

**SEDUCERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: A SELECTED HISTORY OF
THE DISCOURSE OF SEDUCTION
IN EUROPEAN AND CANADIAN WRITING**

By

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Susan Holloway-Ramírez

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface.....	1
1. Introduction.....	8
2. A Selected History of Seduction in Literature.....	25
3. The Aesthetics of Seduction.....	94
4. Parody as Seduction.....	134
5. <i>Kamouraska</i> : Writing on the Pure White Driven Snow.....	162
6. <i>No Fixed Address</i> : Don Juan Revised.....	221
7. Language of the Body in <i>Ana Historic</i> : The Reader/Archivist's Performance of History.....	283
8. Conclusion.....	324
Works Cited.....	329

Abstract

Seduction in literature is of greater consequence to the society in which it occurs than it is to the victims, because the seducer, more often than not, appears in moments of social crisis and shifting cultural identities. What is then at stake in the discourse of seduction, as it appears in this study, is a renegotiation of a variety of identities, ranging from the personal to the political, encompassing issues of religion, class, and gender. My enabling assumption is that seduction is less about sex than it is about various forms of artifice, requiring forms of aesthetic, political, and social control. One obvious starting point, then, is to note how the discourse of seduction blurs borders of sexual identity through its emphasis on artifice. Jean Baudrillard offers "seduction, as an ironic, alternative form, one that breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance" (21). Thus, the binaries of male/female, history/fiction, writer/reader become suspect in this model that refuses to accept such hierarchies as "natural."

Seducers as Agents of Social Change: A Selected History of the Discourse of Seduction in European and Canadian Writing surveys seduction throughout European literary history, examining such European works as *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, *Clarissa*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, several versions of Don Juan, and *Dracula*. Arguing that seduction is more about social power and control than it is about sexual conquest, the theoretical framework draws on essays by Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Linda Hutcheon, in order to set up three final chapters on Canadian novels: *Kamouraska*, *No Fixed Address*, and *Ana Historic*. Here, even parody turns into a form of intertextual seduction, offering a trope for larger matters concerning social, political, cultural, and literary change.

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Preface

Seduction in literature is of greater consequence to the society in which it occurs than it is to the victims, because the seducer, more often than not, appears in moments of social crisis and shifting cultural identities. What is then at stake in the discourse of seduction, as it appears in this study, is a renegotiation of a variety of identities, ranging from the personal to the political, encompassing issues of religion, class, and gender. My enabling assumption is that seduction is less about sex than it is about various forms of artifice, requiring forms of aesthetic, political, and social control. One obvious starting point, then, is to note how the discourse of seduction blurs borders of sexual identity through its emphasis on artifice. Jean Baudrillard offers "seduction, as an ironic, alternative form, one that breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance" (21). If feminist identity politics then attempt to situate women under social and/or biological codes, the discourse of seduction, obsessed with games and artifice, inevitably displaces these codes and sexual binaries. For seduction and the narratives that form it constitute a series of complicated games in which the relations (binaried and otherwise) are more important than any one speaking subject.

One does not have to be a deconstructionist to see that binary relations carry social and political implications about hierarchies. Fraught as it is with hierarchical tensions, the discourse of seduction is nonetheless analogous to deconstruction in the way that it reverses and destabilizes a variety of binary oppositions. In her essay, "Don Juan, or Loving to be Able to," Julia Kristeva attempts to rethink the peculiar power of the infamous Don Juan: "Indeed, the power of the sovereign sensualist resides less in the blasphemous destruction of devoutness than in the affirmation of the possibility of

expenditure: losing, endlessly, for nothing, hence for humanity, gloriously. The power to triumph while playing" (204-205). In such constitutions and reconstitutions, the seducer would appear to elude a fixed identity, so that the speaking subject signifies itself as a medley of always/already absences, leaving only traces after s/he is played out. Kristeva suggests an intriguing reading of the Don Juan myth by situating him, not as a rebel refuting the system, and therefore operating within a traditional binary, but rather as a series of polyphonic voices that has no centre. Thus Kristeva's point that there is the "affirmation of the possibility of expenditure" suggests that such loss provides a way to renegotiate.

Another reason to theorize the discourse of seduction is to identify in its multiple relationships various sites of power. One way of tracing these sites is through an analysis of the traditional binaries associated with the discourse of seduction: seducer/seduced, hero/villain, or lover/beloved. But the relations in a discourse of seduction set up by exclusive binaries rely on a system of polarized opposites which do not allow for the possibility that within the literary figure of the seducer those binaried opposites may conflict or merge, collapsing the strict binary.

An implosion of binaries is especially apparent in the type of resistant narrative that would seem to characterize historical narratives of seduction, but that has also become characteristic of the larger body of contemporary prose. The effect of the resistant narrative is always contingent upon a reader's knowledge of the conventional tropes – in this case, those related to seduction. The reader must understand the already-in-place discourses of seduction to understand a writer's parodic play with their conventions.

Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody as "extended repetition with critical difference" (7) may then be altered slightly to show how parody is another form of seduction, by which individual texts are invited to betray themselves into the design of some other. In Aritha van Herk's novel *No Fixed Address*, for example, the female Don Juan undermines the picaresque tradition by presenting a woman as trickster and seducer. What is at stake here, however, is more than the renovation of a literary form; the renovation of social roles, and gender constructions is the upshot of such "repetition with critical distance."

Traditionally, the discourse of seduction has been confined to questions of sexual behavior. However, at the heart of seduction lies a much larger issue of control. Seduction is finally about the politics of control. In the case of writing, it involves the concession that there is always meaning exceeding the limits of control. But in a cultural context, seduction offers a way to measure the changing socio-political climate in terms of power relations. Baudrillard understands seduction as simply excluding the real, whereby a virtual reality is constructed through performance, play, and illusion. Seduction, however, still requires real bodies acting in a cultural context; if seduction is play and fiction, it also has real consequences and a real history that comes out of it. Paradoxically, it is at this point that reality/fiction coincide, collapsing the binary. A poststructuralist approach then has the advantage of bringing the text back into culture and looking at the problematic relation between text and culture.

Most theories of writing marginalize the importance of play in language. But language is seductive precisely because writing exceeds any writer's or reader's individual control. Both writer and reader are seduced by their own vulnerability; they must give

themselves up to the act of writing/reading which is always an encore performance. Derrida argues that writing is iterable by necessity. The meaning which we attribute to writing as a form of communication is only possible because of its repetition. The meaning of language is not bound by the intentions of the writer or reader but rather by the context in which the communication has been produced. Neither sender nor receiver is crucial to this process, as Derrida notes: "To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten" (*Limited* 8). Thus, the relation between signifier/signified is also not self-contained; instead, the signifier is in continual pursuit of new referents for meaning. Meaning exceeds the grasp of writing through this act of deferral.

Within what may appear to be a nihilistic theory of writing, however, Derrida suggests that *différance* also opens up "the general space of their possibility" (*Limited* 19). The possibilities for the play of language resides in "inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains" (*Limited* 9). That is to say, meaning must be defined through context but, paradoxically, contexts are limitless in how they might be defined. Context is always open to further description, and it can easily be expanded through grafting the current statement onto the context given to explain that statement. In the discourse of seduction, then, the seducer does not invariably exert total control over a seduced, not if the supplement of writing evades the writer/seducer who would use it to establish his power over the seduced. Ironically this means the seducer is already caught in a web of his or her own making, a web over which no single party has control. The seducer must have read, seen, heard, experienced elsewhere what he intends to repeat with the seduced, thus

making him a once-upon-a-time always/already reader/seduced as well as being a seducer/writer.

Ultimately, the discourse of seduction suggests that seducers may then be limited by several social factors, including language, audience, and modes of interpretation. If none of these is stable or static, seducers will not be able to preserve old privileges of class, or gender, or imperial authority. In short, seducers appear to exert power over a seduced just at the moment that traditional relations of power and cultural identity are most in flux. Even a selective history shows how seduction has changed over time in relation to cultural imperatives and power politics. In the last thirty years, Canadian identity has been shaped by various concerns such as the rise of feminism, the evolution of nationalism in Quebec and an increased interest in post-colonialism. As the story changes in the Canadian narrative, it takes on new cultural references and expressions, where literary tropes of seduction can then turn into political tropes of changing relations of power, and where old hierarchies can turn into revealed hypocrisies.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one explores a number of critical approaches to seduction, and outlines the argument in further detail. Chapter two traces the history of tropes of seduction in literature from medieval to nineteenth-century writing. This chapter examines, in relation to seduction, the importance of the sub-genre of epistolary novels; the role of authority figures, procurers and confidantes; and considers a number of paradigms associated with seduction (for example, an older woman ridiculed for doing exactly what younger male seducers do – seduce someone younger and of a lower social status). Chapter three introduces the works of Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault whose theories share an interest in social

construction, identity politics, and the relationship of power to language. Chapter four traces the history of parody in western thought, in order to suggest that parody itself is a form of seduction, that is to say, a form in which later texts seduce earlier texts into their play. Chapter five examines the subversion of cultural binaries and fixed identities through a discussion of Anne Hébert's French-Canadian novel *Kamouraska*. I will use Philippe Lejeune's structuralist approach to polyphonic voice to explain the unaccountable shifts from first to second to third-person narrative, and to explore the multiple selves of Elisabeth as a speaking subject, both in relation to her loves and to the reader. Chapter six will review some of the literary reproductions of Don Juan (the writings of Tirso de Molina, Casanova, Lord Byron, Molière, and Mozart) and the parodic representation of Don Juan in *No Fixed Address*. Chapter seven explores Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* as a same-sex discourse of seduction. To some extent, reader and author become "same-sex" too, as joint creators, undermining the old hierarchical relationship of author/reader. The final chapter will show how discourses of seduction can elucidate identity politics within a particular cultural context. Discourses of seduction in these contemporary Canadian texts work, in fact, to establish a new feminist project. *Kamouraska* shows ways in which discourses of seduction serve in a feminist context, to overthrow an imperial (male, foreign) colonizer. Don Juan and the myths that surround this literary figure as the greatest seducer of women are then betrayed into the hands of a militantly feminist text in *No Fixed Address*. Lastly, lesbian and post-colonial resistance mark alike the constructed reader's inclusion as co-creator in the shift to a same-sex relationship in *Ana Historic*.

According to Michel Foucault, power resides in discourse. I hope to elaborate a hermeneutics of power relations which show how various social, political, and cultural identities are redefined. I wish to elucidate the use of artifice within seduction, which blurs sexual referentiality, and show how subversion (especially the parodic play of many contemporary texts) is inherent to the discourse of seduction. In its broadest terms, my objective is to critique sexual reasoning as represented within a number of contemporary Canadian texts. It is my hope that this project will yield insight into reading strategies, which can help to articulate identity in the discourse of seduction, and point out its importance to the study of literature as a whole.

1: Introduction

One way to explore seduction within the framework of critical theory and feminist psychoanalysis is to use poststructuralist theory to destabilize traditional binaries of seducer/seduced, man/woman, and nature/culture. At the same time, seduction is about more than language or writing, and should be examined in relation to social context. Critics such as Jane Miller rightly take issue with Jean Baudrillard, for example, for treating the subject in exclusively theoretical terms. Miller notes, for example, that "at the heart of this beguiling story [*Clarissa*] is a rape" (29). She is correct to observe that negative and weak representations of women in literature and serious issues affecting them may not only reflect, but also perpetuate, stereotypes.

Firstly, then, it is important to distinguish stereotypes of seduction from stereotypes relating to love, desire, and sex. Even then, seduction cannot be labeled in one specific way as it has changed in various historical periods and genres. And yet seduction prevails as a prominent discourse throughout literature and has proved important to the discussions of many theorists. If we think of seduction as a game, then love and desire can be seen as its tools, which are certainly useful; yet love and desire must always be subordinated to seduction, that is, short-circuited, if a seduction is to succeed. By contrast, the lover's discourse is about solitude. For example, in Robert Browning's poem "Porphyria's Lover," love demonstrates the lover's desire to control the situation and crystallize the perfect moment. The lover idealizes the beloved's beauty and proceeds to wrap her long hair around her throat to strangle her while saying, "I am quite sure she felt no pain" (line 42). A lover's discourse, as Roland Barthes has pointed out,

is isolated and struggles continually to find epiphanies in its expression. Seduction differs in that it is not complete without the regular interference of society. For example, a man seduces a woman over a long period of time; moreover, this seduction involves other people such as procurers, agents, and confidantes. A typical ending is that the seducer by means of seductive strategies forces the consummation of the relationship, understood as conquest. The woman, following the consummation, must confront one of three rather gloomy options: to die of shame or unrequited love; to enter into a nunnery; or to face ruin in society's eyes and take on the role of a fallen woman. We continue to revisit this paradigm in numerous classical texts such as *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun*. Conversely, a woman might seduce a man, as is the case in Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Admittedly, this scene of seduction is not as common, or at least not ostensibly so. Jenny Newman in *The Faber Book of Seduction* shows how older women as seducers are typically negated in literature. For example, in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, a restoration play filled with robust humour, a middle-aged Lady Wishfort receives mocking attention. We first meet her in the third act putting on makeup in preparation for her grand meeting with the supposed Lord Rowland who is actually her enemy's servant disguised. She is shown as a figure of ridicule, as Newman points out, because she is an older woman doing exactly what younger male seducers do – seduce someone younger and of a lower social status (xvii). Her use of cosmetics shows that she wants to use artificial means to create a scene of seduction, but the privileged value of innocence associated with women is also linked with the idea of a completely natural woman. The conventions of seduction are such that any woman

putting on makeup, and especially an older one, cues the reader to know that this woman does not fit into the category of innocence.

Within another paradigm, however, the seduction of a woman does not necessarily imply that she is a victim. Alan Johnson, for example, argues convincingly that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be interpreted as a projection of the underlying desires of Mina Murray and Lucy Westrena within an otherwise oppressive Victorian setting. Mina becomes a vampire when her party of men abandons her as they go off in search of Dracula. They do so in accordance with the chivalric code, but their desire to protect her is exactly what leaves her vulnerable to Dracula. These women, then, are innocent in the sense that they do not openly seek to change their lives, yet on an unconscious level, they rebel against social norms.

Beyond the changing paradigms of seduction, there are still common tropes in the discourse, such as deceit, espionage, and betrayal. Individuals such as procurers, oppressive authority figures, and agents alternately encourage and dissuade scenes of seduction. Deferral of the consummation scene is another constant, whereby one of these above-mentioned marginal characters impedes the seducer (although the seducer may have strategically planned it so). In defining the encompassing features of seduction, one must not forget Elizabeth Hardwick's point that there can be no seduction in a society in which innocence is not a value (208). Hardwick points to the continuing inter-relation between seduction and society, where social class and religious ethos play an intrinsic role in many discourses of seduction.

There are formal constants as well, such as one finds in the sub-genre of the epistolary novel. The epistolary form lends itself to the writings of seduction because it

gives the reader a sense of intimacy with the characters. A reader may feel as if he or she is looking over the shoulder of the writer in the process of writing. In the case of Richardson's *Pamela*, the story allows the reader to perceive from a first-person narrative how a young woman of the lower class might react to seduction. Pamela is not allowed to become marginal because it is her voice that predominates; her letters are given importance within the narrative. Pamela has to sew her correspondence into her clothing in an effort to ensure that it is kept private. Yet, this very desire for secrecy is one of the justifications her hypocritical seducer uses to touch her. Mr. B says that he wants to "strip her garment by garment to look for her letters" (274). He insists that it is his right as a landowner to see all mail that leaves the house, and yet he has broken the relationship of trust between servant and master by accosting Pamela against her will. This epistolary history of the individual has its own long formal history, however, such as will appear in discussion of Ovid's *Heroides*, *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, and Chaclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

When one turns to a theoretical consideration of seduction, however, one often finds more emphasis on artifice than on social hypocrisy. Jean Baudrillard's text *Seduction* posits that the best seducer is a transvestite rather than a woman because a transvestite consciously plays with all of the signs. Baudrillard would not consider *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* a "pure" seduction because he says that seduction does not have physical consummation as its goal. For him, seduction is about games, play, and defiance; it is an "eclipse of a presence" or an "aesthetics of disappearance" (85). The seducer's power lies in his or her abilities to create a hypnotic-mesmerizing presence that does not attempt credibility or reasonableness. The seducer may ask the question "Who

am I?" although s/he is not so much interested in answers as in the possibilities opened up in the process of answering; the seducer is a *tabula rasa* onto which the seduced inscribes his or her desires. The seducer must find ways to engage the seduced through sparking curiosity and managing objections. Baudrillard makes the point that the seducer tries to draw the object of desire into the seducer's realm of weakness, and thus presents him/herself as weak. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Valmont uses this strategy when he says to Madame Tourvel that she has made him reconstrue his entire system of ethics because of her influence, and she seduces herself into believing that this could be true. He is not only interested in obtaining her physical consent, delaying the consummation of the relationship, in fact, to ensure that he also seduces her spiritually.

Baudrillard makes the point that seduction is aesthetic as much as it is social; in consequence, it likely mirrors a "natural" seduction. Madame Tourvel is considered beautiful and "naturally seductive." According to Baudrillard, what the seducer attempts is an imitation of that same beauty in order to destroy it. Necessarily, there is a pre-existing concept of seduction, which includes a ritualistic aspect that includes sacrifice: the seducer destroys what already exists. The seducer is aware of the tactics that a person being seduced may use to try to avoid the seduction, and also knows that, "if handled correctly" (Baudrillard 87), that person will succumb to the wish to be seduced (to be seduced is seductive). More importantly, the seducer must not fall into the trap. To be a seducer entails cruelty to oneself, as to others, to ensure the continuity of the game which is relentless. In the case of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Valmont and Merteuille are two seducers working together who eventually turn in on themselves, and they are destroyed.

Analogously, Julia Kristeva argues that the seducer must always be external, a figure who does not internalize his emotions. The seducer must play on the surface to keep seduction a game. Another way of thinking of the seducer is of someone who, according to Kristeva "is in search of conquest without possession" (195). Indeed, Kristeva's project focuses entirely on women's relationship to language. Through a psychoanalytic approach, Kristeva would change the very conceptualization of thought itself. For she views the speaking and writing subject in a constant process of constituting language: the speaking subject does so through his or her fluctuation between the semiotic and symbolic orders. Semiosis refers to the pre-Oedipal stage in which the speaking subject is receptive to all signifiers and no sexual difference exists. The symbolic order corresponds to Jacques Lacan's understanding of the Law of the Father, whereby the speaking subject enters into the more limited cultural discourse of language. Kristeva's theories of "*le sujet en proces*", of abjection, of femininity as negation and subversion, and poetic language closely parallel the strategies of seduction.

Michel Foucault, who likewise posits that the speaking subject is constituted through discourse, identifies the important question as being who gets to say what to whom. Power and knowledge can be understood as different points on a grid in which the nodals form points of concession or resistance to ever-changing configurations. In other words, there is nowhere "outside" of power and we must conceive of power as not only changing but also being continually productive.

Although Foucault certainly has been criticized for the exclusion of feminist issues from his theories, his viewpoint still provides an important element of how I wish to theorize the discourse of seduction. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, he argues

that a study of the prison system reveals a micro-version of the principles that characterize society at large. This includes its rulers who help as agents, not fixed oppressors, to perpetuate a system of international norms and self-regulating limits. Moreover, the individual speaking subject not only acts as a mechanism for the system but as well the individual's very sense of "self" must also be attributed to his or her relations to language and society. Thus, in terms of seduction, the binary of seducer/seduced must also be understood in relation to power and knowledge. This may also complicate the notion that the seducer as an isolated entity holds the power in this hierarchy.

Chapter four will explore some of the relations between parody and seduction as formal operations. This section begins with a comparison of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (double-voiced discourses), Foucault (parody as transgressive), and Linda Hutcheon (parody as repetition with critical distance). Hutcheon's theory is particularly useful, since she proposes that the ironic inversion of one book, paradoxically played out in another, signifies the artistic and intellectual distance (and connection) between the two texts. This parodic play, more importantly, parodies ideologies in startling ways. Many of the tropes of seduction formed in the Restoration or the Victorian periods, for instance, are reflective of some of the conventions and mores of these eras. Similarly, tropes of seduction in the twentieth century are simultaneously informed by historic paradigms and contemporary ideologies.

Parody itself needs to be read as a form of seduction, which is to say that one text may seduce another, or subvert it to do the bidding of another. The intertextuality of texts has always been playful and, of course, has always required a willing reader.

Seduction begins with a willingness, even if that will is tinged by skepticism and resistance. Parody, taken as a form of seduction, then elucidates some of the premises of Baudrillard's theory. For example, parody insists on drawing in the seduced, parodied text into its own realm of discourse. The text that is the seducer controls the medium of language and only selects that which it wants from the seduced text.

This discussion of parody is meant, finally, to introduce the rhetorical triangle that underlies the particular relevance to one another of such texts as *Kamouraska*, *No Fixed Address*, and *Ana Historic*. How texts can seduce other texts is the subject of discussion in a chapter on *No Fixed Address*, which parodies some of the classic formulations of the Don Juan myth. In *Ana Historic*, by contrast, it is the relationship of the constructed reader to the text – how the text seduces this reader – that is of central concern. The third part of this communicative triangle examines how narration itself can occupy the position of the seducer, allowing for multiple sites of power, and a theory of seduction that encompasses political contexts.

Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*, a French-Canadian novel written in the 1960's about a nineteenth-century love-murder triangle in Quebec, we are told, is based on true events. Chapter seven will open with an analysis of the discourses of the historical documents surrounding the murder and trial that followed. In this novel the question of innocence of the protagonist Elisabeth, is ultimately a question of performance. The retrospective narrative shifts between first, second, and third person, and the time frames can also change within mid-sentence. Elisabeth awaits her never-to-return lover in the house of her second husband, Jérôme Rolland, who lies dying in bed. She ostensibly creates the impression that she is the seduced, and thus also the victim of her three relationships. Yet

the binary of seducer/seduced breaks down in this novel as Elisabeth plays both roles, and so undermines the stability of any fixed identity. Elisabeth's whole narrative is a protest that she is innocent of the murder of her first husband, Antoine Tassy, although her narrative slowly reveals that she was in fact the instigator. Elisabeth's interior dialogue shows that she is very aware and overly concerned with how she thinks her society perceives her, or more precisely, her appearance of honour.

Since Elisabeth is a seducer, her narrative voice seems to sustain a theatrical dramatization of her life. She is of the upper class and has been raised in a woman's world by three spinster aunts who want to live their lives vicariously through her. She acknowledges that she invites drama into her life for its sheer excitement. Right away, when she meets Tassy at a hunting party, she knows that she is not so much interested in him as in what he represents to her. She identifies him as a "scoundrel" (63), when he wants her to commit a joint-suicide, and yet reaches happily into his madness, so different from the rest of her world. Elisabeth says that her life is "the theatre" (74) where she can stand anything except to be bored. She sees Antoine as someone capable of a language that refutes the conventions of their society, and she clearly shows they are in allegiance when she calls him her "accomplice" (37). Thus they sleep together under her aunt's roof in defiance of the propriety of these three women rather than out of sexual desire. Victorian morality and realist conventions are undermined through Elisabeth's passionate performance in both of her roles as protagonist and narrator.

Elisabeth as seducer opposes most clearly when she thinks to herself, "not two separate husbands....but one man, one and the same" (26), and she starts, at various points in the narrative, to elide the three men in her life. Although she shows a preference for

George Nelson who is her lover, she treats all of them as players in her drama. Creating a tragedy, Elisabeth now realizes nineteen years after the murder of Antoine that really she is more in love with the idea of death than any one of her lovers. This may be seen in Kristevan terms as Elisabeth's confrontation with her psyche: if you are not in love, then you are dead – if you are in love, you are in love with death.

Kamouraska's ultimate significance has yet to be understood in a larger cultural context. Although first published in French in 1970, this novel recounts the events that took place in a small Quebec town in 1840. Elisabeth uses her theatrical abilities and seductive strategies to subvert both French and English imperial authority. Thus this narrative serves to restage and expose the mechanics underlying colonial discourse. In particular, *Kamouraska* offers a political allegory of the relationship between Papineau and Mackenzie, between the French and English, in resisting colonial authorities. The year 1840 may recall the historical events of a particular love-murder triangle, but it also recalls the rebellions of 1837. For Elisabeth's lover, George Nelson, is a British-American Loyalist, and her desire for him represents her refusing both a French husband and colonial authorities who repress the patriots of Lower and Upper Canada in the rebellions of 1837. The language of the colonizer becomes suspect when disrupted by discourses of seduction that question the stability of imperial frameworks.

This novel also poses question about translation as a form of seduction:

Kamouraska was first translated into English in 1973, and it reached a much larger audience. To what extent is translation a form of transformation of the speaking subject? How discourses of seduction operate in the cultural relationships of English and French Canada says something about the production of colonial powers in general. As political

allegory, *Kamouraska* traces Elisabeth's multiple selves and desires, including her social identity as a daughter of New France, the wife of a French husband, and the lover of an English-Canadian who, along with her, subverts the colonial authorities and Victorian moralities in this sexual rebellion which seems to parallel the rebellion of 1837. If Elisabeth is a woman who looks like, she also subverts, Queen Victoria. So she recalls her prosecution by the Crown Attorney: "As if it makes the slightest difference to our dear Victoria-beyond-the-sea! What does she care if there's a little adultery, a little murder, way out there on a few acres of snowy waste that England once took away from France?" (38).

After such political questions, chapter six asks more formal questions about *No Fixed Address*, opening with a discussion of the history of literary representations of Don Juan. James Mandrell suggests that honour and seduction are intricately linked; moreover, that Don Juan offers "the exchange of trick for honour" (59). In Tirso de Molina's play, Don Juan breaks all the codes of honour in his society. He not only seduces women of all classes, he also betrays both his male friends (Don Alfonso and the Marquis by making cuckolds of them), and even kills the father of Doña Ana. Don Juan represents anarchy in that his betrayal of trust damages the social fabric. It can also be noted, though, that Tirso's play offers an implicit moral foundation, inasmuch as Don Juan acts as a scapegoat who is finally punished by society, so reunifying the society as a force against him. The marriages at the end of the play can in part be attributed to a greater appreciation of marital stability after the upheaval produced in the characters' lives by Don Juan.

When one turns to Lord Byron's "Don Juan," one finds a narrator who in some ways is more essential than Don Juan himself. This poem, which is another subtext for *No Fixed Address*, is told as a monologue from a narrator who seems to be older than Don Juan, and who states at the beginning that he is in search of "a hero" (1.1). The hero, however, comes out of the mock epic tradition. He seems more acted upon by the women than active himself: "With women he was what/They pleased to make or take him for" (501). Don Juan provides a palimpsest for the women's imaginations: to Dona Julia he is the bud of youth; to Haidee he is her one true passion; to Gulbayez he represents an androgynous, sentimental potential lover; and to Fult-Fitz he constitutes someone willing to take on the challenge of her phantom appearance.

An unlikely contemporary version of the Don Juan figure is the protagonist Arachne in Aritha van Herk's novel *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*. The novel starts with a critique of the history of underwear in the western world, and how it has constrained women. This piece ends by saying that no one has ever studied the influence of underwear in relation to "petty rogues" (10). A rogue, like a burlador (trickster), comes out of the Spanish picaresque tradition of a young man who journeys and encounters many unexpected problems along the way. *No Fixed Address* offers a parodic, contemporary retelling of the Don Juan myth.

In many respects, Arachne does not fit the characteristic image of the Don Juan seducer. She comes from a working class, immigrant background, has one true sentimental love, and never uses the gaze as a technique in her seductions. She is extremely impolite, awkward, and in general, hostile. She also does not ruin anyone's reputation, and on the contrary, as a woman seducer, she gives men a sense of new life.

Such is the case for an eighty-year-old seduced, Joseph, who is made to feel younger; upper-class Thomas who finally learns to feel natural around her; and the black pianist who plays his best music when he has an affair with her. Arachne's boundless passion thus transcends age, class, and race. "There is no map for longing," says the narrator (171). Arachne challenges the social fabric as does Tirso's Don Juan, yet this novel seems to offer a greater focus on women's psychological exploration of desire. *No Fixed Address* in some ways reflects current problematic feminist issues of how to address the Don Juan figure who appears almost misogynistic. *No Fixed Address* takes the focus away from the relationship of honour and seduction, and instead concentrates on how the position of the seducer changes when it is a woman who acts more like a trickster than a seductress. The difference may well be that a seductress relies on her beauty, whereas a seducer or trickster relies on her cunning.

Where *Kamouraska* challenges colonial authority, *No Fixed Address* challenges the patriarchal authority of Don Juan. A third novel in this argument raises questions about both male dominated perspectives and imperial authority by constructing women's experiences and accounts of their sexual relations from a postcolonial perspective. The very framework of *Ana Historic* and its textual fragmentation undermines the authority of master narratives, such as history with its claim to factual knowledge. The implications of this narrative are greater than just immediate power relations (sexual colonization); they also include the colonization of memory. The establishment of discourses of power and the erasure of historical subjects are revealed in the very process of writing history. Through privileging the imagination's role in reconstructing history, *Ana Historic* impedes the colonization of memory, and requiring in turn a new narrative of women

"giv[ing] birth to each other" (131) in the reading act. Now the point of seduction is not to reverse roles with the male, but to write "the real history of women" which "runs through our bodies" (131). This text becomes part of a greater postcolonial project because it attempts to reevaluate the historical positioning of the speaking subject in relation to the readers of history. The reader, in turn, becomes involved in the production of meaning as the text solicits the collaboration of "same-sex" writer/reader.

Thus exploring Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, chapter seven provides an alternative model for seduction narratives; feminist history shows how it is possible to resist the conventions of dominant discourse. The narrative, for example, multiplies and interconnects several stories in process. The narrative is generally from the first-person viewpoint of Annie Torrent, yet it is also the retelling of Annie's dead mother Ina, and the love story of Mrs. Richards, a historical figure who appears briefly in the Vancouver archive of the 1880's, and whom Annie baptizes Ana. In giving these other women voices, Annie also creates one for herself.

The other important personage in this novel is Zoe, Annie's only reader and editor of her manuscript. It is Zoe who suggests how to read this text by Daphne Marlatt – to "read with a different eye" (107). It is Zoe who asks Annie the crucial question, "so what do you want from her?" (91). Ostensibly, this question refers to Annie's disappointment with the choices made by the historical figure, Ana Richards. But the question shifts the conversation to remind Annie that she also needs to express what she wants from Zoe as well as from Ana. The three persons conflate into one as the division between individuals becomes blurred. Annie's own desires for Zoe are temporarily displaced through her writing that alludes to a lesbian relationship between Ana and the only other

independent frontierswoman, Birdie. This displacement creates an intriguing twist in the binary of seducer/seduced because in a sense the love object becomes this other discourse.

Finally, this chapter focuses on how a text seduces a reader into its desires. Encoded within the character of Zoe and her relationship to Annie is a means for the reader to actually participate in the text as a desiring, speaking subject. Only when Annie has articulated her own desires does Zoe invite her into the context of the rest of her life, and they spiritually and physically consummate the *jouissance* of their relationship. This is also the moment when Ana Richard's story can come peacefully to an end. Annie realizes the love story that she has created between Ana and Birdie is actually her own, and that she has the opportunity now to live it. Seduction is far-reaching, however, and so it is also the constructed reader as well as Annie who is seduced in the closing pages.

In these terms, reader and author become "same-sex" too, as joint creators, rather than reinscribing the old hierarchical relationship of author/reader. Again in the final pages of the novel, Zoe asks the question, "what is it you want?" (152), thus giving prominence to Annie as a desiring subject. The "you" of their lovemaking shifts reference from these two personae to the reader: "we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other – she and me. you. hot skin writing skin" (153). The "you" is the reader invited to participate in the writing of the literal and figurative desiring body of the female. The narrator appeals to "you," the constructed reader, in the closing scenes of the book, to "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (153). As a text with designs on the reader, this is a crucial narrative for demonstrating how a narrator seeks to engage the reader's desire for the text, for a continuation of the story/dialogue.

Confronted with inversions of classical seductions, this same-sex narrative elides the binary oppositions of seducer/seduced. The hierarchy cannot sustain itself when faced with multiple forms of ironic play. Parody thus invites the reader to recognize the classical trope, and also to engage in rewriting that trope. The reader not only decodes the narrative and its parody, but also his/her desire for the parodic play. There is also a parody of a more metaphysical sort in *Ana Historic*. While trying to recreate Ana Richard's personal past, Annie imagines her as witness to a birth described as "a massive syllable of slippery flesh slid[ing] out the open mouth" (126). This may be seen as a subversion of the Platonic/Christian metaphysics of the word made flesh. Here, instead, the "mouth speaking flesh" is the woman's body which reverses the old credo, and turns it into the flesh made word, the woman's body as the ground of being, both material and linguistic. But this kind of inversion also seduces the Gospel of John to new ends, makes it "speak" with another kind of "mouth."

A concluding chapter sets out to show what part these discourses of seduction might have to play in both feminism and identity politics. The long historical build-up to a reading of three Canadian texts turns back now to a reconsideration of the several narratives of colonialism, post-colonialism, and feminism. Elisabeth, *Kamouraska's* protagonist, refutes her colonized position under the male gaze within both French and English systems of imperialism. *No Fixed Address*, through its female reproduction of Don Juan, reinscribes the term "seducer" within a feminist ethos. And *Ana Historic*, offers a feminist-postcolonial text that seeks to subvert a variety of master narratives – history, religion, metaphysics – that could still be said to dominate our culture.

Through an examination of how discourses of seduction shape fictional identity, I hope finally to illumine the hermeneutics of power relations. In particular, I want to explore how these discourses evoke parody and artifice to undermine the hierarchical relationships associated with traditional binaries, and instead, blur sexual referentiality and multiply sites of power. It is my hope that such a project could help to further alter the figure of the seducer as an agent of social change.

2: A Selected History of Seduction in Literature

The discourse of seduction has always played an important role in literature, although there are many revealing shifts in the aesthetics of seduction as it has been produced in different time periods. Exploring these aesthetics requires first some identification of the paradigms of seduction used as part of literary conventions. My focus here will be largely on eighteenth and nineteenth-century discourses of seduction in the novel because in these two centuries there was a proliferation of seduction narratives. The four texts that I have chosen to discuss are nonetheless separated by a span of several hundred years and two distinct literary cultures. An historical analysis of discursive formations necessarily accompanies this move from medieval to enlightenment to late nineteenth-century social and political formations. Questions of power relations have to be historicized, since they are not a "timeless" question of gender, but a timebound effect of the social and political culture to which these texts belong.

In the medieval *Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, for example, Abélard uses his religious status to seduce and to repress that part of his own identity which is abject; he tries to mediate his role in the medieval society which privileges the discourse of religion over that of seduction. Héloïse subverts the societal structures that try to determine a circumscribed role for her by sublimating the discourse of religion into that of seduction. In the eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* comes to represent the success of the new, bourgeois class of values in which seducer and seduced also become part of an economy of exchange. Choderlos de Laclos's late eighteenth century *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* provides a revisionary narrative of *Clarissa* in as much as the seducer, Madame de Merteuil, suffers when she attempts to move beyond her station and outwit

her society through self-constructing performance. A century later, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* comes to symbolize the changing class tensions between commoners and aristocrats and depicts a new kind of aristocracy.

Even though these texts are products of specific historical conditions, they share a politics of control. The tropes that are found in the fiction of seduction are most significant in terms of identifying power relationships, not only between the seducer/seduced, but also between the reader and the text. Enumerating these tropes will enable a discussion of the amorous epistolary narrative and its specific relationship to the discourse of seduction, following which a frequent conflation of the discourse of rape and the discourse of seduction can be examined.

The paradigms of seduction in literature point to tension that exists between formulaic expectations and constant revisions to that very formula. For instance, the most conventional seduction has it that a woman will be the seduced and will pay a rather high price for playing in the games of seduction. Traditionally, the seduced has experienced a variety of social castigations, which alternately point out the hypocrisy of the society in which she lives because seduction may condemn seduction but at some level also covertly promotes it. The woman is thus socially compromised, always vulnerable to the damaging social effects of participating in seduction. And yet for her not to do so would be to deny almost life itself as seduction has often been the only means for a woman to renegotiate her identity in a society that would objectify her. The woman knows the formula very well and what risk it poses to play at being the seduced, yet she wants to participate in the rewriting of the code, thinking temporarily that it is possible that she is unique and will not be abandoned.

Strong links between the epistolary novel form and the exchange of correspondence in the novel serve to naturalize the discourse of seduction. As Linda Kauffman explains:

The narrative consists of events reported by the heroine to the lover; it is oblique and elliptical because we frequently see only the repercussions of events that, like the love affair itself, are never narrated. Other acts of communication are enacted rather than reported in the narrative: the heroine's writing reenacts seduction, confession, persuasion, and these constitute what 'happens' in the text. She writes in the mode of amorous discourse, transforming herself in the process from victim to artist. Style, subjectivity, and intertextuality are the motives for and subjects of the writing. These may seem incompatible, but since the discourse itself is the product of incompatible narrative impulses, it vacillates between vengeance and nostalgia, defiance and desire. (*Discourses* 26)

Kauffman's apt analysis of the epistolary form points to a common thread throughout all seduction narratives: the tension that comes from the expectation of a certain formula that is known and yet constantly under revision. That is to say, the tensions of the epistolary form that give agency to the seduced, who is "transforming herself in the process from victim to artist," ensure that tropes of seduction are made provisional because the seduced is given centre stage. Correspondence becomes her ultimate means to take on a performative role of seduced.

THE LETTERS OF ABELARD AND HELOISE

A medieval discourse of seduction in *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse* (ca. 1130) resonates with the passion and the pain of two ecclesiastical lovers who have been

separated through their religious orders. In their continuing correspondence, another sort of seduction is now enacted. For in these letters, the body becomes an important metaphor representing the intricacies of power between the seducer and the seduced. This power must also be understood in its larger social context as a performance that also seduces the reader. These letters form an eloquent, if at times bitter, love story in which two lovers after ten years of holy separation correspond once again.

What little-known historical facts of their lives there are appear through the letters themselves. Abélard, her tutor, in the house of her uncle Fulbert, a fellow Canon of the Church, has seduced Héloïse. She eventually becomes pregnant, and they marry in private against Héloïse's wishes because, as she argues in the letters, to do so privately would not appease her uncle, could jeopardize Abélard's liturgical career, and in her opinion, could only be viewed as "chains". Still unsatisfied as Héloïse has predicted, Fulbert takes his revenge on Abélard by sending his servants to castrate him. Following this brutal act, Abélard then insists that he and Héloïse should both take their vows, arguing that Héloïse do so first, thus revealing his fear that she may resist such a life choice. In their new roles, Héloïse becomes an abbess and Abélard becomes a renowned logician and philosopher.

In the Middle Ages, women's social roles were severely restricted and largely defined by men. Marital consent for girls was legally defined as being in force at age twelve. Property belonged to men through common and legal practices such as the rule of primogeniture. Working-class women could have serious responsibilities, nonetheless, in the textile and farming industries and many of them belonged to craft guilds. Ladies of the aristocracy likewise exhibited some power in their ability to act as patrons of the arts,

and they exercised considerable power in their management of business affairs, even though they did not have ownership. The most vulnerable women in this society were young unmarried women who had virtually no freedom of choice or legal rights. Women of the era who chose to enter into nunneries also had considerable freedom in that they were able to pursue scholastic interests and to have the support of a community. Thus, it is important to contextualize the social milieu of Abélard and Héloïse to understand more fully the power dynamics of their relationship.

Abélard's interest in Héloïse seems to stem partly from her relationship to her uncle Fulbert, who is also her legal guardian. Keep in mind that Abélard is a forty-year-old canon of the Church who has seduced a seventeen-year-old niece of a fellow canon. His fellow canon of the Cathedral, Fulbert, is at best his social equal, at worst his social inferior. Abélard and Héloïse in their correspondence seem to revel in the public spectacle of their previous affair; after all, he seduces her in the house of her uncle, circulates his love poetry in adoration of her in public, and supports her decision to have their child. From Fulbert's point of view, Abélard flaunts his abuse of the trust normally established between a guardian and a teacher, and he interferes with possibly other more profitable plans of marriage for Héloïse. Furthermore, he breaks the trust between brothers of the Church. Abélard subverts the established order of the Church by using Héloïse as a pawn in his game with Fulbert. In his letters, Abélard admits that he thrives on adversary and debate as a means to hone his intellectual skill, and he bases his entire career as a scholar on overturning the accepted methods of study of his time to insist on a dialectical approach. It seems possible, then, to imagine that Abélard's competitive nature leads him to challenge the social rules that try to dictate his behaviour.

Although Abélard and Héloïse are both somewhat older in the *Letters*, they are not exactly social equals. Peter Abélard is the eldest son of a feudal Breton lord; she is a girl of unusual education, due to the encouragement of her uncle to allow her to study, but not of noble birth. Héloïse is most likely to have been married into the merchant class of Paris. Abélard, as the son of a feudal lord, has gained an education that gives him ambitions to rise in the church hierarchy. Yet he also wants to find out what he is missing by denying his erotic nature. Abélard clearly indicates his confidence in his own ability to choose any woman for his seduction as he writes in the *Historia calamitatum* that he "feared no rebuff from any woman I might choose to honour with my love" (66). Although he reports that Héloïse is not a great beauty, he claims that her attraction for him lies in her intellectual prowess. Thus, he singles out a young woman renowned for her abilities in letters as well as the Latin classics. He is a seducer foremost in the sense that he takes one of the most sacred parts of his life, learning, and utilizes it as a strategy of seduction. As a teacher, he gains unhindered access to Héloïse when he becomes her tutor; he lives in her house, has complete authority over her, and determines the direction of her education. Of course, the education he gives her has little to do with formal learning. There is a misogynistic impulse in his desire to undermine the education of this woman. Abélard surely knows that, along with her social ruin, he will affect her access to knowledge and power by cutting short her opportunities to study seriously. Perhaps she symbolizes to him the joining of the erotic body and the logical mind in one figure — a configuration that he has not been able to achieve. (We know that Fulbert trusts him so completely with the charge of his niece because of Abélard's previous reputation for chastity.) Abélard might also feel threatened by Héloïse's youth and intellect because she

represents for him a time of beginning that only belongs to the young. His desire to seduce a much younger woman of a lower social class highlights the seducer's savage desire to maintain his class superiority and knowledge as weapons in the art of seduction.

