Forum: Feminism and Interpretation Theory

I Introduction

In order to suggest some directions that a discussion of these two very dense papers might take, I would like to begin by inventing some provisional relations of coherence between them for the context of this conference. If this invention conforms to Anne Freadman's definition of rhetoric, then I would hope that I am not presuming to manipulate the answer to the puzzle of what one set of propositions has to do with the other. I shall, however, do my best to exclude two possible answers.

I want to suggest that the exchange between these papers by Sneja Gunew and Anne Freadman cannot be read — at least, for feminist purposes — in terms of a simple opposition between deconstruction and formalism; and also, that the exchange between both papers and the conference cannot be reduced — again, for feminist purposes — to a confrontation between feminism on the one hand and interpretation theory on the other. I'm assuming that the invention of what I've just called "feminist purposes" is, in very general terms, what both papers are about.

To be more specific, I suggest that Gunew and Freadman have both considered the prospect of discourses changing hands, and at this level the papers share some common problems and assumptions. Both are concerned, for example, with the problem of silence — or rather, the womanly silence produced in and by discourses: Gunew, in terms of the function of “woman” as the prima materia of figurative discourse; and Freadman, in terms of the need to transform discursive material which, untransformed, leaves a woman no place from which to speak, and nothing to say. Secondly, in dealing with these questions both papers are based on a repudiation of essentialism, whether of a feminist or an interpretative variety. It is this repudiation which allows the projects of the papers to be complementary as the deconstruction of femininity metaphors on the one hand, and on the other, the construction of women's writing.

Finally, in order to carry out these projects, both papers deploy a notion of textual strategy. Since “textual strategy” is a wildly suggestive notion at the moment, I'd like to constrain it a little and give it a sense at once more modest, and more precise, than that of the unbridled interpretative orgy promised by some recent North American anthologies. A first constraint, I would suggest, is provided by the very notion of discourses “changing hands.” As the philosopher Michele Le Doeuff suggests,1 when Simone de Beauvoir took the initially unpromising material provided by the famous “holes and slime” metaphysics of Sartrian existentialism and turned it into a discourse which has mobilised women's movements in the Western world for the last thirty years, something more was necessary, for that to happen, than the simple transfer of that discourse from the hands of a man to the hands of a woman. The problem

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of strategy we are concerned with here is, quite specifically, the problem of that "something more."

A second constraint may be produced by considering the status of the "we" that I have just asserted as the subject of this forum. And here, in order to delimit further our notion of strategy and the practices it might imply, I would like to differentiate this "we" from that presupposed by the question put to this conference by E.D. Hirsch: "What kind of culture do we want to foster?" I would argue that Hirsch's formulation of current debates in literary theory — including the debate between Hirsch himself and certain deconstructionist practices — presupposes the unity of a humanistic culture confronted with a choice of futures. As feminists, Gunew, Freadman and I are obliged to assume the disunity of humanistic culture, if not the desirability of its positive disunification. Furthermore, Hirsch's formulation of the question of power and authority in that culture in terms of a distinction between "autocratic" and "allocratic" reading assumes not only an opposition between Self and Other, but also a unified reader (though not necessarily, of course, an individual, subjective reader). Since the publication of The Second Sex, the opposition between Self and Other has been a site of feminist interventions, rather than a support for those interventions or a solution to the problems they pose. And so the assumption of this forum — as discourse — is not a unified reader nor even a unity of readers, but rather that the subject of feminist reading and writing practices is an "I" in at least two places at once. This does not mean that it must be contradictory: a contradictory "I" (the subject of some Marxist discourses) may be understood as unified precisely by its constitution from at least two places at once. Instead, a feminist "I" is one which is pluralised in a practice of displacement: and I take it that theorising that practice of displacement is a way of dealing with the problem of transforming and transforming discourses, as well as of inventing a textual strategy in terms of its feminist aims. It is in these terms that I would like to read the strategies of the two papers presented here.

If the "I" of the forum is already in at least two places at once, each paper itself effects a shift of speaking position. Gunew's begins from a generalised position as feminist critic, and moves towards articulating a specific practice as feminist analyst, a practice informed by the methods of deconstruction. Freadman's paper moves from formalism to feminism; or rather, to a position in which it is possible to speak as the subject of both discourses at once. That is one reason why the exchange cannot be read as deconstruction versus formalism. But a stronger reason, I think, is that two quite specific projects have been defined in the process of shifting. Gunew begins as a feminist "I," and proposes to invoke the aid of deconstruction in a project of working deconstruction against itself — not to enjoy the pleasures of infinite regress so alluring to many deconstructionists ("whatever you can do, I can do better"), but in order to dismantle what she calls the "metaphorisation of woman" on which some deconstructionist practices depend. Freadman, in beginning with the question, "What can I do with formalism?" proposes the rather scandalous project of seeing how
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formalism can take itself to the point of raising feminist questions or, indeed, political questions in general.

At that point, it becomes possible to use both papers to argue that no feminist practice in literary theory can be committed to an ideology of interpretative free play, since the pertinence of our textual strategies is always constrained in and by an interaction with the changing discourses of feminism. It is for this reason that the forum does not constitute an opposition between feminism and interpretation theory, but rather a politics of movement between them.

Yet it is also possible — for feminist purposes — to define a difference between the two papers. If they were to be related in terms of their continuity, the relation would be that Gunew’s outlines for us an argument as to why discourses must change hands, while Freadman’s uses Indiana to show how that can happen in one object. But the procedures used are perhaps not easily reconcilable. Gunew is concerned by the problem of femininity metaphors at the level of discourses in general, and so claims the deconstructionist right to treat metaphors as “pivots,” detachable from the enunciative position from which they are produced. Freadman’s paper, I think, contests the value of this procedure, and in its analysis of the mirror and la tâche in Indiana implies that, when dealing with metaphors of the feminine, we are not always or necessarily dealing with the same metaphor at all.

If this is a difference articulated by our plurality, then the last point I want to stress is that for us, speaking here, this plurality and this difference are deployed not as a quality inherent in the female (and still less as a metaphor for either truth or art) but rather as defining quite precisely the parameters of a coherent — feminist — debate.

Meaghan Morris


II Feminist Criticism: Positions and Questions

In the beginning . . .

“The individual spirit cannot see further than into its own mother, from which it derives its knowledge of origins and in which it stands; for it is impossible that this individual spirit should by its own natural power see into another principle and to behold it,
unless born again within it." Jakob Boehme, chap. 7 of *Die drei Principien göttlichen Wesens* (The Three Principles of Divine Being). My translation perforce remains rough: and Boehme, it should be cautioned, uses "Mutter" as a quasi-alchemical term. But the anthropomorphic and psychological connotation is unavoidable.¹

The alchemists give *materia prima* — which they regard as both the primary substance of the world and the basic substance of the soul — a large number of names. The object of this multiplicity is not so much to protect Hermeticism from the unqualified, as to underline the fact that this *materia* is contained in all things, and that likewise it contains all things. They call it 'sea', because it carries within it all forms, as the sea the waves, or 'earth' because it nourishes all that 'on it' lives. It is the 'seed of things', the 'basic moistness' (*humiditas radicallis*), the *hyle*. It is 'virgin on account of its infinite purity and receptivity and 'meretricious', because it seems to cling to every form. It is also compared, as we have seen, to the 'hidden stone', although in its primordial condition it is to be distinguished from the 'philosophers' stone', which is the fruit of the whole work. *Materia prima* can be considered as 'stone' only in that it remains immutable.²

couvade: a male simulacrum of childbirth . . .

