3 *Michael Riffaterre*

Compulsory reader response: the intertextual drive

An intertext is one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance (as opposed to the discrete meanings of its successive words, phrases, and sentences).[1] The distinction is paramount because linguistic usage suffices to account for such meanings, even though they may also develop under the further constraint of aesthetic conventions. Readers, however, sense empirically that the overall significance depends less on referentiality (as does standard verbal communication) than on a relation between form and content, or even on a subordination of content to form. The latter, we feel more or less consciously, constitutes the literariness of the verbal work of art.

These perceptions, this reader response to the text, cannot be explained by linguistic structures, since these are observed in nonliterary and literary utterances alike. Nor can it be explained by tropology, rhetoric, or any corpus of conventional forms whose objects are already found at sentence level: these may account for discursive phenomena, but could not explain the difference between discursive and textual ones. Literature is indeed made of texts. Literariness, therefore, must be sought at the level where texts combine, or signify by referring to other texts rather than to lesser sign systems.

When we speak of knowing an intertext, however, we must distinguish between the actual knowledge of the form and content of that intertext, and a mere awareness that such an intertext exists and can eventually be found somewhere. This awareness in itself may be enough to make readers experience the text's literariness. They can do so because they perceive that something is missing from the text:

gaps that need to be filled, references to an as yet unknown referent, references whose successive occurrences map out, as it were, the outline of the intertext still to be discovered. In such cases, the reader's sense that a latent intertext exists suffices to indicate the location where this intertext will eventually become manifest.

This type of minimal reader response makes it necessary to distinguish between intertext and intertextuality. The latter is the web of functions that constitutes and regulates the relationships between text and intertext. These functions either are fully activated as they are embodied in perceived relationships, or they are activated in programmatic form, in which case they merely postulate an intertext, reminding readers that their response must be predicated on the hypothesis that the text requires it, showing them how the hypothesis may lead to actualisation, and what kind of intertext is to be expected.

Two modalities of reader response are inseparable. One is the readers' feeling that they need surcease from the demands the text puts on their ingenuity, and from the text's departures from accepted linguistic usage or narrative and descriptive conventions. The other is the constraints or limitations the same text puts on the readers' search for that relief. Indeed, contrary to critics' favourite reaction to difficulty (they too often are content to invoke ambiguity and do not seem to think there may be a way out of deconstruction), facts of reading suggest that, when it activates or mobilises the intertext, the text leaves little leeway to readers and controls closely their response. It is thus that the text maintains its identity despite changing times, despite the evolution of the sociolect, and despite the ascent of readerships unforeseen by the author.

It is obvious that such a process must be an imperative of reading. The urge to understand compels readers to look to the intertext to fill out the text's gaps, spell out its implications and find out what rules of idiolectic grammar account for the text's departures from logic, from accepted usage (that is, from the sociolect), from the cause-and-effect sequence of the narrative, and from verisimilitude in the descriptive. However compelling this reading strategy may be, it cannot account for the actual identification of an intertext, since matching textual ungrammaticalities and intertextual grammaticalities is like trying to find a needle in the haystack of a corpus or of a canon, even if we assume that neither has undergone historical changes that may put them out of the reach of normal readers (that

is, readers armed only with their linguistic competence and trying to make do without the philological crutches of footnotes and scholarly gloss). It seems to me that only specific, specialised signs can at once stand for the intertext, point to its locus, and uncover its identity.

I shall try to determine which indices direct readers towards the specific and relevant intertexts, and indeed compel them to look for these intertexts even when cultural changes have made their recovery less likely (obviously, when the culture which the text reflects is still within reach, the readers' task is facilitated by the frequency of references to well-known intertexts, or just by chance encounters with them). These signposts are words and phrases indicating, on the one hand, a difficulty – an obscure or incomplete utterance in the text – that only an intertext can remedy; and, on the other hand, pointing the way to where the solution must be sought. Such features, lexical or phrasal, are distinguished from their context by their dual nature. They are both the problem, when seen from the text, and the solution to that problem when their other, intertextual side is revealed. They therefore belong equally in text and intertext, linking the two, and signalling in each the presence of their mutually complementary traits. Accordingly, I shall call them connectives. And in addition to identifying them, I shall try to show that the connectives combine the sign systems of text and intertext into new semiotic clusters, thereby freeing the text from its dependency on usage and existing conventions, and subordinating its descriptive and narrative devices to a signifying strategy unique to the text.

The text I have chosen as an example is a prose poem by André Breton, an especially arcane and frustrating one because it was written 'under the dictation of the unconscious', the phrase by which French Surrealists defined *écriture automatique*. This mode of writing was to put an end to the traditional literature characterised by laboured style, that which edited out spurts of inspiration, emphasised the approximation of manner to matter, and pursued the *mot juste* – what André Breton called the *littérature de calcul* ('literature of calculation'). In the latter he saw arbitrary conventions, artifice, the tired and tiring repetition of all-too-familiar themes. Whether automatic writing is an immediate product of the unconscious or a concerted attempt at representing it, it privileges associative sequences based on analogy and homophony, and does away with descriptive and narrative logic. And yet our poem eschews arbitrariness and gratuitousness, because intertexts confer authority

to apparently random transitions from one set of images to the next. They make up for what automatic writing eliminates: the orderly teleological progress towards a conclusive and unified significance, a systematic development excluded from the text by the mimesis of the unconscious. As a result this development must be achieved from without the text, in its margins so to speak, by a system of exterior references and formal models composed of the intertexts. Automatic writing thus puts the burden of communication on intertextuality and makes its mechanisms easier to observe.