Subsequent letters between Abélard and Héloïse thus create a dialogue between the past and the present, in which the epistolary genre creates momentary temporal convergences between the two time frames. So, for example, Héloïse can write of her passion as if it were happening now. Kauffman comments on the same phenomenon in the *Heroides*: “One generic legacy of the *Heroides* is that several time schemes function simultaneously; the heroine moves rapidly between past, present, and future. She is sometimes nostalgic, sometimes uncertain, sometimes hopeful. At times, she contrasts her past naivete with her present disillusionment” (*Discourses* 41). The illusion is that present writing can overcome any gaps of knowledge or any past acts that have managed to separate the lovers. Even so, Héloïse is now the seducer in that she wants to engage Abélard in writing as a way of keeping open the game of seduction between them. While he is now her opponent, he is at least interested enough to write, to quibble, to remember their past together, and to evade the demands of her rhetoric.

Of course, their mandates differ as Héloïse clearly wants him to acknowledge that he wrongfully led her to the cloister. In this sense, she subverts the ecclesiastical order far more radically in the letters she writes after his castration. She challenges the spiritual hierarchy in ways that he must renounce after he loses his motivation, so to speak. That is, Héloïse as an older adult articulates her continued desire for Abélard even in the prohibitive context of the nunnery. She overturns his authority by inciting him to partake in a discourse that he ostensibly wishes to reject. She demonstrates her love for him in

this risky strategy of openly stating her longing for him, whereas he can only covertly hint at his unfulfilled desires. Héloïse identifies the power relations that define their relationship, but she also continually challenges the legitimacy of that order. Héloïse becomes his nemesis because she refuses to allow him to write their past from his biased perspective, and instead insists that her views be taken into consideration. She also tantalizes Abélard through this renewed articulation of her desires.

According to Peggy Kamuf, “Abélard’s action takes its meaning from the economy of contractual limits to which it assigned their exchange. Seeing her precede him into the convent stabilizes the order of mastery and submission and negates the destabilizing experience of the erotic” (Kamuf 19). Héloïse uses hard reasoning but also artistic visioning to persuade Abélard, turning his limited economy into a transgressive one: “Beyond all limits and all bounds, Héloïse’s entry into the convent cannot represent for her a conversion in the conventional sense for it is proof precisely of transgression of the convent’s limits. Secular/monastic, chastity/licentiousness are clearly two of the oppositions which are set whirling in this boundlessness” (Kamuf 13). Abélard, in contrast, wants to convince Héloïse that his mastery and the light of God were the correct path to choose; he refuses to recognize the depth of her dissatisfaction. Neither of them is willing to blatantly dismiss the other because, “to maintain the fiction of this mastery, as to continue the pedagogical pretext, is to keep alive the possibility of the erotic subtext in which neither is master. Only in this pretext of submission can she create a backstage for her desire within the public theater of its denial or its subjection” (Kamuf 17).

Surprisingly, at the heart of this seduction is the castration of Abélard, a site of loss and of horror. Since Abélard cannot confront the horror of his own small death – the

castration – he remains impotent in other ways. He justifies his castration as an act of God that was “wholly just and merciful” because it “reduced in that part of my body which was the seat of lust and sole reason for those desires, so that I could increase in many ways; in order that this member should justly be punished for all its wrongdoing in us, expiate in suffering the sins committed for its amusement, and cut me off from the slough of filth in which I had been wholly immersed in mind as in body” (147-48).

Abélard’s speech suggests that it is his genitalia itself – “this member should justly be punished” – which, once rejected, should take responsibility for his past lust, rather than he himself. In this sense, he manages to evade responsibility for his past actions as a seducer. More importantly, his very denial points to divisions in the self.

Abélard wants the mastery of a unified self and tries to find it in the discourse of religion and catharsis. He views his castration as a sort of resurrection, which is confirmed when he writes: “I deserve death and gain life” (149). He wants purification, but seduction draws him into the realm of artifice where the boundaries of the self are not so clear. His honour, a value intrinsic to any narrative of seduction, allows him to translate the scene of horror into a religious purification ritual. His honour vindicates his allowance of the servant who castrated him to be served the same punishment, and his honour gives him the confidence to enter the Church and circulate again in society while casting off the horror of the abject.

Letter writing thus becomes a border of abjection, and seduction becomes a means to explore the boundaries of the self. Abélard is drawn into a correspondence with Héloïse, in part because at some level he wants to explore that part of his identity that is abject. As Kristeva describes it, abjection is “not lack of cleanliness or health....but what

disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*Powers* 4). Abélard rejects, yet simultaneously is drawn towards, a place of non-meaning; he feels the *jouissance* of the abject. He engages in writing because it enables him to articulate what has passed. Abélard sublimates their love on every level into a discourse of religion. He writes so as to assert his authority, but at the same time, his authority is challenged by being put into dialogue with Héloïse’s opposing arguments that contest the possibility of maintaining that there is one truth. Kauffman elucidates this type of semiotic element in their correspondence: “Only in writing can they speak openly; this equation of writing with sexual freedom, transgression, and seduction is reiterated throughout Héloïse’s correspondence, as if she never forgot the lesson Abélard taught her” (*Discourses* 64).

Abélard wants to write the script, justifying his castration as a means of purification, but he is left with a scar, which has in turn left its own writing on his body. The scar is a constant reminder of the presence/absence of the phallic. Writing for Abélard both recalls his scar and is simultaneously an attempt to write over it. Thus, his uncertain engagement with the abject leads to an element of ambiguity in his writing.

Abélard tries to suppress the semiotic in his discourse by giving primacy to the symbolic order, and thus he attempts to reject the discourse of seduction. Abélard, in many ways, is representative of the superego wherein reason reigns supreme and feelings are subordinated. Kristeva has described the abject as an alter ego to the Other, which in turn threatens the unity of the superego: “Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing” (*Powers* 11). It is from

this “territory” of the abject that identity formation occurs, however temporary and provisional it may be. Thus, by engaging in the act of writing, Abélard paradoxically illuminates the abject while simultaneously rejecting it.

There is a price to pay, however, for a subjectivity which relies on such containment of divisions. As Kristeva suggests, “Mother and death, both abominated, abjected, slyly build a victimizing and persecuting machine at the cost of which I become subject of the Symbolic as well as Other of the Abject” (*Powers* 112). Abélard establishes a system of exclusion that would deny such heterogeneity of seduction. Repeatedly, he dismisses Héloïse’s claims as a way to exclude her point of view and to marginalize her discourse of seduction. He writes, for example, in his first reply to Héloïse that she should censor her writing so that he “may answer as God permits me” (119). His desire to contain Héloïse is in part because she is intrinsically linked to his own self-loathing, due to the fact that his initial lust for her led to his castration. Honour is a way to translate scenes of horror; thus, he focuses on the code of ethics that he must uphold in the society to remain a part of it, rather than to understand or acknowledge that his correspondence with Héloïse sublimates his desires into a religious discourse.

Abélard attempts to stave off abjection by seducing Héloïse to his way of thinking. He tries to act as a procurer between Héloïse and God. Abélard can be read as the cruel seducer who sees his seduced object as one that moves within the limits of an economy of exchange in which she is merely a commodity. Ultimately, however, the seducer wants to know that he has control of the situation, and that he is not the seduced when the final cards are played. Abélard will go to any extent to ensure that Héloïse remains under his ultimate authority, even if that requires using God Himself as a pawn, and as the next

seducer, to ensure that the seduced does not gain control. It must be God, and not another man who wins Héloïse, because Abélard wants her to forfeit her will to him alone. If she accepts God, as Abélard proposes, then he knows that she has completely submitted to his (Abélard's) desires. So Abélard reproaches her with these words: "If you are anxious to please me in everything, as you claim, and in this at least would end my torment, or even give me the greatest pleasure, you must rid yourself of it [Héloïse's bitterness of heart toward their entry into religious life]" (145).

This dizzying bid for power leads Abélard into small traps within his own logic. For example, he asks Héloïse and the nuns to pray for him, but there is a logical fallacy in his analogy because he compares himself to the risen dead in the bible, whereas he really wants protection from death rather than benedictions should he die in God's service. It is fair enough that Abélard does not seek out his physical death (although his focus in the letter also seems rather selfish because he focuses on how Héloïse can satisfy his needs after her letter blatantly asks him to discuss hers). However, in symbolic terms, death and resurrection in the bible have been associated with spiritual transformation and epiphany. Abélard is not willing to embrace transformation and instead focuses on death as morbidity and the abject as a threat to his sense of unity. Ironically, he suggests in his biblical analogy that the epiphany will belong to his Other – to Héloïse: "for in being brought back to life she received her own body from death just as those other women received the bodies of their dead" (122). The more accurate analogy would have Abélard seeking transformation and enlightenment through God's will. Of course, a seducer is not bound to strictly follow the rules of logic; however, in this correspondence, Abélard and Héloïse use their intellectual prowess as one of the terms of seduction. Thus the

slightly faulty analogy that Abélard sets up also points to his desire to have his own way even if that means overreaching the coolness of strategy required in true rhetorical debating style. Kauffman also notes Abélard's self-absorption in that, as she comments on their relationship, "[Héloïse] repeats the fundamental motif of amorous epistolary discourse by situating her identity absolutely in the absent beloved....Abélard, in contrast, can find absolutely nothing to live for. It never occurs to him to live for Héloïse" (*Discourses* 69).

Although Abélard is the seducer, his discourse reveals that he longs for the more passive role of the seduced. Note, for example, his reference to the ear in Abélard's plea to Héloïse: "Listen, I beg you, with the ear of your heart to what you have so often heard with your bodily ear" (123). Abélard is ostensibly asking Héloïse to be a good wife and abbess by praying for him, but it is rare for him to refer directly to her body in the present (excluding his references to their liaison ten years prior). This brief mention of the ear merits further investigation, given the significance of the ear in medieval history and literature. There is a belief depicted in some writings and paintings that the birth of Christ was through the ear of the virgin rather than her womb; thus suggesting interchangeability between the ear canal and the birth canal. This belief was clearly a way of separating the birth of Christ from the sexuality of a woman. Abélard requires Héloïse to open her heart to his predicament instead of focusing on her carnal desires. He wants a mother figure devoid of sexuality that will comfort and understand him. Thus, at some level, he wants to surrender his power as seducer to Héloïse; he wants to be the loved object. Abélard's wish masks one of the key elements of seduction; however, there is no relationship in seduction that is neutral. In this case, Abélard counts on Héloïse's

compliance with his request and yet, at the same time, expects to continue in a position of power even though he wishes to reconfigure their relationship.

Héloïse, as the seduced, is asked to sacrifice a part of her identity to the Virgin Mary. In her essay "Stabat Mater," Kristeva has critiqued representations of the Virgin Mary and its effects on the symbolic division of women from their bodies. Kristeva's reading of the Virgin Mary as constructed by western Christianity reveals that it has "produced one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilization" (*Tales* 237). Abélard wants Héloïse to identify with this powerful construct in order to colonize the body of Héloïse for his own purposes. Abélard wants Héloïse to be like Mary, at once a mother but at the same time reclaiming the 'innocence' of virginity by insisting that she take the veil so that she can become "the bride of Christ" (137). Similarly, Kamuf points out how Abélard's indirect references to the female body are a way of constituting his reign over Héloïse: "As we have already seen, the black bride analogy reduces contradiction by substituting for the open confrontation of two different but mutually implicating locales of desire a singular space that is circumscribed and contained by an undifferentiated masculine will articulated on the undimensional surface of a woman's body. In effect, Abélard's first response to the renewed threat of Héloïse's desire is a displaced repetition of her earlier cloistering" (*Fictions* 32).

Thus, a conflation of identities appears in the metonymic substitution of Héloïse's ear for that of the Virgin. As Kristeva notes: "The Virgin obstructs the desire for murder or devouring by means of a strong oral cathexis (the breast), valorization of pain (the sob), and incitement to replace the sexed body with the ear of understanding" (*Tales* 257).

Abélard's sublimated desires thus lead to substitutions that take place on several levels. If

Héloïse's and the Virgin's bodies blur together, the emotions and pain of Héloïse become abstracted; they are now symbolic and taken out of the personal realm of her relationship with Abélard to signify on a religious and symbolic plane. In addition, if Héloïse's ear is that of the Virgin's, the implication is that the sign must repeat itself. Thus, Héloïse is made aware that she is only one in a long line of substitutions of women. The Virgin is praised as unique at the expense of other women who must always be a poor imitation. Similarly, Kauffman observes that, "Narrative time in amorous discourse is further complicated by each heroine's awareness that she is neither the first to be seduced nor the last to be abandoned by her lover" (*Discourses* 41). So, Abélard's attempt to liken the ear of the Virgin and Héloïse implies a displacement of his previous physical liaison with Héloïse. In a sense, he negates their joint responsibility of the birth of their child by intimating that Héloïse transcends physicality of normal parenting. "Thus, just as Abélard once relied on letters to seduce Héloïse, he now uses letters to seduce her with the logic of his argument and to reconcile her to her barrenness" (*Discourses* 81).

In her own poetic writing, Kristeva refutes this notion that the experience of motherhood can be completely separated from the body: "Taut eardrum, tearing sound out of muted silence....I no longer hear anything, but the eardrum keeps transmitting this resonant vertigo to my skull, the hair. My body is no longer mine, it doubles up" (*Tales* 242). A mother's experiences, whether through the ear canal or the birthing canal, seems to be one of sound, music, and pain. And yet Kristeva uncovers a fundamental division in the subjectivity of the mother figure: "A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language – and it has always been so" (*Tales* 254). Women's relationship to language must then carry a degree of duplicity in

the sense of doubleness or ambiguity, which is more like an inherent part of the arsenal of seduction.

A certain ambiguity in *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse* illustrates how seduction is ostensibly about a private relationship but still signifies in the public sphere. The prime reason Abélard picked Héloïse was so that they could correspond. As Abélard writes: “Knowing the girl’s knowledge and love of letters I thought she would be all the more ready to consent, and that even when separated we could enjoy each other’s presence by exchange of written messages in which we could speak more openly than in person, and so need never lack the pleasures of conversation” (66). Héloïse is known for the verse and song Abélard writes about her and circulates in public. These letters are a performance that reveal an acute consciousness of the public and the private merging, while simultaneously refusing to directly acknowledge that what is private has been given a place on stage in order to be performed before the audience of society.

The letters make allusions nonetheless to their awareness of a watching society. As Héloïse claims, “Every wife, every young girl desired you in absence and was on fire in your presence; queens and great ladies envied me my joys and my bed” (115). In the course of the personal letters, Héloïse frequently draws attention to the class system, using it to show how far her love goes. Thus, in this sense, the class system becomes the social measure of her love even though she may illustrate her love through her rejection of any social ambition; for example, she uses the analogy that she would rather be his whore than the wife of a prince. Similarly, she talks about the envy others feel for them and feel for Abélard’s brilliance as much as she does about their private love.

Indeed, Héloïse suggests that it may be permissible to be a hypocrite in the Church, the public sphere, so long as the performance is acceptable. She writes to Abélard: “And yet perhaps there is some merit and it is somehow acceptable to God, if a person whatever his intention gives no offence to the Church in his outward behaviour, does not blaspheme the name of the Lord in the hearing of unbelievers nor disgrace the Order of Lord in the hearing of unbelievers nor disgrace the Order of his profession amongst the worldly” (134).

Héloïse’s confession of her hypocrisy serves one other function according to Kamuf: “The protest of her hypocrisy – its confession not to God, but to Abélard – parallels dangerously an attempt at seduction. Héloïse is seeking to draw Abélard out from behind the mirror with which he steadies her image so that he might once again fall within her own erotic frame: ‘Give me at least through your words...some sweet semblance of yourself’” (*Fictions* 26). For Héloïse knows that theatre may be her last resort from where she is positioned in the cloister. Her desire to form an identity independent of the veil then becomes a matter of survival: “Taking the veil is thus synonymous, for Héloïse, with self-annihilation. She characterizes her love as an independent entity. Sometimes it submits to tyranny; sometimes it doesn’t. In any case, it rarely acts in what she considers her own best interest, and frequently either it is betrayed or it betrays her” (*Discourses* 67).

CLARISSA

Social interaction plays an equally important role in later development of the discourse of seduction in *Clarissa*. Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, first published in

1747-48, is considered by many the first complete novel in English, and it happens to be a tale of seduction. That is to say, the entire plot revolves around Clarissa Harlowe upholding her virtue despite the far-reaching attempts of Lovelace to corrupt her. As in *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, this eighteenth-century novel makes what is private very public. The social and cultural contexts of Héloïse and Clarissa are very distinct, however. Between these texts there is a shift from Catholic hierarchy to the Protestant middle-class, and the transformation of "spiritual" seduction into a world of bourgeois economics, where a greater value is put upon social standing and the proper "price". The challenge of the seducer is not aimed at just Clarissa but rather at her social-climbing milieu. In this way, various social orders play an instrumental role in resisting, manipulating, or encouraging the seduction. Servants, for instance, play a role in the seduction that is complicated, not only by their loyalties to particular members of the household or community, but due to their economic dependence on their employers. Confidantes, another influence for which the seducer must account, pose one of the largest threats to any seduction. Another factor in seduction is the use of correspondence, which invariably goes awry, thus adding to the drama. A study of such factors in seduction reveals its interdependence on social context; seduction only thrives when it is part of the public domain.

This novel is thus in many ways a product of its time. Over the span of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in England, unprecedented events helped to reshape social expectations. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their synopsis of British history point out there were two revolutions within a period of fifty years: the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789), and during this period two kings

were deposed and one was killed. In addition, Puritanism came to pose a serious threat to the Anglican Church. The English Revolution (1640-1660), though it failed to establish a republican form of government in its execution of Charles I in 1649, and failed, in the Act of Uniformity (1662), to end religious conformity in England, nonetheless established a precedent for liberal reforms in religion and government alike. By the late seventeenth century, the English had moved from a monarchical- and church-dominated society to a government of parliamentary supremacy (after the Glorious Revolution of 1688). Thus, for the first time in Anglo-Saxon history, Church and State were effectively separated. After this long state of turmoil, the Act of Toleration was finally passed in 1689, which gave citizens the right to religious freedom and legal protection from religious prosecution.

The expansion of the middle class, the increase of literacy, and the formation of a larger reading public contributed to the changing face of British society. Richardson himself came from the middle class, and his first novel *Pamela* (1740) artistically rendered the values upheld by his class such as the virtues of morality, industry, and ambition. His style of writing reflected the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility in vogue that reacted to the vice of the Restoration plays with at times what current aestheticism would find as laughable sentimentality. Richardson was probably also influenced by his contemporaries Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope who wrote in imitation of the Roman Augustans, and whose portrayal of women in their own writings depicted the ideal woman as demure and polite. Middle-class men felt it their duty to financially support their wives, which led to the stereotype of women as idle creatures. A woman's education at this time consisted almost solely of domestic skills such as

embroidery, sketching, and musical accomplishments. A small circle of aristocratic women in the 1760's, known as the "bluestockings" because of their intellectual prowess, were derided by contemporaries and in literature as being too "manly".

Women's roles were nonetheless as restricted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as they had been in the Middle Ages. Unmarried women were slightly better off in that they could at least own property, although this fact also made them more vulnerable to abductions and family pressures. A married woman was slightly worse off in that she basically abdicated her legal rights after matrimony. A married woman could not own property nor make a will. She was legally considered an extension of her husband rather than a person in her own right. This legal status meant that she had no right to divorce, nor custody of her children, nor could she make decisions with respect to her own body. English husbands could legally imprison their wives in their houses until 1891.

Clarissa alludes to a number of these issues facing women in the eighteenth century, in particular, women's legal rights, class privileges, and level of literacy. In *Clarissa's* case, she is a woman of some learning as indicated by her ability to write letters, although her scholastic endeavors seem to end there. Her family's antagonism towards her in large part stems from her siblings' jealousy that she has inherited their grandfather's small estate, and it is her choice how it will be utilized. Repeatedly, *Clarissa* makes reference to this ownership through her statements that she would willingly give up this property, as material goods are apparently of no value to her compared to the importance of family harmony.

The Harlowe family, part of the eighteenth-century British bourgeoisie, has aspirations to climb the social and economic ladders of their society through the profitable marriages of their daughters. The text draws attention to social interrelations through events that have taken place prior to the commencement of the epistolary narrative. Lovelace's interest in Clarissa is put in the context of the family having picked him out for her sister, Arabella, and of a dispute with their brother over a related misunderstanding. Lovelace cites vengeance against the family as his main reason for his seduction of Clarissa. He pits her family and Clarissa against one another so that she will be left without familiar alliances.

Lovelace's motives run deeper than the ones that he cites. His vengeance is rooted in social class struggles. We know that Lovelace is of a higher social caste than the Harlowe family. He is wealthy in his own right and will inherit the estate of Lord M, with whom he has an obsequious relationship. However, he is an aristocrat who is morally corrupt. Lovelace uses his wealth and status only to further his full-time engagement with matters of seduction; he has no other productive role in society. As an eighteenth-century seducer, Lovelace represents the tensions between the aristocracy and bourgeoisie of Protestant England. He is an aristocrat who appears as a reactionary conservative, seeking to thwart the rising middle class by unsettling the virtue of the whole family.

Clarissa's motivation also shows that she knows what is at stake, at least to some extent, in terms of power relationships. For example, she refuses to give up her correspondence with Lovelace as a bargaining chip with her family so that she can negotiate against their attempts to pressure her into a marriage with Mr. Solmes. Byron

Wells notes that, while Clarissa may “abhor such expedients, she does accept the necessity of resorting to artifice and deceit in order to achieve what she desires” (*Dialectics* 23). Thus, she realizes that there is a paradox in her situation between how she should act and the impossibility of doing so if she is to maintain a sovereign sense of identity.

The reader sympathizes with Clarissa’s predicament, given her parents’ unrelenting treatment of her as a commodity under their ownership to be sold to the highest bidder. Her father solicits her affections and loyalties as reasons why Clarissa should follow his bidding, yet he does not return these sentiments, and thus his demands are hypocritical. Clarissa’s father is interested only in the best bargain that he can acquire which will improve his own financial and social status. Mr. Solmes may not be as well connected as Lovelace, but his estates will provide an important addition to the Harlowe’s, and Mr. Solmes feels likewise that the marriage would be a wise financial merger. Her impatient and at times discourteous attitude to Mr. Solmes indicates that Clarissa spiritedly resists her family’s classification of her worth as a commodity to be traded for their own personal, material gain. Perhaps at some level as well she knows that her ethereal beauty merits the greater potential embodied in the person of Lovelace, even though Mr. Solmes is more her class equal. Clarissa knows that her virtue, which is an integral part of her personal sense of identity, represents for everyone else in her life the success of the new, bourgeois economy of value.

Clarissa’s value, of course, is this beauty of spirituality, which is represented in the novel as the ideal aesthetic, even though this aesthetic is incongruent with the entrepreneurial vision of her class. This intangible quality, which makes her more regal

than the most blueblood aristocrat, causes Lovelace to feel antagonistic toward her because she is his superior in one sense. Clarissa and women like her provide a bridge to cover the gap between the classes. She represents a commodity that a member of the aristocracy desires, and can have at a certain price, that of admitting members of the middle class into his own social milieu through the marriage market. The fact that Lovelace continually consoles himself and his confidante John Belford in his pledge to marry Clarissa should she survive his "tests" reveals that he is well aware of his supposed contractual obligations to her family. His criteria are the same as those of the Harlowes in that a marriage based on socio-economic benefits is perceived as a perfectly acceptable tool of reconciliation.

As Terry Eagleton observes, "In an oppressive society, writing is the sole free self-disclosure available to women, but it is precisely this which threatens to surrender them into that society's power" (*Rape* 49). At the same time, there is a potential for women to enter into a discourse of seduction that sidesteps the logic of society's conventions. Clarissa, for example, can at times appear transparent, naïve, and straightforward. Without completely rejecting this characterization, it is important to note that Richardson set up his plot so that, while Clarissa may seem inexorably carried along by circumstances beyond her control, she is also represented with many options that she has time to weigh and to choose. It is Clarissa who makes the shrewd observation that, "I have said that I think Mr. Lovelace a vindictive man: upon my word, I have sometimes doubted, whether his perseverance in his addresses to me has not been more obstinate since he found himself so disagreeable to my friends" (61). In fact, Clarissa realizes that the challenge for him is her unavailability in the face of an entire

family willing to enter into the fight. In a sense she cannot escape the seduction, as Eagleton observes: "There is no way she can escape from Lovelace without talking to him, and to talk is to create a certain complicity. If Clarissa negotiates she is guilty of compromise; if she refuses to bargain her position becomes even more untenable" (82).

In a sense, Clarissa's family is as much the object of Lovelace's attentions as she is herself. Through his strategizing, he turns the family in on itself. Her mother makes an alliance with her father against Clarissa. Cousin Morden in Florence takes on the role of intermediary, yet he arrives too late for any effective conciliatory action. After Clarissa's "disgrace," her brother and sister take advantage of her supposed seduction to disinherit Clarissa of her fortune. As a seducer, Lovelace likewise plays upon the greed and snobbery of the Harlowe family. Clarissa tries to make an alliance with her cousin Dolly Hervey who advises Clarissa to take up her own estate and wed Lovelace (a business-like approach). However, Dolly is made the messenger who must take Clarissa's keys. Clarissa tries to win Dolly back to her side when she suggests, "[T]ry if your gentleness cannot prevail for me" (107). Anyone could take her keys away, but it has to be Dolly, the Harlowe's way of ensuring that Dolly will submit to their will and take their part against Clarissa.

Lovelace's seduction also affects the relationships of the servants within the family. Hannah, Clarissa's personal maid, is fired for participating in the illicit correspondence between Clarissa and Lovelace, although the text presents Clarissa's writing to him as an innocent action, for the most part. Servants are made instrumental in furthering his plot. As Clarissa herself observes, "This man [Lovelace], somehow or other, knows everything that passes in our family" (46). Leman is the servant who keeps Lovelace informed and

who goes so far as to come into the permanent employment of Lovelace for the extensive services he renders with respect to the seduction, his greatest service being when he pretends to be Clarissa's brother/father/servant pursuing her so as to cause her to flee her family home. This, of course, is the act that sets her tragic history in motion. And here are all of the elements of a game or hunt: psychological persuasion, false representation, drama, and a false sense of urgency. Clarissa signals her awareness of such intrigues under way when she comments with regard to Leman's treachery toward her brother and Lovelace: "So, possibly, this man may be bribed by both, and yet betray both" (83). If the reader has any doubts that Lovelace intends to manipulate the family in his seduction of Clarissa, the narrator intrudes by way of a footnote: "All the time they [the Harlowes] were but as many puppets danced upon Mr. Lovelace's wires" (70). In a further effort to explain Lovelace's motivations, the narrator notes how "resistance was a stimulus to him" (93).

Other servants likewise benefit from the seduction. Betty, a Harlowe servant, is elevated in power within the household once the dispute is underway. Forming an alliance with Clarissa's brother, James, she becomes Clarissa's guard. Betty takes on duties that are beyond the normal responsibilities of a maid, listening in on conversations, checking Clarissa's wardrobe to ensure that she does not take any of her clothes away, in short, observing and regulating all of the most intimate details of Clarissa's life. Thus, for Betty, the seduction, which causes the family to fracture into many alliances, provides her with the opportunity to claim a position of authority. A great deal depends on strategies that incorporate the services of the servants: letters arriving on time; organizing

escape plans; lying to gain compliance; encouraging/discouraging certain alliances to name but a few.

Often the real adversary of the seducer happens to be the seduced's confidante. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for example, Valmont's anger turns on Madame Volanges for her private warnings to Madame Tourvel against him based on his reputation as a seducer. In Richardson's novel, Anna Howe appears as a voice of pragmatism and insight, the reader's confidante as much as she is Clarissa's. It is Miss. Howe who realizes that Clarissa must marry Lovelace to be respectable even if it is not her true desire. Lovelace also knows that marital status is paramount for Clarissa's survival in society, and therefore, when he does contemplate it, marriage is seen as her reward: "But if she resist [seduction] – if she nobly stand her trial? Why then I will marry her" (157). As a seducer, Lovelace understands how the confidante gives the seduced another point of view, which in turn works against the seducer's strategy to isolate the seduced from the rest of society. The confidante makes it more difficult for him to become a mesmerizing force so that the seduced will enter into the seducer's logic. The confidante likewise gives the seduced other resources, providing outside information such as public opinion on the reputation of the seducer. Through the process of writing down what she thinks and feels, and by reenacting the scene of seduction in words in her letters to her confidante, the seduced can pause to reflect and to articulate her experiences.

As Kauffman sees it, "Reading and writing are part of the drama enacted in the heroine's private theatre" (*Discourses* 36). The advantage of reading and writing is that the seduced can gain insight into her relations with the seducer which will make her more objective and therefore more resistant. The character of Miss. Howe is thus provided in

part for functional reasons, so that we have a means to know what Clarissa is thinking. Therefore, whatever Clarissa writes appears transparent and natural, and yet at the same time we know this is not fully the case because Clarissa constantly justifies her actions to Miss. Howe. Moreover, Clarissa highly values Miss. Howe's good opinion of her. In a sense, Miss. Howe becomes a filter for the rest of society and certainly the greatest sounding board for Clarissa's conscience. She listens to and honours more carefully Miss. Howe's opinions than those of the rest of her family or of Lovelace. Despite their close relationship, Miss. Howe is not a mirror for Clarissa; instead, she provides a mirror of how society interprets Clarissa's predicament.

Clarissa's correspondence with Miss. Howe also gives her a steam valve, so to speak, for she needs a space and time in which she can pour out her feelings without fear of harsh judgement or interfering self-interest. Clarissa is actually able to express her desires more clearly to Miss. Howe than to any other character in the novel. Even though her feelings may be directed towards Lovelace, she only realizes her desires in words through her letters to Anna. Foucault notes that such shifts in focus are often indicative of a certain verisimilitude, "shifting the most important moment of transgression from the act itself to the stirrings – so difficult to perceive and formulate – of desire" (*History* vol 1. 20). Thus, there is a shift in which the focus of transgression is not on the body itself so much as on desire, and it is through confession that desire is put into discourse. Miss. Howe is the interlocutor between Clarissa and the reader via their correspondence. A space is created in which Clarissa can articulate her every desire, confess her desires, confirm her beliefs, and betray her own sentiments. The confidante becomes a menace to the seducer in that s/he intervenes in the relationship of seducer/seduced. Firstly, she

communicates to the seduced how society perceives her every action and attending possible interpretations. Secondly, the confidante is a kind of lover, which would explain the seducer's reaction of jealousy to her. The seduced confesses her desires and waits with anticipation and anxiety to have a response that will give her judgement. In this sense, there is more intimacy between the seduced and the confidante than between the seducer and the seduced.

The novel, written in prose, distinguishes itself from lyric poetry or older epistolary forms in that there is more than the confessional discourse, one would see, for example, in *Heroides*; for the confession is now perceived as a habitual action. Clarissa does not pour out her soul to Miss Howe once; rather, it is almost a daily occurrence by which her sentiments are traced in the greatest detail. The discourse of seduction thus shifts from merely recounting larger events, such as the exposure of a love affair, a misplaced letter, or a vengeful shooting, to such mundane details as the seducer's capacity to call her by her first or last name. This shift signifies that the reader of literary seduction must seek out the signs of seduction in every word and action, as it becomes polyvalent.

Another effect is that the discourse of seduction is privileged: all other discourses are filtered through it. For example, we know that issues of class are of primary importance in *Clarissa*, but they only come into play when they somehow relate to the seduction. This attention to details within the discourse of seduction points out the pecuniary nature of seduction as an economy based on trade and exchange.

For example, a "normalized" part of the seduction is seen in the reorganization of servants: in the case of Clarissa, Hannah is first dismissed and then finds service again under Lovelace's tutelage as part of his scheme (even though she cannot accept this

position due to an illness probably caused by her dismissal from the Harlowe's estate). Nevertheless, we must recognize that her livelihood becomes dependent not only on her ability to perform the tasks of a maid (light the fires, clean, run errands) but also on her willingness to procure. Likewise, Lemman wants to know of Lovelace if his betrayal of the Harlowe family will be rewarded by his new master. Thus, although seduction is generally deemed a scandal – relegated to the margins of society – all sorts of small allowances are made to ensure its continued production. It is a well-accepted hypocrisy that the woman who is seduced or allows herself to be seduced will also be ostracized or in some form castigated by society. Yet society encourages seduction by not castigating the seducer and in many ways by being complicitous with him.

Lovelace attempts to secure Clarissa's confidence by trying to take her servants into his services, prevailing on her to borrow money from him after he has secretly deprived her of her existing funds, and by acting as an intermediary between her and her family. The expectation of the seducer is that such indebtedness will lead the loved one into a more intimate relationship with him. A transfer of allegiance is thus a significant part of seduction – transferring one's loyalty from society, or confidantes or God, to the seducer. And since the seducer resents the restrictions society places upon him, seduction becomes a symbolic ground of revenge against society, in which the woman embodies the rules of society, even if she may try to be otherwise.

When Lovelace is on the verge of kidnapping Clarissa, she says to him in the garden: "I cannot go with you....I wrote you words so – let go my hand and you shall see the letter" (129). Essentially, Clarissa wants him to substitute the letter for her body. The letter is given primacy over the hand that is now only an instrument of the letter.

The letter carries as much authority, in other words, as a sign of the constancy of her thought as it does as a record of events. In this moment, Clarissa uses her letter as a bargaining tool. As Brigitte Glaser posits, “Thus letters in Richardson’s novel are occasionally employed for purposes outside their normal domain of mere communication of information, emotions, and ideas, and turned into strategic tools” (115). This epistolary medium of Richardson’s novel can thus serve as a metonym of the body, as the part that stands in place of the whole.

Leading up to the climax of the novel – the rape of Clarissa – are a number of scenes of seduction. One of the more famous ones takes place at the brothel where Clarissa is held against her will. Lovelace’s accomplices are Sally, Polly, Dorcas, and Mabel, who are all either fallen women or prostitutes. When Lovelace lures Clarissa out of her room into the hallway to ravish her, he is stopped by her act of desperation and courage. Rather than attempting to fend off her attackers, Clarissa turns the penknife in her possession on herself saying “The LAW only shall be my refuge” (327). But by turning the knife on herself, she circumvents the expected outcome of Lovelace’s scheme; she essentially turns herself into a weapon. This story is told in retrospect, of course, through correspondence. It is important to note that immediately following this scene Clarissa escapes and writes to her support network: Miss. Howe, Hannah, and Mrs. Norton. At every point in this scene of seduction, their respective accomplices or confidantes accompany either the seducer or the seduced; that is to say, the act of seduction is always presented in the larger social context. This direct link between the individual and society is pointed to when Clarissa writes, “But had I not been rejected by every friend, this low-hearted man had not dared, nor would have had opportunity, to

treat me as he has treated me” (343). Clarissa thus observes how her society has not met its obligations towards her. The reader is made aware that it is morally reprehensible to abdicate responsibility as does Mrs. Howe, Anna’s mother, when she refuses to advocate or involve herself in any way to help Clarissa.

A paradigm that merits further discussion, in view of Lovelace’s attempt to force Clarissa, is the conflation of the discourse of seduction with that of rape, in which the body becomes a site of violence and broken boundaries. As Gillis points out, “The rape of Clarissa Harlowe in the inner house of a London brothel differs from many fictionalized seductions and rapes that preceded it because it destroys not only the privacy of the body but the individual letter as an image of the privacy” (*Paradox* 12). The letter and the body are exposed as commodities within an economy of exchange. The notion of privacy intimates the right of an individual to claim a certain amount of time and space as being entirely within his or her own jurisdiction. Kauffman explains the related concepts of privacy and ownership in the novel in this way: “The word *possession* reverberates through the novel because of its sexual and proprietary overtones and because *self-possession* is what everyone denies Clarissa” (133). The fact that rape is here contextualized in a social atmosphere, as it is in many novels, implies that society plays a role in this act of rape. Society benefits from the confusion of seduction with rape because then only the rapist, an anomaly, is perceived as being responsible.

The discourse of rape is thus presented as “natural,” as something which was bound to happen or may be justified as satiating the normal desires of the man. Invariably, the seducer says to his love object that he is compelled to his passion by forces larger than himself. Yet, when discussing the seduction either after or during the seduction itself, it

is made clear through insights provided by the seducer or seduced, or even the narrator, that this is not the case. Indeed, the seducer always makes a point of claiming control over his emotions while simultaneously manipulating the seduced's feelings. Lovelace alludes to his anticipation of events when he writes: "There may possibly be some *cruelty* necessary: but here may be *consent in struggle*: there may be *yielding in resistance*" (210). Lovelace justifies his actions following the rape by writing to his confidante, Belford: "Miss Clarissa Harlowe has but run the fate of a thousand others of her sex – only that they did not set such a romantic value upon what they call their *honour*; that's all" (306). Clearly, Lovelace does not perceive himself at fault and takes the time to belittle Clarissa's moral values, which previously were the prize to be won over in his act of seduction.

Even so, Terry Eagleton shows how Clarissa can be simultaneously victor and victim in this novel. Clarissa is victimized in part through the "possibility of [that] fatal slip between intention and interpretation" (*Rape* 50). She is the victim of Lovelace's "virulently anti-sexual act of rape" (*Rape* 63). This act, however, is in every way the antithesis of seduction:

But once Lovelace is reduced to the humiliating gesture of having to drug his victim in order to rape her, he has lost the war even before he has performed the act. A forced victory is no victory at all: Lovelace can hardly demonstrate that all women are lecherous if Clarissa is unconscious at the crucial moment. In a sense nobody experiences the rape: not the reader, not the comatose Clarissa, not even Lovelace, for whom the act is purely empty. (83)

Although the discourse of seduction is about appearances and deceptions, we usually think of the deception as being controlled by the seducer. Yet when the seducer crosses the line between seduction and rape, he deceives himself and betrays his role as a seducer; in fact, he is no longer a seducer. Instead, he resorts to desperate acts such as Lovelace's "humiliating gesture" of having to drug Clarissa because his prowess as a seducer has failed. Of course, it is problematic to claim that this is a true moment of victory for Clarissa, because to say so would imply that only through violation and death can a woman achieve power. In addition, Eagleton's argument that Clarissa is like the unattainable Transcendental Signifier is also troublesome. He characterizes Clarissa's resistance as follows: "The violated body of Clarissa slips through the net of writing to baffle representation; as Lovelace's frantic assault on the very scandal of *meaning*, the rape defies signification for reasons other than literary decorum" (*Rape* 61). This hypothesis is valuable in that it tries to explore how Clarissa's death symbolizes her ability to shift the power dynamics between herself, her seducer, and the society in which they live. At the same time, it is important to caution against reading a woman as something unrepresentable, or falling into the old cliché of woman-as-mystery. In all fairness to Eagleton, however, he does offer an astute analysis of the consequence: "Her elaborate dying is a ritual of deliberate disengagement from patriarchal and class society, a calculated 'decathecting' of that world whereby libidinal energy is gradually withdrawn from its fruitless social investments into her own self" (73). For it is through performance that Clarissa is finally able to claim a greater position of power. She refuses to work within the boundaries of her society's theatre that has scripted such an inferior role for her.

Bronfen suggests that Lovelace's desire for control in this rape even goes beyond the boundaries of death. For she argues that he will take any measure possible to possess her once Clarissa is beyond his grasp: "When the body can no longer be kept from its 'original dust' he plans at least to keep Clarissa's heart 'in spirits...It shall never be out of my sight' (IV.376). Lovelace's fantasies about preserving Clarissa's corpse suggest both an anxiety about her bodily dissolution and a desire to demonstrate his unlimited right to possess her" (95). In his bid for ultimate power, Lovelace once again attempts to overpower rather than engage Clarissa in his discourse. "By pointing to the analogy between her displayed dead body and its earlier drugged condition," Bronfen elaborates, "Clarissa implies that to be gazed at in a state when she can no longer determine how she is seen nor reciprocate the gaze is in itself a form of rape" (98). Unlike seduction, where a seducer may use the gaze as a mechanism of flirtation, the rapist becomes a voyeur who does not wish to stay on the sidelines but to crush every opponent.

To come back to the question of why the discourse of rape so often comes in the guise of seduction, we need to think about how it enters into the realm of aestheticism. Rape is a violent act that in its brutality eludes representation. It is an ultimate form of power, which ironically is also a renunciation of power, the power to play. By turning to literature as a way to cope with this violence, cultural memory can temporarily displace the terrifying implications of rape through an aesthetic neutralization at the expense of women. The juxtaposition of death, art, and femininity offers a provocative look at Western culture's psyche, according to Bronfen, who argues, "The aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of the reality of death precisely because here death occurs *at* someone else's body and *as* an image" (Preface x).

Bronfen is not referring specifically to a link between rape and death in this statement; however, she does pose a central question: is aestheticism a way of having power without responsibility? Or conversely, does aestheticism invite a new reality? The reader has the curiosity of the seduced – the desire to explore unknown territory. It is seduction that will draw in the curious reader to see a model of power that does not rely on absolute power, in which the reader can also temporarily be the writer and creator of a new aesthetic.

The discourse of rape is a bastardization of the trope of seduction. Rape is about complete conquest, mastery, control, and the ultimate loss of will. What matters in the discourse of seduction is the question of control – where there is willingness and when there is consent. Unlike seduction, rape takes total control and puts it in the hands of one party; there is no intercourse, no play, no exchange of will. If not wholly democratic, seduction at least allows for some play and involves two parties, whereas rape is a politics of totalitarian control. Rape is brute mastery, involving physical rather than mental control. In seduction, by contrast, there is a need for illusion. The seduced is invited to share the same obsession with the seducer. In this way, both are brought back to the world of art and narrative. Love as an aesthetic object is temporarily theirs to mold through the discourse of seduction.

