

TOWARD A SCIENCE OF SEMIOLOGY:
THE WRITINGS OF ROLAND BARTHES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Marvin Leslie Brown, Jr.
August, 1977

FOREWORD

This study grew from a graduate seminar entitled "Structuralism," conducted in 1974 at the University of Houston by Professor John McNamara. For the inspiration and guidance he has provided for this project, the author wishes to thank Professor McNamara, whose willingness to explore uncharted intellectual territory was essential to the realization of this thesis.

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Ferdinand de Saussure, dubbed the "Father of Modern Linguistics," was the first to describe language as a system of signs, and to postulate the existence of a general science of signs, which he termed "semiology," of which linguistics was a part. The fact that semiology, as proposed by Saussure, remains a tentative science is seized upon by Roland Barthes in the introduction to his Elements of Semiology as a springboard for his extensions and revisions of semiological concepts.

Barthes' aim, in revising Saussure's position regarding the role of linguistics in semiological study, is to propose methodologies to aid the development of semiology into a science. Barthes' methodologies have brought him recognition as the leading proponent of semiology, and his pronouncements are relevant not only to the significations of literature, but also to all of the signs which pervade society.

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Part One. Barthes: Cultural Code

"Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images."¹ More than 2,000 years after these words were written by Aristotle, man is still debating their verity. It is difficult to believe, and somehow embarrassing to realize, that he was able to write them in such an unequivocal manner. Historically, man has tried to formulate theories which would make sense out of his surroundings and which would enable him to communicate his thoughts successfully. In order to do this a common bond was needed--both among the phenomena man perceived and among the minds of men. For many philosophers the common bond was not to be found in the content of things which men experienced, so they turned to another abstract concept in the hope that it would provide them with a basis for understanding meaning--that concept was form.

As Jean Piaget has pointed out in his study, Structuralism, a large number of theorists compose this group: ". . . if it were

necessary to cover formalism in every sense of the word . . . all philosophical positions that are not empiricist would be let in . . . those which invoke Platonic forms or Husserlian essences, not to forget Kant's brand of formalism . . ."2 However, these arguments based on formalism settled nothing; they merely created more disputes, but still the faithful pursue the promise of the common bond. Although the road is old and well traveled, there have been some recent journeys taken upon it which are perhaps more encouraging than those that have preceded.

Structuralism is a methodology which deals with this age-old philosophic concern and which has matured into a full-fledged movement within this century. Generally, structuralism is concerned with form, or more accurately, structure, at the expense of content. Structuralists attempt to find and define the organizational principles which underlie empirical phenomena--individual phenomena are not as important to the structuralists as are the systems in which they dwell and by which they operate. The primary concern of structuralism is with universals or wholes, since the advocates of the methodology maintain that little can be learned from individual, unrelated instances, and, since the structuralist view of the world is holistic, the notion of "unrelated instances" is itself absurd to structuralists. For some structuralists the plane upon which meet all the related phenomena of man's reality is the mind: they assert that, in addition to the ways in which men may know empirically, there is a structure of functions

which operate within man's reason, his rational mode of knowing. All structuralists agree that the plane upon which the structure is manifested is language, both oral and written. For that reason linguistics has served as the paradigm for structuralist endeavors. Of course, such a set of concepts of man's knowledge understandably would stimulate a great deal of interest among scholars with a special interest in literature. Since man's communication occupies the central position in the field of structuralism, the beginning of a study of the methodology should concern itself chiefly with the languages of man. However, this is a procedural matter, and any study of structuralism owes its reader the courtesy of reminding him that structuralism unavoidably touches upon all manifestations of culture, for it acknowledges no arbitrary dividing lines between them.

The ancestor of the structuralist movement was Ferdinand de Saussure, dubbed the "Father of Modern Linguistics,"³ for it was his linguistic theories which guided the structuralist experiments which followed him. Those linguistic theories are contained in Cours de linguistique générale (Course in General Linguistics), the contents of which were reconstructed from the class notes of his students, published in 1915, after his death. The concepts set forth in Course in General Linguistics have been of central importance to the development of structuralist and semiological studies. The volume is immensely valuable to an understanding of "structuralist jargon," including synchrony, diachrony, syntagmatic and associative (or paradigmatic)

relations, and what is generally intended by its usage. Of the myriad concepts discussed by Saussure, however, the most valuable one for the development of semiology (and, therefore, for the purposes of this study) is contained in the first chapter of the first part of his book, entitled "Nature of the Linguistic Sign." Saussure maintained that the linguistic sign is a "two-sided psychological entity"⁴ which consists of a concept and a sound-image. To illustrate this principle Saussure uses a drawing of a tree to represent the concept and the Latin word arbor to represent the sound-image; he then changes terminology for the ideas which he has illustrated, replacing "concept" with "signified" and "sound-image" with "signifier." These terms--signifier, signified and the concept which they compose, the sign--are the basic concepts upon which the study of semiology is founded.

Saussure was the first to postulate the existence of a general science of signs, which he termed "semiology": "A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be . . ." (ibid., p. 16). However, as Roland Barthes has noted, since Saussure made that statement many theorists have explored its implications: "Semiology has not yet come into being. But since Saussure himself, and sometimes independently of him, a whole section of contemporary

research has constantly been referred to the problem of meaning: psycho-analysis, structuralism, eidetic psychology, some new types of literary criticism of which Bachelard has given the first examples, are no longer concerned with facts except inasmuch as they are endowed with significance. Now to postulate a signification is to have recourse to semiology. I do not mean that semiology could account for all these aspects of research equally well: they have different contents. But they have a common status: they are all sciences dealing with values. They are not content with meeting the facts: they define and explore them as tokens for something else. Semiology is a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content."⁵ Of course, it is apparent from his comment that Barthes is among these semiologist-explorers; indeed, he is currently considered to be the foremost among them.

Of the movements which Barthes notes to be greatly concerned with semiology, the one with which he is most frequently identified is structuralism. As a holistic movement with applications in many disciplines, structuralism, as was mentioned previously, is almost wholly indebted to the linguistic theories of Saussure. However, this does not tell one what structuralism is. One of the most concise definitions and historical perspectives of structuralism is offered by Jacques Ehrmann, a noted critic, in his edition of the anthology Structuralism:

What is structuralism? Before being a philosophy, as some tend to see it, it is a method of analysis. Even

as such its many facets and different uses make it a subject of various interpretations, debate, even polemics. No simple or single definition applies to it except in very general terms. One could say a structure is a combination and relation of formal elements which reveal their logical coherence within given objects of analysis. Although structuralism can hardly be subsumed in some overall formula, or be given any label which will identify it for public consumption, we can say it is first of all, when applied to the sciences of man, a certain way of studying language problems and the problems of languages. Initially it was concerned with the structure of languages (langues), an area first explored by linguists whose interest developed the methods under study. It was then applied to anthropological inquiries, and in particular to the study of myths which are of the nature of a language (langage). The structural method also extends to the structures of the unconscious, as they are apprehended in psychoanalytical discourse, to the structures of the plastic arts with their language of forms, to musical structures where Lévi-Strauss believes he finds the very type of structural activity, and to the structures of literature since literary language, drawing upon ordinary language, transforms it into langage par excellence (from the point of view of the literary critic, at least!).

Thus, structuralism attempts to uncover the internal relationships which give different languages (langages) their form and function. On a broader point of view, scholars are now trying to lay the bases for a science of signs--semiotics--which would include not only these languages but also any system of signs. Without pursuing this tangent, we can simply say that since languages have in common their function as communication, it is impossible to overestimate the degree to which each discipline--the social sciences especially, but the natural sciences as well--can₆ profit from the methods of neighboring disciplines.

The contributions of Jakobson, who was associated with the Russian formalist movement until he left Moscow for Prague in 1920, to the development of structuralism are numerous, but for the purposes of this study the most seminal of his writings is the essay "The Metaphoric and

Metonymic Poles,"⁷ which outlines two concepts which are of extreme importance to structuralist analysis. The first of these concepts is embodied in the title of the essay; by studying the language patterns of aphasiacs Jakobson has noted that the "development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity." The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second . . ."

(ibid., pp. 1113-14). These two distinctive semantic developments are easily observed in aphasiacs, Jakobson explains, because they suffer from an impairment of one or the other of the two faculties; some aphasiacs are afflicted by a suppression of the "relation of similarity" (metaphor), while others have little or no capacity for the "relation of contiguity" (metonym). The two terms "metaphor" and "metonym," in the senses outlined by Jakobson, are used extensively throughout structuralist studies. Furthermore, there is a striking similarity between the notions of "metaphoric" and "paradigmatic" (or "associative"--Saussure's term) relationships, and between the ideas of "metonymic" and "syntagmatic" relationships. The "bipolar structure of language" (ibid., p. 1115) which Jakobson traces in "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" has helped nurture the binary (or privative) opposition school of thought among the structuralist community. As Roland Barthes explains in Elements of Semiology, "A privative opposition means any opposition in which the signifier

of a term is characterized by the presence of a significant element, or mark, which is missing in the signifier of the other . . . the general opposition marked/unmarked . . ."⁸ According to Barthes the simplicity and the importance of the privative opposition has caused many structuralists to propose the reduction of all known oppositions to the binary pattern, since, as they claim, the binary principle reflects a universal fact (ibid., pp. 80-81). However, the influence of Jakobson's delineation of the metaphoric and metonymic poles had another profound effect on structuralist study, particularly the branch of structuralist study which has in the main concerned itself with literature. Jakobson asserts in "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" that literary genres are characterized by a predominance of either metaphor or metonymy: "The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of Romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called realistic trend, which belongs to an intermediary state between the decline of Romanticism and the rise of symbolism and is opposed to both . . . the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in time and space. He is fond of synecdochic details" (p. 1114). Such mood-setting devices are employed liberally by masters of realism like Flaubert, to whom Barthes has devoted a good deal of attention in his study of literary genres contained in Writing Degree Zero.⁹

Russian formalism is essentially related to the literary applications of structuralism: both movements share the common paradigm of linguistics and many formalists were later involved in structuralist developments. The forefather of the Russian formalists, Alexander Potebnya (1835-1891), pointed the way in which critics such as Shklovsky, Tynyanov and Tomashevsky later proceeded. Potebnya's contention that the study of literature should not be subservient to any other discipline--be it historical, sociological, philosophical or psychological--led to the intensely intrinsic examination of literary works which was characteristic of formalist analyses. Potebnya called for a study of literature as literature, which of necessity, he said, must be primarily a study of language. Although some of the formalists who followed Potebnya renounced several of his theories, this basic one remained of central concern to the formulators of Russian formalist criticism.¹⁰

Although several luminaries of the formalist school were later involved in and lent their formalist predilections to the establishment of the structuralist movement, structuralism as a set of literary critical methodologies does not represent merely a direct result of the historical progression of Russian formalism, nor has structuralism developed independently of formalism; both movements are interrelated, and yet their differences must also be noted. The primary difference between formalism and literary structuralism is one of methodological direction. Formalism generally emphasizes the primacy of the literary work: it asserts, a priori, that literature is different from non-

literature, and its practitioners have attempted to ferret out the determinants which make literature "literary." Structuralism also begins its procedures within a work, but it is most interested in how the various elements of a work function and relate with each other to constitute the work under examination. Structuralism, moreover, is less a theory than it is a methodology; it professes to move inductively, and structuralist commentators are noted for their disavowal of the claim that structuralism is a well-defined ideology.

The formalist will typically allow no reductive procedure in his analysis--the work under scrutiny must remain the same throughout an examination of it; the level of commentary in a formalist analysis is necessarily a surface one. However, it is incumbent upon structuralist methodology to begin an analysis of a work by reducing it to its underlying structure in order to study its universal principles; later the work is "reassembled" with the aid of the new insights gained by the initial reductive procedure. The reassembled work, as André Martinet points out, is believed to be quite different from the original with which the structuralist begins. According to Martinet some commentators are of the opinion that "structure is not a characteristic of the object but a model set up by the scholar in order better to understand the object," ("Structure and Language," Structuralism, ed. Ehrmann, p. 3). Martinet indicates that he does not share in that belief, but he, and Barthes, do

believe that in addition to being a characteristic of the object, structure may be used to devise a model which aids understanding.

Components of the underlying structure (or "deep structure") of a literary work may also be seen, in structural analysis, to correspond to structural elements of disciplines other than literature. This notion of correspondence is very different from the essentially outward direction of literary criticism which predominated prior to the beginnings of formalism, and it differs from the isolationary trends of formalism as well. The dialectical movement (disassembling and reassembling) characteristic of structural investigation signaled a departure from formalism, which itself was a vigorous reaction to the symbolist criticism which preceded it. In the process of taking a work apart many literary "scientists" discovered that forms of literature corresponded to the structures of other manifestations of man's thinking, and these correspondences were made apparent through methodologies postulated by linguists; perhaps what was more important was that critical observers in other disciplines experienced the same phenomenon with their chief areas of concern. As Jacques Ehrmann points out in Structuralism, the movement's methodology has found proponents in various disciplines, perhaps mainly because of the holistic implications of the concept of deep structure. As Barthes mentions in Mythologies, Saussure's postulation of the existence of a general science of signs, "semiology," of which structuralism is a part and to which structuralism is indebted

for much of its development, has had a great deal of appeal for theorists in diverse disciplines.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the distinguished French anthropologist, is the chief proponent of the application of structural methodology to anthropological studies. He acknowledges the indebtedness which his field of specialization has to structural linguistics and Saussure, but he also differentiates between anthropological and linguistic methodologies. Lévi-Strauss credits the advent of structural linguistics with revolutionizing the relationship between linguistics and the social sciences; due to its emphasis upon systems and general laws, rather than upon historical analysis, structural linguistics has made possible the exchange of technical and methodological advances between sociology and anthropology. According to Lévi-Strauss, "Not only did it renew linguistic perspectives; a transformation of this magnitude is not limited to a single discipline. Structural linguistics will certainly play the same renovating role with respect to the social sciences that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences."¹¹

"The Structural Study of Myth" (ibid., pp. 206-31) stresses Lévi-Strauss' theory that there exists an inseparable relationship between social anthropology and linguistics, and, indeed, between social anthropology and literature. Within this chapter of Structural Anthropology Lévi-Strauss analyzes the Oedipus myth to "discover" the universal nature of this deep structure (pp. 213-19). However, not

only has Lévi-Strauss benefited from the methodologies of structural linguistics, but literary structuralist endeavors have benefited from his interpretation and usage of those methodologies; many applications of Lévi-Strauss' methods have been fruitfully employed in analyses of literary works.

The influence which Jakobson and other members of the Prague school have had upon Lévi-Strauss, and his reciprocal influence upon them, is characteristic of the far-reaching effects of structural linguistics. In his book, The Rise and Fall of Anthropological Theory, Marvin Harris states:

The great accomplishment of Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, and their followers was to demonstrate the systemic nature of the set of phonological contrasts employed by each language in building its repertory of significant sounds. The structure of such a system cannot be described by a simple linear catalogue of the significant sounds; the structure consists rather of the matrix or network of oppositions in which binary groupings of sound differences take their position in a multidimensional space. By viewing phonological repertories in this perspective, the apparently infinite variety of sound specialties characteristic of the world's languages is reduced to a small number of systems of contrast in which general categories of contrast substitute for specific phones (e.g., consonants versus vowels and voiced versus unvoiced features). This discovery of the deeper structure underlying surface appearances provides the model scientific achievement toward the emulation of which Lévi-Strauss had already turned his energies during the preparation of his study of kinship.¹²

An obvious result of this linguistic-anthropological interrelationship was a collaborative examination by Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson of the various corresponding structures of a short poem by Baudelaire, "Les Chats."¹³ In a preface to the essay Lévi-Strauss justified the

occasion of his indulgence in an exercise which he had previously discouraged: "Admittedly, the author of this preliminary note has at one time described the myth as being in opposition to the poetic work . . . but those who have reproached him for this have not taken into account the fact that the very notion of opposition implies that the two forms were originally conceived of as complementary terms, belonging to the same category" (ibid., p. 202). The essay, to embellish upon Lévi-Strauss' remarks, may be seen to be a mediator between poetic and mythic criticism. In "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" Barthes, in a discussion of the unity of culture as a general system of symbols, demonstrates the meaning of a popular structuralist term, homology: "the structure of the sentence, the object of linguistics, is found again, homologically, in the structure of works" (The Structuralists, ed. DeGeorge, p. 157). Lévi-Strauss ends the prefatory note to his and Jakobson's essay by indicating that the correspondence between poetic and mythic structural analyses is a homologous one: " . . . if either method can be selected according to the circumstances, it is because, in the final analysis, they can be substituted one for the other without necessarily being completely interchangeable" (p. 203). The careful wording of his concluding statement allows Lévi-Strauss to keep a respectable distance between anthropological and linguistic methodologies.

Jacques Lacan, whose field of specialization is psychoanalysis, does not share Lévi-Strauss' reticence in acknowledging the inter-

relation between linguistic structures and the structures of the human mind: " . . . what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language " (The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," Structuralism, ed. Ehrmann, p. 103). Lacan's procedure has been essentially one of developing a scientific study of the unconscious, first revealed by Freud, through the use of a methodology indebted to the work of Saussure.¹⁴ (His thoughts concerning "the Other," and other Freudian concepts, are utilized by Barthes in his book On Racine, and it should also be noted that Lacan is a member of the faculty of the École Pratique de Hautes Études, as is Roland Barthes.) In a section of his book, Structuralism in Literature, entitled "Structuralism as a Movement of Mind" Robert Scholes comments upon the holistic nature of structuralism, of which the concept of correspondence between the structure of the mind and the structures of its manifestations is a part. Scholes emphasizes the need felt for a holistic philosophy, which led to the development of structuralism--a need which, according to him, was religious in nature: "The last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth were characterized by the fragmentation of knowledge into isolated disciplines so formidable in their specialization as to seem beyond all synthesis . . . The language-philosophers insisted that there is no possible correspondence between our language and the world beyond it. The existentialists spoke of isolated man, cut off from objects and even from other men,

in an absurd condition of being . . . And the only concerted opposition to this posture came from the philosophers of Marxism . . . One of the most penetrating of these attacks came from the scientifically oriented Marxist, Christopher Caudwell . . . Structuralism, I am suggesting, is a response to the need expressed . . . by Caudwell for a 'coherent system' that would unite the modern sciences and make the world habitable for man again. This is a religious need, of course."¹⁵ Structuralists typically allow no arbitrary division among the arts, science, philosophy, or any other discipline--in fact if carried to its logical extreme structuralism would make the very discussion of various disciplines difficult, because the concept "discipline" would not be recognized.

Roland Barthes often carries structuralism to its logical extreme. Methodological similarities are recognizable among the works of Barthes, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson and Saussure, and the general aspects of the formalist and structuralist movements. However, Barthes also differs, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically, from these other influences. Like formalist theorists in general Barthes' point of analytic origin is intrinsic, but he also moves outward (as do the structuralists) to utilize concepts which are more often associated with disciplines other than literature or linguistics. Barthes' methodological directions, however, often extend beyond those of many structuralists to a point where there are few or no barriers among literature and other disciplines; for Barthes that point is semiology.

This study intends to inspect the contribution which Barthes has made toward the establishment of semiology as a science. To accomplish this objective, this study will address itself to the issues of Barthes' thoroughness in analyzing materials and the coherence of his method in doing so. The directions for semiological study which Barthes outlines in the Elements of Semiology are reviewed and utilized to discuss the way in which he has applied his concepts to the analyses of specific phenomena; special attention is given to his analyses of literary works. Other concerns which have appeared in Barthes' latest analyses are also the subject of this study, but the principles of the Elements provide the basic organization for the discussion of them. The cursory historical and topical account of formalist-structuralist commentary which has preceded is intended to acquaint the reader with the development of ideas with which Barthes is chiefly concerned. The term "cultural code," used by Barthes in his analysis, S/Z, to denote the presence of information which refers to a science or a body of knowledge, is borrowed for the title of this part of this study. The science (or quasi-science) referred to in this case is semiology; the body of knowledge referred to in this section is biographical.