The poem is about sexual desire. Desire, sexual or otherwise, can only be represented in terms of a frustrated present, or of a future, in the anticipation of what is to come. Lasting only as long as it remains unsatisfied, desire must be depicted through suspense or delay, or through an impossibility to satisfy it. Any literary mimesis of desire therefore contains an element of desirability (hope, for example), and an element of interdiction. The latter prevents the former from attaining its goal. These elements generate texts of desire either by saturation or by displacement. Saturation occurs when all nouns in the text receive a positive or negative marker, according to whether anticipation or frustration is being emphasised. Displacement occurs when the nouns in the text are metonyms of the desired object; the object's conflicting features are expressed by metonyms carrying markers of desirability and by metonyms carrying markers of interdiction:

[1] Sur la montagne Sainte-Geneviève il existe un large abreuvoir où viennent se rafraîchir à la nuit tombée tout ce que Paris compte encore de bêtes troublantes, de plantes à surprises. [2] Vous le croiriez desséché si, en examinant les choses de plus près, vous ne voyiez glisser capricieusement sur la pierre un petit filet rouge que rien ne peut tarir. [3] Quel sang précieux continue donc à couler en cet endroit que les plumes, les duvets, les poils blancs, les feuilles déchlorophylées qu'il longe détournent de son but apparent? [4] Quelle princesse de sang royal se consacre ainsi après sa disparition à l'entretien de ce qu'il y a de plus souverainement tendre dans la faune et la flore de ce pays? [5] Quelle sainte au tablier de roses a fait couler cet extrait divin dans les veines de la pierre? [6] Chaque soir le merveilleux moulage plus beau qu'un sein s'ouvre à des lèvres nouvelles et la vertu désaltérante du sang de rose se communique à tout le ciel environnant, pendant que sur une borne grelotte un jeune enfant qui compte les étoiles; [7] tout-à-l'heure il reconduira son troupeau aux crins millénaires, depuis le sagittaire ou flèche d'eau qui a trois mains, l'une pour extraire, l'autre pour caresser, l'autre pour ombrager ou pour diriger, depuis le sagittaire de mes jours jusqu'au chien d'Alsace qui a un oeil bleu et un oeil jaune, le chien des

anaglyphes de mes rêves, le fidèle compagnon des marées.[1]

(On Saint Geneviève Hill there is a broad watering-trough where, at nightfall, what Paris still has of disturbing beasts, of surprise-springing plants, come to refresh themselves. You would think it had run dry if, on closer inspection, you did not see sliding capriciously over the stone a thin red trickle that nothing can dry up. What precious blood, then, keeps on flowing in this place, that the feathers, the down, the white hairs, the leaves without chlorophyll which it passes divert from its apparent course? What princess of royal blood devotes herself after her disappearance to the upkeep of all that is most sovereignly tender in the flora and fauna of this country? What saint with her apron of roses has made this divine extract flow through the veins of the stone? Each evening the wonderful hollow cast, more beautiful than a breast, opens itself to new lips, and the thirst-quenching power of the rose-blood spreads to all the surrounding sky, while against a mounting stone a young child sits shivering and counts the stars; soon he will drive home his herd with their millenia-old hides, from the sagittarius or arrowhead that has three hands, one for extracting an essence, the other for caressing, and another yet for casting a shade or pointing directions, from the sagittarius of my days to the Alsatian dog with one blue eye and one yellow eye, dog of the anaglyphs of my dreams, faithful companion of the tides.)

The poem sketches a nocturnal scene, a landscape paradoxically uniting city and country. In the very centre of Paris, in the heart of the Latin Quarter, on the *montagne Sainte-Geneviève*, there exists the magic kind of spring that folklore normally locates in the wilderness, a watering-hole frequented by fantastic animals and plants miraculously endowed with motion. Nearby, a young shepherd watches over a herd that is just as strange, since instead of sheep, the creatures of the Zodiac graze under his care.

The reader will easily recognise in this the well-known legend of the miraculous spring whose pure water flows at the scene of a crime, gushing from the spot where a virgin has been raped and murdered; the crystal clarity of the flowing water either effaces the traces of wrongdoing, or else symbolises the victim's purity. A modern version of this legend can be found in Ingmar Bergman's film *Virgin Spring*, in which the victim is a princess. Sentence 4 in the poem indeed alludes to a princess ministrating to the needs of the thirsty after her own death. Blood, rather than water, flows from the trough, a different and more supernatural variant also well attested to in folklore. But the poem conflates the two alternating liquids by transferring to blood the property of quenching thirst which belongs to water. Since this property is miraculous in blood, blood therefore

becomes a desirable drink.

Readers readily accept the fountain of blood miracle because it conforms to accepted rules of the fantastic. Within the descriptive system of the word *fountain*, blood instead of water and a flow that never dries indicate the miraculous. The description is grammatical, self-sufficient, in no need of bolstering by comparison with the legends in which gory springs gush forth to commemorate the sacrifice of a saint.[3] True, if readers chance upon such stories, they verify the poem as a variant of a theme, and this theme exemplifies the fantastic. This verification, however, remains aleatory. While it does enhance plausibility within the fantastic by connecting this story in a tradition, the story itself only actualises a given of the fairy tale genre that would be interpretable and enjoyable for a reader quite innocent of folktales. Rather than recognising an intertext here, it is better to speak of a theme: the text is understood by reference to usage and to standard tales.