As often as not, the discourse of seduction will deny responsibility for any consequences it may produce in any given scene of seduction. For example, the narrative may take the focus away from negative consequences by placing the final conquest at the end of the book, or by having the seducer move directly on to another “challenge”. Perhaps the reason why the resolution following the scene of seduction comes so quickly

is that the narrative will not easily sustain itself. The vengeance of the seducer is a form of anarchy that does not adhere to the logic or the constraints of society. As Feher puts it, “Seducing, publicizing, and finally breaking up with a din: such are the three steps of the libertine master plan. However, libertine literature seeks to demonstrate that the dangerous man’s victories eventually turn against him – for while he may devote his life to humiliating the world to which he belongs, he nevertheless remains dependent upon the reputation that his caste reserves for him” (*Libertine* 29). In the case of Lovelace, he must eventually repent his role as the seducer of Clarissa and ask for forgiveness. Symbolically, we witness a moral victory of middle class values, and the moral degradation of the gentry’s role in the social order. Despite extreme hardship, the preservation of a pure heart, pious intentions, and industrious labours win out against all the privileges of hierarchical position. Lovelace, steeped in decaying tradition corrupted by his own lack of integrity, proves a liability to himself more than anyone else. The laurels of victory do not always lie at the feet of seducer; the seduced also has her moments of triumph.

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

In Laclos’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, first published in 1782, no one is left untouched by seduction. In this novel, in particular, passion and cruelty are a part of the arsenal of seduction. In such fashion, the discourse of seduction privileges artifice through its insistence on performance. In turn, controlling the elements of performance becomes the means for any seducer to wield power. The troubling conflation of the discourse of rape and the discourse of seduction demands further exploration because in

this narrative, it is a woman, Madame de Merteuil, who at times acts as the proponent of rape while representing it as seduction.

Written as a series of correspondence between various players, the Marquise de Merteuil is in league with the Vicomte de Valmont at games of seduction. The topic of rape comes into the conversations casually on a fairly regular basis, being regarded as just one of the strategies available to the seducer. In her desire for power and control, Merteuil has self-consciously developed every characteristic associated with seducers; she is by turns aggressive, deceptive, charming, intelligent, and theatrical – to name a few traits. Merteuil is a self-made woman in the sense that she has created the illusion of respectability within her society, while at the same time her every move as a seducer subverts that same society. As Chantal Thomas observes in her introduction to Laclos' essay "On the Education of Women": "Mme de Merteuil proclaims herself to be her own creation. To this end she subjects herself to a strict training regimen – total control at all times, both spiritual and muscular, which consists essentially of fashioning a mask in place of a face" (*Libertine* 118). Thus, the face only mirrors the soul that Merteuil finds convenient to put on display.

Merteuil is well aware of her precarious power as a woman in her society. As a widow in eighteenth-century France, she has the entitlement to the property of her deceased husband. As she sums up: "I felt none the less keenly the value of the liberty my widowhood would give me and I promised myself to make good use of it" (162). Merteuil's mother expects she will come to live with her or go to a convent, and the other women of society pressure her to remarry. As a woman, one wrong move can ruin her. Through her ability to manipulate appearances, she nonetheless gains her freedom. Her

strategizing leads to her "master stroke" whereby, through a staged performance of succumbing to temptation and finding redemption among the dowagers of her society, Merteuil ensures "these grateful Duennas constituted themselves [as her] defenders" (163). Were she to remarry, she would lose the legal ownership that gives her both status and wealth. Unlike Clarissa, her "virtue" is a self-fashioned illusion; she uses artifice to uphold her social standing.

Although not a rapist herself, Merteuil encourages rape as a means for the seducer to achieve the culmination of a relationship. Merteuil perceives rape and seduction as interchangeable because she disregards the violence of the act. The body may be a locus of pleasure, but for Merteuil it is more often a prop in the theatre of society. Thus, the violation of the body does not concern her because its function is instrumental only in establishing larger social relations. That is to say, for Merteuil, the discourse of rape only signifies in society when it affects the reputations of those involved.

While certainly a debatable argument, Laclos seems to imply that the ignorance and shackled condition of women due to their limited education is the greater violence that women endure. Feher appears to adopt Rousseau to synthesize Laclos' argument: "Women, who were free while nature reigned, have been enslaved since the beginning of the social state; thus, the issue of their education cannot be properly addressed until they recover their independence" (*Libertine* 38). Or, again, as Thomas puts it, "In the character of Mme de Merteuil, Laclos offers a radical alternative. Given the current state of affairs, a woman can expect nothing from anyone: it is up to her to understand that she must educate herself. She is alone; and not only does she lack institutional and parental

support but she also exists in tacit opposition to society in general and to the opposite sex in particular” (*Libertine* 117).

Curiously, however, Laclos appears to have seduced the writings of Rousseau to his own purposes. In *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau argues that the concept of property and ownership has determined the course of human interactions in a negative way. He assumes a “natural state” amongst men where each is his own judge. The division of land into properties has led to a social contract that ensured men in general, not the individual, would be the judge of law and order; that is to say, inequality first came from “the establishment of the Law and of the Right of property” (*Discourse* 62). In other words, the creation of laws, especially laws to protect property rights, were the first hateful limitation of human freedom and dignity. This reasoning presupposes that there is such a thing as a “natural state” equivalent to the model proposed in Christianity’s narrative of sinful corruption after the fall of Adam and Eve.

Merteuil in some sense would appear to strike out against this social state, and seek, if not for all humanity, at least for those of wit and ability, a return to a state of “nature,” as advocated by Rousseau. The irony, of course, is that Merteuil uses artifice to achieve that state of “nature,” or natural entitlement. Thomas notes, “From the observation that the social state is a state of slavery Rousseau draws two opposite conclusions, depending upon the gender under consideration: for men, it is an unnatural state, for women, an extension of their ‘natural language,’ that reveals their weakness and dependence” (122). Thus perhaps Laclos, who favors strong, independent women in his utopian vision in his essay “On the Education of Women,” uses Merteuil to expose the hypocrisy which underlies the whole social project of Rousseau.

Merteuil clearly attempts to use her powers as a seducer to gain legal control of her fortune. The question of money in eighteenth-century Europe is often an issue of property. The very first sentence that Merteuil writes in her correspondence in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* reflects one of the central discrepancies between her and Valmont as seducers based on gender. She entreats him to return to the city: "Come back, my dear Vicomte, come back; what are you doing, what *can* you be doing with an old aunt whose property is entailed on you?" (5). Her comment, though written light-heartedly, underscores the fact that by virtue of being a man, Valmont is privileged to wealth that secures his independence. Merteuil's sarcasm reflects the truth – he is not forced to pander to the whims of his aunt because his fortune is already set through legal apertures which will claim his aunt's estate as his own upon her death.

Conversely, we learn the perils of Merteuil's own financial predicament. She first refers to the impending law-suit and her uneasy feelings about how "really disagreeable" it is "to have all one's money in the air" (251). Her anxiety is later emphasized when she confides to Valmont, "I am almost at the point of regretting that I did not agree to a compromise" (300). Although never directly stated, the reader understands that she, as a woman, is victim to the laws of entailment herself. Her husband's fortune and estate are entailed to "minors still in the cradle" (251), a fact which surely must embitter Merteuil who has worked so hard to achieve independence. Ironically, the law that secures Valmont's wealth is that which robs Merteuil of what should be her "natural" inheritance. While apparently sincere in his "compliments upon the near completion of your [Merteuil's] great law-suit," there is nevertheless a hint of incredulousness in his tone

when Valmont states, "I shall be very glad if this happy event takes place under my reign" (257).

However, the law-suit clearly shows her intention to fight for her entitlement, and she has the assurance of her two lawyers that she will win. It seems that, in true form, Merteuil has taken on this challenge as a form of seduction. As she says to Valmont, "I reassure myself by remembering that the solicitor is sharp, the barrister eloquent, and the client pretty" (300). In the end, she unfortunately proves correct in her surmise that the laws will bend to reflect social perceptions. While she stood on fairly solid ground in her legal claim prior to her exposure by Valmont, everything changes once she is exposed to her society as a seducer. Merteuil's personal wealth is decimated: "Her law-suit was decided yesterday and she lost it by a unanimous vote. Costs, damages, and interest, restitution of profits – everything was given to the minors; so that the small part of her fortune which was not concerned in this suit is more than absorbed by its expenses" (369). Leaving the country in what is a self-imposed exile, her only defence at this point is to take as many jewels as possible to secure financial means as Merteuil would otherwise be left destitute and most likely be sent to debtors' prison.

Merteuil's contention with Valmont arises when he threatens to expose her as a seducer if she does not accede to his demands. At this point, he is no longer a true seducer because he moves beyond cajoling, flirting, and persuading to an act of brute control. He insists on her physical compliance to their original bet that if he were to seduce Madame de Tourvel, Merteuil would yield to him once again in this game of risk. Merteuil identifies his totalitarian authority when he takes umbrage at her involvement with another man and demands her "atonement" (332). She comes back to an integral

distinction between herself as primarily a seducer rather than a seduced: "I wanted to deceive only for my pleasure, not from necessity" (333). Valmont cannot "own" her through the extortion with which he threatens her, and the fact that she refuses to submit, even though he may win socially, demonstrates that in the end she has established a kind of liberty through the art of artifice. (Of course, never to be seen as just a victim, Merteuil is also an extortionist because she compels her foster sister and now servant, Victoire, to aid in her plots under the threat that Merteuil will otherwise have her "shut up" (165).) Merteuil may well love Valmont, but she insists on a mutual respect where he can recognize her powers as a seducer.

As Laclos writes from the point of view of both women and men, he clearly demonstrates that both sexes are capable seducers. In fact, he represents the seducers of society as the people who are most free to carry out their own autonomous ways of living. Kauffman even sees the writer's ability to take on the persona of the opposite sex as a means to highlight the arbitrariness of signs that we ascribe to a particular sex: "I approach gender as a reflection not of life but of art and literary construction of gender. Comparing Ovid's attempt to write 'like a woman' with the three Marias' proclamation that they intend to write 'like men' exposes the artifice of the literary construction of gender and demonstrates its distance from naïve mimeticism, for each of these authors relies on a concept of referentiality that links not word to thing but text to text" (*Discourses* 20).

Laclos at the very least expects us to read intertextually between this novel and his essay on "The Education of Women". Laclos commences with the controversial statement that there is "no means of improving the education of women" (*Libertine* 131),

yet he qualifies his statement with a direct warning to women: "do not expect the help of the men who created your ills: they have neither the will nor the power to end them...learn that one does not emerge from slavery except through a great revolution" (*Libertine* 130-31). There exists a reciprocal discourse in which one text informs the other and instructs the reader how to read the novel. Ostensibly, this intertextuality clarifies the reading process, though in many ways it makes it more ambiguous as it is possible to read Laclos's claim ironically that *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was meant only to warn young women away from the dangers of seducer predators. An interesting twist is thrown into the plot, though, given that the seducer predator in this novel is a woman who uses men as an instrument to carry out seductions with women whom she wants to victimize. In the case of Merteuil, Laclos "writes as a woman," but a woman who is outwardly the embodiment of traditional femininity while inwardly she is a mastermind strategist.

Merteuil likens a woman's feigned resistance to that of a battle of intrigue, which emphasizes her belief that in any scene of seduction both players are always acting. She advises Valmont to rape Madame de Tourvel: "the best means is to begin by taking her" (19). Merteuil elaborates by stating that she believes Valmont is in love, which she equates to disease in the sense that it blinds him to the workings of artifice. She asks, "Have you forgotten that love, like medicine is *simply* the art of aiding nature" (19)? Thus, she reminds him that their role as seducers is to recognize and to utilize the façade of love that is accepted by others as nature. By recognizing love as being within the realm of artifice, the seducer can then manipulate it to his or her own advantage. Merteuil offers the advice never to "confuse love with the lover" (159). Valmont

derisively rejects Lovelace as a model seducer when he outlines his plans to seduce Madame de Tourvel: "The difficulty would not be to get into her house, even at night, or even to drug her and to make her a new Clarissa" (242). In this metafictional commentary, Valmont dismisses Lovelace as a serious seducer because his attempted seduction, which turns into a rape, fails to engage the mind and spirit of the seduced. There is an ambiguous gap, though, between Valmont's commentary on Lovelace and his own actions, which sometimes suggest that he too has resorted to brutal measures with women, thus turning him from a seducer into a rapist. Merteuil analyzes his history of seduction from her own perspective, which imagines women as players and never as victims.

Merteuil develops her argument to suggest that Valmont is delusional if he thinks that any previous liaisons are his victory because he physically forced the consummation; rather, she posits that all of the seduced victims were in fact willing participants. She chides Valmont: "But tell me, O languishing lover, do you suppose you raped the other women you have had? But, however much a woman wants to give herself, however much of a hurry she may be in, some sort of pretext is necessary; and what could be more convenient for us than a pretext which makes us appear to yield to force" (19)? Thus Merteuil denies the existence of rape as contemporary society would define it. Her prevailing logic, however, does not attempt to work antagonistically towards women; in fact, she seems to place herself in allegiance with other women who are smart enough to recognize love as a trapping of society that must be negotiated. She points to the vulnerable role in which women are placed in society, in that they must contrive to follow its often impossible rules. The irony is noted by Feher who writes, "More precisely,

Laclos's novel accuses this society of turning the notion of 'free love' into an oxymoron by reducing a woman's freedom to her capacity of resisting her own desires, and of sublimating her passionate feelings" (*Libertine* 44). Therefore, women must also be hypocritical; for example, the appearance of rape "which preserves an air of awkwardness by which we [women] ought to have profited" (20), is manipulated in order to maintain the appearance of respectability which in turn is equated to chastity.

Chastity has been set up as the challenge that seduction must overcome. Katharina Wilson's book *Medieval* points out that during the centuries of Christianization (fifth through ninth), Christianity introduced chastity as a "new moral-religious ideal" (*Medieval* x). Thus, the association of chastity with moral purity is exposed as a constructed cultural value that emerged in a specific era. From as early as the medieval period, virginity became a sign of a woman's social status, a status which still holds currency in most parts of the world today. Wilson observes that in medieval times a woman could rise above her native position and become like a man through virginity: "This often resulted in the degradation of women, particularly of secular women, because in the ideology of a male-ruled world at whose pinnacle of excellence chastity was placed, woman then became a dangerous temptress representing lust and carnality" (*Medieval* xi).

The double-edged sword is that virginity constantly signifies the presence/absence of sexuality in a woman, and whether she is chaste or otherwise, she is always a temptress. In a sense, then, the seducer takes the unspoken duality of thought embodied in society and articulates it. It is significant that it is Madame de Merteuil, the female seducer, and not Valmont, who plays two distinct roles: one in front of society and

another 'behind its back.' As Feher notes, "The eighteenth-century character Mme de Merteuil simply pushes what society has established as an ideal of conviviality and worldly refinement to the point of excluding any form of authenticity, purely for the sake of artistic performance" (*Libertine* 120). Merteuil only reveals herself as a seducer to Valmont; she views the private space of any other scene of seduction as an extension of her theatre.

Merteuil also encourages Valmont to seduce Cécile Volanges. Merteuil wants revenge upon the Comte de Gercourt who left her for another woman. Cécile Volanges, fifteen years old and recently from a nunnery, is to marry Gercourt who prizes the young girl's virginity. Thus, Merteuil plans to have Cécile's virginity ruined and make Gercourt a laughing stock. Her other motive seems to be to mould Cécile into a friend of sorts. As Merteuil tells Valmont in one of her letters, "She [Cécile] is really delightful, dear little thing! She deserves another lover! At least she will have a good woman friend, for I am sincerely attached to her. I have promised her I will train her, and I believe I shall keep my word. I have often felt the need of having a woman in my confidence, and I should prefer her to any other; but I can do nothing with her until she is...what she must be" (101). There are at times homoerotic overtones in Merteuil's fascination with Cécile. Merteuil expresses tenderness and a kindred feeling for Cécile when she compliments the young girl in an earlier letter as being capable of "a certain natural duplicity" (68). This is the only woman that Merteuil ever suggests that she could bond with and "take into her confidence," which seems unusual given that Cécile is only fifteen years old. And yet this fantasy seems to point to her loneliness as a seducer who can only trust Valmont, with whom she nonetheless must constantly negotiate.

Merteuil's tenderness contrasts with her supplication to Valmont that he seduce Cécile, which is taken to mean that she must lose her virginity, either with her admirer, Danceny, or Valmont. Moreover, Merteuil intends to corrupt Cécile's innocent worldview and will probably ruin her social standing in society. Merteuil clearly uses the girl with callousness, for example, when she advises Valmont that they "shall have plenty of ways of getting rid of her, and Gercourt will always shut her up when we like to make him" (232). In the end, a seducer distinguishes him/herself from a lover by not confusing "love with the lover" (19). As Merteuil advises Valmont in relation to his simultaneous seductions of Madame Tourvel and Cécile Volanges: "Love, hatred, you have only to choose; they all sleep under the same roof; you can double your existence, caress with one hand and strike with the other" (137). Merteuil highlights the seducer's power to manipulate the extremes of emotion which she identifies as interchangeable weapons. She also points to the exponential quality of living life in excess through the seducer's philosophy of playing games that test the limits of rules. In concurrence, Feher notes that, "A *petite-mâitre* sees his practice of double entendre as the most 'polite' way to maximize his pleasure" (*Libertine* 23).

The seducer must always divine new games of amusement. Prévau, a fellow seducer, provides a challenge for Merteuil. She sets up Prévau to believe that she is as innocent as her reputation claims her to be, and she allows him to deceive himself into thinking that *he* has seduced *her*. At the crucial moment when he is in the compromising situation of sexual relations with her, Merteuil divulges her knowledge of his bet with other society women to seduce her (Merteuil) and for him to recount the event to them (the society women). Merteuil reveals herself as the conquering seducer when she says,

“Up till now you will have a very agreeable story to tell the two Comtesses de B...and a thousand others; but I am curious to know how you will relate the end of this adventure.’ So saying I [Merteuil] rang the bell with all of my strength” (180). Merteuil knowingly sets up Prévau to make it look as if he had committed rape. She uses the narrative of rape as a social device to punish Prévau for intending to challenge her reputation. Reputation is solely based on the appearance of matters as Merteuil notes to Valmont: “You know as well as I that for public effect, to have a man or to receive his attentions is absolutely the same thing” (141). Merteuil never seems to feel remorse for her actions, but in particular with Prévau she knows that, even though her punishment of him is harsh, they were in a savage game in which she would either end as victor or as prey.

The games of seduction can provide a woman with her most important social education. Feher divides eighteenth-century seducers into two kinds: the *petite-maitre* who wants small pleasures to fight against the boredom of his life, and the dangerous man who seeks revenge against society. “For his [the *petite-maitre*’s] own sake, he must carefully pace his pleasures, which are constantly threatened either by a lack or by an excess of emotion. But his sense of timing is crucial not only to his personal well being – it is just as important for the other *petit-maitres* and their mistresses, who depend on him for sustaining the flow” (*Libertine* 21). The seducer’s system, then, is an economy of exchange in which, most commonly, the woman is the item of exchange. The profit is a proliferation of libidinal pleasure and the illusion of control. If the woman withholds too long or causes the seducer to fall in love with her, she disrupts the economy. This economy can be partially beneficial to the woman if she is a willing participant who gets to write the script for her own desire and disregards the pressures to be “virtuous” in

accordance to society's mores. However, this network can also be negative for a woman if she is merely a pawn in the seducer's game; in this sense, fiction acts as a way of educating women by teaching the woman reader the rules of the games of seduction. "In short, both the *petite-maître* and the *petite-maîtresse*'s protestations are carefully coded performances" (*Libertine* 23).

Clearly, Merteuil perceives herself as capable of playing both roles simultaneously, although she never allows herself to become the consumed commodity. As Toril Moi puts it, "Feminism, then, is something *more* than the effort to express women's experience: it is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women" (*Men* 183). There is a brutality in Merteuil's actions that can only be justified if understood in the unforgiving society that she lives in, which does not allow for any straying from it or even the appearance of misconduct.

The epistolary form makes it more obvious how seduction is created in the public sphere, and how the social context of any correspondence cannot be ignored. Merteuil and Valmont both insist that their conquests are only truly achieved once they have been made a public scandal. It is not enough for Merteuil to humiliate Gercourt by ensuring that Cécile is "deflowered," but she plans to tell it in secret in high society to ensure that it becomes public knowledge. Similarly, she tells Madame de Volanges in a letter of how Prévau has insulted her with the knowledge that she "will surely read it in public" (181). Merteuil is fully aware of how incriminating letters can be, and thus she states that she has always taken the precaution of "never writing and never giving up any proof of my defeat" (164). And yet Valmont gives his letters written by Merteuil to Danceny at the

end of the novel, and their proof of her past deeds brings about her ruin (this provides Valmont with the perfect revenge, but also offers a tragic note when one recalls this is the only evidence of friendship and trust Merteuil has ever displayed). She is fully aware that such proof exists in the form of her letters to Valmont but she decides to take the risk. As Merteuil observes in an earlier letter to Valmont, she is well aware that what forms her greatest protection as a seducer is to leave no evidence. With reference to their first encounters, she shows him that she is as calculating as he is: "And yet if you had wished to ruin me, what means could you have found? Vain talk which leaves no trace behind it, which your very reputation would have helped to make suspicious, and a train of improbable facts, the accurate relation of which would have sounded like a badly written novel" (165). This observation also reiterates her belief that no story is of interest unless well articulated through language – the artifice of language.

She eventually pays the highest price of social death for her indiscretion: "Society is an entertainment, but a dangerous one: its rules may be artificial, but the killings it decrees are real. Society's theater is a theater of cruelty. Any sincere confession is a weakness upon which others will immediately pounce" (*Libertine* 120). One might argue, contrarily, that Merteuil requires a confidante to gain delight from her exploits, and so uses Valmont as such. Even though she loses in the end, perhaps Merteuil needs to know that the stakes are as real as they are high in what she can win or lose from having a correspondence with Valmont.

The epistolary mode signifies for the actors of seduction, not only in the writing of the letters, but also in the strategies that are used to deliver or to obscure them from reaching their intended destinations. The act of letter writing is presented as seductive

and sensual when Valmont writes to M^{me} Tourvel his vows of love to her on the naked back of another lover. Merteuil exposes the correspondence she herself created between Cécile and Danceny to Madame Volanges as a means to maneuver Cécile and her young admirer into the countryside and into the trap she has set with Valmont. Valmont recognizes the influence of letters, and thus is willing to go to great lengths to scandalize the name of Madame de Volanges who warns Madame Tourvel against him.

Thus, seduction is always mediated through the form of the letter in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Valmont's letter to Merteuil in which he describes in detail his seduction of Madame Tourvel reveals his strategies as a seducer. For example, he takes her hand in his so that her attention must not only take in her own discomposure but also her lover in tears. Valmont wants Tourvel's willing consent to her own seduction: "Let her have the strength to resist without having enough to conquer; let her fully taste the feeling of her weakness and be forced to admit defeat" (43). The epistolary mode thus acts as the perfect device to relay the underlying strategies of the seducer. He can now, in retrospect, recount to his accomplice all of his measures and explain his motivation and actions. What on the surface seems the act of the sincere lover is thus subverted.

The seducer also affirms this identity that he has constituted for himself by creating a narrative in which he is simultaneously the protagonist and the voyeur of his own actions. What he may have done in pure passion at the actual scene of seduction can now in retrospect be subordinated as only one more advancement of the seduction. Kauffman comments on how the epistolary form affects our reading of this discourse of seduction: "It also highlights another trademark of Ovidian strategy, which is to highlight the correspondences between the correspondents. The heroine in one letter

frequently comments on the fate of other heroines: this device reinforces the sense of sequence and unity in the text and simultaneously draws attention to the repetitive structure of desire, seduction, and betrayal” (*Discourses* 42).

The reader’s understanding of this scene of seduction must take into account the irony, for Tourvel’s sincere pondering of her moral state in her letters to Madame Volanges is always held up against the backdrop of Valmont’s caustic comments when he reenacts the scenes in vivid detail for the amusement of Merteuil. Feher concludes that this contextualization leads to an inescapable flatness of character and narrative: “Despite its wit and lightness, libertine fiction is thus informed by a painfully inconclusive debate about eros: all the characters who engage in this debate, no matter how articulate, are destined to sound either insincere, too cynical, or too naïve” (*Libertine* 16). Tourvel’s desperate attempts to resist the seduction or to explore her own feelings come out in torrents of passionate writing, juxtaposed with her composed features and surface social graces. Her letters foreshadow her doom. As Kauffman writes of the heroines in *Heroides*: “Suicide is omnipresent but unfulfilled in the text, for the act of writing is a continual deferral of death” (*Discourses* 58). Tourvel does not commit suicide but she loses her will to live at the same time as she desists from her correspondence with Valmont. Her letters have become her life. Kamuf emphasizes that this series of correspondence represents subjectivity constituted through a field of positions that is permeable and changing: “[I]t cannot still be a question of feminine or masculine positions identified with the female or male characters. Instead, there are only liaisons between the points named Merteuil, Valmont, Tourvel, indeterminate spaces from which to write letters of disclosure” (*Fictions* xviii).

At the end of this novel, society maintains its untroubled reign. Despite the moves towards a radical autonomy that would distinguish these women as distinct from the norm, they are all penalized. Tourvel dies, simply withering away after she has allowed herself to be seduced. Cécile miscarries Valmont's protégé in secret and eventually ends up in a nunnery since her affair is found out through the exposure of Valmont and Merteuil's correspondence. This exposure will lead to his celebration and commemoration by other men as a true seducer, whereas Merteuil faces societal ridicule, financial ruin, and societal ostracization.

Merteuil's downfall is explicitly linked to her desire to be acknowledged as a seducer (in control of the seduction). Her desire to have Prévan publicly humiliated and for him to know that she was in control of the game the entire time of their brief liaison leads to her financial ruin. As previously mentioned, the law and social mores are clearly linked by the fact that she loses her lawsuit in the end because of her character defamation due to her role in the Prévan affair being exposed through her letters to Valmont. Her complete social destruction is brought about by these letters because, once again, Merteuil determines that Valmont must be her sworn enemy if he will not concede to her ever as being the master authority in matters of seduction. She understands the rules of seduction when she states: "I must conquer or perish" (166). However, the reader feels some sympathy for Merteuil, despite her harsh tactics, since she loses because she is a woman who wants recognition for her abilities and respect for her modicum of power with the few people that know her for what she is, and yet she is brutally crushed for this very desire.

All of the traditional fates for women who do not observe society's rules are meted out to them. According to society, these are examples of "fallen women" who have not been virtuous enough. Feher questions this idea of virtue and suggests that it is only a further example of a social control mechanism: "Thus, while the fear of punishment is the primary cause of lovers' restraint, tales of sin, honour, and devotion continually reinforce it. Taking hold of people's imagination, these stories succeed in impressing upon them a totally artificial notion of virtue" (*Libertine* 18). This opinion supports Foucault's point that power is about production of norms as much as it is a form of oppression. Note that Feher's phrase, "take hold of people's imagination," draws attention to the fact that reality is largely constructed through the perceptions of the imagination, and that the way fiction constructs reality can influence it and vice versa. Society reinforces these roles of sexual constraint to define the procreative role of woman and more importantly to affirm paternal lineage.

On another level, Merteuil's daring life performance that engages societal powers on its own terms – that of artifice – also represents the changing trope of subversion in fiction. In the earlier eighteenth-century novel *Clarissa*, aristocratic values are subverted through the unfailing virtue of the protagonist, this "virtue" providing an epiphany to all who might be tempted to think or act outside of this paradigm. Merteuil, who uses "virtue" as a way to further authenticate her façade, instead relies on her knowledge, acute perception, and acting skills to guide her in achieving her ambitions. She knows that language is what protects her identity, although the societal discourses ultimately serve to conflate the binary of reality/performance: "The codification of linguistic exchange testifies to the strengthening of social controls, in a universe dominated by

appearances....Treatises on social conversation throughout the seventeenth century develop ways of being simultaneously present and absent in society, elaborating a theory and practice of *detachment from the self* that turn the actor's paradox, that distanciation that separates the actor from his character, into a way of being" (qtd in *Thomas* 119).

In a moment of sincerity, Merteuil expresses her admiration for Héloïse whom she claims is able artistically to write with the order of disorder a love letter that dissimulates the feelings of love so perfectly as to convince the beloved. As Merteuil writes, "That is the defect of novels; the author lashes his sides to warm himself up, and the reader remains cold. Héloïse is the one exception; and in spite of the author's talents this observation has always made me think that its subject was true" (58). Thus, rather than illuminating the hypocrisy of society through the revelation of contrast between one pure individual (Clarissa) and her hypocritical society (eighteenth-century Britain), Merteuil subordinates the hypocrisy of her eighteenth-century French society to her own ploys and strategies. She uses the vanity of others to blind them to her manipulations. Merteuil sees in Héloïse a fellow conspirator who knows how to use the discourse of seduction to her advantage.

Seduction exchanges the rules and structure of morality for those of aesthetics. The morality of a seducer's choice lies in his ability to create a seduction of beauty and creativity. Beauty in seduction is measured by how cleverly the seducer manipulates societal norms to his benefit. Kauffman elaborates on such Ovidian aestheticism, which follows closely the seducer's understanding of artifice as beauty: "The Ovidian rhetorical ideal challenges the concepts of unity, fixity, and consistency; instead, it celebrates the fluid, the multiple, the capricious. Rather than seeing illusion as veiling a central reality

or a fixed truth, Ovid values illusion for its own sake and recognizes how large a role artifice plays in arousing desire" (*Discourses* 21). Seducers such as Merteuil and Valmont take the focus away from society's obsession with the standardizing of morality to recognize instead that same standardization as a game in which one can gamble.

Finally, Merteuil's ruin has to be viewed within the historical context of the age in which it was written. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was first published in 1782, just seven years prior to the French Revolution. In the changing economy of France, the bourgeois had greater power, yet little say in how their government was run. Deeply influenced by the success of the American Revolution and the writings of such thinkers as Thomas Paine and the *Rights of Man*, as well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated radical social thinking, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* might in some ways anticipate this political and social revolution that would change France so greatly. Rousseau paradoxically advocates both a return to nature, which seems to reinforce traditional values, and yet his philosophy simultaneously questions the legitimacy of *l'ancien regime*. At first it may seem that Laclos is on the side of the coming revolutionaries in his portrait of the radical, subversive Mdme de Merteuil. Yet, in the end she seems to be punished, in part, because she has risen beyond her station. Laclos may then represent the precise opposite of English middle-class values and the myth of the self-made (wo)man, or Virtue Rewarded. We start with the self-made woman and end with the theme of Vice getting its just desserts. The ugliness and depravity that her position of power as a seducer is meant to represent is shown literally at the end of the novel when she becomes completely disfigured by the smallpox and the loss of one eye. As one of her enemies spitefully says that, "her disease has turned her round and that now

her soul is in her face" (369). Thus, the intrigues of an individual woman seducer are not enough to affect the hegemony of an oppressive society.

Merteuil is seduced into believing that she is fairly invincible against the plots of other seducers and her society. Valmont learns from Merteuil's "master stroke" by also acting to enlist the dowagers of their society to take his defence so as to allow them to glory in their own self-righteousness. In doing so, he exposes Merteuil as a seducer and immortalizes himself as the greatest seducer. He also dies knowing that he leaves her in a state worse than death. Merteuil's own letters are turned against her as the damning evidence. What is interesting is that she is given no voice at the end of the novel to argue her case. Kauffman characterizes seduction in the following way: "The abandoned heroine accuses her seducer of infidelity, impugns his motives, demands justice, threatens vengeance, and justifies herself. The language of the genre is not just a dialogue but a trial, a contest, a debate" (*Discourses* 45). Kauffman argues that seduction is like a trial in which all parties are always being judged. In this trial, Merteuil is prohibited against giving her own defence. Her ruin is related through a series of letters – significantly – through the correspondence of Madame de Volanges and Madame de Rosemonde, dowagers who condemn Merteuil when her "true nature" is revealed. Her notable silence points to the unfairness of this trial. Tried in the court of her society, it is certain that she will lose. For Laclos, it turns out, is no Rousseau advocating an end of the social state and a return to a pristine state of nature. In the end, he is more like a counter-revolutionary bent on proving the artifice involved in any revolutionary questioning of the social order.

DRACULA

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which first appeared more than a century later in 1897, is an example of Victorian literature that reproduces the discourse of sex through its indirect manifestation in a proliferation of other discourses within larger societal structures and language. *Dracula* needs to be read in terms of the discourse of seduction because of the link that this novel provides between society and Dracula's representation of the return of the repressed. One paradigm in the discourse of seduction suggests that the seduction of a woman does not necessarily imply that she is also a victim. Alan Johnson, for example, argues convincingly that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be interpreted as a projection of the underlying desires of Mina Murray and Lucy Westrena within an otherwise oppressive Victorian setting. This novel also explores the body as a language that is simultaneously a site of violence and a locus of desire. Seduction in *Dracula* reveals limitations placed on women and men in the nineteenth century, and furthermore comments on how versions of masculinity and femininity continue to be reproduced in problematic ways. This novel also can be seen as a metaphor that explores the class tensions of the nineteenth century.

Stoker's interpretation of the vampire myth is characterized by the fact that he makes Count Dracula an intelligent member of the aristocracy. Moreover, Cahalan and Downing point out that his reworking of the myth also painted Dracula as having "an overt sexuality" (*Gender* 52). These are tactics that also characterize the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century libertine. In her introduction to the latest Oxford edition of Stoker's novel, Maud Ellmann briefly traces some of the history of the vampire myth, and she makes a clear link between the vampire and the seducer figure:

Polidori's vampire character resembles Byron himself, being aristocratic, moody, cynical, and above all sexually irresistible: he is, in short, a recognizable figure, that of the libertine or the rake, a predatory upper-class male who exploits the innocence of young women, particularly of lower social rank, and cruelly casts them aside after having his way with them. This stock figure is crucial to the middle-class fantasy-image of the corrupted landed aristocracy. (*Dracula* xvi-xvii)

These larger-than-life dimensions of the vampire who sides with evil, yet still proves attractive to multitudes, enough so to invite him into their lives, parallels the seducer's reputation for offering the tantalizing possibility of providing the opportunity to risk beckoning one's own doom – social or physical – through the aid of this mentor. The powers of the vampire-as-tempter are complex precisely because they do not reside within him, but rather arise from his relations with others and the gradation of success that he has in tempting them to become vampires. Similarly, the seducer's quest leads him to change his victims into converts, and his greatest achievement is to have one of his victims willingly succumb after a long and steady resistance.

The women in *Dracula*, though, often seem to be seducers themselves. Seduction encompasses desire and prohibition, each working to define the other. On the one hand, desire in this novel is linked with the evil of vampirism and therefore denounced; on the other hand, the narrative lingers and develops sensual imagery. For example, Jonathan Harker innocently goes to the Count's castle in Transylvania where he unwittingly aids the vampire in his travels to England. While there Harker, among other fantastic encounters with the un-dead, is seduced by three daemon women. This is the first of

many scenes that reads much like erotic literature; the repetition of tactile adjectives and verbs such as “tingling,” “voluptuous,” and “lick” as well as the graphic descriptions and slow build-up of anticipation contribute to this overall impression. The text seduces the reader into understanding Harker’s longing.

Such eroticizing is further developed by the genre since Harker makes his confession within the writings of his diary in which he relives the pleasures of the scene of seduction and gives the reader a window into his most intimate thoughts. His own “agony of delightful anticipation” is clear when he writes: “I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart” (38). Twice already Harker has referred to his selective vision when he notes that he watched the daemon women through his half-closed lashes. He signals his participation by now closing his eyes and thus turning a blind eye to what he knows is considered morally wrong by his society. In the climactic moment Dracula enters and demands that the three daemon women leave his prey, Harker, alone. Ironically, there is a role reversal in this first scene of seduction because the desirous tone of Harker leading up to this point makes it clear that he wants the daemon women to have their way with him, which means that it is disappointing and anti-climactic when Dracula interrupts. In the future, the roles will be reversed and Harker will feel it is his duty to stop Dracula. In her “Homoerotic History of *Dracula*,” Talia Schaffer argues that Harker’s desires for the daemon women are not interrupted by Dracula, but rather reflect a displacement of his true desires for the Count, who claims Harker as his own. As Schaffer writes, “Being imprisoned also gives Harker a certain sexual freedom – he plays the passive victim who cannot prevent Dracula’s advances” (*Gender* 404).

Either way, this scene sets a precedent for passive resistance. After Harker leaves the castle he temporarily loses his sanity, which can be read as a way for him to cathect the desires he has experienced and thus reconcile himself back into the conventions of his society. As Ellmann notes, “Harker and the Count represent two halves of a divided self” (*Dracula* xii). Thus the Count metaphorically represents Harker’s unconscious desires on which he feels incapable of acting. As Cahalan and Downing note, “On an unconsciously reflective social level, the repressed Victorian males (with Jonathan Harker as literary purveyor of established morality) wanted what they could not have – sexually aggressive females” (52).

The double-edged sword of seduction that both attracts and repels its potential participants becomes apparent in a linguistic parallel that links two scenes of seduction. Harker describes the “movement of breath” that precedes the vampiresque ‘kiss’ of one of the daemon women as follows: “Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood” (38). This dichotomy of sweet/bitter echoes in the next major scene of seduction in Lucy Westrena’s waking dream. First, Lucy is bit by Dracula in the churchyard, and Mina later finds her to bring her home. Mina attributes the events of the evening to sleepwalking and her own fumbling that leave prick marks on Lucy’s throat by her safety pin. A week later, though, Lucy alludes to the events of that night, which Mina thought prudent not to discuss further. Lucy is able to organize her experience by conceiving of it indirectly as having been a dream. Thus, she gives primacy to her encounter with Dracula through that part of her mind associated with the unconscious.

So does Harker, who also suggests his experience must have been part of a dream. There is an uncanny parallel between her description of being seduced with that of Harker when she recalls the ambience of her dream as “something very sweet and very bitter all around me at once” (98). Thus we have two sweet innocents who are the products of a bitter irony: they are only pure as long as their desires remain repressed. Furthermore, the parallel illustrates how seduction is engendered in the novel. If we are meant to draw a comparison, clearly the greatest difference between these two scenes of seduction is that the seduced is male in one case and female in the other. They have similar experiences; however, it is Lucy who must confront the more serious consequences of this seduction. She becomes a part of the un-dead, and she is eventually hunted down by her closest friends and it is her fiancé who cuts off her head and puts a stake through her heart. When Lucy becomes a vampire, she becomes a threat to their identities: “Like the ghost, the vampire traverses the limit between life and death; his extravagant and errant spirit cannot be confined to either realm; and thus he must be staked, pinned down lest he should ‘derange all boundaries’” (Ellmann xii). Noticeably, of all the characters in the novel, only the two female protagonists, Lucy and Mina, are truly threatened by Dracula.

Alan P. Johnson suggests that the women in *Dracula* lead a dual life: “In this diptych each woman develops what Van Helsing at one point calls a ‘dual life’ (p. 206) – a life of conscious and willing conformity to her society and yet also a life of largely subconscious rebellion against it. In the case of each woman, Dracula symbolizes her inner rebelliousness, and its crisis coincides with her commerce with Dracula” (*Sexuality* 21). Mina becomes a vampire when she is abandoned by her party of men as they go off

in search of Dracula. They do so in accordance with the chivalric code, but their desire to protect her is exactly what leaves her vulnerable to Dracula. Van Helsing who leads the men in their fight against Dracula says of Mina: "We men are determined – nay, are we not pledged? – to destroy this monster; but it is no part for a woman. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors; and hereafter she may suffer – both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams" (235). These women are innocent in the sense that they do not openly seek to change their lives, yet on an unconscious level, they rebel against social norms.

What Johnson's article does not account for, though, is the disturbing link between women's bodies, lust, and fertility. The text seems to pose a warning that seduction can lead to the literal consumption of the desired object. The three daemon women and Lucy consume the blood of live babies and children. Since Mina and Lucy are the only ones infected with Dracula's blood amongst their social group, they are the only ones to develop signs of vampirism, which eventually are reversed in Mina's case. They are presented as seducers whose desires overwhelm any other thought or need. Their seductiveness becomes equivalent with infection and a type of death that does not even provide the normal release of an afterlife. Mina is only rewarded with matrimonial bliss and childbirth once she has been purified and made part of her society again.

The ramifications of becoming a female seducer are well summed up by Schaffer when she examines the implications of the vampire-killing scenes that she equates with rape:

This rape [Lucy's beheading] reestablishes 'proper' relations: Lucy is pure and virginal, Arthur is grateful to Van Helsing, and Arthur may now kiss the corpse.

Van Helsing himself manages to perform a similar rape not on one but three women. The rape reestablishes normative models of both gender and history.

The women are grateful and passive towards their brave male deliverer, no longer seductive wanderers who sweep through the mountains trying to overpower him.

(412)

Thus, the desires of women seducers are fleeting and an anomaly to be halted. One is led to believe in the case of Lucy and the three daemon women that Van Helsing has done them a favour by allowing them to return to their pure state, "placid each in her full sleep of death" (371). Only through the obliteration of the vampires and their nocturnal world can the society's mores be restored. Or so seems to be the ostensible message conveyed by the rather trite, happy ending of *Dracula*.