*Another Parodic Prologue*

Enough of metaphors and metonymies, condensation and displacement. Since women are themselves gifts/*Gifte* (poison), I need to give nothing away. Let me merely pour myself into your collective ear. First, a story, an embryo rather than a further abstract, and illegitimate at that. When, on hearing of this conference (on hearing that there was a rummaging for feminist voices in the undergrowth) I sought the hermeneutics section in a local English Department library, the librarian stopped me with a friendly interrogation. "Hermeneutics," I murmured; she understood "hermetic" — that was her signifier. Here in the *nommen* was an omen. A sign from . . . ? Well, we won't bother with origins. What was this conference and hermeneutics about if not the secret and the sacred, passwords and gangs? And to which chapter or enclave would feminist criticism belong? Did it help to begin at the beginning of hermeneutic enterprises with biblical exegesis? In that case, what do we do with that phrase which precedes the entrance of the male mother in the biblical text? God "creates" the binary opposition of heaven and earth; or are they merely an echo of the previous opposition of "beginning" and "God"? We will try to hatch this hermetic puzzle instead of leaving it as the philosophers' stone, the gold standard, the metaphor for truth; for in that metaphor of alchemical labour, "woman" is only the incubator. The "we" in the previous sentence is a shifty pronoun designed either to entice you
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into communal exchange or to provoke you to gang warfare and a last supper. We shall see . . .

Feminist criticism is a term which seems explicitly to pose the notion of “gangs.” And yet, isn’t this merely being honest about certain prejudices that exist also in other horizons of critical tradition, but which are not acknowledged as readily? To speak historically, as Gadamer reminds us, is to speak inevitably with certain prejudices, which can never be fully known but which one must attempt to know. We all possess these political components in our various subject-positions, which in turn articulate various discourses. We don’t all choose to disclose them as part of the conditions for speaking, be they religious, national, or gendered, or a combination of these. To speak as a feminist critic means no less than to be alert to the ways in which “woman” is constructed in various signifying practices, and to use this awareness to deconstruct texts. Barbara Johnson, in her recent introduction to Derrida’s Dissemination, formulates the deconstructive process in the following manner:

The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or generalized skepticism, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another.

Being a feminist critic is not an absolutist position, but rather a work or text in progress, since one must — impossibly — learn to think as a woman outside one’s conditioning or inscription as “woman.” Ultimately, as I understand it, feminism seeks to abolish the privileged status assumed by the binary equation of sexual difference (male and not-male), which is so privileged that it is usually effaced as a question altogether. The formula, male plus “other,” is of course an endless narcissistic reflection, and feminism must fracture it by posing not opposition but differences. Eventually, difference must be no longer fetishised as male/female, which is (as we shall observe again today) merely male and male. Such proliferating narcissistic categories are, if not folds in an umbrella, then folds in a parachute, a shield against the fall into differences and loss of meaning in the infinite referentiality of the abyss which post-structuralist critics (with a little help from their friends) have opened up in language.

Here today, to be a feminist critic will involve being a re-reader, that is a writer of texts, that is, critical texts. My model to put next to — and hence to interrogate — that form of criticism which searches for signatures, for origins, for paternity suits in order to guarantee “meaning,” is to reinvoke the analyst’s couch instead of the proprietorial marriage bed. And instead of the procreative “Voice” uttering the “Word,” the labile labial ear slipping from listening into the murmur of endless heretical hearsays. In this model we see that the analyst seeks precisely those meanings which are not consciously intended or signed by the analysand; that she resurrects the illegitimate idiolect into the sociolect, and seeks that which has been
suppressed in metaphorical and metonymic textual configurations. Sitting on the edge of the couch, at the outer limit, the feminist analyst discerns the nature of those limits, and locates with housewifely concern that which has been pushed under the (lit) reading couch. Perched there, she reads intertextually, a term recently defined by Geoffrey Hartman as a process of "disaffiliation" (p.121), a disavowal of origins, of the father. To read intertextually is to perceive texts as an orphaned brood, to query proprietorial claims to truth, or at least to hold secrets concerning maternity, the skeletons or forged signatures upon which all great traditions are erected.

And so we are back with the hermetic, with alchemy, the secret and the sacred, passwords and gang, because what erupts consistently in the analysand's text is both the metaphorisation of woman and her metonymic displacement. Woman displaced is the password which ensures the complicity of the (male) reader, a secret language of astonishing ubiquity which underpins the public language of "competence," shared horizons of meaning. The one constant in those changing historical horizons is that of "woman" as metonymic object of exchange — as much in language as in kinship systems, where she is the communal glue, the masonic sign. For women to form their own lodges of the adept is merely to play out the same exchange system: it is to play into the hands of the narcissistic binary sexual equation. To recover lost women, to sentimentalise a secret language, an écriture féminine, or to rewrite the great tradition, all involve subscribing to familiar discursive formations: the temple, the institution, the law, the symbolic. To speak "woman" is to theologise once more. The only écriture féminine that we as feminist critics can safely allow at this juncture is the Barthesian one of a re-reading which is really a rewriting. Otherwise we are placed once again in the service of a theology in which "woman" denotes pre-speech, the condition which makes speech possible and is a step in the anxiety-laden process of separating oneself from the mother, a step which must subsequently be resolutely suppressed so that we can become functioning members of society. At the same time, the nostalgia for this symbiotic, a-verbal relationship manifests itself, for example, in the desire for closed communities and hermetic codes — all those impulses towards a communication which transcends language. Operating against those impulses is the necessity to reopen hermetic existence to wider social bonding, which in turn is predicated upon the exchange of women, the resurrection of the buried mother. In these contradictory processes, "woman" is condensed as the metaphorical entity of the eternally "other" upon whom structuralist binary equations are based. Meanwhile, those individuals designated "women" in society are forced to stagger beneath this colossal burden of figurative language. But maybe not. Perhaps the ball can be thrown into the other court, particularly in the deconstructive game, where metaphors can act as pivots which alert readers to the presence of confluentual modes of signification. In the words of Gayatri Spivak: "Since metaphors are not reducible to truth, their own structures 'as such' are part of the textuality (or message) of the text."
Let us proceed now to look with our labial ears at an assortment of current criticism which locates its interrogation of meaning and closure in "woman," among other "things": the last chapter of Hartman's *Saving the Text*, Barthes's *S/Z*, and Derrida's *Spurs.* All three display certain preoccupations with the preconditions of speech, with origins, with decentred meanings, with castration, and with the parental dyad. What I shall now do is re-read some variations on their themes. Will it be feminist? I don't presume to answer that definitively. I can only say that the shared horizon of this present text is an awareness of how "woman" is inscribed as metaphor and metonymy, as condensation and displacement, in this dream of a common language — how she is theologised as the adjunct within this narcissistic economy of the same. Which last refers to what? Let us begin with *S/Z*:

Thus, sexual classification is not the right one. Another pertinence must be found. It is Mme de Lanty who reveals the proper structure: in opposition to her (passive) daughter, Mme de Lanty is totally active: she dominates time (defying the inroads of age); she irradiates (radiation is action at a distance, the highest form of power); bestowing praises, making/comparisons, instituting the language in relation to which man can recognize himself, she is the primal Authority, the Tyrant, whose silent *numen* decrees life, death, storm, peace; finally and above all, she mutilates man (M. de Jaucourt loses his "finger" because of her). In short, the precursor of Sappho who so terrifies Sarrasine, Mme de Lanty is the castrating woman, endowed with all the hallucinatory attributes of the Father: power, fascination, instituting authority, terror, power to castrate. Thus, the symbolic field is not that of the biological sexes; it is that of castration: of *castrating/castrated, active/passive*. It is in this field, and not in that of the biological sexes, that the characters in the story are pertinently distributed. On the side of active castration, we must include Mme de Lanty, Bouchardon (who keeps Sarrasine away from sexuality), and Sappho (a mythic figure threatening the sculptor). On the passive side, whom do we find? the "men" in the story: Sarrasine and the narrator, both led into castration, which the former desires and the latter recounts. As for the castrato himself, we would be wrong to place him of necessity among the castrated: he is the blind and mobile flaw in this system; he moves back and forth between active and passive: castrated, he castrates; the same is true of Mme de Rochefide: contaminated by the castration she has just been told about, she impels the narrator into it. As for Marianina, her symbolic existence could not be defined apart from that of her brother Filippo. (36)