Intertextuality would add to this elementary reading mechanism only if we had to know other variants of the theme in order to understand that this blood is good. This is not the case. The medliorative process merely consists in a paradigm of variants in praise of blood repeating the word *blood* positively each time by its figurative acceptations, but also in its literal sense by embellishing associations. The whole series first makes blood an object of wonder. The expression *royal blood*, for example, can literally designate the blood of a monarch, or it can simply be a metonym for 'royal family' (cf. *princesse du sang*). 'Essence' (*extrait*) is a word borrowed from the vocabulary of chemistry, and specifically that of perfume-making; it designates the precious liquid distilled from rose petals that is used in the rarest perfumes. The literary synonym for this essence is in French conventional poetic language *sang des roses* ('blood of roses', or 'rose-blood'). 'Precious blood' (*sang précieux*) commonly signifies exactly that, but it is also, in religious discourse, the term for the blood of Christ and more to the point, it is that blood when it becomes drinkable: the phrase designates the transubstantiated wine of the Eucharist. This meaning still needs no more than normal linguistic competence to be understood, but its unexpected aptness for the poem's symbolism does not become evident until the next rung on the paradigm's ladder, the vision of the blood spreading through the sky. This image signals a major shift from blood as an object of admiration to blood as an object of desire – that is, a blood

one thirsts for.

This shift is specific to the poem and indeed constitutes its idiosyncratic, topical significance. But it is also with this shift that the poem departs from grammaticality most visibly. Readers could be satisfied with the truth and beauty of the rose-blood as a metaphor for the sky coloured by the setting sun. They are denied this natural and obvious reading, however, for it is precluded by the fact that the subject of the sentence is not the rose-blood itself, but its *vertu désaltérante*, a quality equally nonsensical for speaking of celestial hues and of a rose distillate.

This is the point at which an intertext intervenes, making a second reading possible and indeed compulsory, an intertext that authorises the seemingly gratuitous and absurd sentence where thirst-quenching power can serve as a subject for the predicate 'spread through the sky'. This intertext is a literary one, but it is also the subject of paintings by Tintoretto and Rubens, a fact that must have increased its currency: the myth of Juno forced to suckle Hercules at her breast, despite the child's being Jupiter's bastard. The errant king of gods pushes the famished babe against the bosom of Juno asleep. Awakened by the voracious lips of Hercules, she turns and pushes his mouth away from the breast that he has already grasped. But the divine infant's suction is so powerful that the stream of milk still flowing from the nipple spreads across the heavenly canopy: thus was the Milky Way created.

Better still, now that this ungrammaticality is further emphasised by the intertext that redeems it, readers' attention reverts to the beginning of the poem and to a first ungrammaticality that may have escaped them in the initial jumble of contradictory images. Instead of just depicting a miraculous fountain in accordance with folktale practice, the second sentence is at variance with the fantastic of the motif because of the double anomaly of a trough. A farmyard implement is ungrammatical in a big-city context, and it is ungrammatical in a virgin-spring context. The verisimilitude of the supernatural tale (a literary genre) is compatible with the locus amoenus of a bucolic setting, in which a rivulet trickles over pebbles through a verdant mead, or a silent pond reflects the leafy shade, etc. By contrast, it would seem to exclude the prosaic utilitarian décor of the farm.

The mythological intertext does provide a transition back to the fantastic. Even though the Juno myth has cultural connotations

which somewhat defuse the direct impact that the fantastic has in a Celtic tale of fountains, both the breast and the spring are clearly supernatural. But replacing the breast with its own cast, and making it still function as a spring, ceases to be absurd when we grasp the similarity between the cast's hollow and that of the trough, a similarity confirmed by the fact that both produce a beneficent blood. The whole transformation still remains painfully far-fetched, however, until we relate it to the intertext that lurks behind *moulage*. This word functions as the connective here because it is even more of a technical term than *abreuvoir*. It is borrowed straight from the sculptor's studio, designating the plaster templet moulded on a model's breast, or on a sculpture created in her likeness: molten bronze poured into the cast takes the shape of that breast and immortalises its beauty. The cast is thus halfway between the trough and the breast, partaking of the artificiality of the former and the eroticism of the latter. The intertext illustrates this with a well-known motif of pathos about the irony of Fate, where Nature herself is the sculptor, and the cast is accidental, the negative impression left by a woman's breast in the hardened lava of Pompeii.

Théophile Gautier's short story, *Arria Marcella*, offers a fully developed version of this intertext:

> . . . he was looking at a piece of coagulated black ash with a hollow imprint. It looked like a fragment from a statue's mould, broken during the casting procedure. An artist's knowledgeable eye would have easily recognized the outline of a wonderful breast and of a waist whose stylistic purity was worthy of Greek statuary. Any traveller's guidebook will tell you that as this lava grew cold around the body of a woman, it kept her charming contour. The caprice of an eruption which destroyed four cities has preserved until our day a noble shape that had fallen to dust two thousand years ago. The rounded outline of a bosom has endured through centuries while so many empires have vanished without a trace.[4]

There are quite a few other versions of the cast-moulding-a-breast story, to which I shall refer later. The Pompeii variant is the one most frequently invoked, and the one most likely to be remembered, for two reasons. The first is its complexity; its effect is heightened by two other themes. One is that the love or desire inspired by the bosom triumphs over death. The other is that art or beauty survives the fall of empires, with the added twist that the more apparently perishable the media, the more it endures (a motif made famous by Horace celebrating the power of poetry, that outlasts bronze statues,

monumentum exegi aere pereenius). Gautier's story gives narrative proof of desire made eternal when the dead beauty appears to the young tourist in his dreams and seduces him. We are left uncertain as to whether all this is but a figment of the aroused sleeper's erotic dreams, or whether it is an actual visitation by the undead risen from the grave. Despite whichever version happens to be correct, both spell out the maximal form of the axiom of desire: if frustration is eternal, then the libido must accordingly be undying.

