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The Politics of Seduction in Literature

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An abstract of
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Abstract

The Politics of Seduction in Literature

By Dane Primerano

A reading of seductive relations in four texts, using the work of Shoshana Felman and Jean Baudrillard.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Rien ne sert de jouer l'être contre l'être, la vérité contre la vérité: c'est là le piège d'une subversion des fondements, alors qu'il suffit d'une légère *manipulation des apparences*.-- Jean Baudrillard

In a belligerent sentence in Book One of *The Will to Power*, Friedrich Nietzsche asks his audience to “[r]ead the New Testament as a book of seduction [*Verführung*]” (124). The ‘book of seduction’ that Nietzsche seems to be referring to is the popular seduction novel, where a diabolical libertine leads a naïf—usually a young maiden—into a sexual fall. With the New Testament, however, Nietzsche is equating the *polis* with this maiden, and it is not a repressed carnal urge but the very “virtue” instantiated by the virgin that “is appropriated in the instinct that with it one can capture public opinion.” The axioms of Christ will be the plying of a malevolent seducer, teaching “ideal sheep...[the] most absurd hatred toward everything in power.” Two things stand out. First, it is tempting to see seduction as only figurative here, with society placed as a rhetorical maiden vis-à-vis the metaphorical seducer of the church. Second, we see that seduction is a prime error—even as the terms are reversed from the seducer’s corruption *of* virtue to the seducer’s corruption *through* virtue, seduction itself is the form *par excellence* of evil, or at least the undesirable. This thesis will attempt to contest both of these points. In opposition to the first point, seduction, etymologically speaking, entered the English language as a political problem nearly a century before its meaning shifted to something like a seedy device for sexual gratification—in other words, it is no metaphor to speak of seduction in reference to the state, power or politics. The second reason is that

seduction, far from holding an evil essence, is a virulent form of political struggle, a strategy of signs that may potentially be taken up by the otherwise powerless. Furthermore, seduction takes the 'other'—the seduced—into account as a subjectivity in a way that can be considered inherently ethical, and is thus radically opposed to violent forms of political struggle that must see enemy combatants or rival parties as objective problems to be dispassionately liquidated or evicted from positions of power.

To illustrate the politics of seduction, I will take the thinking of Jean Baudrillard, Shoshana Felman and others on the concept of seduction, and use their work to explore various texts of literature from the Romantic to the Modernist periods: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel"; Stendhal's *Armance*; Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*, and Episode 13, "Nausicaa", of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. But before outlining a method for this project and turning to the texts, I will briefly chart how some of the West's most esteemed contemporary readers—at least since the commencement of the industrial age—have characterized seduction and, in turn, used seduction as a trope for characterizing both the desirable and the diabolical. In so doing, I hope to highlight two phenomena: first how the concept is often taken as needing no explication, and second the way that the term is reversible as both bad (generally when others do it) and admirable (occasionally with something like a wink). I cannot make a comprehensive study in only a few pages, but I believe the examples that follow—from Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul de Man, and one interpretation of Sigmund Freud —will capture the ambiguity with which contemporary theory has typically perceived seduction.

Marx never speaks of seduction, and for good reason: his goal is demystification, to replace appearances with truth, and nothing could seem less aligned with the purposes

of revolution than the seductive process whereby the commodity becomes refetishized. The entire project of Marx and Engels can be seen as putting an end to a seduction of the benighted masses, but they articulate seduction in terms of ideology. Nietzsche, on the other hand, finds seduction everywhere and, again, for good reason: one of his purposes is to expose how truth itself is unknowable, irrelevant to essence, and show the seductive way that empirical appearances are mistaken for reality in the positive endeavor to find facts. Nietzsche's unspecific term 'seduction', in other words, is a sufficiently broad category to place against the equally nebulous term 'truth', and he will often, paradoxically, conflate the two. In a characteristic passage, Nietzsche writes:

> The seductions [*Verführungen*] that proceed from [belief in truth, or an 'apparent world'] are of three kinds: (a) an *unknown* world [...], (--the danger of this concept lies in its insinuation that "this" world is known to us--); (b) *another* world, where [...]; something in us calculates [...] perhaps everything will turn out well, we have not hoped in vain [...](c) *true* world: this is the most amazing trick and attack that has ever been perpetrated upon us [....] the true world must always be a truthful world, one that does not deceive us, does not make fools of us: to believe in it is virtually to be compelled to believe in it . (*WP* 319-20)

The most remarkable feature of this passage is that what "belief in truth" seduces one away from is not a more essential truth but from our authentic potential to act. Yet if to act without reference to truth means anything at all, it implies that the agent is in a domain where the terms *authenticity* and *seduction* would no longer obtain: with no reference to truth, appearance and reality would be essentially the same insofar as the

justification for action is concerned. To have no recourse to a hidden truth of an *unknown* world is to erase any potential for epistemological *inquiry*, and all knowledge would be necessarily aleatory and contingent. To have no *other* world is to lose any sense of alterity or identity, in addition to having no possibility for original fictions or the maximal alterity of gods. Finally, no *true* world implies that no epistemology can be constructed and no fact can be stable. There is no reason to dwell on Nietzsche's questionable reasoning, equivocation, paradox and gratuitous antagonism with these sorts of arguments in the present introduction. My desire, instead, is to point out the way that seduction seems to open this passage as an unequivocally bad thing, which is also a necessary predicate for the claims that follow: if seduction is considered as an ambiguous term, then the force of the passage is diminished considerably. But in claiming that these three truths of *unknown*, *alterior* and *true worlds* are themselves seductions, Nietzsche seems to imply that there is no ground for calling anything a seduction. If there is no truth other than strength or will, then so long as the human is a perceiving animal she will be bound to misread, mislead and be misled without the epistemic criteria of factuality to weed through her always-mediated reality. When the term *seduction* is interrogated in the above passage, it becomes clear that what seduction is or does will be rendered stronger as it becomes less visible, when these categories of truth are dispensed with and seduction thus becomes indistinguishable from authenticity. At the most sophomoric, the claims are virtually tautological, since the seductive truths identified by Nietzsche are in essence calling his own argument into question as a seduction of its own: if truths are seductive because they represent a stability that they can not in fact possess, then this be just the same as disallowing the status of 'truth' and thus allowing any image to equal its

substrate.

Referring to the incommensurability between reality and representation in "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche writes that "[t]he word appearance (*Erscheinung*) contains many seductions" (880). *Erscheinung* means not only *appearance* but also *figure* and Nietzsche clearly plays on the plural meanings here, having just described the "allusive transference" of the real into a signified as requiring a "mediating force [...] which can freely invent and freely create poetry." In other words, the poetic figure and the epistemological truth are both seductive representations. The 'seductions' contained in *Erscheinung* are left to conjecture, but it seems reasonable to consider them as contiguous with the seductions of truth to which Nietzsche also refers, the potential for any representation to mislead or fail. Immediately following this challenge, we read that a painter without hands may 'paint' something approximating 'essence' with song, and so we may infer that Nietzsche's concern is that we will be seduced by the surface similarity of representation to a referent, a seduction that doesn't present itself when the image moves to a dissimilar form of expression. In other words, one is to resist equating the image and the real. This seems to imply that a discerning intelligence should resist the superficial and instead seek the same truth that Nietzsche calls into question here and elsewhere. The paradox, again, is that to erect an empirical standard of truth is to be immediately susceptible to false images, but to reject truth as impossible is the same as equating the false and the true, the image and the real. The seductive danger of the word *appearance* seems to be that we might confuse what is seen with what exists, but it is not clear that there is any alternative. Nietzsche's project, presumably, is to undermine idealism, and there may be no use seeking a literal prescriptive practice in these pages.

Yet one is left puzzled by this insistence against idealism, since idealism in most cases at least knows or presupposes what it cannot know. Again, we see the term seduction being used here in a cautionary sense, and, again, within an argument that would render a seductive act every bit as legitimate as a productive one. It is no accident, then, that in the following paragraph we find seduction as the means for salvation from ideal forms:

> But everything which is wonderful and which elicits our astonishment at precisely these laws of nature, everything which demands explanation of us and could seduce [*verführen*] us into being suspicious of idealism, is attributable precisely [...] to the [...] universal validity of the representations of time and space. (881)

It is one's fascination with the "wonderful" and sense of "astonishment at [...] laws of nature" that leads one to intuitively reject idealism. But this rejection is not a positive truth or even some demystification such as that urged by Marx. One is instead 'seduced into suspicion,' led astray from factual truth and into something else unnamed, presumably more essential than truth and of a higher value than knowledge. Or perhaps it is the process of being seduced itself that is the positive outcome here: the infinitive case of seduce does not necessarily lead to any resolution in the context of the passage above, and it would be a small step to read the passage not as leaving a positive practice unnamed but rather as leaving the *details* of an advocated seduction unformulated. What is clear, however, is that the term *seduction* is, again, extremely unstable.

In the fifth axiom of the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals,* we see seduction characterized as a danger to the self in a protest against "[his] great teacher Schopenhauer" (19). The "instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice [are...] the

great danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction." In section nine of the first essay, seduction is again maligned:

> [Out of Jewish hatred grew a] triumphant crown spreading itself father and farther into the purest brightness and sunlight, driven as it were into the domain of light and the heights in pursuit of the goals of that hatred—victory, spoil, and seduction [....] This Jesus of Nazareth, [...] was he not this seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, a seduction and bypath to precisely those *Jewish* values and new ideals? (35)

Forgetting the problems of Christian hegemony over the years and considering this only in light of Nietzsche's own positions, there is nothing in the principles of Christianity *talis qualis* that are opposed to the seduction of individuals 'into suspicion' that we find admired in "Truth and Lie," and there is much aligned with that essay. The 'goals of hatred' are first 'victory' and 'spoil', hardly immiscible with Nietzsche's injunction to realize the will or deny truth. So it is 'seduction' that is disjunctive with power and which seems to be the sharpest thorn in Nietzsche's side. It is not that the imaginary Jews that he posits have despoiled as such, but that they have done it by creating *false signs* of a universal morality, a seductive trap that has placed everyone else in self-imposed bondage. Yet, it seems strange that one could be seduced anywhere in a world where belief in truth is itself a seductive mistake. And if "the intellect shows its greatest strengths in dissimulation" that privileges the weak, then the intellect can lead to powerful effects through that strength that are entirely compatible with self-realization ("Truth and Lie" 875). Nietzsche attempts to exclude seduction as a legitimate practice of will, but everywhere that seduction occurs in his writing seems to confirm that seduction

does not detract from self-realization but merely changes the terms of engagement. What Nietzsche describes—if he describes anything at all—is not the regrettable apotheosis of Judeo-Christian values, but rather seduction *itself* as a form of supremacy over the physical power he often seems to privilege. Recall that in “Truth and Lie” seduction inheres as a danger at the heart of words themselves, and also that seduction away from mere facts is a spontaneous reaction to a sublime encounter with the world (also recall that this was a positive effect for Nietzsche). Overlooking the inconsistent characterizations of seduction for the moment, we must infer that seduction is not the artificially introduced tool of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but something far more fundamental that seems to inhabit the core of social systems. Nietzsche is not engaged in some radically new form of criticism when he assaults Judeo-Christian morality. Instead, the ultimate horizon of Nietzsche’s project seems to be the maligning of seduction itself, and in a manner that has a long—and inveterately conservative—history in the post-Enlightenment worldview.

I am not trying, nor am I qualified, to characterize Nietzsche as facile, naive or oblivious to his own inconsistency; and it is clear that much of Nietzsche’s polemic and irony follows from his desire to arouse his audience, not to simply build, just word by just word, toward a solid science. What I am trying to show, however, is the slipperiness of this term *seduction*: not only does seduction seem to be Nietzsche’s fundamental adversary—as I hope I’ve shown, one that precedes truth, Jews, Christians and idealism—but, moreover, the term is eminently reversible in his writings, offering both negative and positive interpretations. As in “Truth and Lie,” seduction’s reversibility arises in *Genealogy*. The translation of Kaufmann renders this sentence from section

eleven of the third essay: “Read from a distant star, *the majuscule script of our earth existence would perhaps lead to the conclusion* [die Majuskel-Schrift unsres Erden-Daseins zu dem Schluss verführen] that the earth was the distinctively *ascetic* planet” (117). A more literal translation of the italicized phrase is that the observer would be ‘seduced to the conclusion.’ The line is absolutely ambiguous, because here seduction would in a certain sense lead to the *correct* conclusion about the paradigm challenged by Nietzsche, insofar as we take his portrayal to be an accurate one. Of course, the implication is also that not everything on the planet has succumbed to asceticism, and there is the strange conceit that humanity, before anything else, would be the interest of the extraterrestrial observer. More interesting, perhaps, is that this seduction is operative across an impossible theoretical expanse, requiring neither agent nor action on anyone’s part for it to work—seduction in this case is more powerful than any will yet conceived if it can be effective at such a distance and so spontaneously, at least in Nietzsche’s conjecture. Regardless, seduction here is figuring as something other than evil. Similarly, the seventh section of the third essay claims that Schopenhauer’s “enemies seduced him ever again into existence” (106). The meaning here is not what one would at first suspect, particularly with regard to a philosopher: ‘enemies’ does not mean ‘false prophets’ or the like, and seduction is not a metaphor for ‘untruth’ (or ‘truth’ for that matter). No, this is the common, more salacious kind of seduction: by “women,” “sexuality as a personal enemy” and “bilious, black-green words” that brought Schopenhauer to “scolding for the sake of scolding.” In other words, Schopenhauer was seduced not *from* duty but *into* duty, and it matters little who or what was doing the leading. Recall also that it was Schopenhauer—in the passage cited above from the preface—who, through his ascetic

virtues, was Nietzsche's *original* seducer. The reversibility of seduction is shown to be total, and there is no way for a reader to distinguish between a good and bad form of seduction in the case of Schopenhauer. It seems that the form is the same both cases, which leaves how precisely the reader is to think of seduction ambivalent in Nietzsche's work.

This analysis could go on but I will instead turn to Paul de Man. De Man, like Nietzsche, uses the concept of *seduction* quite a lot: some permutation of the word shows up on one out of six pages in *Allegories of Reading* (to put that in perspective, it is roughly equivalent to the frequency with which the more quotidian *false* occurs). Again like Nietzsche, de Man has a rather amorphous concept of where *seduction* lies in his axiological schema: sometimes the word is directly and unexpectedly opposed to truth, at other times it means simply *attractive* or *enticing*, and often the term simply denotes *misleading*. When he uses the term *seduction* in his essay on Rilke, for example, de Man never questions what *seduction* means: not when positing the "seductive power" of both "the beautiful and the ugly" (22); nor when he claims that "seductive surfaces" are not "merely superficial" (23); nor when he formulates (a formulation that Nietzsche would certainly protest) "truth or a seduction" as disjunctive (24); and not even when he announces his mission to "approach [...Rilke's] poetry by way of the negative road that would analyze this seduction" that de Man claims is the poet's "zone of maximal opacity" (22). Seduction is never questioned, only applied by de Man as an unsteady concept. De Man's argument begins with an exegesis of Rilke's "initial seductions" of a formal variety that convey "the near impossibility of living" (qtd. de Man 21), which de Man notably links to a "shared weakness" with the poet's reader. What is seductive is

figured as the commonplace and even lazy route for the reader, and this aesthetic or personal route is one that she must be always on guard against following. As de Man sees it, Rilke will seduce his reader into commiserating with him in their 'shared weakness'—formalized in the aporiae where Rilke claims to be aphasiac—that will lead the reader away from the knowledge that Rilke is not actually in these points of "weakness." But the project by de Man to "analyze this seduction" through Rilke's formalism is abandoned only four pages later—with thirty pages of the essay remaining—when de Man writes, "By suggesting that the properly poetic dimension of Rilke's work has been neglected in favor of his themes, we do not wish to return to the seduction of the forms" (26). Certainly not, since seductive forms play an important role in de Man's own rhetoric and he might thus have a stake in allowing seduction's forms to remain 'opaque.'

To demonstrate the benefit de Man gains from the seductive form, it will be of use to turn to his chapter on Nietzsche's rhetoric, where he cites from "On Truth and Lie" with the following translation of Nietzsche: "The intellect [...] when it is allowed to deceive without direct harm [....] is never so rich, so seductive, proud, clever and outrageous" (qtd. de Man 114). The word by Nietzsche that de Man translates as 'seductive' is *üppiger*—usually meaning 'luxuriant' 'opulent' or 'lush' (the only appearances of *verführung* in the essay are in the two examples I've already cited). It is possible that this is a trivial embellishment or an accident, yet it certainly seems suspicious that for his explication of the passage in the paragraph that follows, de Man again brings seduction into his own paraphrase of Nietzsche's broader argument:

> But when literature *seduces* us with the freedom of its figural combinations, so much airier and lighter than the labored constructs of

> concepts, it is not the less deceitful because it asserts its own deceitful properties. (115, my emphasis)

De Man's paraphrase of Nietzsche is relying on this loaded term that he himself has introduced: in translating *üppiger* as *seductive,* de Man is free to unify the fragments of "rich [...], proud, clever and outrageous" into one category (one would have a hard time finding any one of these terms strong enough to contain the others, a role that 'seduction' fills nicely). The reason that this matters, and why it is not trivial, is because of the "*never so*..." in Nietzsche's statement: the hyperbolic grammar demands that what follow be quite precise.

Since—as I've attempted to demonstrate above—Nietzsche seems quite comfortable introducing the term *seductive* where he sees fit, we might pause before taking de Man's substitution as acceptable or even innocent. Certainly if Nietzsche wanted the word there, he would have used it. A better way to read the passage—in light of de Man's manipulation—would be to find the absence of seduction no accident on the part of Nietzsche, but rather a confirmation that *there are* times when the mind is more seductive: to wit, precisely when artifice does *not* "asser[t] its own deceitful properties," when, as with Schopenhauer, no volitional agent seduces, and seduction instead follows from a state of affairs in which a subject is situated, a condition that Nietzsche has sufficiently attacked to make the distinction I am making here a meaningful one. Nietzsche is *not* warning that literature is seductive; he is instead elaborating the attributes of literature that can make it so.

In de Man's seductive substitution, a supporting passage is covertly conflated into Nietzsche's critical gesture. I do not want to tendentiously dwell on this brief moment in

a broader argument, though the characterization is a crucial piece of the larger claims. I only wish to point out a few important elements of this passage. First, and most basic, de Man is seducing his reader, both away from the meaning of Nietzsche and toward his own reading. Second, we see implicitly that seduction is a powerful term for de Man—beyond de Man's own abundant usage of the term—and that he chooses to slip this concept into a citation of another author should indicate the weight of the term as well as the concept. Finally—as in the earlier examples from the Rilke essay—what the concept of seduction is or does is not specifically addressed. I do not mean that the contingent and particular effects are left unsaid (de Man does make Rilke's practical effects upon the reader clear enough) but that the definitive process of seduction is itself taken for granted, despite the plural meanings and valences that de Man gives the term in his writing, and which would therefore seem to demand some sort of unpacking for the sake of clarity.