Roland Barthes, who was born in 1915, is the Director d' Études of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where he conducts seminars on the sociologies of signs, symbols and collective representations. The result of one of these seminars, a two-year project which took

place from 1968 through 1969, was published in 1970 as S/Z. As founder in 1936 of the Groupe Théâtral Antique at the Sorbonne Barthes was able to draw upon his previous studies of French literature and classics at the University of Paris. Following a long illness he taught French at universities in Egypt and Rumania, after which he joined the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, devoting himself to research in sociology and lexicology. In 1947 Barthes published a number of articles on literary criticism and the nature of writing in Combat, a Paris newspaper. The articles were collected and published under the title Le Degré Zéro de L'Écriture (Writing Degree Zero) in 1953. He helped found the magazine Théâtre Populaire, and has been one of the principal advocates in France of Brechtian theatre, in addition to being one of the most vocal spokespersons for the "nouvelle critique" and the "nouveau roman," the latter being most aptly represented by the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet.¹⁶

Although the impact of Barthes' work has been upon the European academy, English-speaking theorists and scholarly commentators have become increasingly aware of his influence upon literary and sociological matters. In addition to several articles and essays which have appeared in British and American journals and periodicals, nine of Barthes' books have been published in translation. The first English translation of On Racine was published in 1964. It was followed in 1968 by the publication of Writing Degree Zero, which was combined with Elements of Semiology and re-published in 1970, and two collections

of Barthes' essays, Mythologies and Critical Essays, were published in 1972. The book-length essay, S/Z, which analyzes Balzac's short story, "Sarrasine," was translated and published in 1974, and Barthes' three most recent books in translation, The Pleasure of the Text, Sade/Fourier/ Loyola and Roland Barthes, bear 1975, 1976 and 1977 publication dates, respectively. In translation Barthes' work is most often encountered through the study of either the formalist or structuralist movement, which has led many of Barthes' critics to presume that a principle of either the formalist or structuralist "school" would be applicable necessarily to Barthes. However, Barthes properly would be associated with one "school," of which he is headmaster, and that is semiology.

Barthes has stated numerous times, and in numerous contexts, that every human activity is a language in the sense that each one forms its own system of rules and operations. Each of these social languages makes up the total and ultimate language: semiology. Saussure states in Course in General Linguistics that linguistics is merely a part of semiology (p. 16). The fact that semiology as proposed by Saussure remains a tentative science is used by Barthes in the introduction to Elements of Semiology as a springboard for his extensions and revisions of semiological concepts. Rather than seeing semiology as the paradigm for linguistics, Barthes advocates viewing language as the basic structure of the science of semiology. As Barthes understates his position in the Elements, "Now it is far from certain that in the social life of today there are to be found any extensive systems of signs outside human language" (p. 9).

Part One Notes

¹ Aristotle, "On Interpretation," Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica), 8 (1952), p. 25.

² Jean Piaget, Structuralism, trans. and ed. Channing Maschler (New York: Harper, 1970), pp. 5-6. Originally published in French in 1968.

³ Richard DeGeorge and Fernande DeGeorge, eds., The Structuralists from Marx to Lévi-Strauss (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), p. xviii.

⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. W. Baskin, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 66. First edition published in French in 1915.

⁵ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 111. First edition published in French in 1957.

⁶ Jacques Ehrmann, ed., Structuralism (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. ix-x.

⁷ Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), pp. 1113-16.

⁸ Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1970), p. 76. Originally published in French in 1964.

⁹ _____, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1970). Originally published in French in 1953.

¹⁰ Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, trans. and eds., Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1965), pp. xi-xii.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 32-33. Originally published in French in 1958.

¹² Marvin Harris, The Rise of Anthropological Theory (New York: Cromwell, 1968), p. 494.

¹³ Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Charles Baudelaire's 'Les Chats,'" Introduction to Structuralism, ed. Michael Lane (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 202-21.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Jacques Lacan, The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968). Originally published in French in 1956.

¹⁵ Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ See Roland Barthes' autobiographical work, Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), originally published in French in 1975, for further biographical insights. Also see notes on the back cover of The Pleasure of the Text and S/Z, on the frontispiece to Critical Essays, and the note on Barthes at the conclusion of Writing Degree Zero/Elements of Semiology, p. 112, of the editions of these works referenced elsewhere in this study.

Part Two. A Special Kind of Language

Chapter One. Exploring the Limits

Barthes does not postulate a fixed science of semiology in his Elements, but he does contend that semiology's first step in establishing itself as a science is to "at least try itself out, explore its possibilities and impossibilities" (Elements, p. 11). Exploring the applications of semiological analysis is apparently what Barthes has devoted his life to. Elements of Semiology is a complete philosophic-technical treatise on the development of structural linguistic and semiological concerns, with suggestions for further development of the quasi-science. The implied purpose of the book is to enumerate the various elements which contributed to and make up semiological research so that interested parties (other than the author) may have at their disposal a guideline for conducting valid semiological studies. Elements of Semiology does accomplish this purpose; however, to the reader familiar with Barthes' work the treatise is seen to fulfill another objective--that of laying the groundwork for further semiological research by Barthes himself. This is the point at which Barthes loses credibility with some scholars, such as Raymond Picard, because they argue that his work is circular--i.e., in order to evaluate properly his writings for validity they must be measured in light of the rules

which he has written. However, for the present it seems that Barthes' critics must be content to simply lament this point, because he is the preeminent commentator in the field of semiology. As the chief explorer of the possibilities and impossibilities of semiology, Barthes is convinced that interdisciplinary investigation is one of the methodology's strongest possibilities.

Language serves as both model and component for Barthes' concept of semiology, but "such language is not quite that of the linguist: it is a second-order language, with its unities no longer monemes or phonemes, but larger fragments of discourse referring to objects or episodes whose meaning underlies language, but can never exist independently of it. Semiology is therefore perhaps destined to be absorbed into a trans-linguistics, the materials of which may be myth, narrative, journalism, or on the other hand objects of our civilization, in so far as they are spoken (through press, prospectus, interview, conversation and perhaps even the inner language, which is ruled by the laws of imagination)" (Elements, p. 11). According to Barthes semiology achieves, or has the potential for achieving, its own special synthesis of studies of traditionally diverse disciplines, because it is primarily concerned with the element common to all of them: their relation to, and existential dependence upon, humanity. It is humanity which imposes signification upon the objects of the world.

Signification is the unifying principle which lies at the heart of semiological study. All of the objects of the world which man

perceives are bestowed with a value, because they signify various things to him. As was mentioned in the first part of this study, Robbe-Grillet's work has been of particular concern to Barthes, and one of the main reasons why this so is found in several of the essays in Barthes' Critical Essays--Robbe-Grillet addresses in his novels the problematics of human significance: "As we know, Alain Robbe-Grillet's work deals with this problem of the literary object; do things induce meanings, or on the contrary are they 'matte'? Can and should the writer describe an object without referring it to some human transcendence? Signifying or non-signifying, what is the function of objects in a fictional narrative?"¹ In an essay entitled "Objective Literature" Barthes examines instances in Robbe-Grillet's works in which the author strips his objects of their significance to humanity: "The author's entire art is to give the object a Dasein, a 'being there,' and to strip it of 'being something.' Hence Robbe-Grillet's object has neither function nor substance. Or more precisely, both are absorbed by the object's optical nature" (Critical Essays, p. 15). According to cinema analyst Christian Metz, Robbe-Grillet has also utilized a similar concept in his technique of film-making: "A sequence of film, like a spectacle from life, carries its meaning within itself. The signifier is not easily distinguished from the significate . . . This is an entirely new concept of ordering. The cinema is the 'phenomenological' art par excellence, the signifier is coextensive with the whole of the

significate, the spectacle its own signification, thus short-circuiting the sign itself."² Robbe-Grillet's art, which calls to the attention of the spectator the existence of the nature of the significance of objects, is contrasted by Barthes in "The World as Object" to the art of the Dutch masters, which encases its objects in a patina of fixed functions: "Consider the Dutch still life: the object is never alone, and never privileged; it is merely there, among many others, painted between one function and another, participating in the disorder of the movements which have picked it up, put it down--in a word, utilized. All this is man's space . . . there is no other authority in his life but the one he imprints upon the inert by shaping and manipulating it" (Critical Essays, p. 5). So Robbe-Grillet's work has the consequence of making the problematic nature of significance obvious and of making the reader deal with the problems; by negating the human element, which usually bestows significance, he questions the necessity of its existence and forces the reader to supply the answers. Robbe-Grillet's technique makes the reader conscious of that of which he is usually unconscious: the process of signification.

In Saussure's theoretical framework the process of signification is composed of two basic elements: the signifier and the signified. According to Saussure the relationship between the components of the linguistic sign, the signifier and the signified, is an arbitrary one. As was mentioned in Part One Saussure's Course in General

Linguistics illustrates the duality and the arbitrariness of a linguistic sign by using a drawing of a tree to stand for the signified (or psychological "concept") and the latin word "arbor" to represent the signifier (or psychological "sound-image"). Both elements, the sound-image "arbor" and the concept "tree," make up the complete linguistic sign: "The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other" (Course, p. 66). Although the word "arbor" has a socially conditioned and historical connection to the concept "tree," Saussure points out that there is no natural bond between them; another sound-image could as easily be associated with the same concept, therefore the linguistic sign is unmotivated. He contrasts the linguistic sign with the notion of symbol, which is motivated: "One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary . . . for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot" (p. 68).

Barthes distinguishes between the linguistic and the semiological sign through the use of a concept introduced into linguistic theory by Louis Hjelmslev in his book Essais Linguistiques. The plane of the signifiers constitutes the plane of expression; the plane of the signifieds constitutes the plane of content. In the diagram below, which illustrates this relationship, "Sr(E)" represents the plane of the signifier/expression and "Sd(C)" represents the plane of the

signified/content:

$$\frac{Sd(C)}{Sr(E)} = \text{The Sign}$$

Hjelmslev distinguishes two elements within each of the planes: form and substance. The form of either the plane of expression, in which the signifier operates, or that of the plane of content, wherein resides the signified, can be described by operations which are intrinsic to the study of linguistics; a description of the substance of either of the components of the sign, however, requires the discussion of phenomena which are extrinsic to the system of linguistics. In most of his writings Barthes seems more concerned with the form of the two planes than with their substance, and his analyses usually concentrate upon the form of either the signifier or the signified. One essay, dealing with a history of madness written by Michel Foucault, is even concerned with the form of form: " . . . the history described by Michel Foucault is a structural history . . . the whole of Foucault's history answers: no, madness possesses no transcendent content. But what we can infer from Foucault's analyses . . . is that madness . . . corresponds to a permanent, one might say to a transhistorical form; this form cannot be identified with the marks or signs of madness (in the scientific sense of the term, i.e., with the infinitely various signifiers of what is signified . . . it is a question, rather, of a form of forms, i.e., of a specific structure" ("Taking Sides," Critical Essays, pp. 166-67).

However, substance also is important to Barthes' explanation of the nature of the semiological sign. The semiological sign,

according to Barthes, is similar to the linguistic sign in that it is composed of both a signifier and a signified, but the two differ at the level of their substances. Unlike linguistic signs, semiological signs do not exist solely to signify; the origin of a semiological sign is "utilitarian and functional," not arbitrary. Located somewhere between Saussure's notions of sign and symbol, semiological systems, which have "a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify," are termed by Barthes "sign-functions" (Elements, p. 41). Such sign-functions are some of the objects of Barthes' attention in his collection of essays entitled Mythologies.

Many phenomena are not readily observed as being "symbols"; due to their utilitarian aspects the significance of phenomena which one encounters every day is often overlooked. In Mythologies Barthes "discovers" the significance of such things as detergent, motion pictures, food, photography, toys, striptease, automobiles and literature, and accuses middle-class society of duplicity by hiding its awareness of the signification process under the guise of the "natural." While the process itself is hidden the signs are very apparent; in fact, the signs are used in a way which allows "realities" to be dismissed: "By appending to Eastern realities a few positive signs which mean 'native,' one reliably immunizes them against any responsible content" ("The Lost Continent," p. 96). Another of Barthes' essays, which deals with Mankiewicz' Julius Caesar, pin-points the inherent duplicity of the film in using a sign--a fringe

or a frontal lock of hair--to evoke "Roman-ness": "For although it is a good thing if a spectacle is created to make the world more explicit, it is both reprehensible and deceitful to confuse the sign with what is signified. And it is a duplicity which is peculiar to bourgeois art: between the intellectual and the visceral sign is hypocritically inserted a hybrid, at once elliptical and pretentious, which is pompously christened 'nature'" ("The Romans in Films," p. 28). Therefore, when the reader or viewer thinks that he is experiencing the "true nature" of something, he most often is indulging in acceptance of an artifice which lets him dismiss events (history). Or, as Robert Scholes interprets Barthes' thoughts on the subject, "The great error of the 'realist' in literature or in criticism is to assume that he is in touch with some ultimate context, while in reality he is simply transcribing a code" (Structuralism in Literature, p. 150). Such is the error, and the crime, according to Barthes, of the communicators, literary or otherwise, of society.

One aspect of his institutionalized coding is that a contractual relationship exists between a signifier and what is signified. Signs have a value, whether they are linguistic or semiological. Linguistics corresponds to the science of economics, in that the economic term "work" is homologous to the linguistic term "signifier"; the linguistic term "signified" is homologous to the economic term "reward." There is a dialectical relationship between both work and reward and

between signifier and signified: If either work or reward is altered, quantitatively or qualitatively, the system of exchange between them will also change. A similar system of exchange exists in the system of signification, and alteration of either of its terms will also produce a change in the system (Elements, pp. 54-55). Manipulators of the terms of the system of signification can often determine the results of their manipulations. For instance, Barthes illustrates in "Photography and the Electoral Appeal" that the ability of a campaign manager to present the most favorable "image" of his candidate can win elections ("the conventions of photography . . . are themselves replete with signs," Mythologies, p. 92). Similarly, advertising is viewed by Barthes, in "Operation Margarine" (*ibid.*, pp. 41-42) and "Soap-powders and Detergents" (pp. 36-38) to be an operation fully conscious of its use of signifiers in order to effect, in the consumer, a predetermined signified.

The existence of a sign or an economic value implies both the possibility to exchange dissimilar things (work and wage, signifier and signified) and to compare similar things. To illustrate this assertion Barthes writes, "One can exchange a five-franc note for bread, soap or a cinema ticket, but one can also compare this bank-note with ten--or fifty--franc notes" (Elements, p. 55). So both linguistics and economics have an equal share of synchronic (comparative) and diachronic (sequential--the exchange) aspects. Another ramification of the theory of value in the system of

signification is that the sign has a value of its own, but it also gains or loses value in relation to other signs. Meaning, in human activity, is the sum of a sign and its value.

Saussure's concept of the nature of language is also important to Barthes' formulation of semiological methodology. Saussure felt that there was a two-way division of the term "language (langue): "language" would stand for the social, collective contract, the universal (including potential) aspects of language--it is the ordering principle in human speech (langage), which belongs to both the individual and to society; "parole," the execution of the language act, is an individual act of selection and actualization (Saussure, Course, pp. 9-13). Barthes, and others, found many problems inherent in Saussure's dualistic view of the composition of language, the primary one being that the two terms were not always distinct and identifiable. According to the Saussurean framework it is possible to identify language with the code and parole with the message. However, in Elements of Semiology Barthes cites studies made by Jakobson in which he found cases of overlapping of the code and the message ("duplex structures").

For example, one case of duplex structure is that of the "shifters," such as the personal pronouns "I" and "you." The shifters may be seen to unite the code and the message, making the task of separating language from parole very difficult if one accepts the Saussurean distinction. Within utterances "I," because of a convention (social

contract), simply represents its object, a person who utters--this is the universal or conventional disposition of the shifter, which is the aspect that corresponds to Saussure's "language." However, the "I" can also be seen to have a particular value in that within any utterance the existence of the "I" is dependent upon the person speaking, and it refers to the particular traits of that person. In various applications, the shifter acquires even more complexity; Barthes writes of two major uses of the shifters in the essay "Historical Discourse": "Historical discourse seems to have two standard types of shifter. The first marks what might be called the monitorial mode . . . which combines a message (the event reported), a code-statement (the informer's contribution) and a message about the code-statement (the author's evaluation of his source . . . It may take many forms of expression: asides like as I have heard, as far as can be ascertained; the use of the present tense to make an intervention by the historian; or any reference to this historian's personal experience . . . The second type of shifter covers all those devices by which the writer declares a departure from or return to his itinerary, any explicit signpost to the organization of his own discourse" (Introduction to Structuralism, ed. Lane, p. 146).

Another type of shifter about which Barthes writes in "Historical Discourse" is that of the "referential illusion," in which the "author seeks to stand aside from his own discourse by systematically omitting any direct allusion to the originator of

the text: the history seems to write itself" (p. 148). According to Barthes this technique of the author "discards the human persona but replaces it by an 'objective' one; the authorial subject is as evident as ever, but it has become an objective subject" (ibid., p. 149). The referential illusion is a trait not only of historians, but also of the so-called "realist" writers of the late nineteenth century, with whom Barthes is chiefly concerned in his book, Writing Degree Zero. The opposite of the referential illusion is the overtly self-conscious writing such as is found in the contemporary work Chimera,³ by John Barth. In each of the three novellas which compose Chimera the author appears as one of the characters and he confronts the other characters and the reader with the problems of his narrative and with the techniques he uses to make the narration progress. By using this technique Barth directly involves the reader in the writing of the work--something with which, Roland Barthes contends, a reader of any work is involved. It is at the discretion of the author to acknowledge his part, and the reader's part, in the writing of a work.

Because of such problems as the shifters, Barthes has proposed modifications to the Saussurean dualism of language/parole according to the theories of Hjelmslev, who, in Barthes' opinion, redistributed Saussure's terms "in a more formal way" (Elements, p. 17). By dividing "langue" into three parts--"schema," langue as pure form; "norm," langue as material form, but spoken rather than written; and

"usage," langue as defined by the social or collective contract--the need for the term "parole" is eliminated, since it is supplanted by the term "usage," which implies both actualization and socialization. (If one were to examine Hjelmslev's trichotomy from a traditionally historic viewpoint he probably would relate "schema" to prehistoric man's "idea" of language, "norm" to his attempts to communicate the idea, and "usage" to later civilization's ordering of those attempts into formal systems of communication, both spoken and written.)

Redistribution of Saussure's original terms is paramount to Barthes' conception of semiology, because Barthes feels that linguistic principles may be utilized to examine the systems of semiological phenomena other than spoken or written language, and Hjelmslev's emphasis upon the importance of socialization of language bears directly upon semiological concerns.

"Language," in a semiological context, describes the system in which certain human concerns or activities operate and are bestowed with values of significance. For instance, as Barthes points out in various essays and books, there is a "language" of fashion, of food, of transportation, and, to extend the argument, of sex. Some of the sociological systems appear to Barthes to be "speech-rich," others are described as "speech-poor." A system which is rich in speech, that is, one such as the food system which has little or no dependence upon social group factors, can easily be related to Saussure's opposition of langue/parole. Barthes

illustrates the langue/parole distinction by noting the relationships among items listed on a restaurant menu (Elements, p. 28). The typical American menu, for instance, is organized according to a certain structure, the elements of which are usually appetizer, entrée, dessert and beverage. The structure, or form, of a menu corresponds to the notion of "langue," and the elements and their variations (such as types of entrées and methods of the preparation) correspond to the Saussurean "parole." According to Barthes, "the alimentary language is evolved only from a broadly collective usage /Tangue/, or from a purely individual speech /parole/."

However, in "speech-poor" systems, such as the automobile system, or in complex systems, such as the electronic media, the distinction between language and parole is very difficult or impossible to discern. "Speech-poor" systems are often governed by arbitrary codes which are determined by special interest groups: the "language" of the automobile is determined by its manufacturers--an individual auto is restricted in the variations which would constitute "speech" in the car system (ibid., p. 29). The appearance of an auto which breaks, even in a minor way, with the traditional closure of the automobile system is heralded as a major innovation: "It is obvious that the new Citroen has fallen from the sky inasmuch as it appears at first sight as a superlative object" ("The New Citroen," Mythologies, p. 88). As for the complex systems, such as the cinema, Barthes postulates in Elements of Semiology that it is "premature to decide . . . which facts

belong to the language and which belong to speech" (p. 30), since each of the semiological languages or systems which compose a complex system must be dealt with individually. Such is Christian Metz' attempt in Film Language.

In reading his many pronouncements about the relationship between language and semiological phenomena one question continually comes to mind: "How far is Barthes willing to extend the correspondence between them?" There is little ventured by asserting some essential, nebulous similarity between linguistic operations and all forms of human activity. It is quite another matter to postulate the ability to analyze man's activities by comparing their basic structures with basic linguistic structures. The illustration of the restaurant menu indicates the importance which Barthes attaches to linguistics in explaining signification theory: the arrangement of a menu constitutes a "grammar"--the grammar of a meal.