But the other reason for the Pompeii version's fame is that its melodramatic tension makes more visible the function of a structure which is nothing less than the basic mechanism of intertextual exchange. If praise of a woman in love poetry can be done by depicting her as statuesque, an equally effective praise does the reverse by imagining her as the mould from which a statue will be cast (e.g., the motif of the bereft lover drinking to his dead mistress's memory from a cup moulded on her breast). A further reversion of the intertextual shuttle then describes a female shape through the detour of a figurative, or literal, hollow mould. This mechanism is central to the entire poem because the comparison of the body and of the artefact is being misused or diverted, as it were, in the statement about the *cast more beautiful than the breast*. This would appear paradoxical or nonsensical if the poem were about the real thing. The intertextual manipulation here builds on the fact that the word *abreuvoir* designates a hollowed-out stone, and that images derived from it may be easier to recognize as synonyms of it if the stone component is preserved, which is the case for *cast*. The cast therefore imagistically designates a wet mould of flesh which, we will soon discover, is literally a more beautiful sex object than the breast itself.

The two intertexts (*moulage* and the galaxy) conjured up together by the same sentence and knotting together two images of desire (sex and thirst), posit an idiolectic rule, applicable only within the poem and germane to its significance, whereby blood's newly established equivalency with milk makes it a synecdoche for the whole woman.

But the question remains: why is blood made into an object of desire? And if it flows as a memorial to the victim of a tale of rape and murder, who is she? The answer, of course, is a shepherdess. She who gave her name to the Paris hill, the city's patron saint and therefore a metonym for it, was a shepherdess, but most readers would not think of it. The name itself may however become a connective, or one of the connectives, when readers become aware that the whole tale

narrated or hinted at in the poem is but the long periphrasis for a repressed word, *bergère*. The very nature of a periphrasis is that it beats around the bush hiding the word that is that periphrasis's lexical equivalent. The periphrastic meandering itself, and the multiple question marks lead readers towards identifying the victim with *bergère*, and eventually to guessing which aspects of the sememe 'shepherdess' enable it to function as an exemplary object of desire, and consequently to give the poem its textual identity.

As always in literary texts, a number of secondary signals ensure that even the most absent-minded readers will find the thread leading to the solution. These signals consist in repeating words from the descriptive systems[5] of 'shepherd(ess)' or aimplifying these words into periphrases each of which constitutes a mini-description to make the point explicit. The very size of the space occupied by the developing representation emphasizes it. The child of sentence 6 is a shepherd himself, as we are told twice through two periphrases. The first amounts to a definition and suscitates a rich intertext of poetic allusions to the mythical birth of astronomy. It is a well-known theme, in France and elsewhere, that the first people who were able to discern and name asterisms were those men whose occupation kept them awake at night, watching over their herds and contemplating the starry skies – the pastors of ancient Mesopotamia. Then a new periphrastic approach to the key is made via metonyms of the shepherd. First, the herd itself, which being the Zodiac, confirms the supernatural, or perhaps just figurative or symbolic, nature of the whole tale. Then, the shepherd dog, twice described as such through its species and through its characteristically varicoloured eyes.[6] And now that we have shepherd, herd, and shepherd dog, only the shepherdess is missing. Not for long, however, because a dog is a symbol of fidelity, and the text leaves blank only the space where the name of that fidelity's beneficiary should be. That this space should be filled out with the renewed nonsense of *tides* makes it even more necessary for readers to correct this with the only appropriate word so far left unuttered. Of course, any feminine character could be an object of desire. But it so happens that *bergère*, which was so difficult to uncover, is a word ideally suited for this role since, as a conventional character of the pastoral, she embodies sexuality in the bucolic genre. This proceeds from the idylls of ancient literature through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *bergerades* in poetry and in painting down to vulgar usage. To this day, *bergère* is a

colloqualism for lover or even for a 'loose' girl. Add to this phrases like *l'heure du berger*, a humorous euphemism designating the moment of surrender of a willing female, and *étoile du berger*, another name for the planet Venus. This name, by the way, is also a synonym for the first sign of the Zodiac, and an occasional synecdoche for the word *zodiac* as well, bringing us back sylleptically to the other facet of the poem, the mimesis of the fantastic, and thus realising once more the interface of vision and of sexuality.

The intertext summarised and represented by *bergère* selects therefore from the descriptive system based on that word those descriptive details and narrative situations that may actualise sexuality literally or figuratively, especially in the hyperbolic form of male desire: rape. A shepherdess, alone and defenceless in the solitude of woods and meadows, is a natural symbol of feminine vulnerability, so much so that the development of a poetic genre, the medieval *pastourelle*, is but a narrative expansion on *rape*. The modality of experience that defines the shepherdess would seem to be feminine availability. So powerful is this stereotyped derivation from the very name of the character, that it involves or contaminates even those components of the descriptive system that have nothing to do with the strategy of the act itself. First, the dog. He was supposed to protect his mistress. Instead, he becomes an accomplice in her demise. Second, the spring of water. Third, the tree shading the scene. These two were but props in the setting of the bucolic *locus amoenus*. They now symbolically re-enact the unutterable scene that transforms the pastoral bower of bliss into a dramatic stage of violent lust.

An early instance of the intertext gives us an example of the dog's new function. Marmontel wrote a short story, *La Bergère des Alpes*, first published in his *Contes moraux* that so aroused his readers' fantasies, that the musical stage version of it was produced in 1766, plagiarised as a comedy by abbé Desfontaines in 1795, and developed into a full-fledged five-act drama in 1852 by Desnoyers and Dennery. It tells the seduction of the heroine by a hunter who loses his way in the mountains and is saved by the dog. The dog brings him to her hut. She becomes pregnant, but all is well that ends well: they get married. The dog turning from protector into procuror is an instance of role reversal, and of resulting suspense, common in melodrama. But that structural shift permanently endows the animal with literariness and makes him a fixture of the seduction tale, with the effect that his presence alone indicates what is going on.