In turning to Freud, I will change my approach somewhat. Rather than examine his use of seduction grammatically within his own texts—which will differ significantly from the usage of the term by Nietzsche and de Man—I will instead use a nuanced reading by Martha Noel Evans that addresses both the euphemistic status of the term 'seduction' in Freud and the problematic 'seduction theory' of neurosis that Freud advocated and then abandoned in favor of the Oedipal model. What I hope to demonstrate here is not only how seduction is conceived in general, but also how it is posited as a fundamentally distaff danger in Freud. Evans makes her position quite clear in the first lines of the article when she writes, "I shall show [...] how Freud's early seduction theory of hysteria led, in turn, to *his seduction by* oedipal theory" (73, my emphasis). In referring to Oedipal theory as a seduction, Evans does not simply seek to

rehabilitate the former seduction theory, as is sometimes advocated by critics immersed in psychoanalytic methods. Instead, and why I choose her essay for my own project, her aim seems to be to show how historical prejudices and norms are articulated through Freud, as well as how psychological anxieties of Freud himself were expressed in the movements of his hypotheses. Evans writes:

> The shift if Freud's vocabulary from words denoting injury to one implying persuasion and even possible assent can be seen as part of a widespread social pattern which minimizes the sexual exploitation of women by men. [...] The paradoxical obverse of this tendency to minimize or even conceal the real sexual victimization of women consistently shows up in Freud's writing about hysteria in the form of a mythology of the female hysteric and the male doctor. (74-75)

Oedipus positively privileges the male—particularly the father—whereas seduction theory protects the father by making him absent in favor of avuncular males and referring to 'abuse' as 'seduction'. The term seduction thus operates in two different ways: first, it acts as a less appalling term than *attack*, *abuse* or *incest*; and second, conversely, seduction is maligned as it takes on the significance of those terms. The "paradoxical obverse" of the covering over is Freud's recapitulating the aetiology of exploitation in his patient's cases, converting them into a currency among his "colleagues, [the cases] thus becoming [objects] of exchange" (76).

According to Evans, "Freud's theoretical manipulation of hysteria [along traditional gender lines] depends precisely on the fantasy of a feminine patient and a masculine authority figure" (75). And yet, as Evans depicts the hysteric in general and

illustrates in particular with the 'Dora case', seduction is reversible in a way that "seems to be particularly enraging for male analysts" (78):

> One thing that makes the hysteric so difficult both as a patient and as an element of theory, is the fact that her seductiveness is false; she won't follow through. She is what the French call an *allumeuse*, firing men up only to say no in the end. Since the feminine version of seduction [...] includes positing oneself *as an object of desire for another*, the falsity of the hysteric's seduction lies precisely in her posing limits to the self as an object. (78)

In response to a clinical failure, when the object of inquiry becomes a recalcitrant seducer in her own rite, the analyst is driven back in "humiliation [...] to a group conventionally defined as male [viz. fellow analysts] in order to seek the recognition and admiration that he failed to get from the hysteric." In other words, as the analyst is spontaneously placed in what he conceives of as the feminine position to a patient-seducer, theorizing becomes a "regressive move [...] where the analyst can be mirrored and admired by counterparts," thus reclaiming a masculine role. This anxiety about seduction as a reversible process that can feminize anyone and is unbound by biological sex seems to determine the move from the contingent theory of seduction to the universal Oedipal model. As such, the move from seduction to Oedipal theory accomplishes a remarkable feat: it places the little boy—a sexually ambivalent figure, sexed as male but gendered as something less certain—into a relation that is *ab ovo* male and heterosexual: in desiring the mother from the start, there is less danger that the male child will be 'seduced' into being functionally female (80-81). In this universal and "uncanny substitution [....], the little boy takes the

place of the victimized girl" who occupied the original seduction theory of trauma (80).

Evans provocatively speculates "Freud [...] *decided to disbelieve* [...in the] substitutability of the boy for the girl, or more precisely, the recognition that the boy has always already occupied at some time the female position" (80, my emphasis). Whether or not one take's the move from seduction to Oedipus as an over-determined model or a legitimate theoretical advance, it is nevertheless right to question this rhetorical shift in Freud that replaces the traumatized and hysterical female with a fatal, stable male. More importantly, this characterization of Freud's theoretical shift as willful places us beyond a Möbius-strip logic of indicting Freud according to his own rules. Instead, we move to a more explicitly political problem, where it is not some originary unconscious anxiety that is guiding Freud's adjustments but rather an at-least-partially cultural bias or discomfort that is compelling the analyst's concepts. In her figuring of clinical relations as themselves Oedipal, Evans writes:

> [I]f we can read the theory of the oedipal complex as a repression of male hysteria (fear of feminization), we can see that in the triangle of hysteric/analyst/colleague, the underlying positions and roles of the genders are not as clear as they originally appeared in Freud's theory, but are, rather, hopelessly blurred and shifty. (81)

Seduction, which is not only a euphemistic process to describe what was undergone by the patient but is also an active danger to the analyst, is replaced with the triangular model that is supposed to diminish seduction's dangers. But reading Oedipus as a regression or repression as Evans asks us to do seems to reveal—though she does not state this directly—that seduction is more operative than ever. Instead of a dangerous

patient seducing the analyst, however, we now have a process where the analyst is seduced by his own theory and his own will to master himself and the patient. Dora, for example, "subverts Freud's theory of female desire as necessarily being directed not only toward men in general, but toward specific men" (81). Yet in Freud's new Oedipal schema—the one that is supposed to be do away with the relevance and dangers of seduction—Freud has only one universal way to read the analysand: Dora must, in the end, desire anyone who occupies the position of Herr K. Where seduction theory suggested contingent histories to be sorted out, in Oedipus all roads lead to Thebes. For Freud, the reversibility of seduction's roles means that either male hysteria will require couching in the feminine position, or male hysteria will simply have to be excluded (as it is in Freud's early case studies); that is, if the culture's discomfort with mobile gender roles is to be upheld. With Oedipus, the male becomes the only non-pathological position, but in a recalcitrant model that inherently seduces the analyst away from the real and into an idealistic image of his own making.

What I hope I have demonstrated through these readings is that seduction is a potent but shifting force in contemporary theory. The charge could be made that I have not closely followed the arguments from which my citations emerge, to which I would counter that the unstable meanings of the term 'seduction' in the arguments would render any definitive reading inconclusive, which is precisely my point. What should be clear by now is that seduction is often treated as a danger (particularly a feminine danger), taken for granted, and used in contradictory ways. What I hope is equally clear is that seduction is implicated as a danger at critical moments in arguments, from which one can infer that seduction is a more powerful concept than is commonly allowed for. To gain a more

comprehensive account of seduction, it will be necessary to turn to two later theorists, working at the peak of postmodernity, Shoshana Felman and Jean Baudrillard.

Though seduction is never clearly defined by Shoshana Felman, the concept is central to her book on the convergence of J. L. Austin's speech act theory and Molière's "Don Juan." The title of the text amply demonstrates one of her own insights: like the elision of Austin's humor from scholarship that Felman laments, the "body" of the original title to her book, *Le scandale du corps parlant*, is itself silenced for the book's first translation into English. Apparently either too playful or too salacious for an academic work, a polar reversal in rhetoric has the text renamed a bromidic *The Literary Speech Act*. But this transubstantiation of the "body" (into "act", perhaps more licentious than the antecedent) does not extend to the "seduction" of the subtitle[1], which is given a faithful rendering in English. Seduction, surprisingly, seems to be considered academically safe, at least when the subject is Don Juan. But within the text, rather than being restricted to a quotidian model of sexual strategy, Felman radicalizes the concept of seduction as that which "grounds...the literary order, the theoretical order, and the historical order in turn" (*Scandal* 5). This outrageous claim, however one may take it, is grounded in its own 'literary seduction' of a sort: in what seems a conscious omission, Felman refuses to define her own understanding of just what seduction is. By examining Felman's use of the word "seduction" as it relates to her provocative claim in the preface, I will seek in what follows to reach what is behind her thinking on seduction. Let me say from the outset that I do not consider seduction to be merely a metaphor: it cannot be reduced to a figure any more than the economic metaphor of "value" can be. In other words, the term "seduction" carries behind it ideological components--namely challenge

[1] :*"Don Juan avec Austin, ou la seduction des deux langues"*

and play--that offer an alternative horizon to the economic ideology of equivalence and utility.

One of Felman's clearest gestures to expand the domain of seduction beyond the bad-faith promise of marriage comes in her claim that "Don Juanian debauchery is...a debauchery of explicit performatives–commisive performatives which are used...*to seduce men just as much as women*" (16; emphasis added). Even if eroticism may be implied in these male relations, erotic desire is not being served directly by these acts toward men, nor in the extant acts toward Dona Elvira, of promising, flattery, and dissimulation in *Don Juan*. While these acts may indirectly serve the body--by prolonging Don Juan's sexual pursuits or preventing dispossession, for example--Felman is deliberately expanding seduction beyond the pitch of eroticism. Rather, she here regards seduction as the general manipulation of signs, linguistic signs in the cases of Don Juan and Austin, which "consists in producing a referential illusion through an utterance that is by its very nature self-referential" (17). In this case, "the discourse of seduction is as such a discourse of promising"(20): the promise of seduction, explicit or implicit, always being foremost that the seducer *is* what his signs or words *appear* to be.

Transporting this logic to literature, it can be recognized that seduction "grounds...the literary order" in that a broken promise takes place when the signs of performative acts circulate among bodies: a promise of corporeal constancy, predicated on a body that cannot possibly guarantee the constancy that it represents (either implicitly or manifestly). In terms that recall and perhaps clarify Nietzsche[2], Felman writes:

> Now it is at the very moment of this overreaching or outdistancing that the

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[2] And it is worth noting that the first sentence of Felman's preface begins with a reference to Nietzsche, after her epigraph from *Genealogy of Morals* where Nietzsche claims that "the paradoxical problem" of "the right to make promises" might be "man's true problem" (qtd. Felman, *Scandal* 3).

> literary...opens onto an irreducible *scandal*: the scandal...of the incongruous but indissoluble relation between language and the body; the scandal of the *seduction* of the human body insofar as it speaks [...]; the scandal of the promising animal insofar as what he promises is precisely the *untenable*. (5)

While the "promise of love" may be *"par excellence* the promise that cannot be kept," Felman suggests that *any* oath by the "promising animal" similarly assures a constancy of the body–and its attendant drives--that the act has no grounds for guaranteeing: "the act *cannot know what it is doing* (67).

By this reasoning, the "literary order"[3] is seductive. Like the "promising animal," the signifier promises a signified that it cannot secure: the signified thus becomes a second-order promise. The first-order promise, the *promise* of a promise–the constancy inferred by the presence of the signifier–is broken by its own condition of possibility: the condition of contingency into (or 'from', a Baudrillard might say) which all linguistic systems are delivered (Saussure 112-13). "[L]anguages...are self-referential, because they act–they affect the real [presupposed referents]–only by referring each to itself" (Felman, "Scandal" 63): that is, by referring to their own (arbitrary) structure of extrinsic assignment and intrinsic difference, languages seductively feign a spurious stability.

Because this extends to non-linguistic signs as well[4], it might be correct to say that all semiotic systems are seductive from their inception: the moment a sign is

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[3] I am admittedly limiting this analysis to the linguistic component of the literary, out of consideration for the complexity of the term; but a comprehensive study of what constitutes the "literary" itself would no doubt reveal an abundance of seductive parts.

[4] Counterfeit items signify ersatz values, and the promise of sexual pleasure in the signs of a physical seduction by no means make this pleasure the only terminal phase–indeed, the pleasure may and often does come primarily from the play of signs itself.

codified, it promises a stability that it constitutively cannot provide for. This performative promise inherent to the sign is essentially perlocutionary in that the *credulity* that the sign relies upon is silently introduced as one of its own effects–even if no unified subject or intention is behind the deployment of the sign, the *hairetic* act of valuing a sign (with a coincident promise of stability) is invoked with each use of the sign: “The referent functions dynamically, in an intervening space; radically bound...to a structure of effects, it can inscribe itself only as...a relation to a relation” (51). From the affinity between the seduction of the “promising animal” identified by Felman and the qualities inherent to language in Saussure’s linguistic theory, it can be understood that seduction grounds the literary because the literary intrinsically diverts the interlocutor from both referential reality and the contingency of the relationship between the signifier and the signified concept.

Felman considers Austin’s theory to be “the performance of the *loss of ground*” (44). Because Austin does not keep “his promise of a constative to the performative....the philosophy of language...proves to be a subversive seduction” (46), and this “*loss of ground*” extends to theory in general because any referent that theory concerns itself with is not “a preexisting *substance*, but an *act*” of a theory, and subject to the failure inherent to a promising body (51). Felman’s contention that the theoretical (as I understand it, what underwrites the practice of theory, is the effect of theory, and makes possible the replication of theory) is grounded in seduction distinctly departs from the literary model in one key fashion: where the literary attempts to persuade the *presence* of referents and meaning, theory feigns an *absence* of–or *distance* from–the irrational drives of the body. In effect, theory attempts to seduce away from its source in a body, or to be constantly

concerned with covering the bodily traces of motivation behind its choices of both object and objectives.

Felman's belief that theory generally hides the desiring body can be inferred from Felman's use of Austin as an exceptional case of "a theory of desire that seeks above all to communicate the desire of the theory" (74). Austin's "rhetoric of seduction" includes the "connotation of laughter [and] the *fun* of humor...found everywhere" in his style that seeks to produce bodily pleasure (73). Austin therefore inverts theory's typical seduction away from the body into his own theory's seduction deliberately oriented toward the body in his uses of humor and sexual innuendo--perlocutionary intentions change from the effect of credulity to the effect of reaction. Furthermore, like Jacques Derrida's claim in *Eperons* that "there never has been *the* style, *the* simulacrum, *the* woman. There never has been *the* sexual difference" (139), Felman demonstrates–by considering Austin's theory as inextricable from his style--that the perception of femininity in seduction is in no way related to the female–that is, the presumption of a natural or material alterity (and, needless to say, highly-debatable)–and may totally alloy itself to the "masculinity" of logic, undermining a certain source for either term.

In analyzing Felman's claim about the seductive ground for the historical, her following statement proves useful[5]:

> Seduction itself turns out to be, therefore, a systematic and symptomatic *détournement* of the established system that, while deconstructing this system, precedes a historical shift by anticipating, at the center of the present, a semioticity to come. (*Signes* 332, my translation)

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[5]La séduction s'avère être, ainsi, un détournement systématique et symptomatique du système éstabli qui, tout en déconstruisant ce système préfigure une mutation historique en anticipant, au sein du présent, une sémioticité de la avenir.

If we read "established system" as the material existence of a *status quo*, then seduction is at work when what is rationally determined to maintain this system gives way to a transformation of this system--innovations, diplomacy and political adjustments require risks to the established order, enacted through the seduction of apparent continuity with the system, adjustments that in fact offer opportunities for the system to fail. Each adjustment consequently becomes an event of history: seduction is perhaps "anticipating...the future" in that the immaterial seductive sign that spurs action subsequently comes to stand for that action, regardless of whether or not the historical vicissitudes in fact correspond to the originary sign. Just as Don Juan cannot seduce until he is himself seduced by the gap between constative and performative interpretations, the historical requires the seductive substitution of an "opaque 'I'" that semiological analysis attempts, if not to undo, then certainly to demystify (Kristeva 127).

Hannah Arendt writes, the "shift of emphasis" from the "'what' to the 'how'" presumes one can "'know' a thing whenever [one] understand[s] how it has come into being" (57). The "what" refers not only to the object, but also to the indeterminate processes that led this object to seduce the historical "I" into action (as distinct from the "how" processes following from the selection of this object). Conversely, the seductive sign can be studied to extract an anagogical structure of futurity:

> Austin's speech act participates in what one might well call the logic of the scandal of historical practice, *owing to the very fact that it has enough force to set in motion a systematic series of misunderstandings*, that is, a historical operation-no doubt unconscious-of repression. (Felman, Scandal 107, my emphasis)

The systematicity of misunderstandings implies that these corruptions and failures can be identified and accounted for, possibly predicting the ‘afterlife’ of the theory and its recapitulative repressions: just as Austin’s own theory is misread, derivative theories offer endlessly available opportunities for their own misreadings and repressions.

These “seductions” of the literary, the theoretical, and the historical can be considered to unite around the concept of the sign that takes itself for the referent: in linguistic identity through difference; theoretical conceits of immanence that treat theory as *sui generis*; and the historical misrecognition of the historical narrative as the historical intention. “The Don Juans of History,” Felman writes, “are in reality *bequeathing* us what they do not have: their *word*, their authority, their promise” (“Scandal” 112). If seduction leaves a legacy of misunderstanding, purloined authority, and unsecured promises, then Felman’s claim that seduction is seminal within these orders does not only mean that we are misled or lost. More positively, we might examine how seduction–if it is the irresistible center of the literary, the theoretical, and the historical–might be accounted for as a generative model in contests with hegemonic power.

I should pause here. What I’ve just written on Felman may have been too dry to maintain the reader’s interest, so I want to explain what I find to be so remarkable in this opaque *seduction* that her writing refers to. To rearticulate the problem of reference as a problem of seduction is certainly rhetorical, and I do not mean to obscure that. But it is not only rhetorical. The most exciting consequence of thinking in these terms is that a positive model is described that allows one to think more creatively about semiotic problems in post-Saussurian theory. It is easy to conceptualize, for instance, language as a differential system, or to proclaim the unmotivated quality of the sign, but very difficult

to think of ways to find a place to turn these negative powers to a generative practice. The categories lose any warmth rather quickly. Seduction, on the other hand, seems to be a practice that does fill in the consequences of linguistics, whether spontaneous or strategized, with a practice every bit as virulent as these remarkable semiotic insights deserve. What I find irresistible about Felman is her cavalier stance in the writings cited above, and the outrageous claims, in what at first seem to be tossed off lines, that turn out to feel quite solid and follow from concrete evidence in the texts under consideration. But Felman, perhaps to her credit, never defines seduction explicitly. While Felman's thinking of seduction is subordinate to her elaborations on Austin's theory and the myth of Don Juan, Jean Baudrillard, perhaps more than any other writer since Kierkegaard, has gone to great lengths to model and theorize the concept of seduction on it's own terms.

Baudrillard's 1979 *Seduction*, though an academically contentious text, offers radical and illuminating definitions of seduction within the political sphere: seduction, exploiting the ambiguity and contingency of signs and which is not simply deception or artifice introduces a foil and supplement to the *rational* allocation of power that is traditionally thought of as the political concern *par excellence*. Most importantly, Baudrillard's theory permits thinking about revolutionary moves in politics in terms of literal seduction, particularly at moments when power has become contradictory or in crisis, such as it has in some of the texts that I will examine in this thesis.