The signs of social and linguistic language are distributed upon two axes--system, or paradigm, and syntagm. A system or paradigm is synchronic, timeless; a syntagm is diachronic, arranged along a temporal continuum. This dichotomy is homologous to Jakobson's distinction between metonymy and metaphor in that system, or paradigm, and metaphor are concerned with associations among signs which are in the same category, and syntagm and metonymy are concerned with combinations of signs which are in different categories. In the illustration of the restaurant menu a systematic (paradigmatic) or

metaphoric study would consider the possible substitutions in the category "entrée" or in the category "dessert"; a syntagmatic or metonymic examination of the menu would be concerned with relationships among the categories "appetizer," "entrée" and "dessert"--those relationships would constitute the syntax or grammatical construction of a meal. Certainly, to construct a binary opposition between the two terms is an artificial exercise, and Barthes exhorts us to remember that paradigm and syntagm are usually interrelated within their original context: " . . . in metaphor, selection becomes contiguity, and in metonymy, contiguity becomes a field to select from" (Elements, p. 88). However, applications of the paradigmatic/syntagmatic distinction are fruitful for semiological study and the consequences of an "ungrammatical" way of eating, dressing or writing are easily traced--ungrammatical behavior is barely tolerated by society, and Barthes gives an instance of this in his essay "Literature and Discontinuity," which discusses the furor over Michel Butor's Mobile: "Mobile offended the very idea of the Book . . . to divide is to dissect, to destroy, to profane the Book's 'mystery,' i.e., its continuity . . . In short, to be a book, to satisfy its essence as a Book, the work must either flow (like a narrative) or gleam (like a flash of light). Outside these two systems lies violation, outrage of the Book, a not very tempting sin against the hygiene of letters" ("Literature and Discontinuity," Critical Essays, p. 175).

As has been indicated literature, or ordered writing, occupies a special place in Barthes' formulation of a science of semiology. The influence which literature has had upon the shaping and transforming of man's "reality" is remarked upon in Barthes' essay "Dominici, or the Triumph of Literature" (Mythologies, p. 43). It is evident that underlying this essay is Barthes' premise in Elements of Semiology that literature is a second-order language, and, as is further asserted in Mythologies, that literature and reality, two quite different substances (with similar "structures"), are often mistaken as being of the same order. The essay explains how one substance may be mistaken for the other, how the "bourgeois Establishment" may assign a bourgeois literary fate to a realistic member of the proletariat, and why these operations are not only ethically despicable but also logically invalid. The essay contains more than an outraged reaction to a documented, unjust event--within it are the principles of a defense of both the "new criticism" and the "new novel" of France, and an attack upon the opponents of the theories of the "new." In the last paragraph of the essay Barthes sweeps the reader's attention from the injustice of a particular event to the danger of the principle underlying it: " . . . there was also the spectacle of terror which threatens us all, that of being judged by a power which wants to hear only the language it lends us" (p. 46). The languages of traditional criticism and traditional literature are not, Barthes insists, the only ones which we have to draw upon.

In addition, reality is not the only model for literary language or events, nor should the language of reality be confused with literary language.

There is, of course, a commonality between non-literary and literary language, in that both use similar components: words and syntax. The language of reality, however, may be seen to have a function outside itself, whereas the language of literature constructs its own system in which its measure of "truth" is, for Barthes, actually a measure of validity. In his preface to Critical Essays, Barthes gives the example of the loss of a loved one by a friend. Barthes wishes to express his sympathy, so he proceeds to write a letter. If he were verbally communicating with his friend, his first impulse might be to say simply "I'm sorry" or "I sympathize," phrases which may seem inadequate by themselves, but when supplemented with facial expressions or gestures, would convey the friend's concern and sympathy. However, when written, such phrases will usually seem unsatisfactory to the writer, and he will most likely consider the substitution of the conventional word, "condolences." This will probably offer even less satisfaction to the writer of the message than the phrases of the first impulse, because it is so impersonal, so trite. The writer then attempts to select a phrase which will appear neither original nor conventional, neither direct nor impersonal--a sort of tempered originality: "Thus we find schools and periods assigning to literary communication a controlled zone, limited

on one side by the obligation of a 'varied' language and on the other by the closing of that variation, in the form of an acknowledged corpus of figures; this zone, a vital one, is called rhetoric, whose double function is to keep literature from being transformed into the sign of banality (if too direct) and into the sign of originality (if too indirect)" (Critical Essays, p. xvi). The tempered originality of language, then, is seen by Barthes to be an internal operation within the system of rhetoric, and literary works, at least traditional ones, are operations within the larger system of literature. That system has its own language--a second-order language--which facilitates its operations.

The difference in "order" between non-literary and literary language is a recurrent subject in Barthes' writings. As Hugh Davidson observes, "By a special twist given to the notion of the signifié, what is signified, Barthes establishes the specific order of literary language. When language is involved in praxis, in activity designed to modify a situation, it is transitive . . . The natural tendency of language toward ambiguity is thus checked by the circumstances. But literary language is intransitive; there is no external situation surrounding literary language and restricting its semantic possibilities."⁴ Barthes' contention that "one writes perhaps less to materialize an idea than to exhaust a task which bears within itself its own satisfaction" (Critical Essays, p. xiii) has been a major theme in many of his writings. "It would be

interesting," Barthes muses, "to know at what point the verb to write began to be used in an apparently intransitive manner, the writer being no longer one who writes something, but one who writes, absolutely" ("To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" The Structuralists, ed. DeGeorge, p. 164).

It is on the plane of paradox that Barthes situates the form of communication which he differentiates from language--that of "writing." For "writing," according to Barthes, is an Orphean experience: "Thus we find the techniques of literature . . . all employed to distance the namable they are doomed to double, to repeat . . . rhetoric . . . articulation . . . irony . . . fragmentation or . . . reticence . . . All these techniques, results of the writer's necessity to start from a world and a self which the world and the self have already encumbered with a name, seek to institute an indirect language, in other words a language at once persistent (provided with a goal) and circuitous (accepting infinitely varied stations). This is . . . an epic situation; but it is also an 'Orphic' situation: not because Orpheus 'sings,' but because the writer and Orpheus are both under the same prohibition, which constitutes their 'song': the prohibition from turning back toward what they love" (Critical Essays, p. xviii). Elsewhere Barthes directs the reader's attention to the self-consuming characteristics of writing. A passage in his essay "Workers and Pastors," in Critical Essays, reasserts the keynote of the book's preface: "All literature knows that like Orpheus, it cannot, on pain of death, turn around to

look at what is behind it: it is condemned to mediation . . . it is because socialist realism, in its very project, rejects any mediation that (at least in our Western countries) it asphyxiates itself and dies: it dies of being immediate, it dies of rejecting that something which hides reality in order to make it more real, and which is literature" (p. 126). Literature, therefore, does not "act" upon anything other than itself, the result of that action often being destructive. "The author performs a function, the writer an activity. Not that the author is a pure essence: he acts, but his action is immanent in its object, it is performed paradoxically on its own instrument: language . . ." ("Authors and Writers," Critical Essays, p. 144).

What is the nature of the function which the author performs? For whom is the function performed? The function is one of mediator, and the mediation is between the world and the reader, between the author and the work, between the world and the work, between the reader and the work, between the author and the reader, and between the author and the world: " . . . it is precisely when the author's work becomes its own end that it regains a mediating character: the author conceives of literature as an end, the world restores it to him as a means: and it is in this perpetual inconclusiveness that the author rediscovers the world, an alien world moreover, since literature represents it as a question--never, finally, as an answer" (ibid., p. 145). Literature merely mediates between action and stasis,

forever suspended, forever middle-voiced. As Barthes points out in Writing Degree Zero the language of culture has formulated the problematics of literature by making literature (and writers) self-conscious, by making it turn inward and ask itself why it exists: "Whenever the writer assembles a network of words it is the existence of Literature itself which is called into question . . ." (p. 61).

One ramification of the self-consuming nature of writing is the seeming impossibility in breaking away from tradition so that a new order may be established. Each generation of writers since Flaubert, as Barthes discusses in Writing Degree Zero, has attempted to claim for itself the distinction of being the "avant-garde," but each movement bears the seeds of its own destruction: "There is therefore in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a coming to power, there is the very shape of every revolutionary situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution must of necessity borrow, from what it wants to destroy, the very image of what it wants to possess" (p. 87). In "Whose Theater? Whose Avant-Garde?" Barthes further defines the notion of an avant-garde as a myth, since it is "the parasite and the property of the bourgeoisie" (Critical Essays, p. 69) --that is, the avant-garde is tolerated, perhaps even promoted, by the bourgeoisie as a radical fringe area which serves as a catharsis to perpetuate bourgeois norms. Eventually, though, traditional forms absorb avant-garde movements and the "revolution" becomes a school or

convention to which the bourgeois majority aspires: " . . . there always comes a moment when Order recalls its vanguard" (p. 68). Representatives of each "new school" often view their activities as a religious missionary might view his; it is the nature of such "innovators" to regard their activities as steps in a march of progress. However, their efforts may be seen to correspond to a circular movement, since most literary genres, as Jakobson reveals in "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," tend to fall into the categories of romanticism, realism and symbolism. Clearly, these trends toward a dominance of metaphoric or metonymic forms, or varying degrees of mediation between them, can occur at any period in history.

Perhaps the self-defeating enterprise of declaring one's own work to be avant-garde is one reason why the work of an author who has no such aspirations is so enthusiastically admired by Barthes. Racine, who based his tragedies upon the literature of the ancient Greeks, has been called by Barthes "the greatest French author."⁵ In the preface to his study of Racine, Barthes states that Racine's work has been the object of contemporary critical scrutiny in France for a paradoxical, but understandable, reason: " . . . by a remarkable paradox, the French author most frequently associated with the idea of a classical transparence is the only one to have made all the new languages of the century converge upon himself. As a matter of fact, transparence is an ambiguous value; it is both what cannot be discussed and what there is most to say about. Hence it is ultimately his very transparence that

makes Racine a veritable commonplace of our literature, the critical object at zero degree, a site empty but eternally open to signification" (ibid., pp. viii-ix). The next chapter will give an indication of the breadth of significance which Barthes has perceived in the works of Racine.

Chapter Two. The Tragedy is Linguistic: On Racine

The three essays which compose On Racine ask the question "How does the critic deal with a particular literary work's, or an author's, various modes of signification?" Theoretical indications of the answer are found in the last essay, "History or Literature?" Practical indications, which follow the theoretical guidelines, are contained in the book's other two essays. The particulars are universalized, or rather, universal aspects are drawn from the particular works in the first part--"The Structure" (of "Racinian Man")--and although Barthes' remarks address the literature and theater of Racine, the methodologies which he employs are clearly applicable to other authors and other works. The second part, "The Works," examines the methods of analysis which facilitated Barthes' derivation of Racinian structure; "The Works" is the characteristic second step of a structural analysis--the re-assembly of the original work with the aid of insights gleaned from its universal form or principles.

A theoretical clue to the puzzle of the proper duty of a critic is provided by Barthes in "History or Literature?" In this and other essays Barthes does not seem to believe that he can over-emphasize the need for literary commentators to define their objectives and to avoid muddling their methods in attempting to achieve them. He calls

to task critics who allege a correspondence in meaning between two dissimilar substances because they happen to correspond chronologically. As an example Barthes cites a radio program which, by its structure, asserted a relationship between history and music based on chronology, and further asserted that this relationship somehow established a history of music. Barthes feels that some literary critics have done a similar disservice to literature by trying to assert the existence of a history of literature and basing that history on non-literary facts. Some commentators conceive the concern of a history of literature to be a biography of an author or merely a discussion, in a chronological order, of his works. Instead the work of a critic in constructing a history of literature should be to pursue a question or problem raised by a work of literature:

"We are told in passing that Berenice achieved a great succes de larmes. But who still cries in the theater? One might hope that the tears inspired by Berenice would tell us as much about those who shed them as about the man who made them flow, that we might be given a history of tears . . ." (On Racine, pp. 157-58. Unless indicated otherwise, the page references in this chapter refer to this work). The critic must, according to Barthes, declare the system of his commentary and keep a coherent purpose and methodology. He must either write literary history, divorced from individuals and concerned with institutions, or he must expect, and declare, subjectivity and a certain system of psychology (ibid., p. 172).

Raymond Picard is one of the critics whom Barthes criticizes both for violating singularity of purpose and method and for denying his violation. Picard, a professor at the Sorbonne who is well-known for his exhaustive studies on Racine, does not advocate criticism which concerns itself with the psychology of an author; to the contrary, Picard has written many essays condemning such methods and insisting upon objectivity. Imagine his chagrin when he read the following comment of Barthes upon his efforts: "No matter how often Picard rejects the psychological interpretation . . . Racine's person constantly returns and embarrasses him" (ibid., p. 160). Despite his protestations to the contrary, Picard, according to Barthes, has demonstrated the pitfalls of those who subscribe to the "realist" point of critical view--that is, "the view that the narrative emanates from a person (in the fully psychological sense of the term) . . . both narrator and characters are essentially 'paper beings.' The living author of a narrative can in no way be mistaken for the narrator of that narrative . . ."⁶ Certainly Racine was a flesh-and-blood historical entity, but events of his life should not be paralleled to the events of his works in order to substantiate a critical assertion. Neither should psychological inferences be drawn about an author from the events of his work: " . . . history will never tell us what is happening inside an author at the moment he is writing" (p. 156).

The central position usually granted to an author in critical treatises is a barrier to the writing of a literary history. "Everywhere it is Racine who passes history in review before him, around him; it is not history that cites Racine . . . by making the literary 'genius' the very source of observation, we relegate the properly historical objects to the rank of nebulous, remote zones . . ."

(pp. 158-59). Everywhere there are signs--therefore, the "properly historical objects" have significance. However, traditional critical practice has been to relegate these objects to a supporting role, while concerning itself mainly with the construction of a mystical aura around the author. This practice is in distinct contrast to the methods of Barthes in S/Z, but it may well be that Barthes follows a tradition which predates the one of which contemporary culture is most aware; the notion of the writer as "creator" is a relatively recent one. Such distinctions were, if mentioned at all, most often disclaimed by authors prior to the age of romanticism. Advent of this notion has caused society to regard the writer "as a superman, as a kind of intrinsically different being . . ." ("The Writer on Holiday," Mythologies, p. 30). Barthes feels that to overcome the problems posed by this attitude, one of them being the construction of an obstacle to the discussion of the essence of literary history, the critic must deal with activities and institutions: "Thus it is only on the level of literary functions (production, communication, consumption) that such a history of literature can be written and

not at the level of the individuals who have exercised them" (On Racine, p. 161). The critic must regard the author in the role of functionary rather than in that of creator in order to deal with matters proper to a history of literature. The "paper being" author, of whom Barthes writes, may be seen to be a catalyst who brings together the characters, the other "paper beings" who participate in the writing of a work, so that they may react with each other to produce the "story."

The first essay of On Racine is not concerned with Racine as an individual, but with the literary world manifested in the works of Racine; Barthes is specifically interested in the structure of that world, and his examinations are of its institutions. His observation, for instance, on the roles of "logos" and "praxis" in Racinian theater have far-reaching consequences both for theater as a whole and for the relationship between linguistics and literature. Of Greek origin,⁷ praxis is a concept which recurs in the writing of several structuralists, including Marx. Maurice Cranston has supplied three definitions for the notion of praxis as it is used in the context of Marxist writings: "(1) the common sense that stands opposed to speculation, (2) the process of acting, as opposed to meditation, by which understanding is acquired, (3) empirical, scientific, or industrial work."⁸ Of these three definitions, it is clearly the second which Barthes has in mind in On Racine, although, as is more clearly demonstrated in the essay on Loyola in Sade/Fourier/Loyola, the

concept is a good deal more dialectic--involving aspects of action and contemplation--than is indicated in this brief passage from Cranston's essay. On Racine, though, allows the observer more freely to separate logos from praxis than does "Loyola," because Barthes states the distinction himself: "The behavior of the Racinian hero is essentially verbal . . . his language constantly represents itself as a course of action" (p. 57). Barthes asserts that the "key" to Racinian tragedy may be that "to speak is to do, the logos takes over the functions of praxis and substitutes for it" (p. 58), thus emphasizing the importance of linguistic phenomena in the functions of Racinian theater, and ultimately, all theater.

Barthes had laid careful groundwork for his assertion. In Mythologies he calls wrestling an activity which is suprisingly devoid of praxis, and one passage from his essay on wrestling uses a Racinian drama for an analogy: "Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque" ("The World of Wrestling," p. 15). The spectacle of the theater or the wrestling match is visual and verbal, and both are languages--one operates with the grammar of costumes and movements, the other with the grammar of linguistics. The element common to both aspects of the theatrical spectacle is semiology, for the sign is effected by visual and verbal means. However, Barthes contends that the elements are weighted heavily in favor

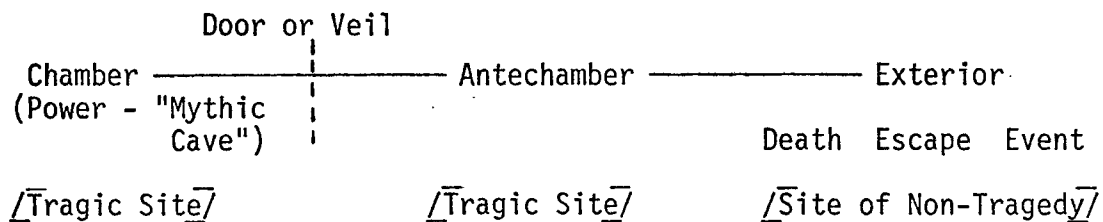
of linguistics because language serves as the paradigm structure for visual semiology. Certainly this is the case with both the wrestling match and tragic theater, because the conventions of each dictate that pain, and even death, must be inflicted; however, actors and wrestlers are spared the actualization of these fates, due to the "grammars" of their spectacles.

Of course, the literary critic is not the only interpreter of theatrical art. The other most visible violators of the coherence of method and purpose in the theater are the actors and the director, and their functions receive their due admonition from Barthes in the second part of On Racine, "Racine Spoken." Barthes' estimation of Racinian theater, as it is presented in contemporary culture, differs profoundly from his evaluation of Brechtian theater. Barthes' characterization of the exchange between actor and audience is, at the least, unappealing: "Between the bourgeois tragic actor and his public there is a singular relation of authority, which may be susceptible of a psychoanalytic definition: the public is the child, the actor a mother substitute, preparing the food, offering fare already predigested, which the public consumes quite passively" (p. 143). This predigestion causes an over-emphasis on acting delivery, since the only participation in the drama is that of the actors: " . . . in a language as 'distant' as that of classical tragedy, the choice of delivery vastly predominates over the choice of interpretation" (p. 145). For Barthes this is confusion of purpose of the theater; in contrast, Brechtian

theater proposes that "the public must be only half-committed to the spectacle so as to 'know' what is shown, instead of submitting to it; that the actor must create this consciousness by exposing not by incarnating his role; that the spectator must never identify completely with the hero but remain free to judge the causes and then the remedies of his suffering; that the action must not be imitated but narrated; that the theater must cease to be magical in order to become critical . . ." ("The Brechtian Revolution," Critical Essays, pp. 37-38). Brecht's principles are implicitly endorsed by Barthes for having singularity of purpose and method. Even the method of costume, always a potential hazard to the overall purpose of a play, is seen by Barthes to serve Brecht's principles in Brechtian theater ("The Diseases of Costume," Critical Essays, pp. 41-50). Barthes feels that Brecht adheres to his "ethic of costume," which is, essentially, that costumes should aid the aims of a play without stealing attention from it. Barthes is obviously opposed to a jumble of languages, visual and verbal, for fear that a battle for dominance between the two would bring about a veritable Babel of signs. Distraction caused by inappropriate costuming also receives the attention of Barthes in "Putting on the Greeks," in which he discusses the confusion afforded by Barrault's presentation of Oresteia: "Style, design, esthetic, and intention mingle here to an extreme degree . . ." (Critical Essays, p. 160).

Such considerations make it very difficult to draw a line of demarcation between "stylized" and "realistic" art. Both are representations of objects or occurrences in the empirical world, and, as representations they function according to the set of rules governing the world of signs. On the stage the "paper beings" of a play are represented by flesh-and-blood beings, but that fact does not return the functions of art to the empirical world. In fact, the world of the theater is farther removed from the empirical world than that of the written play, because not only is the theatrical production derived from the written work (thus constituting a "metalanguage"), but other sign systems, other "languages," are introduced into the work when it is presented upon the stage. "Realistic" art is an illusion; the relation of art to the empirical world is essentially representation, whether it be mirror-image representation or some other kind. The stage production may possess contents similar to those of "reality," but the difference in their forms must be recognized. Barthes writes, "The behavior of the Racinian hero is essentially verbal," and his observation also applies to the theatrical spectacle when Racine is presented on the stage. During the staging of a drama daggers are not plunged into hearts, eyes are not plucked from their sockets--there is no praxis, only its representation. His discussion specifically about the forms of Racinian theater illustrates his argument concerning the logos-praxis opposition.