A later version of the intertext provides us with a more complete example of the transference, transforming the dog and the surroundings into a symbolic account of the event. In that version, from Jean Giraudoux's 1926 novel *Bella*, a Parisian dandy takes a walk in the countryside. He is sexy (*Pan en veston*, 'Pan in morning coat') and Spring is beckoning. A shepherd dog befriends him (rather than the more usual way around) and brings him to his mistress. The dog's literary function (as opposed to its role of guardian in reality) as a metonym for his mistress in her role as sex object, is clearly expressed: the dog does the wooing (*le chien de la bergère l'avait séduit*) and the shepherdess has the same varicoloured eyes as the animal. The metonymic transference is repeated through the name: the dog is called, unaccountably, Red Stockings, a riddle solved by the indirection in the narrative derived from the name. Instead of a straight account of the scene's climax, the text alludes to it circuitously by having the wench display to the passer-by the top of her own red stockings. Finally, a variation on the vernal theme repeats the story as if it were a commentary on Breton: '. . . the setting *seduced him* rather than the shepherdess herself. How splendid, how *potent* the mountain-ash looked, beneath which she was sitting. The tree was *raping* the earth that was *fighting back*. A spring was flowing: it would soon be good to *touch its water*.'[7]

I have italicised images that may seem merely ornate and fairly artificial stylistic devices. The instant we perceive their common implication, these images assume a new function as members of a paradigm of synonymous representations of desire. We therefore read them as figurative paraphrase of the implicit rape story.

The recovery of *bergère* from under *tides* is unmistakable and cannot fail, as we have seen, because the phrase *faithful companion of* for a shepherd dog cannot be completed except with *berger* or *bergère*, and of the two only the latter is still available. But even if the descriptive system I have described were not actualised, thus facilitating the proper interpretation of the riddle, or rather making it foolproof, the substitute chosen for the predicate of *faithful companion* would have pointed to *shepherdess*, for *tides* makes sense only with the feminine. Given the blood paradigm, *tides*, suppressing the designation of a woman, must be read as a metaphor for menstruation. All mythologies have concurred in linking women's menses as well as tides to the phases of the moon. The plural of *tides*

makes the substitution even more imperative since French *règles* ('period') is used only in the plural.

As soon as the reader makes this discovery, nonsense disappears. While the whole paradigm of synonyms describes the blood as desirable, this intertext reveals it as prohibited, since menstrual blood is impure blood in all western religious traditions. The connective, therefore, actualises the frustration component in the mimesis of the libido. After all, Leviticus prohibits intercourse with a woman during her period. In consequence, both miraculously thirst-quenching spring and taboo liquid, menstrual blood is a perfect metaphor for desire.

Nevertheless, the prose poem still presents images that appear arbitrary. The fusion of two incompatible settings, urban and rustic, remains entirely gratuitous, and its relation to the blood-symbolism remains far-fetched. Miraculous fountains are usually hidden in forests and dales like the nymphs that once frequented them. But so long as a man-made trough was substituted for the natural spring, the latter could have transferred its magic to the former, while remaining in the background as an intertextual footnote. The substitution itself is the real problem: not even the usefulness of a trough to shepherds could explain it, since ponds and springs would do the job just as well, especially in the bucolic genre.

Actually, the key to the riddle is not the thing itself, but the word for it. *Abreuvoir* sticks out in context because it is a technicism of sorts, a term found only in the special vocabulary of animal husbandry, that would seem appropriate only in a realistic description of a farmyard. So conspicuous a presence, and one so estranged from its context, impels readers to search for its reason. Since contextual justification is lacking, readers turn to outside associations for an answer. They find it in a lexical look-alike of *abreuvoir* whose near identity at the phonetic level is bound to attract attention, the more so because it combines so disparately at the stylistic level. The two words so close in shape, so far apart in style, thus constitute a near syllepsis. The farmyard word happens to be related to only one other term in the whole lexicon, a term that paradoxically is used only in conventional literary contexts, the verb *abreuver* or *s'abreuver*, 'to slake thirst'. Moreover, the thirst in question is metaphorical (its seldom-used literal sense is always melodramatic), the thirst for blood, as in *s'abreuver du sang de l'ennemi*, 'to slake one's thirst for enemy blood', certainly a desirable activity.

This bloodthirsty hyperbole would have been long forgotten, buried in the rhetoric of political polemics of the Revolutionary period, Classical tragedy, or outdated epics, were it not kept alive in France's national anthem. No French reader can go from *abreuvoir* to *s'abreuver* without recognising this intertext, of which he is reminded at every public event, when most people to this day join in the refrain:

> Aux armes, citoyens! Formez vos bataillons!
> Marchons! Marchons!
> *Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons!*
>
> [Take up arms, citizens! Form your batallions!
> Let us march! Let us march!
> May our furrows be slaked with impure blood!]

Impure blood; the thirst for this blood; and the word *sillons*, 'furrows', rather than *champs*, 'fields', or *labours* 'tilled fields', a synedoche for *campagnes*, 'countryside'; and finally the fact that in the first stanza, *campagnes*, 'our fields' invaded by foreign violators, rhymes with their intended victims, *nos compagnes*, 'our women': all these components are now in place to form a series of double meanings that trace the silhouette of women and of bloodthirsty aggressors. *Sang impur* refers to the blood of France's enemies, but it is also a pompous euphemism for menstrual blood, while *sillon* is a salacious euphemism for the female genitals. The optative form of the verb for thirst-slaking expresses a programme of desire. Thus *sillon* in this explicit intertext caps a paradigm of erotically charged images of hollowness: the watering-trough, and the cast of a breast. Obscene equivocations on the refrain are found in off-colour jokes about intercourse, and about defloration in particular. *Sang impur* paves the way for a retrieval of the intertext. Despite its archaism, the phrase exists in present everyday usage, and always with a comical, parodic tinge, because in spoken French there is this one phonetic liaison, that seems to contradict spelling, in which the final *g* in *sang* is pronounced as a *k*, and the example that schoolchildren memorise when they learn this strange rule is the same *sang impur* line about thirst and furrows.