Baudrillard sets the force of seduction up in opposition to a lot of concepts: masculinity, interpretation, perversion and the real. But the fundamental force that Baudrillard opposes to seduction is that of production, and it is in this opposition that the political stakes of seduction are most apparent. Seduction in a strong political sense might

be considered through the tactics of something like guerilla warfare, manipulating signs to draw an organized force into a position where the guerilla exploits the vulnerabilities of that manifest power (determinable position, paranoia at losing what is produced, and even the desire to be seduced/engaged). In the chapters that follow, however, I will not be giving attention to self-consciously organized practices of political seduction. Instead, I am most interested in the less-apparent way that the process of seduction is spontaneously expressed in literary works, and how seduction seems to triumph over material reality in power struggles between the two. The seducer may be killed or revealed, but cannot fail in a typical sense because seduction is--like J.L. Austin's performative language--either felicitous or infelicitous: if it does not succeed--if seduction fails in its perlocutionary intent to effect desire or credulity in the object of seduction--it can hardly be said that the seducer has simply lied, even when the seduction deploys a lie. Instead, the seducer has only been revealed in his or her attempt to perform and exploit the constative presumptions of a true-false model of language or reference in the object of the seduction.

For Baudrillard a seductive or a productive entity commits all action in the political realm. That is to say, the former's concern for surfaces, appearance and play, is in opposition to the latter's materiality, desire, and paranoia of losing what is accumulated; read this way, there is no other role (although the two may find one source). This does not offer a dialectic, as an encounter between the terms does not result in a synthesis, but rather a demystified seducer or an apotheosis of the seducer as usurper of power. In this way, seduction is a structural fact inherent in social power, and the roles are determined and inevitable. "Seduction always seeks to overturn and exorcize a power.

If seduction is artificial, it is also sacrificial" (Baudrillard 87). Furthermore, "power is realized according to a duel/dual relation, whereby it throws a challenge to society, and [power's] existence is challenged in return [by seduction]" (45). It is likely that the generative moment for *De la séduction* lies in Baudrillard's 1977 essay "Forget Foucault" that seeks, provocative title aside, I am sure, to complicate rather than discard Foucault's *La Volenté de savoir*. In "Forget Foucault" Baudrillard writes:

> Seduction is stronger than power because it is a reversible and mortal process, while power wants to be irreversible like value, as well as cumulative and immortal like value. Power shares all the illusions of the real[6] and of production; it wants to belong to the order of the real and falls over into the imaginary [...]. Seduction, however, does not partake of the real order. It never belongs to the order of force or force relations. (45)

It is important to understand that Baudrillard's opposition of power to seduction is not as absolute as it appears to be in these lines; indeed, one of the projects of *De la séduction* is to describe how power wavers between productive and seductive entities. It is this latter opposition that Baudrillard believes to be the fundamental disjunction, no doubt a thumbing of the nose at Foucault's project to describe how "discursive productions [...] bring about the 'will to knowledge'" (Foucault 11-12). This antagonism, however, is attempting to introduce into Foucault's theory an element that has been cast out rather than placing Foucault's work on the rubbish heap. I do not find, as David Halperin[3] does,

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[6] N.B. that these categories are not synonymous with the Lacanian orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic.

[3] Halperin may very well be right to imply that the distant and amoral way in which Baudrillard speaks of something such as the AIDS epidemic, for instance, as "a remedy against total sexual liberation" immediately moves to the immoral (qtd. Halperin 25). Yet I prefer to read this sort of cant as something less certain. Baudrillard gives similarly contentious formulations to other grave matters such as misogyny or the Holocaust, and it does not strike me as right to read Baudrillard's casual-seeming abstractions as

a “New Age moralism” guiding Baudrillard’s work, nor am I suspicious of Baudrillard’s claims in later works that his purpose with “Forget Foucault” was to make something of a constructive tribute to Foucault’s work, which was already tremendously influential (Halperin 24-25). When Baudrillard writes *De la séduction* two years later, the passage cited above recurs verbatim, but Baudrillard will elaborate his conception of power so that it is no longer simply opposed to seduction:

> Power seduces. But not in the vulgar sense of the masses' desire for complicity (a tautology that ultimately seeks to ground seduction in the *desire of others*). No, power seduces by virtue of the reversibility that haunts it, and on which a minor cycle is instituted. No more dominant and dominated, no more.victims and executioners (but "exploiters" and "exploited," they certainly exist, though quite separately, for there is no reversibility in production - but then nothing essential happens at this level). (*Seduction* 45)

As with so many of his claims, here Baudrillard matches great opacity with greater hyperbole, but what he seems to say is that subjects are not drawn to power because of material benefits, whether they be direct or secondarily in the form of status or authority. Instead, the ‘minor cycle’ of power is an epic cycle, and power seduces by permitting the space for a subject’s fall, the exhilarating and vertiginous effect of being worthy of destruction. It is easy to see that “dominant and dominated” are defined by a structure for which materiality is irrelevant, and “victims and executioners” are similarly in a relation

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straightforward commentary. As with Nietzsche, some of the most distasteful lines in Baudrillard’s work are also his most difficult to parse, and occasionally the difficult lines feel calculated to offend—often in ways that, regrettably, do not feel particularly high-minded. All the same, it does not seem justified to find a ‘moralism’ behind Baudrillard, New Age or otherwise.

for which exchange escapes—though this latter opposition is problematic and is certainly open to debate. In contrast, the "'exploiters' and 'exploited'" are in a separate domain of 'production', the notion of 'exploitation' always presupposing some tangible commodity or effect that is up for grabs. If the contention is true that power is sought for the game and challenge of its perpetual overturning—which is a compelling model for a general economy of power, given the arbitrariness of political systems—then seduction is a no more or less legitimate than the production of coups and campaigns in the vicissitudes of political life.

As Baudrillard puts it in *Seduction*—again, written not long-after "Forget Foucault":

> One must completely turn round what Foucault has to say in *The History of Sexuality I*, while *still accepting its central hypothesis*. Foucault sees only the *production* of sex as discourse. He is fascinated by the irreversible deployment and interstitial saturation of a field of speech, which is at the same time the institution of a field of power, culminating in a field of knowledge that reflects (or invents) it. But [...] if neither sociality nor sexuality exist[s] unless reclaimed and staged by power, perhaps power too does not exist unless reclaimed and staged by knowledge (theory). (48, my emphasis)

In my reading, Baudrillard's aim is not to diminish Foucault's position that knowledge and power are linked. Baudrillard does not reject Foucault, but only suggests that "Foucault's text should be criticized for failing to" account for the possible "reversion of power in simulation" (49). The purpose of Baudrillard is to describe a form of discourse

that is adamantly not simply epistemic—what we can call, after Claude Reichler, ‘seductive discourse’ (9)—and that does not conform to the structure of the syllogism. Seductive discourse, being self-reflectively reversible, as Felman has argued, cannot be described in the terms of power or production, for which reversibility comes at the cost of a continued existence.

In the following chapters I will elaborate the seductive operations as they’ve occurred in some works of literature since 1800. I have not limited myself to one literary period, but I have restricted the present study to works written during and after the rise of industrialism but before the prominence of strong commodity capitalism characteristic of our present age (*Ulysses* might occur late enough to be an exception, but my feeling is that the generation of the Nausikaa episode sources in the older model). The reason for this restriction is simple: I am not at all certain that seduction in the present can be isolated quite so neatly as a force opposed to production. Or as Baudrillard puts it:

> It is [now] no longer a matter of seduction as passion, but of a *demand for seduction*. [...] Wh a vague collusion between supply and demand, *seduction becomes nothing more than an exchange value*, serving the circulation of exchanges and the lubrication of social systems. (*Seduction* 176)

Seduction is operative but not necessarily in opposition to production. Instead, it seems accurate to describe contemporary seductions as deployed against other ‘seductions’. Perhaps this is of another order, perhaps not. All the same, I err on the side of caution and avoid the problem of postmodernity. The question might also be raised of whether or not a historical argument could follow from the Romantic to Modernist characterizations that

constitute the following essays. I've given some thought to this, and I do not believe that depicting a historical progression would be appropriate. Comparing the operations of seduction in a poem such as "Christabel" or the novel *Armance* to that of a cycle of classical plays such as, for instance, *The Oresteia* does not present any great adjustments to the model of seduction I've attempted to describe above. If there is a difference from antiquity to the modern it would seem to be the move to positing a subjectivity, but this is common to all of the works explored here, and the shift falls under the purview of another study than the present one. What seems clear is that to think in terms of seduction is to apply a model that is at once thoroughly archaic and perfectly modern. If this model necessarily dispenses with or diminishes the importance of materialist methods such as psychoanalysis or Marxist critique, it has at least the benefit of relying on a volitional subject to be seduced. In any case, seduction offers a remarkably egalitarian strategy for libratory action. Though few today would argue a trite line that 'we can be free in our own minds', the outlook is considerably brighter that one might gain a bit more freedom by distracting some certain others' minds with a few well-chosen signs of one's own. Or, as Baudrillard puts it in the epigraph above, "why become stuck undermining foundations, when a *light* manipulation of appearances will do" (*Seduction* 10)?

Chapter 2

‘Weak[ness] in Health’:

Reparative Functions of the Parasite and Seduction in S.T. Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’

In his 1816 preface to the first printing of ‘Christabel’, Samuel Taylor Coleridge takes pains to “preclud[e] charges of plagiarism or servile imitation,” placing the dates of composition nearly two decades prior and berating himself for “indolence” that has precluded the “impression of its originality” upon his readers in their present encounter with the poem (57). He goes on with the pointed observation, “there is amongst us a set of critics [...] who would [...] charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank” (57-58). Framing “Christabel” in these terms, two concerns of Coleridge stand out. The first of these is the fear that the circulation of similar texts will engender a spurious *image* of his own, or that the *true* originality of his project will be overcome by the *false* appearance—that his poem is derivative—when the discursive *noise* of the literary milieu is introduced between writer[4] and reader. The second concern is that he will be perceived as a *parasite*, drawing from the “tank” of another in a one-way exploit. Notice that the “perforation” is not an accident that one would discover, and only then take advantage of, but is deliberately “made” by the exploiter. Toward the end of his preface, Coleridge offers these beseeching lines to the “celebrated poets” whom he may be “suspected of having imitated”:

> 'Tis mine and it is likewise yours;

[4] Here I say ‘writer’ instead of ‘text’ because Coleridge’s claim is essentially about *composition*—something the text itself does not immediately prove, disprove or reveal (though—as Julia Kristeva has argued—traces of the unconscious productive processes might be readable via the semiose, historical facts of composition are not necessarily readable). Indeed, so much of what is known about the text’s composition comes from hearsay and conjecture that it is almost necessary to choose the author—and thus, a possible agent of factual misrepresentation—over the text if we are to maintain some semblance of objectivity. Since we do not know precisely how to date the published text, I choose this formulation.

> But an if this will not do;
>
> Let it be mine, good friend! for I
>
> Am the poorer of the two. (58)

This appeal to hospitality seems an odd addition given his firm affirmation of his own originality with which the preface began. What is of interest to this paper is not that Coleridge may stand wrongly or rightly accused. Instead, I refer to his first two concerns—the corruption of *appearance* by *noise*, and material *parasitism*—and his third, subsequent appeal to his brethren to act as *hosts*, because these moments could not circumscribe a more appropriate poem. As I intend to show, 'Christabel' is concerned above all with these three forms of parasitism: how noise determines appearance; how the figure of the parasite undoes order and even gains primacy; and how guests encroach upon their hosts. What is revealed is not merely the working of the parasitic function, but how parasitism might be generative of positive effects beneath its destructive appearance.

To bring these concerns to the surface, I will invoke Michel Serres's *La parasite*, a work eminently concerned with all three of these concepts: in the French, *parasite*[5] may refer to the biological parasite (the most common literal usage in English), or it may instead mean 'noise' or 'uninvited guest'. Before turning to the poem, I will introduce Serres's conception of the parasite, alongside which I will place Jean Baudrillard's thinking of seduction. The relation between seduction and the parasite will become more apparent, but let me say from the outset—and at the most basic level—why I make the decision to bring these two concepts together. Seduction, as Baudrillard notes in a 2004 lecture, is a *détournement*, a subversion or diversion of an unwitting subject through a

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[5]As the translator puts it, "In French, [*parasite*] has three meanings: a biological parasite, a social parasite, and static [viz. noise in a communication channel]" (Schehr, Trans. Preface vii).

desire manufactured by the signs of a seducer. Parasitism is also a *detournement*, but of resources or, in the case of noise, an image or intended meaning. Because seduction is usually signifying what the seducer does not have—or, as Baudrillard would have it, because seduction is the "eclipse of a presence" by an absence (85)—seduction parasites off the sign value of whatever absent form it places over the seducer's presence. Thus, the referent parasited upon by the absent sign is materially unaffected, but what that referent will mean to the seduced—particularly if he or she eventually become disillusioned about the seduction—will be necessarily altered or diminished. That is to say, if a need is *perceived* as having already been met, then the *desire* for that need vanishes; it does not matter whether the fulfillment of need was imaginary or real. While this might have no great effect in societies strongly centered around use-value, we can see that in certain epochs where sign value is of the higher value—our own consumer system, for instance—that to parasite the sign value can actually be more damaging to overall value than to damage the material referent[6].

The ternary parasite of Serres can be summarized as follows. First, it may be a *literal* parasitic relation—although the term might be used metaphorically, as Serres does in his evaluations of capitalism, it will continue to operate according to the model of a biological parasite—where the *material* body or worth of the host is taken and diminished by the parasite. Second, the *guest* may count upon a meal or other material benefit for which she does not remunerate the host beyond the pleasure taken by the host in the parasite's words or company. This might be a *fair* exchange between two orders—

[6] I will not pursue any connection to the French Revolution in these pages, other than to point out the tremendous alteration to how the relation between appearance and reality was perceived after The Terror. Though a historical analysis will not follow here, I mention this to adumbrate a potential point of continuity between 1800—the year Coleridge reports that he completed the poem—and our own era.

the real and the symbolic—which are, nevertheless, imperfectly commensurate and thus always imply an excess share for one or the other party. Already we see a space for a parasite that is generative. Serres's third parasite is that of *noise*. Noise will be his privileged parasite insofar as the meaning of *noise* appears more stable when it occurs in his analysis than the other two parasitic forms he describes, which should come as no surprise from one concerned with discourse as any writer is. But I would argue that Serres also gives this most ephemeral parasite—the one that appears most innocuous, a nuisance at worst—an agency potentially greater than his material exploiters. "The stentor who deafens with his commands," Serres writes, "takes their place" (141). In other words, minimal physical expenditure can provide one with absolute dominion. Serres is thinking not only of the raucous revolutionary or the plangent authoritarian, but also of the "motor," "the jet, the bulldozer, and the chain saw." I want to emphasize two things about this third parasite of noise. First, the noise that disrupts other discourse is not always linked to a representational sign: the stentorian roar may signal a lion or laryngitis, but the signified does not necessarily affect how noise operates (a signifying function may certainly inhere and create additional effects as a product of the sign, but the fact of the noise will be the same with or without signification). Second, noise may have no identifiable source or object, but its effect on discourse will render the noise itself as a vital agency regardless. Noise is thus a more powerful concept than at first appeared to be the case, whether as accidental excess or as a deliberate tool. On the one hand, noise seems conservative because"[n]oise destroys and horrifies," offering control of the discursive field to those who can dominate it, and counterrevolutionary since it drives opponents away to an imaginary escape where the noise will no longer pertain

(127). But Serres seems to also imply that noise offers a spontaneously available way to contest established power, or a noise that "nourishes a new order." This last point will be most important.

To approach how I am using Serres's book, it might be useful to mention two evaluations of his success at negotiating between the scientific and the literary, one quite critical—that of Katherine Hayles—and the other from a more laudatory perspective, in a summary by William Paulson. Hayles writes, "[T]he equivocation characteristic of [Serres's] writing becomes more intense as it comes closer to potential resolution" (203). Though she clearly has a high estimation of his projects, Hayles seems to find Serres's equivocations and reflexivity exasperating at times, even as she herself describes why they might be necessary or useful. While Hayles is uncharacteristically damning of some minor factual errors, and perceives Serres to be establishing "a general theory of exchange" that in her view is "not successful" (and in my view doesn't really define Serres's project, despite some passages that do suggest Hayles's claim) Hayles is most critical of the contradiction she finds in Serres between his avowed project to undo 'global theories' while perpetrating this same globalization in his 'global' application of the parasitic economy (196). A subtlety I believe Hayles misses is that she is using the term 'theory' in a potentially equivocal fashion herself. A theory may imply a prescriptive, normative practice and revelation of ontological essence, or it may simply elucidate a phenomenon in a self-acknowledged epistemic model that knows itself to be contingent. I consider Serres primarily to be doing the latter. Indeed, one of his more interesting claims is that the terms of *parasite*, *guest* and *host* are all potentially equivalent, depending on the observer's perspective (19). In this always-reversible

economy, we come more to have a heightened sense of the impossibility of applying the global and do not, conversely, feel ourselves to possess some sort of Procrustean tool with which to mutilate whatever exchange is under consideration so as to conform to our own *Weltanschauung*. This is, of course, too metaphysical for strong 'scientific' application, but that is not the point; what is more relevant is that this theory seems to emerge itself from strong scientific work. This is where Paulson's occasionally hagiographic perspective nevertheless manages to hit its mark. As he puts it, "[Serres] practices neither hermeneutics nor formalism. Reading Serres, one has the uncanny impression that theoretical concepts and models are not being applied to the text but instead are being drawn out of it" (31). Serres may leave his theory maddeningly abstruse, but his readings always hew close to the literary texts under consideration, and while this cannot be neatly summarized into a repeatable practice, neither can it be simply dismissed as accidentally obtained. Where I differ from both Hayles and Paulson is in the focus on 'economy' by the former, and the latter's denial that Serres is a formalist. In fact, it is precisely because Serres *is* describing a reversible *form* that we cannot call his project one simply of economy: the difference of value necessary in exchange cannot operate where every position of the form is already equal to every other position. But Serres does not claim that the *force* of each position will always be the same, only that the status we grant each term is relative, contingent and without essential axiomatics. This complete reversibility, though unusual, is not unique to Serres: we find a call for precisely this logic in Jean Baudrillard's writings on seduction.