Barthes finds the structure of the Racinian theater--"Racinian Space"--to be of great importance to the tragic aspects of the plays. Diagrammed, the description he gives of Racinian Space appears thusly:



This space is the physical structure of each of Racine's plays; for Barthes, it defines the tragedy of Racinian theater. For instance, in Phaedra the absence of Theseus is substituted for the "Chamber"--the site of power is all the more ominous; the "Antechamber" (the stage proper) is where Phaedra is located, and the "Door" of the unknown stands between her and Theseus; and when Phaedra confesses, she reaches the "Exterior" (death). One of the most striking things about Barthes' description of Racinian Space, when diagrammed in this manner, is that death may clearly be seen to be non-tragic. This, of course, is contrary to our traditional beliefs about the conventions of tragic theater. Barthes declares, "Physical death never belongs to tragic space . . ." (p. 5), for when a death occurs in a Racinian tragedy, the tragic action stops. The tragic hero or heroine, therefore, must be identifiable by other signs than by the mere knowledge of the audience that he or she is destined to die. According to Barthes the only tragic order is the order of language--the tragic hero or heroine suffers but thrives in the spaces of the chamber and the antechamber,

for each space allows speech to occur. When the tragic figure moves to the exterior he simultaneously leaves the stage, thus obviating speech, and severing participation in the tragedy of his predicament. Such is the occurrence of "death" in a tragedy: death, Barthes writes, is non-verbal, the suspension or cessation of language. Tragedies are not concerned with the deaths of people, but with the deaths of language and of the functions which that language performs.

The "paper beings" of Racine's plays are not so much characters as they are functions, according to Barthes. He suggests that if all eleven of Racine's tragedies were considered as one that the "tribes of some fifty tragic characters who inhabit Racinian tragedy" (p. 9) would be seen to fulfill a pattern of fewer functions. In Racinian tragedy one does not deal with an individual character, but with a "figure, or, better still, the function which defines that figure" (p. 10). This theoretical position is reminiscent of Propp's assertion that Russian fairy tales contain all or some of 31 basic functions.⁹ However, Propp's analysis dealt with events; Barthes' deals with actors-as-functionaries (actants). As such, the actants differ from events--they, considered as paradigmatic wholes, become signifiers who consume and produce the signs of tragedy. Part of these signs are the events, which are fed to the tragic figures by the non-tragic actants, inhabitants of the exterior space. The non-tragic figures of Racinian drama extract the "tragic essence" from events

and bring on-stage "only fragments of the external world, distilled as news" (On Racine, p. 7). The audience, "readers" of the signs of tragedy, sees and hears the language of tragic events (the language of praxis) rather than experiencing the events themselves.

The functions or figures of Barthes' analysis of Racinian tragedy are those of the primeval "horde," as conceived by "Darwin, Atkinson, and later Freud" (p. 8). According to the theory of the horde, earliest man's society was composed of numerous small tribes, with the most powerful male as the dominant figure. The sons of the tribe coveted the mothers and sisters, but were restrained by the father, but as soon as he was deposed discord broke out among the sons--only to be resolved by the institution of the taboo on incest. As Leach points out in his study of the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the anthropologist has embraced the principle of the incest taboo in his theory of universal kinship systems: "This allows Lévi-Strauss to follow Freud in declaring that the incest taboo is the cornerstone of human society. His own explanation of this allegedly universal natural law depends upon a theory of social Darwinism" (Leach, Claude Lévi-Strauss, p. 110). Barthes contends that the history of the taboo constitutes the whole of Racinian theater, and that the theater, like the horde, contains two chief categories of human relations: the first, of lust; the second, of authority. There is, of course, a circular aspect of the horde--as the sons

assume power, they become like the father; their reaction to tyranny becomes suicidal, because it is a reaction to their own actions. The "recipe of tragedy" (p. 41), reversal, is thus introduced into the tragic structure, and the "Other" is born. "Racinian theology is an inverted redemption: it is man who atones for God" (p. 46). God, or the Father, is powerful and guilty, and the son is weak and innocent. However, since the order of the world cannot exist if the figure of power is unjust (if the judge is guilty), then the son must assume the guilt of the father. Once this reversal takes place the son (the tragic figure) wars with himself, becomes alienated, strives to conquer the Other, and ultimately conquers himself. The Other is the primordial Father of the horde, and is the power which is felt, but not seen, in Racinian theater. The Other is the power which resides within the Racinian chamber, which is the "mouth" from which the tragedy is spoken.

Racine's tragic figures embody a "tragic dogmatism" which is contrasted to their confidants' pragmatism. The dogmatic desire for failure and death lends the tragic figure his isolationary existence; he is a cosmos which bears the brunt of the horde, for contained in him are the unmediated conflicts of the horde. Barthes reminds us that "only the tragic hero is divided . . ." and that "Racinian division is rigorously binary" (p. 36). Binary opposition is widely used by structuralist theorists to indicate the extreme opposing forces within one work under consideration. Most illustrative of

their employment of this term are the categories of Lévi-Strauss, "culture" and "nature," which have been essential to his analyses of myths. With men at one extreme (culture) and gods at the other (nature) the myths of man have used various mediators in between to achieve resolutions. The Racinian tragedy, however, is devoid of mediation; the reversal is a complete one--it consists of extremes rather than of degrees--and the direct conflict between the tragic figure and the Other is the essence of the tragedy. According to Barthes the presentation of tragedy--the spectacle--is its only mediation: " . . . out of the spectacle of failure it /tragedy/ believes it can create a transcendence of failure, and out of the passion of the immediate, a mediation . . . tragedy is the myth of the failure of myth: (p. 60). The "fundamental design" of Racinian reversal is "symmetry. Destiny turns each thing into its contrary as though in a mirror . . ." (p. 43).

The reversal, like other elements of Racinian tragedy, may be stated in the terms of an equation:

A is powerful, B is weak
 A is guilty, B is innocent (intolerable)
 Therefore, B becomes guilty to save the World
 (p. 46)

Barthes utilizes the form of an equation to illustrate the "fundamental relation" of Racinian tragedy, which involves the two chief categories of human relations, lust and authority, previously mentioned:

A has complete power over B
 A loves B, who does not love A
 (p. 24)

These relationships which may be described by equations lead Barthes to invoke the system of exchange in his attempt to explain them. "The Racinian world is one of elaborate bookkeeping: there is a constant calculation of favors and obligations . . . For example . . . B's life is A's property de facto and de jure" (p. 26). A full treatment of the systems of exchange may be found in the essay "Structures of Exchange in Cinna," by Jacques Ehrmann (in Lane's Introduction to Structuralism, pp. 222-47). The keynote of the essay is reminiscent of the linguistic value theory discussed by Barthes in Elements:

" . . . the nature of the relations which exist between the three main characters--Emilie, Cinna, and Auguste . . . are based on a certain conception of exchange, so much so that it is not exaggerated to say that they are almost 'economic' by nature" (p. 223). Value, in linguistics, refers to the relationships of exchange and comparison among words: "One can exchange a five-franc note for bread . . . but one can also compare this bank-note with ten- or fifty-franc notes . . . in the same way, a 'word' can be 'exchanged' for an idea (that is, for something dissimilar), but it can also be compared with other words (that is, something similar)" (Elements, p. 55). Barthes states that the effect of value is to "de-psychologize linguistics and to bring it closer to economics" (Elements, p. 54). Supplied with other insights into the critical theories of Barthes, it does not seem rash to propose further that he feels that concerning literature the effect of value has been to de-psychologize literary criticism in order to aid the

process of critical analysis: "The somehow mathematical necessity of gratitude designates the time and place of the rebellion: ingratitude is the obligated form of liberty," and "In Racine there is never an adversary . . . There are enemies who agree to be enemies, that is, who are also accomplices. The form of the combat is thus not a confrontation, but a settling of accounts: there are certain debts that must be liquidated" (pp. 26-27).

The relations of lust and of authority are involved in the Racinian Eros as well. Barthes perceives a "Double Eros" in the plays of Racine, the first part of which involves mediation, the second of which does not: "The first Eros is born between lovers who share a very early community of existence . . . here love is generated by duration, a gradual maturation process . . . The other Eros . . . is an immediate one" (p. 10). The basic relationships of the horde, lust and authority, are essential components of the Eros of immediacy; the horde theory is also central to Barthes' concept of the first Eros, because it is condoned by society--"because it has consented to start from a mediation, misfortune is not fatal to it" (p. 10). The Eros of immediacy, however, allows no time to intercede, to "bless" the relationship, for with it "to love is to see" (pp. 10-11). Barthes has observed that in Racine hatred is also born of sight, so the tragic extremes are united in, and initiated by, the eye. The literary convention of the eye as an organ of evil dates at least as far back as the Bible, but with

Racinian theater the convention assumes a central importance, not only to the reading but also to the portrayal of the plays. The immediate Eros, Barthes writes, is the "true" Eros, because it is the one that is "immobilized in the tragic tableau" (p. 11)--in other words, it is the one doomed to failure. This tableau is a mixture of the verbal and the visual languages, Barthes elaborates, since the tragic figure is able to recite through memory or hallucination the events of the first vision of love (lust) in such a way that the erotic scene is relived as it originally transpired (pp. 17-18). Furthermore, the written or acted tableau is imbued with the aspects of the plastic art from which its name is derived: "Not only are these scenes composed, but the characters and objects in them assume an arrangement calculated with a view to a total meaning . . . above all they have the special quality of painting: chiaroscuro" (p. 18). Finally the Racinian Eros is ambiguous, in that the sexes are not defined by biology. It is the relation of force which determines sex: "In Racine, sex itself is subject to the fundamental situation of the tragic figures among themselves, which is a relation of force . . . There are viriloid women . . . There are feminoid men, not by character but by situation" (p. 13).

On Racine foreshadows structural-semiological matters expounded upon by Barthes in later works. The determination of sex by the relation of force is a matter which also receives the critical attention of Barthes in his study of Balzac's "Sarrasine." The sexual

ambiguity which deceives Sarrasine gradually weakens him as well, and, in the end it is he, not the castrato who is the object of his affection, who bears the "feminoid" characteristics which Barthes discusses in On Racine. Barthes' observations in On Racine on the tragic tableau are also echoed in S/Z, because Sarrasine falls in love with Zambinella at first sight--the tragic situation in Balzac's short story, like Racine's plays, revolves around the Eros of immediacy, the erotic event which is doomed to failure. A critical point is also made in both works about the similarity and the relation between love and hatred. Sarrasine's abundant love for Zambinella is transformed into just as abundant hate once Sarrasine discovers that he has been duped. In the works of Racine and in Balzac's short story, Barthes has noted the implicit equation "intensity of love = intensity of hate." This observation, made about the structure of the works of Racine and Balzac, is utilized by Barthes in his remarks about the explicit content of the works of DeSade in Sade/Fourier/Loyola. One cannot read Barthes' remarks about the "tragic tableau" and the relation of force to the Racinian Eros in On Racine without thinking of his comments upon the Sadian spectacle in his more recent work, Sade/Fourier/Loyola. As we consider the most recent objects of Barthes' attention, it is unavoidable to observe the parallel between what he terms the "pleasures of the text," and that part of man's psyche which experiences fascination with the pleasures of the flesh.

Part Two Notes

¹ Roland Barthes, "The Last Word on Robbe-Grillet?" Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1972), p. 198. Originally published in French in 1964.

² Christian Metz, Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University, 1974), p. 43. Originally published in French in 1971.

³ John Barth, Chimera (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1973).

⁴ Hugh Davidson, "Sign, Sense and Roland Barthes," Approaches to Poetics, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia University, 1973), p. 32.

⁵ Roland Barthes, On Racine, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. ix. Originally published in French in 1963.

⁶ _____, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," New Literary History, 6, No. 2 (Winter 1975), pp. 237-72. Originally published in French in Communications, 8 (1966).

⁷ Barthes states that praxis is "Aristotelian" in Roland Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 53. Originally published in French in 1971.

⁸ Maurice Cranston, "The Later Thought of Jean-Paul Sartre," Modern Occasions, ed. Philip Rahv (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 189.

⁹ Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner, 2nd. ed., rev. (Austin: University of Texas, 1970).

Part Three. To Write, To Read -- The Erotic Verbs

Chapter One. Saturation of the Egg Text: S/Z

For some of the followers of Barthes' work the author of Elements of Semiology and Writing Degree Zero began to fade throughout On Racine, S/Z and The Pleasure of the Text, and by the time they read Sade/Fourier/Loyola they felt that he was lost entirely. The voice which spoke the Elements and Degree Zero seemed cold, clinical, and scientific (the bane of traditional literary criticism). The new voice, however, is even more frightening to the critical community, for it openly discusses lust, transsexuality, bliss and sadomasochism. For some the experience has been disorienting, tantamount to receiving an obscene telephone call from a computer. To put his later work in perspective, though, it must be stated that although one could conceivably trace an erotic pattern through the most recently published of Barthes' commentaries, to infer anything from that pattern, other than the fact that it does exist, would restrict the role of the literary critic in a way that would be "unBarthesian," and finally, unsemiological. The insistent "psychosensuality" of Barthes' recent works may not have been apparent but was present in his earlier treatises too. Susan Sontag's preface to the English edition of Writing Degree Zero enlightens the English-speaking reader concerning

the connotation of Barthes' usage of the French verb "écriture":

"A more helpful translation of what Barthes means by écriture--the ensemble of features of a literary work such as tone, ethos, rhythm of delivery, naturalness of expression, atmosphere of happiness or malaise--might be 'personal utterance'" (p. xvii). There is a certain amount of erotic potential--which is realized in The Pleasure of the Text--embodied in this concept.

By proposing the erotic potential of the acts of writing and reading Barthes has acknowledged that the two activities possess dimensions not previously attributed to them by critics. The critic of the past spoke of the sensuality about which an author wrote--the erotic content which the author expressed with his style of the craft of writing. Barthes' most recent objects of commentary are works with erotic content, and he seems to have chosen them in order to demonstrate that eros transcends the events of the story--it is inseparable from the form, from the act of writing, and from the act of reading. For Barthes the "intellectual" exercises of writing and reading have assumed properties which were traditionally reserved for discussions of man's behavior, his emotions. Barthes has acknowledged that which is undeniable--that he gets emotionally involved in the words he writes on a page, that he derives pleasure from the reading of words. Most important, Barthes has asserted that there is no way to divorce the intellectual enjoyment of reading or writing from the emotional enjoyment of them; indeed, he does not

recognize the existence of a division between the two. This attitude is consistent with the holism of structuralist methodology. Also, as was discussed in previous chapters, the writings of the Neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan, which are a part of this methodology, have aided Barthes in expressing his belief in the erotic aspects of the text. Everything that is man's has an erotic potential; certainly man's chief means of expression is invested with a wealth of that potential. A recognition, conscious or subconscious, of erotic potential in a work is all that is required for the reader to derive eroticism, or at the least pleasure, from a text. When we consider The Pleasure of the Text this premise will be treated more fully, for it is in that volume that the idea receives its fullest treatment by Barthes. However, readers of Barthes' works first began to notice his concern with erotic potential when they read S/Z.

Several of the insights which were rendered by Barthes' examination of Racine's theater are utilized in the analysis of Balzac's "Sarrasine." The exchange theory, the relations of the "horde," and the substitution of "logos" for "praxis" are concepts which function in both analyses. However, the methods of treatment of the two studies differ remarkably. In On Racine the structural, paradigmatic observations about the work of Racine, which have the potential for universal application, are separated from the works themselves. The analytical remarks which Barthes makes in On Racine are not only removed from the works, they are also abstract and reductive of the

ideas which Barthes claims to "discover" within the plays. In striking contrast to this is the method of S/Z, in which Barthes has gone to painstaking lengths to integrate his commentary with the short story being examined, and in which he has actually expanded upon the narrative.

The "essay," as Barthes terms it, is the fullest treatment to date of an analysis of a literary work. The first question which comes to mind upon the first reading of S/Z is "Why devote so much attention to a short story?" Barthes supplies us with one answer: "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 . . ."¹ His other writings, Writing Degree Zero and The Pleasure of the Text for instance, tell us that around the time of Balzac (1799-1850) and that of Flaubert (1821-1880) something revolutionary and irreversible was occurring to the enterprise of writing: with Flaubert and his contemporaries there began to form "an image of the writer as a craftsman who shuts himself away in some legendary place . . . and sets his form exactly as a jeweller extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort" (Writing Degree Zero, p. 63). Before Flaubert, Barthes informs us, "the existence of the bourgeois was a picturesque or exotic phenomenon; bourgeois ideology supplied the norm of the universal and, postulating that pure man existed as such, could experience a sense of well-being as it contemplated the

bourgeois as a spectacle in no way commensurate with itself. Whereas for Flaubert the bourgeois state is an incurable ill which sticks to the writer . . ." (ibid., p. 64). For writing, this phenomenon had two major consequences: the establishment of an ethic (middle class) of writing and, due to writing's self-conscious concern with form, the establishment of a problematics of writing. These matters are dealt with at greater length elsewhere in this study, but for the matter at hand, let it suffice to say that Barthes' accounts of the history of literature seem to indicate that, contrary to what he has stated, the choice of "Sarrasine" as an object for analysis depended upon more than chance. Literary works, such as Balzac's, which were written prior to the establishment of a problematics of writing, are termed by Barthes to be "classical" or "readerly" texts. Only the replete, "classical" text could furnish the intricate "weaving" so necessary to Barthes' extensive analysis, and Balzac is one of the last authors of classical literature. Common sense provides us with another reason for the choice: only a short work could be so fully analyzed and still hold the attention of the student of literature or the skeptical literary critic. Barthes is still very much on a proving ground with his semiological methodologies; although he has won the respect and admiration of many scholars, he is still exploring the limits of the road he has chosen to follow.

The foundation for that road was begun with Elements of Semiology, and S/Z is the most comprehensive experiment which has been performed thus far through the use of the principles enumerated

in that volume. S/Z is best thought of as an experiment in literary science, a term which Barthes has proposed as an alternative to "criticism," since criticism is a non-specific term which, ultimately, sets the concept of literature apart from the concept of science. The semiological methodologies and terminologies of Barthes unite the two concepts, which, according to Barthes, is the natural state of literature: " . . . literature, growingly subject as it is to an overturning of the traditional genres of poetry, narrative, criticism and essay, already is and always has been a science" ("Science versus Literature," Introduction to Structuralism, p. 416). The influence of structural linguistics and its "scientific" methodologies upon Barthes' semiological methodologies is easily noted by the reader of S/Z. The major part of the book is composed of 561 "lexias" or "sense units" which are divisions of the original text of the short story, "Sarrasine." Barthes devised a "code system" from five semiological codes, which he "discovered" within the text, to classify each lexia. However, there is a great deal of "overlapping" of the codes throughout the lexia divisions, i.e., from one to all five codes may be used to discuss each lexia, regardless of the lexia's length, and one lexia may contain several examples of the same code. The codes are discussed further in this chapter; the ordering principle of the lexias, which is the most difficult operation of S/Z to understand, may best be thought of as organization by "nuggets of meaning." Some lexias consist of one phrase, and others consist

of several sentences; however, each lexia contains at least one "nugget" of meaning which refers to at least one of the five semiological codes. Blocks of commentary are employed by Barthes to discuss the various "themes" of the text, usually as they appear syntagmatically; the essay combines both syntagmatic and paradigmatic procedures. Barthes also utilizes the structural "geometry" or "diagramatta" which has come to be a superficial sign of structural analysis, but he uses it sparingly in order to emphasize his theory of reading. As Scholes has pointed out, Barthes "deliberately ignores the obvious 'structural' divisions according to incident or episode, and even the divisions of the discourse into sentences and paragraphs. He does this to emphasize that the process of reading is linear--through the text from left to right--and also involves our movement from the text out to the various codifications of the world invoked by it. The frequent critical device of 'structural' spatialization of the text, which diagrams its contours, does great violence to the process of reading that Barthes wants to enact for us" in S/Z (Structuralism in Literature), p. 152). This is an important distinction of the methodological preferences of Barthes. He professes admiration for the work of Lévi-Strauss, who liberally employs charts and diagrams, and for that of other structuralists, but his respect for the power of words is greater. His work with literary subjects, especially his most recent work, emphasizes his belief that the text is constructed of two basic

exercises--the first, writing; the second, reading. For the most part S/Z proceeds episodically, emphasizing the importance of the two exercises--particularly the way in which the reader first comes to the text; On Racine, on the other hand, was constructed a great deal more paradigmatically. In S/Z there is a stricter adherence to the methodologies prescribed in Elements of Semiology than there was in On Racine.