The intertextual role of the patriotic refrain is special. Contrary to the intertexts that transform one sentence at a time, the impact of the *Marseillaise* affects the whole poem at once. It causes readers to recognise, however unconsciously, that the trough and the *moulage*

are synonymous, as are the princess, the female saint, and the shepherdess. All three are identical in the single respect that they are overflowing with desirable blood. This intertext therefore, by providing the model that sets the rule of transformation to be applied to the other intertexts, has the same function as the interpretant in C. S. Peirce's definition of the sign: a sign stands to somebody for something in some respect, creating in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, the interpretant.[8] Translated at the level of textuality, this would read: a text stands to the reader for an intertext, creating in her or his mind an equivalent sign system. The interpretant intertext embodies that system and keeps it in store for all future readers as a written guarantee that they will all end up with the same interpretation.

The power of the interpretant results from its repression: once readers identify this intertext, they still have to cope with the *double entendre* of *sillon,* to perceive that that word is relevant only in a prurient intertext repressed and therefore directed to our attention by the patriotic bombast of the song in its official use.

It must be emphasised that it is not the actual context of the French anthem which constitutes the interpretant. If the refrain itself were a key to interpretation, it would be a quotation or an allusion, not an intertext. For the intertext to play its role as a supplement to the text, it need not be more than a structural referent, a model authorising certain verbal connections which are unacceptable in usage. These may be predications, syntagms, or fragments thereof. Or they may be mere juxtapositions; words otherwise unrelated in language, and belonging to different syntagms in the intertext, are still close enough to one another to be remembered together. Their nearness is valorised because we observe it within the compass of a familiar intertext. The refrain is not, therefore, involved in its entirety. It only provides an abstract frame endowed with the power to give authority to whatever fits into it; a hallowed textual space in which *s'abreuver* presupposes a craving for blood; a space in which that particular libido demands that the blood be impure; a space where the locus of fulfilment is a furrow. Only because of that abstract frame, only because of its ability to consecrate a specific verbal combination, does a second step become possible: the activation, the accession to relevancy of the already present but dormant sexual *double entendre* of 'furrow' (as if to make sure that readers will not miss the cue, another sylleptic intertext urges them to the second

step: *moulage* is an abstract connective, corresponding to a literal mould in the intertext, to a metaphorical one in the text where it stands for vulva).

This activation doubles back, as it were, onto the text. As soon as the water-trough is revealed for what it is, thanks to the discovery of the *furrow* interpretant, details of the hollowed stone's description that were as yet unexplained become in turn the interpretants of *sillon,* which latter now functions as the primary sign.[9] Consequently, these details too acquire a sexual significance. The feathers, hairs, down, and leaves through which blood trickles therefore appear as a periphrasis for two stereotyped images, *toison,* 'head of hair' or 'fur', and *forêt*, 'forest', the alternately literary or colloquial metaphors for pubic hair, in lofty poetic style as well as in lowbrow or vulgar discourse.

So wide an impact, so totalising a transformation, presupposes that the multiple meanings of the text should be modified together and given a common significance simultaneously, irrespective of their discrete referents. It could not therefore depend on a connective whose own meaning might differ from and obscure the aim of the overall transformation. This is why the connective for an interpretant intertext must be a syllepsis – that is, a word that has two mutually incompatible meanings, one acceptable in the context in which the word appears, the other valid only in the intertext to which the word also belongs and that it represents at the surface of the text, as the tip of an iceberg. As a word, the syllepsis has two meanings, each of which generates its own derivation in its separate text; yet as a connective, it has no meaning of its own. The connective is therefore empty, since it is a mere phonetic shape which can be filled in turn by two otherwise alien universes of representation. As such it is vastly more powerful than a metaphor, which needs some semes common to both its tenor and its vehicle for the tropological substitution to work. The syllepsis, on the contrary, resting as it does on homophony, is a connective in the abstract, a mere sign of equivalency.

The syllepsis's power over the reader lies in the paradoxical combination of two factors. One is the unmistakable obviousness of the connective, the other is the distance between the connected texts. Obviousness: one word is at once the question and the answer, having both textual and intertextual relevances (sometimes two words almost identical as is the case here but with the same radical,

which makes them look like a declension or conjugation on one radical). Distance: the irresistible lure for readers is an enormous return for a modest investment, and also an effect of transgression, of pleasurable release from a repression, such as the titillation we experience when a wording safe from any embarrassing connotation yields to minimal changes (e.g., letter or syllable permutations in spoonerisms) and produces an outrageous or even taboo derivation.

The other cases of intertextuality I have discussed are equally compelling, but they differ from syllepsis on two major points. Far from being empty, the connective carries a double semantic load. And instead of being a lexical Janus, one word with two faces, the connective is a puzzling substitute for the term that should have been lifted from the intertext in order for the text to produce significance. The instances found in Breton belong to two different types, but in both of them the key word or phrase common to text and intertext is missing, and is replaced with another in such a way that readers cannot fail to sense a substitution. This makes the recovery of the intertext both urgent and unavoidable.