In his 1979 *De la séduction,* Baudrillard makes the interesting point that what exists as a structure—what he will sometimes align with *production*—is only reversible

at the expense of its existence or life: to pass into mere appearance is a kind of loss (for the *material* only, of course, since this disappearance also holds the potential to become a seductive model itself). In contrast to this, Baudrillard portrays seduction as immortal: because seduction posits an imaginary state of affairs that loses nothing by eventually reversing to a true state, seduction is an indestructible form. Baudrillard writes:

> Every *positive* form can accommodate itself to its negative form, but understands the challenge of the *reversible* form as mortal. Every structure can adapt to its subversion or inversion, but not to the reversion of its terms. Seduction is this reversible form. (21)

A quick syllogism would demonstrate, therefore, that seduction is not a structure. Already we can see that, if we take Baudrillard at his word, then Serres's parasitic model must not be a structure either: the parasitic relation is *thoroughly reversible*. One obvious point of contention would be that if every term can be exchanged for any other term, we seem neither to gain nor lose anything and the theory is tautological or superfluous. Reading this state through Baudrillard, we can instead choose to read Serres's theory as operating as its own seductive form. What is paramount is that, as Baudrillard suggests, reversibility itself might be the 'difference that makes a difference', and to use Serres's theory would not be simply to apply it *to*, but to simultaneously keep it operatively reversible *through*, the object of investigation: as soon as the object lets the theory down, we lose both the theory and the parasitic relation. It might be too naive to take Baudrillard at his word here. Worse, it would reduce the sustained and careful analysis of the parasite by Serres—however opaque one may regard it—to the kind of 'pataphor that it is not. In analyzing 'Christabel', however, the theories of seduction and the parasite

will conform to one another more perfectly than a critical reader may at first suspect. I will now address the three parasites of the poem--*biological*, *noise* and *guest*--in turn.

As Christabel "kneels beneath the huge oak," praying for her "betrothed knight," we come upon a scene where the parasite is literally the only thriving organism: "naught was green upon the oak / But moss and rarest mistletoe" (ll. 28-35). What was originally a minor imposition on the tree has taken over in this place where "Spring comes slowly" (l. 22), overturning the hierarchy that typically holds the parasite as the subordinate term, and standing in vivid contrast to the "one red leaf" remaining on the oak's "topmost twig," an ironic signifier of the oak's former potency (ll. 49-52). Only in the imaginary realm of Bard Bracy's dream will "grass and green herbs" again populate beneath "the old oak tree" (l. 540), and this is certainly no accident: the soon-to-appear Geraldine will recapitulate this domination of power by parasitism after her new acquaintance Christabel has taken her home to bed. In turn, Geraldine suggests that she is herself a kind of parasited-upon excess when she claims, "Five warriors seized me yestermorn" (l. 81), taking the woman from her father, "Lord of Tryermaine," and using the language of property to refer to herself. The reversibility is even more apparent when we recall that Christabel's lover is a knight who may also be engaging in just this sort of parasitism at this very moment. Later, when Bracy tells of his dream, we see a phantasm of the forest full of green things, both the flora mentioned above and a "bright green snake[7]" coiled around a dove that the bard first identifies with Christabel (ll. 530ff.). Here, the color

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[7] I permit the snake to stand as a parasite because to do so accords with Serres. Objecting to the narrow concept of a parasite as internal, which invades or draws from a host through a penetration of one sort or another, Serres refers to our external form of parasitism, observed in factory farming and the exploitation of labor, as a form that "constitute[s] our environment" (10). Because our Hobbsean "collective was given the form of an animal" metaphorically—the Leviathan—Serres is confident in claiming, "We parasite each other and live amidst parasites."

green—a stock symbol of fecundity—is alloyed with the predatory snake just as green was paradoxically attributed to the parasites of mistletoe and moss in Part I. Bracy's dream is clearly in reference to the coiling of Geraldine around Christabel the night before, but the "half-listening" Baron dismisses the Bard's interpretation of the dove as Christabel. Instead, he reads Geraldine as the dove and promises to "crush the snake" (l. 571). If we continue to regard the dream as symbolic of the relation between Christabel and Geraldine, then Sir Leoline has unwittingly made an oath to "crush" Christabel, placing his daughter—not the guest—as the parasitic party. What is important here is that it is not strictly a mistake for Leoline to make this substitution: whatever Geraldine's ambitions may be, it is apparent that at this point Christabel is the nuisance, interfering with the relation that Geraldine is attempting to establish with Leoline. It is therefore appropriate that Christabel's eyes are "shrunk up to a serpent's" and that she speaks with a "hissing sound" (ll.585-91), despite the fact that Christabel is not her own agent, simultaneously a parasite *to* and having her speech parasited upon *by* Geraldine. In addition to parasitic violence, the mobile positions that Geraldine manipulates are in the service of her seduction of the powerful baron and his daughter. When Geraldine reveals her "mark of [..] shame" and "seal of [...] sorrow" to Christabel, she performs a doubled act of unmasking her own appearance and taking power over Christabel's ability to speak the truth of this same unmasking. When Christabel's speech is still her own, Geraldine takes care to dissimulate the presence of her 'mark' and what that mark represents, gaining access to the inside of power only by adopting the image of desirability. Once she has revealed the mark and enlightened Christabel, Geraldine has no choice but to intervene between this knowledge and what Christabel can say about what she knows.

Similarly, Geraldine ingratiates herself to Leoline only by the twinned masking of both Christabel's knowledge and of her own creation of Christabel's distorted sounds. The more Christabel attempts to speak the diabolism of her companion, the more Geraldine appears angelic, in contrast to the freshly-ophidian Christabel's uncouth utterances. Geraldine's position in the castle has only occurred through her seduction of the Baron's daughter, the daughter who must now be diverted from a discourse of rectitude if Geraldine is to seduce the Baron in turn.

But Christabel is clearly complicit in this seduction, and at least one critic has gone so far as to reverse the roles. Edward Dramin claims that "Christabel is more of an innocent seducer than a seduced innocent; she places herself in situations which facilitate her encounter with sin, and she eagerly embraces it" (223). If "Christabel represents the limitations of innocence" as Dramin claims, we might equally find that the limits of evil are represented by Geraldine. Instead of a *limit* in the sense of an impenetrable border, however, we might instead recognize that this limit is the folding point, the boundary where terms reverse. Dramin makes another apt point on the following page, finding a discontinuity between Geraldine's tale about the 'five warriors' (who, recall, are supposed to return at any minute) and her relatively banal "nee[d] to be sheltered 'from the damp air'" (224). Christabel apparently finds no problem in this gap between the posited threat of a new abduction and this complaint over a "trivial nuisance" of cold air, and—taken along with her repeated 'bad decisions' elsewhere—we might begin to intuit that the young woman wants to believe anything that will keep this seductive relation intact. In the terms of Baudrillard, the "seducer and the seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that [....] cannot end because the dividing line that defines the victory of

the one and the defeat of the other, is illegible" (22). Geraldine will seduce her way into the place of power, but Christabel's complicity allows a potentially reparative outcome to take place—to which I will return—as Geraldine acts as 'exciter' in the castle still mourning for the death of the mother.

When Geraldine enters the castle and reveals the famous "bosom and half her side" (l. 252), she informs her host, "In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,/Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!" (ll. 267-68). Geraldine will thus constitute in one gesture both the biological model of a parasite—intruding upon Christabel's body—and the model of *noise*, displacing Christabel's intended speech with Geraldine's own articulations. This illustrates the political implications of speech that Serres identifies, where a grand enough noise is sufficient to ensure hegemony. It also reveals that the three parasitic models are amorphous rather than distinct in "Christabel". Noise will be of greater importance in the poem than it might at first seem. Pure noise opens Part I of 'Christabel'. It is midnight, and the "owls have awakened the crowing cock," owls that may, like the "mastiff bitch", have in turn been awoken by the "castle clock" (l. 1ff). The mastiff will introduce her own noise with "Sixteen short howls not over loud" (l. 12). The difference between the mastiff's howls and the other noise is that the mastiff is provided with two potential triggers, explicitly "in answer to the clock" (l. 9), but also, it is suggested, the mastiff's perception of the "lady's shroud" (l. 13). Thus, the parasitic intrusion of the mastiff's howls might in fact be signifying a presence that cannot be distinguished from the ample racket around her, the problem of noise *par excellence*. A few lines later, Geraldine will first introduce herself not as an 'exceeding beauty' but as a barely audible moan. What might not be immediately apparent is that this

noise of a moan takes on a demonic significance due to the communication that it interrupts: Christabel in the act of praying. This most divine of dialogues is undone not by a 'stentor' or a Satan, but by the slightest utterance in the silence of this forest, and god is challenged not with a Miltonic mountain thrown at heaven by a raging Lucifer, but by the mere whisper of the young woman who appears delicate and weak.

The noise of Part I is variously innocuous, meaningful, and a potential for crisis, all of which are still permissive or even generative of future events. The second part of the poem, however, opens with a noise that is functionally hegemonic and static, covering all available consciousness with a monad of thought. After "he rose and found his lady dead," (l. 335), Leoline is shown to have imposed an order to make the memory of her death inescapable:

> And hence the custom and law began
> That still at dawn the sacristan,
> Who duly pulls the heavy bell,
> Five and forty beads must tell
> Between each stroke—a warning knell,
> Which not a soul can choose but hear. (ll. 332-36)

Sir Leoline has proclaimed a "custom and law" whereby the "sacristan,/ [...] duly" covers the baron's public domain with the remembrance of a private death. It is not *corporeal* subjects forced to listen, but their very *souls* that cannot "choose but hear," making this imposition not merely an inconvenience but an invasive and violent act against the baron's community. Leoline, who awoke to find his wife dead, ensures that every subsequent waking—of himself and everyone else—will also be a waking to the

knowledge of death. The noise of the bell thus returns Leoline's society to the point of loss that obscures any living meaning of survival. In a sense, the survival of the baron and Christabel will not be allowed to occur, as each waking will place them back precisely at the scene of death of the wife and mother. This noisy injunction to remain at the scene of departure opens Part II of the poem with the lines, "'Each matin bell,' the Baron saith,/ 'Knells us back to a world of death'" (ll. 332-33). Whatever risk Geraldine may bear for the household, we cannot say that the scene that she intrudes upon, or is seduced into, is one where all is well: like the 'barren' oak of the opening, this 'baron' *host,* far from thriving, seems barely alive. When Christabel spoke earlier of her father as being "weak in health" (l. 118), it was easy to read this as the father ailing from a diminishment *to* his health, or along similar lines. But we can read another way. It is possible that being "weak in health" means, instead, that Leoline's weakness follows *from* the health itself, and that Leoline's weakness does not apply *to* health but instead literally inhabits and emerges from it. This may sound absurd at first, but consider what is enabling the memory of his departed wife to remain so inescapably present: it is the strength of his authority and the robustness of his rule which have brought this obsession with the wife's death to act as the dominant force in this territory. Were Leoline to fall a little from power, to receive an inoculation against death by catching a little sickness of his own, so to speak, he may be forced to confront the continuance of events outside his grief. It is precisely this effect that Geraldine seems to have, dividing the father from the daughter, and each one of these from the memory of the mother long enough for something new to occur. I will come back to this, but for now I simply want to point out that what we have seen in Part I—the seduction of Christabel by the parasitic Geraldine, which seemed to be

undesirable (to the narrator, at least)—must be reevaluated in light of these opening lines of Part II that are permeated with death. If Leoline's gambit to signify death through the bells sacrifices eventuality for memory, then it is the parasite Geraldine that, if we follow Serres, can act as "an exciter" to reanimate Leoline and events. Serres believes that, "The parasite intevenes [...] as an element of fluctuation. It excites [the system] or incites it; it puts it into motion, or it paralyzes it" (191). This contention is justified within the poem. The intrusion of Geraldine initiates a replacement of Leoline's noise with her own noise, instantiated through Christabel. The seduction of Leoline will occur only if Geraldine can subvert the totalizing noise of the bell with the seductive accent of the guest.

The potency of this noise can be seen most vividly when the spirit of the mother returns to interrupt both the drinking of "cordial wine [...] of virtuous powers" and the attendant discourse between Christabel and Geraldine (l. 191-92). Before arriving in Christabel's chamber, they "softly tread" through the castle, taking care not to introduce noise that would wake the "father who seldom sleepeth well" (ll. 164-65). We can see from the outset that an ethics of noise might apply in this episode, and this will become clearer when the inhospitable mother intrudes to damn the guest. As the *invited* guest Geraldine begins to partake, the reader prepares in turn for the more candid speech that the wine will produce between the two women. Instead of intimate dialogue, however, the spirit of the mother arrives to upset the narrative and the curiosity of the reader. The mother's appearance is registered only via Geraldine's verbal tirade against her—"'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine! / I have power to bid thee flee," and similar words (ll. 205-6). That Christabel rushes to comfort Geraldine—seeming to have, first, taken no notice of the mother and, second, overlooked, or repressed, if you like, what she has just

heard Geraldine say—raises the question of whether this mother is really a protective force, or even a desirable presence at all. Instead, we might understand this scene to be about Christabel's choice to align with the living but unknown alterity of Geraldine over the dead and oppressive memory, a memory that the daughter willfully disavows the presence of. The care taken earlier not to awaken Leoline is the decision not to arouse his waking "back to the world of death," a "world of death" in which Christabel up to now has had no choice but to participate. Indeed, her choice to venture out to the forest only as the castle sleeps reinforces what might at first seem to be a tendentious claim: that for this withered host to become viable again will require the parasite of Geraldine, that Christabel knows this, and that this tale is not about whether Geraldine or Christabel is the true seducer but is instead demonstrating the mere fact that seduction needs to be introduced back into this maudlin milieu. Here the parasite is protective, vital and necessary. That "[t]he devil mocks the doleful tale" told by the ringing, encouraged or called forth by this 'life in death', is a strong indication that a force is needed to squelch this bell. The "power" wielded by Geraldine is not shown to be of a supernatural variety, but rather the ability to seduce the daughter, and eventually the household, away from the deafening memory of the dead, just as Geraldine has been seduced by Christabel, the host, into playing this part.

The house is divided between the hospitality of Christabel, and the bad manners (of a sort) of the "bodiless dead" mother (l. 209). More so than in the prior models of exploitation and noise, this third parasite of the *guest* will call forth ethical behavior from the hosts. From Christabel's carrying Geraldine through the doorway early in the poem to Leoline's privileging of Geraldine over his daughter at the close, we see people who were

formerly obsessed—one with her absent knight, the other with his dead wife—but who are now called forth to give selflessly to a stranger. If one would agree that the actions of Christabel and her father are exemplary moral acts[8], then we have to wonder what real damage Geraldine is doing. Enthusiasts of marginalia and palimpsests aside, we are compelled to take the poem as a whole, and not merely a fragment. The narrator—and the legend surrounding the poem—may allude to real damage caused to these hosts through Geraldine, by invoking the plan of the author or other rumors, but if we restrict ourselves to what happens within the printed text we find no real harm done by the visitor and many instances of good: the compassion, certainly, but also the more salacious fact that these formerly morose characters are invigorated with feelings of desire (l. 239ff.), "wonder and love" (l. 567), and "rage and pain" (l. 638). The seduction that Geraldine performs to transform the dead space to a living one is not at the expense of some regrettable subversion of Christabel's speech. Instead, the invasive parasitism that she performs on Christabel is a necessary method for disarticulating the customs and diverting the desires of the powerful lord, away from his death cathexis and toward the possibility for new events to take place. The "turning away from his own sweet maid" is the precondition for his stepping "forth [to lead] the lady Geraldine" toward both his reconciliation with his estranged friend (and Geraldine's father) Lord Roland, and his loosening of control on, and influence by, this perhaps too-loving daughter. In evaluating the potential victimization of Christabel, we would do well to recall that her hospitality toward Geraldine began as absolute: "And I beseech you courtesy,/This night, to share

[8] And even if we feel sympathy for Christabel at being displaced in her father's eyes, we must recall that Geraldine might have actually gone through the ordeal she claims, in which case most sympathies here would shift toward Geraldine; in fact, our own most ethical act might be to recognize what we do not explicitly know, not to commiserate with the victim but simply to acknowledge our own uncertainty and thus admire Leoline's actions.

your couch with me" (ll. 121-22). Christabel has placed Geraldine in the position of host, giving her possession of Christabel's own bed and asking the guest to allow her to take a liberty of Christabel's own. Like Coleridge's request for hospitality in the preface, the formulation of Christabel's request has already enacted what it seems to "beseech." By implying that Geraldine is already in the position of the host by asking her for a favor, Geraldine is not given a choice of which position to take, just as Coleridge's appeal for the hospitality of other poets is synchronic with his publishing the poem and thus taking that hospitality for granted. In both cases, what is putatively gracious is shown to be, in fact, an *imposition* in which the host has no choice but to capitulate. It is only after Christabel has had her desire fulfilled that she seeks to expel the guest, and we should not immediately assume that there is a continuity between Geraldine's imposition upon Christabel and the latter's desire to dislodge the guest. It is equally possible that Geraldine has retained a moral relevance, and that Christabel still has a moral duty, which would preclude any justice in the guest's expulsion.

To conclude, the poem demonstrates the paradoxical nature of both the seductive and the parasitic *détournements*. As Jane Nelson puts it, the juxtaposition of opposites in the poem "clearly indicate the 'power' of one opposite to 'generate' the other: the rising of Geraldine's powers, for example, occurs at the same moment that a literal 'falling' of Christabel [...] occurs"(381-82). This reversibility, I claim, comes directly from the political forms under consideration: the parasite and the seducer. This is not some Manichean struggle between good and evil, but a dynamic process driving the social organism toward life. Seduction cannot operate under hegemony, and the total power represented by the bell leaves no place for seduction to operate. By introducing this

principle, and drawing father and daughter into their own complicity in seduction, the parasites of the poem move toward and equilibrium, but one in which—crucially—"No equilibrium is sustained" (Nelson 382). Against the stasis of the bell, this movement toward and away from equilibrium is the oscillation constitutive of life.

Chapter 3

The Seductive Accent of Truth[9]:

Tone, Image and the Recursivity of Signs in Stendhal's Armance

As Octave lies afflicted with tetanus, with one-in-three odds of survival after his duel, Armance makes him swear that, should he live, "there shall never be any question of marriage between" them (119). Octave replies, "I swear it [...], but will Armance permit me to speak to her of my love?" to which she responds, "with an enchanting look[10]," "It will be the name that you give to our friendship." To break this statement down to its signifying components, we see that "friendship" will be the signified concept for the phoneme 'love': we have a signifier and a signified, so where is the referent? Unspoken, yet signified by Armance's "enchanting look"—the equivalent of an ironic wink (for what else could the look mean?)—we are told that the referent is in fact 'love' itself. Something strange is happening here. No longer is the signifier bound to the signified in an arbitrary relation, itself arbitrarily dividing a stable referent located elsewhere. Instead, the referent and the phonemic signifier move into a very *concrete* relation with a bifurcated signified moving elsewhere, manifestly 'friendship' but implicitly 'love' when the radical signifier of Armance's 'look' unties the semiotic knot.

