

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

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

VII. THE STARRED TEXT

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

THE TEXT - SKY WIND THE SOOTHSEYER
Cuts up into squares
to consult.

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

VIII. THE BROKEN TEXT

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

not to: the
text: but
plurality
to text

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

IX. HOW MANY READINGS?

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

Re-Reading - n
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but play
① ② ③

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

X. SARRASINE

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

¹ Jean Reboul: "Sarrasine ou la castration personnifiée," in *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, March-April, 1967.
² *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*.