Of course, the discourse of seduction is here displaced into the fantastic world of vampirism. By doing so, Stoker is able to explore the erotic nature of desire. And yet the formula for seduction and vampirism is not that indistinguishable. First one must be invited in, next the seducer vampire must establish a hypnotic state in which the seduced is mesmerized; this hypnotic state is then furthered by means of a kiss or a similar gesture. There is never just one isolated scene of seduction. The ritual must repeat itself so as to indoctrinate the seduced. The seduced continues to represent a challenge to the vampire until s/he is also a vampire. It is not enough to achieve just physical consummation of the relationship, for example, to just completely suck the blood of the seduced. We see that Harker, Lucy, and Mina are mentally and emotionally drawn to Dracula. Lucy sleepwalks, waits impatiently at the window, and longs for Dracula with "her hand to her throat" (91). Harker again enters into the sensual vampire realm when

he becomes a voyeur for Mina and Dracula as she performs a kind of forced fellatio on the Count as he holds her face to his chest to swallow his spurting blood: "On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed, and breathing heavily as though in a stupor" (281). The displaced sexual liaison of the married couple is emphasized by the fact that Mina is now referred to repeatedly as "Mrs. Harker," and by her role as Harker's "wife," she engages in what can be construed as sexual relations with Dracula in her husband's presence.

Most obviously, the nineteenth-century seducer is a vicious, but attractive aristocrat. He represents the shifting relations between the commoner and the aristocrat in the wake of the 1867 Bill of Reform. In 1832, the first Great Reform Bill was passed, giving suffrage to all men owning property or with an annual rent worth more than ten pounds. In 1867, the working-class party called the Chartists lobbied for universal suffrage, which resulted in the Bill of Reform that extended the right to vote to all men. Eight decades after the American and French Revolutions, the ruling class in Britain could no longer maintain its hegemony. Influential writings such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Engels and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1847) had finally demolished the "natural" right of established social hierarchies, as well as the divine right of Kings. The middle-class, growing in size and power, wanted a greater share in the decision-making powers that affected the regulation of their lives. The bourgeois class had benefited the most from industrialization and the expanding markets as a result of imperialism. Yet at the same time, the bourgeoisie harboured feelings of nostalgia for an aristocracy that, historically, not only represented the rightful ruling class, but also the ideal that they themselves were striving for. Thus, *Dracula* might be

interpreted as a fable about the attractions of social hierarchy (the aristocrat) in spite of the risk it presents to democratic equality. Since seduction can only be understood in its social, historicized context, it must also take into account class relations which play such a large role in defining society.

Class evidently plays a role in who wants to join Dracula's ranks. Johnson rightfully points out that women's struggle for equality in the nineteenth century was difficult. There were unprecedented changes in the lives of women as they fought for the vote, the right to own property, to join trade unions, to have custody over their own children after divorce, and to have access to higher education. Lucy is of the upper-middle class; she is a woman of leisure. Her servants do all of the domestic work; it is assumed that she would never work herself, and her greatest passtime is deciding which man to marry. To some extent, she represents the typical Victorian female who is fragile and passive. When she is introduced in the novel, she is focused on choosing amongst three suitors, although it seems clear that Arthur Holmwood's fortune and social status make him the best candidate. Her mother views her engagement to Arthur as successful because he is of the aristocracy, even though, when she describes the three proposals to Mina in a letter, his is the only one she hastily skims over. When Lucy is most vulnerable to the attacks of Dracula, Arthur makes it his priority to be at his father's sick bed.

Arthur represents the old aristocracy that is disintegrating because its real hold is over property rather than over the heartbeat of young lovers. Johnson writes that, "because Arthur's ineffectuality was largely a result of his subordination of personal interest in Lucy to aristocratic family duty, Stoker seems to imply that the aristocratic

duties prevent vigorous, independent, procreative, life-sustaining action and should be thrown off or transcended" (*Sexuality* 28). Dracula has in a sense transcended death, in order to revise old power structures in which the class system plays out distinctly. The marginalized vampire figure is not punished in this novel since middle-class powers of virtue seem to have no effect on him; he becomes a seemingly invincible colonizer. As Stephen Arata notes, *Dracula* is a "narrative of reverse colonization" in which "the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized" (623). The characters most vulnerable to Dracula are also in the position of greatest vulnerability in terms of wealth and class: Jonathan who is on his first assignment as a solicitor when he visits Transylvania, Mina who is a school mistress so busy she does not have time to reply to Lucy's letters, and Lucy who, despite her apparent wealth, has her entire estate entailed to Arthur by her mother against their lawyer's wishes. Dracula is the (reverse) imperialist who has come to claim property and victims in England. His is an ancient hierarchy, indicated by the subordination of characters like Renfield or the three Daemon women, yet he gives voice to the repressed desires of others. Dracula's suave assurance that he will win this game against the powers of religion and science, manages to hold the reader in suspense until the end, when he is brought to his eternal death. The moral ambiguity of Dracula's proposed reign would thus remind nineteenth-century readers of the greater cultural production and freedom under the Restoration period of two hundred years ago, the last time that a king acted as a homogenizing agent for the British empire.

CONCLUSION

Beyond its shaping effect on class politics, the discourse of seduction has helped as well to shape aesthetics. In the epistolary genre, seduction is able to 'perform' as its deeds are told and retold by the various players. As Kauffman notes, "Some feminist critics insist that women's writing must be 'true-to-life,' based on 'the authority of experience.' The danger of that approach lies in reducing the art to the life, as if women were incapable of writing about anything but themselves, and lacked aesthetic control and imagination" (*Discourses* 21). Through seduction, masculinity and femininity are alternatively entrenched in familiar paradigms and at times reencoded in unexpected new ways. The discourse of seduction thus helps to define a politics of control that rules the psyche of nations in the process of reinventing the social orders.

While the topic may be too broad to trace a history of seduction in the Western world, it is interesting to explore how certain tropes recur and characterize the power dynamics that exist between seducers and their societies. It is crucial to note the changing attitudes in each text to the seducer, who is always an agent of social change. Of course, part of what I have tried to propose is that the binary of seducer/seduced breaks down in these texts. So there is really more than just one seducer, in most instances, as the roles fluctuate and mobilize in new ways. The seducer is constructed as a literary figure that embodies some of the values of a particular historical period. Thus, Abélard and Héloïse present the "spiritual" hierarchy of the Middle Ages and attempt to subvert it through their discourse of seduction. Five centuries later, Rousseau reinscribes their story for his own purposes in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to tell again the story of challenges to class divisions posed by seduction. So, too, Clarissa transcends the

bourgeois values of her eighteenth-century society through her impervious virtue. Her seducer, Lovelace, symbolizes the cruel edge of class tensions between the aristocracy and the middle class and how controlling a role society plays. For Laclos, in the decade leading up to the French Revolution, Valmont and Merteuil are potential Jacobins, seeking by their wits to overthrow the state and to return to a state of nature, or at least to a state where a career is more open to the talents. Madame Merteuil's defeat suggests, however, that Laclos, for all the sympathy he shows to the lower estates, remains on the side of entrenched social power and order. The grip of the aristocracy is also felt in Dracula's discourse of seduction. He is a ruling-class seducer who, even though he comes from the margins, has all the power and attraction of his class, as well as a vision for its continuation. The discourse of seduction thus continues to be reinvented within literature, according to requirements of the social context. It may even parody itself, in order to show how seduction may be constructed in succeeding works of fiction.

3: The Aesthetics of Seduction

The discourse of seduction is a narrative that appeals to our individual as well as our collective consciousness, as evidenced by its continual reproduction in various forms in western literature. In fact, its presence is so well accepted that perhaps, despite the fascination, seduction as it usually is represented is too easily accepted at face value. Rather than accept this narrative as a natural plot line, we might rather view the discourse of seduction as an aesthetic form. For the nature/artifice binary implodes as soon as seduction is interpreted as a game of aesthetics. Such artifice needs to be catalogued in terms of the salient features that shape the discourse of seduction. Furthermore, the play of signification in the construction of identities as seducer/seduced needs to be analyzed in terms of the play of signification in language. Read as a dramatic game, seduction thus insists on artifice; in many ways, it parallels the arts of drama, literature, music, and the fine arts. What is still lacking in critical appreciation of this literary form is a model that connects the relationship between author-seducer and reader-seduced as part of the paradigm that blurs the lines of distinction between life/art. Here, the works of Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault help to underwrite related theories of social construction, identity politics, and the relationship to power in language in discourses of seduction. In the final analysis, there is an overlooked relationship between seduction and fictional identity which may be central to human experiences.

PART I

If we limit our discussion to discourses of seduction in the western world, we note that these discourses are mainly characterized by a dichotomy of nature/artifice. Hence, the behavior that surrounds seduction may be mistaken for natural desires rather than for socially produced norms. The language of seduction is further problematized by the overtones it shares with other familiar narratives: those of war and religion. Thus, a “good” seduction may take on the language of military conquest, implying victory for the species. Or morality may inform the narrative, whereby the seduced is presented with various trials of temptation that s/he must resist. Historically, “she” has been the inferior term in the roles of seducer/seduced, which are usually played out within the hierarchy of man/woman; thus, the language used to reinforce these roles as natural is really engendered. Susan Heckman observes how, “The association between women and nature is closely related to the identification of woman as irrational and their exclusion from the realm of rationality.... As de Beauvoir showed so clearly, women’s failure to achieve transcendence, her inability to be a subject, and her association with nature through reproduction are closely tied” (105).

Axiomatically, this binaried configuration of nature/artifice is a narrative formulated through language; such relational roles are then provisional, and should not be assumed as the natural order of things. Although naturalized and accepted on certain terms within western culture, ironically, seduction is at the same time most often articulated and identified as artifice. It is relegated to a secondary position as the supplement within the binary, yet the appeal of seduction rests, in part, in its self-

conscious fabrication. In this sense, the discourse of seduction privileges the second half of the nature/artifice binary.

In exposing the logical fallacies inherent to the nature/culture debate, Jacques Derrida provides evidence for the instability of binaried thinking (although he also notes the impossibility of ever fully escaping metaphysical thinking). In his article "Structure, Sign, and Play" Derrida argues that self-contradictory elements reveal the limitations of language. He gives the example of the incest prohibition, which meets the rules of nature through its universality because all cultures treat incest as taboo. Simultaneously, however, the incest prohibition meets the rules of culture in the specificity of rules applied against it. As Derrida writes,

The incest prohibition is something that escapes these concepts of nature/culture and certainly precedes them – probably as the condition of their possibility. It could perhaps be said that the whole of philosophical conceptualization, which is systematic with the nature/culture opposition, is designated to leave the domain of the unthinkable to the very thing that makes this conceptualization possible: the origin of the prohibition of incest. (*Writing* 284)

But the incest prohibition is only one among many possible examples of the nature/culture binary. What is important is that the possibility of origin or any other foundation for a particular system of thinking is denied.

The example of nature/culture is particularly apt to any discussion of seduction because this particular discourse rests on the logic of nature/culture as a true opposition. For instance, some writers of eighteenth-century British novels might choose to represent seduction as nothing more than a strategy to attain sexual liaisons. This perspective

reduces the discourse of seduction to a desire to fulfill carnal needs and implicitly supports the man/woman hierarchy, inasmuch as the woman's virtue in such novels is equated with her virginal status. Thus the "natural" seduction as told in this way suggests that seduction is inherently structured in terms of hierarchical binaries. Conversely, if we perceive the discourse of seduction as privileging the second term of the binary, artifice, then the logic of the nature/artifice binary becomes suspect. Derrida notes in his discussion of the difference between signifier and the signified that "the *paradox* is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing" (*Writing* 281).

Binaried thinking is also disputable because seduction cannot be limited to heterosexual relationships. Hence, the hierarchical relationship of man/woman that relies upon opposition, and which is usually associated with seduction, cannot be sustained in 'unconventional' narratives. Judith Butler questions the naturalization of gender and sexuality within a heterosexual framework. In *Gender Trouble*, she poses the following argument: "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (10). Butler's argument thus throws into question any reading of seduction that presupposes a binaried hierarchical relationship. The logic of the binary seducer/seduced, and its implied hierarchical power relationship is displaced within a homosexual/bisexual/transvestite framework. Seduction appeals to both writers and readers because it implodes the binary of nature/artifice. In the novels on which I have chosen to focus, the logic of the binary collapses because it depends on the stability and

hierarchy of these terms. A gay narrative shows itself as either a performance of a different version of love or as a parody of the heterosexual paradigm.

Binari ed thinking can be challenged on several levels. For example, equating the outcome of a seduction with physical consummation is problematic since all seductions do not end so. A man or woman can be mentally seduced, and in fact, this kind of seduction can be more fulfilling for a seducer. According to Jean Baudrillard, the basest presupposition of our society is that seduction can be equated with sex. Sex is merely a limitation that short-circuits any true seduction, and an orgasm is only a limited realization of desire. Seduction, which is highly ritualized, thus becomes effaced behind a naturalized sexuality. It would be misleading to assume that seduction is merely the attraction of one individual to the body of another. Seduction is the intersection of relationships on multiple levels – linguistic, literary, physical, emotional, and social. Baudrillard argues that the sexual model promotes libidinal pleasure in an environment in which saturated desire is perceived as a prize. I do not think that Baudrillard contends that seduction is completely separate from physical attraction, but rather he proposes that it is only one element in seduction.

I am interested in how Baudrillard defines seduction as artifice; for instance, he posits that the best seducer is a transvestite, rather than a woman, because a transvestite consciously plays with all of the signs. He writes of transvestitism that, "Here the signs are separated from biology, and consequently the sexes no longer exist properly speaking. What transvestites love is this game of signs, what excites them is *to seduce the signs themselves*. With them everything is make up, theatre, and seduction" (11). Baudrillard would not consider *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* a "pure" seduction because he says that

seduction does not have physical consummation as its goal. Seduction is about games, play, and defiance; it is an "eclipse of a presence" or an "aesthetics of disappearance" (85). The seducer's power lies in his or her abilities to create a hypnotic-mesmerizing presence that does not attempt credibility or reasonableness. The seducer will ask the question "Who am I?" although s/he is not so much interested in answers as in the possibilities opened up in the process of answering; the seducer is a *tabula rasa* onto which the seduced inscribes his or her desires.

The seducer must still find ways to engage the seduced through illusion and intrigue. According to Baudrillard, the seducer must try to draw the object of desire into the seducer's realm of weakness, and thus present him/herself as weak. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Valmont uses this strategy when he says to Madame Tourvel that her influence has made him reconstrue his entire system of ethics; she is left to seduce herself into believing that this could be true. Valmont is interested not only in obtaining her physical consent, since he delays the consummation of the relationship to ensure that he also seduces her spiritually. The players must play the game until the bitter end, which for Valmont relies on his death and exposing his once beloved Merteuille to be a seducer, so that he can claim victory as the supreme seducer.

Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* offers an alternative way of reading seduction through his suggestion that we "live artistically". In "The Decay of Lying," Wilde writes that, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy" (53). Significantly, Wilde privileges artifice over the sincere expression of our

thoughts and feelings. His doctrine veers away from the Romantic notion that in Nature we find truth and beauty. Instead of perceiving artifice as decoration, artifice is integral to understanding language. In Wilde's "The Critic as Artist," Gilbert answers Ernest's question, "But what are the two supreme and highest arts?" as follows: "Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of life" (112). The artifice of seduction is part and parcel of the artifice of language. In both cases, truth is perceived as multiple and thus, in a sense, irrelevant. Of greater importance is the form or medium, which in itself takes on complex meanings: "the object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty" (21), writes Wilde. He argues that life is a blank slate that only gains meaning when inscribed with art: "As to the infinite variety of Nature, that is pure myth. It is not to be found in nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her" (2). This relationship between art and life is also integral to seduction. At the heart of any seduction must be the imagination. The relation between the seducer and the seduced still circulates within an economy of love constructed by the society in which they live. Seduction inevitably takes place within the boundaries of society, but simultaneously it challenges those boundaries in part through its call to "live artistically."

Wilde's claim to "live artistically" anticipated the modernist's separation of morality from art. However, Wilde does not propose that art be viewed separately from life. Instead, he insists that they each influence one another, but that life is utterly dependent on art for its expression. As David Williams elaborates in *Confessional Fictions*, "Wilde, in his doctrine that 'life imitates art,' seems bent on turning literary history into social reality" (19). The aesthetic impulse for Wilde necessarily breaks down

the boundaries between life and art. Thus, when we talk about the art of seduction, it is more as an element of the social fabric by which art comes to influence life. This reverse mimesis in which art reigns supreme offers society a radical rereading of itself. The imaginative powers of seduction in a literary work provide a locus for the artist who wants not only to reflect reality but also to create it. This artist envisions a collaborative project in which the writer, the reader, and the seducer are all participants in the game of seduction.

“The Decay of Lying” is an ironic title that portrays art as an institution more difficult to defend than the fortress of truth. Truth is thus turned into a corruptive influence that slowly erodes the “pinnacle of lying.” This reverse logic that works contrary to traditional thought is quite plausible when put forth in Wilde’s persuasive prose. For instance, he points out that “what is interesting about people in good society....is the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask” (12-13). By means of such irreverent logic, Wilde is very much the seducer of the reader. He uses the same sort of reverse logic as that of a seducer who places the onus on the seduced to account for his or her actions. Following the terms of his argument, then, truth is seen as vile and untrustworthy. Its requirements consume people’s imaginations and feelings within the stifling bounds of its narrow morality. Wilde charges truth with these crimes and demands that the reader instead embrace the freedom of lying. Like the classic seducer, Wilde asks the reader to betray his or her conventional impulses to accept truth-telling as right and to be allied with him as the champion of lies.

The seducer and the criminal thus have a great deal in common. They are both intrigued by the challenge of negotiating with society’s rules in unconventional ways that

involve risk. For Wilde, as Williams notes, “the criminal becomes an artist every bit as much as the artist is a criminal, though a criminal sort of life is but one of many modes of ‘fiction’ available to the artist” (*Confessional* 7). The artist as criminal creates a life outside the law which justifies the artist’s imagination. Seducer and criminal alike enjoy playing with the conventions of truth, and they may do so precisely because neither feels bound to or invested in the rules and mores of society. As Wilde says, “Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer” (169). And yet the criminal contributes much to society’s artistic vision.

The relationship between art and life is complicated further when the nature/artifice binary implodes. However, we should not view this implosion as some kind of complete rupture with the past. It is rather the opening of a new potential in language. Like Wilde, Derrida points us towards reverse mimesis through his conceptualization of the relationship between play and language. For Derrida, truth is quite as impossible as the totalization of meaning: “But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of *play*....this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity” (*Writing* 289). Derrida may be more indebted to Nietzsche than to Wilde for his notion of play, which he refers to as “the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the play” (*Writing* 292). Such a seminal trace is evident in the subtle play of Derrida’s own diction. It is likely impossible to ever fully escape this system; however, it is still possible to conserve “all these old concepts within the domain

of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used" (*Writing* 284). The rather nonchalant tone of Derrida's language – recommending that the reader use deconstructive strategies to "here and there denounce" the self-proclaimed *raison d'être* inherent to all metaphysical systems – illustrates the playfulness in language that he also advocates.

This concept of play in language relates directly to the discourse of seduction. The 'dangerous supplement' is so named by Derrida because it is an agent of play and a disruption of presence. Games of seduction offer a similar disruption of presence, substituting masks for "realities." More importantly, though, the concept of a "dangerous supplement" in language points to a fundamental ambiguity in the constitution of subjectivity, as well as to an inability to limit the borders of identity. Many contemporary theorists of seduction use the metaphor of games because of the ludic nature of post-structuralist thought. Derrida seeks to expose the ambiguity of language and thus to disrupt the premise of logic upon which logocentrism is based. Deconstruction uncovers the hidden contradictory elements of binaried thinking such as signifiers that hold the trace of other signifiers: these moments of rupture and undecidability are called aporias. In an essay entitled "Différance" Derrida writes, "If there is a certain wandering in the tracing of *différance*, it no more follows the lines of philosophical-logical discourse than that of its symmetrical and integral inverse, empirical-logical discourse. The concept of *play* keeps itself beyond this opposition, announcing, on the eve of philosophy and beyond it, the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end" (*Margins* 7). A text is always/already under erasure because meaning is always plural, and as a part of its multiplicity, meaning always has traces that

form a metonymic chain that is constantly deferred. The playfulness of language, analyzed from a deconstructive position in the margins, thus suggests the limitless potential of interpretation.

How is seduction similar to the ludic nature of language? The mentality necessary to play a game is similar to the frame of mind necessary to participate in seduction. Both have strict rules and expectations; moreover, both provide a way to socialize people. People know if they follow the rules of play in games or in seduction, they will be rewarded by their society. Both may take diverse forms, but all of the players know that what is at stake is a contest of wills and desires. As ritual, the games of seduction are similar to the act of falling in love in that this is a space where the identity of the subject is always/already slightly under erasure. The border between the seducer and the seduced thus blurs. The competitive nature of sports is present here; the game of seduction will only run its course as long as both participants are actively in conflict. This conflict may be one of desire, or even indecisiveness, as to whether or not to proceed with or to defer the seduction. Only complete disinterestedness can kill the game of seduction. Put simply, no game can take place if no one wants to play. Of course, feigned indifference is another matter, and can in fact act as one of the strategies of seduction.

Julia Kristeva's chapter-heading, "Don Juan, or Loving to Be Able to," points most tellingly to the seductive quality of potential. Kristeva argues that the seducer must always be external, a figure who does not internalize his emotions. The seducer must play on the surface to keep seduction a game. Another way of thinking of the seducer is someone who, according to Kristeva, "is in search of conquest without possession" (*Tales*

195). In any game, there is a sense of potential, of expectation and exhilaration. The seducer and the seduced continually anticipate the outcome of their contact, and yet they simultaneously defer it. Kristeva asks, "Is not his [Don Juan's] libertine attitude more of a longing to change existence into a form, a game, a jouissance? Is not the libertine outlook an extraordinary claim to change life into an art" (*Tales* 197-98)?

Kristeva clearly adopts a Wildean approach to seduction. Her Don Juan incites women to imagine their lives artistically and to live in the impassioned, ephemeral moment of the present romance. Don Juan embodies the game of fantasy. The only rule is that no one must fall in love; of course, this rule must also be broken by the seduced. Her full sense of seduction only comes into play when she no longer has Don Juan, when she realizes that he has conquered her, but not possessed her. In those moments of memory and desire, she fully plays out the scenario of her seduction. Kristeva writes how "Even the love letter, that innocently perverse attempt to subdue or revive the games, is too much engulfed in the immediate fire and speaks only of "me" and 'you' or even a 'we' resulting from the alchemy of identifications, but not of what is really at stake *between*" (*Tales* 3). What stands "between" the players is an element of performance, as each takes a role. The performance, in this case, requires the players to temporarily merge identities, to blur the borders of self, and to fall into a "vertigo of identity, vertigo of words" (*Tales* 3).

PART II

Wilde's concept of "living artistically" may best be seen in terms of the construction of the subject in performance. A dramatic alliance between the natural and

the aesthetic game of seduction appears in literary works as well as in life. Thus subjectivity can be read in an intertextual context that is as permeable as the discourse of seduction. We can also extend the theatrical metaphor into the shift from private to public identity in the staging of seduction. In addition, the roles of the seducer/seduced can be viewed in terms of the author/reader, and the role reversals that occur in both types of plot.

A performative element in seduction first appears in the ambiguous positioning of the seduced. Playing the role of the loved object has its shortcomings. For in this role one is expected always to play a passive recipient to the desiring subject. The discourse of seduction, when looked at closely, reveals nonetheless that there are often many shifting ambiguities in these roles. That is to say, in any literary representation of seduction, much of the excitement comes from the spectacle of interaction between the seducer and the seduced. The tension is generated in part by not knowing how either might react. It would make for a rather dull tale if the seduced were indefatigably passive. Rather, a seduction develops precisely because of the increased involvement of the seduced. This involvement, even if it be only defensive measures, ensures that there are two players in the games of seduction. Moreover, the idea that the seduced is only an object of desire diminishes as his or her character develops into an intricate personality in the literary text. The tension between the polarized opposites of subject/object helps to undercut the hierarchy of these terms. The possibility of a fixed identity is called into question as the border of the binary blurs, as the object becomes (temporarily) the subject. Even if the seduced wants to play the role of desired object, she must at some

level consciously manipulate her attributes to attract the seducer, which in turn means that she has momentarily to become the seducer.

If we accept the Foucauldian idea that language constitutes the subject, then an analysis of some of the assumptions embedded in language will reveal how subjectivity is constructed, and how the subject/object binary cannot remain in stasis. The seducer may be a desiring subject, but the following example provided by Foucault shows that desire is still an artificial construct. The reasoning that formulates desire – who is desired and for what reasons – can vary from society to society. In *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault analyzes fourth and fifth-century B.C. Grecian documents to formulate a hypothesis regarding the formation of individual subjectivity as sexual beings. He identifies several areas of regulation that society has for helping to define sexuality: "(1) the formation of sciences (savoirs) that refer to it; (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice; (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality" (*History* vol. 2 4).

Foucault explores the different perceptions of sexuality in ancient Grecian culture – as much preoccupied with the practices of sexuality as our own age – in which he finds differing emphases. He questions, for example, how sexual behavior ever became an area of concern, and even the domain of moral experience. The Greek's perceptions are rephrased as being distinct from a modern perspective: "The ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported 'by the pleasures and desires'?" (*History* vol. 2 43).

Foucault also demonstrates that the moral dilemma for Greeks over what we choose to term "homosexual" relationships was not preoccupied with the object of same-

sex affections. Rather, the concern lay in the precarious position of the loved one. Greeks condoned the use of wives and slaves as objects of pleasure, although it was certainly expected that a man would show that he could properly govern himself by exhibiting moderation and respect in his dealings with all others. Grecian law not only permitted but even encouraged a sexual relationship between an older man and a young boy: "But to accept the love relationship, to enter the game (even if one did not play exactly the game the lover proposed) was not considered to be a disgrace either" (*History* vol 2 208). Similarly, the boy was considered an object of love, and it was considered the role of the older man to actively pursue and seduce his younger conquest. The unease of this relationship, discussed as it was in a covert and anxious manner, was a major focus of Grecian society. Foucault suggests that the unease is created by the positioning of the boy as an object. The reason being that this is a transitory position, since the boy could only be perceived as an object of love for his pubescent years; following this period, it was expected that he would then take up his role as an adult male in society. As an adult, the expectation for the young man is how he would take up his position of responsibility in the society. Thus, his role includes transition from a position of object to that of subject.

The Greeks even attempted to lay out a set of conditions and modalities with which individuals could approach sexuality. "One could behave ethically only by adopting a combative attitude toward the pleasures" (*History* vol 2 66). For example, the advice given to young boys suggested that they must be modest in their selection of suitors and, more importantly, any enjoyment that they derived from the relationship should be the result of giving and seeing the pleasure experienced by their partner rather

than any physical satisfaction obtained for their own part. This advice placed the focus on the more spiritual side of the relationship. However, this philosophy also meant that Grecian society expected the boy to play a role but simultaneously not to identify with that role.

Boys were encouraged to find lovers who could later become business associates or contacts. In turn, the transformation of the love scene into social ties also meant the transition from a private to a public relationship. Private, in the sense that the relationship would be one of lovers, yet also public in that, as in many scenes of seduction, the relationship would be under the intense scrutiny of the public sphere. Thus from an early age a performative element is found in scenes of seduction. The young lover would have been acutely conscious of his double role as an actor accountable to his audience, that is to say, to his society. Yet the polemics of this same-sex relationship still troubled Grecian thought, mainly because it disturbed the traditional understanding of relationships which suggested that one of the partners take on the role as dominant penetrator and the other as passive. "The relationship that he was expected to establish with himself in order to become a free man, master of himself and capable of prevailing over others, was at variance with a form of relationship in which he would be an object of pleasure for another. This noncoincidence was ethically necessary" (*History* vol. 2 221). It was Plato among others who displaced the discourse of desire onto a more metaphysical plane of thinking. "It was here, at this point of problematization (how to make the object of pleasure into a subject who was in control of his pleasures), that philosophical erotics, or in any case Socratic-Platonic reflection on love, was to take its point of departure" (*History* Vol. 2 225).

As in his other writings, Foucault argues that our focus in understanding power relationships must be on how the individual has endeavored to form him/herself into an ethical subject; it is a person's relationship to him/herself that most strongly reflects a society's construction of truth. By truth, Foucault means the "games of truth" that are used to establish codes of conduct and beliefs. Plato reorganized thinking around same-sex relationships to allay concerns regarding the potentially excessive and frivolous nature of such a relationship. Contrary to Foucault's view of truth as multiple and changing, Plato utilized truth as a technique to explain desiring subjects. "The appetite, Plato explains in the *Philebus*, can be aroused only by the representation, the image or the memory of the thing that gives pleasure; he concludes that there can be no desire except in the soul, for while the body is affected by privation, it is the soul and only the soul that can, through memory, make present the thing that is to be desired and thereby arouse the *epithumia*" (*History* Vol. 2 43).

Desire, here made analogous to the discourse of seduction, is thus constructed as a lack or absence that requires pursuit. In particular, Plato frames the relationship of youth to older men as a search for their male half, allowing older men to tap into the energy of youth through such a relationship. Thus, the theme of love becomes linked with desire for access to knowledge. "And thus one sees how Platonic reflection tends to detach itself from a common problematization that revolved around the object and the status that ought to be given to him, in order to open a line of inquiry concerning love, which will revolve around the subject and the truth he is capable of" (*History* vol 2 243). The inquiry turns from the question of the honor or disgrace of a subject to the quest for truth and knowledge through an understanding of one's own proper desire and its origins. This

sublimation of desire has the further implication that to conceive of oneself as a desiring subject is a morally and ethically justifiable action. In fact, Plato shifts the paradigm of desire from a general attitude held by Grecian society towards how an individual might relate himself and others to a belief that one's morality is intimately linked with how an individual constructs himself as a desiring subject. In this paradigm, the discourse of seduction takes an inverse form in that the object of love, through passive efforts to attract the subject, essentially becomes a kind of seducer.

The subject/object binary thus collapses when it is revealed as a construct. The concept of performance is an aesthetic construct that helps to reveal the artifice of binaried constructs such as the older/younger man or the nature/artifice binary. As an artistic concept, performance also helps to explain how subjectivity is socially constructed and represented in literature. There is a performative quality to any seduction. The seducer and the seduced know that they both have starring roles. In the limelight of their own lives, they are enthralled by the drama as they cause it to unfold. Moreover, they know that they are playing to an audience, for although seduction may begin in secret, it always ends in the public domain. Seduction is dramatized through the strategies used to foster it. As in most fiction, the commonplace details of the seducer such as sleeping, eating, running errands must all be left out of the drama. Seduction is not a space of comfort or domesticity. Instead, it is a great stage where emotions have full range and a series of dramatic decisions must be taken and their consequences played out. The theatre provides a perfect space for seduction because seduction is meant to perform. Furthermore, the performance of seduction acts to collapse the binary of nature/artifice that tries to underpin it. This is not to say that seduction is not genuine in

its own way: sometimes a well-interpreted, sincerely performed life is more exciting and honest than a life unconsciously lived.

Baudrillard notes that to be seduced is the best way to seduce. One must go through the secretive, ritualistic initiation into the rules of seduction, but this private initiation has the privacy of a soliloquy performed on stage. That is to say, an audience must witness one's emotions and epiphanies to transform them into an affirming experience when one is a seducer. Thus the performance of a seducer moves from the private to the public domain within the space of the theatre. Baudrillard states, "Seduction does not consist of a simple appearance, not a pure absence, but the eclipse of a presence. Its sole strategy is to be there/not there, and thereby produce a sort of flickering, a hypnotic mechanism that crystallizes attention outside all concern with meaning. Absence here seduces presence" (85). The seducer evades any questions dealing with "truth" because s/he wants to create an illusion. In any scene of seduction, the seducer and the seduced need as actors to elaborate their roles so as to challenge their identity formation. In a sense, everything within a scene of seduction becomes a prop to the main actors. This concept can be taken to its radical extreme in that even the seducer or the seduced can become each other's prop. In such instances, the object of desire becomes a means for articulating a discourse of seduction that is really more directed at the interlocutor, or the audience, which is society. Part of the 'flickering' effect of seduction is that it is sometimes unclear where the seducer's intentions lie; that is to say, it may be that the seduced is not on stage but in the audience.

The discourse of seduction is thus heavily inscribed with the language of the theatre. The role of the seducer involves a mental cruelty to him/herself as well as to

others; s/he is driven by the demands of the performance. Baudrillard argues that the seducer is only interested in seducing, and not in pleasing or loving the object. Seduction is sovereign; however, the price of this ritualistic passion is high. In literary narratives, the seducer does not exist outside of the theatre of seduction, and thus every other aspect of the text becomes subordinate to the play of seduction. "Seduction consists in letting the other believe himself to be the subject of desire, without oneself being caught in the trap" (86). In seduction, desire is not an end but a prize to be gained. Despite the field of the seducer's game, despair and cruelty, the seducer wants immortality; in other words, s/he is relentless to ensure that the audience experiences the catharsis of living through the seduction of another. The seducer is aware of the tactics that a person being seduced may use to try to avoid the seduction, and also knows that, "if handled correctly" (87), that person will succumb to the wish to be seduced. The seducer relies on deception as an aesthetic form that embellishes the narrative of the script: "Even if she [the seductress] speaks of reasons or motives, be they guilty or cynical, it is a trap" (85). By exposing her own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, the seducer finds the strength of her performance. In turn, even though the audience knows that the seducer exposes his weaknesses only as a strategy of seduction, the audience is nevertheless also seduced because it is such a clever performance.

The audience is usually two-fold: (1) those within the text who witness, facilitate and/or perhaps impede the seduction (2); and those outside the text, the readers or spectators. They are bemused, taken in, hoodwinked, temporarily seduced because they understand the longing of the seduced to let the seducer play out her role. Seduction can never be fully articulated, and so it must be viewed as a performance. Seduction and

performance are both subversive. Henry Sayre says that, "A good way to think of performance is to realize that in it the potentially disruptive forces of the 'outside' (what is 'outside' the text – the physical space in which it is presented, the other media it might engage or find itself among, the various frames of mind the diverse members of a given audience might bring to it, and, over time, the changing forces of history itself) are encouraged to assert themselves" (94).

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes, "The question I would like to pose is not, Why are we repressed? but rather, Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed" (*History* vol.1 8-9)? Foucault argues in his "repressive hypothesis" that the Victorian era is less marked by sexual repression than by a proliferation of discourses less obviously related to sex. Thus, the silence of the body intersects with the discourse of confession: people were asked to confess their most intimate sexual-life details to an interlocutor, a priest. The drama is relived and savored by all parties. Confession then becomes a performative means of regulating sexuality, and normalizing heterosexual relations. This performance is also a means of transgression.

To locate the regime of power/pleasure/knowledge within the economy of sexual history, we must ask who produces the discourse of sex and under what conditions. Foucault shows how discursive practices in the West during the last three centuries have been deeply concerned with the production, control, proliferation, and regulation of sexuality. Sex has been brought under the auspices of medical, judicial, and governmental regulatory bodies that have been responsible for promoting the family as

the locus of sexuality. These regulatory agencies, however, also express anxiety at their inability to draft the silent body into language. The discourse of seduction has also been marginalized as the pariah within the economy of these other official discourses. In this sense, the discourse of seduction is that which is abject: it challenges the borders of our identity. The performative aspects of seduction nonetheless reside in the margins, eluding the authoritative mechanisms of official discourses.

The ironic strategy of the seducer is to turn himself into a mask so as to disturb appearances. Baudrillard asks, "Doesn't the seducer end up losing himself in his strategy, as in an emotional labyrinth? Doesn't he invent the strategy in order to lose himself in it" (98)? Baudrillard's questions emphasize that artifice is an essential element of any seduction. The seducer as a desiring subject must always defend himself against falling prey to his own seduction, and yet this is somewhat inevitable for at least a brief period of time for the seduction to have any charm. Baudrillard's argument implicitly suggests that the nature/artifice binary is undermined through the inverted relationship of seducer/seduced which occurs when the seducer is seduced. Baudrillard claims that since seduction can be viewed as a ritual, we must account for the ritualistic practice of sacrifice by observing how the binary of nature/artifice in the case of seduction privileges artifice. The seduced as the object of desire is "naturally endowed with seduction," (99) according to Baudrillard, who correctly points to the fact that the seduced is normally portrayed in any literary representation as naturally beautiful, pure, and virtuous. Baudrillard argues that the seducer and the seduced thus play out a ritual of sacrifice in which beauty is made the sacrifice. Therefore seduction, in this light, means that the seducer's game is to conquer the beauty of the seduced so as to claim its natural powers

under his reign of artifice. The seducer's artificial power will destroy the seduced's natural power, and in doing so, reverse the nature/artifice binary. The seducer will use all of his skill to bring her to erotic abandon, and thus give up her power to the seducer; "the calculated seduction mirrors the natural seduction" (99). In this interpretation of seduction, according to Baudrillard, seduction is always/already present; it responds to the preexisting challenge of beauty endowed by nature, and thus it tries to right the imbalance of privileging nature over artifice. The symbolic force of beauty must be overturned and sacrificed. Baudrillard elucidates this concept as: "The ritual execution of a form that consumes its subject. This is why the piece takes on both the aesthetic form of a work of art and the ritual form of a crime" (99).

Baudrillard does concede that pure seduction has a spiritual dimension, which should not be equated with purity: to conquer someone spiritually requires a certain amount of deviousness. Baudrillard wants to argue that the ritualistic sacrifice of the natural beauty of the seduced to the artificial cunning of the seducer is a way of attaining a kind of spiritual purity. In that sense, it is cathartic because the seduced is made abject so as to reaffirm the identity of the seducer.

Language itself is always already seductive because it offers such tantalizing possibilities, even when we know that it is no more than the illusion of appearances. Every time we have a well-expressed thought, there is the sensation of clarity and of having met a challenge. At the same time, language never completely reveals its secrets. Within Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework, all subjectivity is "in process," which secures this link between subjectivity, language, and power. In fact, Kristeva suggests that we should think of the self as part of a linguistic system. She argues that nothing is

outside of language. However, we can locate points of destabilization within language, which in turn open up infinite possibilities of identity, thus forever deferring the possibility of fixed meaning. Such an open system should not be seen as a threat; rather, it is an invitation to the possibility of growth of the psyche. True subjectivity, for Kristeva, is the articulation of being within the social realm, what she calls *le sujet en proces*: the "constitution and deconstitution of the subject: a subject in process/on trial" (*Revolution* 616). The discourse of seduction cannot exist outside the social realm. Seduction is a powerful discourse because it does not play by the rules of society, yet all societies produce seduction. Moreover, the discourse of seduction is generated from the relations between subjects rather than from the subjects themselves. In this sense, it is an elusive force, much like language, which constitutes the subject but is not part of the subject.

The formation of the subject-in-process also appears in the uneasy relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic orders. The subject-in-process must always negotiate between the symbolic and the semiotic order. The semiotic is a pre-language state when child and mother have their closest bond, and the child does not differentiate itself as Other. (Freud would name this as primary narcissism.) Kristeva's semiotic differs, though, in that she is speaking literally and figuratively about the body. Furthermore, the semiotic does not only refer to the child in the womb, but instead to a state that we can access as a means to subvert the Law of the Father and the symbolic order. Thus the semiotic is a transgressive force that aids seduction by tapping into the playful elements of language that evade the ethos of logocentrism. While Lacan, for example, has privileged the symbolic and sought to outline its limits, Kristeva, by

contrast, has tried to seek out what is beyond those limits and the premises of logic. The semiotic entails both the music and the body of language; it is *jouissance*, an extreme pleasure. The rather indecipherable quality of the semiotic that refuses strict definition enriches discourses of seduction. Kristeva notes that it is such elusiveness, as well as the joy of Mozart's Don Juan, that embodies the semiotic element.

The subject must still identify with the Ideal Other to exist, since the Ideal Other provides a necessary mirror of self through language. Subjectivity thus relies on a shifting identification with the Other:

The Ego ideal includes the Ego on account of the love that this Ego has for it and thus unifies it, restrains its drives, turns it into a *Subject*. An Ego is a body to be put to death, or at least to be deferred, for the love of the other and so that Myself can be. Love is a death sentence that causes me to be. When death, which is intrinsic to amorous passion takes place in reality and carries away the body of one of the lovers, it is at its most unbearable; the surviving lover then realizes the abyss that separates the imaginary death that he experienced in his passion from the relentless reality from which love has forever set him apart: saved. (*Tales*, 36)

The subject desires to be united with the Other precisely because the Other is separate. That brief moment of complete identification with the Other is fleetingly a site of love. Therefore, Kristeva is really talking about two types of "Other" and their intrinsic relationship in constituting the subjectivity of the self – the Ideal Other that tries to unite with the self, but always leads to misrecognition in the mirror stage; and secondly, the lover as the "Other" whom in our daily lives provides a mirror of the self.

When there is a death or break from the Ideal Other, the Self comes into confrontation with borders of identity. Lurking on the edge is the border of abjection which differentiates identity: "The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth" (*Powers* 9). Kristeva's description compels the reader to reminisce about thoughts of fiery love; abjection, similar to *jouissance*, blinds the lover and at the same time provides epiphanies of self-knowledge. Kristeva's reading of the Other is complicated by her analysis of abjection which ascribes agency to what she defines as the Stray. The binary of Self/Other is further multiplied/divided by the inclusion of the Stray or deject: "A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating this universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the object – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (*Powers* 8). The Stray does not have an object because it attempts at every opportunity to supersede binaried systems, to participate only in their destruction or modification. When the Other collapses, it is at that moment that the Stray steps in as the alter ego. As Kristeva puts it, "as in *jouissance* where the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the object. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego* drops so that 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence" (*Powers* 9). The object is that space where the effects of non-meaning are allowed to exist, where the signified has not been able to wholly unite with the signifier. According to Kristeva, "abjection is above all ambiguity" (*Powers* 9). The Stray as an outlaw, on the borders of identity – always

challenging its right-to-be – has much in common with seduction. Like seduction, “abjection is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them” (*Powers* 15). The relationship between Self/Other is haunted, supplemented, by the abject which makes the Other reiterate itself in new forms, and thus causing the Self to constantly metamorphosize.