The 'necessary[11]' relation seems to occur at the site of its derivation[12], as opposed

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[9] I take and modify this line from the French (see n2) "Octave, séduit par l'accent de la vraie passion" (315), which the intrepid translator has rendered as "charmed by the accents of true passion" for reasons unimaginable (166). It comes up in the construction I use for the title on p. 154 of the Moncrieff as well.
[10] "Ce sera le nom que vous donnerez à notre amitié, dit Armance avec un regard enchanteur" (230). All endnote references will refer to the French edition. When the French is quoted in the main body, or when my own translation is provided, a citation will be provided in an footnote so as to avoid any confusion with the Moncrieff translation. In this passage, Moncrieff translates *enchanteur* as "bewitching," but I prefer 'enchanting' for its more secular feel and, more importantly, for its close association with 'charm' that I wish to emphasize. Likewise, his translation of *regard* as "glance" adds a furtive edge that I believe is absent from the original, which I translate as the more traditional 'look'.
[11] Roland Barthes confirms the possibility of this, writing, "In linguistics, motivation is limited to the

to its origin: it happens in the hairetic deployment of the sign, not in the orthodox act of using the dead and valued sign. In a semiotic shuffling of terms, the originary aspect of language as arbitrary is used in a form of signifying that is itself *not* arbitrary or contingent: the relation of the signifier "love" to the same referent is quite *necessary* due to the *unstable ambivalence* of the manifestly signified concept of "friendship." Moreover, this moment in the text is of a piece with the novel: the use of signs throughout—not only linguistic signs—is bound up with two occurrences that undo any hope of a stable sign system. First of all, because the true meaning is not communicated *within* language—language is not a 'vehicle'—but at the *margins* of language, as with Armance's 'enchanting look.' Second, the signs themselves become disarticulated, as just described. I will provisionally call this type of discourse 'seductive discourse', and intend to demonstrate that *Armance* is above all a sustained model—both thematically and formally (but where to draw the line!)—of this kind of discourse. Before returning to the text, however, I should briefly articulate the methodology for this paper.

Among twentieth century theories of signification that do not concern themselves

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partial plane of derivation or compositions; in semiology, on the contrary, it will put to us more general problems. On the one hand, *it is possible that outside language systems may be found*, in which motivation plays a great part. [...] On the other hand, it is highly probable that a semiological inventory will reveal the existence of impure systems, comprising either very loose motivations, or motivations pervaded, so to speak, with secondary non-motivations, as if, often, *the sign lent itself to a kind of conflict between the motivated and the unmotivated*" (*Elements* 51-52, my emphasis). Although I would take issue with the term 'outside', the meaning is probably apparent. Accepting the metaphor for the moment, we can regard the seductive discourse as 'extra-linguistic', using language by exceeding its capacity to signify. The "conflict between the motivated and the unmotivated" in the seductive sign is the conflict between the unmotivated linguistic material, and the subsequent deployment of this material that make the meanings 'motivated' in that the stability of meaning is relied upon when the methods of signification break with established linguistic conventions.

[12] This paper is on Armance, so I will accept a traditional model of this as derivative for now. My sense is that this is at the origin of language itself—the possibility certainly is. In any case, my primary argument is that language will become infinitely recursive at the moment it enters into social relations. That is to say, the sign may become rearranged or made to function through other signs—in part or in whole (this is a crucial aspect, because a possibility of fragmentation in derivative signs suggests that it could just as easily be at work from the very beginning of the sign)—so that the relations become more concrete at the moment they become disarticulated and entropically-infused with more 'information' (See *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Claude Shannon, 1949.).

with subjectivity, perhaps none has had more influence than Saussurian linguistics. Saussure's model does many things well, but it is not a universal one, particularly when desiring subjects get involved. The three-part structure (Sr, Sd, referent) and the 'arbitrary nature of the sign' are doubtlessly correct, but need this arbitrariness refer to the relation of the signifier to the signified alone, or might the components of sign systems themselves be modular? In discourse, the model becomes anemic and quintessentially logocentric, failing to include what it *cannot* account for. In other words, it is possible to find moments—nth-order signs[13], let's say for now—where the relation between the referent and the signified remains arbitrary, but for which the signified meaning changes place with the referent to be the guarantor of meaning with regard to the signifier. I consider this mobility and recursivity of signification to be at the center of seduction and the seductive discourse, and I claim that this mobility is the 'key' (not the mythical one) to Stendhal's *Armance*: in short, Stendhal's novel devises new practices for thinking the stable ternary sign.

Throughout the novel, characters read the *tone* of speech to reach a truth behind the words. I will consider *tone* or *accent* –inclusive of 'looks'—through what Julia Kristeva refers to procedurally as the *semiose* and materially as the *genotext*[14]. Kristeva

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[13] N.B. This is distinct from Roland Barthes's work on myth, which "shift[s] the formal system of the first signification sideways" (*Mythologies* 114). The recursive model I am speaking of is not a "lateral shift" but an involution of signification, or perhaps 'unfolding' would make for a better metaphor. Barthes has covered a great many areas with which I am not acquainted, and it is possible that his ideas overlap somewhere else, but they certainly do not within *Mythologies*. The reason should be apparent: in a myth, the contingency and arbitrariness are maintained at every step. As I have stated, the seductive discourse transforms this contingency into a necessity *within* its own functioning (the sign is still arbitrary in origin, but not in use). But let me be clear: I greatly admire Barthes, and the distinction I make here is not to distance myself from his work as a whole, but simply this particularly visible theory that one might immediately associate with what I am attempting to communicate

[14] The *genotext* is not linguistic, but it has real effects on signification that can be recognized, and in this way I consider it to be 'material'. "It is, rather, a *process* which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral [...] and non-signifying" (*Revolution* 86). The genotext as a process can be thought of as being in conflict with the *phenotext*, or "language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms

considers the *semiose* to be a signification enacted by drives, a kind of signification that precedes the differentiation of the subject from the object (in what she will call the *thetic phase*[15], or the subject's emergence into language). The semiose originates from the *chora*[16], the space in which the subject and the object are still indistinguishable. "Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (*Revolution* 17). It is just this 'kinetic rhythm' that we find in the 'enchanted look' of Armance above. Kristeva claims that this enunciation of drives through the semiose is the source of poetic language: poetic language seeks to communicate precisely that information which exceeds symbolization. Because the semiose subverts the standards of symbolic language (the linguistic location of established tradition, and hence power), the semiose is itself 'revolutionary'. I will advance the position that this is true of the seductive discourse as well—which is more radical, in fact. Where the poetic exceeds language at the level of the subject, seduction always takes the objective Other into account, relying on a contract of signs to beguile the credulous while also acknowledging the subjectivity of the other in the same movement.

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of 'competence' and 'performance'" (87). However, the genotextual can only emerge through the deviations or ruptures that it enacts within the phenotext: the genotext is has no identifiable existence before the symbolic that it subverts. Like the pleasure principle and the death drive, the two cannot form a dialectic that would lead to a synthesis of the two, and instead they hold a Manichean chimerical quality. Because seduction has a very real signifying effect, one that confuses semiotics but nonetheless enacts its own signification, it seems reasonable, if only *concesso non dato*, to consider seduction as conforming to Kristeva's model.

[15] The thetic phase is the precondition for signification which necessitates the subject's breaking away from the object, but which also posits the subject as an 'I', and which therefore envelopes the signification in the subject's presence through as identification with the object. "All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects" (*Revolution* 43). For this reason, "*there exists only one signification*, that of the thetic phase, which contains the object as well as the proposition, and the complicity between them" (44).

[16] "'The *chora* is a modality of *signifiance* in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic. We emphasize the regulatory aspect of the *chora*: its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call and *objective ordering* [*ordonnancement*], which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the 'biological' difference between the sexes or family structure" (*Revolution* 26-27)

A central inspiration for this paper is the work of Claude Reichler[17], who writes of the supposed opposition between the seductive and the 'straightforward' discourse that "these two modes of speaking are like two imaginary beings, invested by speaking subjects in language with *an ambivalence constitutive of its secret*[18]" (10, my translation). It is not that the seductive model is false in relation to a straightforward model, but rather that the ambivalence at the heart of language renders each model imaginary. Once the speaking subject employs either model, the constitutive ambivalence of language is invested with intentions, in seductive discourse to exploit ambivalence, and in straightforward discourse to imagine that it does not exist. Neither can be said to be corrupt or true, since each is, in a sense, playing its own game.

Shoshana Felman, in her review of Reichler's book, makes the claim[5]:

> Seduction itself turns out to be, therefore, a systematic and symptomatic(sub/di)version [*detournement*] of the established system that, while deconstructing this system, precedes a historical shift by anticipating, at the center of the present, a semioticity to come.(*Signes* 332, my translation)

To be redundant, seduction is not a corruption, but here both a deconstruction of the

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[17] Although I cannot claim to use this particular criticism directly, my thinking on the sign structure of seduction in *Armance* has been greatly aided by a brief 'misreading' or *felix culpa* of reading of Reichler's work. A table in *La Diabolie* places the 'signifier' in opposition to a structure made up of the referent and the 'signified'. My original reading of the supporting text was that the seducer undoes the ternary structure, but Reichler seems to claim that the structure remains, and that the seducer 'evacuates truth' from the sign, much like the Barthesean model of myth (12-13). What I am attempting to show is that the signifier and the referent can take on a *necessary* relation when they are put into a seductive discourse, as explained above.

[18] On ne cherchera donc pas à cerner le discours séducteur ni à définir la rectitude, selon une transcendance ou un donné positif. Ce sera même tout le contraire: on tentera de décrire l'opposition de ces deux modes du dire comme étant celle de deux imaginaires investis par les sujets parlants dans le langage, qu*'une ambivalence constitutive de celui-ci sécrète* (Reichler 10).

[5] : La séduction s'avère être, ainsi, un détournement systématique et symptomatique du système éstabli qui, tout en déconstruisant ce système préfigure une mutation historique en anticipant, au sein du présent, une sémioticité de la avenir.

linguistic system—revealing a contradiction to signification at its origin—and an anticipation of the future: the ambivalence of the sign, when exploited by the seducer, means that it may always become true later. The sign can give a site for meaning that precedes and determines the otherwise radical contingency of history. We see this in *Armance* when Mlle. de Zohiloff transforms her love into a desire to join a convent after Octave confronts her with her own condemning remarks about himself (seductive signs *themselves*), making it a seductive sign that dissimulates (without lying) her feelings, only to have this seemingly false sign (the desire for the convent) become real as the necessary terminal point after Octave's suicide (47). Her 'sacrifice' is not simply a failure of the desiring body, but the triumph of a seduction that supersedes the putative 'needs' of the body: the 'game' continues even after the death of Octave, and that Armance continues her seduction can be seen as the highest proof of their bond, a bond that is far beyond the solitary facet of love, and that *demands* more than love as well—it is the epitome of the *devoir* she so often avows, so in a sense this is another example of a seductive sign anticipating the futurity of signification—converting her *entire being* into a sign, instead of one mere feeling into another mere component.

Binding these theories together[19], we can conclude that the *semiose* is not only used to signify a subjective drive, but that it can be deployed in seduction as a readable sign by a seducer—as Armance does with her 'look'—and can even function as an unconscious sign for another, deployed without a subjective agency:

> Quite unconsciously, he who had so loved silence acquired the habit of

[19] I will not include Baudrillard's analysis of seduction in this methodology, because it does not consider the signifying process, but the seductive model against one of power. I do, however, acknowledge that Baudrillard constitutes the backbone of this chapter, which exceeds citational remarks. His work resides in implications rather than the linguistic concerns elaborated here.

> talking volubly whenever Mademoiselle de Zohiloff was within earshot. [...] Whatever brilliant or eminent lady he might be addressing, he spoke really to Mademoiselle de Zohiloff alone, and for her benefit. (31)

The status of language is difficult to gauge here: the only certain thing is that Octave's speech is neither true nor false, and is certainly not covered by the reduction of language to a medium of manifest communication. Octave uses words to communicate to anyone except for Armance, but they are intended for her alone. The words are therefore constative only to the one to whom they are not addressed, and who is thus not in the role to contest their verity in any way. Octave presumably *converses* with others—his words *respond* to another's—but whatever the interlocutor reads in the words is a misinterpretation: Octave unwittingly bends his language against the linguistic contract, away from she who has the right to invoke this contract (the interlocutor) and towards she who is beyond the contract (Armance). It is intended that Armance hear a discourse outside of traditional linguistics, not concerning herself with Octave's duty to the presence of others, whose language hence is converted by Octave from subjective speech by themselves into only a frame for his own speech. Spontaneously and without volition, Octave speaks a seductive language. As Reichler points out, this is not a corruption of the straightforward speech but rather calls the difference between the two into doubt. And as Benveniste claims, "The *instance* of discourse is [...] constitutive of all the coordinates that define the subject" (731, my emphasis). The seductive discourse converts these coordinates from past, stable meanings into a *process* of future and multivalent meanings. The difference between the straightforward and the seductive discourses lies not in 'truth' but in the *temporality* of the coordinates of the subject, the orientation of the former

toward the past, and of the latter toward future.

Turning to *Armance* with these concepts in mind, I would like to address the complexity of Octave's first act of seduction in his pursuit of Armance. In order to gain an invitation to Mme. de Bonnivet's, outside of the normal hours of socializing, and thus speak to Armance alone, Octave 'confides' to Mme. de Bonnivet that he has "no conscience"(39). Only after she invites Octave to "the house next day at noon" do we learn that Octave has seduced her by putting his soul at stake, gaining the "invitation for which [he] had long been waiting" (43). Simple enough, but as they "becom[e] animated [...] these two people, the most remarkable in the room, in which, all *unconsciously*, they were providing a spectacle, had no thought of their own pleasure; nothing was farther from their minds[20]" (41, my emphasis). Octave is not the only seducer; M. de Bonnivet has in turn seduced him. To perfectly illustrate this complicity, recall that it is Octave's "perfect beauty and the natural tone full of feeling"—that with which he draws her in—which creates a response that makes *her* "truly seductive." Also note that their spirited conversation is only *unconscious*[21] of others: not ignorant of or even oriented away from others, but offering a potential for intent *for others* that cannot be evaluated objectively. The importance of this will become apparent below.

Apparantly, Octave seems to be carried away by his enthusiasm: in attempting to achieve the invitation, he has become diverted—seduced away from—his goal,

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[20] Et ces deux êtres, les plus remarquables du salon, où sans s'en douter ils formaient spectacle, ne songeaient nullement à se plaire, et rien ne les occupait moins. (*Armance* 81).

[21] I will rely on this translation of *sans s'en douter* for this paper, although Montcrieff's choice would obviously be anachronistic w/r/t *Armance* (although Coleridge had already coined the term in English at the time, it goes without saying that the meaning since Freud renders the associations of *unconscious* unacceptable without commenting to the contrary [N.B. I do not intend this comment for the elucidation of my reader, which would be unreasonably patronizing. I include it to prevent the reverse: the accusation that I myself am unaware of the problems of this term]. Regardless, a more literal 'without questioning it" or "without suspecting it" would still allow for the reading I am giving here, but keeping the term *unconscious* allows for an alignment with Kristeva's semiose without the jarring effect of the 'proper' translation.

"providing a spectacle" with "no thought of [his] own pleasure." Octave's enthusiasm—because it is unconscious—seems difficult to attribute to his purpose. Yet the characterization of this apparent discourse is wrong, and this excess of the language between Octave and Mme. Bonnivet—what escapes from them 'unconsciously', we are assured—is nothing less than the *source of* Octave's invitation:

> At length, the instinct of the conversations, if I dare venture upon such an expression, or certain intercepted smiles gave the fair Marquise to understand that a drawing room in which one hundred persons assemble every morning is not precisely the most appropriate place to investigate rebellion. She told Octave [...] to come to the house next day [...]. (43)

If we were to diagram the path of signification, we would see that Octave addresses the marquise with a passion or enthusiasm that she herself is drawn into, absorbs, and then *reflects back* to Octave. The 'excess' of this enthusiasm is detected by the court, and reflected, in turn, *back toward the marquise*. Forced to become conscious of this excess, she invites Octave to a more appropriate setting. What he performed *unconsciously* was not an aberration but the *true purpose* of the conversation. That is to say, Octave's sign was not only extremely complex in its deployment, but in its consideration as well. The *semiose*—his *imperative to signify* his unconscious drive to see Armance—is converted to a *genotext* of 'excess'. At no point can this seduction of the Madame be called false: allowing himself to be seduced into creating the excess that will become the sign, Octave achieves his goal without the slightest suggestion or hint of what that goal is, at points even to himself, and this all occurs at a point beyond verity.

Just prior to this complex seduction, we see Armance and Octave unconsciously

attempt to affect one another:

> Unconsciously Armance allowed him to see, by a casual utterance, that she no longer looked upon him as an intimate friend; his heart was wrung, he remained speechless for a quarter of an hour. He was far from discovering in the form of Armance's speech a pretext for replying to it in an effective manner and so recovering his rights. Now and again he attempted to speak, but it was too late, and his reply was no longer appropriate; still, it did show that he was concerned. (34)

It is the "*form of Armance's speech*" that precludes an 'effective' reply: not the meaning of the words, but the meaning of her *unconscious* gestures or *genotext.*[22] This does not seem at first to be particularly seductive. To change our minds, we only need to consider two passages. The first is when, following her 'traumatic' garden conversation with Octave, she flees to her room and confesses her "fatal secret," that she "was in love with him then without knowing it" (46-47). The second, as we have just discussed, has Octave striving to meet her as the result of her *unconscious* silence. Armance's scorn, in other words, *is likened to her love*: it is *sans savoir*. It seems a very easy step to link the two in a causal relationship, her *unconscious* love being expressed as the *unconscious* scorn that, at a certain level, she recognized to be effective with regard to Octave, the evidence for which we will return to.