Here Barthes ostensibly discards one system of binary opposition (biological or sexual difference) in favour of the "proper structure" of castration. Proper for whom? The one opposition is named, after all, in terms of the other "improper" one: that is, the "proper structure" is named
in terms of what has been discarded or suppressed, the sexual dichotomy. The hierarchy said to exist in all such binary structuralist equations has been exposed (see Spivak, lxxvi-lxxxvii). Thus Barthes has effected a kind of closure or, at the very least, a kind of sleight-of-hand which needs to be disclosed. Is it possible (referring back to Johnson's definition of deconstruction) to rediscover the signifying practices at war in this text, to dethrone the "proper structure"?

Let us recapitulate his schema. Those who are not castrated are the castrators, predominantly women. Those who are designated the castrating women (notably Mme de Lanty) are also phallic women, that is, "active" and associated with the potency of the Father, the only possible begetter. La Zambinella is also, paradoxically, the "father" of Marianina and Filippo, certainly of the fortune which has spawned them. Barthes juxtaposes "castrating" with "active," but is this also misleading? Does it lead one away from the narcissistic specular economy to the more familiar mythic one of the sexual hierarchy, the one that has ostensibly been suppressed along the lines of "the jury will disregard the evidence just presented"? In both the proper and the "improper" structure, "woman" is metaphorised. "Woman" is castrated when she is constructed as ideal; thus, for example, the narrator in the framing story castrates the marquis his listener (233), and Sarrasine castrates La Zambinella by constructing her in his own image. In other words, what both the narrator and Sarrasine are creating are simulacra guaranteed to feed them back their own idealised selves. Is the "proper" structure therefore one of the castrated/castrating, or, rather, that the so-called castrators merely precipitate an awareness of self-mutilation insofar as they are seen to desire the same, literally self-perpetuation? Both Sarrasine and the narrator have attempted to create mirror images which reassure them of their own inherent desirability, namely women as mirrors, castrated (wo)men. The only possible role for women in this sort of economy is as castrated men or as castrators of men, insofar as they are perceived to be different; any further difference is veiled by the "function" of castration, is transformed into merely castration.

But are the women in Sarrasine in fact the castrators? Or is it not rather that their difference (insofar as it is barely glimpsed), precipitates the revelation of their castration in the narrator and in Sarrasine? Another way of reading the story is to say that the women paradoxically negate or redeem castration; that is, Mme de Lanty provides La Zambinella with "heirs," the marquis provides the narrator with narrative potency, and the story is perpetuated. If the women castrate it is with a narcissistic wound which excludes them since, according to Ovid, the myth concerns Narcissus' coming to know himself, in this case biblically. The women then are merely simulacra, meretriciously named by Barthes as agents of castration when in fact they are agents of revelation. At the same time, their false difference, the superficially sexual, serves to conceal the nature of the narcissistic economy. Barthes's reading then is more properly concerned with transvestism, male transvestism, than simply castration.
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Can we re-read $S/Z$ then in terms not of castrated/castrating but procreation/couvade, the latter being the flat of male birth, here autogenesis? In this binary equation Barthes's "proper structure" could be reformulated in terms of: those who give birth, and those who fear to know that they cannot give birth. It makes all the metaphorical difference. In this equation, La Zambinella becomes the paradigm for the castrated woman who stands for, is the metonymy for, the exchange system of the desire for the same: in this case, the guaranteed, self-generated male descendant. And indeed, La Zambinella merges into the motive underlying this desire, the hoard of gold, the mint, the retention of property. Perhaps that is also a "proper structure." Instead of saying "it is for having fled castration that Sarrasine will be castrated" (Barthes, 175), one may re-state it thus: "it is for having been blind to difference that Sarrasine has been condemned to the same, that is, imaginative bankruptcy, that is, death," since couvade in this case doesn't work.

From the stiletto of Barthes to the style of Derrida; more accurately, Derrida on the styles of Nietzsche in Spurs:

Because woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her. In other words, it could be said that if style were a man (much as the penis, according to Freud is the "normal prototype of fetishes"), then writing would be a woman. (57)

"The style is the man": it is a familiar saying. Style suggests here imprint, but also spur and the German Spur (spoor), that is, goad and trace. What acts as goad and trace in Nietzsche — as re-read by Derrida — is "woman," metaphorised as truth, who casts a spell from a distance. At close quarters, when seen to be "only" woman, she deceives (95-101). Style becomes the signature, the signed textual offspring of this "mixed" union in the old critical dispensation, and Derridean "dissemination" in the new. But in Derrida's own epistle, writing is "woman" and "death," since the authority of the presence of the voice has been suspended (Spivak, xl-xliv), together with paternity and hence authorial meaning. Fastening on Nietzsche's (?) note, "I have forgotten my umbrella" (Spurs, 123), Derrida uses it to undo all will-to-meaning, all origins. He uses it to cast Nietzsche's style into the abyss, and to pluralise the style. "The 'styles' are the man" does not have the same ring of confidence in paternity. Necessarily so.

All is not what it seems, however, for on re-reading Derrida, one comes across this: "But that there is a loss, that anyway is ascertainable, as soon as there is hymen" (101). Loss for whom? Derrida has bestowed on us a hymeneal fable (Spivak, lxvi) to replace Freud's phallocentric one, in which the phallus is the privileged signifier of the imaginary, of desire. But still, loss for whom? It is a male-defined metaphor, signifying loss by the male of exclusive proprietary claims (this is supported in footnote 14 in Spurs). It signifies loss of copyright on progeny, yes. The statement suggests complicity with an identifiable male viewpoint, which raises doubts about the usefulness of this fable for feminists. For other fables we may do better to look to writers like Luce Irigaray. The clash of warring
modes of signification is heard again:

Stated (or rather translated, since Heidegger doesn’t put it in so many words) in another way, there has been, until now, only a philosopher of art. And this philosopher of art, who, face to face with art, never abandons his positions in front of art, who never actually ventures to lay his hands on it, who, even though he at times fancies himself an artist producing works, is content merely to gossip about art, he is a woman — and what is more he is a sterile woman and certainly not the männliche Mutter. Before art, the dogmatic philosopher, a maladroit courtesan, remains, just as did the second-rate scholar, impotent, a sort of old maid.

(Spurs, 77)

What kind of reader complicity is being evoked here in a text which purports to undo the metaphor of “woman”-as-truth, or any kind of unified metaphysical other? As in the case of the Barthes passage quoted earlier, there appears to be a similarly negative evocation of what has ostensibly been suppressed. Again the jury is meant to disregard the evidence. What we circle towards eventually is not just the image of the androgynous umbrella which hides a Stil beneath its skirts. We are also sustained in a figurative subtext with the notion of “woman” as absence; the absence of metaphysical presence, the decentering of the voice and of magisterial meaning. Nonetheless, “woman” is used to name the place of what has been excised (castrated), the spoor of absence. Strategically, this has its uses in undermining certain hermeneutic assumptions. But for the re-reading feminist analyst, the implications of the figurative language convey an extra conflictual mode of signification, which is intensified when she moves from this text to Hartman’s re-reading of Derrida in Saving the Text.