As a comment upon literature, criticism, or literary science, functions as a metalanguage, and as such it must speak the language of literature: " . . . the opposition of language-objects and their meta-languages is still subject in the end to the paternalistic model of a science without a language. The task confronting discourse is to make itself entirely homogeneous with its object" ("Science versus Literature," p. 416). Literature, Barthes reminds us, is itself a metalanguage--it speaks the language of the world, it comments upon the world, although it may restructure the world in the process--so criticism, or literary science, is a metalanguage upon a metalanguage. As such it is a form of semiological research. In the Elements Barthes clearly outlines the procedures for conducting semiological research, the first step being to build a simulacrum of the object under scrutiny. In the case of S/Z the short story "Sarrasine" is the object, and the contents of S/Z, the simulacrum, are limited to the meaning possessed by the object and are dependent upon the signification of the object. The limits, however, are

explored to their farthest reaches by Barthes, and, characteristically, the object is scrutinized not only in terms of what it presents, but also in terms of what it withholds--that which is absent, but which is potentially present (i.e., the paradigmatic dimension of writing): "I was deep in one of those daydreams . . . The lexia . . . lays the groundwork . . . for a vast symbolic structure, since it can lend itself to many substitutions, variations . . ." (p. 17) and "The excess of metaphor . . . is a game played by the discourse. The game, which is a regulated activity and always subject to return /referring to the plural existence of the text/, consists then not in piling up words for mere verbal pleasure . . . but in multiplying one form of language (in this case, comparison), as though in an attempt to exhaust the nonetheless infinite variety and inventiveness of synonyms . . ." (p. 58). This characteristic thoroughness of Barthes results in the discussion of other determining factors--psychological, sociological, anthropological and physical--which are all relevant to the semiological system which Barthes perceives at the core of man's culture. For instance, on pages 186 and 187 of S/Z Barthes comments upon the realistic motivation for inclusion in the short story the reference to Zambinella's tremendous financial success. Barthes would not be in favor of discussing the short story simply in these terms (a uni-dimensional psychological or sociological study of a literary work), but they are an integral part of his procedure which permits manifold accesses to

the text. His remarks about the fortunes of castratos are explanatory of the semantic code which applies to lexia 471; it is interesting to note the details which Barthes has compacted into this little piece of exposition, because it is indicative of the wealth of knowledge and/or research which Barthes brings to each of his projects. At least one full-length work (a novel)² has been written on the theme of the wealthy castrato (Carlo Broschi, known as Farinelli, who is discussed by Barthes in the expository comment following lexia 471), based upon no more known facts than those mentioned by Barthes in this comment.

Observation of the semiological system is begun, though, from within the work, "Sarrasine," which corresponds to the procedures of the formalists. Another of Barthes' stipulations in Elements is adhered to in S/Z, in that a finite, arbitrary (at least, to a great degree) collection of materials is analyzed (certainly no one would argue against a 30-page short story being a finite collection of materials), and, according to another of Barthes' admonitions, the corpus is exhausted by the analytical methods employed by the commentator. If the "perfect project" is one which is coherent and valid, one which adheres completely to its stated objectives, then S/Z is perfect. The thorough analysis of a literary work, a project about which many structuralists have fondly discoursed, has been accomplished with the writing of S/Z. This is not to say that a more thorough analysis is not possible, but it is to say that a more

complete one has not yet been produced.

First of all, Barthes heeds his own advice in Elements "not to add anything to it [the corpus under scrutiny] during the course of the research, but also [to] exhaust it completely by analysis" (pp. 96-97). The first indication of his following this advice in the writing of S/Z is the form of the essay--Barthes' organizational methodology. S/Z begins with several expository passages which attempt, by allusion, to bring the object of study at hand into perspective. Barthes alludes in the first passage to the early days of the formalist/structuralist movements--perhaps an apology of sorts for the experiment which follows. He then briefly touches upon his methods for dividing up and discussing the text of "Sarrasine" before proceeding with his essay. The lexias and the blocks of commentary, including explanations of the "codes," follow. At the end of this section is a series of appendices, composed of the original text of "Sarrasine," a "Sequence of Actions"--Barthes' apparent tribute to the methodologies of Propp, since the term "actions," in this case, could as easily be called "functions"--in which Barthes groups together the various lexias of the text which are part of the proairetic code, a "Summary of Contents," Barthes' outline of his thoughts presented in the essay, and a "Key," which is an index to the 93 blocks of commentary, or divigations, in S/Z.

The first of the five codes is the hermeneutic code. It is on this code which the syntagmatic thread of the narrative,

"Sarrasine," hangs. The hermeneutic code is the one which, throughout "Sarrasine," operates as a "striptease" does, with both the reader and Sarrasine. As Barthes points out in his commentary, there is an implicit mystery throughout the short story. Both the reader and the protagonist of the story are aware of the enigma, and the reason why they know that it exists is because the story offers hints, to the girl to whom the narrator is relating his story, to the reader, and to Sarrasine, although not necessarily simultaneously in every instance, about the mysteries of the Lanty family and Zambinella. From beginning to end, though, there is a dialectic necessity within the story which is imposed by the hermeneutic code. The audiences of the stories contained in "Sarrasine" are provided with both useful and misleading information about the enigmas which the stories have hinted that they hold. All of the digressive techniques of the text are employed to perform this function: "The dynamics of the text (since it implies a truth to be deciphered) is thus paradoxical: it is a static dynamics: the problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's 'unfolding' and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of stoppages . . ." (p. 75). Narrative which is organized according to the rules, conventions or "history," of the hermeneutic code is

structured so that the beginning of the narrative reveals the existence of an enigma, which is slowly unveiled until the concurrence of truth and the narrative's ending. As is implied by Barthes (p. 76) the hermeneutic code is structurally linked to the syntagmatic dimension of the sentence (of linguistics). Since the hermeneutic code imposes delay upon the inevitable answer to be given to the question which the narrative itself poses, digression could be said to be part of this code. However, "digression" is not a detailed enough concept for Barthes' purposes, and the term implies a value judgement upon parts of the narrative; digression has traditionally been regarded as inferior to the "story line." Barthes' theory of writing and reading is opposed to a hierarchy of parts of narratives, so he offers his own terms of the hermeneutic code: the snare, the equivocation, the partial answer, the suspended answer, and jamming (acknowledgment of insolubility). All of these techniques are employed in "Sarrasine" in order to keep the enigma (and the narrative) open until the end of the story, which coincides with the abandonment of these techniques and, consequently, the solution to the enigma. Stated in another manner, with another of Barthes' essays in mind, the verb between the subject (enigma) and predicate (truth) of the hermeneutic code is "to write"--according to Barthes, the intransitive verb. It is only when the truth is finally revealed that "to write," in the case of "Sarrasine," becomes transitive and the short story is finally fixed with Barthes' designation of "readerly."

The other four codes are also very important to the structure of the narrative, and to the study of semiology, although perhaps not as important to the "story." The semantic code is the system of signifiers, which, of course, is crucial to a semiological study. The "flickers of meaning" (p. 19) which comprise the semantic code--the semes--are the most codified segment of man's social existence. It is the semantic code which, of all the codes in S/Z, is least confined to the discipline of literature. Accompanying the semantic code, although to a lesser degree for a sociologically oriented semiologist such as Barthes, in applicability to man's situation is the symbolic code. The lexias, or parts of lexias, which are assigned to the symbolic code by Barthes are marked by a degree of conventionality not characteristic of the semes. For instance the references to classical Greek mythology (literature) in lexia 229 is an example of a member of the symbolic code which is conventionalized before it comes to the text of "Sarrasine," and the undressing symbolized in lexia 255 is an example of a member of the code which becomes conventionalized during the process of the text (i.e., the conventionality is generated by the text). The proairetic code is characterized by actions, and we are told by Barthes that this code, unlike the others, is empirical rather than rational. The cultural code refers us to a science or a body of knowledge, accessible to anyone who can read. For Barthes each code is a voice: the hermeneutic code is the voice of truth, the semantic the voice of

the person, the symbolic the voice of symbol, the proairetic the voice of empirics, and the cultural is the voice of science. The voices, of course, are all voices of the text: the voice of truth is the one which proposes and finally solves the enigma of "Sarrasine"; the voice of the person is the signifier of the "feelings" which the reader is intended to have about the story (its ambiance); the voice of symbol speaks metaphorically, and, when reviewed in toto, its pronouncements form an antithesis; the voice of empirics presents the actions and behavior of the characters; and the voice of science is the one which speaks traditional human experience. The "stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect" becomes writing (p. 21): "The source of the sentence cannot be discerned. Who is speaking? Is it Sarrasine? the narrator? the author? Balzac-the-author? Balzac-the-man? romanticism? bourgeoisie? universal wisdom? The intersection of all these origins creates the writing" (pp. 172-73).

The lexias, which function as Barthes' basic units of his analysis, have been called into question by some critics because of their lack of coherence and because of Barthes' lack of acknowledgment of the importance of one over the other. To criticize him on these counts, however, indicates that the critic is unfamiliar or, at the least, unsympathetic with some of Barthes' very basic beliefs about art and the science of semiology. Specifically concerning literature, Barthes has written that "a narrative is made up solely

of functions: everything, in one way or another, is significant Art . . . is a pure system: there are no wasted units" ("An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," NLH, pp. 244-45). The fact that these units may not be uniform does not concern Barthes: he has remarked that in literature "functions will be represented at times by units larger than the sentence . . . at times by lesser units" (ibid., p. 246). Of what, then, do these units consist? How does one determine where one stops and another begins? Barthes' answer to these questions in S/Z is that division of the original text into lexias is "arbitrary in the extreme" and "a matter of convenience" (p. 13). This is certainly so, but his earlier work with narrative units probably influenced the formation of the lexias of S/Z. For instance, in his essay on the structural analysis of narrative in New Literary History Barthes states: "One may say . . . that a sequence is a potentially incomplete logical unit . . . it is justified within the local context, but it is also rooted in the larger context. Because it is self-contained with regard to its functions, and bracketed under a name, the sequence can be apprehended as a unit, ready to function as a simple term in another, broader sequence" (p. 254). Whatever their drawbacks may be in the eyes of other critics, the lexias provided Barthes with an efficient method of organization for his discussion of "Sarrasine," and they enabled him to observe one of his own admonitions in Elements of Semiology.

It is important to note that by adhering to a syntagmatic procedure, S/Z cannot be accused of being reductive--this, again, is apparently due to Barthes' concern for a proper metalanguage and simulacrum; his commentary upon the story is read as the story itself is read. However, the reader of Barthes' essay must remember that he is reading the "reassembled" product of a structuralist analysis: the very presence of the "codes," the division of the narration into "lexias," and the existence of the 93 "divigations" (I use translator Richard Howard's term, borrowed from Mallarmé, for Barthes' blocks of thematic-symbolic commentary) are demonstrative of the structuralist "deep reading" used to discover the paradigmatic dimension of the text. With a little assistance from Robert Scholes it is easy to understand the concept of the codes used in S/Z. "For Barthes," writes Scholes, "there is no such thing as a pure context. All contexts come to man already coded, shaped, and organized by language, and often shaped in patently silly ways. The great error of the 'realist' in literature or in criticism is to assume that he is in touch with some ultimate context, while in reality he is simply transcribing a code. Thus in approaching the archrealist, Balzac, Barthes will be intent on showing how Balzac's 'reality' is always derived from some preexisting code" (Structuralism in Literature, p. 150). The codes, then, are internal to the narrative--they serve as vehicles for discussing the polysemanticism of the Balzac text, polysemanticism which has been invested in the codes of the text as

polysymbolism has been invested in the codes of society. These vehicles, like other methods of S/Z, are true to Barthes' exhortation in Elements to maintain immanence in semiological research.

Culture has encoded man's efforts to communicate--this is what semiology is all about, this is its raison d'être, and it is the core of the convolutions of S/Z. S/Z is not a "literary criticism," nor is it an "explication"; Barthes' essay is not a "structural" criticism of a short story. Its essence is not the discovery by Barthes of a male/female dichotomy existing throughout the story, which would be the "core" of the typical reductionist criticism. The "point" of the essay, if it can be said to have one (for it, like the short story, is polysemous--the essay is metalanguage about the short story), is its concept: "We shall not set forth the criticism of a text, or a criticism of this text; we shall propose the semantic substance . . . of several kinds of criticism (psychological, psychoanalytical, thematic, historical, structural) . . . we seek . . . to sketch the stereographic space of writing . . ." (pp. 14-15). Barthes' essay, like the "writerly" literature which he discusses, is aimed at decoding the communication which our culture has encoded. Its purpose is mainly semiological--to discover the sign systems of literature (in the case of "Sarrasine," readerly literature)--and its method is writing. Scientific and structural analyses implement this endeavor, but only writing, with its elusive nuances and its propensity for neologism, can present the proper metalanguage for

conveying the codes and messages which are "uncovered."

One of the most widely discussed and disputed concepts which Barthes presents in S/Z is the distinction between the readerly and the writerly texts. It is clear that for him the terms "classic" and "readerly" are synonymous, as are the terms "modern" and "writerly." He describes the readerly text variously as being one which is replete with meanings, an intersection of voices, dependent upon antithesis and transgression of the oppositions imposed by the antithesis. Unfortunately, none of this informs us of the origin of the terms "readerly" and "writerly." However, Barthes' rule of closure, which has been discussed elsewhere in this study, is helpful to the understanding of these terms. A verbal or written transmission which is made in order to achieve an objective (to signify a predetermined signified) is a relatively "closed" transmission; one which is made for the sake of its very creation--one which does not point to a specific signified, one whose intention is to signify limitlessly--is a relatively "open" statement. While this does tend to shed light on what Barthes has in mind by using the terms readerly and writerly, it should be noted that the ideas of the readerly and writerly texts cannot be reduced to mere equivalence with the terms closed and open. One of the obvious problems in doing so is the implication of absolutism.

"Readerly" and "writerly" are relative terms, and I do not think that Barthes means to connote by their usage a difference in value as

much as he intends to connote a difference in kind. For instance, we know that the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet are considered by Barthes to tend to be writerly, whereas Barthes states that the works of Balzac compose part of the literature of the readerly. Robbe-Grillet is noted, by Barthes, as a writer who envelopes his objects in description, in an attempt to "write out" or place at a zero degree the potential for human signification within the narrative. However, it is apparent that the resultant effect of such a technique, contrary to Robbe-Grillet's supposed intention, is to make the narrative more of an enigma--since the possible meanings (significations) which surround the objects described become more elusive to the reader, he is provoked to ask more questions, to indulge in more speculation than is usually the case; the conspicuous absence of humanity--of signification--in the writing of Robbe-Grillet opens up the narrative to the participation of the reader (see "Literal Literature" and "There Is No Robbe-Grillet School" in Critical Essays pp. 51-58 and 91-96, respectively). No matter how the process works, though, the specificity of description in the works of Robbe-Grillet imposes a degree of closure. There is, in fact, no pure example of writerly literature in existence, and Barthes says as much in *S/Z*: " . . . the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore . . . The writerly text is a perpetual present . . . 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 . . . which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (p. 5). The writerly is an ideal to which modern writing aspires; it is an attempt to unravel the threads of culture which have historically made all human communication part of a code system. The writerly may be seen as an attempt to delve into our communication processes deeply enough to discover a more primal mode of communication. In that sense, the literature of the writerly is like semiological experimentation: some literary exercises seem to the traditional reader to be works of literary science which belong, in our compartmentalized culture, to the classification "criticism" rather than to the body of writings known to man as "literature." Such classification is absurd to Barthes, since the exercise in which both the author and the literary commentator (the "critic") are engaged is a common one--writing--and the function of that exercise is the same in both cases--to communicate. Moreover, writerly literature and semiological commentary embody an at least implicit invitation to the reader to participate.

Readerly literature, on the other hand, is somewhat foreboding because it is replete. If it invites at all, it invites the reader to engage in interpretation, not participation. In its smugness it assumes that its meaning is invested by its writing--the exercise of reading cannot bring additional value to that investment. Unlike Robbe-Grillet, Balzac's intention is to mystify, to "write in"

the enigma: "Like the Marquise, the classic text is pensive: replete with meaning . . . it still seems to be keeping in reserve some ultimate meaning, one it does not express but whose place it keeps free and signifying . . ." (p. 216). The pensiveness, however, according to Barthes, is an illusionary allusion, one of which the discourse is conscious, and one which gives "meaning its last closure: suspension" (p. 217). Thus we are presented with inverted mirror images: the text of Robbe-Grillet, which attempts closure, represents writerly literature because it is open to participation, and the text of Balzac, which attempts to be aloof, is "replete with multiple, discontinuous, accumulated meanings, and yet burnished, smoothed by the 'natural' movement of its sentences: it is an egg-text" (p. 200). Obviously the notions of the readerly and the writerly are complex. Another facet of their complexity might be termed "honesty" or "ethics," because when Barthes discusses texts he is actually referring to portions of a universal text--the text, the ideal of the writerly which is infinitely written--since each of these individual texts refers to the plural, universal one. Individual texts which tend to be readerly do not readily claim the existence of the infinite text--each pretends to be complete, each poses as a self-contained cosmos. The writerly, however, openly refers to the circumstances of its existence: it is more direct, more honest--its method (cf. Robbe-Grillet) is denotation. Connotation is the instrument which may be applied to the mid-range of

plurality (S/Z, p. 6), i.e., to those texts located closer to the center of the readerly/writerly scale than to either side of it. Connotation is also the instrument of semiological research: " . . . the future probably belongs to a linguistics of connotation, for society continually develops, from the first system which human language supplies to it, second-order significant systems" (Elements, pp. 90-91). "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)" (p. 9). Without the countercommunicative aspect of connotation there would have been no S/Z, because there would have been no need for it. This illustrates the relative sense in which Barthes applies the term "readerly" to Balzac's "Sarrasine."

So there are aspects of both the readerly and the writerly qualities in all narrative. However, some literature (not necessarily some authors) aspires to emulate the ideal of the writerly, while other works strive to be replete, thereby patterning themselves after the classic ideal of the readerly. The same is true for literary commentary, at least literary commentary such as that of Barthes, in which the metalanguage embodies at once mirror images of the literary language under scrutiny and a second-order (literary or quasi-literary) language of its own. In the case of S/Z Barthes has taken a readerly

text and "re-written" it to realize a more writerly result. In other words Barthes would not consider "Sarrasine" to be concluded with the last sentence penned by Balzac: the short story, and any other written communication, is subject to being re-written, embellished, for forever. Although "Sarrasine" approaches the ideal of the readerly, its re-written version by Barthes, S/Z, stands at the opposite pole, that of writerly communication; S/Z is more accessible from a number of entrances than is "Sarrasine." With S/Z the reader or critic may "read" the short story via its original syntagmatic progression, the lexias, the codes, or the divigations. It is appropriate that the last word in S/Z is "suspension" (p. 217), because it implies what Barthes has stated explicitly in so many contexts: the most attractive quality of writerly communication is its open-endedness; it may be infinitely re-written--it is never "finished."

Chapter Two. The Pleasure of the Text

Although the basic vehicle for S/Z is a scientific one, the expedition on which it takes the reader (as opposed to the critic or the student of semiology) is concerned with the pleasure to be derived from the act of reading. Writerly literature holds a special treat for the reader, because he is more a participant in the writerly narrative than he is in the readerly variety; however, the exercise of reading, and especially re-reading, any narrative can be a remarkable pleasure: " . . . rereading . . . 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 plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology . . . and recaptures a mythic time . . . rereading is no longer consumption, but play . . . 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 . . . not the real text, but a plural text: the same and new" (S/Z, p. 16). Such a description of the activity of reading is pretty heady stuff to the student of criticism--how many times has one encountered a comparison between reading prose and being under the influence of drugs? Passages such

as this one can be found in S/Z, but they constitute the main body of the text of The Pleasure of the Text.

Professor Kermode has pointed out that Barthes' concern with the text's dimension of pleasure is his most obvious, and most characteristic, deviation from the mainstream of structuralist-semiologist thought: "Pleasure is on the whole unlikely to be an important part of the subject-matter of semiology, and in my experience it is rarely produced by the reports of practitioners, the wayward Barthes always excepted."³ This deviation is also one of the major factors which makes the semiological treatises of Barthes vastly more appealing to the reader than those of other structuralists, because his acknowledgment of the potential for pleasure favorably influences the readability, the pleasure, of his own writings. Barthes' "quirk" of recognizing the erotic dimensions of writing and reading keep S/Z from being the "pure," dry semiological essay which constitutes the Elements of Semiology: "His S/Z is a detailed commentary on Balzac's story Sarrasine, using a system developed from the alliance, in the mid-Sixties, of structuralism and a revised Russian Formalism, but also departing from this neo-Formalism in all manner of fruitful ways" (ibid., p. 660).

Some of the digressions from structural-semiological dogma which are contained in the divagations of S/Z receive fully developed treatment in The Pleasure of the Text. Like S/Z, Pleasure has as one of its central concepts a binary opposition which concerns

literature; while S/Z advances the theory of the readerly/writerly opposition to classify texts, Pleasure classifies the activity of reading according to the categories "the reading which produces pleasure"/"the reading which produces bliss." There seems to be some correspondence between the concepts of the readerly and the pleasureable reading, and between the writerly and the blissful reading, but the prevailing similarity between the two sets of classifications is their ambiguity. That is, as there are no distinct lines separating the readerly from the writerly text--no examples of texts which are either absolutely readerly or writerly--neither are there readers who strictly derive either pleasure or bliss from a text, nor are there texts which produce either pleasure or bliss for the reader. For the student of Barthes the most important part of the pleasure/bliss concept is not the features of one of its parts, but rather the whole concept of reading a text for pleasure. The whole idea of "pleasure of the text," be it the pleasure invested in its writing or the pleasure derived from its reading, is "value shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier."⁴ Given this definition by Barthes it is easy to see the parallel between the text of pleasure and the writerly text: the ideal of the writerly text is that text which purely signifies; the reader who is able to experience pleasure in reading a text (readerly or writerly for that matter) will find that pleasure in the text's signifiers. The dichotomy pleasure/bliss does not in and of itself occupy a

central position in the Barthes corpus--the concepts "pleasure" and "bliss" in this regard are, to borrow Professor Kermode's phrase, "facets, bubbles and phylacteries" which induce pleasure in the mind of the reader of Barthes' commentary. This is not to say that the concepts do not have substance, but in semiological terms they are more signifier than signified--they are catalysts for the thought processes of the reader, and if they provoke more questions than they answer it is because they intend to do so.