PART III

Up to this point, we have been discussing subjectivity in psychoanalytic terms, in historical contexts, and in literary representations. The discussion, however, needs to expand the relationships between seducer-writer and seduced-reader, and the reversals that may occur in these roles. This section, in part, will draw on phenomenology and the reading act as described by Wolfgang Iser. The phenomenological approach differs from poststructuralist thought in that it ascribes more agency to subjectivity. We will focus on the discursive practices that impute power to the functions of discourse that are typically named as author and reader. The discourse of seduction likewise plays a role in defining the complexities of these roles.

Let us first establish that when we speak of the reader it does not matter really whether we refer to the implied reader or a ‘real’ individual. What is of more importance is that, although the reader can be seen as a subject constructed through discursive practices, this subjectivity ought to be understood as *subject to* many possible oppressions associated with the privileges of class, gender, or race, which in turn affect the process of interpretation of what constitutes a reader and how such a reader is read.

Of course, these same conditions apply to the literary representation of the seduced. Thus, for instance, certain feminists such as Gilbert and Gubar have critiqued the disjunction for women between an implied white, male heterosexual man and the actual reader (perhaps a black lesbian) unable to identify with the text on certain levels. Likewise, the writer occupies a somewhat ambiguous position in the "author-function," a term that Foucault coins in his essay, "What is an Author?" He contends that "the function of the author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (*Language* 124). He assigns the author-function power only insofar as it is invested with communal authority. Of noteworthiness, many contemporary theorists such as Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva have explored the positioning of the author in relation to society. These terms of writer/reader may be further illuminated when put into a dialectical relationship with the seducer/seduced.

Why is seduction an interesting plot for authors and readers alike? Readers are caught off-guard when (and if) they realize that the focus of the text's seduction is not so much centred on the protagonist as it is on themselves. The discourse of seduction is readily taken up by writers who recognize its transgressive elements. The writer and the fictional personae, in a sense, become accomplices in the seduction of the reader. The appeal of seduction thus lies partly in the fact that it relies on surface appearances; it is a narcissistic mirror. The reader, loath to look beyond the mirror surface, will eventually find a strange refraction. That refraction will be the site of reality and fiction folding in on one another. For the reader has dual roles as a voyeur of the text and as a participant drawn into the seduction.

The reader is an audience member who must act as more than a mere spectator, and the writer is a playwright who solicits collaboration. There is a linguistic seduction at work, so to speak, as the reader is drawn in to participate in the production of meaning in the text. The ploys of the writer are similar to those of the seducer: the seduced-reader must be intrigued enough to want to participate in some form in the seduction, even if that form comes in the shape of resistance. The writer-seducer works as a playwright trying to develop, not only his role, but also an entire plot in which all participants must take on roles. This is not to suggest that the writer-seducer has a masterplot. Rather, s/he is an instigator in propelling the narrative towards the dizzying emotions and intrigues found within the discourse of seduction. This desire to initiate rather than master any plotline is borne out through numerous gaps in the text that appeal to the need for collaboration. In his essay "The Reading Process," Iser discusses the necessity of gaps in any text that require the imagination of the reader so as to more fully realize the meaning of the text.

To position the reader as a performer allows for an interesting analogous reading of the seduced. The perceived real experience of the reader relates directly to his/her processes of interpretation. Iser explains, "Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own" (1224). Just as an actor may have to take on unfamiliar emotions or actions to play a part truly, so must the reader. The reader and the seduced are both performers since they must temporarily abandon themselves to the emotions demanded by their role. In this sense, the reader identifies with the seduced (the literary figure) and is seduced by the writer and the text's desire for him/her to

become immersed in the narrative and its potential. The reader's seduction parallels that of the seduced because in both cases they take on their respective roles in the drama, while at some level always acknowledging that the drama is an illusion not meant to constitute reality. As Iser states, "it is precisely during our reading that the transitory nature of the illusion is revealed to the full" (1227). Since it is revealed that both the reader and the seduced have knowledge of their roles in the seduction plot, we must also recognize that such knowledge is a form of power. Thus the performative element of seduction ensures that the hierarchical binaried system is destabilized through role reversals. Armed with the knowledge and the capabilities of his/her own theatrical techniques, the reader-seduced (at moments conflated into one subject) also plays a role in determining the discourse of seduction.

Power must still be worked out through systems and metaphor. For example, systems of power include various societal structures such as institutions of formal learning, law, and religion. Seduction must always act through metaphor because the signifier, analogous to the Other or the seduced, is perpetually in flight. That is to say, the signifier in writing tries to control meaning and to seduce the signified to conform to a specific conceptualization. The signified, however, like the seduced, is never fully within the grasp of the signifier (seducer). Because of the ambiguity inherent to language, the story of seduction can never be fully written just by the writer. The reader must also participate in the creation of the meaning of any given text. This is where the dialectic of power lies: readers/signifieds/seduced are just as guilty of imposing meaning as writers/signifiers/seducers. "Each term grounds the way a culture stabilizes and represents itself, yet does so as a signifier with an incessantly receding, ungraspable

signified which invariably always points self-reflexively to other signifiers” (Bronfen xi). Metaphor is a means of negotiating the gaps in language, which exceed explicit meaning.

Seduction appeals to the writer and reader alike because it naturalizes the love story only long enough for one to believe in it temporarily, much in the same way that we enjoy a good fable before bedtime without any desire that the fable will later become our reality. The fact that the narrative of seduction implodes the nature/artifice binary is also seductive because, in recognizing that these previously naturalized versions of seduction privilege only certain power relations and paradigms, the possibility for other configurations now opens up. By self-consciously recognizing seduction as art, the writer is invited to take creative license. Likewise, the reader is not merely a recipient of knowledge; s/he must engage with the text and its production of meaning. The reader is reading not only to understand and evaluate the text, but also to be seduced. Moreover, society’s norms for the reception of texts is written as much by the reader as the writer; together, they form an aesthetic vision. The seductive quality of many texts relates to the prohibition of their narratives because often what is considered outrageous appeals to a larger audience. Throughout the history of books, those that have been censored have also found over the long term a wider audience.

Seduction functions much the same way that power does in that it is found in the relations between objects/people/ideas rather than in any one given person or text. In her essay entitled “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” Kristeva maintains that we should think of “the ‘literary word’ as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the earlier cultural context” (*Desire* 65). Kristeva’s intertextual approach suggests that each

component in the writing/reading process mediates the Other. Thus, seduction is produced by the relationships of this dialogue. Elsewhere in the same essay, Kristeva observes, "The writer's interlocutor, then, is the writer himself, but as reader of another text" (*Desire* 86).

Foucault likewise argues that power lies in the relations between individual subjects and as nodal points within the larger structure. He posits that the speaking subject is constituted through discourse and identifies the important question as being who gets to say what to whom. Power and knowledge can be understood as different points on a grid in which the nodes form points of concession or resistance to the ever-changing configurations. In other words, there is nowhere "outside" of power, and we must conceive of power as not only changing but also being continually productive. Moreover, the individual speaking subject not only acts as a mechanism for the system, but the individual's very sense of "self" must be attributed to his or her relations to language and society. Thus, in terms of seduction, the binary of seducer/seduced can only be understood in relation to power and knowledge. The notion that the seducer individually holds the power in this hierarchy is in fact quite complicated. Ultimately, it is the aesthetic sublimation of life which allows seduction to be wrought from art.

Part IV

Seduction ought to be understood as a strategy of displacement; the etymology of the word *seducere* is to take aside, to divert from one's path. Seduction implies a reversible and indeterminate order much like the semiotic which refuses the Law of the Father. As previously suggested, metaphor is a means for the signifier to try to grasp

hold of the signified. The myth of Narcissus, while distinct from seduction in terms of where the politics of control lie, helps to clarify how it is that signifieds, readers, and seduceds are so often (willingly) led astray. Baudrillard claims that, "Inexorably, discourse is left to its own appearances, and thus to the stakes of seduction, thus to its own failure, by the bracketing of its objectives, of its truth affects which become absorbed within a surface that swallows meaning" (54).

A "surface that swallows meaning" and leads to the erasure of the self is the water that mirrors Narcissus's reflection. Much like the Velasquez painting "The Dwarf," in which an artist paints a couple who are reflected endlessly back and forth between two mirrors into infinity, the attempts of Narcissus to unite with his Other lead to a similar infinitude of erasure. The seducer, unlike Narcissus, does not fall into an oblivion of solipsism; rather, he is framed in a narrative of displacement. Although there are fascinating parallels between Narcissus and the figure of the seducer, it is important to note that Narcissus mistakes the image for external reality, whereas the seducer does not. In the first case, the image is deceiving; in the second case, the seducer is deceiving. The discourse of seduction is heterogeneous and must be sought out in the traces of language where it exists as a supplement and as a presence/absence. Invariably, there is the erasure of both the identity of the subject in "love" and in the text in the play of signification.

Reading Ovid's Narcissus, as well as Kristeva's interpretation of the amorous figure, provides insight into the psychology of the seducer:

Himself he longs for, longs unwittingly,
Praising is praised, desiring is desired,
And love he kindles while with love he burns.
How often in vain he kissed the cheating pool
And in the water sank his arms to clasp
The neck he saw, but could not clasp himself!
Not knowing what he sees, he adores the sight;
That false face fools and fuels his delight.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (III 425-32)

Narcissus has fallen in love with his own watery image. His solipsism leads to the collapse of the image into the Ego Ideal. The comedy and pathos of Ovid's portrait both come from the absence of a separate Ego Ideal. For his Narcissus poses subjectivity as unstable and changing, though not in the sense of tautological change. Narcissus is like the seduced, momentarily abandoned to the Other, absorbed into both the Other and Ego Ideal. He is a fragmented subject searching for completion. Ovid's Narcissus spurns the love of his many admirers, including Echo, and is seduced instead by his own image when leaning over a pool. The seducer, while certainly not so completely self-absorbed, must find some aspect of his own identity that he longs for in his object of desire, and yet that object will always remain to some extent an elusive appearance.

The seducer must then continue his/her search for new conquests beyond the self, in part, because the object of desire can never fully realize the Ego Ideal. With her focus on the threat to identity that love poses, Kristeva writes of Narcissus's solipsism: "We are here confronted with what we can but call the vertigo of a love with no object other than

a mirage" (*Tales* 104). The story culminates in Narcissus realizing that this disembodied hope of desire found in his own image is himself, and more importantly, he learns, as one of his tears disturbs the water's surface, that this image can disappear. "He then discovers that the reflection is no other but represents himself, that the other is the presentation of the self. Thus, in his own way, Narcissus discovers in sorrow and death the alienation that is the constituent of his own image" (*Tales* 121). Narcissus rejects the real Other that might replace the image because he both wants and refuses Otherness; he has no object to fill the space precisely because his object *is* psychic space.

As John Lechte observes, "The story of Narcissus opens up a new dynamic in western subjectivity where the youth beside the pool, at the very point of desiring an object outside himself, thereby confirming his subjectivity, does not quite succeed: desire fails and Narcissus dies" (cited in *Kristeva* 172). The seducer loves himself through loving the seduced, which is only a temporary state of being. In the times when he is in-between conquests, there are moments of self-loathing and abjection, even though s/he may not internalize these emotions. As Freud notes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to love passionately is also the closest we can come to the death drive. As Kristeva notes, "Let us make this clear: if love takes over from narcissism in ulterior sexual drives, it is underlain, borne, and determined by hatred" (*Tales* 124). It is important to include Narcissus within this theoretical framework of seduction because he complicates the notion of love. For Narcissus is simultaneously an ecstatic and brooding lover who reveals in the most candid way how the object of love or seduction is always to some extent an illusion.

The *jouissance* of seduction also has a cruel edge. The stakes in the games of seduction are high precisely because they play a role in our psychological development. In *Tales of Love* Julia Kristeva argues that late twentieth-century western society is in crisis because, in a sense, its psychological development is paralyzed. It no longer has the comfort of the metaphysics of being, and yet it longs nostalgically for something to believe in. Thus, like Narcissus, we stare into our own reflection lovingly, unaware that it only provides a screen of emptiness: "*emptiness* that is intrinsic to the beginnings of the symbolic function appears as the first separation between what is not yet an *Ego* and what is not yet an *object*" (*Tales* 24). Kristeva argues that behind this emptiness lies death or neurosis. However, she suggests that to come in contact with this space is truly to confront the borders of the psyche; the way to access this space is through the psychoanalyst's couch or amorous discourse. Kristeva elaborates: "If narcissism is a defense against the emptiness of separation, then the whole contrivance of imagery, representations, identifications, and projections that accompany it on the way toward strengthening the *Ego* and the *Subject* is a means of exorcising that emptiness" (*Tales* 42).

Amorous discourse allows us to renew language and to incorporate playfulness into our actions; it is the permanent stabilization/destabilization between the symbolic and the semiotic. The seducer uses amorous discourse as a means to explore the borders of his/her own psyche and that of the seduced. There is, of course, always a relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic order. Kristeva proposes, though, that western civilization has ignored the semiotic to try instead to represent language and the self as a unitary model. I wish to suggest that seduction can disrupt this illusion by bringing the

semiotic into play. In other words, the seducer exposes the artifice of the relationship between language and the self by privileging the semiotic. S/he does so through games of seduction, which rely on strategies aimed at subverting traditional logic. This confrontation with death behind the screen of narcissism and emptiness is then an opportunity to access the language of the semiotic where it meets with the symbolic and, in a sense, to do what Narcissus fails to do: "know thyself." The solidarity between narcissism and emptiness ensures that even chaos in the psyche is not loosed, thus ensuring the limits of identity: "A fragile crest where death and regeneration vie for dominance" (*Tales* 5).

Love, in fact, can be described as a fear of crossing the boundaries of the self. Seduction subordinates love to its own objectives of exploration of the self. Kristeva argues that falling in love is really a narcissistic moment; similarly, Roland Barthes proposes that the lover's discourse is one of profound solitude. If these contemporary theorists are correct in setting up love as solitary and narcissistic, it is seduction that still acts as a conduit for love. Kristeva suggests that love moves between narcissism and idealization of the Other, and that we construct love as part of the natural and real world. The idealization of love cannot sustain itself, and thus the discourse of seduction, I will argue, necessarily contradicts this representation of love. One way that seduction undermines the "naturalness" of love is by parodying its claims of sincere devotion to the loved one. For example, the seducer, it is normally supposed, also plays the double role of lover. Fulfilling this role involves professions of love, whether they be uttered in a perfunctory, scripted manner or in the throes of passion and (at least temporary) sincerity. However, the language of the lover is mediated and undercut because it is no longer clear

whether it belongs to the realm of nature or to artifice. According to Kristeva, we lack a code of love today, and therefore the identity of the self is under erasure. Love hovers between narcissism and idealization. Covered in abjection, we only have temporal guideposts of idealization (*Tales* 7). The discourse of seduction, through its emphasis on artifice and play, thus challenges the borders of self and the constitution of a fixed identity, contributing to the erasure of a centre, or any fixed meaning.

By understanding the abjection of love through psychoanalysis, we are likely to have more control over the horrors that it stimulates in us. It is through defining our borders, which are constantly threatened by abjectness at the margins, that we constitute our identities. As Kristeva notes, "Abjection, with a meaning broadened to take in subjective diachrony, is a precondition of narcissism. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle. The more or less beautiful image in which I behold or recognize myself rests upon abjection that sunders it as soon as repression, the constant watchman, is relaxed" (*Powers* 13). Abjection is the muddy, now-disturbed water that Narcissus does not want to see because his unity is thus threatened with the possible dissolution of his image, his Other. The seducer senses the emotional *jouissance* and turmoil which are equally present in the semiotic order, and longs for the risks that each presents, as much as the potentially passionate feelings that are not grounded in the logic of the symbolic order. Similarly, the seduced also longs to experience an array of emotions that the abject offers; the Stray (seducer) invites the seduced to explore the full range of her identity. The seducer and the seduced, unlike Narcissus, share the desire to keep exploring; they are not interested in watery stasis. Although risky, this flirtation with death and renewal is what abjection offers to both parties of seduction.

According to Baudrillard, Narcissus is not a reflection but rather a deception: "the strategy of seduction is one of deception. It lies in wait for all that tends to confuse itself with its reality" (69). Seduction must then be a matter of self-seduction, and so the deception is far-reaching. For narcissism and artifice are both concepts that try to find a unity where there is none. The watery image that Narcissus sees in the pool is a deception. Likewise, seduction is not interested in constituting reality. It employs signs without truth and gestures without reference; its logic is not one of mediation but of immediacy, whatever the sign may be. Baudrillard writes, "Above all, seduction supposes not a signified desire, but the beauty of an artifice" (76). Intrigue leads to deception, and both the seducer and the seduced are in search of but always just beyond the grasp of meaning, any final understanding of themselves will prove elusive. In this moment, when one is drawn into the void of meaning, the narcissistic pool, seduction, is constructed.

Invariably, however, the discourse of seduction leads to implosions in the nature/artifice binary. The emergence of this discourse has led to the "groping apparition of a form of thought in which the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality and the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions" (*Language* 50). The discourse of seduction is an act of transgression, in that it is politicized as a subversive element within any discursive structure, but it maintains a virtual autonomy free of ethical choices through its constitution as an aesthetic form. Through the configurations of the players involved, and more importantly, through their relationships, the link between seduction and power is more clearly defined. The subject, destabilized

and under erasure, nevertheless abandons him or herself to the seduction of “living artistically.”

4: Parody as Seduction

Chapter four explores some of the relations between parody and seduction as formal operations. This section begins with a comparison of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (double-voiced discourses), Foucault (parody as transgressive), and Linda Hutcheon (parody as repetition with critical distance). Hutcheon's theory most interests me because she proposes that the ironic inversion of one book that is parodically played out in another signifies more than the artistic and intellectual distance between the two texts; it also embodies their intimate connection. This parodic play, more importantly, transforms literary ideologies in startling ways. I would like to explore how many of the tropes of seduction formed in the Restoration or the Victorian periods, for instance, are reflective of some of the conventions and mores of these eras. Similarly, historic paradigms and contemporary ideologies simultaneously inform tropes of seduction in the twentieth century.

I will argue that parody itself is a form of seduction, which is to say that one text may seduce another, or subvert it to do the bidding of another. The intertextuality of texts has always been playful and, of course, always required a willing reader. Seduction must begin with a willingness, even if skepticism and resistance tinge that will. Parody as a form of seduction can also elaborate some of the premises of Baudrillard's theory. For example, parody insists on drawing a "seduced" or parodied text into its own realm of discourse. The text that is the seducer controls the medium of language and only selects that which it wants from the seduced text.

This chapter will also act as a segue to introduce the rhetorical triangle that I see underlying my choice of *Kamouraska*, *No Fixed Address*, and *Ana Historic*. I wish to discuss how such texts can seduce other texts through a close analysis of *No Fixed Address* in relation to other, more classic formulations of the Don Juan myth. In *Ana Historic*, I shall focus on the relationship of the constructed reader to the text and how the text seduces this reader. In *Kamouraska*, I will move into the third part of this communicative triangle to examine how the narration itself acts as a seducer. This reading strategy will further allow me to trace multiple sites of power, and in turn, to propose a theory of seduction that is more far-reaching than, say, Baudrillard's reading.

An important factor in the discourse of seduction is that it invariably requires a form of dialogism. Mikhail Bakhtin proposes that double-voiced discourse, otherwise referred to as dialogism, is a determining factor in understanding literature. Bakhtin coined the term dialogism, which can be understood in two ways. An understanding of dialogism can serve to explain some of the complex tensions in the discourse of seduction. Firstly, double-voiced discourse suggests that no word exists in isolation; instead, it is part of a greater whole and so a word is just that, a word, and yet at the same time it embodies the whole history of the use of that word. Secondly, dialogism is a language that contains two voices within a single grammatical construction (passive or active double-voiced discourse). The active double-voiced discourse represents parody in that there is a discrepancy between the parodist's views and the direction of another text's aspirations. As Bakhtin explains, "Thus it is that in parody two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects. It is true that only one of these languages (the one

that is parodied) is present in its own right; the other is present invisibly, as an actualizing background for creating and perceiving” (*Dialogic* 76).

Bakhtin uses the prism as a metaphor to elaborate the dynamics of dialogism and its relation to the reader. As he explains elsewhere, “To one degree or another, the author distances himself from this common language, he steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to retract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language (a view that is always superficial and frequently hypocritical)” (*Dialogic* 302). The discourse of seduction is that much more intriguing when the reader realizes that the language of the seducer/seduced is consciously being played with to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that whatever is said takes place within the paradigm of the historical conventions of the discourse of seduction. For instance, the reader views Arachne, the protagonist of *No Fixed Address* differently, when s/he realizes that this heroine is characterized in terms of the figure of Don Juan. The parody enriches our understanding of the protagonist and creates an interesting tension in the discourse, which parodies the traditional Don Juan narratives. The whole tradition, which generally privileges the male viewpoint as central, becomes inverted as the female Don Juan has her way with men. The language “refracts” every time that Arachne speaks because her discourse both embodies and contends against the Don Juan-esqueness of her own dialogue.

Bakhtin suggests that discourse always has a particular social ambience and that it can never be neutral or free from bias. As he argues, “It is the nature of every parody to transpose the values of the parodied style, to highlight certain elements while leaving others in the shade: parody is always biased in some direction, and this bias is dictated by

the distinctive features of the parodying language, its accentual system, its structure – we feel its presence in the parody and we can recognize that presence, just as we at other times recognize clearly accentual systems” (*Dialogic* 75). It is important to recognize that Bakhtin is pointing to a tension in this discourse that arises from contending voices in the parody. It would be a faulty assumption to automatically privilege the parodied version because what the two versions share is as important as what distinguishes them. “Thus every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and style actively and mutually illuminate one another” (*Dialogic* 76), writes Bakhtin. Parody can also revive the parodied text in new and exciting ways, increasing its potentially seductive powers to a reading audience. “It is exactly like the modern novel, where one often does not know where the direct authorial word ends and where a parodic or stylized playing with the characters’ language begins” (*Dialogic* 77). The blurring of borders as to what constitutes a parody makes the reader more attentive and sensitive to the tone of the discourse. This is similar to a well-conducted seduction because a seducer’s objective is also to engage the careful, minute attention of the seduced. Martin Kuester elaborates on the advantages of parody: “What we have here is a new form for an old message (or an old form for a new message), which (1) draws attention to its own form and (2) helps to renew interest in the message itself by severing the message from its expected traditional (or envisioned new) form” (*Framing* 7).

Bakhtin thus posits that dialogism offers an alternative to monologism, which attempts to present a coherent worldview that can no longer be supported in our contemporary postmodern society. For example, in epic literature there is one dominant voice that represents a point of view, tribal or otherwise, that assumes everyone agrees

with it. In *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin shows how monologism and dialogism work (or fail) through the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. A way to move from any dominant societal position, then, is to parody it; that is, to undercut the authority of that viewpoint by presenting "doppelgänger" alternatives. The genre of the novel, according to Bakhtin, is the most successful milieu for parody because its extended prose leaves a great deal of room for play with discourse.

It should also be understood that Bakhtin's theories are written in reaction to and in criticism of his contemporaries' theories, the Russian Formalists of the 1920's. Unlike the Formalists, Bakhtin does not believe that parody acts as a vehicle for the historical development of literature. The Formalists' perspective suggests there is an inherent process of 'growth' that a parody provides in relation to the targeted parodied text, thus assuming the parody is to some extent the superior evolution of the original. Linda Hutcheon provides an example of the Formalists' interpretation of how parody operates: "Parodic works like this one [*Don Quijote*] – works that actually manage to free themselves from the backgrounded text enough to create a new and autonomous form – suggest that the dialectic synthesis that is parody might be a prototype of the pivotal stage in that gradual process of development of literary forms" (*Theory* 35). Moreover, Bakhtin disputes the Formalists' assumption that the parody of one era can be transposed from or transferred to another. Conversely, he argues that parody is period specific. A parody manifests itself in specific relation to its social, political, and ideological conditions. It may be appreciated in later ages, but only with the additional lenses of that other new social, historical context. Bakhtin's contempt for the Formalist vision of

parody comes from his sense that it has been flattened out to an almost monologic form under the name of democracy that prohibits the proliferation of a polyphony of voices.

Bakhtin's theories were transmitted to Western literary theory through the work of Eastern Europeans such as Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva praises Bakhtin's model "where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to *another* structure" (*Desire* 64-65). She goes on to point out that the metaphoric "literary word" for Bakhtin encompasses a whole system of representation, "as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a point (a fixed meaning)" (*Desire* 65). This theory gives the discourse of seduction greater freedom to develop dialogic practices that encode multiple meanings so as to engage the seduced on several levels. Kristeva's 1966 essay "Le mot, le dialogue et le roman" introduces her term "intertextuality," which implies that poetic language should be read as double. For Kristeva, intertextuality is more far-reaching than dialogism since it proposes a juxtaposition between texts rather than just utterances. She sees this juxtaposition as the mapping of ideologies from specific socio-historic backgrounds coming into contact with one another in random orders. The text is a network of sign systems in a constantly shifting relationship to other signifying practices of subjectivity and culture. As Kristeva states elsewhere, "The ideologeme of a text is the focus where knowing rationality grasps the transformation of utterances (to which the text is irreducible) into a totality (the text) as well as the insertions of this totality into the historical and social text" (*Desire* 37). In part, Kristeva argues that the semiotic is translinguistic; it can move from one system to another, which in part is what refutes the metaphysical reliance on binaried oppositions

because the semiotic does not adhere to this pattern. Instead, one can have a double discourse in the language of literature because of the permutation of texts.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* has the teachings of twentieth-century art forms as its main focus. She examines the effects of aesthetic practice on aesthetic theory. Hutcheon's theory of parody provides insight into parodic forms, which in turn informs the way the discourse of seduction plays out in many literary texts. Hutcheon's study encompasses all art forms, but we will limit the scope of this study to literature. She makes the astute observation, though, that "Parody is one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse" (*Theory* 2). Hutcheon rejects the most basic of definitions of parody that confine it to mean merely a form of ridicule and imitation. Instead, she recognizes that parody signals a critical discursive practice initiated within the text itself that depends upon its operation in conjunction with the parodied text. As she writes,

Parody, then, in its ironic "trans-contextualization" and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader. In the intertextual "bouncing" (to use E.M. Forster's famous term) between complicity and distance. (*Theory* 32)

Therefore, Hutcheon finds her understanding of parody in part on the observation that parody, etymologically speaking, comes from the Greek noun *parodia*, which means both "counter" and "beside" – the latter definition usually being ignored. So a relationship of

“engagement” and playfulness, rather than an agenda of destruction or subversion, is perceived as possible. This amplified reading of parody has important implications for the discourse of seduction because it helps to explain how certain tropes of seduction metamorphose while maintaining conventional attributes, even if they are continuously shifting.

Hutcheon maintains that parody can demarcate difference, but it can also operate “as a method of inscribing continuity while permitting critical distance” (*Theory* 20). She identifies key features of parody while at the time expanding traditional notions of the genre that are typically more limiting. In fact, Hutcheon claims that modern parody is as powerful as it is because of its versatility and broad range of operations. Its breadth of theoretical potential and implementation, which extends into all art forms, characterizes Modern parody. The énonciation (the contextualized production and reception of texts) recognizes that parody is time-specific. So, even though it can be reinscribed in new ways, what is understood as parodic is contingent upon the aesthetic practices and ideological assumptions of a given culture and time. As Hutcheon writes, “Perhaps parodists only hurry up what is a natural procedure: the changing of aesthetic forms through time” (*Theory* 35). Within the context of her own writing, though, Hutcheon clearly states that parody is not tautological as the Formalists’ theory advocates, but rather acts as an impetus for change. Kuester responds to the argument that everything can thus be read as parody: “This position implies that every artistic act is a parodic one reacting to earlier models, but also an active one insofar as the parodist re-functions the past models he parodies” (*Framing* 10). Thus, a discussion of parody should always

take into account its relationship to history since it provides an important way to access and to reinscribe information from the past.

The discourse of seduction and parody both privilege artifice. As Hutcheon notes, “Imitating art more than life, parody self-consciously and self-critically recognizes its own nature” (*Theory* 27). Parodic play recognizes that metafiction offers an important commentary and critique of the ‘real’ world in that representations considered fictional or otherwise are all subject to the analysis that parody realizes through critical distancing. Parody recognizes and celebrates its own artificiality: “All parody is overtly hybrid and double-voiced” (*Theory* 28). Whether language truthfully represents events is really unimportant. Instead, it is the manner in which the representation has been constituted, and what has led to the establishment of the accepted aesthetics of that representation, which illumine how discourse functions as a site of power. Thus, in the discourse of seduction a parodic version of seduction is not necessarily any less seductive than the text it attempts to parody. The parody acknowledges the “original” and tries to interrogate it through displacement of the original narrative. That is to say, the narrative is revived and explored in new ways by transposing parts of the “original” in a new context that thus frame it and recontextualize it in such a way that the old is made self-consciously new.

Martin Kuester also considers the relationship of the artifice of a text to that of reality: “Parody certainly is such a metafictional technique of textual self-mimesis; by definition, it is always metafictional or at least ‘meta-linguistic’ in the sense that parody – whatever its purpose – is based on a primary text rather than (or in addition to being based) on ‘real life’even non-fictional texts rely on such textual and textualized material. Especially when we deal with events in the past, ‘real life’ is accessible only

through texts” (*Framing* 16). Kuester’s point is not the New Critics’ view that we are only looking at texts in isolation; rather, he suggests that our ideas and perceptions of reality are always mediated through language. That mediation is also true of any historical discourse, as Hutcheon notes: “Modern artists seem to have recognized that change entails continuity, and have offered us a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of that past. Their double-voiced parodic forms play on the tensions created by this historical awareness” (*Theory* 4). The parodic model thus offers a means to recognize the historical construction as a form of artifice. Furthermore, it acknowledges that historical constructions are always biased; “parody is a form of auto-referentiality, but that does not mean that it has no ideological implications” (*Theory* 28).

Hutcheon’s cogent analysis defines parody, in part, through comparison with genres, modes, and techniques with which it has often been confused. As Hutcheon writes, “Ironic transcontextualization is what distinguishes parody from pastiche or imitation” (*Theory* 12). Parody has often been mistaken for satire; however, these two modes are distinguished in two ways. Parody can be aimed at the ideologies of a historical period or any number of other targets rather than directly at the expense of the parodied text: “parody’s ‘target’ text is always another work of art or, more generally, another form of coded ‘discourse’” (*Theory* 16). Satire, on the other hand, is “moral and social in focus and ameliorative in its intention” (*Theory* 16). In addition, satire usually makes a negative statement on what it satirizes. By contrast, parody “is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” (*Theory* 6).

Many theorists generally agree that parody is of a higher semantic order than other similar genres. While it certainly incorporates irony, parody must also be distinguished from it: "Irony's patent refusal of semantic univocality matches parody's refusal of structural intertextuality" (*Theory* 54). Parody is macrocosmic working at the textual level, and irony is microcosmic and deals with language at the semantic level. Pastiche is only imitative and thus does not exhibit the full range of possibilities of commentary as does parody. Burlesque and travesty necessarily involve ridicule, whereas parody is "repetition with critical distance" (*Theory* 6) that can at times act as a tribute to the parodied text. Quotation differs from parody in that it does not have critical distancing. Lastly, Hutcheon observes that allusion operates through highlighting correspondence rather than difference and is thus a "device for the simultaneous activation of two texts" (*Theory* 38). Parody subordinates other formal elements of narrative to its own use just as seduction utilizes its "cousins" – love, lust, desire, hate, revenge – to do its bidding.

Both parody and seduction rely on an interstice of understanding between parties. As Hutcheon notes, "parody prospers in periods of cultural sophistication that enables parodists to rely on the competence of the reader (viewer, listener) of the parody" (*Theory* 19). Parody needs to be understood in terms of its reception by the decoder. Parody relies on an informed audience that will recognize the double-voiced quality of its discourse; otherwise, "if the receiver does not recognize that the text is a parody, he or she will neutralize both its pragmatic ethos and its double structure" (*Theory* 27). The discourse of seduction is similar in that the seducer can only hope to succeed if at some level the seduced is willing and able to decode his messages of love. Both discourses, it

can be argued, play along the surface of language because they function in terms of codes and structure primarily as a means to form content. The structure of a code shapes the very meaning of the discourse.

Thus, parody can only be understood as a learned code that can be recognized by an audience. As Hutcheon notes, “The structural identities of the text as a parody depends, then, on the coincidence, at the level of strategy, of decoding (recognition and interpretation) and encoding” (*Theory* 34). A similar relationship exists between the seducer and the seduced, although part of the seduction might actually be teaching the seduced the codes of seduction as s/he is drawn further into the act. Hutcheon elaborates on the role of parody and its audience: “While parody offers a much more limited and controlled version of this activation of the past by giving it a new and often ironic context, it makes similar demands more on his or her knowledge and recollection than on his or her openness to play” (*Theory* 5). Parody may not demand a spirited reader, but it does certainly invite the reader to play. The double-entendre effect of parody leads to the expectation that the reader will want to participate more fully in the act of reading so as to uncover other parodic codes – this is part of the joy of reading a parody.

Innocence nonetheless perishes in the discourses of parody and seduction. As Martin Kuester observes, “It is true that if we recognize a parody, this has an effect on our reading of the original: we will never be able to return to the parodied text and read it in the same ‘naïve’ way in which we read it when we did not know the parody” (*Framing* 18). The innocent do not follow the double meaning encoded in language; they do not ‘catch’ the parody. The innocent about to be seduced by a seducer fails to read the performance correctly, does not recognize the formulae, and falls under a spell s/he

would term as love. As a reader, one is formed into a more sophisticated interpreter of texts when an understanding of parody becomes a learned skill. Likewise, the seduced must experience the whole range of emotions associated with seduction before s/he can claim knowledge in the area of love. These are rites of passage. At times painful, they require the innocent to be more self-reflective and more critical of how systems of power operate through discourse.

Parody is also a form of play – it opens up a dialogue between the two texts and the reader. The binary of the original versus the parodied text, and the resulting hierarchy, are broken down through Hutcheon's theory because parody is seen as an extension and exploration of both texts rather than the ridicule of the parodied text. In addition, her theory helps to point out the artificiality of the idea that a text is autonomous. The dialogue between texts, and their grounding in larger social and historical issues, is highlighted through the act of parody. An example of parody's capacity to do more than parody any one given text is how it can show that a character's identity is not stable: Don Juan becomes a metonymic name that can stand in for many seducers and yet remains open to continually changing interpretations. This playfulness is much like the game "hide and seek" – the reader must be constantly vigilant to decode the parody.

Before turning to some specific examples of how parody, ideology, and history inform one another, we must explore another salient feature of parody, which is, as Kuester puts it, "the paradox of parody": "Bakhtin's mention of the principle of carnival, of authorized transgression, thus has become one of the cruxes of Bakhtinian interpretations: 'the paradox of parody'" (*Framing* 14). These transgressions are

paradoxically authorized within society because parody, using irony or satire as part of its technique, can be a corrective force. Thus, parody in its full range can be conservative or revolutionary, depending on how it is used. As Foucault observes, “The parody of his [Nietzsche’s] last texts serves to emphasize that ‘monumental history’ is itself a parody. Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival” (*Foucault* 94). Carnavalesque parody refers to Bakhtin’s theory of carnival – a limited time frame in which a society can invert the social and power order. The genealogical approach to the recording of the past avoids grand narratives that seek to explain everything within a certain pattern and present history as tautological. Foucault implies that the serious tone underlying such a project is subverted by the parodying act of writing history genealogically, which can only act as an imitation. Traditionally, history has been seen as a form of mimeticism, but many theorists would now argue that it is a narrative construct. As Kiremijdan points out, “parody forces us to be aware of form as an artifice or as an artificial discipline” (*Study* 17). Since a genealogy does not pretend to represent a seamless narrative, it instead highlights the gaps in a parodic fashion because the marginalized, unofficial voice of history is articulated. Kuester thus affirms Hutcheon’s analysis: “Even though the Russian stresses its positive aspects, carnival as authorized but temporary transgression can be interpreted as a conservative as well as a progressive method, and it shows the two faces of parody in a clear light” (*Framing* 14).

While at first appearing radical, the discourse of seduction also has the same paradox imbedded in its discourse. The scene of seduction is supposed to be detrimental to the social order; for the seducer upsets every acceptable social custom, threatens economic stability, and expresses no repentance for his wrongdoing. In many traditional

tropes of seduction, the woman falls prey to the seducer's wiles, leaving her a social outcast and generally an unproductive member of the marriage market. The marriage market, in turn, is the focus of many economic bargains, for example, solidifying fiscal relationships based on property and assets. Furthermore, the seducer's lack of remorse for his deeds puts society in the position of having to address a radically different set of values than those that it maintains as the norm. In these ways, the seducer challenges the foundational structures of society. However, one of the characteristics of seduction is that it is also ephemeral. Like carnival, seduction is not meant to be a sustained process. Otherwise, society would not exist as we know it. It is through creating an alternative vision of the scene of seduction as playfully hypnotic that the seducer periodically reinforces society by delimiting its normative features.

Hutcheon distinguishes between Bakhtin's and Foucault's understandings of parody and transgression. Bakhtin and Foucault both read parody as paradoxical, but Foucault is more interested in how transgression functions at the limit of non-meaning and the creation of Being through discourse. As Hutcheon notes, "Despite Bakhtin's rejection of modern parody, there are close links between what he called carnivalesque parody and the authorized transgression of parodic texts today. In Foucauldian terms, transgression becomes the affirmation of limited being" (*Theory* 26). Hutcheon suggests that, in his essay "Preface to Transgression," Foucault outlines a relationship between transgression, parody, and identity formation. As he puts it, "In that zone which our culture affords for our gestures and speech, transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more

scintillating” (*Language* 30). It is through pushing to the limits of what is considered acceptable that we affirm identity. In this way we see beyond the limits of what is taken as “natural” to understand that such limits are a form of artifice. Parody is a form of transgression that reveals the limits of texts.

In defining transgression, Foucault observes that it “has its entire space in the line it crosses” (*Language* 34). Likewise, parody resides in a space where it is always testing the limits of the targeted text. The fact that parody requires the reader to interpret it, to recognize its double-voiced discourse, is also a transgression because it forces the reader to move between the limits of the original and the parody. Foucault, however, posits that transgression is more than the oppositionally defined “limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful” (*Language* 35). Instead, he suggests that “their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust” (*Language* 35). As is the case with Foucault’s general understanding of power, transgression manifests as a series of nodal points that are not always easily located. Furthermore, Foucault notes his indebtedness to Kant who defined the limit of being as “nonpositive affirmation” (*Language* 36). This observation that transgression does not contain anything negative fits Hutcheon’s claim that parody is not necessarily done at the expense of another text.

In his essay “Language to Infinity,” Foucault indirectly compares parody to a sequence of mirrors that mirror into infinity, as in Velasquez’s painting “Las Meninas” (“The Dwarves”). He explains the relationship of language to repetition in this way: “Writing, in Western culture, automatically dictates that we place ourselves in the virtual space of self-representation and reduplication; since writing refers not to a thing but to speech, a work of language only advances more deeply into the intangible density of the

mirror, calls forth the double of this already doubled writing" (*Language* 56). Foucault seems to suggest that there is no way to qualify how language is played out from one repetition to another. I would argue that the ability of a text to parody, or for parody to seduce, other texts into its own discourse, is a way to create such critical dialogue with the past. The "density of the mirror" is also the space where parody seeks out the other text's inner-most secrets and betrays them into its own reshaping of the narrative.

Kuester thus sketches a theory of parody that rejects Foucault's and Hutcheon's belief that it only functions within larger systems of power. Instead, he argues that some agency must also be assigned to the encoder and decoder, since their intentions, especially the encoder, play a role in framing how we interpret parody. As Kuester writes, "parody...includes a strong dose of purposefulness and intention on the author's part, which in fact differentiates parody from other intertextual modes" (*Framing* 150). Kuester's argument in relation to post-colonial discourse will have to await development in future chapters; what is important to understand here is that there is no clear agreement amongst theorists as to how parody should be perceived in relation to power.

In addition to the social relationship of coder/decoder, which is essential to parody, parody also has an interdependency with its historical context. As already mentioned, parody is a way to comment upon the ideological mores of a society. For example, the parodic texts of the seventeenth century parody more than the targeted text. In seventeenth-century Britain, unstable and changing governments affected the confidence of the general population, many of whom were suffering under extreme poverty as the agrarian-based society moved towards urbanization and industrialization. The extreme ideological and political shifts of this period are mimetically reflected in the

arts. In particular, the bawdy humour of the Restoration plays, partly as a direct reaction to the censorship of Cromwell's government, provides a clear example of links between life and art. More importantly, this is an example of how parody is not always directed at the parodied text because, in this instance, it is the repression of Puritan law and religion that is parodied rather than any one particular text.

Hutcheon refers us further back to the sixteenth century, but I believe her comments apply better to the tumultuous politics of the eighteenth century. She posits what are some of the possible cultural conditions that generate parody: "like the sixteenth century, the postmodern period has witnessed a proliferation of parody as one of the modes of positive self-aesthetic self-reference as well as conservative mockery" (*Theory* 82). More importantly, the widely separated periods share in common "the sense of ideological instability, of a challenging of norms" (*Theory* 82). The links between literature, history, ideology and interpretation are complex. It is important to bear in mind Lee Patterson's observation that, "The literary text is an object that can never be *explained* as the effect of local historical causes but only *interpreted* as a bearer of cultural significance" (*Critical* 254). Parody is necessarily a "bearer of cultural significance" due to its social and political nature.