I will attempt now to re-read what Hartman does when he re-reads Derrida and broods on the relationship between closure and the anxieties of infinite interpretation, particularly in the last chapter, “Words and Wounds,” where he executes his own thesis on Derrida’s text. In the subsection “Closure” he closes on this: “Is closure in the sphere of the father or the mother?” (154). How do “we” read this image of the parental dyad? Hartman begins that chapter with an interpretation of (and invocation to) Keats’s Moneta, mother of the Muses. He refers later to Boehme’s alchemical pronouncement, in which the “mother” principle appears to function in a manner akin to that of the prima materia of the alchemists, and — if we are recalling the origins of hermeneutics itself — recalls the in principio which opens the Bible. Textually, “in the beginning” is anterior to “God”; and if we are speaking in hermetic, kabbalistic, and sacred literal terms, this becomes a telling figurative image. Certainly it is implicitly so in Hartman’s text. Hence we have something that comes before the most famous couvade of all, Genesis itself.

In Hartman’s text, the “mother” or mother-principle functions as the womb, and the smile as the origin of the word before it falls into public
exchange. Consequently, the desire for verbal exchange (verbal exogamy) is concurrent with the desire for a visionary, anterior, pre-verbal, total communication which is essentially a-verbal. Hence the first naming is the word en(tomb)ed in the womb but, as the pun implies, always destined to fall. The father, or father principle, will always name, always mark with his imprint, and hence function as closure or the desire for closure.

The word is only "like" a word in these situations: it is divinely stupid or a ghostly sound. It is, precisely, a word that does not contain other words, that therefore cannot be translated, interpreted, and enter the language exchange. The structure of words within words, while complicating the process of understanding, also founds the possibility of interpretation or of exchanging word for word. To this process, however, there is no bottom, and so no truth in the ordinary sense. Writing goes on and on, and always at risk. "I write, write, write," said Mme. Blavatsky, "as the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks."

One tries to find ways, of course, to allay this infinitude; and these ways constitute what is called "closure." But there is also a foreclosure, this glossolalia, that takes words away before they can be profaned by the language exchange. They are withdrawn from circulation as soon as uttered; they are at once elliptic and epileptic. They suggest an intransitive intimacy, or the wish to encrypt in oneself the womb — the maternal (paternal) source — of verbalization. If that is so, we understand better the importance of inner dialogue, of chatter and babble developing into verbal thought. But verbal thought remains a precarious self-probing, as in Gertrude Stein's prose, so close to a beginning that never ends, to an insistently euphemistic and cryptic style that is both a continued solcism and involuably retiring: "Always then from the beginning there was in me always increasing a conscious feeling loving repeating being, learning to know repeating in every one, hearing the whole being of anyone always repeating in that one every minute of their living. There was then always in me as a bottom nature to me an earthy resisting slow understanding, loving repeating being" (The Making of Americans). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was the loving repeating being, the ticking of the watchful heart, the soft namings of a maternal voice. (144)

The mother's naming, "the soft namings of a maternal voice," does not signify because it is not communal, and does not enter the symbolic exchange of language. The father's will-to-closure is paradoxical and contradictory, in that it desires both the fall of the word into public usage and the retaining of the word as exclusive property. The father's will-to-closure manifests itself in the interpretative act, which comprises the assigning of origins and hence of meanings. But paradoxically, the word cannot be limited; for within each word there is the tnesis or ghostly interpolation of other exchanges which have debased the initial imprint,
the mint condition, and have deprived the word of an exclusive father/author. Hence, for the father, the word contains the cuckold's castration. Writing-is-'woman'-is-death because, unlike speech, it is not visibly sired. There is plenty of room for prestidigitation behind the veil of the magician's box. For Hartman, words aspire to silence, the state of communication beyond words, "the matrix of a healing and necessary illusion" (157). Moneta is also another name for Juno, in whose Roman temple money was coined: Moneta the mother of the Muses also contains the mint. Procreation, exclusive paternity, property, money, confute in the paradigm for all these exchanges—"woman," who is denied other differences, including that of her own desire within language.

Reading intertextually means acknowledging that the mother tongue is promiscuous and not "proper." As Hartman points out, words often act as passwords, which suggests that they are not so much "meaningful" as arbitrary signs of recognition (135), and function as nothing more specific than the will to communicate. What they say is not so much what they mean as an exchange of recognition for those initiates who have the ears to see and eyes to hear. What the feminist analyst hears when she re-reads the verbal condition is that "woman" as the prima materia of figurative discourse must be rendered visible, and become one of the modes of signifying which deconstruct the text. I have not been saying anything so banal as that couvade should replace castration as the binary equation in these critical texts, and that somehow this would right the balance. Rather, I have been implying that as a strategic re-reading it alerts us to the implication of metaphor as "part of the textuality (or message) of the text." It is not that couvade is a more "proper" structure than castration, but that the nature of the linguistic gold standard (the imaginary signifier, phallogocentrism) needs to be exposed as a possible, not inevitable metaphor.

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Sneja Gunew

6 For a characteristic ludic but serious discussion of these concepts in relation to "writing" as not inevitably "communication" see Derrida, "Signature Event Context," Gisph, 1 (1977), 172-97.
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7 Elaine Showalter reminds us that the concept of a secret women's language dates back to antiquity, and reflects predominantly "the male fantasy of the enigmatic nature of the feminine" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Critical Inquiry, 8 [1981-82], 191).

8 Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface" to Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. lxxiv. All further references will be given in the text.


III Sandpaper

It would be possible to interpret the project of my paper as resting on the assumption of the immanence of meanings; as if the structures of a text were inducible from the text taken in isolation; as if the text were significant in and of itself; as if George Sand's Indiana could be made to disclose the secrets of women's writing, and to foreclose the formulation of important generalisations about that highly problematical object.

But a description such as that would be based on a set of assumptions about "formalism" grounded in the practices of North American New Criticism. I do not share these assumptions. So despite the possibility that I may be preaching to the converted, I beg leave to stipulate my use of the term. I take it, first of all, that formalism is the study of forms, insofar as form is the enabling condition of signification. On this view, form is not opposed to content.

Secondly, "form" is a theoretical object derived from the practices of formalism; it does not pre-exist those practices. Formalism must in general be characterised as the practice of differentiation. Since difference is the primary enabling condition of signification, it follows that formalism is not the principle of what has been called the "autonomous" text, since "difference" supposes a field of pertinent comparison. It further follows, then, that formalism is not inductive. But it is the case that it takes as its domain of enquiry (and as its theoretical object) not the "individual text," but the text as individuated.

Thirdly, formalist theories of text are not necessarily, or properly, restricted to describing the linguistic forms deployed in any text. No theory of linguistic forms can of itself provide the foundation for a theory of textual forms. Theories of genre are formalist in precisely the sense in
which I am using the term, that is, they are practices of differentiation which take as their criteria conventions or rule-governed strategies for the formation of texts.

My major methodological presupposition will be that any text is a rewriting of the field or fields of its own emergence, that to write, to read, or to speak is first of all to turn other texts into discursive material, displacing the enunciative position from which those materials have been propounded. I mean that “use” can always do something a little different from merely repeating “usage.” In an attempt to do something towards specifying “women’s writing,” I shall suppose that it is in the business of transforming discursive material that, in its untransformed state, leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say. The production of a speaking-position, with respect to discursive material that is both given and foreign, is what can be studied by a feminist formalism.