However, although the concepts of pleasure and bliss are purposely vague there are certain distinctions which may be drawn from Barthes' text. First, the text of pleasure, according to Barthes, is one which "contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading," whereas the text of bliss "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts . . . unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (p. 14). This statement, along with others made by Barthes in Pleasure, indicates a correspondence between the terms pleasure and readerly and between bliss and writerly; the classic (readerly) text is conventional, its plot structure is predictable, but the ideal of the writerly text is one with many surprising convolutions. There are two major ideas emerging from these two sets of dichotomies: First, there is a typology of texts being

constructed by Barthes in the notions readerly text/writerly text and text of pleasure/text of bliss; secondly, as was mentioned previously, there is also a typology of reading habits being established, and it too involves both sets of oppositions. In S/Z Barthes speaks of the different requirements which readerly and writerly texts make upon their readers. For instance, readerly texts usually require a syntagmatic progression of the first reading, but writerly texts may be "started" at any point in the text. Similarly, texts of pleasure require different things from the reader than do the texts of bliss. Literature of pleasure can be skimmed; literature of bliss cannot: "Whence two systems of reading: one goes straight to the articulations of the anecdote, it considers the extent of the text, ignores the play of language . . . the other reading skips nothing; it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport . . ." (p. 12). Therefore, a parallel between the two typologies of texts can most easily be traced, whereas the notion of two activities of reading--reading for pleasure and reading for bliss--seems to transcend and interplay with the concepts of both readerly and writerly literature. The interplay between the typologies of texts and the concepts of reading activity are most visible when we look at what Barthes has to say about the application of the reading exercise to specific texts: "In Bouvard and Pécuchet, I read this sentence, which gives me pleasure: 'Cloths, sheets, napkins were hanging vertically, attached by wooden clothespins

to taut lines.' Here I enjoy an excess of precision, a kind of maniacal exactitude of language, a descriptive madness (encountered in texts by Robbe-Grillet)" (p. 26), and "The text is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens, selective baffles: vocabulary, references, readability, etc." (p. 27). In these passages Barthes promotes the idea of participation of the text in the exercise of reading--that is, in the exercise of the reading of itself. Therefore, texts are seen by Barthes to share the responsibility of the reading of them--reading is an interaction between the text and the reader, and, to a small degree, the writer: "The writer is always on the blind spot of systems, adrift; he is the joker in the pack, a mana, a zero degree, the dummy in the bridge game" (p. 35).

In Barthes' analysis of the system of reading it is the reader of the text, the enjoyer of the text, who indulges in the most joyous and rewarding "writing" of the text. Barthes' assertion of a correspondence, whether in "spirit" or in structure it is uncertain, between the bliss of reading and the experience of orgasm is clear. Derivation of bliss from a text involves what Barthes terms "writing aloud," from the classical rhetorical term, actio--"a group of formulae designed to allow for the corporeal exteriorization of discourse . . . it is carried not by dramatic inflections, subtle stresses, sympathetic accents, but by the grain of the voice,

which is an erotic mixture of timbre and language . . ." (p. 66).

According to Barthes, one of the few contemporary social occurrences in which we may satisfactorily observe this writing aloud is the cinema, which "capture[s] the sound of speech close up . . . and make[s] us hear in their materiality, their sensuality, the breath, the gutturals, the fleshiness of the lips, a whole presence of the human muzzle . . ." (p. 67). Barthes' writing in this section (the last, and appropriately, the climactic section) of The Pleasure of the Text, it should be noted, is intense and sensual--itself building toward a crescendo, a "spilling over" into something other than criticism. As Professor Kermode has noted, this is a dangerous precipice for a structuralist/semiologist, but it is also a characteristic one for Barthes: "Dangerous talk this. But any writer as fertile, conceited and stylish as Barthes is likely to upset the apparatchiks when he meditates privately, as he does here, on official doctrine. He makes not only the negative point, that oversystematic procedures destroy pleasure, but the positive one, that the perverse jouissances of reading ought to be more generally enjoyed . . . Reading this book /The Pleasure of the Text/ . . . gives both kinds of pleasure. It is fragmentary . . . but it joins, at some level, the continuous semiological party-line" (Kermode, "Facets, Bubbles . . .," p. 661). Although the system of semiology is intertwined with the sensuality of Pleasure it may be difficult for the uninitiated reader of Barthes' work to perceive

the underlying concern with semiological precepts when he or she reads that the writing aloud of the cinema not only constructs an erotic body to provoke pleasure in the audience--in this particular passage Barthes himself--but also shifts "the signified a great distance and /throws/, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss" (p. 67).

Barthes illustrates elsewhere in Pleasure the similarity of the human sexual experience to the activity of reading. Sexual experiences shared with one's familiar partner--a spouse, a long-time lover, oneself--can be pleasureable (as can reading the classic text), but the blissful sexual experience is dependent upon novelty, whether it be a previously unexperienced partner or an untried position. "Now, encratic language (the language produced and spread under the protection of power) is statutorily a language of repetition; all official institutions of language are repeating machines: school, sports, advertising, popular songs, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words . . . Confronting it the New is bliss (Freud: 'In the adult, novelty always constitutes the condition for orgasm'). Whence the present configuration of forces: on the one hand, a mass banalization (linked to the repetition of language)--a banalization outside bliss but not necessarily outside pleasure--and on the other, a (marginal, eccentric) impulse toward the New . . ." (pp. 40-41). Without the

presence of the language, the reading or the literature of the familiar, however, the language of bliss (the New) would not be blissful, erotic: it is the confrontation, Barthes states, the tear, the edge, the seam of the two which constitutes bliss: "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so" (p. 7). In other words, in order to regard the work of John Barth as "blissful" we must have a balanced "diet" of his fiction and that of writers such as Stephen Crane.

It is not the object, the signified, which determines bliss or eroticism: as Barthes commented upon the cinema, its success in evoking eroticism is not dependent upon what is signified, but upon the value placed upon the signifier--the throwing of the "anonymous body of the actor" into his ear via the grain of the voice. Similarly there is no eroticism in the "art" of striptease, because the signifier is both ritualized and devalued: "It is only the time taken in shedding clothes which makes voyeurs of the public; but here, as in any mystifying spectacle, the decor, the props and the stereotypes intervene to contradict the initially provocative intention and eventually bury it in insignificance: evil is advertised the better to impede and exorcise it" ("Striptease," Mythologies, p. 84). Certainly there is no better example of the confrontation, the bliss, of language in literature (particularly in French literature) than in the works of the Marquis de Sade. Barthes refers to him in Pleasure: "Sade: the

pleasure of reading him clearly proceeds from certain breaks (or certain collisions): antipathetic codes (the noble and the trivial, for example) come into contact; pompous and ridiculous neologisms are created; pornographic messages are embodied in sentences so pure they might be used as grammatical models . . . Two edges are created . . ." (p. 6).

Barthes' recognition of the quality of bliss in the writing of Sade is amplified in Sade/Fourier/Loyola. This volume assembles what at first appears to be an absurd, dissimilar grouping, but faithful as always to the methodologies of his fellow structuralists (if not always to their assertions) Barthes does manage to logically associate the structures of the writings of the three authors. First of all the works of Sade and Fourier are perfectly suited to his thoughts regarding textual pleasure, because they are the two "marginal figures" cited by Barthes for being the exceptions to the traditional rule that philosophies repress hedonism (Pleasure, p. 57). Further, the two hedonists and the saint share in common the act of creation of a language (the languages of "Sadism," "Utopian Society" and "Jesuit ritual," respectively). Each second-order language, or language system, is logically whole; neither depends upon social convention, only upon written language, i.e., adherence to and violation of grammar. Sade, Fourier and Loyola each created worlds of words, or universes of discourse (see Sade/Fourier/Loyola, p. 36), which is to say that the writings of each author stress the value of

the signifier above that of the signified. In addition, each of the three created a religion of sorts in his works--the functions of the actants in the writings of both Sade and Loyola are ritualized; in Fourier the pleasures of Utopia are worshipped to the extent that hierarchies are non-existent--no pleasure is trivial, all are sacred, including the mirlitons (little spiced pastries). Barthes states in the preface to the book that all three authors share the same sensual pleasure in the act of classification, the same mania for cutting up (the body of the victim/the human soul/ the body of Christ), "the same enumerative obsession (accounting for sins, tortures, passions, and even for accounting errors), the same image practice (imitation, tableau, seance)," and "the same erotic, fantastic fashioning of the social system" (p. 3). He goes on to state that the same operations are conducted by each in his writing: self-isolation (setting the scene, creation of a world), articulation (of Eros, Psyche, prayer), order (by a "Master of Ceremonies"), and theatricalization (pp. 4-6). Of course, a concern with an author's "operations" is an especial structuralist concern--one which makes possible a comparison of such apparently diverse authors as Sade, Fourier and Loyola. Another characteristic of all three authors, as observed by Barthes is metonymy, but, unlike Flaubert, who included a multitude of physical descriptions in his work, here the metonymy is weighed in favor of the signifier; Sade, Fourier and Loyola string together rows of signifiers, for none of the three

is interested in discourse leading to an object. The three authors are only interested in creating "languages"--methodologies which may be acted out, physically or mentally (in fact, fantasizing, in the case of all three, is probably preferable to actualization), by the readers of the narrative. Theirs is a literature of involvement.

As inventors of languages, that is, language systems (langue, as opposed to parole, in the terminology of Saussure), Sade, Fourier and Loyola are understandably unconcerned with fixing the meaning of the languages which they propose: "Thus, if Sade, Fourier, and Loyola are founders of a language, and only that, it is precisely in order to say nothing, to observe a vacancy (if they wanted to say something, linguistic language, the language of communication and philosophy, would suffice: they could be summarized, which is not the case with any one of them)" (p. 6). Barthes goes on to state that, of the three, Fourier is least concerned with meaning--his signifiers are least concentrated, most dispersed; in Barthes' terminology, his metonymy is the most evenly weighted throughout the field of signifiers, "least-centered"--this, Barthes asserts, accounts for the literature of Fourier being the most euphoric of the three. This reasoning may not appear to be logical, but Barthes claims that therein lies its appeal: "Nothing is more depressing than to imagine the Text as an intellectual object . . . The text is an object of pleasure" (p. 7).

Pleasure, however, in terms of the "text" should not be

confused with eroticism, nor, as has been stated earlier, should the eroticism of content be confused with the eroticism of form. Barthes remarks that society dismisses the essence of Sade by referring to him as an "erotic" author, but Barthes points out that what is usually understood as erotic by bourgeois society cannot be found in Sade (pp. 26-27). Eroticism is the mind's method of self-titillation: it feigns surprise in order to create a psycho-sexual "charge"; this is quite apparent in the aforementioned example of the striptease, the scenario of which could not be any more undramatic, but which is nevertheless exciting to those who think it should be. Sade does not provide his readers with the elements of self-titillation--his scenarios are also well-ordered, but there is no subterfuge on the part of the author; therefore, to the dismay of many, there can be none on the part of the reader. There is no easily accessible pleasure for the reader of the text of Sade; the reader of the Sadian text must compromise his expectations a great deal more than the reader of Balzac or Flaubert because the Sadian text must be read on its own terms, but for his efforts, according to Barthes, he will be the recipient not merely of pleasure, but of textual bliss: "Sade commonly practices what we might term metonymic violence: in the same syntagm he juxtaposes heterogeneous fragments belonging to spheres of language that are ordinarily kept separate by socio-moral taboo" (pp. 33-34). We recall that in The Pleasure of the Text such metonymic violence in Sade was commented upon by Barthes

as the creator of the "edge," the "tear," which represents the text of bliss. Seeing this operation of the writing of Sade, therefore, brings us full circle: once attention to the exercise of writing has weaned the reader from his usual expectations of eroticism, he can experience the erotic structure of the text, i.e., the text's "erotic body." It is clearly the form of the Sadian novel which is highlighted by Barthes as being erotic: "It is not only speech that is erogenous, not only what it represents . . . it is the subtlest, most cultivated forms of the discourse: reasoning . . . system . . . maxim . . ." (p. 146).

There is, of course, an erotic body within the content of the text, but its primary site is language, and for Barthes the importance of that body is its correspondence with (and, thereby, its sign of) the erotic body of the structure. The manifestation of this erotic body within the Sadian text, Barthes states, is the pornogram: "The pornogram is not merely the written trace of an erotic practice, nor even the product of a cutting up of that practice, treated as a grammar of sites and operations; through a new chemistry of the text, it is the fusion . . . of discourse and body" (pp. 158-59). The erotic body of the Sadian text is necessarily an abstraction the totality of which defies description: "Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body only if it cuts it up . . ." (p. 127)--the reader recalls the scene in "Sarrasine" when the young couple gaze at the painting of Adonis

and remark upon its exquisite beauty without every describing it; the discourse of "Sarrasine" finds that it too must "cut up" the body to reveal it, hence the spectre of castration is also revealed-- the mirror image of S is Z, the letter which performs the act of cutting up (Sarrasine, for his pains in trying to describe the erotic body of his "lover," is confronted with his castrated mirror-image, Zambinella). Reinforcing this parallel between the writings of Sade and the beauty/horror confrontation (bliss) which is the erotic body of the text "Sarrasine" is the note which is supplied by Barthes in Sade/Fourier/Loyola on the etymological chain of the name Sade: "Sade, Sado, Sadone, Sazo, Sauza (village of Saze). Again, lost in this lineage, the evil letter" (p. 173). May we say, therefore, that the text of bliss is sadistic? Yes, for as Barthes has pointed out in several contexts, the operation of the text of bliss is one which tears the language, violently upsets the expectations of "style," and discomforts the reader.

As with his examination of Racine, Barthes concentrates upon three major structures in Sade/Fourier/Loyola: space, language and signs (semiology). Through each of these structures, Barthes traces the "pleasure" and/or "bliss" afforded by the texts of the three authors. Language is clearly the prime operator in the text of each of the authors: of Sade $\sqrt{\pi}$. . . crime consists of transgressing the semantic rule . . ."--p. 137, and "The principle of Sadian eroticism is the saturation of every area of the body . . .

This is the same problem the sentence faces (in which respect we have to speak of a Sadian erotography, there being no distinction between the structures of ejaculation and that of language . . ."--p. 129), of Fourier /^{III} . . . as in Sade, it is syntax and syntax alone that produces the supreme immorality"--p. 102, and of Loyola /^{III}'Spiritual' as it may be, Ignatius's Exercises is based in writing. One need not be a Jesuit, a Catholic, a Christian, a believer, or a humanist to be interested in it. If we wanted to read Ignatius's discourse with this reading, interior to writing and not to faith, perhaps there is even some advantage in not being any of the above . . ."--p. 40. One of Barthes' main assertions in On Racine--that praxis is absorbed by logos in the literary work--is again made in this volume. Barthes tells us in his essay on Fourier that antique rhetoric included a special topic, the "impossibilia," and this rhetorical feature is utilized abundantly in the texts of Sade and Fourier. Barthes remarks that "if some group conceived the desire to realize literally one of the orgies Sade describes . . . the Sadian scene would quickly be seen to be utterly unreal: the complexity of the combinations, the partners' contortions, the potency of ejaculations, and the victims' endurance all surpass human nature . . ." (p. 136). Fourier employs the impossibilia to turn brackish seawater into lemonade, and Loyola's instructions to the exercitant are conducive to contemplation, to fantasm, rather than to action.

Due to his predilection for structuralism, Barthes notes

distinct stereographic spatial relationships among the writings of Sade, Fourier and Loyola. The tableau vivant, he states, is sketched in each, which follows logically from the basic premise that each author's objective is to create a world or universe (of words).

Barthes refers in his first essay on Sade to these spatial relationships as language space, which corresponds directly to the spatial arrangement in the theater of the Chateau de Silling which serves as the site of debauchery (pp. 146-48). Furthermore, it is the language space which stands between the binary opposition of mimesis/praxis, in which the telling of stories is transformed into the program of the theater. The concept which Barthes has of the tableau vivant has profound problematic consequences for the roles of reading and writing and the interactions of those roles. Barthes seems to see the tableau vivant within the Sadian novel being homologous to the idea of the writerly text, as if, somehow, the text bade the reader to "write" the scene being presented therein (by acting it out, perhaps, or more likely, by fantasizing upon it): " . . . some vast erotic tableau, conceived, composed, framed, lit, where the most libidinous figures would be represented through the very materiality of bodies, and instead of the actors jumping into the auditorium vulgarly to provoke the spectator, the spectator would go onto the stage and join in the posture . . . the ensemble, scene and tableau, will be written--and will even be pure writing . . ." (p. 156). One can imagine an endless "frame tale" to carry this concept to its logical

inconclusion, something along the order of the Pet milk can cited by Ray Bradbury in "The Illustrated Man," the label of which bears a picture which seems to infinitely recede into itself. One wonders if the creator of the recent pornocinematic work "Behind the Green Door" could possibly be a student of Sade à la Barthes: The spectators in that film view the actants, thereby becoming stimulated to the point of becoming actants themselves, and the implication is very strong that the audience viewing the motion picture is similarly being invited to participate in the sex acts which it is observing on the screen.

There is a sense of power detected by Barthes in the narrative works of Sade, Fourier and Loyola. In each case, the power is negative, that is, it is the reverse of what would be powerful in any other world but the world being sketched by the author in question. In both Sade and Fourier, Barthes perceives the power to be moral, and the negative value of moral power is, in the case of Sade, immoral power, and in the case of Fourier, amoral power. The chief difference between the two is the presence and necessity of the victim in the narrative of Sade. Negative power is essential to the "world" of Loyola, too, but in the Exercises the negative power is manifested in the mental exclusion of the outside world by the exercitant, which is necessary in order to dwell in the inner world of meditation. The attention to power is another typical concern of Barthes, and it is essentially an outgrowth of his concern with the

power of language and of writing. His discussion of Racinian space and considerations of the horde theory in On Racine include location, spatially and psychologically; of the site of power. Power in Racine, Barthes states, is possessed by the tragic character, the character who speaks--he even possesses the power to render himself ineffectual. In the literature of Sade, Barthes remarks, the victim is distinguished from the libertine by the function of speech: "The master is he who disposes of the entirety of language; the object is he who is silent . . ." (p. 31). This distinction may be stated in semiological terms: the sign is effected by an abundance of signifiers in the literature of Sade; perhaps the "spill-over" which results (and corresponds to the excess of sperm in Sadian literature, which Barthes contends is substituted for speech) is for Barthes the most pleasurable and rewarding facet of the writing of Sade.

Although Barthes' primary attention is devoted to the language systems proposed by Sade, Fourier and Loyola, the social systems--systems of signs, the substance of semiology--contained in those language systems are also objects of scrutiny. The food system, for instance, is of central importance to the universes (the spatial universe parallels the universe of the discourse) proposed by Sade and Fourier. In Sade, food is cast in a functional role, but it is also operative at the level of signs. It has a direct bearing upon the activities of the libertines and their victims: "Thus, the functions of food in the Sadian city: to restore, to poison, to

fatten, to evacuate; everything planned in relation to vice" (p. 19). However, the kinds of food--the substitutions of elements in the food system--connote the social status, and consequently the literary function of the consumer: "In Sade, diet is a fact of caste, and therefore subject to classification. The libertine diet is . . . a sign of luxury . . ." (p. 18). Other social sign systems in the writings of Sade, such as the systems of fashion and economy are noted by Barthes as performing similar functions of signification. In Fourier, Barthes points out, the food system signifies the entire Utopian system which the author proposes: "In a way," Barthes remarks, "all Harmony has grown out of Fourier's taste for compotes . . ." (p. 116). Obviously, Loyola's asceticism contains its own directives which govern social sign systems, but Barthes does not acknowledge an absence of signification because of this factor. Instead, he notes the negative power of the sign in Loyola, which ultimately leads to the absolute zero degree of the divine sign--that is, the Exercises are signifiers which point to a signified (the guidance of God, the divine sign), but sometimes the signified does not occur. Therefore, the creator of this particular sign system (Loyola), in order to maintain the integrity of this system, incorporates even this negative aspect of signification into it: "There is but one outcome . . . it is to make the withholding (of guidance) . . . itself into an ultimate sign . . . Hearing turns into its own answer . . . the divine sign finds itself completely absorbed in its hearing . . . the mantic act

. . . has succeeded in including within its system this empty and yet significant place called the zero degree of the sign: restored to signification, the divine vacuum can no longer threaten, alter, or decentralize the plenitude which is part of every closed language" (p. 75).