Parody works to expose the limits of ideologies. Ideology refers to the larger historical, political systems that produce speaking subjects. As James Kavanagh explains, "ideology designates a rich 'system of representations, ' worked up in specific material practices, which helps form individuals into social subjects who 'freely' internalize an appropriate 'picture' of their social world and their place in it" (*Critical* 310). This is a deconstructivist view of ideology; ideology as a practice for socially-

constructed speaking subjects to function in the larger social network. Kavanagh concludes that, "Ideology offers the social subject not a set of narrowly 'political' ideas but a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self; it constitutes what Althusser calls the social subject's 'lived relation to the real'" (*Critical* 310). Parody, in a sense, acts as a subversive force to undermine the assumptions of any given ideology by testing the logic behind its professed beliefs. The parodic play with an ideology reframes the debate; in other words, those ideological assumptions face critical inquiry through the process of parody. The fallacies of logic that are inherent to any ideology are in turn exhibited through the parodic version. And again, in turn, since the larger systems of power are critiqued, the identity constituted by individuals is also under constant revision.

Let us look at a specific example of the relationship between a shift in ideological beliefs and how that shift is parodied in literature. Foucault uses the inauguration of health care as we know it today in Europe and North America as an example of a site of power. Like an archeologist, he takes the unlikely findings from his digs and tries to interpret them in light of what he perceives the eighteenth-century impulses do. Foucault locates the shift in ideological priorities: "The sudden importance assumed by medicine in the eighteenth century: originates at the point of intersection of a new 'analytical' economy of assistance with the emergence of a general 'police' of health. The new nosopolitics inscribes the specific question of the sickness of the poor within the general problem of the health populations, and makes the shift from the narrow context of charitable aid to the more general form of a 'medical police,' imposing its constraints and dispensing its services" (*Foucault* 278). Industrialization and the larger systematizing of

society influences health politics. No longer seen as merely individuals in need of care, health becomes a matter of economics and fiscal policy. The state assumes a role in the physical well-being of its citizens to ensure that they do not burden the system with illness and unproductivity. Foucault uncovers a historical shift in thinking that consequently reveals changing power relations in which the state realizes that the increased demographics must be accounted for.

Foucault clarifies that this shift is not located solely in the apparatuses of the state. Various religious groups and charitable organizations helped to initiate and to implement new health policies aimed at the larger population. One of the ways that sickness shifts from being viewed as a component of disease to an economic issue is through the subtle discriminations that define sickness in relation to morality and work ethics. As Foucault observes, "In this process of the gradual attenuation of traditional social statuses, the 'pauper' is one of the first to be effaced, giving way to discriminations (the good poor and the bad poor, the willfully idle and the involuntarily unemployed, those who can do some kind of work and those who cannot)" (Foucault 276). Health issues are also taken up by the "police," defined as "an ensemble of mechanisms serving to ensure order" (Foucault 277). At the centre of this shift is "the medicalized and medicalizing family" (Foucault 282), which becomes the focus and means to carry out new health policies in the eighteenth century. Children and their well-being are now of the greatest importance to health practitioners, and the ideology evolves that the imperative of health is "at once the duty of each and the objective of all" (Foucault 277).

Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* offers one of the earliest parodies of such benevolent plans of the state to provide for the well-being of the people of Ireland. His

argument, as has often been pointed out by critics, is based on the trite metaphor, "the English are devouring the Irish." Swift sees a disparity between the rough poverty systematically imposed through governing policies on the Irish, and the state's new movement towards placing the onus on the family unit to care for their health. He reacts angrily against the implicit moralism of the new health-care advocates who assume they can provide ideal solutions for the general population without really knowing their needs. The rationalization of the kind humanitarian, too naïve to see that he is ill-equipped to render favourable service to the poor, is summed up in Swift's ironic subtitle: "For Preventing the Children of the Poor People in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public" (*Modest* 1113). The persuasive narrator enthusiastically expounds on his theory. He proposes children should be bred as a food source, in as much as "a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food" (*Modest* 1115). Thus, the parody is a savage commentary on a public shift in the eighteenth century to forming health care policies to ensure economic productivity and profit. Swift displaces the new valuation of parents and their children to unmask it for what it truly is: a profit-making venture, whereby the young bodies of children must be managed and trained to meet the needs of society. In this imitation of a humanitarian offering sage advice, one of the parodic elements seems to be that this narrator lacks every humanitarian quality despite his reasonable tone of discourse. The artifice of his "natural" logic becomes apparent when one realizes that in this economy of productivity, there is no room for human relations. For example, the most that women can hope for is to become wives who are "breeders" (*Modest* 1114).

In another example, parody imitates with critical distance British eighteenth-century attitudes that shape the role of women in Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock". This poem is written in response to an actual event when a quarrel between two prominent families ensued because a gentleman cut off a woman's lock of hair. As a means to reconcile differences, Pope's friend John Caryll asked him to write a poem that through humour would help make amends. In the poem, parody occurs on several levels. Most obviously, it is a satire of the real episode, and comes with the message that no one should take such matters so seriously. Critics have noted the many parodic references to epic figures such as those found in *Paradise Lost*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Iliad*. This mock epic helps to point out that small things can be blown out of proportion - the humour is that the reader must compare infinitesimal things with greater things, card wars of Belinda and the Baron, the protagonists of the poem, with the events from the War of Troy. Belinda is a young woman in jeopardy of losing her lock of hair, not her home or state or life, in the poem. What I wish to discuss is how this poem is also a parody of an emergent eighteenth-century ideology that believes women should be formed into "ladies of virtue" through the many small disciplines in society that rule their lives.

Thus, to draw on Foucault again, he posits that in the eighteenth century certain formulas for manipulating the body become a force of domination, a way to realign power systems. As Foucault puts it, "La Mettrie's *L'Homme-machine* is both a materialist reduction of the soul and a general theory of *dressage*, at the centre of which reigns the notion of 'docility,' which joins the analyzable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault 180).

Foucault clarifies that bodies have been subjected to manipulation throughout all ages;

however, this practice becomes more prominent and honed in the eighteenth century. Now the coercion works at the level of the individual rather than *en masse*. The individual's self-regulation in turn allows for uninterrupted surveillance of every act. Finally, the shift occurs because "it was no longer the signifying elements of behaviour or the language of the body, but the economy, the efficiency of movements" (181).

Discipline now occurs in many facets of life – military, politics, education – to name a few examples. This analysis thus reveals a site of power in the eighteenth century through the shift in ideological perspective on how to disperse effective discipline and control a population. This theory could even extend to the regimens of beauty practiced by women and criticized by Pope in "The Rape of the Lock." His poem parodies the 'docile' bodies of women, and provides an insightful commentary on the duplicity of their position in society as it is located in the binary of virgin/whore.

The female body becomes a site of moral interpretation; the blush indicates which "category" of woman one fits into. As Janet Todd writes: "The female body also became an organism peculiarly susceptible to influence. Women were thought to express emotions with their bodies more sincerely and spontaneously than men; hence, their propensity to crying, blushing and fainting" (19). Blushing is a familiar sign in body language that usually indicates embarrassment and is often associated with the virtue of purity, thus the term "blushing bride". However, for Belinda, the blush only becomes another weapon devised by "the Cosmetic Pow'rs" (83). By means of make-up, she puts on a disguise, "And calls forth all the Wonders of her Face/ Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise" (83). Belinda, even when she is alone, seems to be as crowded by her cosmetics and the role they impose on her, as if she were in a parlour full of people. Her

vanity table is cluttered with "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (83). It seems incongruous that a bible, never mind more than one, would be a part of this mess. Yet, there is a sense that Belinda's understanding of her own sexuality is as scattered and fragmented as the articles on the table.

Is the protagonist the seduced or the seducer? Belinda is not comfortable with her sexuality because society demands that she restrict her feelings to conform to the "chaste female" stereotype. Belinda sustains her role as a mindless beauty queen by becoming inseparable from it. She endorses her artificial surroundings through a reliance on her vanity table and cosmetics. Ironically, the products which she uses to create her façade are what eventually destroy the person behind the image. Her fascination with makeup suggests her society has succeeded through small disciplines to gain control over how women constitute themselves as speaking subjects. Or so it would seem.

Baudrillard proposes another possible reading of Belinda's relationship to makeup: "Makeup is nothing else: a triumphant parody, a solution by excess, the surface hyper-simulation that is itself the symbolic law of castration – a transsexual game of seduction" (15). This argument suggests that the artifice of makeup separates the biological signs from those of femininity. Makeup does not depend on sex to create the illusion of femininity; hence, the ability of transvestites to be seductive women. Belinda's relationship to makeup is that it exaggerates her features; she is in control of the illusion. Part of the parody is that the sylphs, who are mystical beings sent to protect her virtue, are the innocents unaware of Belinda's brash attempts to seduce the Baron. Thus, in some ways, Belinda is a caricature of Merteuil in her desire to present an innocent façade to society, but to act as the seducer behind the scenes.

The word "rape" in the title encodes violence into the poem, and so ultimately it seems to suggest that, although Belinda is portrayed in a humorous light, the parody also comments on the schism of women's roles in eighteenth-century England through an imitation of its hypocrisy. Belinda, rather than resisting the double standard set for men and women, supports its continuity by worshiping at the "altar" (83) of vanity. When her hair is cut off, the scissor's action is described as "T'inclose the Lock; now it joins to divide" (91). Pope could have simply said "the lock was cut off," but instead he creates a metaphor for men who join together to divide and conquer women. If society stresses that women should occupy their time with small vanities, as coquettes do, then men can continue to maintain control over them. It is a terrifying visual image of men cutting women into pieces so as not to allow them to function as whole individuals. Belinda is like a china doll made of a fragile shell that is susceptible to breakage: "In glittering dust the Fragments lie" (92).

Belinda is evidently more susceptible to the castigations of her society than is the Baron. The Baron who has cut off Belinda's lock of hair, and offended her honour, proclaims:

As long as Atlantis shall be read
Or the small Pillow grace a Lady's bed....
While Nymphs take Treats, or Assignations give,
So long my Honour, Name, and Praise shall live. (92)

For him, the achievement of seduction can always be the subject of a boast; it will never serve to make him disreputable, because even the most demoralized seducer holds a fairly high status in society as long as he is male. So as long as women continue to act in the

traditional female role, then nothing will change in terms of power relationships. Belinda perpetuates the cycle that represses women by allowing the lock of hair that represents her vanity to be more important to her than what is really at stake. She loses her virginity at the same time the lock is being cut, but the former, although a much more important event, is hardly mentioned. It is only alluded to twice in the midst of many pages describing the loss of the lock. Given that the "engine" is a phallic representation, the passage reads as "Ev'n then, before the fatal Engine clos'd/A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd" (91).

Although Belinda certainly expresses her lust for the Baron, it is left unclear as to whether or not she willingly gives up her virginity. Again, the title of the poem seems to indicate, in the ambiguity of parodic style, foppery but also dark intentions. The fairy guardian Sylph does not interfere to save Belinda's chastity but rather intercedes on behalf of the lock of hair. It is easier for Belinda to deal with the loss of the lock rather than her virginity because she has been trained to think only in terms of her outward appearance, not her inward character. Belinda is conscious that "at ev'ry Word a Reputation dies" (88), which makes her vulnerable to lose what little her person has left that is acceptable to society. Gossip thus acts as a social control to turn women against one another or themselves.

The repressed comes to haunt Belinda with an alternate vision of gender relations. The sun is an important symbol used frequently in the poem to help reveal Belinda's character. Belinda does not like sunlight because it shows up all of her flaws in "the Day's detested *glare*" (93). A few lines later, the revealing sun is replaced by the criticisms of Belinda's "*glaring* friends" (93) (The italics are my own to emphasize the

correlation.) In lieu of the sun, Belinda sinks into the Cave of Spleen, where there is no light, only "A constant Vapour" that is formed by "Mists" and "Shades" (93). Perhaps she is there in hope of finding escape from her environment through dreams, as they allow the subconscious to come to the forefront of the mind to grapple with repressions. However, this is a nightmarish world in which the distortions are grotesque and where, "Men prove with Child, as pow'rful Fancy works/And Maids turn'd Bottels, call aloud for Corks" (93). The Cave of Spleen focuses on a Carnavalesque world of sexuality and the body. The limits of the body are transgressed as men are able to procreate, and the reader envisions a large, protruding, maternal body grafted onto the male physique. Women can openly "call aloud" their desires and change shape at will. Belinda's obsession with appearances has distorted her vision of the real world so much that her unconscious self has become adversely affected by the warped stream of her conscious thoughts. Perhaps, though, in the Cave of Spleen she is also able to explore her desires for negotiable gender roles.

As well as parody's ability to skewer ideology, it is also a form of seduction. As an art form, parody is similar to seduction in that it requires an emotional, empathetic rapport with the seduced text. Parody's first task is to seduce the targeted text into its realm. To be successful, a parody first and foremost must reproduce elements of the targeted text so that they sound authentic and thus resonate for the reader. The parody is further heightened if, in laying the groundwork, the reader feels a certain pathos for the echoes of the "original" text, or whichever genre that is targeted. This intimacy with the "original" requires that the parody knows the targeted text better than it knows itself. The parody, like the seducer, must sympathize and meld completely with the targeted text for

at least a period of time. Here lies the pitfall that Baudrillard poses as a rhetorical question: "Doesn't the seducer end up losing himself in his strategy, as in an emotional labyrinth? Doesn't he invent that strategy in order to lose himself in it" (*Seduction* 98)?

The only alternative to this sympathy felt by the seducer is strategic emotional manipulation; interestingly, the seducer must manipulate his feelings as much as that of the seduced. Thus parody and seduction share the need for critical distancing. Part of knowing a text's secrets is being able to expose them. The parodist aspires to reveal the targeted text: sometimes its greatness and complexity, and at other times its parodic double, functions to expose the paradoxical or illogical rifts in the text. The parodist, like the seducer, challenges the targeted text to thrive even when displaced. Parody forces targeted texts to enter into a new dialogue with other elements of discourse, and to provide a critique of the targeted text.

It is not surprising that parody takes so many different forms. It is resilient in the same way that the discourse of seduction is because of its versatility. Both parody and seduction traverse a series of tropes to transform and reconfigure in new ways. Each of these discourses has a sly, adaptable manner that draws on the changing aesthetics of any given time period to aid in its guise. In the twentieth century, parody has latterly extended itself into a more critical discourse that appraises other works of arts while seducing them at the same time. In the following chapters, we will see that parody plays a role in shaping how seduction is redefined to challenge the ancient privileging of nature over artifice. Artifice is instead celebrated as a way for seduction to move beyond the biological limitations of the sign of femininity to open up the sign and provide insight into sites of power that allow the current hegemony of power to be maintained.

5: *Kamouraska*: Writing on the Pure White Driven Snow

Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*, a French-Canadian novel published in the 1970's about a nineteenth-century love-murder triangle in Quebec, we are told, is based on true events. In this novel the question of innocence of the protagonist Elisabeth, it can be argued, is a question of performance. The retrospective narrative shifts between first-, second-, and third-person, and the time frames may also change within mid-sentence. Elisabeth awaits her never-to-return lover in the house of her second husband, Jérôme Rolland, who lies dying in bed. She ostensibly creates the impression that she is the seduced, and thus also the victim of her three relationships. Such performance undermines the binary of seducer/seduced in this novel as Elisabeth plays both roles, and so in turn undercuts the stability of any fixed identity. Elisabeth's whole narrative protests that she is innocent of the murder of her first husband, Antoine Tassy, although her narrative slowly reveals that she was truly the instigator. Elisabeth's interior dialogue shows that she is very aware and overtly concerned with how she thinks her society perceives her, or more precisely, perceives her appearance of innocence.

In *Kamouraska*, the binary of seducer/seduced collapses as the protagonist Elisabeth enacts both halves of the binary. Ostensibly, Elisabeth bows to her two husbands, her lover, and to society for approval. Yet she also shares many of the attributes that best describe Don Juan, a seducer who has no one fixed object. Elisabeth as seducer is seen more clearly when she thinks to herself, "not two separate husbands....but one man, one and the same" (26), and she starts, at various points in the narrative, to elide the three men in her life. They are objects of desire, and although she

shows a preference for George Nelson, who is her lover, she treats all of them as players in her drama. Creating a species of tragedy, Elisabeth now realizes eighteen years after the murder of Antoine that she is really more in love with the idea of death than any one of her lovers. This may be seen in Kristevan terms as Elisabeth's confrontation with her psyche: if you are not in love, then you are dead – if you are in love, you are in love with death.

The fragmented narrative moves between the present and past, sometimes more than once in the same paragraph. Elisabeth's surname frequently orients the reader as to the time frame. Observe how she names herself according to her marital status at the commencement of the novel: "Me, Elisabeth d'Aulnières widow of Antoine Tassy, wife of Jérôme Rolland" (2). In the present, the course of one night passes by as Madame Rolland cares for her dying husband, who "was just slipping away ever so gently, hardly suffering at all, and with such admirable good taste" (1). Meanwhile, this crisis seems to trigger memories of an even more dramatic period in her life when she married her first husband, Antoine Tassy, took a lover called George Nelson, and participated with Nelson in the murder of Tassy. Elisabeth intermingles the two time frames, while using the present tense in both narratives.

Amongst critics of *Kamouraska* there is some disagreement regarding the narrative style. Murray Sacks asserts that after the first three paragraphs in third person, "The narrative remains in the first person for the rest of the book, until the very last page when the anonymous narrator quietly returns to record the novel's last moments" (115). This description of the narrative fails to address the usage of third-person narrative evoked throughout the text. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi more closely analyzes the

discourse in her distinction between the narrative devices that embody Elisabeth's social façade and the self-narrative she attempts to establish. Mudimebe-Boyi critiques the narrative as such: "An uninvolved third-person narrator regularly takes over, thus differentiating Madame Rolland or Madame Tassy from the intradiegetic narrator 'je': Elisabeth d'Aulnières. Elisabeth at times plays the observer, at times the observed going back and forth as a 'je' and as a third-person narrator" (127-28). To use one of Mudimebe-Boyi's own examples (already quoted), Monsieur Rolland dies "with such admirable good taste" (1). Surely this description, while apparently from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator, is more accurately a reflection of Madame Rolland's thoughts as a woman who continually preoccupies herself with appearances and social judgements. The narrative, in fact, frequently prevents the reader from ascertaining who is speaking.

The fact that this novel has been translated from French to English also raises the important question of translation as a form of transformation. Translation is a form of seduction in its need for critical distance and at the same time emotional closeness. This novel also poses the question of translation as a form of seduction. *Kamouraska* was first translated into English in 1973, where it reached a much larger audience. To what extent is translation a form of transformation of the speaking subject? In its translation from French to English, we lose certain subtleties of the narrative, for example, the distinction of a formal and informal second- and third-person usage that does not exist in English. As Lintvelt observes, "D'une part, ce dualisme crée un conflit intérieur dans l'identité personnelle de Mme Tassy et dans celle de Mme Rolland. D'autre part, il produit aussi des tensions entre Mme Rolland-narratrice et Mme Tassy. Le dédoublement psychologique provoque ainsi de dédoublements narratifs" (125). *Kamouraska* seduces

the reader through its complex narrative and at times seems to knowingly address the English-speaking reader, informing her of crucial aspects of the relation between culture and identity as explored through the persona of Elisabeth. Numerous cultural references within this novel help raise the consciousness of the English-speaking reader that this novel is ultimately French Canadian. The translation of this novel points to the fluidity of language and the inability to have fixed meaning; the text in translation moves into a new politics of control. As Marilyn Rose observes, Hébert "chose French. That innocent choice is not without its political overtones. In Hébert's case, using English would have been not only a studied choice but would undoubtedly have been considered opportunistic, a betrayal of her Quebec heritage" (150).

As argued in the previous chapter, parody can have certain ideological beliefs as its target rather than another text. Kuester suggests parody as one of the tools available for a writer's vision: "Parody is a means of counteracting a feeling of almost total dependence on an overpowering neighbor" (25). In this case, parody is inherent to the act of translation. Translation, after all, is a form of "repetition with critical distance." The original French is now transformed into a similar, yet never quite accurate, imitation in English. Ideologically, the parody targets the English culture in that English speakers attempt to understand the translated words even though certain nuances of the francophone culture embedded in the language always prove elusive.

The French language becomes an absent signifier supplemented by the English translation. So the English-speaking reader ironically longs for the "original" French text, which in turn means that she, the reader/seduced, becomes the writer/seducer involved in a linguistic chase. The reader wants to write the narrative all over again and

bridge those impossible gaps between two languages. The minority language captivates and dominates the wider English audience. This act of parody at the level of language, of reading and writing, can also be seen on a cultural level. There is a measure of violence in the act of translation, for, even though the language may be willingly fluid, to some extent there is always a cultural clash. Within this particular narrative, *Kamouraska* replays a crucial historical conflict between the French and British in the Rebellions of 1837-38. In this political allegory of the historical account of the French patriotes, the English have attempted to assimilate the French to their culture. Thus, the translation of ideas turns into the complete domination of another; there is no room left for the free play of the signifier (the French language) because the British want absolute control of the signified (French culture). The English people's seduction ends at this point because they are no longer willing to read into and engage with the seduced (the French people); rather, they wish to overwrite them, although this brutal attempt at full control is never fully realized as the Canadian political system today testifies.

For such reason, anglophone critics tend to confine the narrative of *Kamouraska* to more general psychological terms. Elaine Garrett, for example, argues "that Elisabeth removes herself from the action in an attempt to control the dream, to shape it like a tragedy in which she plays the role of tragic heroine, in order to expiate her own guilt for inciting the murder of her husband" (92). On this point, Garrett does correctly identify a salient feature of the narrative; the protagonist, Elisabeth, is like an artist arranging her narrative in an aesthetically pleasing manner; she is the director and the star of her own narrative. Therefore, she is able to assemble the elements of her story in such a way that she makes a narrative of the crime, and through its repetition, she turns it into another

performance. Her confession must always be understood as a part of that performance, which in turn suggests that, despite the cloying restrictions of her role as Madame Rolland, she is still a performer and a seducer to the very end.

Katharine Gingrass is more aware of the split subjectivity of Elisabeth: "Her [Elisabeth's] personality is impossibly split *and* collapsed. In her reformulation of Rimbaud's phrase, she repeats the first-person pronoun, but keeps the verb in the first-person singular: 'Je dis 'je' et suis une autre.' Elisabeth's interior doubling blurs the temporal distance between present and past in her dream-state, undercutting the ostensibly healing effects of time. Since none of the selves associated with either the pronoun *je* or *elle* is fixed, there is no relief for Elisabeth" (141). Gingrass goes too far, however, in claiming that Elisabeth's split psyche leads to "her complete loss of the will to live" (143). Elisabeth, I believe, is a talented actor who can play many roles. As Godard suggests, Elisabeth "fragments her personality through multiplication, rather than division" (19).

There are nonetheless several ambiguous moments in the text when the narrative could be attributed to more than one speaker. The following paragraph could be an omniscient interiorized narrator observing momentarily from Monsieur Rolland's viewpoint, or a projection from Elisabeth as she imagines the thoughts going through her husband's mind: "Madame Rolland begins to count the drops. Her hand is trembling. He must trust her, reassure her, do anything to stop that trembling in her hand. He has no choice, he must make peace with this woman who stands there trembling. His life depends on it. Again Jérôme forces a feeble smile. He feels his dry lips tighten against his teeth" (16). Depending on whose voice is heard, the textual analysis will shift. If it is

Jérôme we hear, then the paragraph gives insight into and perhaps sympathy for his fears. However, if it is read as Elisabeth parodying her husband's paranoia, the focus of the narrative changes to her feelings of betrayal. The ambiguity of double voicing implies that the speaking subject has no clear borders of identity, and that those borders are open to fluctuation.

Undoubtedly, a large portion of the narrative is filtered through Elisabeth's perceptions, which in turn must be questioned as to whether or not her account is reliable. After all, Elisabeth's confessional dialogue repeatedly cries, "I'm innocent," as she slowly reveals in detail her story of guilt and murder, and provides enough information to let the reader know she was complicit in the crime. Elisabeth manifests pain, and yet she also savours her own story. Perhaps the reliability of Elisabeth's narrative is less important than to understand that the narrative is a game, or one game amongst several games of seduction pursued throughout the novel.

Philippe Lejeune's theory of autobiography helps to identify how it is that the narrative itself may contribute to the seduction of the reader. His structuralist model of discourse yields insight into the relationship between fictional identity and the fragmented narrative. Lejeune's *On Autobiography* (1989) is a series of essays that must be read in juxtaposition because they reflect the development of Lejeune's concepts. Entering into a dialogical exploration of Emile Benveniste's theories of narrative and the construction of self, Lejeune breaks language down into smaller parts (text, sentences, words, morphemes, etc). But Lejeune dismisses Benveniste's rejection of third-person narrative, radically revamping the notion of the "I" in autobiography as embodying the notion of a split subject. Lejeune is most frequently categorized as a structuralist, though

his theories are more far-reaching in that they move beyond the inner workings of a text. Nor does he suggest, as does the structuralist school of thought, that the text can be seen as autonomous in the sense of being ahistorical or apolitical, as he believes, like Barthes or Foucault, that the constructs of fiction and reality necessarily affect one another. As Paul Eakin observes, Lejeune, along with a number of other theorists, has concluded, "the true locus of reference in autobiography pertains not to the level of the *utterance* but to the level of the *enunciation*, the autobiographical act, where the identity of the author, narrator, and protagonist is textually postulated, to be immediately grasped by the reader" (Foreward x). Thus, Lejeune argues that both language and autobiographers are social constructs, and that identity is contingent upon the development of language. Lejeune wants to explore the relationship between reality/fiction: "The interest of Lejeune's position resides in his willingness to concede the fictive status of the self and then to proceed with its functioning as experiential fact" (Foreward xiv).

Lejeune's narrative model helps to work out the implications of Hébert's complex narrative in *Kamouraska*. Although Lejeune most often discusses autobiographies in the classic sense of an author presenting his or her past through writing, he also looks at the relationship between a narrator and a protagonist when the narrator purports to recount his or her autobiography. Hébert's background as a francophone, white, female author writing in Quebec in the 1960's does seem to bear in part on how the narrator/protagonist of *Kamouraska* is positioned in relation to institutional power, but this is a point that I will return to later. The narrator of *Kamouraska*, Elisabeth, is also the protagonist. The discourse shifts relentlessly in time frame, tone, and point of view. Such displacements are typical of the relationship between narrator and protagonist that Lejeune needs as a

double displacement, arguing that: "The subject of the utterance ('the individual') is represented by the subject of the enunciation" (33). In other words, the subject of utterance (protagonist) at times projects "to be one" with the subject of enunciation (narrator), but these moments are ephemeral in narrative time and space. How is it that their identities merge and separate in the journey of autobiography? Lejeune claims that the "I" of narrative is a split subject that masks first-, second-, and third-person narratives: "By unfolding the pronoun 'I' (or 'you') in this way, we inevitably come up against the problem of *identity*" (33).

Elisabeth is a split subject, linguistically as well as temporally, as she herself acknowledges: "The time has come now to split in two. Accept this total sharp division of my being...Deep as I can, I probe the pleasure I feel. This rare delight, pretending I'm really here. Learning to leave my words and gestures far behind me. With no one any the wiser, no one to know how utterly empty they are" (194). Paradoxically, at the very moment when Elisabeth declares she is falling apart, she also alludes to how it is that fictional identity is shaped. She may desire to "leave [her] words behind", but language ultimately defines her existence. Furthermore, she confirms this suspicion by rejecting language, but then in the next paragraph she is again immersed in words: "I'm losing myself in a string of names" (194). The prolific nature of Elisabeth's identity is pointed to by the fact that names – her own or those of towns she traces on a map – are metonymic, leading to contiguous, rather than continuous, identities. As Lejeune puts it, "The name is the guarantor of the unity of our multiplicity" (34). Thus, the exponential number of names in this novel might suggest that the narrative plays with the notion that there cannot be even the *appearance* of a unified self in the case of Elisabeth who reveals

the fictive boundaries of identity. Thus, the collapse of the binaried opposite seducer/seduced in the persona of Elisabeth constitutes her as a speaking subject while simultaneously deferring any sense of her fixed identity.

Lejeune's explanation of the split self helps to trace some of the complex shifts in narrative that leave the reader unsure as to whom is speaking at any given time. As already mentioned, the voices of the narrator and the protagonist blur at various points in *Kamouraska*. This blurring is further complicated by the fact that there are also ambiguous moments in the text when it is unclear whether it is Elisabeth speaking directly, or Elisabeth mediating what she thinks another character might be thinking, or an omniscient narrator giving voice to another character's thoughts. To come back to how it is that Elisabeth can shift from first- to second- to third-person narrative, Lejeune offers an interesting hypothesis. Firstly, it is important to understand how Lejeune defines third person: "This use of the third person can be understood as a 'figure,' as opposed to the proper, or literal, meaning of the third person, which is the use of the 'nonperson' in talking about the person who is neither the addressor nor the addressee of discourse" (33). This "secret third person" (35) points to one of Lejeune's central comments on the splitting of the subject: "the inescapable duality of the grammatical 'person'" (33).

This "splitting of the subject" also occurs in the second person. For example, Elisabeth thinks to herself in protest against the silent accusations she feels from her second husband, Monsieur Rolland: "I'm innocent!...Suspicious? You? Always so good, so kind? No my head is reeling" (10). The "you" is Elisabeth confirming the identity she prefers to assume – that of innocence. The "you" is also her silent plea

directed to her husband to believe in the image she has tried so hard to conjure these last eighteen years. And the "you" may well be directed at the audience/reader here at the beginning of the autobiography, asking the reader to maintain faith in this story of the virtuous wife she continues to perpetuate. As Williams observes, "such transpositions of voice also reveal a means by which the 'I' might get outside itself, or step back from its own discourse, in effect unvoicing itself" ("Re-imagining" 129). The ambiguity in her wording is clearly a way to avoid taking responsibility for her actions; as a seducer, Elisabeth seeks ways to put the onus on others. Ironically, this ambiguity – a performance if you will – is one of Elisabeth's survival techniques. "A system of oscillation and of indecision," writes Lejeune, "makes it possible to elude what is inevitably artificial or partial in each of the two presentations" (43).

Her games of seduction come alive through the narrative structure; Elisabeth tries to make the reader complicit in her performance. Although it is non-linear, at first the narrative strikes the reader as being written in the realist mode. The text plays on the reader's expectations of nineteenth-century literature, even though this time period only reflects the setting rather than when the novel was written. Furthermore, the fact that Hébert acknowledges that this narrative is based on true events also suggests realism. The game of seduction lies in undermining the reader's preconceptions: "The law of the organization of the text is no longer coherence or verisimilitude, but a search for maximal intensity through a deliberate game of bursting the conventional expectations" (Lejeune 68). The text insists on the reader accepting the juxtaposition of many competing discourses, which blur in Elisabeth's recollections. But at the same time, the

reader knows that s/he is also subject to Elisabeth's sly games. The reader is willing to fall under Elisabeth's control, desires to know where the story will lead.

Part of the provocative nature of this narrative is that it is autobiographical although not always written from a first-person perspective. *Kamouraska* thus consistently reveals the artifice of autobiographical writing, which Lejeune finds inherent in a form that seeks to communicate a childhood perspective in adult autobiography. So, Elisabeth, for example, frequently jumps from one time period to another or elides them, often in the same sentence. Her elision of the past and present occur frequently, for example, when she states, "And me, I'm Madame Rolland, and I'm off again on my first wedding trip" (67). Elisabeth takes her present role as wife of Monsieur Rolland, and fuses it in an impossible way with her activities as Madame Tassy when she rode off on her honeymoon to Kamouraska. Part of the fatalism alluded to throughout the narrative is adumbrated by Elisabeth herself who is looking back on events even though she usually writes in the present simple tense to describe what has actually passed. Lejeune expands on this concept: "The blends of voices between the narrator and the hero appear less like articulation of two chronologically different cases, than like the result of the work within a voice that mimes, reverses its mimes, jeers, plays naïve, a *made-up* voice, that no longer makes any 'natural' (that is to say, believable) sound but that perhaps invents a new form of the natural" (69).

It is clear from some narrative moments that Elisabeth remembers her past with guilt as she reconstitutes scenes as if all the stages of her life were on trial: "My mother goes over, stands by George Nelson's side. She seems almost happy. This first encounter has gone off very well. The judges must be really disappointed. No fault to find with

how this man and woman have behaved" (107). Elisabeth's discourse of seduction works; the reader is seduced even though s/he knows all of the ploys that she, the narrator/protagonist, has used to convince the reader. By the end of the novel, the reader knows that Elisabeth is less interested in having anyone give credence to her innocence than in believing that hers has been an outstanding performance.

This game also has the element of transgression. For the games or "sheddings" of voices (Lejeune 61) implies that an ambiguity is present in the narrative that challenges the hierarchical stance of classic linear narrative. *Kamouraska* resembles the realist mode through its detailed, concrete descriptions and development of character, yet at the same time parodies this mode through the extreme fragmentation of narrative. Lejeune gives an example of a narrative regime of instability when he writes, "In reality, we have the impression that Vallès decided to take no account of the laws of opposition which ground the system of tenses in the narrative – as if he were avenging himself on the sacrosanct rules of the 'concordance of tenses' displayed in Latin grammar" (69). The very text of *Kamouraska* is in its use of tenses an outlaw. Karen McPherson notes the polemics of any law's legitimacy, especially in a narrative world where there are so many different allegiances, including linguistic ones: "Our sense in *Kamouraska*...is that *finding* the law is the problem, and that lies and betrayal are a natural extension of both criminal and narrative processes" (21).

Part of the testing of "criminal and narrative processes" is due to the narrator's insistence upon a supposedly versatile reader. The narrative suggests the reader must be intelligent enough to figure out the rules of this rather complex game of narrative in what is a constantly changing relationship. As Lejeune states, "He [the reader] will have to

make up his mind according to the other signs, the pace of the narration, the syntax, the perspective; but these signs will themselves often be either indifferent (allowing one *or* the other reading) or contradictory (imposing at the same time the one *and* the other reading)" (63). The reader must be fully involved in the narrative or risk simplifying the most profound and intricate levels of the game into a reductive tale. Seduction demands that there be a transgressive element in the discourse, although there are a number of genres to choose from to achieve this end.

The title *Kamouraska* gives us an important clue about the genre of this narration, which, as well as being an interior dialogue, is also a commentary on the effects of social conditioning. Within the narrative itself, we are told that the word "Kamouraska" means "rushes-beside-the water" (204). We are reminded of ancient Greek mythology and the story of Midas, King of Pessinus, who is most famous for his wish to turn everything into gold. His wish was granted by Dionysus, god of life force, but this wish ended tragically in Midas's daughter being turned to gold when he accidentally touched her. Another legend has it that, following his tragedy, Midas became a follower of Pan, god of the woodlands. When Pan challenged Apollo, god of music, to a contest of musical talent, he lost. Midas questioned the ruling, and since Apollo was offended by this challenge, he gave Midas donkey ears as his punishment. Embarrassed by his new physique, Midas always wore a large hat to hide his humiliating form. Only his barber, who was sworn to secrecy, knew of Midas's dilemma. However, the barber was unable to resist keeping this secret, and so he went down to the shores of the water, dug a hole, and whispered the secret there before covering the hole again with sand. There, on that spot, grew up reeds by the water. Every time the wind blew through the reeds, they whispered "Midas has

donkey ears!". This story tells of how social secrets may still be relayed by a particular social structure.

In *Kamouraska*, seduction is always constructed in the social context of the larger society. Gossip circulates, adding layers to the complexity of the seduction as it becomes entwined in the lives of the population as well as the protagonists. As Elisabeth recalls the journey that George makes back from Kamouraska after he has killed Antoine, she translates the witnesses' accounts given in court into a ballad of his return to her. Their whispers, real or otherwise, have shaped her life. As Gingrass writes, "for Elisabeth, the word 'Kamouraska' simultaneously functions as a synonym for *la mort*" (142). Just as Midas loses his daughter because of his lack of prudence, Elisabeth loses George because of their rash plans. Elisabeth's whole life is the product of other people's expectations of her, and her acceptance or rejection of those expectations. She lives in a milieu that uses gossip as one of the main forms of social control. Her seductions are never truly private, even though she may act them out in a way that would suggest that she is alone on the stage of her life. Thus, on the surface, she must continue to present herself as the seduced.

The classic seduction narrative clearly defines the role of seducer and seduced. As seen in a previous chapter, in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* the women's virtue is under attack from an unscrupulous seducer. The literary trope invariably positions the woman as the seduced and victim. Elisabeth, too, appears victimized by some of the circumstances of her life. She is virtually orphaned because her father dies while she is still in the womb, and her mother "shuts herself up in her widowhood" (111). Her three spinster aunts raise her, and seem determined to live out their lives vicariously through

her. She abides by strict social rules and marries unhappily twice. Her eleven children, a testament to the power of life, offer her small comfort, and instead, she thinks of herself as "nothing but a faithful belly, a womb for making babies in" (4). The reader also sympathizes with Elisabeth as a seduced victim when her lover, George Nelson, flees justice in his escape over the American border, and leaves her to confront the courts alone, and to serve two months' time in jail. At one point, her resentment boils over in contrast to her otherwise loving attachment usually expressed for Nelson: "You ran, ran off like a coward. Left me behind, by myself, to face that pack of judges" (17).

Implicitly, the reader's sympathies usually lie with the seduced, even though, as a general rule, the seducer proves more interesting. Reading Richardson's *Pamela*, the reader wants to rewrite her character, and have Pamela take a dagger to her seducer's throat at least just once. Her motto, "My virtue or my death," remains unchangeable and somewhat tedious in its permanency. Elisabeth encompasses some of the qualities associated with the role of a seduced, but she also embodies the characteristics of a seducer. Acting on this hypothesis, her persona would thus destabilize the hierarchy of the seducer/seduced binary. The first term, seducer, no longer stable, cannot dominate the second term, seduced. Each half of the binary, instead, must constantly reaffirm its power. This destabilization, in turn, aids the reader to locate where are the sites of power in the text. In her commentary on *Kamouraska* and *Lady Oracle*, Barbara Godard writes, "The books themselves are models of paradox, playing with our desire for binary structures, but, ultimately, asserting the absence of boundaries which would create dualities. Both books dramatize the clash of modes of perception, the marvellous facing-off with the real" (18).

Elisabeth, seducer of the audience/reader, seduces through her world of theatrical dramatization, which has as its axiom the aesthetic of living passionately. In many respects, Elisabeth's retrospective narrative reveals her insecurities, and yet also her intelligence, sensitivity, and self-aware usage of language. She makes numerous references to the theatrical aspect of her story, perhaps in part to distance herself from painful recollections: "As if I were waiting just for that cue, I make my entrance. I use the word 'I' and yet I'm someone else" (112). Her "performance" may also suggest a desire to play games, deny strict parameters between reality/fiction, and invite, not just accept, drama into her life. This is a drama that ensures excitement and dread simultaneously, and a drama that Elisabeth implies she wants to engage in when she states: "And that's my world. The theatre....I'm not afraid of anything. Only of being bored" (74). A theatrical disposition gives the seducer a position of control; she controls her domain by sublimating reality into the artifice of performance. Elisabeth feels antipathy for "being bored" because her ability to bring excitement into her life is also a way to assert herself as a seducer in control.

One observes the paradigm: while each lover physically and emotionally abuses Elisabeth, in each instance she rather surprisingly emphasizes the theatrical quality of her response. Antoine Tassy bruises her and repeatedly threatens her with a joint-suicide. Elisabeth comments on her feelings for the public reaction, which is sympathetic and admiring towards her position: "I take a certain curious pleasure in my role as martyred wife and outraged princess" (87). Elisabeth self-critically acknowledges her desire for recognition even if it means she only signifies to others when in pain. The only time Elisabeth expresses any sincere tenderness for her second husband, Jérôme Rolland, also

shows how their marriage gave her back a respectable lifestyle after the murder inquiries. She says, "Oh, Jérôme! Dear, dear Jérôme! I'm so afraid! Take me in your arms just one more time. Help me find my lost salvation" (25). The context of this speech, however, undercuts the plausibility of these words representing Elisabeth's long-term feelings towards her husband. In one instance, she dramatically depicts him as her protector; in the next, she perceives him as an enemy who uses her past "like a rusty weapon to kill me [Elisabeth] with" (22).

Elisabeth, positioning herself as victim, insists on the medical attention of the doctor through an exaggerated performance of her illness: "I turn my head. Let it toss on the pillow. From side to side. Again and again. Like a whining, wailing little child" (109). Elisabeth is spiritually and physically ill, yet she also admits that she uses her illness as a ploy to attract the doctor. Elisabeth is not a "femme fatale," nor do I intend to suggest that Elisabeth is hypocritical because she may dramatize herself as victim; rather, Elisabeth draws attention to the uneasy situating of "seduced" or "victim" as a fixed identity. In discordance with the classic tale of seduction, the criteria for the seduced no longer entail an "innocent," "virtuous," or powerless woman to fill the role. Elisabeth seems to find a certain *jouissance* in naming herself as the seduced as well as having those surrounding her naming her as such. She is of the upper class and has been raised in a woman's world by three spinster aunts who want to live their lives vicariously through her. She acknowledges that she invites the drama into her life for its sheer excitement. Elisabeth notes that the first time she meets Antoine Tassy she is a part of his hunting party and is called "the huntress" (62). She bases her attraction to him on the knowledge that he is a scoundrel, "Good family and all, but a scoundrel just the same"

(63). Antoine himself is less interesting than what he represents to Elisabeth, which is the opportunity to explore previously prohibited behaviours. Not only sexual behaviour, but rather more importantly, Elisabeth recognizes in Tassy someone who might share a language that resists social conventions. She also recognizes in him a performer like herself, and the potential drama attracts her. Antoine may fill an emptiness, a void that lurks in young Elisabeth d'Aulnière's life because in their relationship there is room for scandal.