For the sake of convenience, I distinguish three kinds of discursive material, which I shall label “discourse,” “genre,” and “rhetoric.” Discourse I take in a broad sense, as the sign as it has been used in a specifiable body of texts, and entailing the uses to which it has been put in those texts. Following Foucault, if discourse consists of statements made in that body of texts which specify the objects of a knowledge and predicate of them in specifiable ways, then it follows that to read a sentence in terms of a discourse is at once to construe that sentence as a statement, and to count it (or not) as the same as another, as entailed in another, or as-contradicting another of the same discourse. It is thus the determination of discursive value that determines the construals of logical inference. Such construals are conventional. It follows from this definition that discourse is a quasi-formal entity, constraining interpretation. Since I hope I can take it for granted that no text is made only of statements, I suppose that the place of interpretation in the practices of reading is not determined by the theory of discourse as such. Genre I take as being in a limited way trans-discursive, a set of conventionalized practices for text-making. The determination of genre is thus the determination of appropriate modes of reading. Rhetoric I take as techniques of persuasion, entailing the relationship of an “I” to a “you,” and the invention of provisional relations of coherence between what must in principle be heterogeneous discourses; it thus manipulates the possible answers to the puzzle of what one proposition or set of propositions has to do with another. “You” is positioned in consonance with “I” vis-à-vis these discourses. I suppose it is uncontentious that the rhetorical “I” and “you” together specify the enunciative position of the text, that they are both discursive constructs in principle distinct from empirical writers and readers, and that the enunciative position is a textual place from which the organisation of the discursive materials can proceed.

I shall accordingly read Indiana as a set of rhetorical and generic strategies that rewrite the material of two discourses. The first of these is the story of Don Juan. Now, you all remember Don Juan: he’s the chap who confuses textuality with sexuality, the one for whom the seductive text
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is more than nine-tenths of the long something-or-other of the law. The discursive model for Don Juan's texts is the blandishments of the devil, while the generic model is something like the elegy, a form in which the dialogue structure is presupposed but rarely used. Were we to dramatise the elegy, the "you" of the text could respond only by resistance or collaboration: enthusiastic collaboration would either produce a love-story on the model of the eighteenth-century rococo idyll, and thus put an end to the character of Don Juan as such, or Don Juan would reassert his role, cast the poor lady aside, and repeat himself. In the case of initial resistance, Don Juan would repeat himself until she stopped resisting, after which he would cast the poor lady aside, and repeat himself. My point is two-fold: on the one hand, whatever the lady says is predetermined by the form of the seductive text; as such, she has no control over discourse. She is left at the end of the story with only one text, the lament. But Don Juan is a bad listener, because he talks too much; and the lament is a powerless text. On the other hand, the narrative structure of the Don Juan story is anomalous amongst narrative structures in that it cannot end, and the generic problem for any narrativisation or dramatisation of it will be precisely that. Byron turns the tables on his hero, having him seduced by, instead of seducing, a formidable duchess, and leaving him at the end of his endless epic very tired indeed. Mozart and Molière both use the Commander. The point of this is that the theatre is precisely the medium to show the essential theatricality of the Don Juan role and the absolute lack of fit between the theatrical and the moral. Theatrical versions of Don Juan are generic paradoxes, and doubly satirical, since by the dramatisation of repetition, the repeated text becomes powerless, and the swagger of the Don is deflated; repetition itself works as judgement; but the explicitly judgemental gesture of the Commander is theatricalised, and as such emptied of moral content. Now let us suppose a novel written from the point of view of one of the Don's victims: the problem will be to retain the possibility of judgement-by-joke without undercutting the moral problematic, to individuate the victim from the list while retaining the list as the essential statement about Don Juan, and to construct a speaking-position that will avoid the lament-and-reproach form.

The second discourse worked on by Indiana, and which in this case informs the narrative of the narration itself, is the myth of the Muse. The Muse is a thematics of form, and the Muse narrative is the story of the construction and the occupation of the speaking-position of a text. Just as in the Don Juan story, the two roles are always already distributed: the Muse is a female role, and the poet, on whom she bestows the gift of speech, is a male role. Nineteenth-century Muse narratives are invariably interpreted as erotic, where the encounter of Muse and poet is the enabling event for the production of speech. A convenient contrast is therefore to be made with the Don Juan story, since there text is instrumental to seduction, while in the Muse story, seduction is instrumental to text. But while the Don Juan story leaves a place for the speech of the victim, however unsatisfactory, the Muse story entirely eliminates the Muse as speaker. Not only is she silent, a "you" to the poet's invocation, but her role
is over by the time the poem starts. There is only one speaking-position, and it has been usurped. Only the poet says "I." It is for this reason that the Muse narrative poses a serious problem for the woman writer. What fiction is there available to speak the origin of women's texts, given that the Muse discourse makes the expression "woman writer" an oxymoron at best, and at worst, a contradiction? At periods when the Muse discourse is dominant, it is not possible merely to avoid it, while to reverse it would simply put the woman writer in the position of taking dictation from a pedagogical authority. The invention of an appropriate fiction, it seems to me, will always engage in some way with this account of the origins of speech which positions women as merely spoken.

The two major male characters of Indiana, Raymon and Ralph, and the stories of which they are protagonists, can be read in terms of these two discursive models. Raymon de Ramière is a Don Juan. In the course of the novel he has three love affairs, of which the central one is with Indiana herself, each of which in some way repeats the structures of the others. The first is with Noun, milk-sister, companion and maid of Indiana, and sometimes referred to as "la belle Indienne." These two women are treated in the novel as doubles, such that through the mediation of the mirror, Raymon sees each reflected in the other at the crucial moments of erotic encounter. The parallel is emphasised with various other details. The third lady in Raymon's life is Laure de Nangy, whom he meets when her adoptive father buys the property that had belonged to Indiana's husband. Paying his first courtesy call, he finds Laure seated at Indiana's place beside the fire. But there the parallel ends, since Laure is cleverer than Raymon and calls his bluff, calculating his submission to her designs rather than becoming the third in a string of replacement women victims, positioned as "the same" by the discourses of seduction.

Just as important for the interpretation of Raymon as a Don Juan is the series of descriptions of him as speaker of the seductive text. We are told that he "expressed his passion with art, and felt it with warmth. But it was not passion that made him eloquent, it was his eloquence that made him passionate" (p. 62). And again, "having so carefully thought out his plan of seduction, he had grown passionate, like an author warming to his subject, or a lawyer to his case; the emotion that he felt when he saw Indiana could be compared with that of an actor totally absorbed in his role . . . " (131). Raymon's eloquence is interpreted from the beginning as theatrical, and it is to its theatricality that the narrator attributes its power. Correspondingly, the women who fall victim to his power are not totally deprived of speech, but their speech is ineffectual. Noun writes Raymon a letter: "Poor girl!" exclaims the narrator, "it was the last straw. A chambermaid's letter! Although she had taken the satin writing paper and perfumed wax from Madame Delmare's writing desk, and she had formed the style in her heart . . . But the spelling! Do you know what a dreadful effect dropped syllables can have on sentiments?" (53). Indiana, too, writes letters, and more significantly, a journal: "This journal of her pains was addressed to Raymon, and although she had no intention of sending it to
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him, she conversed daily with him in it, telling him, sometimes with passion and sometimes with bitterness, of the evils of her life and the feelings she could not stifle" (268). Letters and diaries are of course "women's texts": both are private, since letters have single, personal interlocutors, and diaries are designed to be secret if not violated. But the place of letters and diaries is shown in the novel not to be a speaking-position, by the fact that they are effectively not read; and they are in no way the model for the narration. When the "you" of the seductive text starts talking, Don Juan's eloquence is already being addressed to another. The "I" who has no interlocutor is no "I" at all.