As with S/Z, Barthes supplements his commentary in Sade/Fourier/Loyola with structural diagrams, but, as is characteristic of Barthes, his commentary is not dependent upon the diagrams. At their best the diagrams in Sade/Fourier/Loyola complement the points being made in the commentary by their structure, and one feels that some of the diagrams are intended not only to complement the text but to convey irony as well. For example, the chart on page 43 which illustrates the four levels of the Ignatian text seems to portray the conventional "stairway to heaven"; similarly, the diagram of Ignatian language on page 57 has significance in this context as more than the "tree" diagram common to structuralist linguistics--it brings to mind all manner of Biblical "trees," including the "tree of life," "the tree of the forbidden fruit," "the tree upon which Judas hanged himself," and "the tree from which Christ's cross was carved." Perhaps the most amusing diagram, considering its context, in Sade/Fourier/Loyola is actually a chart on page 142 which details the marks of defloration in the narrative of Sade. In a discussion of ironic aspects of the Sadian text, Barthes remarks that the central irony is that the "high, pompous, cultural styles [of language, of writing]" coded by centuries

of orthodox literature are summoned to appear in this little theater of the sentence side by side with the pornogram" (p. 149). This is the very outrage in which Barthes himself participates by analyzing pornographic literature with semiological methodologies, and this juxtaposition of the two languages (that of defloration--the pornogram of Sade--and that of semiological analysis) defines the irony and humor of the chart on page 142--the sites of defloration in the bodies of the characters at the Chateau of Silling are listed in a clinical manner, and for a moment one forgets what is being discussed here.

However, if one reads the sections of Sade/Fourier/Loyola which deal with Sade from the perspective of the erotic content, it is just as easy to forget that semiological methodologies are being utilized: there is a temptation to note the content at the expense of the structure. This is a direction in which the serious student of semiology should not allow the text to persuade him. To read the corpus of Barthes' work in perspective, the student should observe the admonitions of the structuralist and semiological movements; he should not impose an arbitrary dividing line between Barthes' earlier concerns and his later ones. Although some features of semiological analysis are emphasized in some of his works and not in others, the author of Elements of Semiology is without doubt the author of Sade/Fourier/Loyola--indeed, the two are parts of the same book. Since his writing of Elements, Barthes has followed his own directives

contained therein in the writing of each subsequent study.

Part Three Notes

¹ Roland Barthes, S/Z: An Essay, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 16. Unless indicated otherwise the page references in this chapter refer to this edition of S/Z. Originally published in French in 1970.

² Lawrence Louis Goldman, The Castrato (New York: John Day, 1973).

³ Frank Kermode, "Facets, Bubbles, Phylacteries," New Statesman, 4 May 1973, p. 660.

⁴ Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 65. Unless indicated otherwise the page references in the first part of this chapter refer to this edition of The Pleasure of the Text and those in the second part of the chapter refer to the edition of Sade/Fourier/Loyola noted in Part Two. The Pleasure of the Text originally published in French in 1973.

Part Four. New Imposture? Criticism and Rebuttal

"In the fall of 1965 Raymond Picard, a professor at the Sorbonne, and well-known for his exhaustive research--basically historical in conception--on Racine, published a short but hard-hitting little book entitled Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture (New Criticism or New Imposture). While it is clear that Picard intended to question the procedures of the whole group of New Critics, his principal target was Roland Barthes . . ."¹ Picard's attack upon the writings of Barthes is not the only casualty sustained by the structuralist, but it has been one of the most persistent. One of the reasons for this is that Picard does not necessarily represent the "Old School" of literary criticism--in fact, his views are apparently patterned after those of the Russian formalists, precursors of the structuralist movement. Davidson's comment--that Picard's research on Racine is "basically historical in conception" gives the professor short shrift, to say the least. Indeed, no sooner had the controversy erupted than observers began to cast the principle combatants in roles which were unfair symbols of their relative positions--Picard, as the defender of the Ancients, versus Barthes, champion of the Moderns. A column in the Times Literary Supplement addressed this nonsense head-on on behalf

of Picard: "M. Picard, although at the top of the academic tree, is also to some extent an enemy of traditional academic procedures, and his thesis on Racine, for instance, was not meant as biographical criticism but as a sociological study of the position of a particular writer in the seventeenth-century setting."² It is hard to imagine Picard as an Ancient when one has read comments written by him such as "The old-established superiority complex of the French in the field of ideology and philosophy seems to forbid their importing critical concepts for the better understanding of their own literature" and "A movement has started, however, a somewhat negative but by no means insignificant one, against the exaggerated practice of biographical criticism so firmly entrenched in France, and in favour of a return to the work itself . . . it has at last been grasped that the life of a writer does little to explain his work, and that circumstantial anecdotes about creation shed little light upon the act of creation itself, still less upon the resulting work."³

So what is the furor all about? Well, it turns out that both Picard and Barthes accused each other of committing essentially the same crime: bad faith. Barthes has charged Picard, at least implicitly, with indulging in Lansonianism, a rather involved set of concepts which carries with it the taint of academism, positivism, and a critical prejudice which assumes a relationship between the details of an author's life and those of his works--to put it succinctly, Lansonianism, for the French "new critic," is a quick reference label which sums up all

that is bad about French "old criticism." However, in his implicit application of the label to Picard, Barthes pointed out that his "argument against Lansonianism is not that it has assumptions, but that instead of admitting them, it drapes them in a moral cloak of rigorous and objective investigation; it is as if ideology were being smuggled surreptitiously into the scientific approach."⁴ Picard claimed that with Barthes and the structuralist movement the observer discovered "subtle ways of pursuing biographical criticism, even though it may be repudiated. The admittedly interesting business of studying a writer's basic intuitions, the structure of his thought and the quality of his sensibility, often leads critics to place on the same level, and even to fuse into a vague general concept, elements discerned in the historical personality of the writer, on the one hand, and those revealed in his literary production on the other; so that once again we have a confusion of the man and his work" (Picard, "Critical Trends," p. 719). To comment further upon the similarity of these two arguments would only serve to belabor the obvious, but what should be noted are some of the peripheral comments made in the context of the arguments which do indicate a real division between the positions of the two critics.

First, the holistic motivations which contributed to the development of a methodology which we can call "structuralism" would seem to find Picard's definition of the proper role of criticism restrictive: "For a work, be it poem or novel, is sufficient unto itself, endowed with its own power and containing its own clues. These are to be

found simply by examining the text . . ." (ibid., p. 720). While agreeing with the initial spirit of such a statement, most structuralists would probably argue that it, like many of the pronouncements of the Russian formalists, did not go far enough. A work may be sufficient unto itself, true, as one manifestation of the literary system, but the structuralists would also be interested in viewing that work within the perspective of that system. However, Picard has charged that the structuralist critic grinds down the individual text of an author "to a rubble of signs, undifferentiated by any literary judgment. If some of the champions of this kind of criticism claim to be interested in 'structure,' their structure is certainly not a literary one" (ibid.). He fails to evaluate adequately the structuralist endeavor, which is first to examine the "literariness" of a text, including its place within the system, or language, of literature, then to examine the multitude of significations to which the text gives birth. The critic's task, as perceived by the structuralists, is to attempt to go wherever those significations lead, and if the path of the journey winds through the worlds of psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology, then it is only hoped that the critic is equipped well enough to make the trek. Barthes has stated that "a work of literature is a very special semantic system, the aim of which is to put 'meaning' into the world, but not 'a meaning'" ("Criticism As Language," p. 740). Picard's interest, on the other hand, seems to be in limiting the meaning, subjecting the

literary work to a test of truth: "If philosophy tends nowadays to become confused with literature, that is no reason why literature should allow itself to become confused with philosophy, nor literary criticism with philosophic criticism. If criticism is to be worth anything it must be complete, and accordingly we have to establish the idea of literary meaning ("Critical Trends," p. 720). The first sentence of this quote is evidence of the kind of confused thinking which common sense criticism, which is what Picard advocates, leads to. Philosophy permeates man's culture; philosophy and literature are inextricably linked, and it seems exceedingly naive to say that the two should be kept separate. It does not seem naive, but a great deal more sensible, to say, as Barthes has said, that criticism is a "comment on a comment, a secondary language or meta language . . . applied to a primary language . . . Criticism is defined by the interaction of these two languages and so bears a close resemblance to another intellectual activity, logic, which is also entirely founded on the distinction between language-as-object and meta-language. Consequently, if criticism is only a meta-language, its task is not to discover forms of 'truth' but forms of 'validity'" ("Criticism As Language," p. 739). Josipovici has observed and commented upon some of the weaknesses of the common sense approach to modern criticism, and his published observations on the dispute between Picard and Barthes are apropos of any discussion about the profound differences between the methodologies of the two critics:

The explanation of a work of art, he /Picard/ says, should surely be sought inside it, not outside. This is an admirable sentiment, but what is the inside? What sounds like commonsense may in fact be the result of a set of assumptions just as much in need of justification as those of the 'new critics.' And it may be that Picard's commonsense approach distorts the work just as much as any other bias . . . The trouble is that the opponents of the 'new criticism' operate with an oversimplified scheme of what literary creation is. They seem to believe that if it is not conscious it must be subconscious, that if it is not concerned with the external world it must be concerned with the author's psyche, and that if the 'new critics' are not concerned with the surface of the work they must be concerned with some sort of hidden subject-matter beneath. Thus Picard winds up his attack by saying that the new criticism, by relegating the overt subject-matter to a secondary place, does away with the work altogether, and he asks rhetorically: 'How could it be otherwise, since the work is considered in large part as though it were the product of the unconscious?' And, with a pompous irony that Barthes is surely right in comparing to Proust's Norpois, he concludes: 'I myself, who love literature, have made up my mind--at least in the present state of my knowledge--to remain satisfied with the conscious meaning. I will be told that this is limiting myself to appearances. But the appearance is the reality even in literature, as it is in painting. To look in a painting only for the canvas on which it is painted is to condemn oneself to see nothing of the painting.' This is the basis of Picard's attack, and it illustrates the source of his misunderstanding. Taking a commonsense view, he says, in effect: either you see this as a portrait of x or as daubs on a canvas behind which it is necessary to go so as to see the plain canvas beneath. But, Barthes would surely answer, I am interested neither in x nor in the canvas, but in the painting--neither in the subject-matter of the story nor in the writer's subconscious, but in what the writer has made of his subject, in his distinctive 'style.' Thus it is Picard himself who is always reducing art to something else, for in his insistence on the primacy of subject-matter he is really denying art any legitimate sphere, denying that 'espace litteraire' on which Barthes and Blanchot so rightly insist,⁵ and whose mysterious boundaries they try to plot.

Actually Josipovici has given a better assessment here of Picard's mistakes than he has of Barthes' philosophy. Rather than being concerned with the artist's "style," Barthes' primary attention would be devoted to the interaction between the painting and the world upon which it comments. However, I must agree with Josipovici's spirit in challenging the questions which are raised by Picard's point of view, for they are many indeed.

However, as Josipovici has pointed out, any statement of methodology will be problematic to a certain degree. What is less excusable in Picard are the unwarranted attacks he has made upon the methodologies of Barthes and other structuralists. For instance, Picard was one of the first to charge the structuralists with the crime of demeaning literature, and since he made his statement to that effect, others have taken up the charge as their banner. In "Critical Trends in France" Picard states that structuralist criticism "betrays its lack of real interest in literature by putting all written matter on the same level, so that a private note scribbled in haste ranks with a published text which is part of a carefully organized body of work" (p. 720). If anyone is indicted in the context of that statement, it is surely Picard. The structuralist notion of a "grammar" of literature is based on the assumption that there is something which differentiates literary texts from other written communications. This is a "received" notion, based on what structuralists perceive as a fact of existence; that is, structuralists, or more to the point in

this case, semiologists, notice that throughout recorded history man has separated certain writings from the bulk of written communication, and has called the excepted ones "literature." Some critics have concerned themselves with pinpointing the reason for this, and have actually constructed models for literary texts, based on functions, plots, or types of characters. However, it is enough for others, especially semiologists such as Barthes, to remark upon the fact that there is a difference in the way man receives written communication, and it is presently a moot point whether or not there is actually a difference within the works themselves. To discuss the phenomenon of difference between literature and other writing, to properly construct one's metalanguage, one must be well-versed in literary conventions, because for example, as Jonathan Culler has remarked, "anyone wholly unacquainted with literature and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, would, for example, be quite baffled if presented with a poem. His knowledge of the language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature--as we say with emphasis to those who would use literary works for other purposes--because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' which enables others to proceed. He has not internalized the 'grammar' of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings."⁶

Metalanguages or, if you will, "critiques" of literary works which are based upon analyses of literary conventions are not, as Picard and others have claimed, "the result of subjective associations. They are public and can be discussed and justified with respect to the conventions of reading poetry--or, as English allows us to say, of making sense. Such conventions are the constituents of the institution of literature, and in this perspective one can see that it may well be misleading to speak of poems as harmonious totalities, autonomous natural organisms, complete in themselves and bearing a rich immanent meaning. The semiological approach suggests, rather, that the poem be thought of as an utterance that has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated. If other conventions were operative its range of potential meanings would be different" (ibid., p. 116). Relativity, system, structure--these are the concepts to which Picard seems to object so profoundly and pompously, and they are the concepts which keep the semiological methods of Barthes free to discuss so many works of literature in so many diverse ways. Picard and others like him would be a great deal more content if Barthes were to relent and state that he believes that literature is x and what is not literature is y; Barthes' critics would then have something very definite for which to criticize him--as it stands, he is too flexible for their purposes. Meanwhile, he is true to the principles of semiological methodology, which is to say that his work has validity within the

system of semiological analysis, and while not painting himself into any corners, he has not feared to "think out loud" about the nature of literature: "A work of literature, at least of the kind that is normally considered by the critics (and this itself may be a possible definition of 'good' literature) is neither ever quite meaningless . . . nor ever quite clear; it is, so to speak, suspended meaning; it offers itself to the reader as a declared system of significance, but as a signified object it eludes his grasp. This . . . explains how it is that a work of literature has such power to ask questions of the world . . . without, however, supplying any answers . . ." ("Criticism As Language," p. 740). Perhaps, for Picard, the meaning of Barthes' methodologies is similarly suspended--beyond, at least for the time being, his grasp.

Others have missed the "structuralist boat," either by intention or misinterpretation, and, based upon cursory examinations of structuralist methods, have dismissed the whole lot of structuralists as intellectual charlatans. However, a number of critics have made very thorough, informed and thoughtful investigations into structuralism, its methods and its proponents, including Barthes. They have raised some questions which demand answers such as "What are the theoretical limits of structuralist activity?" Yves Velan poses the question in an essay on Barthes, and he warns: "Saying 'here is what it is' (a language which avoids any deliberate meaning, which is its own end), it is very difficult to avoid sounding like 'here is what it ought

to be' . . . There is a great temptation to pass from analysis to creation. Let one not adopt for himself a method a posteriori, and immediately, there will come those who will make a finality of language, presented as the essence of literature, a literary project."⁷

If Velan truly sees evil in this procedure, then he will probably view the whole of structuralist criticism as an evil activity, because, as has been discussed previously, there is no artificial dividing line between the literary "creation" (a word of M. Velan's choosing) and the structuralist analysis of it. However, Velan should be alerted to the structuralist contention that an analysis which embellishes thusly does not do so in a prescriptive way; the analytical model of the work under examination does not intend to be an improvement of the original, but it does propose to do a thorough job of analysis. The fact that a structuralist analysis can, in some instances, be viewed as an extension of the "creative" act is merely testimony that the original work has been, in Barthes' term, "saturated."

Ironically, another aspect of the act of creativity--originality--has been found wanting in the writings of Barthes and other structuralists-semiologists by critics of structuralism. Belaboring of the obvious by structuralists is another accusation which has come from several advocates of traditional critical methods, as is the creation of exasperating jargon and neologisms. The latter act, neologism, has aroused many critics' hackles--of Fourier's creation

of words, Barthes wrote in Sade/Fourier/Loyola that "neologism is an erotic act, which is why he never fails to arouse the censure of pedants" (p. 81). This comment can be taken as a rebuke to many who have accused Barthes of something evil by his indulgence in the practice of forming new words or assigning new meanings to words. Actually, in the instances when Barthes neologizes it is usually to use words or phrases in untraditional applications, and his reason for doing so is the same reason he has for the use of "exasperating jargon"--to deal adequately with his subject, to construct an appropriate metalanguage: " . . . a metalanguage takes the other language as its object, and functions as a signifier to the other language, which is thus its signified. Thus Barthean commentary is metalanguage in that it abstracts the structure of another primary language . . . and makes it available in a new and different form (in which . . . the neologisms function as a reminder that we have to do with a metalanguage rather than a primary, or object-language)." ⁸

Barthes does not feel that his use of neologisms is a matter of personal capriciousness; in fact he feels compelled to use neologisms in the construction of his semiological metalanguage: " . . . there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely . . . This instability forces the mythologist to use a terminology adapted to it . . . which . . . often is a cause for irony: I mean neologism. The concept is a constituting element of myth: if I want to decipher myths, I must somehow

be able to name concepts . . . what I need most often is ephemeral concepts, in connection with limited contingencies: neologism is then inevitable. China is one thing, the idea which a French petit-bourgeois could have of it not so long ago is another: for this peculiar mixture of bells, rickshaws and opium-dens, no other word possible but Sininess" (Mythologies, pp. 120-21). By referring to the "pleasure" or the "bliss" of a text, Barthes describes more definitely the processes which take place when he reads a text than he would have described them if he had discussed the processes in terms of "plot structure," "character stereotype," etc. In other words, Barthes' methodology is subjective, as are other critical methods, but overtly so. For this reason, as the paradoxical style of Barthes would compel us to conclude, Barthes becomes more objective, for, through his treatment of his opinions as ultimately subjective he is able to place the question of objectivity in a position of unimportance to his commentary. It is an ironic aspect of man's existence that once he determines to be objective, to dismiss the prejudices of subjectivity from his thought processes, he simultaneously builds a biased model (a model which subjects everything with which he is dealing to a questioning process to determine if he is approaching the matter objectively) which brings subjectivity back into play. Barthes is in contact with his thought processes, through the age-old rationalist practice of reflection, which produces

new ways of viewing language--Barthes assumes a philosophic position of radical doubt, he takes nothing for granted. He does, however, appropriate the terminologies which are useful to his purpose, terminologies which, through his examination of their applicability, are revealed to have validity within his system of semiology.

One erudite critic of Barthes is Frank Kermode, who, surprisingly, has criticized Barthes for unoriginality. In an article concerning S/Z, Kermode intimated that the learned reader of Barthes was probably asking himself if Barthes "with rather extravagant (and for that matter, ideological) additions, is not saying something that in a way we know already" (Kermode, "Use of the Codes," Approaches to Poetics, p. 58). Kermode's accusation is surprising because it seems to indicate a possible misunderstanding, on the part of the critic, of the philosophical exercise. If we do already know the points which Barthes has brought to the fore in S/Z and other works, then why have we not done likewise in the past? One may answer that every point which Barthes has made has been made in the past in different terminology--in fact, such a criticism has been made of the structuralist movement in general--but such a statement bears a deep resemblance to the critical statement which alleges that all of today's novels are merely copies of those which were written in the past, simply because they have plots similar to the classics. A comparison between these two opinions probably makes those who accuse structuralists of being unoriginal quite uncomfortable--it is doubtful that they would wish

to be cast in what they might believe to be a "structuralist light." However, structuralists may discuss the structural similarities of two or more works and state that a homology exists between one or more levels of "meaning," but they would never be so reductionist to claim sameness between or among works. It is doubtful that any critic would do so, so one must wonder why one critic would accuse another of doing something unsavory because his theories are "unoriginal." After all, if one could speak to the dead, who would say to Descartes that he should never have written "Cogito, ergo sum" because it was something which everyone, in a way, already knew?

Oddly enough, literary commentators other than those who consider themselves either structuralists or semiologists, but who wish to put literary criticism on a scientific basis, have gone astray in their attempts. An excellent example is Stanley Fish, who has championed the cause of affective stylistics and has made the term "learned reader" at once a catchword for, and a condemnation of, the movement. The title of an essay by Fish pretty well sums up his argument: "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics."⁹ Professor Fish contends that critical pronouncements about meaning or understanding of literature usually ignore the reader (ibid., p. 383), so he sets about to set the matter straight. His methodology employs an elaborate and intricate form of explication of the literary work as it is received, bit by bit, by an "ideal" reader as he reads it (sequentially, in English, of course, left to right).