Our poem presents no other type, not, I think, because of its limitations, but rather because the examples at hand cover all possible alternatives. Substitution is the clue, because the semantic or lexical incompatibilities it creates between the substitute and the sentences surrounding it are blatant forms of ungrammaticality. For the incompatibilities to be experienced, the verbal sequences they modify must have some stability, some permanence, barring which we could not recognise them and compare their original form to the altered version before us. These sequences may be found either in a text signed by an author, or in the potential, inchoate or fragmentary narrative and descriptive sequences floating in the limbo of the corpus of myths, stories, exempla, etc. of which a sociolect is comprised. But their permanence, their stability can only take two forms. It can manifest itself, first, in one-sentence cliché predications, phrases that go unchanged in any context, or even in stereotyped full-length stories, admitting of few variations from one version to the next, such as themes, motifs, and myths. Any repressed component of the above category is sure to be recovered because it is presupposed by its context. The second kind of permanence is that of descriptive systems, within which a repressed component is readily identified as a metonym or synecdoche of the system's kernel word. The two instances I have discussed correspond to the possibilities:

stereotypes (Milky Way), and textual models (*bergère* descriptive system).

Within these categories, the recovery of an intertext proceeds in two stages both so overdetermined that they are unlikely to elude for long any reader equipped with basic linguistic competence. Overdetermination is the more inescapable because it is an in-built self-contained model accessible in its entirety through the semanalysis of the matrix word from which the stereotyped text or descriptive system is derived. At the heuristic stage, readers instantly notice the substitution of a connective because it disturbs an expected verbal sequence. At the interpretive stage, they easily recover the substituted component because anything missing can be deduced from the extant components.

The question arises as to whether intertextuality ceases to work if the reader is unfamiliar with the intertexts involved. One might think the Breton poem would become a dead letter if the sculptor's mould were to go unrecognised (and its implications ignored), if Gautier's short stories were no longer accessible to French readers, or if British readers were to tire of Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii,* in which the same negative of a bosom is depicted. Experience suggests otherwise. The cast emptied of its statue has many other variants. One would be a sultry scene in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*: when a lover, waiting for his mistress in her boudoir, loses himself in fervid contempation of the girdle and bra strewn about him, he muses, 'every item of your underwear offers to my burning imagination the parts of your body they conceal . . . Delicious imprints, I kiss you a thousand times.'[10]

The passage could serve as an emblem of the mechanism of desire: the object of desire, reduced to an outline, is both represented and missing; it is literally visible in its very absence. A prurient immediacy is added through vicarious sensory perception; the sight and touch of undergarments is so strongly associated with the body that they are already stereotyped metonyms for it. Indeed, they are as forbidden as those parts of the body they cover (it is not so long ago that they were still called *unmentionables*). Just to name them is as potent as a striptease.

Nor is there any need to know printed versions of this generalised variant (Rousseau's novel is also losing popularity), since linguistic competence (that is, familiarity with the clichés of the sociolect) should suffice for readers to recognise the reversed form of an erotic

stereotype (fantasising about the suggestive swelling curves at once hidden and displayed by feminine attire). The only difference is that published variants enjoy the momentary authority of the canon. If we further hypothesise the loss of the stereotypes, there is little chance that any full shape can ever be perceived or conceived of without its counterpart, the hollow outline that complements it, especially when the strategies of clothing, fashion and sexual symbolism valorise them together as mutually alternative. Furthermore, we should not assume that the survival of intertextuality depends on whether or not the reader's libido is aroused. Although the examples discussed are heated up by libidinal drives, they are but especially valorised variants of a universal structure of intertextuality: the semiotic shuttle between polar opposites, trading them back and forth, and treating them as if they were mutually equivalent, one pole being the negative of the other. The widespread literary practice of depicting nature in terms of artefacts and vice versa is an example of this.

Finally, words correspond to sememes, and sememes contain, in a potential state of suspense, the semes that can, at any time, develop into a narrative. A sememe is an inchoate text. Conversely, a text from which a crucial component is missing can be rebuilt by reversing the generating process; that is, by performing a semanalysis. This is why the gradual vanishing of mythology from readers' memories is unlikely to hamper the recovery of *milk*, although it is displaced by the *sang* substitute. In any language in which a major galaxy is called the Milky Way, one easily surmises that the convention of describing a symbolic liquid spreading over the sky has for its authority the metaphorical phraseology of popular astronomy that represents stardust as milk. We do not have to know the details or the names, let alone read obscure mythographers like Hyginus, who spins the tale in his *Astronomica*. The Juno story itself is but an early rationalisation of the original semanalysis of the popular name for the galaxy: that semanalysis merely deduced the breast from the milk, and supernatural nurse and nursling from the cosmic proportions of the spectacle.

The stability of intertexts, and the reader's ability to compensate for their losses, should not lead us to assume that intertexts are just themes and motifs. In terms of content and even of form, intertext and theme may indeed coincide, but they differ radically from each other in terms of their impact on the reader, let alone in terms of the

reader's awareness. In fact, a theme's impact can be quite independent of the reader's recognition of the theme: narrative and stylistic devices, the actualisation of diegetic structures – in short, the very features that explain its success and its becoming a theme as a result – these same features will arouse even a reader who does not suspect the existence of other versions. In fact, it is not unusual for a theme to be known as such only by specialised readers, by comparatists.

By contrast, intertextuality exists only when two texts interact, whether or not they are themes as well. There cannot be an intertext without our awareness of it. This awareness, as I have tried to demonstrate, rests either on the transparency of the syllepsis or on the momentary opaqueness of a substitution.

In other words, even if the intertext can also be described as a theme, it will differ in one major respect: it will either be a theme missing a key word, relevant only if rephrased as a riddle (the substitute type), or a theme made inseparable from another story with which it shares a key word (the sylleptic type) to the exclusion of anything else. This implies the erasure of any identifying structure previously built with traits definable as thematic. Any significance attached to the similarity between versions, from which we deduce the existence of a theme, is superseded by the illogical relationship (unjustifiable in referential terms) produced by the mere pun that the syllepsis ultimately is.