For now, we must revisit Octave's seduction of Mme. de Bonnivet. It is only *after* reaching the confession of love by Armance that we are in a position to recognize the recursivity of seduction, and to understand perhaps why Octave's *unconscious* actions—

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[22] I hope that I will escape a charge of 'dogmatic' thinking here. I am only trying to homogenize my terms here. While the relevance of Kristeva could be disputed, I want to try to work the theory in if I can do so without smothering the novel, which I believe is possible.

without his subjective agency—were so effective. Armance has unwittingly seduced an unwitting Octave, through signs of indifference, into arranging the meeting that she never could have, not only due to social conventions but because she had not yet avowed her love. Octave's seduction posited signs of a 'missing conscience', which seemed to be a manifest lie, or at least deceptive in a very banal sense. In fact, Octave *has* had his conscience seduced away by Armance: the corrupt signified in Octave's speech is replaced by a correct referent that is at one with the signifier: he *is* missing a 'conscience', willing to sacrifice his own volition and morals in order to reconcile with Armance. The *genotext* of Armance's unconscious indifference is the input for Octave's own seduction, and parallels his in every way. The display of indifference corresponds to her *signified* indifference to Octave: even when his love is assured, her concerns lie with the opinion of society, her honor before which is paramount. Yet the *referent* of this indifference, if my reading is accepted, is the *unconscious* love for Octave , beyond even his death, as her submission to the convent should make evident.[23]

To further illustrate how seduction disarticulates and feeds signs into one another, I will now turn to the second half of the paragraph discussed above. After Armance *unconsciously* spurns Octave in order to gain him—as we have just seen—Octave is described thus:

> While seeking in vain for a way of justifying himself in face of the accusation which [sic] Armance brought against him in secret, Octave let it be seen, quite unconsciously, how deeply it affected him; this was

[23] In other words seduction, being recursive, has no finite end. Even when the sign seems lost, there is no guarantee that the components do not still circulate. With Octave absent, is she really seducing him, or has she been seduced by his death, or by herself? Probably all of these are true, and yet one must end somewhere.

> perhaps the most skilful method of winning her forgiveness. (34)

The origin of this seduction seems to have *reversed* again, Octave now manipulating his own signs in order to be forgiven. It is *unconsciously* that Octave reveals to Armance her own effectiveness, and it is *unconsciously* that he succeeds in “winning her forgiveness.” Our narrator is neither omniscient nor credible, but one thing is certain: this is not the free indirect discourse of Octave, who is the misreader of all ‘good’ signs *par excellence*. If this line is in denotative good faith, we are presented with a dilemma: if forgiveness must be won from Armance, then she is sincerely upset with Octave, which seems to conflict with a reading of her as seductive. But this is meaningless, pointless, and inconsequential; it is a false dilemma. The desire to seduce and be seduced is the provider of all meaning for this relationship, and all manifest thoughts are incidental sites for deploying furtive signs for one another’s benefit. I would even go so far as to say that it is the *manifest expression of love* that seals the fate of Octave, making death the only method for maintaining the structure of seduction (with love as one facet) for the couple.

I will conclude with a point made by Shoshana Felman in an early essay on the role of Octave’s impotence—*la clé,* according to the extra-textual correspondence of Stendhal—in Armance, about which she writes:

> It is in the crucial fact that the novel would be completely different if the infirmity of the hero were formally documented. The absence of *la clé* itself is functional, necessary and meaningful: the *silence is made an integral part of the text*. It is not the essential that is avoided, but the ellipsis that is essential[24]. (*Parole* 136, my translation and emphasis)

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[24] Elle est dans le fait, capital, que le roman serait tout autre si l'infirmité du héros y était formellement explicitée. L'absence de la clé est elle-même fonctionnelle, nécessaire et signifiante: le silence fait partie

It is my belief that the disarticulation and involution of signs extends to the elision of Octave's malady in the novel. To begin, one is rather perplexed by exactly what part of literature this elision would consist of: the content-form dyad falls apart. Is the ellipsis formal, since the absence provides a particular *way* of reading, or is it conceptual, since this is the absence of narrative? It is both, but it is also the reverse of these apparent effects: the absence formally allows a plurality of ways to read, and introduces a multivalent number of narratives within one text: Stendhal's failure to choose creates an explosion of meaning. And, I probably have no need to add at this point, it is seductive. The signs exist, yet not where we think. Like Armance's using a book—itself a collection of stable signs—unstably balanced on Octave's door to signify one thing—his return—but ends up signifying an infinite number of possibilities when it confirms his absence instead, the effect of the missing key liberates the novel from a reductive reading. As Felman continues, "The value of criticism is therefore not to seek to explain this absence by the presence that, from outside, explains and is then done with it, but to examine the *function* of the absence, the riddle *as such*" (ibid.). I hope that I have managed to do something like this for the text. Armance worries that she will be seen as "a paid companion who had seduced the son of the house" (*Armance* 72). Later, she is described by Octave as "the most seductive woman in Paris[25]." And so seduction reigns, and, in a permissible nod to tradition, Stendhal has truth spoken by the fool. As M. de Soubirane fumes over his inevitable loss of influence, he thinks of 'the most seductive girl in Paris'

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intégrante du texte. Ce n'est pas, en effet, la clé qui manque, mais un manque qui en est la clé. Ce n'est pas l'essentiel qui est éludé, mais l'ellipse qui est essentielle. L'intérêt du critique n'est donc pas de chercher à élucider cette absence par la présence qui, de l'extérieur, l'explique et lui fait pendant, mais d'examiner la *fonction* de l'absence, l'énigme *comme telle.*

[25] Je vois tous les jours et moins souvent que je ne le voudrais la femme la plus séduisante de Paris. (176) Breathtakingly translated as "attractive woman" by Montcrieff (90).

who will reign, not incidentally, “with absolute power over the heart of a husband who loved her to madness” (149).

Chapter 4

Portable Milieus and Proliferating Signs:

Despatialization, Gender and Seduction in *The Wings of the Dove*

The cohesive sense of a U.S. identity, according to the Americanist Paul Giles, experienced a relatively short span: from roughly 1860 to1980, with a peak early in the twentieth century. Literature of this period, Giles writes, was “saturated in locality [...] as a guarantee of its own authenticity and patriotic allegiance” (45). If—as Giles contends—the post-globalization United States is one that has effectively lost its sense of ‘locality’ or spatial identity, one is tempted to read novelist Henry James as either a perceptive anticipator of this curve of accumulating and then eroding territorial identity, or a positive sign that it was never fully operative to begin with. Emerging right at the peak of Giles’s national-identity salad days we find James’s 1902 novel *The Wings of the Dove* all but purged of meanings suggested by locale. This essay will attempt to show that an absent territorial presence in *The Wings of the Dove*—along with a parallel elision of patriarchal authority to be replaced by agnate absence or weakness—alters the perception of characters within the text by assigning their points of reference to other characters, themselves, and to the relations between the two categories. One question that this paper will raise but not answer is whether or not the crypto-consumerist milieu portrayed by James in London drawing rooms and most of Venice represents the nascence of American counter-colonialism of the Old World, via symbols and capital exchange, that would come to thrive during the last half of the 20th century and contribute to the phenomenon that Giles identifies.

As a sense of national spatiality—and thus national history—is dispensed with in

The Wings of the Dove, and as the text's 'sense of place' becomes an amorphous and inadequate provider of meaning, certain facts of intersubjectivity—such as gender identity and the relations between classes—gain importance to fill the gaps. The loss of spatiality initiates a concatenation of other historical losses[26] to reveal the social at its most synchronic and unstable. I will focus here on the loss of historically stable markers of identity in the characters, and how these displacements, such as those of gender and class, operate through the practice of seduction[27]. Seduction—that which "grounds [...] the literary order, the theoretical order, and the historical order in turn", to borrow from Shoshana Felman—moves to the fore as a method for contesting and extending power (*Scandal* 5). Most germane to this paper will not be the 'literary' order to which Felman refers, but rather James's demonstration of a 'historical' realization (within the world of the text) of what starts as a seductive sign: the performance of love by Densher for the

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[26] I make this connection because the spatial and the temporal (i.e. history), in order to achieve a recognizable differentiation, are bound to one another. To be more specific, we might consider how the histories of individual characters are unstable even as we read those histories represented within the novel. Kate Croy's relation to her father, for example, is given primacy in the structure of the novel, and yet we cannot say with any certainty how her opening meeting with Lionel explains or relates to her seductions of Milly and Densher. To borrow a term from a much later novel, what we could call the *temporal bandwidth* —or the comprehensive and continuous series of events occurring from time A to time B—of *The Wings of the Dove* is often reduced to the specific scene under consideration. Like Lord Mark, events rarely offer themselves up as identifiably related to earlier causes. As *temporal bandwidth* narrows, events come to seem increasingly contingent.

[27] While I will not claim that *The Wings of the Dove* is a direct descendent of the seduction genre that came to thrive after the American Revolution, I will note a similarity in the strange fact that Merton Densher, at the most schematic level of his actions, does coincide with the stereotype of a dangerous seducer: he expends a great deal of effort to have Kate "stay, as people called it" (312), after which time his desire (for admittedly complex reasons) abates. Though his justification is of a moral variety, it does seem suspicious that only after achieving a sexual relation with Kate has his desire cooled enough for him to reject marriage to her after so much striving for just this purpose. Again, this does not necessarily account for anything, but it is worth pointing out. Also, as Cathy Davidson notes, *The Power of Sympathy*, considered by some to be the 'first American novel' (83), is a seduction tale—so much so that the dedication page takes as it's aim to "Expose the *fatal Consequences* of SEDUCTION" (94, my italics, for reasons which will become clear later in this paper). As Davidson reads it, "the prominent placement of the word 'SEDUCTION' [....] is centered in the middle of the page; occupies an entire line; and is written in the clearest, darkest, boldest type on the page. [...] What we have here is a graphic illustration [...] of the role of the printer in the creation of the novel and in the 'seduction' of the American reading public" (91). I point this out to emphasize that portraying the dangers of seduction has a long been the purview of the American novel. Likewise, we might note that this theme is eminent prior to the rise of American nationalism as Giles portrays it, just as it comes up more subtly among the lost localities of *The Wings of the Dove*.

benefit of Milly Theale begins as a seductive sign with no referential truth, but turns out to be a placeholder for a real 'love' that does, arguably, come to pass at the close of the novel.

Spatial differentiation is notably absent from *The Wings of the Dove*. That Lancaster Gate and Matcham should 'feel' identical is understandable. Yet even after the novel shifts to Venice, one is hard pressed to find a distinguishable and stable territorial milieu[28] which is not immediately subsumed by the verbosity and complicated syntax of the text. I anticipate an objection that Venice is amply described in the second half of the novel, but it is essential to note how these details of the city neither introduce unique exigencies into the plot nor, I contend, cohere to initiate an aesthetic response in the reader. Consider the first lines of Book Eighth:

> Densher became aware, afresh, that he disliked his hotel [...]. The establishment, choked at that season with the polyglot herd, cockneys of all climes, mainly German, mainly American, mainly English, it appeared as the corresponding sensitive nerve was touched, sounded loud and not sweet, sounded anything and everything but Italian, but Venetian. The Venetian was all a dialect, he knew; yet it was pure Attic beside some of the dialects at the bustling inn. (278)

First, notice the plurality of foreign languages around Densher that blends into a "polyglot herd, cockneys of all climes, mainly German, mainly American, mainly

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[28] This is not very eloquent—'territorial milieu' will sound redundant, probably voguish as well—so I want to justify the phrasing: as mentioned, there are milieus within the text, but I claim that they are detached from any sense of geographical space, which—with the exception of the scene of Milly Theale and Susan Stringham in the Alps, and the separate, serial escapes of Theale and Densher to the gray Regent's Park—is simply any site for erecting lavishly (or seedily-) appointed dining and drawing rooms. While this is not strictly innovative, it does stand out as odd in a novel that seems so concerned with national identities within spoken dialogue and yet so indifferent when it comes to distinguishing how those identities are anything but nominal. I would prefer to use more mellifluous terms, such as the 'placelessness' that Robert Weisbuch uses to characterize Dickinson, but I will stick to my present language.

English" to obliterate and replace the native language. The line that seems at least to be introducing the 'local color' of Venice as a tourist destination fails in even this regard: because James allows each particular language to dominate through the adjective "mainly", we have a logical impasse and no ground for reconstructing the scene to say much more than 'it was loud'. The second point I'd like to make is that the episode is described in terms that evoke the earlier (and separate) scenes of Milly and Densher in Regent's Park. There, as Milly wanders London after her visit with Sir Luke Strett, reeling from his "injunction to rejoice" and "to 'live'," she does not experience some kind of moral uplift or find an inspiration in life and all its splendor (153; 151). Instead, Milly notices the "stretches of shabby grass. Here were benches and smutty sheep; here were idle lads at games of ball, with their cries mild in the thick air; here were wanderers anxious and tired like herself; here doubtless were hundreds of others just in the same box" (153). This is a strange kind of living, to say the least. I'd like to point out the terms of the scene—the repeated 'grey immensity' of London; the hundreds of voices and miens obscured and amalgamated until nothing speaks or shines as a singular presence; and the city taking on the most morally maligned of hues all distance the reader from London. Milly's figural language also tends toward dehumanizing the assembled crowd: "cries," not voices, of the herd of 'sheep' arranged over the inadequate fodder of "shabby grass" and placed in a stall-like "box." Individuals go unnamed and unvoiced, the crowd portraying either a malignant mass or an entropic diffusion of humanity[29] instead of a plural society.

There is a separate experience by Densher—paralleling Milly's—of a gray,

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[29] Sharon Cameron reads this scene as Milly's "construing the park as a receptacle for pictures one wants one's own mind free of," namely death (147). While I do not disagree, I think that these unwanted thoughts must include more than just death to explain the animalistic figuration chosen here by Milly.

desolate London in the next chapter of the novel just before he reaches the same spot in Regent's Park, but in markedly different terms that bring this loss of locale into the highest relief and simultaneously reveal the replacement of place by empty signs:

> His full parenthesis was closed, and he was once more but a sentence, of a sort, in the general text, the text, that from his momentary street-corner, showed as a great grey page of print that somehow managed to be crowded without being "fine." The grey, however, was more or less the blur of a point of view not yet quite seized again; and there would be colour enough to come out. He was back, flatly enough, but back to possibilities and prospects, and the ground he now somewhat sightlessly covered was the act of renewed possession. (190-91)

Here, the words on the page are no longer representing the world in a semiotic system of reference and arrangement of syntax; instead, the *very fact* of words and text comes to stand for the world they would represent. To see the page is to look at London. The "blur of a point of view" in motion can refer to the reader stumbling over James's diction; an outsider's view of Densher rushing by with someplace to go; or, more likely, it is a London that Densher can only accept, and regain self-possession from, by demurring "sightlessly" from its effects by either refusing to look or changing his vantage so swiftly that he will not recognize what he sees. This language of the text-as-figure is, of course, constitutive of Densher the journalist, and I do not mean to overlook the character insight that we gain through Densher's own characterization of London in such terms. But all the same, this is first and foremost a rhetorical choice of James, and the reason I juxtapose this passage with Milly's—who, unlike Densher, is seemingly *not* constituted around

texts, and who, notably, will not even cut the seal of the book she carries—is to show that while each chooses different figures, the London they convey is much the same: ‘grey’, diffuse and inhuman. Where the two *flaneurs* differ, however, is that where Milly Theale uses the ideologically-loaded modifiers of “smutty” and “idle”—suggesting Protestant values with regard to sexuality and work—Densher chooses to abstract his environment to the point that axiologies no longer obtain[30]. This abstraction might be considered as a form of abjection of the social order that has played such a key role in keeping him from Kate Croy, and I will come back to this point.

Returning to the opening of Book Eighth in light of this brief digression, we see a similar abstraction: against the mass of tourists is the “pure Attic” of the Venetian dialect (278). Far from lifting the organic, native language above an artificial foreign assemblage (in which, we must not forget, Densher is silently complicit), this immediate identification of the Venetian dialect with ancient Attic both abstracts the former and locates it in an unreachable past. London society arrives to fill the void and reanimate the location in its own image, at least from the perspective of the novel.

Correlative to the opening lines is the next paragraph, which has Densher thinking of Theale’s Palazzo Leporelli in terms that call to mind his encounter with the richly-appointed Kensington drawing room of Maud Lowder (61-64): the thoughts attributed to Milly by Densher are that “her palace—with all of its romance and art and history—had set up round her a whirlwind of suggestion that never stopped for an hour” (280). It is

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[30] As Katherine Hayles reads his work, “For James, the observer is an embodied creature, and the specificity of his or her location determines what the observer can see when looking out on a scene that itself is physically specific” (37-38). Such does appear to be the case, but the ‘specificity of...location” that the observer sees—at least in these passages—is precisely the loss of specificity in the scenes. The emphasis on embodiment is a valuable one, but I want to put forward that the body—and the body as a signifier—takes on an added significance when the outer scene fails to cohere. To put this another way, the landscapes depicted here—by Milly and Densher—have themselves lost an embodiment of sorts.

difficult to see the movement from lurid appointments to historical ones as a fundamental shift rather than one of taste, and ultimately this aligns Milly and Maud in relation to Densher and others. Much as in the Regent's Park passages, the palace becomes a blurred "whirlwind of suggestion" that "never stopped" long enough for the reader to get a clear picture of the "romance and art and history" that we are assured exists but are not shown existing there. I would defy anyone to demonstrate that the local elements described in the text are being used to enrich the narrative rather than reveal the hegemonic capacity of the rich to purge and insinuate meaning whenever and wherever they like. Like Densher's London-as-text, it is the uniform *fact* of dominance that is highlighted in the move of the coterie to Venice, with the latter failing to meaningfully confer many of its own qualities upon the former.

This is a departure from the vivid sense of location that James conveys in some of his earlier works, such as the ever-salient Venice of *The Aspern Papers*, or the shifting scenery of towers, lakes, stairways and views through windows (all of which are crucial aesthetic and thematic elements) of the Essex estate in *The Turn of the Screw*. For all of the putative importance given to Milly's being an American in *The Wings of the Dove*, we find even this transatlantic distinction undermined, such as when Milly's 'mourning,' 'hair' and 'history' are all given a single spatial epithet, "New York," to convey three separate meanings that convert the concrete city and a strong synecdoche for the U.S. to a contingent set of signifiers—presumably "public," "flamboyant" and "temporal," respectively (77). As a result, the similarly (financially) powerful characters of Milly Theale and Maud Lowder seem situated along an axis of naivety and experience rather than at poles of the New World and the Old, whether we define those worlds

geographically or by timelines.

The effect on the novel of this indeterminate sense of location is twofold: first, it homogenizes a crucial aspect of the text, disorienting the reader between episodes; and second, the characters and commodities within the novel carry whatever meaning (whether symbolic or literal) that would have been couched in their relation to location or historical origin within themselves: the characters bring their milieus with them, in a sense, although the specific attributes are dependant on the system of characters present at any given time. It might even be said that each character is both a person and a figurant, the later a point of reference for the identities and behaviors of others, or a vessel into which the thoughts of other characters are alternately invested[31] and drawn from. I want to suggest that the rampant mobility of identity among characters is a result of the missing coordinates of territory and history: taken as a whole, the novel seems to approach a monadic entropy of characterization, particularly when it comes to gender stereotypes. In other words, if we take the long view, character's gender identities blur and come to appear much alike. But this is, in fact, merely an effect of the archaic tendency to seek a guarantee of meaning within a character's biological sex. As the temporality of character relations approaches zero—that is to say, as we view the characters at discrete moments limited to particular scenes—identities sexual and otherwise do become determinate as what is commonly called *masculine* or *feminine*, but with little regard for any biological sourcing of either term.

