature of the classic text. These blocks have names: on the one hand, truth; on the other, empiricism: against—or between—them, the modern text comes into being.

(14) "Monsieur de Lanty hasn't owned this house for very long, has he?"

"Oh yes. Maréchal Carigliano sold it to him nearly ten years ago."

"Ah!"

"These people must have a huge fortune."

"They must have."