Before concluding, I should like to point out one final (but essential) difference between intertext and theme, a trait common to both types of connectives. Because it is specific to intertextuality, this trait excludes the synonymous or antonymous kind of relationship that exists between versions of a theme. Instead, this trait is the combinatory nature of the connectives. Each connective has, as we have seen, two components: the substitute in the text, and its corollary or correspondent, the item substituted for, that remains *praesens in absentia* in the intertext, displaced or repressed, but in no way suppressed, inactive, or dormant. Intertextuality of the sylleptic type provides, in an intertext unconnected with the text except for the purely formal pun that indicates their relationship, the rule or programme for the interpretation of the text; the paradigm associating the cattle's watering-trough and the artist's mould would remain cryptic without the explicitness of the one word (*sillon*) that has remained behind in the intertext, while *abreuvoir* and *sang* are transferred to the text. Intertextuality of the substitutive type fuses

ogether the mimesis of the repressed element and the mimesis of the epressing one. Consequently, the solution to the riddle posed by the ubstitution can never be just a reductive strategy that would not, for ıstance, go beyond recovering *bergère* from under *marées*: Far from eing a momentary conundrum to be erased the minute it is solved, ıe substitution triggers a semiosis which isolates and privileges, /ithin the sememe 'shepherdess' as a sex symbol, a seme 'menstrution'. Without the connective, that seme would remain untapped. Ience a lexical hybrid, a ghost portmanteau-word holding together peasant girl and the vast sea's ebb and flow. As a mimesis, this efies visualisation, but its role is to try an equation (not unlike the xymoronic structure of an adynaton) on the reader's imagination. Ience, in a fleeting but illuminating reconciliation, a compound ign, in which a character from conventional bucolic poetry, indicatıg the legitimacy of sex, and the menstrual component of ·maleness, indicating the illegitimacy of sex, stand together, one nd indivisible, for *desire*.

The combinatory nature of the connectives accounts, it seems to ıe, at one fell swoop for three aspects of intertextuality. It explains ıe fact that intertextuality enables the text to represent, at one and ıe same time, the following pairs of opposites (within each of which ıe first item corresponds to the intertext): convention and deparıres from it, tradition and novelty, sociolect and idiolect, the ready said and its negation or transformation. It explains also that ıtertextuality should be the one trope that modifies a whole text ıther than a sentence or phrase, as a metaphor, say, or a synecdoche ould. Indeed, it takes a whole text to compensate for the disappearıce of the repressed intertext, and at the same time to transfer to ıat text (i.e., to the periphrastic derivations of the repressed item) a gnificance issuing from the intertext.

It explains above all that the most important component of the erary work of art, and indeed the key to the interpretation of its gnificance, should be found outside that work, beyond its margins, the intertext.

In conclusion, the concept of combinatory connectives explains hy the recovery of the intertext is an imperative and inevitable ocess. We should not be misled by the fact that in the Breton poem ıis process is bolstered by its coincidence with a structure of desire. is true that the reader's compulsion to lift the veil on the lust for enstrual blood can be explained in psychoanalytic terms.[11] And,

generally speaking, we are justified in drawing a parallel between intertextuality and the unconscious, since the text plays the role of a screen. Thus the intertext is to the text what the unconscious is to consciousness. Reading, therefore, is not unlike analysis.[12] Nonetheless, we must recognise that what impels the reader to pursue the search for the intertext, to experience the intertextual drive, as it were, is above all not just the material fact of the binary structure of the connective, but its being consistent with, or a variant of, the ubiquitous mechanism of tropes. In a response rendered compulsive, and facilitated by this familiar model, as soon as the reader notices a possible substitutability, s/he automatically yields to the temptation to actualise it. The intertextual drive, therefore, is tropological rather than psychoanalytical, a reader response dictated by the tantalising combination within each connective of the enigma and the answer, of the text as Sphinx and the intertext as Oedipus.

Notes

1 For a sensible introduction to these problems, see the Intertextuality issue of *Texte: revue de critique et de théorie littéraire*, II, 1983. It includes an exhaustive bibliography by Don Bruce, pp. 217–58.

2 This piece is the eighth of thirty-two prose poems entitled *Poisson soluble* published in 1924 (Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Paris, 1988, Vol. I, pp. 347–99). There is no visible intertextuality between this and the other pieces. I tried my hand at a reading of this poem, from a different viewpoint, in 'Désir, représentation, textualité', *Degrés*, XLIX–L, Spring–Summer 1987, esp. pp. 6–11.

3 A majority of these legends attribute the origin of the fountains of blood to the violent death of women, whether victims of rape or martyrs of the faith. The second case would seem free of sexual overtones. Far from it: the woman is decapitated or cut to pieces, and blood or water gushes forth from the spot where her head or breasts fall.

4 First published in *Un Trio de romans* (1852), reprinted in Théophile Gautier, *La Morte amoureuse, Avatar et autres récits fantastiques*, ed. Jean Gaudon, Paris, 1981, pp. 167–8.

5 A descriptive system is a network of words associated with one another around a kernel word, in accordance with syntactic relationships between the semes of that nucleus' sememe. Each lexical component of the system functions as a metonym of that nucleus.

6 Actually, the dog's membership in the *shepherd* descriptive system is symbolised three times, the last time, revealingly, through the obscure image of *anaglyphs*. The word should refer to a kind of *bas relief*, but instead refers to a gadget or toy of the twenties, a kind of stereoscope whose yellow and blue lens created an effect of relief, like the goggles American spectators had to put on thirty years later to watch 3-D movies. Three times then