Ralph, by contrast with Raymon, doesn't like Noun much, and it never occurs to him to establish a parallel between her and Indiana. Equally by contrast with Raymon, he is inarticulate, given to heavy handed clichés and catastrophic frankness. Even his face is said to be insignificant, and he is compared unfavourably at the beginning of the text with the puffy face beaten into a metal fire-screen (25-26). Raymon finds him indistinguishable from his portrait, and speaks of his "mask of stone." But beneath all this, there is wisdom, passion, insight and love, and as his true character is revealed, his mask falls away, his "words take on the colour of his sentiments" (314); and just as his portrait hanging in Indiana's bedroom is covered with a triple layer of gauze, so it is said at the moment of his transformation that "the veil which hid such great virtues, such depth and strength of spirit, fell quite away, and the mind of this man rose to the level of his heart . . . words came to the aid of his thoughts, and this mediocrity who had never said anything but commonplaces in the whole of his life, became, at the end of it, eloquent and persuasive as Raymon had never been" (318). He is thus contrasted systematically with Raymon, who is said at the beginning to have a "happy face and a way with words" (49), but whose eloquence is gradually revealed to be a mask.

The transformation of Ralph has a narrative shape that resembles in a number of respects the Muse narrative. Firstly, it is a narrative of the transformation of silence into speech which not only reveals his true soul to Indiana, but crucially gives him the capacity to become the major narrative-relay of the text. That is, it is Ralph's account of the story which the narrator recounts. Furthermore, it is the sea voyage that takes Ralph and Indiana back to the Island which restores Indiana to health and Ralph to expressivity. Having planned a suicide pact, they are released from the pains of their former existences, and it is at this point that Indiana weeps on to the brow of Ralph, who is then and thereby freed to tell her of his love for her (320). Consummation occurs at the edge of a highly romantic version of the fountain of the Muses, a cataract, where their planned leap into the chasm becomes an unplanned orgasm, and they live, precisely, to tell the tale. Now this has every appearance of the classic Muse event, and its central function in the emergence of the narration will not have escaped you. We may remark on the fact that the major narrative-relay is a male character, as is the narrator, and that Indiana herself is sent out of the room at the moment of the transmission of the story from one to the other.
How, we might ask, could George Sand have published in her first novel an account of the renunciation of the speaking-position? But to ask the question this way is to indulge in essentialism, and in particular, takes no account of the fact that Raymon and Ralph are opposed not merely as “characters” but as principles or modes of speech. “Men” may not be a category in this novel, and nor, indeed, may “women”, but “genre” certainly is. It is through the question of genre that the roles of the characters are specified. To ask the question of the “Muse interpretation” will not be to ask the question of Indiana’s role qua woman, but to ask the question of her relationship with the taxonomy of genres whereby the conventions of this novel are described. Let me remind you that the Muse is Conventionally not the Muse of a particular text so much as of the genre which governs that text.

The eloquence of Raymon is not merely the naked abuse of phallic speech. Raymon, we are told, was a man of “elegant manners, a studied life-style, and poetic loves” (52). Meeting Noun in the forest at the dead of night, his fantasies are nurtured by “the poetry of the place” (51). Persuaded that Indiana’s insistence on chastity is a proof of her coldness, he interprets her passionate letters and avowals of love as “an application of the exaggerated sentiments she had read about in books.” Accordingly, he works on his own “passionate eloquence and dramatic improvisation, so as to keep up with his novelistic mistress, and he manage[s] to perpetuate the error. But for a calm and impartial audience, this love scene could only have been theatrical fiction disputing the stage with reality. The bombast of Raymon’s sentiments and the poetry of his ideas, would have seemed a cruel and unfeeling parody of the emotions Indiana expressed with such simplicity” (196). You will no doubt have noticed the recurrence of the nineteenth-century version of the Aristotelian triad: the theatrical, the novelistic and the poetic are the predicates used to position Raymon’s eloquence as false, in rather the same way as Byron says in *Don Juan* that his Muse is “the most sincere that ever dealt in fiction” (Canto 16, st. 2). Raymon’s love-making is literary, yet it is Raymon who levels the accusation at Indiana, reproaching her with taking literally what she has read in books: “Where did you get your dreams of love? In what chamber-maids’ novelette did you study society, I pray?” (210). She responds: “I was mad; I had, in your cynical language, learnt life from chamber-maids’ novels, those carefree penny-fictions where the heart is inveigled by dreams of wild escapades and impossibly happy endings” (240). But if this is the definition of the novelistic, it is framed in this novel in such a way as not to be its model.

I take the theatrical to be the mode of insincerity, the poetical to be the mode of fantasy, and the novelistic to be that of illusion. Together they make up the literature of untruth, what the narrator calls “the art of words” as distinct from “the knowledge of things” (115). While of necessity partaking of the mode of prose narrative, this novel will be counterpointed to the novelistic as empiricism is to fiction. To observe, to watch, to listen and to understand are the predicates both of Ralph and of the narrator: “If
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somebody had observed closely Madame Delmare," we are told at the start of the text, "they would have seen in this trivial circumstance of her private life the painful secret of her entire existence" (29); and only four pages later, Indiana upbraids Ralph for knowing more, through his close observation of her, than she has ever permitted him to know. Ralph makes it his business, however, always to know what's going on. He is a sort of human watchdog to Indiana, whose first act in the novel is to light a candle and place it strategically so that Indiana's husband might notice her sickly state; his last is to tell the story. Observation, understanding, and illuminating the heroine so that others will understand is the role of the realist novelist; and when Ralph speaks, his text is not called a "novel," but a history, a narrative. Similarly, the narrator's preface claims that "the writer is but a mirror," that the "narrator recounts what he saw," that he is the "historian of Indiana," telling the story under the same construction as it was told to him (6-10). These claims, which are typically those of the realist novel, are specifically those of third-person narrative.

Just as the conventions of the literary are set against the realist novel as the false is to the true, so the other genres mentioned in the text are arranged in contrast. Political pamphlets, which are Raymon's forte and the main domain (apart from seduction) for the exercise of his eloquence, are by definition public, concerned with the manipulation of power rather than with truth. The opposite of these is Indiana's journal and her letters; the contrast lies in the opposition between the exclusively public text, which need only ever be performance, and the exclusively private text, which can only ever be truth, but which remains unheard. How to translate the public into the domain of the private is the rhetorical problem of Don Juan: the contrary problem — the translation of the intimate into public discourses, without either violating its secret or betraying its truth in the conventions of the literary — is the problem of the novelist of the personal. To solve it, to tell the story in such a way that the reader interprets it without relying on public opinion and the conventions of public morality, the novelist must construct an enunciative position that can speak from the domain of the personal. This is the problem solved by the figure of Ralph. But if it is at the same time to avoid the form of the lament and reproach, the first-person narrative that would have been Indiana's or Ralph's must be mediated. The narrative voice must be capable of gentle irony, the detachment of the sympathetic but lucid stranger, whose place is neither in the society characterised by public discourses, nor in the island refuge with its victims.