Michael Moon[32] contests common interpretations of the novel that read "an

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[31] This is in line with Cameron's contention that characters' thoughts are determined largely by external 'others,' articulations and 'looks' (123-25), to which I will return.

[32] I make the claims that follow strictly *concesso, non dato*. Moon's reading is a perceptive and powerful attempt to bring to the surface traces of historical and psychological elements, in the tension between

idealistic fiction that represents the betrayal and death of its heroine Milly Theale by her duplicitous friends [...] as a 'sacred mystery,' a 'sacrificial,' even 'sacramental' action (427). Instead, Moon argues that "male-homosexual thematics"—primarily between Densher and Eugenio—are "the real [...] source of the novel's undeniable power" (428). After substantial textual, historical and biographical evidence is displayed, Moon seems to waver in his conclusion, suspecting that "any account of Eugenio's role or the place of intense 'eye-games' he plays with Densher [...] must remain speculative" (441). Does this indeterminacy make homosexual dynamics themselves opaque or suppressed, or is Moon—in requiring a biological 'maleness' in order to guarantee homosexual status for Densher or Eugenio—essentially looking in the wrong place? From the moment that Moon rightly invests Kate and Milly with "possession of the phallus" (429), the gendering of Densher must be reconsidered as either symbolically yonic (a heterosexual symbolic relation) or, if Densher retains his masculinity, a symbolic homosexual in relation to each 'masculine' woman.

If this is the case, and if Densher is functionally feminine in relation to Eugenio's masculine gaze, it might be better to claim that instead of representing a specifically homoerotic (or a [conservative and] symbolically heteroerotic) event, the scene prefers a less certain status as a scene of seduction. If it is erotic, it is circumscribed by a spontaneous kind of eroticism that does not necessarily take the participants' sexes into

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Eugenio and Densher, that would likely not be available to the reader (consciously, at least) without the self-described 'speculative' intervention performed by Moon. The implications of his reading, subtle and not so subtle, are urgent, salient and political. Nevertheless, as is usual with James, the meanings and thus interpretive possibilities of the text are plural. By choosing to read the more-manifest way that stereotypically gendered roles are largely deprived of the alibi of sex in the characters—rendering hetero- or homosexual possibilities irrelevant not by an absence but by an ubiquity that discounts sexing—I wish to emphasize how the archaic model of seduction allows for desire, and fascination, to be pursued by subjects at a different register, one 'beyond the pleasure principle' (to take a rhetorical cue from Freud via Neil Hertz).

account. Or perhaps it is better to say that Densher is desiring to be ‘seen’ a certain way—to exist as an image or appearance—that inherently holds an erotic potential, but that we might hesitate to give an erotic status for the reason that Densher’s femininity is a challenge that Eugenio does not seem to take up. Furthermore, we should not assume that to revoke Densher’s biological maleness *in situ* would make it impossible to ever reclaim: the mobility is absolute. If the novel tells nothing else through the life and death of Milly—whose apotheosis converges with her literal loss of everything, including her life—it communicates the poverty of a paranoiac cathexis on potential loss. Although Densher may seem to operate as an obsessed representative of ‘castrated’ or thwarted masculine desire at the level of the plot, we should recall that it is Densher’s adoption of a stereotyped feminine passivity that makes his attempted seduction of Milly (or Kate, Maud and Eugenio, for that matter) sublimely indeterminate as either a moral or immoral act.

In *De la seduction,*[33] Baudrillard addresses the mobility of conventions[34] like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ that we find in the seductions of *The Wings of the Dove*. Baudrillard considers this mobility “not from the perspective of a psychic or biological bi-sexuality, but that of the trans-sexuality of seduction” (*Seduction* 7). Instead of some ontological essence, with the body acting as a material ground for gender norms, Baudrillard considers gender as tactically enacted in response to the immediate requirements of a strategy of seduction. The *doxy*[35] on seduction holds that the woman is

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[33] All citations are from the 1990 English translation.

[34] This is less in reference to primary or secondary sexual characteristics than social and behavioral expectations.

[35] It is incidental, but not without interest, that *doxy* is also sixteenth-century slang for a ‘mistress’ or ‘prostitute’ (both commonly troped as figures of ‘feminine’ danger) according to the OED. And while we’re entertaining false etymologies, let’s dispel the notion that to speak of seduction in the political realm could only be an accidental metaphor, with the ‘state’ being given a contingent status as ‘body’. In fact, it is

seductive, and that the man seduces; the one exists as appearance, the other appears as desire. But these conventions along the lines of sex obscure the fundamental way the feminine and masculine gendering is hairetically enacted and deployed. In the shifting allegiance to gender norms that features in seduction, Baudrillard suggests we may find a realm beyond the body where what is considered 'feminine' has long been not repressed or subjugated, but rather triumphant[36]:

> In seduction. the feminine is neither a marked nor an unmarked term [...].To be sure, one[37] calls the sovereignty of seduction feminine by convention, the same convention that claims sexuality to be fundamentally masculine. But the important point is that this form of sovereignty has always existed [...]. (7)

If we consider Densher, Milly, Kate and Maud Lowder along these lines, we see that their victories tend to correspond not to masculine will but to feminine passivity. Aunt Maud,

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just the opposite: the Latin *seducere* is first taken up in English in the 15th century, again citing the OED, as the persuasion of a "vassal, servant, soldier, etc." to "desert his allegiance or service": this is fundamentally political. In other words, as seduction is transported to the interpersonal realm, it seems to me that it is the body that is being treated as the state, and not vice versa when we consider seduction—whether it is of the 'state' or something else—as a political form.

[36] Before attempting to describe things in these terms, I want to be careful not to be misunderstood as insinuating that if feminine appearance trumps a masculine existence that there is then no need for a strong women's movement or the like in the 'real' world. To make such a claim would reattach what is called feminine only through convention to the body of woman as such, which is precisely the opposite of my intention in these pages. This is not the place to address in depth the rhetoric in Baudrillard where he himself seems to do just this re-inscribing of the feminine onto the genetic 'woman', so I can only say 'I disagree with him'. I see the need for real political work, in conventionally 'masculine' terms (viz. gaining a material benefit or status), which Baudrillard's formulation does not always acknowledge. To reiterate, however: the strength of Baudrillard's thought, to my mind, is that we must consider other political practices that are not directly translatable to material gains, 'in addition to', not 'in place of', the material. We should also keep in mind that the French *féminin* can mean either 'women's' or 'feminine', and I suspect that the closer proximity of the *form* to the *material body* in French has something to do with Baudrillard's occasional collapsing of this distance. An important point is that this collapsing almost always happens in a tossed-off sentence, not in his broader argument that constantly detaches the feminine from the genetic woman. As he claims in an interview on the topic with Sylvere Lotringer, "I consider woman the absence of desire. It is of little import whether or not that corresponds to real women. It is my conception of 'femininity'" (*Forget* 95).

[37] To give context, Baudrillard is being wry: it is his own argument that the feminine is sovereign, not a piece of received wisdom or common sense, as I needn't point out. The 'one' who calls sexuality 'fundamentally masculine' is, of course, Sigmund Freud.

for example, might prohibit Densher and Kate from being together, but the prohibition will fail. It is only by introducing her 'one lie' behind that scenes that her plan to separate the pair comes to pass, and here not as an act of will but as part of a network of effects in which she plays only a minor role. Here it might be of help to turn to two examples of Sharon Cameron's on how 'thinking' is figured in *The Wings of the Dove:* that "thinking is confused with manipulating another's thinking" and "that the content of thought [...] is itself manipulated" by those external to the thinker (125). I want to take this up, but choose to consider this externalized thought not as descriptive of cognition *per se* but of the dynamics of persuasion and seduction that occur between the characters. One might consider this opening up of thought as an effect of environments where 'need' and 'utility' seem as absent as London itself. To recall Felman's claim[38] that seduction "grounds the [...] historical order," and put it in the terms of Cameron, we can consider how the novel culminates in Densher being bequeathed "not simply [Milly's] riches but also her image of him as it dictates what he is, as if voluntarily, to do" (Cameron 124). In other words, Densher's performance of love for Milly begins as a simulation, yet the empty signifier turns out only to be waiting on its referent. "Her memory is [Densher's] love," according to Kate anyway (403).

With the mobility of gender norms and the loss of locale in mind, I would now like to turn to some scenes of the novel and analyze how seduction seems to operate in contests with power. I am deliberately choosing two passages that do not immediately seem to be 'seduction scenes' in order to reveal the pervasiveness of the seduction model

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[38] A further elaboration of Felman's thinking in this regard comes in a 1980 book review for Claude Reichler's *La Diabolie*, where she writes, "Seduction itself turns out to be [...] a systematic and symptomatic subversion/diversion [*detournement*] of the established system that, while deconstructing this system, precedes a historical shift by anticipating, at the center of the present, a semioticity to come" (*Signes* 332, my translation).

in *The Wings of the Dove*.

James portrays a world where almost every relation—sexual, political or otherwise—is determined not by the exigencies of the power or value but by their images and signs. As such, these images and signs are subject to be taken up spuriously by seducers. The meeting early in the novel between Merton Densher and Maud Lowder culminates in Densher confronting an aristocratic system of objects: the opulence that he otherwise simply abjects, in its absence, from his personal calculus becomes--at close range in the drawing room--"a portentous negation of his own world of thought" (63). I refer to 'abjection' because the two axiologies, Densher's and Lowder's, must not be so radically opposed if, out of all possible women to desire in London he has chosen Kate Croy from the small collection of aristocrats. In other words, we may infer that Densher is more susceptible to the worldly than he believes himself to be, and therefore attempts to distance himself from what he simultaneously desires and finds distasteful. In a perceptive move, Lowder leaves Densher and the objects alone together, perhaps trusting that her own conclusion regarding a relation between him and Kate Croy will osmotically become his own. The objects will thus act primarily as signifiers of the difference between the worlds of Lowder and Densher and their use value will exist as secondary if at all.

This strategy seems partially effective to the extent that Densher does read 'merciless difference' in the objects, a mercilessness that complicates his earlier ideal of a "woman whose value would be in her differences" (47). Yet Densher determines to "*use* his fatal intelligence to resist" (64). What this 'fatal intelligence' would be is not entirely clear, and on the surface this meeting of subject and objects has little to do with

seduction. To again invoke Baudrillard, however, we might be persuaded otherwise. If to seduce is to make oneself the object—or the image of the object—of another's desire, then the seducer is necessarily bound to the subjectivity of another. Thus, the relation between subject and object is a crucial one, but the 'subjectivity' in question will be that of Maud Lowder, not Densher's own. Densher will attempt to succeed not by directly or even obliquely resisting Aunt Maud, but by taking up the signs of her own desire to conceal his plans: resistance will not seek to negate Lowder's strength but to divert it. We might gain some ground by thinking of Densher's 'fatal intelligence' as what Baudrillard calls a 'fatal strategy'. Baudrillard writes:

> There is perhaps but one fatal strategy and only one: theory. And doubtless the only difference between a banal theory and a fatal theory is that in one strategy the subject still believes himself to be more cunning than the object, whereas in the other the object is considered more cunning, cynical, talented than the subject, for which it lies in wait. (*Fatal* 181)

Densher's 'fatal intelligence' comes tantalizingly close to these terms. The italicization of *use* in the James citation above places a strange weight on the word. I will posit that this grammar objectifies 'intelligence' along the lines of Baudrillard's 'fatal theory'. In other words, intelligence here will not be internally related to a desiring subject of Densher. Instead, Densher will objectify and *utilize* his intelligence in relation to an external Maud Lowder, much along the lines of Cameron's concept of 'external thinking'. This intelligence is 'fatal' to Densher as a subject desiring of Kate, but generative of Densher as an active agency precisely to the degree that his desire is replaced with Lowder's.

While she "might use [his intelligence] for whatever she like[s]," this will, in fact, furtively further Densher's own ambitions. Lowder, seeming to trust that the material gap between Densher and herself is sufficient, asks "no promise of him" and does not "propos[e] he should pay her for her indulgence by his word of honor not to interfere" (66). By explicitly submitting, Densher maintains the minimum gap between the implicit and voiced expectations of Lowder so that he never needs to lie. It is necessary for Maud to continue believing that Densher has "a certain amount of decency" in order to keep her from persisting too far in preventing his appearances at her home (68). In this scene, Densher seems to allow himself to be seduced by Maud Lowder and her appointments, but Lowder is in turn seduced by Densher's taking the submissive role that permits him to continue his relation with Kate.

Another such scene arrives after Densher informs Kate that Susan Stringham knows "everything" (362). Kate tells Densher, who feels "a brute" to "have pleased so many people," that he had "done it to please *me*." All acts and all signs are restrained from vulgarity by this univocal, noble purpose. A few lines later, in contrast to this noble characterization, we read a complication of this purpose: Milly, "having *been* loved" by Densher will have "realized her passion" and had "*all* she wanted" (364). There is no negotiating between these two absolutes, and the reader is confronted with a split between desiring both meaning to be given to the life of Milly and for the plan of Densher and Kate to find its very justification in their eventual union. The chain of seduction has gone from Kate seducing Densher to have him in turn seduce Milly. Milly's money, of course, constitutes a seductive challenge by virtue of its existence, but she has allowed herself to remain the challenged to this point. Here, at the end of this

passage, we receive the clearest example of the reversibility of seduction. Kate tells Densher "We've succeeded. [...] She won't have loved you for nothing. [...] And you won't have loved *me*" (364). These lines will retroactively come to be true through a reversal, the seductions by Kate and Densher undone by the disappearance of Milly from the novel into a death that trades a world of wealth for one of transcendent meaning, all the more successful because this meaning will reside necessarily in he who would have been the seducer. The implied 'for nothing' after "you won't have loved *me*" turns out not to exist, and Kate's speech in the scene becomes prophetic of the novel's ending, the grammar retroactively reversed to make the words mean their opposite.

To conclude, I would like to address recent criticism that pursues a materialist account of the novel, as such criticism relates to my claims about seduction in this paper. It is important, perhaps, that the need for all of these manipulations begins with a father's denial, when Lionel Croy refuses the approval of Kate's marriage to Densher, which, had it come to pass, might have led to a more cheery outcome for all parties. That Lionel may be as corrupt or dissolute as he pleases with no effect on his patriarchal authority is clearly an important historical element of the plot—as is the financial power of Milly or Maud—that I do not wish to dismiss. But in addition to materialist aetiologies we must also consider how signs and images can have their own agency and engender their own strategies, detached from referential reality yet having real effects. These seductive practices come to the fore as the social environment becomes more modern and more dependent on the value of signs. We might hesitate to regard Kate as demystified of "ideological effects" at the close of the novel, or Milly revealed as a "fully transcendent ideological power" (Martin 127). To take an orthodox Marxist position might prevent our

seeing features of a burgeoning modernity where the terms of Marx require augmentation. *The Wings of the* Dove demonstrates how material facts can be thoroughly thwarted by words, images and glances. If a Jamesean "counterfactual realism" is featuring here, it is not only in the "subjunctive...alternative grammar of time" (Dimock 244), but also in the seductive practices legible in the margins, depicted as victorious albeit, as one might expect, ambiguously so.

Chapter 5

Fascination and Seduction in 'Nausicaa'

"What happens when what you see," asks Maurice Blanchot, "although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance" (*Space* 32). Blanchot's answer is fascination, or what "robs us of our power to give sense." Episode 13 of James Joyce's *Ulysses* exemplifies this observation. "Nausicaa", describes a masturbatory and voyeuristic encounter between the 18-year-old[39] Gerty MacDowell and protagonist Leopold Bloom on Sandymount Strand. Gerty is lame in one leg, for which the severity is unspecified, but she remains immobile and manipulates her appearance for Bloom who, "fascinated by a loveliness that made him gaze," watches from a distance (296). Gerty becomes an apparent object of desire until after Bloom's climax, when he recognizes her malady and describes her as a "jilted beauty" that might arouse one as a "curiosity" but not as the ideal she seemed to be moments before (301). Additionally, the episode is divided between the aureate prose of the young woman's thoughts in the first half—often considered to be a parody of Victorian or 'young peoples' literature—and the elliptical, stream-of-consciousness style that characterizes Bloom throughout the novel. I intend both to complicate this parodic interpretation of Gerty's monologue and to show how the conventional prose of her thoughts is necessary for her victorious emergence from what can be interpreted as a power struggle with Bloom—an archaic conflict between the imaginary and the real. The fascination that she creates to seduce Bloom might be nothing other than the effect of turning herself wholly into a cliché (if an ideal may be thought of in such terms), but this is not simple objectification for reasons I will come to

[39] Presumably confirmed in the line "though Gerty would never see seventeen again" (288).

later. What is crucial is that the fascination Gerty enacts for Bloom seems unexpectedly to place him, not her, in the place of a captive object, “where what one sees seizes sight” (Blanchot *Space* 32). Captivation ceases only when Bloom is released by an orgasm that seems more exhausting than recuperative, “drain[ing] all the manhood out of” Bloom and returning him the realities of being a cuckold and alone. For this reason it is Gerty, who “didn’t look back [.... and who] Wouldn’t give that satisfaction” to Bloom (304), who survives the encounter intact.

The episode is appropriate for this essay not only for the theme of seduction in what takes place between Gerty and Bloom, but also for the circumstances under which “Nausicaa” initiated a legal response from real political groups. The July-August 1920 installment of *Ulysses*, being serialized in *The Little Review*, elicited prosecution of the publication by the government at the urging of “John Sumner, Secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice” (Vanderham 2). Though the episode came to Sumner’s attention through the district attorney’s office, it was, perhaps not unlike Gerty herself, a young woman, “the daughter of a prominent New York lawyer,” who took the initial offence at the writing, bringing the work to the attention of her father and thus originating the case against the publishers and the work (which in any case was already being suppressed by the Post Office). In other words, it is possible to view the legal case that would leave the novel banned from American shores for over a decade as a powerful effect of a young woman’s caprice or sensibilities, whatever the case may be. And she may have been right to take offense, for if the episode does not merit the status of obscenity it certainly is perverse by at least one definition—if one accepts that the scene Joyce depicts is one of seduction. As Jean Baudrillard writes, “all the perverse forms of

seduction have the following in common: they betray its secret and the fundamental rule, which is that the rule remain unspoken" (*Seduction* 127). In wanting a "fixed" rather than a "supple ceremonial," using Baudrillard's terms, by instantiating through prose the thoughts of Gerty and the seduction that takes place between her and Bloom according to a pretence that these operations could be known and written of, Joyce does in a sense betray what should "remain unspoken." Though one cannot know if it was a perceived obscenity or Joyce's pretense of knowledge that offended the daughter and called her into action, it might be best not to take for granted that she acted out of mere prudishness. What matters most in my view is that a marginal and unaccounted-for figure achieved spontaneous ascendancy over the writer, publishers and work itself not through her own strength or power but by adopting the sign of a young innocent. I do not mean, of course, that Margaret Anderson or Jane Heap were mighty moguls who deserved punishment any more than I believe Joyce was a pornographer. Likewise, it would be wrong to assume that the daughter of a baker, for instance, would have been so influential in bringing real power to bear. But the contest over obscenity is a public matter to be judged as something other than the private encounter between the young woman and the text. For if there is an element of perversity in Joyce's presuming to know the thoughts of a young woman, we might find some sympathy, despite the larger circumstances, for the one who sees an inadequate caricature of herself in that perversity. It would be too easy to place the young woman anonymously alongside the philistines of literary history such as Sumner, and it is remarkable despite the obscenity of the repressive apparatus itself that a seemingly-inconsequential person can perhaps seduce the state into bringing that apparatus to bear on her provisional 'enemy' by adopting the sign of 'innocent' (though again I distinguish

between the public and private justification here).