This contest of power seems to act as one of the games of seduction. Antoine follows her back to Sorel and the home where three spinster aunts raised Elisabeth after she has left him. In spite of their separation and her abhorrence of his brutishness, she has sexual relations with him again. Elisabeth illuminates their relationship when she refers to Antoine on several occasions as her "accomplice" (37). Sexual intercourse under her aunts' roof represents more than physical pleasure. She flouts her aunts' prudery, and consciously chooses Antoine's madness over their sensibleness. She seeks vengeance on her blood relatives whom she knows have poured so much energy and affection into her, subconsciously living their lives through her. Elisabeth names Antoine her accomplice because he opens up new freedoms to her when she reaches into his madness, a place where the signs of referentiality of her strict Victorian upbringing disappear. Victorian morality and realist conventions are undermined through Elisabeth's passionate performance in both of her roles as protagonist and narrator. Elisabeth feels contempt for both of her husbands in the sense that they capitulate so easily to her seduction, and thus disallow the opportunity to play out the game to its fullest.

George Nelson is superior to her other two lovers in every way possible including the fact that he is a lover (not a husband), and therefore entices playfulness. George Nelson is a Protestant anglophone by background who refuses to join in with the local gentry, and practices unfamiliar, modern forms of medicine. He is an outsider on all accounts, and provokes feelings of hostility. Elisabeth seduces him with a strategic plan. Even though George converts to Catholicism and learns to speak fluent French, he will always be marked as an outsider by his accent and slightly strange ways to the local people. Yet he is also an exile from his native America because his father has sent him to Canada to be a good Loyalist. We hear the voice of Nelson's father as Elisabeth imagines it: "This American independence is really too much for good loyalists to bear... Let them become Catholics. Even learn French if they have to. Anything, just so long as they keep their allegiance to the British crown" (125). Ironically, he is asked to identify with the absent Crown instead of either the French or American cultural entities most immediate in his life. His estrangement from a society that will never fully accept him makes Dr. Nelson worthy of seduction. He is willing to explore a gamut of emotions and participate in Elisabeth's games of seduction. She is the seducer in their relationship, too, as made evident by the recurring metaphor of the seducer as hunter: "Your scent, my love, that smell of the beast.... Inside of me, a dog, crouching. Whining softly. Baying its long and deathly cry" (213). This reminds us of the dog that waited in the warming hut when she went hunting with Antoine; it whined because it wanted to go out and hunt rather than stay with the women. Similarly, Elisabeth wants to track the scent of the doctor and make him hers.

Elisabeth thus transcends her role as seduced to become the seducer. Illogical, unseemly, she thereby increases the excitement of the game by breaking its rules. Elisabeth is a sort of Don Juan or Narcissus thrown back into French Canada in the Victorian period, exhibiting the same sort of self-love, a desire to seduce, and a greater love for the game of seduction than the achievement of obtaining any one loved object permanently. In *Tales of Love* Julia Kristeva remarks that, "instead of the sullen claims of the victim, the air resounds with the pure *jouissance* of a conqueror, to be sure, but a conqueror who knows he has no object, who does not want one, who loves neither triumph nor glory in themselves, but the passing of both – the eternal return, infinitely so" (193). *Jouissance* recalls the French verb *jouer* (to play), intimating Elisabeth's desire to see her lovers as an amusing pastime. Watch Elisabeth as she actively conquers each of her lovers: each one individually cherished and recollected. And also each one meshed together as a series of objects: "Not two separate husbands, one by one, following each other in the marriage registers. But one man, one and the same, rising again from his ashes" (26). This phoenix reference alludes to the quality of repetition – I would argue, repetition with critical distance – in which, through parody of certain tropes, Elisabeth conflates the terms of the binary seducer/seduced.

Thus, Elisabeth makes her conquests for the sheer pleasure that she knows she can do so. Granted, she does not share the same privilege to roam as freely as libertines such as Don Juan or Don Giovanni. Nevertheless, Elisabeth recognizes that, while her feelings of passion and love may be sincere, they are also a performance. Elisabeth puts on a mask daily in which she hides herself as the seducer under the appearance of being the seduced, and through this ritual simultaneously conforms to and resists the social context

into which she was born. Elisabeth is in control as a seducer because she is able to sublimate a system of signification to her advantage. She operates on two levels simultaneously by: (1) appearing as the seduced, subject to the constraints of the natural world, but (2) at the same time, she extracts from the concrete world what is symbolic to bring those she wishes to seduce under her control. Jean Baudrillard makes the distinction: "Seduction, however, never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice – never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals" (2). Her society trains Elisabeth in the arts of artifice and subterfuge. Her entire upbringing gears her towards achieving a good marriage. Her society, for example, paradoxically refuses to recognize the disparity between a prim and proper attitude towards sex and the deployment of corsets that function in part to display women's breasts bulging from their dresses.

Recall the story of Narcissus. He falls in love with his own image in a pond without realizing that it is himself. He is in love, but not with an other, only a mirage. Narcissus desires unity; he wants to feel whole. Kristeva points out that this desire appeals to modern Western thought because it embraces the notion of subjectivity. Individualism occupies a privileged space, yet Kristeva also insists that this desire for unity covers a lack, an emptiness or abjectness, that must be constantly deferred. Narcissus and Don Juan are alike inasmuch as they perceive the loved object as metonymic, and both do not internalize love. Don Juan and Narcissus are in the perpetual process of becoming, and yet simultaneously represent a form of stasis. The seducer differs from Narcissus in that he is the deceiver of the image rather than the deceived.

Elisabeth similarly seduces herself through the mirror image when she falls in love with the surface of her reflection. In her desire to relive the past, she creates stasis in her current life in the role of Madame Jérôme Rolland. For Elisabeth goes in search of a smooth reflection of the past as a protection against recognition of the realities of her present. Her current physical preservation becomes a sign to her that she can pick up the pieces of her past at any time and keep living in a seamless narrative, unbroken by the abandonment of her lover or her ignorance of his fate and his choices. Elisabeth finds solace in her image: "Over to the mirror, to find her own reflection, her best defence" (8). However, Godard interprets the mirrored reflection differently: "The eye stops there, fails to see beyond to the depths. Mirrors become symbols of the fragmented self, providing a distorted image of the self, stealing one's sense of real or complete self, robbing one of an identity" (20).

Kristeva points out that it was Plotinus's reading of the Narcissus myth that first interpreted it as the search for internal unity through the unity of multiple reflections in the mirror. As Kristeva writes, "The Narcissus Plotinian divinity is love, but it is a love of self in itself. The one who constitutes himself through it creates himself in and for himself. Not for the Other" (*Tales* 113). Kristeva argues that this shift in thinking has had an impact on twentieth-century western civilization's understanding of psychic space. The myth of Narcissus, she argues, can be used to read how Western contemporary subjectivity has been shaped. Elisabeth, through seduction, likewise tries to find the object, her other, so as to define her subjectivity. She is like Narcissus, though, who only finds love and constitution of the Self in his reflection. The difference is that Elisabeth as a seducer knows that this momentary collapse of the object into the

subject is only an illusion, but one in which she wants to participate: “Not secured to an object, his [Narcissus’s] anguish returns, and when he realizes through that rebound that the other in the spring is merely himself, he has put together a psychic space – he has become subject. Subject of what? Subject of the reflection and at the same time subject of death” (*Tales* 116). The image Elisabeth sees reflected in the mirror is an autoerotic experience where the mask of her face is reaffirmed in its image. This is a true play of signs that takes subjectivity for what it is - a series of signs constituted through games and power systems of discourse. As Elisabeth herself says, she pushes aside her “musty, mildewed soul” (8), her internal self, to displace it with the “pure image” of self. Elisabeth *becomes* her own image in the mirror. The fragmentation of self is momentarily halted when her narcissistic gaze gives her the apparition of wholeness. She looks and sees, “The mirror, come to life like a bubbling spring. My youth, smooth and clear....Queenly bearing” (132). She steps out of her role as the star actor to become (temporarily) a spectator of her own glory.

However, more frequently, Elisabeth must deal with the shattering of her image. She is denied a sense of fixed identity; it is this lack of unity of self that causes her to desire an external object. As the seducer, her love for the seduced is her search for unity with the self. Elisabeth in the present is haunted by the image of her murdered husband, Antoine, coming back from the dead to seek his revenge on her. Her mind turns from the image of a bandaged Antoine to the mirror, perfect in its image-producing abilities even as it smashes into smaller pieces: “Oh! The piece of mirror is breaking, smashing to bits....One last sliver clings to the wall. Tiny triangle, all jagged around the edges. But so clear. Limpid....The mirror, too flawless. Its flash is sure to pierce my heart” (182). It

is noteworthy that this breaks into a “triangle” shape. All of Elisabeth’s seductions are love triangles. The triangles configure in several different ways: Elisabeth, Aurélie, and George; Elisabeth, Antoine, and George; and Elisabeth, George, and Jérôme. These configurations and reconfigurations complicate the scenes of seduction, and how the power dynamics are played out. This triangle formation points to a doubling that happens twice in two different directions. Just as in the myth of Narcissus, Kristeva points out that “Narcissus encounters a preconfiguration of his doubling in a watery reflection in the person of the nymph Echo” (*Tales* 103). The players in this triangle are Narcissus, his image, and Echo. The trope of seduction thus undergoes critical analysis because the individual's confrontation with psychic space characterizes seduction and is as fundamental as sexual intrigue.

The love triangles in *Kamouraska* draw attention to the complex playing field of the psyche that loves the mirage of the object as a love-object as well as the power of the image. Elisabeth senses that no one object will be able to unify her sense of self, and so she tries to become whole, not through one, but several love objects, always oscillating on the border of love and hate, which are in many ways the same. The mirror’s reflection, which presupposes an original that is copied, is called into question when that image is skewed. For example, the beautiful and virtuous image of Elisabeth in the mirror does not truly represent her. The imitation is still valid, even though it may not be an accurate depiction of the original, which in turn problematizes the privileging of origins. Whether we refer to original/imitation, art/life, or reality/theatre, these binaries are in a sense “triangulated” or complicated through a discussion of the discourses of power and seduction.

Elisabeth attributes her acting abilities to the early training of her aunts as they prepared her for society. A rigorous training it is: "Elisabeth sit up straight! Elisabeth, don't speak while you're eating! Elisabeth, make that curtsy again, this very moment!" (51). She perceives the irony of her "glass cage" (184). If Elisabeth wants respectability, then she must play the role meted out to her by society, which at the same time requires that she forsake a large part of her gregarious personality. The alternatives she sees for women are strictly limited: her mother wrapped in widowhood, depression, and completely withdrawn from society; her three spinster aunts whose only passion is to live vicariously through her; her mother-in-law who tolerates her son's abusive behaviour of everyone in his path, including her daughter-in-law, insisting that as squire it is his right, and that any bad behaviour such as adultery should be ignored. As she says, "Simply ignore it...No matter how my son mistreats you" (74). Her other possible role model is Aurélie Caron, her childhood acquaintance. Aurélie fascinates her because she represents every aspect of "bad" society that Elisabeth must supposedly guard herself against. Aurélie is also of a much lower class than Elisabeth, and thus she does not have the same privileges as she. Therefore, Elisabeth learns to play the role that she has been given so as to have that role's social benefits, but she rejects every role model provided to her through these women who influence her life.

Elisabeth at times expresses contempt and passive-aggressive feelings for her aunts that oscillate with her acceptance of their coddling. She knows that it is only through their aid that she has the necessary refinements to become a seducer. They shower her in lace, satin, and velvet. They teach her the Queen's English: "repeat after me, *the cat, the bird*....Don't forget, you pronounce the *th* in English with your tongue on

your teeth” (51). Through their society, she has access to people like governors and squires – those in positions of power. On the other hand, Elisabeth resents her aunts’ timidity to cross the barriers of society they themselves have created. She takes pleasure in flaunting her own sexuality, which is in such great contrast to their own barrenness. Repeatedly, Elisabeth differentiates herself from them by pointing to her own fertility through the birth of eleven children. Elisabeth sees that her mother did not break free of their cloistering control; she does not want the same fate and will do anything to disrupt the “dynasty of solitary women [that] isn’t going to continue forever, here in the house on Rue Augusta” (95).

The way that Elisabeth often uses her aunts as pawns in her strategies of seduction may seem cruel. Especially when it is made clear that their attachment to her is truly sentimental and genuine, and that her Aunt Luce-Gertrude goes so far as to stay in the jail cell during her sentence to take care of her. Yet from Elisabeth’s point of view, their insistence on her role as a virtuous young woman in society becomes the cruellest of charades. This process is what draws the mask over her face: “Violent counterpart. Your delicate face, Elisabeth D’Aulnières. Film of angel skin laid over your loathing. Thin as can be” (88).

Her aunts are really only a microcosm of the society that Elisabeth participates in and also rallies against. She recognizes the artifice of her class system that works to continually fortify itself against any possible threats, including rebellion or mutiny from its ranks. Elisabeth will not be ostracised because, as much as she rebels, her class of society does everything possible to preserve her façade of innocence and virtue as a reflection of themselves. She may reject her restricted role in some ways, but Elisabeth

uses snobbery as part of her own defence mechanism to justify why she should not be accountable to others for her actions. As she recalls the trial, her outrage is against being exposed in the public courtroom to people of a lower class: "No, I won't be brought to trial before the likes of them! Servants, innkeepers, boatmen, peasants!" (53). In the present, Elisabeth continues to assume the privileges of class hierarchy as her right as illustrated through her perception of the running of household affairs. As she observes in dreary resignation, "an endless supply, replenished there in the darkness by hands whose duty it is to keep providing sugar. That's how it works. It always has" (12).

Despite her "frugal" (73) tendencies, Elisabeth's mother-in-law, Madame Tassy, knows that even though she despises her daughter-in-law and blames her for the death of her son, Elisabeth must be protected as one of her own class. Thus Elisabeth feels that her destiny is decided before any of her life has taken place: "The aristocratic old family machine grinds into motion. Parleys and ponders. My fate is sealed. Decided even before a word is spoken. Keep everything quiet. Condemn Elisabeth d'Aulnières to wear the icy mask of innocence. For the rest of her days. Save her, and save ourselves along with her. Measure her virtue by that haughty way she has of denying the obvious truth" (235). Madame Tassy makes her show of public support to fend off criticism of her family by accompanying Elisabeth along with her aunts to take her away from jail where she has been set free on bail. Elisabeth is released after two months in prison, while her servant, Aurélie, then must serve two years in her place as a scapegoat for the crime. Clearly, innocence in this case depends upon one's social background. The "facts" of the crime are obscured and made irrelevant in comparison to wealthy families who are able to recognize what should be deemed in "good taste". As Antoine says, he is "entitled to

some respect” (98) due to his title, Squire of Kamouraska; similarly, those of the landed gentry believe that it is their right to live beyond the reach of the law.

However, although Elisabeth learns that innocence may be used as a façade to insulate her from the law, it will not be enough protection from her own family. While seduction is usually represented as what operates in opposition to innocence, the word “innocence” is metonymic in the context of this novel, posing the problem of the “naturalness” ascribed to the quality of innocence. Innocence enters the realm of theatre and artifice in *Kamouraska*. For example, Elisabeth’s case largely depends on her ability “to wear the icy mask of innocence.” Thus innocence is a façade, the antithesis of sincere emotion, and a burden to be worn in retribution for Elisabeth’s misdemeanours, not so much against her husband as the reputation of well-off families. “Innocence,” as it is normally portrayed in association with the qualities of naiveté and purity, is also present. Elisabeth is somewhat innocent of sexual matters when she agrees to marry Antoine. Without proper guidance from her mothers or aunts, she ends up in a brutal, violent relationship with a man who tries to seduce her into a joint suicide. Innocence can also take on the meaning of making excuses as shown in the mask of innocence that hides the monster that Antoine can be. Antoine, one might argue, is innocent in his insanity. As well, he looks the epitome of innocent physical appearance as a “fair-haired giant. Eyes so blue, like flax, filled with tears” (66).

The social criticism implied within the narrative is harsh. The aunts are negligible in their innocence because it makes them blind to the realities of this marriage proposition of their seventeen-year old charge. And Elisabeth, at this point in time, is worthy of pity. She only moves from innocence to knowledge when she realizes that a

local servant girl, with whom Antoine is having an affair, is wearing her clothing in public. Thus, there is nothing virtuous about innocence. Rather, it is a commodity used to serve individual's needs, and that can be put on or taken off at will. Elisabeth talks of her innocence in a cynical tone when she says it is something to be "spruced up" (2). As well, she comments on the typical role of women in her society: "Yes, that's all a virtuous woman is. A gaping fool that struts along, staring at the image of her honor" (3). In plotting Antoine's murder, Elisabeth thinks to herself, "keep plenty of distance between ourselves and Antoine's death. Enough to restore our innocence" (171). Innocence becomes part of the arsenal of artifice, another mask to draw upon.

The words "I'm innocent!" ring out frequently throughout the narration in Elisabeth's impassioned declaration. If the word "innocent" is ubiquitous in this novel, that is because it is a story of a murder. Yet the binary of innocence/guilt is complicated when we note that the law that indicts her is also guilty of many injustices. Her mother-in-law notes that "her tears and hysterics are part of that unseemly world of bad taste and excesses. A world which, for want of a better term, she calls the theatre" (73). As a means of gaining control in her own life, Elisabeth plays with the binary of reality/artifice, or life/ art, in which the art of seduction, the theatre of passion, is one way of subverting the realist hierarchy, of turning life into a mode of art. Elisabeth shows the reader another way to read her life. There is the surface version: her performance of being the good, pious wife. And then there is the gateway to her mind: an exploration of passion and transgression. The reader is invited to look at the discrepancy between these two views of one life. In this way, she is a director asking a discerning audience to "read between the lines" and appreciate the sophistication of her performance. Despite the fact

that Elisabeth seems to know herself well in some ways, she is unable or unwilling to admit her culpability in the crime. The words "I'm innocent" therefore come to signify her defence against the invasion of unpleasant memories – not so much of the death of her husband as the death-in-life situation that she has created as Madame Rolland.

And so Elisabeth becomes an early nineteenth-century backwoods version of Wilde, in one sense, the criminal as artist. In fact, what she seeks in her discourse of seduction is exactly that same power of the artist/playwright, not only in the theatre of her passions, but also in the theatre of her memory, where she justifies herself even as she reveals her complicity. And so she seduces the audience to share in that complicity, to justify her as well. Note that her autobiography chooses not to dwell on certain aspects of her past such as her aunts' deaths, her reaction to the medical student who reportedly tells George that he blames Elisabeth for inciting him to murder, or her involvement with Aurélie following the murder. Like most criminals, she arranges her plea in such a way as to draw on the sympathies of her audience. Elisabeth knows that she continues to be put on trial; she realizes that the border between her private/public life is one of artifice. And as a criminal, she takes cheating as her creative licence. As Ien Ang comments, "I would like to consider autobiography as a more or less deliberate, rhetorical construction of a 'self' for *public*, not private purposes: the displayed self is a strategically fabricated performance, one which stages a *useful* identity, an identity which can be put to work" (136). Elisabeth's passion for crime is also a work of art because she gives the men that she seduces what they most desire. To Antoine she gives the gift of death, which he was too incompetent to carry out on his own. To George, she gives the anger he needs to fully develop his identity. And to Aurélie, she gives the opportunity to be as devilish as

she has dreamed she might be. Elisabeth's artistry lies in her ability to draw out the dormant passions and secret desires of those closest to her.

Her first husband, Antoine, longs for death and escape. Although he often strays from their relationship, he always comes back to Elisabeth because he recognizes that she is the true leader. In Sorel, he tries to leave her unsuccessfully: "Antoine pretends he's leaving for Kamouraska....But look, first thing in the morning, here he is, back again" (99). He writes a fake suicide note and then surreptitiously follows Elisabeth to see if she is having an affair. Most importantly, he invites her into his madness by repeatedly suggesting a joint suicide. As she recalls him saying to her in their first months of marriage, "And he tells me that I'm so pretty, so kind. And that one fine day he's going to kill me" (80). He attempts to make good on his word by once throwing a knife at her head, and on another occasion, he tries to slip a noose around both their necks. Even though Elisabeth has guilt dreams in which his spirit comes back to reproach her, she also knows she has given him the perfect death at the hand of his perfect opponent, George.

A third person heightens the excitement in this triangle of seduction. Elisabeth remarks on her jealousy of George and Antoine's bond as schoolboys. She pieces together their stories and imagines the rituals of the all-boy monastery where they boarded together. They share emotions to which Elisabeth wants to be privy in her relationships with them: "Two young fellows without a thing in common. Except in the deep recesses of their souls. A silent, premature experience with despair" (122). Their bond works its way out through the game of chess: "The same stubborn silence. The same complicity. Through endless games of chess" (123). Both men confess that this game represents to them the closest chance at friendship that either has had. Antoine

speaks of George in a voice Elisabeth has “never heard him use before” when he reminisces: “In school...To have had a real friend...he’s the one I would have chosen” (111). George expresses the same sentiment with fierceness in his tone because he knows how the game will be played out: “Did I tell you [Elisabeth] we used to play chess at school? I think he used to like to lose. He never could beat me. Never. Not even once, you hear?” (119). Elisabeth knows the fatality of these games and that “anyway, the games have already been acted out. The winner and loser chosen in advance” (123). Elisabeth sees it as “a holy sacrifice” (165) – Antoine’s life in exchange for hers and George’s freedom. McPherson, who suggests that Elisabeth is the “Queen” in their game of chess, must be active in accomplishing the checkmate: “Elisabeth had always recognized and felt the ultimate threat to her own existence posed by the fraternity underlying the sado-masochistic relationship of her husband and lover” (23).

Although George would be satisfied with an illicit affair with Elisabeth, the seduction for her must be greater. The love triangle of husband, wife, and lover is necessary to her plan to push him beyond his limits. Her seduction of George becomes a passionate affair with death: “Your handsome face, triumphant over death, flashing with a wild delight. The way I love you, yearn to make you mine. But first you’ll have to push yourself beyond the limits of your strength. That absolute, gnawing away inside of you. Turn it to crime, to a deed of blood” (203). Elisabeth, the criminal, wants to convert others to her ways of thinking. Their love transformed into an obsession for murder. The potential for drama increases exponentially compared to a simple affair. Now they spend hours in the forest plotting the murder: “A kind of ritual between us...Playing at death. The tautness of death, stretched out to its final length. The

stiffness of death, all feeling gone. Complete and utter emptiness" (148). Strategies, games of the mind, transgressing the limits – these are their obsessions. Even their lovemaking just becomes a reflection of their minds' misdemeanours. Just as George finishes killing Antoine, he “searches his heart to find the woman for whom...Years to possess her body here and now. In triumph” (233). The passion between Elisabeth and George transforms into the seduction and death of Antoine.

Another love triangle emerges prior to Antoine's death. Elisabeth and George in their first attempt to murder Antoine persuade Aurélie to go to Kamouraska disguised so as to seduce and then to poison Antoine. Their plan fails, even though he takes the poison, thus suggesting the inevitability of George and Elisabeth's final act. In their efforts to convince Aurélie, they offer her guaranteed wealth and a place in Elisabeth's home as her reward. In the end, though, Aurélie agrees to commit the crime because she is seduced by Elisabeth.

An erotic scene ensues in which Elisabeth and George tantalize Aurélie with implicit promises of dizzying love. He starts by provoking Aurélie by turns with anger, gentleness, and humour (as Elisabeth stands by as a voyeur). Elisabeth and George manipulate Aurélie as if they have preplanned the whole scene of seduction. Elisabeth's performance as a seducer begins, “As if my role were being whispered to me line by line” (176). They work collectively to seduce Aurélie as Elisabeth makes it clear when she notes, “A sign from George, and I start to undo her hair” (176). George barks commands at Aurelie, “Be quiet! Now close your mouth....your mouth!” (176), much in the same way that he has ordered Elisabeth to undress in an earlier scene when they made love in his cabin. Aurélie is enthralled by all of the attention and the sensuousness of their touch.

Aurélie's real attraction is to her mistress, Elisabeth, whom she holds in awe ever since she started her affair with George. It is as if, at that point, Aurélie recognizes Elisabeth's powers as a great seducer. The greatest challenge of the two seducers, though, is to make Aurélie sublimate her adoration for them into an obsession with the beauty of these two seducers' love. Elisabeth asks Aurélie to "think of her [Elisabeth's] wonderful love for the doctor, warm and tender" (179). In this way, Elisabeth, through these triangular configurations and the constantly changing love object, destabilizes the notion of a fixed love object, thus challenging the concept of the seduced as an unchanging entity in the binary mode.

What excites Elisabeth most about the seduction of Aurélie is that the performance demands that she should act oppositely to her true feelings. Elisabeth, watching Aurélie, thinks, "I'm beginning to find her hateful" (173). Elisabeth parodies the Queen's attitude of political strategy; she will do what is best for the greater good. Indeed, it is her queenly bearing that has always been one of the greatest allures for Aurélie. At the same time, Elisabeth has always been curious about Aurélie because she knows that Aurélie is one of the few people in her life who has not been deceived by her con-act of regality. Thus, perhaps Aurélie's fascination for Elisabeth is not a belief in her queenliness but in her performance of confidence and poise. The drama that Elisabeth invents in her life intrigues Aurélie, and she senses her mistress's power is attained through this theatre that she has created.

Through her parody of the Queen, Elisabeth subverts the authority considered "naturally" inherent to the Crown. On a number of occasions in the text, Elisabeth aligns herself with Queen Victoria, as a way to affirm a position of power. As McPherson

argues, “Any clearcut opposition between law and law-breaker, authority and subject, English and French is, however, almost immediately complicated and undermined in the text. The Queen may be against Elisabeth; but Elisabeth attempts to undo that powerful opposition by stressing precisely her *resemblance* to the other” (18). As Madame Rolland, she flatters herself when she strikes a pose with her children, which her servant says makes her resemble the Queen herself as she surrounds herself with the children. As Elisabeth thinks to herself, “I look like the Queen of England. I act like the Queen of England. I’m fascinated by the image of Victoria and her children. Perfect imitation. Who could find me guilty of doing anything wrong?” (29).

Elisabeth’s own language makes it clear that she knows this is a game of artifice: “look,” “act,” “image,” “imitation” – her diction indicates that she is playing with appearances. This hints at a parody of Victorian morality, the drama of sovereign dignity masking a desire to subvert that morality/sovereignty, as well as to subvert the self and its self-contained identity. Elisabeth does not so much identify with the Queen as try to assume that identity while at the same time shaping it to suit her own purposes. This is imitation that is repetition with critical distance. She shows how the illusion of the Queen’s authority and respectability is a fragile entity easily imitated, though perhaps not for a sustained period of time. Identity becomes a pose as fleeting as beauty. It does not matter that “the backside of Victoria’s image” (30) has been exposed because Elisabeth’s act of parody shows that the original is also a “sham unmasked” (29).

Both women ironically try to present a unified front to the world. Queen Victoria purports that it is her right as Queen to claim sovereignty over colonies under her jurisdiction as part of the “family” of the British Empire. She claims her colonial

authority is legitimate, despite the unrest overseas under her rule. Elisabeth, in a similar fashion, puts a great deal of energy into convincing her society that she is the model wife and mother. Murder and the like are hidden under the façade of her apparent domestic harmony. Thus the logic of the binary of original/imitation is thrown into question because it turns out the “original” has no more legitimate authority than the imitation. The artifice of the binary is made clear.

Elisabeth’s identification with the Queen and her family also recalls another aspect of imperialism. As Gillian Whitlock observes, “The female body has always been crucial to the reproduction of Empire, and deeply marked by it. On the other hand it can also be at the bosom of de-scribing Empire” (349). The marks of childbirth on Elisabeth illustrate this point. Her children, who are the product of her union with her lover and two husbands, represent the diversity of her society. Although raised under the homogeneous roof of a French-Canadian man, who as a notary aligns himself with the British ruling class, this entourage of children also includes the French-Canadian children of Tassy and the British-American Loyalist child of Nelson. There is subversion at the root of family identity. Society applauds Elisabeth for fulfilling her duty of producing colonial subjects, but she, of all of her children, only truly treasures her “bastard” child, “the one and only child of my lover, dark and slender. My little Nicolas” (14). He is an illegitimate child, a product of Elisabeth’s crime of passion. Yet he lives amongst the family flock, his secret being kept by his mother. As Whitlock writes, “Confusions of complicity and resistance in these cultures makes the identification of outlaws in settler territory a perilous enterprise” (349). Most likely in Quebec in the 1830's the marriage market did not offer many beautiful upper-class women to choose amongst for wives.

Thus Jérôme Rolland, who might have thought otherwise if he were in England, asks Elisabeth to be his wife. Victorian morality undergoes transformation when we see that it is used as a public gesture of respectability but does not truly preserve the values of the people who supposedly represent it.

Perhaps some of the outrage that Elisabeth seems to feel personally against the Queen is based on the fact that in the past she has always been aligned with the privileges of the English. Her bilingualism has previously been an asset that gives her access to two cultures, and it distinguishes her as part of the elite class of her society. As McPherson states, though, language and law can support or subvert one another's authority: "The most obvious obstacle in any attempt to *fix* or define the guilt in *Kamouraska* is the fact that English represents the language of Law, and French that of the 'crime'" (20). Are the brutal crimes of imperialism or the abandonment of one's lover any worse than her crimes?, Elisabeth might ask. She feels betrayed by the language that has helped largely to shape her identity, especially, by "the indictment, writ in the Queen's own English by the masters of this land" (27). Elisabeth here acknowledges her position as colonial subject who has less voice because she is not 'authentically' English. Secondly, George's final words before he leaves for Kamouraska are "whispered in English 'Goodbye my love...'" (149). Elisabeth is a split subject living her passion in one language and the recrimination in another. As McPherson develops this argument, "Though the language of their communication and communion is French, their relationship can only ever be bilingual and some aspect of their shared language will always be a *langue étrangère*" (21).

Elisabeth then has to turn the language of imperialism in on itself through irony. As Lejeune observes, "Irony is a dangerous and tricky weapon: dangerous because it robs the other of his language, it 'vitiates' his speech, which he will no longer be able to use with the same effectiveness; and, at the same time, the assailant is out of reach, since all he does is repeat what the other says and so can, ironically, plead innocent. The adversary is led to 'commit suicide with his own tongue'" (64). The supposed reading of the law against Elisabeth is put in italics to indicate another discourse. However, a closer look at this discourse reveals that Elisabeth's bias is present, and thus we are not hearing a "true" account of the verdict against her. Nevertheless, the verdict starts out with the tone and diction that one would expect in the court recordings of a murder trial: "At Her Majesty's Court of King's Bench the jurors for our Lady the Queen upon their oath present that Elisabeth Eléonore d'Aulnières, late of the parish of Kamouraska..." (27) And so it continues in an apparently serious tone. The irony lies in the reader realizing how absurd it is that the jurors, who have lived their whole lives in Quebec, are doing the bidding of a Queen in another land. If the irony is not outright at this point, it is by the end of the dialogue as the image of the Queen, being disturbed or inconvenienced by this trial and Elisabeth's inconsiderateness by murdering one of her subjects, is evoked repeatedly: "and of her malice aforethought to poison, kill, and murder the said Antoine Tassy, against the peace of our said Lady the Queen, her crown, and dignity" (28). The legitimacy of imperial law is questioned in this ironic play with the language of the law itself.

The discourse of seduction, in opposition to the law, operates between the cultural relationship of English and French Canada. The production of colonial powers and how

they are legitimized is explored in this particular literary representation as symptomatic of larger political questions. The political allegory appears in Elisabeth's multiple selves and desires, including her social identity as a daughter of New France, the wife of a French-Canadian husband, and the lover of an English-Canadian who, along with her, subverts the colonial authorities and Victorian moralities in this sexual rebellion which seems to parallel the rebellions of 1837-38. Elisabeth is also a woman who looks like, but subverts Queen Victoria; Elisabeth recalls her prosecution by the Crown Attorney: "As if it makes the slightest difference to our dear Victoria-beyond-the-sea! What does she care if there's a little adultery, a little murder, way out there on a few acres of snowy waste that England once took away from France?" (38).

Colonial authority in the 1840's is embodied in the persona of the Queen, who represents the "source" of British law that extends to Canada. As Allan Greer in *The Patriots and the People* observes, "Queen Victoria ascended to the throne of England in August 1837, just as tensions in Lower Canada were reaching a boiling point. There is no indication that the seventeen-year-old monarch gave much immediate thought to the political squabbles wracking her North American possessions, but her coronation provided Canada with an occasion for further reflections on Sovereign authorities and state forms" (190). Interestingly, Greer points out that Sorel was one of the few towns to celebrate the coronation by firing off a salute. Sorel, the town where Elisabeth grows up under the care of her aunts, is a bastion for English loyalists. Her position of power presents society with a paradox whereby a woman rules the masses in a patriarchal society. In this respect, the gender politics of Elizabethan and Victorian courts are similar. Louis Montrose, writing about the sixteenth century, notes "a fundamental

cultural contradiction specific to Elizabethan society: namely, the expectation that English gentlemen would manifest loyalty and obedience to their sovereign at the same time that they exercised masculine authority over women” (153-54). This paradox that Montrose articulates is no less true under Victoria’s reign.

The Queen – as a figure of authority whose position made her ruler over all of the men in her domain – had to contend with frequent challenges to her regime. In particular, the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau seem to have informed the patriotes’ view of women (Greer 189). Rousseau maintains that women should stay in the domestic sphere where their “natural” attachment to family and home life best suit them to this environment. He argues that men are not as apt to become as emotionally attached as women are to individuals, and thus are more capable of making decisions that are for the greater good of the community. Rousseau’s theory gives equal status to both roles in society, suggesting they are of distinct but equal value. His argument mandates, though, that any woman who attempts to enter the public sphere should be considered suspicious; he links this desire to be political with a lack of innocence and chastity on the women’s part. Greer cites a speech of Papineau in which he clearly affirms Rousseau’s division of labour along gender lines as being proper and “natural.” Thus, gender identity formation is being shaped in new ways in Quebec in the 1830’s and ‘40’s. This misogynistic way of thinking is prevalent in the public denunciations of the Queen based on her gender. Queen Victoria was brandished with the derogatory insult of “whore,” for example, by the patriotes. As Greer writes, “it is when we recognize this linkage between public roles for women, sexual disorder, and political corruption and tyranny that we begin to

understand why the patriotes could even conceive of accusing Victoria Regina – innocent, young, but undeniably a prominent public figure – of being a ‘whore’” (202).

Greer posits that one of the main factors of the patriotes’ defeat lies in their own oppressive measures against marginalized groups such as women and First Nations people. Had their policies of liberation extended to these groups, the stronger support within the larger population may have contributed to a more successful resistance movement. As it was, some women certainly supported the patriotes’ movement but their efforts to participate, and quite frankly the utilization of this segment of society as a valuable resource, were ignored and thus they missed a strategic opportunity. In *Kamouraska*, the British and French allegiances are alluded to in relation to the women’s role. Under Papineau’s lead, and in imitation of measures taken by the American revolutionaries, a boycott of British imports was instigated that required the co-operation of women consumers. As Greer writes, “Since textiles accounted for a large part of British exports to Canada, the patriote press felt called upon to lecture the ladies of the country on the need to forgo foreign finery in favour of plain homespun” (210).

A dichotomy that sets Elisabeth apart from her mother-in-law from the beginning of their relationship is their divergent opinions on dress. Repeatedly, Elisabeth’s wealth and prestige is obliquely referred to through her wardrobe full of “velvet, linen, and lace” (69). Such materials could only be obtained through importation from England. Madame Tassy, thoroughly French Canadian, seems to represent the patriotes’ commitment to a boycott with her determination to knit their clothing “with homespun wool, rough and prickly, the color of porridge” (75). Her only luxury is boots, especially made for her clubfeet, significantly imported from New York, and not England. The

beginning of Elisabeth's rejection of the patriotes is played out on a subtle domestic level when she rejects her mother-in-law's "homespun shawl, one she knitted herself" for her new-born child, claiming it is too rough. Thus, the symbolism of this rejection suggests that the next generation of the Tassy family will not put its loyalties with the patriotes.

Here is the crux of Elisabeth's identity crisis; she belongs to a system in which she is francophone, yet she simultaneously must feel superior to and reject everything French so as to claim her right to her British loyalty that upholds her class status. Her identity is further complicated by the fact that her lover, the Loyalist George Nelson, notably has the same surname as Robert Nelson, one of Papineau's co-leaders, an Englishman and supporter of the patriotes. Ironically, Taft Manning asserts that part of the patriotes' downfall can be attributed to men such as Nelson championing the habitants against the seigneurs: "For Papineau, however egalitarian he may have been in theory, was not ready to do much in practice for the 'common man'" (*Revolt* 366). Thus, Elisabeth's allegiances – linguistic, cultural, class-based – are divided along several different lines.

Kamouraska can also be understood as a political allegory for the larger historical context of Canada in the 1830's, and the seduction of colonial New France by English Canada. Although first published in French in 1970, this novel recounts the events that took place in a small Quebec town in 1839-40. As Rose writes, "*Kamouraska* is a novel of psychological research, exploring a Québécois marital triangle and crime of passion of January 1839 and exposing allegorically the colonial mentality prior to national consciousness" (150). Elisabeth uses her theatrical abilities and seductive strategies to subvert both local French-Canadian and English imperial authority. Thus,

this narrative serves to restage and expose the mechanics underlying colonial discourse. *Kamouraska* offers a political allegory of the relationship between Papineau and Nelson, between the French and English, in resisting colonial authorities. The year 1840 may be attributed to the historical events of this love-murder triangle, but it also recalls the rebellions three years earlier. Elisabeth's lover, George Nelson, is an American Loyalist, and her desire for him represents her refusing both a French husband and colonial authorities who repress the patriotes of both Lower and Upper Canada in the rebellions of 1837-38. Robert Nelson and his brother were both speakers in the great meeting of five thousand people at the beginning of the outbreak in October, 1837. His political namesake in the novel, George Nelson, serves to question the stability of imperial frameworks by translating the language of the colonizer into the discourse of seduction.

Some of the particular causes of the Rebellion of 1837 are still apparent in this discourse of seduction. In the early 1830's, Lower Canada, with its mainly French-speaking inhabitants, dominated the elected Assembly of the colony. They believed that although the British Constitutionalists had stronger political clout with imperial Britain to back up their policies, that there was still the possibility of discussion, compromise, and stable growth. The patriotes wanted to move in the direction of democracy and independence with the not-so-distant models of the French and American revolutions in mind. They aspired, though, to a form of change that would preclude the violence of revolution. The old regime, unable to conform to the demands of the patriotes and still maintain their privilege, especially as an English minority, were quicker to foresee the violence that might result and thus took strong measures to quell any reforms or

insurgencies. This control took the shape of martial law and the suspension of citizens' individual rights.

Greer takes the unique perspective that the Rebellion of 1837 was in many ways the will of the peasants more than the vision of any one leader. Rural conditions in Quebec were difficult; there were consecutive crop failures from 1834-37 in a place where eighty-nine percent of the population lived in the countryside. Expanding demographics and accelerated immigration policies heightened this problem. These factors compounded negatively with the seigniorial system in a place that greatly limited the habitants' ownership of property and burdened them with a levied tax system that became increasingly more onerous in the years leading up to the Rebellion.

As appears in many paradigms of colonialism, the state as an extension of the British Empire is problematic, both ethically and functionally. In functional terms, the imitation of institutionalized policies based on England's governing style does not translate efficiently into the new colonial social setting. As Greer points out, "The social hierarchy and the state structure could never be integrated because the latter was controlled and, at its highest levels, staffed from overseas" (89). The habitants were able to feel legitimate in expressing their grievances, in part, because members of the bourgeoisie composed part of their party. They founded newspapers such as *Le Canadien*, which gave currency to the rights of the colonized. When their French-dominated elected Assembly started to conflict with the British appointed legislature, they became politically active. "This clash drove them to undertake an intensive self-education campaign in order to master the wonders of British constitutional law, the better to understand the representative system that had been installed in 1791"(Greer 121). They

were well aware of the power division that, for the most part, also ran along linguistic lines to the detriment of francophones. Dickinson and Young comment on how real was this threat: “In Westminster, the Union Bill (1822) was introduced into the British Parliament. Proposing to unite Upper and Lower Canada and to abolish French as an official language, the terminology of the bill – ‘all written proceedings of the [assembly and legislative council] shall be in the *English* language and none other’ – left no doubt as to the future of French Canadians and their bourgeoisie in a united Canada” (160). These French-speaking people were in the ironic situation of being British subjects. The patriotes' demands were articulated in 1834 in a document entitled the Ninety-two Resolutions, which British authorities perceived as threatening in what they considered its revolutionary tone. “Expressing support for American republicanism, the resolutions threatened to impeach the governor” (Dickinson and Young 164).

The rejection of these Resolutions led to increased agitation. Furthermore, the government broke down as a functional political unit as the Assembly and the Legislative Council (or Senate) ended in a deadlock, each vetoing any measure proposed by the other. The British were not interested in compromise so much as bringing the patriote movement under their control. In the end, the patriote movement was not as successful as it might have been because, as Greer points out, they were planning to have time to build up the military when the British moved in quickly to end any thoughts of revolution.

There are only a few subtle references to the Rebellion of 1837 in *Kamouraska*. Most notably, the year 1840, when the trial of Elisabeth D'Aulnières occurs, clearly sets the context. This is the same year that the Governor General Lord Durham ensured that

the Union Act was enacted: "By the Union Act of 1840, the reunited Canadas were granted a legislative assembly in which Canada East (Lower Canada) and Canada West (Upper Canada) each had forty-two seats; the government, however, did not have to maintain a majority in the assembly. The appearance of equality was in fact a denial of representation by population. Lower Canada had a significantly larger population, 650 000 compared to Upper Canada's 450 000. The policy thus ensured the political superiority of the minority anglophone population" (Dickinson and Young 181). There is political allegory at work here, in which the murdered husband is imperial France, well dispatched and gotten rid of by a Loyalist American, an English-Canadian lover who could possess her if he were not so changed by his crimes, and mourned as deserter/madman. Especially that concluding estrangement, in which Elisabeth recalls the end of her relationship with George: "through all that crime and death. Like a boundary to cross....And then you come back. And your face, your look against mine. Unknowable, now, for ever and ever. So frightful...No, I don't know this man! Found out, Doctor Nelson! You've been found out! Murder. Stranger" (248). All that was transformative, all that changed Elisabeth's identity, or bent it out of recognition during the love affair, now rebounds on the lover as the stranger, and English Canada as the beloved enemy. Elisabeth thus betrays both her English and French heritage.