The people who tell stories in this story are above all good listeners, and it is only when a character is constituted explicitly as a good listener that another character can speak. This is the major model for the emergence of the narration. Its first occurrence is in the contrast between the two senior ladies of the novel, Madame de Carvajal, Indiana's aunt, and Madame de Ramière, Raymon's mother. On the morning of Indiana's escape they discuss the matter: "the only thing that had struck Madame de Carvajal in Madame Delmare's disappearance was the scandal
Raymond's mother wept over Indiana's fate and sought to excuse her. . . ." (228). Listening is not a simple, passive compassion; Madame de Ramière asks questions, and after this conversation with Madame de Carvajal goes off in search of news of Indiana (228). Similarly Ralph, the silent watcher, makes it his business to be in the right place at the right time, and his questions, though flat-footed, are always to the point. It is appropriate, then, that Madame de Ramière should discuss with Ralph the situation of Indiana, and that they should share their information to form a more or less complete story. Similarly, complementary narratives give us the necessary insight into Ralph's intimate life. Raymond's curiosity about him prompts Indiana into telling what she knows of his life story, but it is only when Ralph himself accedes to expressivity that the rest can be told, of course to Indiana herself. Indiana is thus positioned as listener by the fact that her version of Ralph's story is both true and compassionate, but incomplete. Now, Indiana in her role as listener is compared directly to the reader: "If the narrative of the inner life of Ralph has produced no effect on you, if you have not come to love this virtuous man, it is because I have been unskilled as the interpreter of his memories . . ." (337). If a reader is a listener like Indiana, whose job is to "come to love" Ralph as she does, then it must be because the reader is in possession already of enough of the facts of the matter for his own version of the story to be complemented but not contradicted by the revelation of a hitherto secret truth. These are the procedures of verisimilitude.

The presence of a good listener is signalled not so much by his or her response to a story as by his or her capacity to feel compassion before the story is told. Thus, Madame de Ramière weeps for Indiana before going off for news of her; the young narrator weeps before Ralph tells him the story; and Indiana's tears fall on to the brow of Ralph before he tells the story of his inner life. In each case, compassion is the sign of the listener, and it is the constitution of the "you" position that both constitutes the "I" and allows the succession of narrators to occupy it. The function of the prefaces is much the same, since they guide the reader towards compassion rather than condemnation, before the story begins.

The prefaces also function to define the genre and the mode of reading appropriate to it. The 1832 preface calls it a tale, and this word is used in several places in the novel in conjunction with descriptions of the characters as sculptural and motionless. In each case, however, the progression of the narrative will bring these fictional characters to life. The teller of tales has the job, claims the preface of 1832, of "amusing and not instructing" (8); and the 1842 preface, likewise, denies that the narrator is a pedagogue, claiming instead that he is "the true advocate of the abstract beings who represent our passions and our pains before the tribunal of force and the jury of public opinion. This is a task which has its gravity, beneath an appearance of frivolity. . ." (16-17). This is not incompatible, however, with the role of "teller of tales," since the later preface is written from the point of view of an author re-reading a book written and published ten years before. It is precisely the task of an understanding
reading to seek the truth beneath appearances, just as it is the task of the
teller of tales to give a form to truth. The realist novelist, and the realist
reader, are defined by this dialectic.

Now, bringing a form to life is what Pygmalion does to Galatea, and
we know from Ross Chambers' work on angels and automata that the
Pygmalion myth is a variant of the myth of the Muse. The transcendental
Muse is claimed to be a source of the "I" position, and to bring from the
realms of the unknown a Word which would remain inaccessible without
her mediation. But the paradox is that the poet is "I" to the Muse's "you":
her presence and her existence are contingent on his speech. Only when he
has constituted her in her role can she play it, and she says what she is told.
The Pygmalion myth makes this paradox explicit, but it is because of this
that the roles can be reversed, where those of the transcendental Muse can
not. To reverse the roles of the Pygmalion myth is to have a female
Pygmalion breathe life into a male Galatea, and have him sing and dance at
her bidding. When the walking portrait of Sir Ralph Brown receives the
tears of Indiana on his brow, it is not she who is Muse, but he; in the role of
Galatea, he speaks her story. His place as observer guarantees that in his
role as eye to Indiana's "I" he controls the principal generic constraints of
the novel, mediating the private to the tellable in order to produce the
novel of the personal, and truth through the forms of fiction to produce the
realist novel. The male Muse of verity is a stolid English empiricist.

The problem of speaking in this text is posed, then, in terms of who
can tell the story, but the question of "who?" is in its turn raised in terms of
"what genre?" Like Don Juan, Galatea is an actress; but unlike him, Ralph
has only one part, asserting thereby the indissolubility of "form" and
"content" in the conventions of genre, as in the myth of the Muse.
Pygmalion, like all good authors, absconds from the text: it is Indiana's
role to retire into privacy and silence at the end of the book, leaving Ralph
to do the talking. She thus becomes the third person, that which must be
told. She is the figure of truth, but for that very reason, she is not a figure of
speech. We can see this as sundering the two traditional figures of Woman:
her place in Philosophy, as Truth, and her place as Muse, in Poetry. But
her occupation of the place of truth allied with her role as Pygmalion
disturbs the picture somewhat, for Foucault has shown that these two roles
together define the power of the speaking position. Indiana as author and
authority? Surely not. Yet it is her alliance with Ralph that allies truth with
the genre of the realist novel, and provides the place of mediation for the
personal to emerge into the public. And it is her role as Pygmalion that sets
up the chain of narrative-relays. This alliance gives us a picture of the
authorial position, as all good Muse stories should do. But the "author" is
in the third person, spoken by a stranger who can say "I" only because he
has no name and no face. Indiana is the very figure of the self-entailing
ambiguity of "her story" that cannot be resolved into its disjuncts.

The man with the stone mask and the habit of resembling statues is
not, then, a figure for the Commander in the Don Juan story, though he
does have the last word over his Latin rival. The vengeance of the Muse is rather different in Raymon’s case. He ends up married to a ruthlessly disdainful literary lady with the unmistakeably Muse name of Laure. She is busy, when we meet her, painting a copy of an eighteenth-century fresco. Her copy is exaggerated to bring out the mannered falsity of the rococo idyll, and she entitles it “Pastiche.” But though she mocks it, with its “poetry” and its “ridiculous fictions” (289), it is no worse, she says, than the “sombre political elucubrations” of the present day. She thus marks the demise of Raymon’s career not only as political pamphleteer but also as Don Juan. It is a sticky end indeed for the seducer, to be bound in holy matrimony with his own pastiche.

When Laure says of eighteenth-century art: “Is it not true that these sheep neither walk, nor sleep, nor graze like the sheep of today? nature is so pretty, so well-groomed . . .” (289), her description of the stylised depiction of nature must be set alongside the narrator’s description of a part of the island where a volcanic disturbance has scattered rocks in the strangest patterns, suggesting half-formed sculptures and the outlines of architectural styles. Among this confusion, there is a “basalt obelisk, whose sides seem to have been chiselled and polished by an artist” (340). Laure’s taste is neither for contemporary seriousness nor for eighteenth-century frivolity, and her double negative clears a space for the realist aesthetic of the narrator, for whom art is fashioned by the “chiselling and polishing” of the forms left by a natural disaster, a drama whose arena is the real world.