What the lawyer's daughter might have missed, however, is that whatever Joyce's intention in depicting Gerty as he does, his pastiche of conventional writing does not wholly account for Gerty's status within the episode, and the prose cannot be adequately described as parody. What is essential is that Gerty orchestrates every detail of what takes place, not only because she fascinates Bloom with her body but also in that she is herself fascinated—through received language and according to the plots of received narratives—with her own image of what she would like for the antihero of Bloom to be. But Gerty's pleasure seems to derive as much from the fascinated gaze of Bloom as from her own construction of what he represents, the "eyes that were fastened upon her set[ting] her pulse to tingling" (299). The lameness of Gerty is converted from a weakness to an asset, for if her companions "could run like rossies she could sit so she said." Gerty will excel at sitting, redoubled in the immobile "passion silent as the grave" that she evokes from Bloom. As Maurice Blanchot has it, "fascination is the passion for the image," "what fascinates us robs us of the power to give sense" (*Space* 32). From this perspective, the senselessness of Gerty's clichés couples with the silence of Bloom and seems appropriate, "affirm[ing] itself in a presence foreign to the temporal present and to presence in space." Gerty and Bloom encounter one another across a separation that "is the possibility of seeing" but without "perceiv[ing] any real object [...], for what [they] see does not belong to the world of reality" but rather to the imagination of the characters. For Gerty, the dyspeptic Bloom whose face "seemed to her the saddest she had ever seen" (292) and in whom she reads "deep mourning" transforms to the man "of which she had so often dreamed...,her dreamhusband" (293).

If there are clichés in Gerty's diction that seem borrowed from convention, they are no more or less worthy of ridicule than the innumerable other received wisdoms constitutive of societies, and certainly more noble, at least, than Bloom's own post-orgasmic musings upon the exchange value in currency of intercourse with Molly Bloom: "Suppose [Blazes Boylan] gave her money. Why Not? All a prejudice. She's worth ten, fifteen, more, a pound" (303). It is in light of this contrast that one might consider the entire episode: a conflict between the fascination, however spurious, instantiated by Gerty, and the disenchanting realities of Bloom as his fascination with Gerty is broken after his climax.

If Bloom will eat "with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (45) then Gerty will ask "why you couldn't eat something poetical like violets or roses," (289), and its a damn good question[40]. Whatever delight one finds in the scatology of a Swift or Rabelais, whose impulses to demystify the body find expression in Bloom, it is worth considering that Gerty's question takes one much further back into Hesperian literary genealogy. It would seem, after all, that Gerty's problem of being an eating and thus shitting being is the same problem that led the Greeks to feed their gods on wine and ambrosia. If the plot of the episode describes a movement from an imaginary enchantment to disillusioned reality, then the shift in narrative language and perspective from Gerty's ornate diction to the banalities of Bloom does not entail a move from parody to realism. Instead, the language is a redoubling of this plot, and what seems parodic is in fact necessary, a tactic of the fascination that seems to be Gerty's strength and purpose.

The narrative perspective seems to shift from Gerty's to Bloom's, though some

[40] And, it is worth noting, in prose certainly not formulated as a cliché.

critics have found the "suggest[ion] that she is thinking what Bloom might like to imagine her thinking" (Vanderham 40). I reject this interpretation[41], but the desire to unify the episode through the psyche of Bloom is an understandable response. If Gerty's thoughts were her own, it would seem that Joyce's sole foray into a female[42] psyche before the "Penelope" episode at the close of the novel is demeaning or even misogynistic. For, by most accounts, Gerty's thoughts are described in terms of parody, a riff on the conventions of "woman's magazinish style which, viewed as literary burlesque, is devastating" (Blamires 134). In contrast to these two positions, I see no reason that Gerty should be viewed as diminished, nor to read the clichés simply as a Joycean thumbing of the nose at the conventions of popular literature. Instead, I find Joyce describing a profound interaction founded on belief and fascination in this episode, where the cliché, emptied of meaning, is not regrettable or derivative form of communication but rather forms the structure of a ritual not at all unlike the lines of the Benediction that are appropriately woven through the episode.

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[41] The reason that I reject the claim that Gerty's thoughts are in part or whole the projections of Bloom is a straightforward one. Perhaps the most crucial event in the episode—an event that the present essay will rely on in any case—is Bloom's becoming aware of Gerty's lameness after idealizing or objectifying the young woman (Joyce 301). Yet the debility is already described throughout the first pages of "Nausicaa" from the putative perspective of Gerty: most explicitly in "the accident coming down Dalkey hill" (298), but almost certainly also in her singular description of her "foot" and "well-turned ankle" (287), where one would expect the plural 'feet' or 'ankles,' thus implying that something is awry. Unless one is prepared to engage psychoanalysis to call this a repression or disavowal by Bloom—and I am not—then at least part of the opening pages must be from the discrete perspective of Gerty. This evidence takes me halfway to my purpose, but one may still insist that at least some of Gerty's thoughts are applied by Bloom. For the remainder of the distance I rely on intuition. Throughout *Ulysess* there are inexplicable coincidences of thought and deed. If Gerty and Bloom share reference, for instance, to the jakes, there is no reason for one to immediately find an explanation in the episode being Bloom's imagination anymore than we'd say that Bloom is a projection of Gerty. In other words, I find these coincidences just that—serendipitous or spontaneous witnesses to a common humanity between the two—rather than evidence of Gerty's thoughts being the fantasy of Bloom or something similar. In any case, a cognitive gap between the two will be crucial for the argument of this essay so, whatever judgment the reader holds on this question, I will ask that he or she side with me on the question for the present discussion.

[42] Which is not to say that a feminine psyche is not described, since throughout the novel, and particularly in "Circe", Leopold Bloom is given explicit thoughts, concerns and even pronouns that are conventionally feminine.

It would not be appropriate to assault Harry Blamires for simplistic characterizations of his subject since his attempt to summarize *Ulysses* benefits first-time readers—myself among them—so remarkably well in their attempt to grasp the work. It is true that *Ulysses* is as much an epic poem as a novel, and as an epic *Ulysses* lends itself to the exemplary summarization performed by Blamires. But *Ulysses* is a novel first, dealing with subjectivity perhaps as much as any novel has before or since. As Blanchot perceives, the epic "'he' [...] divides: the 'he' becomes the impersonal coherence of a *story* [for which...], since it exists on its own, there is nothing left to do but tell it" (*NV* 461). In contrast, the novel "dissipates the *story* by contrasting it to the banality of the real," introducing "an ideology to the extent that it assumes that the individual, with all his particular characteristics and his limits, is enough to express the world, that is to say, it assumes that the course of the world remains that of the individual." Whatever its objective epic roots, *Ulysses* certainly does partake of this ideology of the individual, and "Nausicaa" in particular becomes a rich site for describing the meeting of the epic and the novel, since it seems to instantiate both an epic object of 'he' and 'she' while also positing meaning in the unified, individual course of Bloom. I will therefore take Blamires's work, because it has been so influential to how *Ulysses* is taught and understood, as an example of how an emphasis on epic explanation may short circuit subtler, profounder meanings of the hybrid text.

For Blamires, though he does admit that the "farcical, satirical strain" of "Nausicaa" is not the whole story, "the vulgar idiom of the novelette [...] becomes particularly touching by virtue of its sheer aptness to [Gerty's] adolescent self-dramatization" (134). In other words, the object of ridicule behind the parody is not only

jejune literature but the young Gerty's of the world as well; Gerty's conformity to the expectations held by a reader of a young woman of the West will move one to sympathy, though also "implies the very essence of racism and sexism: commiseration" (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 19). One may ask how convincing this reading seems if self-dramatization is not the exclusive purview of adolescence but is instead a feature of every major character in the novel, as I would argue that it is. This reading is still less convincing because the episode is situated structurally between the violence of the "Cyclops" episode—where anti-Semitic stereotypes or clichés culminate in meaningless violence—and the "Oxen of the Sun" episode that is a virtual hallucination of literary styles and conventions, which, if not simply parodic, do belie something more akin to virtuosity than the transmission of pathos or meaning. In contrast, "Nausicaa" forms a coherent and earnest account that, though enacted through dialogue as meaningless as what occurs in the episodes before and after, does hold the banality of events at bay for a time, providing a place for two flawed characters to escape the chaos, judgment and violence that Bloom finds in the pub of "Cyclops" and the hospital of "Oxen." To focus on the "sheer aptness" of the "vulgar idiom" here obscures the fact that some idiom is necessary and vital for the development of a space of fascination beyond reason. It is probably not without purpose that Bloom's thoughts are elided for the first half of the episode, for when they appear they return to rates of columns and the exigencies of good advertising that while meaningful could not be less worthy of the circumstances. That Gerty's happens to be a "vulgar idiom" seems contingent and secondary to the fact that an artificial vocabulary is called for—artificial insofar as this the events of the episode require something beyond quotidian language. In this sense, "vulgar" is a misnomer,

since it precisely because the idiom is not common that the real is transformed to the epic.

The episode opens with language that might be considered saccharine and turgid, with its "last glow of all too fleeting day," "sparkling waves" and "bright merry faces" (284). But it surely matters that this first page also describes the coming into language of the toddler with Edy Boardman, who "was just beginning to lisp his first babyish words." The juxtaposition of the barely coherent "jink a jink a jawbo" (after Cissy Caffery's coaching of the child to say "I want a drink of water") with the overwrought lines of Gerty is more appropriate than it may at first appear to be. In a sense, the toddler and Gerty are approaching language and the real from two different points because of their two separate purposes. For the toddler the task is to assign names for a reality that is meaningful in itself, and though the language is determined by material needs that must be met, it is important that here the language is pure repetition without meaning: the baby does not actually want water but is merely repeating the 'empty' words of Cissy.

For Gerty, on the other hand, the project is to assign the order and meaning of a self-sufficient literary language—regardless of its aesthetic merits—to a reality that might not be adequate to the desires and concerns that this language expresses. In other words, her needs are no longer material but ephemeral, and like the child's empty encounter with language in preparation for his later needs, Gerty's repetition of clichés is coinciding with her coming into an adulthood where the empty signs may soon be linked to concepts of a meaningful existence, such as 'love' and 'heroism', that are every bit as necessary to life as an adult as water is to the toddler. Like the "blemishes which nature has outrageously sown" on the face that render cosmetics justified for Baudelaire in his famous essay (qtd.

Baudrillard, *Seduction* 93), it is a world that holds disability, rejection by "the boy that had the bicycle" (287), bullying friends and the like to which Gerty applies her fantastic language. Just as Madam Vera Verity's advice makes Gerty's "eyes of witchery" where they "once were not so silkily seductive" (286), Gerty's application of ornate language to the lackluster reality around her allows her to be enchanted, self-seduced, into finding an ideal in Bloom whom the reader knows is far too human for this purpose, whatever one's sympathies toward Bloom may be. When Gerty "would fain have cried out to him chokingly, held out her snowy slender arms to him to come" (300), that the language is derivative or conventional cannot repeal that that a real desire and need is expressed, regardless of whether or not its object in Bloom is an authentic or an invented one. Compare this to Bloom's musing on the monetary value of Molly, situated in reality, for sure, but certainly a betrayal of Bloom's authentic feelings about her affair with Blazes Boylan. In a sense, the descriptions of realistic matters in counter-mystic terms are the most disingenuous passages of the episode. That Bloom's thoughts are occulted in the first half of the episode, before the orgasm, might confirm that it is the elaborate process of fascination with Gerty, and not the moment of climax, that provides the most reparative function for Bloom, an escape from the conflicted subjectivity that intrudes once more when Gerty's complex image is converted to one pleasurable moment. Bloom's "watch stopped at half past four," sometimes read as signifying the moment of intercourse between Molly and Boylan, seems alternately to refer to the loss of time experienced by Bloom before the orgasm that re-introduces his consciousness.

The loss of time that characterizes Bloom's fascination offers a paradoxical reading as an ethical act by Gerty. On the one hand Bloom's subjectivity is effaced,

which would at first suggest that fascination is somehow violent. Yet there is no reason, on the other hand, why one would be precluded from reading Gerty's positing herself as an image for Bloom as perhaps the most laudable, ethical act in late capitalist society. For in a society where needs are met almost before they are experienced, and where meaningful social experiences such as those Bloom attempts throughout the novel and particularly with Stephen Dedalus fail over and over again, it seems right ask if there might be something ethical in one's inducing belief in another, such as what Gerty enacts for Bloom. If "the act of seduction is above all an inducer of belief" (Felman *Scandal* 19) and if some kind of belief is a necessary component of meaningful-seeming existence, then Bloom—a questioner and an explainer, but perhaps not a believer in the necessarily naive sense—benefits from his encounter not because he receives pleasure but because his fascination—however meaningless its predicate—takes Bloom to a state if not transcendent then at least transgressive of the disenchanting state he routinely occupies. Gerty is not the instantiation of an ideal, but "as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to *see* (288, my emphasis). In other words, Gerty's ideal status is of a spectral kind, confirmed in the gaze of another and not in the presence or absence of desirable traits. Seeking "a manly man with a strong quiet face who had not found his ideal," Gerty expresses an asymptotic model of desire: for Bloom to remain her own ideal, Gerty seems to suggest that he must never find his ideal, not even in her. This ironic sentiment is accurate, for Bloom after the orgasm does turn once more from fascination with the ideal image to a concern with material reality. "See her as she is spoil all" is Bloom's concession to the fact, but this knowledge doesn't dissuade Bloom from peeking under the skirts of statues and young women, in search of what he doesn't need.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The last word cannot be left to nature: this, fundamentally, is what is at issue. Her exceptional, innate grace (which, like the accursed share, is immoral) must be sacrificed.—Jean Baudrillard

Ce qui est dangereusement "glissant," c'est donc la séduction elle-même [...], *faire trébucher* [...] *n'est pas simplement un acte* jouissif, *c'est aussi et surtout un acte* subversif.— Shoshana Felman

The preceding chapters could be said to unite in that each attends to actions spurred by referentless signs. In 'Christabel', Geraldine's apparent vulnerability conceals her strength; in *Armance*, Octave and Mlle. de Zohiloff spend most of the novel trying to dissimulate their mutual attraction; Milly Theale and Densher alternately read signs and are used as signs themselves in *The Wings of the Dove*; and Gerty MacDowell captivates Bloom through the careful arrangement of her body. This is an admittedly thin broth, and I freely admit that these events lend themselves to theories and interpretive forms other than the 'seductive' model I've chosen. The aspects of literature that benefit most strongly from seduction theories are essentially thematic—or, paradoxically, referential correspondences. Here, seduction is a strong model for analyzing action and anxiety because it allows artifice and appearance to gain some legitimacy as strategies or tactics in the human's pursuit of goals.

A particular difficulty arises when one attempts to study literary effects and devices themselves along the lines of seduction. While a trope such as irony, for instance, could clearly be considered in light of the non- or contra-referential signifying strategy

that it expresses, one does not gain much by considering irony as a seductive form, though it may be quite legitimate to do so. Similarly, much of what deconstruction has taught us becomes less, not more, effective and discerning when other, particular aspects of language like rhetoric—a litany of precise terms and specific structures—or the structure of meaning making are described simply as seductions. In any case, it is probably no accident that Shoshana Felman and Jean Baudrillard make many of their claims after Derrida and de Man, and one could argue persuasively (but not convincingly) that the theorizing on seduction that I've employed here is simply deconstruction in new clothes. For this reason, I've not made a strong attempt to think of literature-as-seduction or something similar, though it's conceivable that such a trial could be made convincing.

A question arises about the central concept of seduction in the theoretical texts I've used, particularly the prodigious scope of the claims used in these chapters. I confess to quoting selectively from Baudrillard, whose *Seduction* is concerned with constructively undermining three contemporary critical stances: feminism, psychoanalysis, and the emphasis on power and production that characterizes Foucault and his followers. As I've stated throughout, I read Baudrillard critically, charitably and modestly. No monograph of two hundred pages could be well spoken of as earnestly attempting to overthrow any one of these canons let alone all three, nor do I find overthrow to be Baudrillard's motive. Instead, the book is in many ways nothing more than a series of meditations on these areas of thought in light of the seductive elements that are neglected in the strong forms of their theories. Baudrillard speaks an abrasive and hyperbolic language at times that I find it easy to separate from the wide-ranging claims he makes. Because the ambition of his text is broad, the prerequisite expertise is lacking

for taking seriously some of his claims, however insightful the kernel of each claim may be. It is for this reason that I cannot say, for example, that the transexuality described as operative in a novel such as *The Wings of the Dove* is directly linked to the fascination found in "Nausicaa" or the strange signification that takes place in *Armance*. If my topic had been focused on the arbitrariness of gender, I could have chosen Bloom's metamorphosis into the female in the 'Circe' episode of *Ulysses*, Geraldine's usurping the place of the knight in "Christabel," or the reflexively masculine masquerade of Octave's violent acts in *Armance*. Instead, I've chosen to consider a variety of forms that seduction takes. I cannot say how these forms are necessarily linked, for Baudrillard or myself, except in light of what feels too reductive: signs without referents, nevertheless presumed to 'refer' by the seduced party.

To start from the idea that the human is inherently flawed is to begin from a theological claim, and it is a beginning that I'd consider inauspicious. To end, on the other hand, with this point is another matter, since this concept of the human is doxa, and as such has real effects on action—whether historical or that described in literature—that one may be permitted to discuss even if there is no ontological basis for the claim. If each human is flawed, then each may admit, correct or conceal their defect. This is the terrain of ethics. But each is fatally flawed, if there will always some defect that exceeds the subject's need for self-perfection, then seduction is not an aberration but a necessity. If *felix culpa* is a danger for religious subjects, it is also the basis of seductive acts. That self-perfection is instantiated only in another's imagination, rather than located in the material *self*, might be a compromise, but it is a compromise that, as I hope I've demonstrated, plays a critical role in how human acts and events occur in literature.

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