This "learned" reader, as Fish terms him, is apparently a somewhat confused concept for Fish, for in one part of the essay this reader seems to be an objective construct which the critic must build in his mind and in another part Fish acknowledges that the "learned reader" is himself: "Analysis in terms of doings and happenings is . . . objective because it recognizes the fluidity, "the movingness," of the meaning experience and because it directs us to where the action is--the active and activating consciousness of the reader. But what reader? When I talk about the responses of 'the reader,' am I not really talking about myself, and making myself into a surrogate for all the millions of readers who are not me at all? Yes and no" (ibid., p. 401). Certainly Fish is not quite as confused as this quotation, taken from the context of his essay, would have one believe--he goes on to qualify the paradox through an application of his theory of the idea of linguistic competence, a concept which is more thoroughly explained by Jonathan Culler (See Culler, Structuralist Poetics, Chapter Six: "Literary Competence," pp. 113-130)--but his uncertainty about this concept, coupled with the restrictive role which he assigns to it within his system, is enough to call his methodology into question. As one who accepts the general tenets of structuralism, at least that brand of structuralism which is practiced by Barthes, I find Fish's methodology to be inadequate. Barthes' methodology seems inclusive--I dispute any claim that Barthes' analyses ignore the reader--in that, for Barthes, literature is not

"created" merely in the reader, but in the interaction among the literary work, the reader, the author, and the world. The primacy of the reader is asserted repeatedly throughout Fish's essay; in one part of his commentary he writes, "In the preceding pages I have argued the case for a method of analysis which focuses on the reader rather than the artifact . . ." (ibid., p. 400). Surely, if Fish is speaking for readers other than himself, the fallacy of this argument can easily be seen--it is founded upon as fallacious a principle as the argument which alleges that by reading an author's work one can infer what was in his mind at the moment of "creation." To prevent the reader of his essay from misunderstanding what he means by the "reader," Fish establishes criteria for the "reader" to whom he refers:

Obviously my reader is . . . an ideal or idealized reader . . . to use a term of my own, the reader is the informed reader. The informed reader is someone who

1. is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up.
2. is in full possession of "the semantic knowledge that a mature . . . listener brings to his task of comprehension." This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc.
3. has literary competence. (Fish, "What is Stylistics . . ." Approaches to Poetics, p. 110.)

These criteria are subject to the most arbitrary of judgments, but disregarding that, it is interesting to note that by the act of establishing criteria he contradicts his objections to attempts by others to make literary interpretation into a science, misguided as

they are by the "impulse to escape from the flux and variability of the human situation to the security and stability of a timeless formalism" (ibid.).

Not only does Fish assign priority to the learned reader, i.e., himself, but he entrusts the concept of the learned reader to evaluate components of a written communication. In his essay, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," Fish comments upon a paragraph from the writings of Pater: "If a casual reader were asked to point out the most important word in the second clause--'not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them'--he would probably answer 'not,' because as a logical marker 'not' controls everything that follows it. But as one component in an experience, it is hardly controlling at all; for as the clause unfolds, 'not' has less and less a claim on our attention and memories; working against it, and finally overwhelming it . . . is an unbroken succession of more forceful words" (pp. 395-96). From a holistic point of view, the obvious question which must be posed to Fish on this point is, "Why be so concerned with assigning a hierarchical value to one component of a whole?" Various elements within the sentence react with each other to produce meaning--why single out one and declare that it is the most important? For that matter, why single out one sentence to analyze, when the rereading of a text surely must place all of its sentences in an important regard? Indeed, the structuralist would say that the meanings of the text depend, at least partly, upon the interplay

among all of its parts. The exercise of reading is less believably described by Fish than it is by Barthes: "Thus, what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again" (Pleasure of the Text, pp. 11-12). As for Fish's "learned reader," it seems that the goal to which the concept strives is the neutralization of a system of reading--an objective to which Barthes addresses himself in On Racine: ". . . literature is that ensemble of objects and rules, techniques and works, whose function in the general economy of our society is precisely to institutionalize subjectivity. To follow this movement, the critic must . . . talk about Racine in one way and not in another: he too belongs to literature. The first objective rule here is to declare one's system of reading, it being understood that no neutral one exists" (p. 172).

Fish takes to task the perpetrators of other theories of style, whose systems are "meaningless," because they refer to nothing except themselves ("What Is Stylistics," p. 124), but he claims that his methods are worthwhile precisely for the same reasons: "The method, then, remains faithful to its principles" ("Literature in the Reader," p. 426). Like Picard, Fish argues in "What Is Stylistics" that no truth is arrived at by other theories of style, thereby seemingly disputing or misunderstanding the value of the rational philosophical enterprise of constructing a valid system; however, unlike Picard, in

the other essay Fish not only defends this enterprise but declares it to be the chief proof of the value of his own system. Until Fish has defined the framework of his own methodologies, those of Barthes will have a "suspended meaning" for him.

Part Four Notes

¹ Hugh Davidson, "The Critical Position of Roland Barthes," Contemporary Literature, Summer 1968, p. 367.

² "Civil War Among the Critics," Times Literary Supplement, 3 February 1966, p. 83.

³ Raymond Picard, "Critical Trends in France," Times Literary Supplement, 27 September 1963, p. 719.

⁴ Roland Barthes, "Criticism as Language," Times Literary Supplement, 27 September 1963, p. 739.

⁵ Gabriel Josipovici, "Structures of Truth: The Premises of the French New Criticism," Critical Quarterly, 10 (1968), pp. 79-80.

⁶ Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1975), p. 114.

⁷ Yves Velan, "Barthes," trans. David Carroll, Modern French Criticism: From Proust and Valéry to Structuralism, ed. John Simon (Chicago: Chicago University, 1972), p. 320.

⁸ Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton University, 1972), p. 159.

⁹ Stanley E. Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," Self-Consuming Artifacts; The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: University of California, 1972).

Part Five. Semiology in Contemporary Society

As current philosophic movements, structuralism and semiology are being used to construct the framework, or at least to perceive that construction, of the contemporary collective human consciousness. The development of semiology as an object of study is symptomatic of the need of contemporary culture to synthesize the disparate elements of man's existence. This need is not peculiar to 20th century man's society; every primitive culture which has been observed has felt the need for synthesis in order to make "sense" of the world, which has resulted in the inventions of numerous mythologies (which, according to Lévi-Strauss, have similar structures). What does seem to be peculiar to our society is the rapid growth of technology, of international commercial relations, and of immediacy of international communication. At the same time, perhaps partially because of and partially independent of this growth, contemporary culture has moved away from its "sacred" characteristics and gravitated steadily toward the opposite pole--that of the "profane": " . . . modern man's anxieties, his experiences in dream or imagination, although 'religious' from the point of view of form, do not, as in homo religiosus, make part of a Weltanschauung and provide the basis for a system of behavior."¹ However, even the most "profane," the most "modern" of

men retain vestigial structures of sacred mythologies which have been camouflaged (encoded) by the forms and content of contemporary life: " . . . the nonreligious man of modern societies is still nourished and aided by the activity of his unconscious . . ." which "offers him solutions for the difficulties of his own life, and in this way plays the role of religion . . ." (ibid., pp. 212-13). It is in this sense of religion that Robert Scholes comments upon the Marxists responding to a "religious" need with their brand of structuralism. Structuralism and semiology are the intellectual mediators between the sacredness and the profanity of contemporary man; this mediating force is necessary precisely because man finds himself in the predicament of hovering over the chasm between the two pinnacles of the "sacred" and the "profane." The "decoding" capabilities of semiology promise to make intelligible the cacaphony caused by the voices of the "sacred" and the "profane" vying for dominance in human society. This, then, is the mark, the articulation, of our age--that the attempt of contemporary society, particularly contemporary American society, is not to return to a state of pre-lapsarian innocence, but to achieve an amalgam of sacred and profane elements so that all things in man's experience may be endured because they are all parts of the same whole: " . . . this redefinition of the world has put something like God back in the universe--but not a God made in man's image, bursting with individualism and subject to temper tantrums when his will is thwarted. But a God who truly 'is not mocked' because It is the plan of the

universe, the master system which sets the patterns for all others" (ibid., p. 182).

Structuralism promotes an order which does not respect individualistic or nationalistic barriers, as Scholes has pointed out. As methods for "seeing through" particulars to discover universals, structuralism and semiology engender a politics which excludes none, because all are parts of the whole. This outlook has another consequence which should be apparent: an acceptance of the structural-semiological world view implies that one has transformed himself from "centrifugal man" to "centripetal man" (ibid., p. 190). This consequence, of course, does not confine itself to influence upon syntagmatic experiences--it has paradigmatic implications as well which permit comparison of structuralism to the contemporary ideology of existentialism: "The relationship of structuralism to existentialism can be illustrated in the relationship between Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Existential Marxism assumes that man is in history, moving toward a better future in a progressive way. Structuralism assumes that man is in a system not necessarily arranged for his benefit . . . Put simply, Sartre feels that men live in history and seek refuge from it in myth; while Lévi-Strauss feels that men live in myth and seek refuge from it in history. For Lévi-Strauss, history is a myth that men make up for their own satisfaction. But what looks like progress to the historian is only transformation or displacement to the

structuralist" (ibid., pp. 194-95).² The more centripetal and less centrifugal man becomes, the more the ego is eliminated from his decision-making processes, and, of course, the less that man has to contend with his ego, the less necessary the concept of a historical progression becomes. The idea of historical progress fulfills two functions only in contemporary society: to feed the ego of man and to further the aims of the champions of divisions among men.

We live in a time in which traditional assumptions of bourgeois society are being called into question: since the establishment of the age of the profane, man has possessed an unwarranted self-assuredness about his world. Ours is a reflective time: some of the most original of our intellectuals, Barthes and Lévi-Strauss among them, have challenged many of the comfortable assumptions which we have inherited from previous generations, including the idea of a linear progression from the "dawn" of the universe to the present time. Some of the challenges seem absurd to many of us; the notions that an Atlantis once existed or that the Egyptian pyramids were constructed by visitors from another planet are dismissed by many of our fellows as totally ridiculous propositions. Still, however, many people today do believe in these and other "radical" assertions. The irony of our period (and, perhaps, of all periods, since contradiction seems to be part of man's nature) is that concurrent with this mood of radical challenge is a mood of unquestioning acceptance: although many members of contemporary bourgeois society entertain untraditional theories

about their society, most of them engage in day-to-day business and leisure activities which are structured according to traditional societal assumptions. Therefore, we find in our culture an abiding faith in the myth that we are somehow in touch with an absolute "truth," and the belief that institutions of our society, such as our various print and electronic media, can present that "truth" to us.

Photography, which is emerging as the chief method of visual representation in our time, is purported by some to be the one graphic expression with a monopoly on truth. What is currently termed "classic" photography can be seen to be an attempt to "capture" nature, thereby containing truth and showing things as they "actually" are. Such photographic techniques as those employed by masters of classic photography are often referred to as "literal," but they are obviously filled with artifice. First of all, the same observation which has been made of the un-reality of theatrical action can be made of photography: the art form is a substance of its own, with significations of its own--the signs of art refer not to "reality" but often to our "idea" of reality, a second-order system of language. Classic photography most often presents reality as "beautiful creations of nature"--landscapes, seascapes, birds in flight; whereas some current "schools" of photography present the ugly as the "true" picture of reality--the faces of starving children, tenements, the suburbs, and service stations. The representation of reality in photography is, like the

representation of reality in literature, a reflection of the opinions of the photographer and his audience; also like literature, the degree of notoriety achieved by a particular photographic "movement" is largely dependent upon the current of popular aesthetics at a particular time and in a particular socio-political situation. As Metz' account of an observation by Barthes points out, though, photography's appeal is based upon a mixture of the affectation of reality with an unreal quality which arises from the fact that the photograph is a static object: "When we look at a photograph, says Roland Barthes, we do not see a presence 'being there'--for this definition is too loose and can be applied to any copy--but a presence that 'has been there.' 'We therefore have a new category of space-time: place present but time past--so that in still photography there is an illogical conjunction of here and then.' This explains the photograph's quality of 'real unreality' . . . We always know that what the photograph shows us is not really here. For this reason, Barthes continues, photography has little projective power . . . 'This has been' overpowers 'Here I am'" (Metz, Film Language, pp. 5-6). The non-projective character of still photography contrasts with the character of cinema photography, the mass appeal of which is due to its affectation of reality: "There is . . . a great difference between photography and the cinema, which is an art of fiction and narration and has considerable projective power. The movie spectator is absorbed, not by a 'has been there,' but by a sense of 'There it is'" (ibid., p. 6).

It is difficult to deal with the semiotics of the cinema because it is a combination of communication systems, and to discuss one of its "languages" almost necessarily precludes discussion of its others. In the Elements of Semiology Barthes cites the cinema as one of the most complex semiotic systems in our culture: "The most interesting systems, at least among those which belong to the province of mass-communications, are complex systems in which different substances are engaged. In cinema, television and advertising, the senses are subjected to the concerted action of a collection of images, sounds and written words" (p. 30). These systems are complex because the various language systems which compose them have not been sufficiently analyzed and described by the quasi-science of semiology: " . . . we know the linguistic 'language,' but not that of images or that of music . . . " (ibid.). Therefore, it is difficult for the analyst of complex systems to separate their various language systems into the familiar linguistic classifications (such as "langue" and "parole") which enable one to deal with most systems of signification. The most ambitious attempt thus far to deal with the semiotics of the cinema is Christian Metz' Film Language, cited previously. Drawing heavily on the writings of Roland Barthes, Metz has begun a semiological approach to the study of the cinema, using both universal paradigmatic and particular syntagmatic techniques to discuss the complex system. In one part of his book ("The Cinema: Language or Language System?" pp. 31-91) Metz

mentions that thus far there have been four standard approaches to the cinema--film criticism, the history of cinema, theory of the cinema (originated within the cinematographic institution), and filmology (originated outside the cinematographic institution by psychologists, sociologists, and others)--and he remarks that linguistic theory has unfortunately been absent from these approaches. He declares that film semiology's time has come: "An approach that would be derived as much from the writings of the great theoreticians of the cinema as from studies of filmology and the methods of linguistics might, gradually--it will take a long time--begin to accomplish, in the domain of the cinema, and especially on the level of the large signifying units, the great Saussurian dream of studying the mechanisms by which human significations are transmitted in human society . . . The time has come for a semiotics of the cinema" (p. 91).

Indeed the time has come for the application of semiological theory to the cinema and to the other documents of contemporary culture. A great deal has been said about the application of semiological methodologies to the analysis of (metalanguage about) written, visual or verbal communication, but it seems inevitable that semiology and structuralism will become increasingly a part of the first-order language system as well. John Barth's Chimera has been mentioned in this study as a work which incorporates the terminology and diagrams of structural analysis in the thread of the narrative. Many contemporary fiction writers apparently consciously utilize the insights of

structuralist and semiological commentators; many are themselves commentators as well as writers of fiction. Robbe-Grillet has authored a book about contemporary fiction, entitled For A New Novel, in which he gives a description of the "new novel" which seems to echo one of Roland Barthes' definitions of the "writerly": "Mahu ou le Materiau /Mahu or the Raw Material/: This title is already a program. The characters of this novel belong neither to the realm of psychology nor to that of sociology, nor even to symbolism, still less to history or ethics; they are pure creations which derive only from the spirit of creation . . . The account develops in a few pages an extraordinarily uncomfortable complexity, which is unfortunately not possible to analyze here; also, later when the two novelists and the postal clerk, all of whom openly claim to be writing the story, intervene, the story then cheerfully exceeds the limits of the incomprehensible."³ One of the essays in For A New Novel seeks to explode some of the myths and misconceptions spread by the opponents of the "new novel"; Robbe-Grillet's arguments in "New Novel, New Man" parallel many of Barthes' arguments in response to his critics and are applicable to the discussion of semiology's role in the future. Robbe-Grillet first states the myths about the "new" writer: "(1) The New Novel has codified the laws of the future novel. (2) The New Novel has made a tabula rasa of the past. (3) The New Novel seeks to eliminate man from the world. (4) The New Novel aims at a perfect objectivity. (5) The New Novel, difficult to read, is addressed only to specialists" (p. 134). Robbe-

Grillet maintains that the reverse of these popular beliefs is true, and that, in fact, the "new novel" is: "not a theory, it is an exploration . . . merely pursuing a constant evolution of the genre . . . interested only in man and in his situation in the world . . . /aimed/ only at a total subjectivity . . . addressed to all men of good faith . . ." (pp. 134-140). In Structuralism In Literature Robert Scholes remarks that we should not be surprised that " . . . writers of fiction, in particular, who deal in the creation of complex systematic wholes, should prove attuned to structuralist ideas and attitudes . . . The resurgence of interest in mythology, among both writers and critics, is an aspect of the general structuralist movement in fiction. But more specific evidence of structuralist awareness can be found in the work of contemporary writers of fiction . . ." (pp. 190-91). Scholes' "specific evidence" includes quotations from the works of Robert Coover (Pricksongs and Descants), John Barth (The Sot-Weed Factor and Giles Goatboy), Iris Murdoch (A Severed Head, Under the Net), and John Fowles (The French Lieutenant's Woman and The Magus). Scholes comments that the latter three authors began writing " . . . as existentialists only to move in the direction of structuralism" (p. 195). In the collection Critical Essays, Barthes names the representative writers of the "new novel" in France: Robbe-Grillet, of course, Michelet, Butor, Queneau, and Bataille. As was discussed previously, Barthes credits the works of Flaubert with beginning a problematics of literature, so it may be said that

Flaubert is the first distinguishable ancestor of the "new novelists." The lineage between Flaubert and the present is traced for us by Robbe-Grillet, through Dostoevski, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, and Beckett, as he states one of the credos of the "new novelists" in the light of literary history: "Far from making a tabula rasa of the past, we have most readily reached an agreement on the names of our predecessors; and our ambition is merely to continue them" (For A New Novel, p. 136).

It would be easy enough simply to observe that the movement of writers toward a structural-semiological outlook is merely in compliance with the atmosphere of the times, but one must recognize the contribution which the movement itself has made toward establishing that atmosphere. One must recognize, as has Robbe-Grillet, the influence which art has upon life: "Before the work of art, there is nothing--no certainty, no thesis, no message. To believe that the novelist has 'something to say' and that he then looks for a way to say it represents the gravest of misconceptions. For it is precisely this 'way,' this manner of speaking which constitutes his enterprise as a writer, an enterprise more obscure than any other, and which will later be the uncertain content of his book" (For A New Novel, pp. 141-42). The uncertainty of writing--its vague nature and dubious identifying characteristics--have helped to constitute a new problem area for those who wish to name literature. As Barthes has so ably demonstrated, the line of demarcation between "literature"

and "criticism" can be very difficult to draw. When one reads S/Z is he so sure that the story of Sarrasine and Zambinella ends with Balzac's final punctuation mark? An even more difficult question to pose is "What is The Pleasure of the Text?"--A program? A work of criticism? Mere rambling thought? Fiction? Manifestation of the potential of pleasure in the reading of writing? Perhaps it is a collection of all of these things or some of them, but in any case, can it be denied that there are definite aspects of a work of fiction in The Pleasure of the Text? Consider the elements present in the book: sex, violence, a "hero" (represented by the shifter, "I," which is as elusive as the "I" of any novel), a theme, movement ("story thread"), and a climax (in fact, several climaxes). Categorizing The Pleasure of the Text is as difficult as categorizing much of the work of the "new novelists," most of which does not constitute novels at all. If man must categorize, he will have to redefine his present categories of literature to include the new writing or construct more flexible classifications. As Robbe-Grillet has stated, "The New Novel does not propose a ready-made signification" (For A New Novel, p. 140), and it seems only logical that the new criticism which must deal with these "new novels" should not propose ready-made criteria for approaching the signifiers of the new writing. For a study which is concerned with the value of semiology for current and future cultures, these considerations have a great deal of import, for, as Robbe-Grillet has pointed out, all of these questions bring us

to the major question:

. . . does our life have a meaning? What is it? What is man's place on earth? We see at once why the Balzacian objects were so reassuring: they belonged to a world of which man was the master; such objects were chattels, properties, which it was merely a question of possessing, or retaining, or acquiring. There was a constant identity between these objects and their owner: a simple waist-coat was already a character and a social position at the same time. Man was the reason for all things, the key to the universe, and its natural master, by divine right . . .

Not much of all this is left today . . . We no longer believe in the fixed significations, the ready-made meanings which afforded man the old divine order and subsequently the rationalist order of the nineteenth century, but we project onto man all our hopes: it is the forms man creates which can attach significations to the world (ibid., pp. 140-41).

Part Five Notes

¹ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 211. Originally published in German in 1957.

² For a more extensive discussion of the differences between the positions of Lévi-Strauss and Sartre, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, "History and Dialectic," in The Structuralists from Marx to Lévi-Strauss, ed. DeGeorge and DeGeorge, pp. 209-37.

³ Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 128-29. Originally published in French in 1963.

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