It is clear that the rhetoric whereby the realist novel is described is one that claims the transparency of discourse and the possibility of telling without interpreting and showing by reflection. But it is not clear to me that the use of this rhetoric in any text should be taken as an unproblematical statement of the case. Indiana’s complicity with Raymon’s eloquence is a function of her reading of novels, and in particular of her literal reading of them which presumes a perfect match with the world. She is thus the precise opposite of Laure, for pastiche is non-complicitious repetition, a denunciation of conventions. The rhetoric of realism is used in this novel as the opposite not simply of the illusory, but — crucially — of the use of the illusory in the discourses of seduction. It is the opposite not merely of a theory of representation, but of a discursive strategy. To be effective against the exercise of power, it must itself be an exercise in the play for power. It appears to derive its power from the claim to truth. But the narrative takes its distance. Ralph’s portrait, the very model of realist art, is described in the following terms: “It was a painting of admirable skill, a true family portrait, a detailed resemblance of infantile and careful perfection, a paragon of middle-class finickityness, a portrait that would make a nurse weep, the dogs bark, and a tailor swoon with pleasure” (92). The narrator is to the discourses of realism as Laure is to those of the illusory. After all, if seduction is a theory of reading to which we cannot subscribe, resemblance is a theory of writing that must on no account seduce.9
I wish to conclude with some remarks on the implications that work of the kind I have just done on Indiana might have for feminist reading-practices in general.

Let me take two specific examples of discursive difference from within the text. The first is the mirror, which functions for Raymon as that which frames the indistinguishability of one woman from another. For the narrator, however, the mirror is the metaphor for the novel which mediates private truths into public forms. This function is made all the more clear by the transformation of the mirror into the face à face at the door at the moment of the meeting of Ralph and the narrator (343). In the first case, the mirror is a metaphor for the discourses of seduction, in which no woman has an identity other than as woman; in the second case, like my mirror at home and no doubt yours, the mirror mediates the passage from the boudoir to the ball. In neither case is it the “same” mirror as Stendhal’s, the metaphor for reflection theory, which is always already in the street.

The second example is la lime, which first appears in the narrator’s prefatory remarks about the oppression of Indiana: “Indiana is well at odds with necessity, blind love striking its head against the obstacles of civilisation. But the serpent wears down and breaks its teeth in its attempt to bite into la lime, and the soul exhausts its strength in its fight against the positivities of life” (9). Its second appearance is implicit: it is the means whereby the artist polishes the rocks thrown up by the volcano, thus turning them into the sculptures that stand as the first step of the Pygmalion story. In the first of these instances, la lime is the weapon of society, but it has changed hands in the second. The positivities of life are seduction, the law, and public opinion; these are discourses, whose power is the instrument of oppression. The fact that the metaphor changes hands—to be used by the writing instead of against the character — is the metaphor I have used for the enunciative position which disempowers the discursive materials on which it acts.

If reading and writing are practices that determine the way signs function under social conditions of some specificity, then they are indeed practices, and should be read as such. To read a nineteenth-century novel as if its discursive strategies were transparent, or enfeebled to the extent that it is taken to consist merely of words behaving like capricious nineteenth-century individualists, is to deny the readability of these strategies. However, to read those strategies is to commit oneself to the theory that textuality is a restriction on the so-called infinite possibilities of language. Discursive strategies are constraints on those possibilities, though in order to keep on working, they need to be reinvented, and their reinvention is of course their transformation. My claim about the mirrors is that they are different metaphors because they are constrained by different discursive formations; and that this difference is readable as a transformation by virtue of the postulate of the enunciative position of the text. I have further claimed that the Stendhalian mirror of the reflection theory of discourse is not a proper construal of either one of them. It is not entailed in the theory of textual constraints that only one construal of a text or of a sign is possible or true; but merely that certain construals are
ruled out, and that we can say which ones these are. To rule out the possibility of certain construals — not by censorship but by textual strategy — is to insert one's speech at the point of the control of discourse. If, as Peirce is so often quoted as saying, the whole world is perfused with signs, then this is indeed what we must do. The alteration of meanings is a gesture of considerable political significance. It is incumbent upon me as semiotician to notice it.

It follows from this analysis that reading is a writing, certainly, and that writing is a reading, and my particular claim about the George Sand of Indiana is that she is a reader of the novelistic in precisely this sense, taking the position of Laure to Indiana, but also, of the narrator to Laure. While it is possible to compare the roles of Indiana and of Emma Bovary, it is also absolutely necessary to differentiate the procedures of the novels whose titles are their names. It is not good enough, after all, to assert that women were the reading public of the nineteenth-century novel, without taking the term "reading" in the strongest possible sense: Emma Bovary does not transform the genre of the novel: the authorial figure of Indiana/Indiana does.

To read textual constraints is thus to read the processes of difference. What is at stake is the possibility of specifying the objects of a feminist reading practice. A reading practice that works according to these principles will be reading the formation of texts from enunciative positions in an attempt to specify the "writing of women" as distinct from "women writers" and "feminine meanings," and "textual practices" as distinct from "expressivity" and "reflection." A formalist practice such as I have adumbrated, however, is necessarily a commitment to studying the particular, and is thus a challenge to two kinds of generalisation: women's writing cannot in this practice emerge as a unitary object, with certain essential properties; nor can it emerge as merely and necessarily derivative. Any history of women's writing will be a history of particular speaking positions as they tangle with particular and historically situated discursive materials. It will therefore be a history of specific transformations.

There is, however, a serious objection to limiting the sights of feminist criticism to "speaking-positions" rather than women writers, and that is that by so doing we seem to have tied our own hands. If the "woman writer" is not an a priori of feminist criticism, how (it may well be asked) could feminist criticism select a corpus of women's writing? My response is that we are not working in the void, any more than to speak is to transform silence. The woman writer is a given; but precisely, it is given in and by discourse. I can read that discourse, and rewrite it. George Sand is not as she is represented to be: prolix and repetitive when she is not just telling a good story, and when she is, a downright embarrassment to the modernist critic — and in either case, derivative to the point of abjection. In a reading such as I have done of Indiana, I have embarked on the rewriting of George Sand as a discursive object. The given of the history books is no more a biological source of meanings than the enunciative position I have sketched out today, though the discourses of biological authorship claim to locate a source of meanings, where mine does not.
Feminism and Interpretation Theory

It remains for me to define my own speaking-position. As a semiotician, I claim that my reading is a reading "of" Indiana, but how can I read it without changing it? And as feminist, I claim that my reading changes the discourses within which George Sand has been read, but how can I so claim without claiming to know what they are? The paradox of my Sandpaper is that it partakes of the predicates both of the mirror and of la lime: it is a reflection upon, and an abrasion. This paradox cannot be solved by considering the work of reading as the production of a knowledge, defined by the epistemological dilemmas that run as a leitmotiv through current literary theory. But it is not the production of a knowledge; it is the plying of a craft, and as in any craft, its materials have their resistance. The material of the text we read does not simply evaporate by virtue of the assertion that we can only read it with language: diamond-cutting after all is done with diamonds. So you may think of "materials" as raw, or in the instrumental sense, as image or as mirror, as rock or rasp, as fresco or pastiche — as the telling or the tale, as the reading or the text. The difference, in this case, is immaterial, especially if you have the luck to be working with Sand.

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1 George Sand, Indiana, ed. Pierre Salomon (Paris: Garnier, 1962). All references are to this edition; page numbers are given in the text; translations are my own.
8 I am grateful to Ross Chambers for pointing out that the claim to truth, i.e. the claim not to seduce, is the ultimate seductive posture (see p. 70 above).
9 The allusion to the fable of La Fontaine, "Le serpent et la lime" (Fables, livre V, no. 16), constitutes itself in itself an ironic rewriting. The moralité of this fable interprets le serpent as un esprit du dernier ordre whose efforts to destroy l’art de beaux ouvrages must necessarily be in vain:

Cest s’adresse à vous, esprit du dernier ordre,
Qui n’ait sans à rien chercher sur tout à mordre;
Vous tourmentez vainement.
Croyez-vous que vos dents impriment leurs ouvrages
Sur tant de beaux ouvrages?
Ils sont pour vous d’alrains, d’acier, de diamant.