Ironically, the English language that brings Elisabeth her one true lover is also the language of her final betrayal. She contests the official discourse of the law in her mind as she recalls the indictment against her: "Elisabeth D'Aulnières, widow Tassy. You hear that? You're being charged in a foreign tongue. The language of my love. Nothing matters now but the shape of the words on his lips. Elisabeth D'Aulnières, Widow Tassy.

Remember Saint Denis and Saint Eustache! Let the Queen have every patriote hanged if that's her pleasure. But not my love. Let him live, him alone. And let me belong to him forever" (39). That clear placement of the affair in the context of the 1837 rebellion, and her rejection of the Québec patriotes in favour of her English love, and the shape of the English words on his tongue, suggests another kind of possible history of this country that is lost in the snows of Kamouraska.

In the novel, references are made to two of the places of the greatest sites of violence, war, and resistance in the Rebellion of 1837 – St. Denis and St. Eustache. At St. Eustache one hundred and fifteen people died and St. Denis represented the final, crushing defeat of the patriotes. Papineau fled Canada for the States after these defeats, and so Robert Nelson became president of the interim government. On this occasion, he said, "Papineau has abandoned us for selfish and family motives regarding the seigneuries and his inveterate love of the old French laws. We can do better without him" (Ouellette 312). Nelson read out a Declaration of Independence on the banks of the Richelieu in February, 1838: "Before being forced back into the United States by local militia, Nelson declared Lower Canada a republic and issued a Proclamation of Independence calling for separation of church and state, and state expropriation of the clergy reserves and the lands of the British American Land Company" (Dickinson and Young 165). He then came back in November, 1838, where he read out the same Declaration. But he was defeated on November 4, 1838 at Odelltown by Loyalist volunteers in a battle that lasted less than two hours. Nonetheless, he escaped into exile in the United States once more.

There is a striking resemblance between the historical figure of Robert Nelson and that of Hébert's George Nelson. In both men we find seducers capable of great rhetorical persuasion, fiery passions, and split loyalties along cultural lines. Moreover, both of these men seduce people into believing in what they purport to represent, but in the end each abandons the seduced. This seduction in *Kamouraska* extends to the reader who never hears George's story directly, only as it is recounted through Elisabeth's narrative. Seduction intertwines with the political in this passage because the decrees of the Queen are seen to affect her loyal subjects on a personal basis; the conflicting loyalties felt by many of the patriotes is dramatized through Elisabeth's heated passion, which ends with her being abandoned.

Elisabeth recognizes the games that the British play at the expense of the patriotes. As she contemplates, "Who can probe the depths of our bodies, our hearts? No trap is fine enough. And the English law of this captive land that says we're innocent until they prove us guilty" (193). The guilt that "probes" her heart is that of the patriotes and the colonialists. They both know their identities are vested in one another, and they are seduced by their own unique relationship. Yet Elisabeth ironically qualifies how justice is served. It is not a question of "innocent until proven guilty" but rather "innocent until *they* prove *us* guilty" (my italics). The English usurp the position of authority, but Elisabeth implicitly criticizes the artifice of this assumed role.

Just as each character in this novel seems to struggle in isolation, so too there is a sense of cultural alienation that pervades this narrative. As Lennox puts it, "each of these characters becomes a prisoner. Elisabeth is trapped by damning self-knowledge; George is trapped by his homicide; Aurélie is trapped by her mistress' treachery; Antoine is

trapped by his obsessive profligacy” (92-93). So, too, the system of political and cultural allegiances traps people in confusion and uneasiness, uncertainty arising in the face of conflicting interests. Elisabeth’s identification with French and English culture is seen again in George’s case. On his trip to Kamouraska, some local people misconstrue his identity when they take him for an English officer: “Quiet women. Don’t talk so much. He could be an English officer and have us arrested. Times are bad. Maybe there was some fighting up the river” (218). British, American, and French-Canadian identities temporarily flow into one another.

Even social forms such as the charivari took on a new character in the Rebellion of 1837 because it expanded to act as an instrument for getting officers to resign their post with the government, allowing the patriotes to replace the colonial order with their own institutions. Charivaris have long constituted a tradition in Quebec French-speaking communities that highlight the artifice of social roles. The charivari is a tradition dating back to the Renaissance in France, and although it transformed over the years in France, it maintained its original function in Quebec. The charivari is a gathering of men and women in carnivalesque form that performs in front of people’s houses to solicit public restitution for what was considered their “crime”. For example, the most common reason to hold a charivari would be if an older man married a woman substantially younger than himself or vice versa. In addition, couples that have a great disparity in income or widows who choose to remarry are also common targets of this ritual. The rabble-rousers appear before the house of the newlyweds dressed in costumes (often cross-dressing) and making a great deal of noise with bells, whistles, drums, and hollering. The newlyweds must pay a price for their “indiscreetness” of match. Normally, this fine is then divided

between the charivari party and the rest donated to the poor. If the couple refuse to pay, the charivari continues every night, increasing in intensity and can last for months. The actual negotiation and payment of fines takes place in the day under the guise of polite business. Given the political climate, “between 1817 and 1826, Montreal magistrates forbade not only charivaris, gaming at city markets, and firing guns to celebrate birthdays, but even skating and sledding within the city” (Dickinson and Young 162).

Although Elisabeth never directly refers to it, one of the scenes of her dreams can be interpreted as having many of the elements of a charivari. In one of her recollections, which turns into a nightmarish vision, faces and voices that are judging her surround Elisabeth. The nightmare begins with reference to her three aunts: “Silly old maids. Look, there you are in the midst of a circus, a huge circus, black with humanity on all sides. Adélaïde, Luce Gertrude, Angélique...Tiny, hemmed in, hooted down”(44). Surely this scene first and foremost draws the reader’s attention back to the court scene, especially since there are references to judges, “white wigs and all” (44). Yet, undeniably, there is another element to this surreal vision that suggests another reading of this scene. This place where we are taken is never referred to as a courtroom but rather a “circus” or an “arena” (44). The scene has all of the elements of Bakhtin’s carnival: a place of laughter and subversion with a menacing undertone. The ambiance of this dream is claustrophobic. There is the tension of Elisabeth and her aunts submitting to a form of persecution. Like the charivari, there are bells, drums, laughter, and “the crowd” (44). The tension grows as the level of noise increases: “Their [the aunts’] rosaries, jingling around their wrists like so many little bells. They’re shouting, struggling in vain to be heard over an endless roll on the drum” (44).

The charivari on the surface offers release in the form of laughter and festivities, yet it also has a coercive edge. The sexual allusion in Elisabeth's dream seems equivalent to disease and infection: "Big thick peals of lusty laughter. Filth showered on our heads" (44). Sexuality literally becomes something dirty. As Greer notes, "The immediate purpose of charivari was not to correct immorality or even to guard the sanctity of marriage against 'real' impurity. Rather, it amounted to a ritualistic response to the *signs* of desecration, a public rebuke filled with accusations of lasciviousness, which aired suspicions shared by clergy and laity alike" (76). The narrative of *Kamouraska* is defensive and paranoid throughout because Elisabeth feels that she is constantly being judged and condemned, even by her husband Jérôme. Indeed, there is evidence that suggests that at least some of her fears are well founded. When, for example, Jérôme inquires about Aurélie Caron by asking, "what was her name?" (20), it is clearly meant as a jab at Elisabeth. Her marriage to Jérôme, although it serves to bring her honour and a secure position in society again, could also put her in a vulnerable position (as a widow remarrying). The purpose of the charivari is to make individuals accountable for their actions and to ensure that they observe the sanctity of marriage. Thus, as Greer elaborates, "Not only did it [the charivari] ape the procedures of priests and magistrates, it functioned as a complementary form of social control, helping to chasten deviants of a very particular sort in strictly limited circumstances" (85).

The Church, though, opposed the charivari as a usurpation of its own authority. Consider, for example, the fact that the charivari presumed to remonstrate marital unions already condoned by the Church. Whether through a court or a charivari, Elisabeth is viewed as a criminal who must be castigated. Similarly, seduction, when brought to trial,

is condemned through both official and unofficial channels of society. Like a penance, the sentences repeated “ad infinitum” articulate Elisabeth’s guilt, as expressed through her aunts’ viewpoint: “The child is damning her soul. And we’re damning ours to protect her” (44). As John Lennox comments, “In reinventing her past, Elisabeth also relives it as a kind of fiction and this reinvention takes shape, to a substantial extent, according to certain structures of literature and folklore which Anne Hébert has used to help transform Elisabeth’s history into art” (91).

Perhaps the most disturbing image of this nightmare is Elisabeth represented as a naked woman with someone throwing a knife at her. Elisabeth is both inside and outside of this camera view. First, she refers to the woman in the third person, but then she later clutches her chest when she wakes as if she were the woman struck. As Gingrass observes in her discussion of dreams in *Kamouraska*, “Like a performer in an ancient ‘arene du cirque,’ she cannot escape the replay of her own life-memory, and her central, frightening role in it” (49). The dream sequence reads as follows: “A woman, breasts bare, is standing with her back against a board. Her hands are tied behind her. The crowd stops laughing, holding its breath. The three judges, in their white wigs, bend over to watch. Gazing in rapt attention, as if the fate of the world were suddenly at stake. An invisible hand is throwing daggers at the woman, held fast to the board. Aiming at her heart” (44-45). Of course, this scene also recalls Antoine throwing a knife at her head, which only nearly missed. If we read this dream as political allegory, she is the colonized whose nebulous position between English and French destabilizes further in the current political climate of 1837. The “bare breasted” woman is without question vulnerable and exposed. She is a spectacle subject to the gaze of others. As in the charivari, she has no

say in the terms of agreement. The fact that the judges are on the sidelines watching with “rapt attention, as if the fate of the world were at stake,” suggests they might represent the British colonizers who implement imperial law. They feel their authority undermined by the patriotes who have an informal system of communication and justice through solidarity represented in rituals such as the charivari. They fear as much as the regular British colonists the “invisible hand”; that is, the mobilization of patriote troops.

Through her allegorical account of the tensions between British, French-Canadian, and American forces, Hébert thus parodically explores the psychological territory of colonialism and its power relations. She uses seduction as a main trope because it places the protagonist, Elisabeth, in a position where she may be on the margin, yet she is still challenging the “natural” order of the system that attempts to encode her. As Godard notes, “Dialectical confrontation must be replaced by oxymoronic or multiplistic vision, or be exploded through parody which subverts our logical structures” (16). Elisabeth’s sexual rebellion is against the mores of the Church law and Victorian, imperial law. And as a potential patriote, she is abandoned by her fellow rebel, George Nelson, who leaves her to face imprisonment and social ostracization. But she nonetheless denies her rebellion, and disavows her loss of innocence, even as she reveals the deep splits in her cultural identity that can only be pulled together through performance. Performance allows her escape from the dominion of colonialism. Her every move, while on the surface of things is a concession to the new powers that be, also acts as a negation because the reader knows that Elisabeth has not conformed. Her unrest might be quiet but it exists, nevertheless.

For Elisabeth understands that she has been seduced by Jérôme Rolland's respectability. Although she despises him for the most part, and her own complicity in their marriage, she fears losing this mask even though it has brought her virtual death. As she thinks to herself, "Pull the mask of innocence over my face. Against the bones. Accept it like some kind of vengeance, some kind of punishment. Play the cruel game, the tedious comedy, day after day. Until the perfect resemblance sticks to my skin"(248). Her role as the seduced has been set for so long now, she feels the oncoming crisis of being a widow. Elisabeth in this entire narrative never once refers to her future. She is only able to talk about the present or the past. Life and art merge as "the perfect resemblance" replaces the "original," and the nature/artifice binary merge. Although by the end of the novel we come to think of Elisabeth mainly as a seducer, she is really a performer who has the versatility to play both the roles of seducer and seduced.

Her final performance is ironic. Ostensibly, she cries for her husband, Monsieur Rolland, because he has just died. At least part of her tears must be seen as theatre. She is intent on how the servants take her performance. They are of course interchangeable – Léotine, Agathe, Florida – because they are only meant to represent the societal eye forever watching Elisabeth's every move. The narrative's last words are given to her audience: "Just look how Madame loves Monsieur! You see, she's crying..." (250). Thus, Elisabeth's performance is gratified.

The entire narrative is then a re-staging of a drama that has already taken place. Aurélie's imagined voice prompts her, "Your really big scenes are coming up, Madame. You've got to live them over out in the daylight" (100). Elisabeth refers repeatedly to the inevitability of her fate: "I have to go racing headlong to my doom. It can't be helped.

The scandal has to break" (109). She knows that the limits her society has placed on her role as a woman need to be broken. She is unwilling to accept the mores of her society as natural, and thus challenges the "natural" order by taking on the roles of both seducer and seduced. To do so, she must be an actor. Elisabeth is involved in the production of power by ascertaining her role as a performer as her haughty comment suggests: "Let them say and do what they please. I'm still the main witness in this drama of snow and passion" (182). But it is this vision of performance that helps to keep her alive: "To go on dreaming at the risk of life and limb, as if you were acting out your own death" (17). The "you" of this quotation reflects the complicated narrative structure of this novel; it is a direct plea to both herself and the reader to believe in a dream. This dream is linked with death – a central motif of *Kamouraska*. Death here can be seen to also represent psychic space, and thus the confrontation with death is also finally to know oneself.

Elisabeth as narrator and protagonist realizes that identity is socially constructed and therefore of the world of artifice. To have any say in how power is structured, then, she must play a role in shaping the theatre of her life, which always feels just slightly beyond her grasp: "It's as if we're rehearsing a play. Groping for words and gestures already used before, already worked out at leisure, but reluctant now to appear in a certain light" (57). Although a theatre, it is also a place of serious consequences. Thus, Elisabeth's sense of alienation and doom is represented in the image of the legendary La Corriveau of French-Canadian folklore, a "woman-monster" risen from the earth and blocked from entering the homes of the townsfolk. The performance of Elisabeth's life has given her some agency, but it has also caused her to lose herself in the image of the mirror. Her discourse allows us to realize that every character in the novel represents a

facet of her own personality. Thus, when Elisabeth says of her first husband, Antoine, "I gaze unmoved at this man's reflection. Watch him in the mirror as he comes undone" (132), we know that in a sense she is also watching herself as she blurs the image of herself as subject when reflected as object in the mirror. Elisabeth is not completely "undone" by the end of the novel, but her performance never ceases. As readers, we must "translate" her experience and understand that ultimately this is a story about power relations – be they personal or allegorical – of larger societal powers such as French-Canadian/British-American struggles.

Finally, *Kamouraska* suggests how the British Empire has also used the strategies of a seducer in its dealing with French Canada in the 1830's and 40's. Up to this point in time, the colonial mechanisms had largely failed, as clearly illustrated by the rebellions. Following these military operations, the British reconsidered their strategy, knowing that brute force is an unsuccessful method of colonization. Instead, in their bid for power and control, they developed a devious undertaking. Their seduction targeted the seduced's identity. In other words, the British realized that Canadian identity was rooted in the French-Catholic tradition. The new bourgeoisie elite following the rebellions aligned themselves with the church to ensure French Canadians would affirm their belief in the imperial system rather than resist it. Dickinson and Young elaborate this shift in colonial power relations:

It may at first seem paradoxical that French-Canadian nationalism was encouraged, on the one hand, by elements in the church that rejected the values of the French Revolution and, on the other hand, by francophone leaders who supported Quebec's integration into the larger Canadian state. The explanation

lies in the changing Quebec elite and its need to manage popular ideology. The popular classes resisted being told what to think and so adhered to their network of family, tavern, friendly society, labour union, and neighbourhood. To combat such independence, lay and clerical intellectuals formulated a unifying, conservative national ideology rooted in Catholicism, the French language, the preindustrial family, and an idealization of rural life. (156-57)

French Canadians were seduced into believing that they could have what they were fighting for all along: their cultural identity. Therefore, the new bourgeoisie elites' control lay in a strategic shift from a pre-industrialized to industrialized, federal nation open to international trade. All the elements of seduction are present in this non-romantic liaison. French Canada, the seduced, resists and resists until the unexpected moment when the harsh British law seems to concede and open up a little to their distinct cultural identity. It appears as if the seducer is vulnerable. In turn, the seduced becomes momentarily trusting, unaware that this is the seducer's true piercing into the exposed psyche of the francophones. The strategy of the seducer – to use what is most precious to the seduced's identity *against* the seduced – succeeds. Unlike the failed attempts at introducing British schooling into rural Quebec, this internalization of the colonial structure, which is always economic at its base, does greater psychological damage than any armored offensives.

The power struggle does not end here, however, because the seduced also contains elements of the seducer. Elisabeth's own rebellion manifests itself in her life's performance. She is a seducer who keeps up the façade of loyalty to religious mores and colonial laws who nonetheless finds her greatest excitement in seducing the reader into

sympathy with her ambivalent position. In this political allegory, Elisabeth is an emblem of the fractured identity of those French Canadians who rebelled in 1837-38, and then tried to conceal their transgression of imperial law. As Dickinson and Young observe, "After border incursions such as Nelson's failed, secret military lodges – were established in the United States and across western Lower Canada in July 1838" (165). The renewed rebellions were minor and without great success, but illustrate the feelings of outrage still nurtured by French Canadians. More importantly, in this tale of power relations, the basis for nationalism in Canada is represented in the process of being established. Still a colonial offspring, at least symbolically, in the early twenty-first century, the Canadian identity is now a post-colonial one. Nationalism is still a shifting question, and Canadians continue to be seduced by new colonial powers. When we address the ambivalence of our position on the world stage, we also transgress the assumptions underlying colonial operations. In a strange way, Canada's power lies more in coming to terms with its cultural history then and now, than in economic patterns which will follow.

6: *No Fixed Address: Don Juan Revised*

Don Juan is a literary figure who has caught the imagination of many writers, and as a trickster he continues to reappear in literature, often taking on new forms, even that of a female in the novel under consideration. Before turning to *No Fixed Address*, then, as a modern-day parodic version, it would help to trace the development of the Don Juan legend in several representative examples that include Tirso de Molina's play *El Burlador de Sevilla*, Lord Byron's long poem "Don Juan", and Søren Kierkegaard's *Diary of the Seducer*. Undoubtedly, these are some of the better known accounts of Don Juan, and precisely because they are famous literary works, they show how it is that *No Fixed Address* can be viewed as a parodic play of the conventions of Donjuanism.

Tirso de Molina's play has serious consequences; for a feminist rewriting of the Don Juan literary figure necessarily shifts the power paradigm. This is not to say that women "gain" power through this reconfiguration; rather it shows as slightly absurd how it is that power is produced under the rubric of one of the ultimate male models of sexuality. The absurdity in *No Fixed Address* is not that the feminist parody is a ridicule of previous, more male-centred interpretations of Don Juan; instead, the quality of the absurd in van Herk's novel engages the ironic element often present in other versions and picks up on this subversive playfulness in new ways.

Canada has to be one of the most unlikely geographical settings that one can imagine for someone like Don Juan, never mind the fact that this Don Juan is female. Yet Don Juan, it turns out, is the perfect literary agent to enter into the social imagination of the Canadian landscape because he represents social/political questioning and

psychological exploration of new terrain. Through the discourse of seduction, *No Fixed Address* maps a feminist identity politics, which is shaped in this narrative through a critique of sexual reasoning. This narrative resists the trope that has a woman punished for her desires; for in this novel, the protagonist proves to be always outside of the lines on the map: "Arachne navigates the landscape as both illusory and substantial. The maps contain towns where there are none, yet towns also exist that are not named on the map" (Dudek 36). Debra Dudek highlights the artifice of maps, which are never fully reliable narratives. The Canadian landscape becomes a metaphor for exploring identity politics, whereby the tricks of illusion become an indispensable grounding for how reality is formed.

Don Juan is the most famous seducer in history, and perhaps this literary figure has been so enduring because he is frequently reinvented. J.W. Smeed's *Don Juan: Variations on a Theme* traces the historical development of the figure of Don Juan across nations, languages, genres, and centuries. As Smeed elaborates, "The inveterate womanizer and rebel is a perennial type, so that these literary variations-on-a-theme reveal changing moral, social and philosophical attitudes and value" (ix). This observation gestures towards one of the functions of parody, which is to renew old literary forms by reinterpreting them within the socio-political climate and aesthetic tastes of a particular writer's lifetime.

Under the pseudonym of Tirso de Molina, Fray Gabriel Téllez, a monk, wrote *El Burlador de Sevilla*, which was first published in 1630. This is the earliest complete surviving play on the subject of Don Juan Tenorio. Smeed observes that, by the end of the seventeenth century, Don Juan and his servant undergo important developments that

will lead to modifications in later plays. Don Juan becomes decidedly more wicked, Catalinón is turned into a comic figure. During this period, the play moves from Spain to Italy where in the 1640's J.A. Cicognini writes a new version entitled *Il Convitato di Pietra*. In this version, Don Juan is more arrogant, and most significantly, he is unwilling to repent. Cicognini's adaptation shows Don Juan lusting after women of all ranks and provides the dramatic innovation of a servant cataloguing a list of Don Juan's conquests, thus overcoming the problem of trying to dramatize this series on stage. Smeed observes that the Don Juan figure also evolves in different genres: "From these Italian pieces, one line of development goes via seventeenth-century French theatre into popular stage – and puppet-plays while another line leads to Italian opera" (7).

In France, the structure of the play remains intact, but playwrights begin to explore the psychological depth of Don Juan's character. For example, in Dormion's play *le Festin de pierre*, the criminal has Don Juan accepting the statue's invitation (Don Ulloa turned to stone at the hands of the seducer's tricks), not only out of pride, but also out of curiosity. As Smeed observes, "For the first time, a Don Juan's inconstancy and hedonism are systematically justified (by him, that is) through an appeal to nature; how, made as he is, could he act otherwise?" (10). Molière's play *Don Juan ou le Festin de pierre*, first performed in 1665 and published in 1682, received much public criticism. Critics argued that the moral impact of the play was lost in the psychological quest for Don Juan's motivation. Don Juan is perceived in this play as a superhuman beyond the bounds of good and evil. Within the larger historical context, Smeed maintains that, "in his Don Juan, Molière was simultaneously depicting and criticizing the 'free spirits of mid seventeenth-century Paris'" (12). In the adaptations by Rosimond (first performed

1669 and published in 1670) and Thomas Corneille (first performed in 1677), Don Juan nonetheless becomes progressively more wicked. These plays serve to truly remove the Don Juan figure from his originally didactic role in Molina's play; now Don Juan no longer repents for his actions. In Germany and Austria in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Don Juan plays take on a new level of "bloodthirstiness" (19) in the puppet plays. In these plays, while the father of Don Juan previously was reviled, now he is actually killed by his son. Furthermore, the comic character of the servant takes on a more central role and becomes more of a clown. For the next century, no serious reinterpretation of the play was to appear until Mozart's opera.

Franz Horn interprets Don Juan in an idealistic way in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. His interpretation of Don Juan as a transcendental persona is taken even further by Eduard Duller's poem 'Juan' circa 1835. As Smeed observes, "Duller, yet more romantic in his approach, presents us with a Don Juan whose idealistic quest for the Divine here on earth is not less misplaced and deluded, but of such intensity that it is salvation" (47). The list of writers influenced by Hoffmann's interpretation of the Don Juan legend is long and continues on into this century. Often in these interpretations, it is through the influence of pure Doña Ana, or a similarly devoted woman, who saves Don Juan from damnation. Mozart's music has often been cited as another major influence in this turn to an idealized version of Don Juan. His *Don Giovanni* is one of the more lovely Don Juan stories because it easily catches the audience up in its musical excitement and allows the audience to judge Don Juan by his own standards and logic, which is that of a seducer. As Kristeva puts it, "Mozart's joyful and stately music ring out above that edifying story....instead of the sullen claims of the victim, the air resounds

with the pure jouissance of a conqueror, to be sure, but a conqueror who knows he has no object, who does not want one, who loves neither triumph nor glory in themselves, but the passing of both – the eternal return, infinitely so” (193).

In reaction against this romanticized retelling of the legend, numerous writers in the twentieth century satirized this new Don Juan, rejecting the idealization of a libertine presented as a tragic hero. In Edmond Rostand’s play *La dernière nuit de Don Juan* (1914) and Henry de Montherlant’s play *Don Juan* (1956), the theatre acts as a forum for literary criticism so as to debunk the idealized myth. According to Smeed, Bernard Shaw’s play, *Man and Superman* (1901-03), “negates both the original didactic message and the romantic-heroic reading” (69). In his Nietzschean vision, the Life Force, as Shaw refers to it, is served through the union of intellect and fertility to create a superhuman. As Smeed puts it, “Nietzsche’s followers regarded Don Juan as a Strong Man whom the world needed even as it denounced him as a reprobate; someone whose uncompromising desire to be himself inescapably led him to revalue conventional moral standards” (111). Shaw’s work as well as that of Max Frisch’s comedy, *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie* (1952), present a more self-conscious Don Juan who is aware of his own faults and is seeking new outlets for his energies.

Out of these paradoxical representations of Don Juan as either a criminal or an idealist, a number of salient characteristics emerge as we trace the history of the legend into the late twentieth century. As is true today, “In popular parlance, ‘Don Juan’ has become a synonym for womanizer” (122). Smeed points out that the notion of a “sporting” Don Juan takes hold of writers’ imaginations which implies “an attitude towards seduction which takes as much pleasure in the hazards and difficulties of pursuit

as in the conquest itself' (104). This Don Juan is also shaped as a fictive character free from regret; he experiences no remorse for what he considers a game. Stendhal compares Don Juan to a criminal who is able to commit crime without a sense of conscience. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it is Nietzsche and Schopenhauer who provide the most influential philosophical interpretations of Don Juan. In contrast to Nietzsche's assertive reading of Don Juan as a Life Force agent, Schopenhauer views him as subject to the larger system. The aesthetics of the stage play a role as well, in that, when Don Juan moves from being perceived as a life force to an individual, the stage productions were scaled back so that, for example, "from the early part of the nineteenth century onwards, the supernatural elements began to constitute an embarrassment in themselves with the result that they were often dispensed with altogether" (Smeed 129). The history of Don Juan is not static; we see that Don Juan's characterization is contingent upon the influence of historical situations unique to different cultures.

Takayuki Yokota-Murakami's *Don Juan East/West* further problematizes the notion that the legendary figure of Don Juan can be treated as if it were the same in oriental and Western cultures: "The concept of 'seducer' is ontologically stable; we simply choose to give it an arbitrary signifier: seducer, Don Juan, *iro-otoko*, and so forth. Such a substitution is, however, open to question, provided that 'seduction' is also a culturally specific signification" (27). The premise for this argument follows Edward Said's argument that the West has attempted to colonize the representation of the East for its own purposes. As Yokota-Murakami summarizes: "Edward Said's *Orientalism* is directed against the West's project of representing the Orient in place of Eastern cultural vocabulary on the ground that the means for representation of the East are meagre. In the

above objection against the nominalistic/textualistic theory, which turns out to be a typical expression of such Orientalist thinking, Eastern culture is devoid of both reality and representation" (72). Yokota-Murakami also makes the argument that *both* cultures are guilty of making assumptions. For example, the Japanese have also been selective in how they choose to interpret Western literature: "After encountering modern European literary discourses, Japanese 'men' of letters appear to have emphasized only the elements of spirituality and courtesy in the Western tradition of passion, and to have ignored its Donjuanesque aspect altogether" (86). Although the main focus of this study is on representations of Don Juan in the Western Hemisphere, Yokota-Murakami reminds us of the element of artifice in every culture's representation of the seducer.

Don Juan is a seducer of literary critics as well. Not only is he known as the great seducer in literary works, it seems that he has also become a figure who metamorphosizes into any shape that the literary critic wants him to take. Western writers assume that Don Juan is an archetypal figure who crosses the boundaries of all cultures. For him to be archetypal would, of course, mean that there has to be some sort of universal definition as to what characterizes Don Juan. The most common feature agreed upon by such critics is Don Juan's "male instinct" to seduce women. This feature becomes unfeasible, though, when the Japanese model is also taken into account: "The difference between Don Juan and the Japanese heroes that Oshima calls attention to, namely, the absence or presence of the homosexual passion, also belies Guillen's definition of the 'archetype' of Don Juan as 'an inveterate *woman*-chaser.' Thus, even the supposedly most elementary definition is prone to collapse" (17). There is nothing "natural" about the prototype male seducer; he is a product of our own imaginations and corresponds in many ways to the mores and

values of Western culture. Thus, the Western seducer feels justified in his actions by taking refuge in the common myth of what is typically accepted as Donjuanism in this culture. The seducer points to his predecessor, in a sense, as if to say that this is the paradigm, the mould from which he comes. Yokota-Murakami traces a different kind of history of Don Juan (even though he argues that ultimately comparative literature is an impossible/violent project that inevitably leads to the colonization or syncretism of one culture by another).

Nevertheless, Yokota-Murakami reveals some of the basic assumptions of the Don Juan myth through what is or is not a comparative literary study to reveal how masculinity is constituted in the West. For example, he poses the question: "To think that 'seduction' is universal/eternal male instinct, having nothing to do with patriarchal ideologies, is this not already metaphysics?" (25). As part of his critique of how Don Juan is usually read within the metaphysical model, he observes that "it is one of the principles of ancient logic that comparison always requires a third object (*tertium comparationis*) that functions as a point of reference" (25). Yokota-Murakami proposes that the third point of reference inserted into the triangle of East Don Juan and West Don Juan is this concept of masculinity as the point of comparison.

This masculinity in turn is defined through its opposition to femininity. Thus, to take Yokota-Murakami's argument further, the masculine claim that it is right and "natural" for the man to be the seducer suggests a logic that states the masculine must oppress the feminine as a means to sustain its own identity through opposition. When a woman is the seducer, then, this "natural" alliance between the terms "seducer" and "masculinity" becomes problematic. Must she imitate "masculine" strategies to be a

successful seducer? The discursive model already in place is accepted as "reality," and thus it is easy to assume that a feminist version of Don Juan must stand as an imitation or mirrored image of the "original". This ontological perspective, though, ignores that the "original" – such as it is – is a linguistic construct.

In another example of differing ideological perspectives, Yokota-Murakami considers the role of romantic love in relation to the West's conceptualization of seduction. As he puts it, "In modern European discourse, love is often primarily a moral issue, even when it takes the form of defiance of the code of ethics. The conditions of morality have been integral to the very nature of love itself: one has to be virtuous to be a good lover" (38). In contrast, Yokota-Murakami points out that Japanese passion is defined by the measure of intensity of the lovers; it is *not* intertwined with morality. The figure of Don Juan in Western culture, we can conjecture, has been viewed in so many different lights because his character is always being newly shaped in response to the mores of any given time period and place.

Don Juan over the last three centuries has alternately been portrayed as a libertine, hero, transcendentalist, lover, martyr, rapist, and pervert. Yokota-Murakami's study reveals some of the underlying assumptions of Western critics whose own discourse is as ideologically bound as is any of the literature that they purport to interpret. Thus, looking a little more closely at some of the historical interpretations of Don Juan, we should recall that each of these versions reflects the history of the aesthetics of seduction in Western literature. The three interpretations of Don Juan chosen for this study, despite the fact that they are each from different time periods and distinct national literatures, share the same basic assumptions that Yokota-Murakami identifies as Western features of the

myth; Don Juan in these versions is heterosexual and gauges his prowess in terms of his masculinity as opposed to femininity.

Scholars cannot determine with absolute certainty if Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla y el convidado de piedra* (1630) is one of the first redactions of the Don Juan character, yet his play is recognized as one of the first full developments of Don Juan as it is known today. Don Juan, in this play, is a handsome, intelligent, and manipulative person. Tirso's play is usually interpreted as having a didactic purpose: to warn would-be libertines against the perils of their amoral choices. This play has provided the basic characterization and sequence of dramatic events from which all other versions of Don Juan have been derived. The sources for Tirso's own works seem to have been popular folklore handed down through oral cultural traditions. Tirso's play will be discussed at greater length presently, but for now it is important to note the main characteristics that define Don Juan. He is an insatiable womanizer, and most of his decisions are marked by his honour, deceit, charm, and intelligence. Don Juan, in this play, believes that he can delay repentance for his wicked deeds, but such procrastination brings about his downfall.

This literary inception of the seducer treats the figure of Don Juan as important because, even in this cautionary tale, he is made interesting to the reader since he also embodies moral ambiguity and acts as a supplement to the binary of good/evil. Tirso's play is religious as one might expect of any Spanish dramaturgy in the seventeenth century. As Gwynne Edwards explains, "The intellectual background to the play has to do with the theological controversy waged at the end of the sixteenth century between the Molinists and the Banezians over the extent to which Divine Grace enables a man to

achieve salvation. In the controversy the Molinists held free-will to be of enormous importance, almost to the exclusion of the role of God's grace, while the Banezians clung to the totally different view that man was virtually predestined" (intro xvii). Thus throughout the play Don Juan is offered the opportunity to repent, which he refuses, always claiming that there will be enough time to do so in the future. In the end it is too late, and when he takes the hand of the Stone Guest, a statue of Don Ulloa, a man whose death must be attributed to the tricks of Don Juan, he is brought to his own death and probably taken to Hell. Thus, in the end, Don Juan is made accountable for his actions based on his own free choices.

Nevertheless, the triumph of good is not so clear throughout the play since Don Juan usually conquers the women he wants without any strong retribution. This ambiguity proves fascinating for many writers of future generations. Its presence in this play might be accounted for by situating it historically. Spain in the Golden Age of drama, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was at the height of its power as a European nation with more control and wealth than any of its neighbours. This wealth was in large part due to Spain's exploration and colonization of the Americas. Some of the ambiguity of this play may then be read as a metaphor for the double code that attends any form of colonialism. For colonists might sincerely believe that they are enlightening other cultures through their proselytization, but at some level there must also be a national conscience and consciousness that they are exploiters profiting from the wealth of others. Similarly, Don Juan exploits the vulnerabilities of those people around him, and yet in the end, the greatest irony is that he has deceived himself by believing that he could forestall redemption and still receive it. Even though he receives his

nemesis, Don Juan is also the person in this drama who foregrounds the hypocrisy of his social context. He is only able to be the seducer that he is because he has so many other people wanting to participate in his game.

Kristeva accounts for such ambiguity in Don Juan's character as part of an anti-humanist stance. As she writes, "Don Juan's paradox is that, at the waning of the Middle Ages, he is not a humanist. His polytopicalness, his combinative pleasure, his lack of attachment, his laughter with and at prohibitions, turn him into a being without internality, with whom humanistic morality cannot identify – in spite of the evidence of atheism that he provides to a large extent. Is not his libertine attitude more of a longing to change existence into a form, a game, a jouissance?" (*Tales* 197). In fact, Don Juan's game appears to be one of shifting identities. Literally, he takes on numerous disguises throughout the play to further his seductions, but figuratively, we come to realize that there really is nothing behind the mask – for he *is* the mask. Don Juan lives on the surface of language; he is a malleable form willing always to strike a new pose to entice whoever wishes to be seduced. Don Juan, then, suggests that identity is fluid; furthermore, he depicts a way of living without internality that is privileged as a beautiful art form and as a sign of the formidable powers of the artist.

Four seductions take place in Tirso's drama: two noblewomen, Duquesa Isabela and Doña Ana; and two peasant women, Tisbea and Aminta. One of the central motifs of the story explores how Don Juan negates his promises, an oral contract with all of the women, and also most of the men, in the play. James Mandrell concludes in *Don Juan and the Point of Honor* that honour and seduction are intricately linked, and moreover, that Don Juan offers "the exchange of a trick for honour." (59). He gives the example of

Don Juan's encounter with Isabela, who makes love to him thinking that it is really her fiancé, the Marquis Octavio, who has come to her in the dark. He offers to fulfil all of her pleasures, but does so while she still believes him to be her fiancé. She asks, "Quién eres, hombre?" (Who are you?) to which Don Juan replies, "Quién soy? Un hombre sin nombre" (Who am I? A man without a name.) (my translation) (1.1.14-15). The ambiguity of this scene suggests that Isabela, who later proves rather ambivalent about whom she marries so long as she can preserve her reputation, may also know that her current lover is a stranger, yet her sense of intrigue causes her to allow him to seduce her nonetheless. Mandrell compares this scene to the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Like Psyche, Isabela cannot resist the temptation to identify her lover. No seduction is complete for any seducer until by chance or strategy, he also undeceives the one he seduced enough to make her aware that she has been seduced.

Don Juan happily breaks all the codes of honour in his society. He not only seduces women of all classes, he also betrays both of his male friends (Don Alfonso and the Marquis by making cuckolds of them), and he even kills the father of Doña Ana. He also betrays the hospitality of Tisbea and later Aminta and Batricio when he becomes their guests. Tisbea saves him from a shipwreck and gives up her virginity to him after having preserved it for so many years. Yet her fear that he will deceive her – contained in her repeated references to the Trojan horse – are justified in the end: "¡plega a Dios que no mintáis! Parecís caballo griego que el mar a mis pies desagua" (1. 612-614). (I pray to God that you do not lie. You seem like the Greek horse that the sea brings to my feet.) (My translation). The degree of deception increases throughout the play so that Don Juan's actions are seen as almost sacrilegious when he breaks up the wedding plan of

Aminta and Batricio, two of the few characters in the play who are depicted as having the honour of virtue. Don Juan thus comes to represent anarchy in the way his betrayal of trust damages the social fabric.

Edwards observes the irony of Don Juan's social position as a nobleman in juxtaposition with the anarchic ignobility of character that he demonstrates in this play. She makes the distinction between "honour as reputation, social standing and public image, and honour as virtue" (xxvi). On the other hand, Don Juan is not the only one capable of selfish actions. We have seen that Isabela is self-serving in her focus on her own pleasures and reputation. Similarly, Ana partakes in an illicit love affair with Mota, and she knowingly deceives her father to further her own ambitions. Of the men, Mandrell notes, we see that the King wants to shut his eyes to any misdemeanours that might implicate him; Octavio willingly changes allegiances several times to satisfy his self-interests; Mota imagines himself as a Don Juan, although he only seems to use women; and Catalinón, Don Juan's servant, also considers himself first in all situations.

Some critics have argued that Don Juan acts as a scapegoat who is finally punished by society, and so also reunites the society as a force against him. Alternatively, Kristeva reads the ending of this play as sublimation rather than as Don Juan's downfall. As she argues, "Thus Don Juan's end, as he hangs on to the stone arms of the Commandant, doomed to fire and death, is perhaps not simply a conventional moral condemnation that might satisfy devout and God-fearing people. One might see in such an ending, in fact an ecstatic one, rather the end of *man* in order for the seducer's music to outlast him. So that the deep meaning of the myth might rise: *seduction is sublimation*" (*Tales* 199). Thus, according to Kristeva, seduction is really more a state of

mind that goes beyond the finite state of the body. Encoded within the discourse of seduction, body and mind are emotionally interdependent rather than binaried. The recondite mind and body of the seducer functions much like the dualistic construction of reading and writing, which continuously work on each other. Throughout the play, it is the deception – the *burla* – which fascinates Don Juan as much as the pleasure of the women whom he seduces. Don Juan does not seek out physical pleasure so much as the suspense of the game of seduction. Such games are not just futile diversions, for they question the very foundations of language and society. Most systems of power would have it that they represent a “natural” state of order; Don Juan disrupts these systems by showing that the established rules can be played with, broken, and thus they are variable.

Intrigue and deception are very much a part of seventeenth-century Spain’s nation-building politics when Tirso writes his play. Having left the Golden Age behind, when Ferdinand of Aragon (1452-1516) and Isabella of Castile (1451-1504) succeeded in uniting the Castilian and the Aragonese kingdoms, Spain eventually falls victim to its own riches and xenophobia. At its height of power, Spain is the most powerful nation in Europe and has many riches pouring in from colonies in South America. However, the Spanish saw fit to expel huge portions of their Moorish population in search of “*pureza de sangre*” (purity of blood), believing such homogeneity would further unity. Leading up to the expulsion, the Inquisition in charge of enforcing religious uniformity was condoned by a papal bull in 1478. The ramifications of Spain’s zeal to impose its views, though, eventually led to its downfall. The cost of maintaining an expensive military across several continents, the inflation caused by the glut of gold bullion from America, and a growing aristocracy that led to a stagnated business class, are key factors attributed

to the Spain's decline as a world leader. Tirso's play reviles the Don Juan who does not want to repent, yet it also provides a critique of the cultural/historical milieu. For Don Juan represents the decadence and deceit that has plagued Spain over the last century in the 1600's. Surely at some level, as is always true in the colonialist project, the nation's conscience knows it is guilty of duplicity on several levels: the Inquisition which burned innocent people; the expulsion of the Jews with whom Spaniards had lived alongside for several centuries; the plundering of the Americas; and the subordination of distinct regions to the Spanish crown.

Although the social drama of seventeenth-century Spain may seem somewhat removed from the long poem of early nineteenth-century Britain, in Tirso and Byron we find a similar concern for hypocrisy that they acknowledge in their societies. A rebel himself, Don Juan's reappearance in literature often seems to coincide with social unrest. Spain enters into complete political turmoil in the seventeenth century under the incompetent rule of Philip III (r. 1598-1621) and Philip IV (r. 1621-25). The internal exploitation of the kingdom's wealth under the reign of Charles II (1665-1700) seals the fate of the flagging nation. Similarly, the French Revolution (1789-1832) deeply influences the Romantic poets who privilege the rights of the individual, even though, by the end, they see that their ideals are not realized through the bloody revolution. At home in Britain, the industrial revolution takes its toll on the lower classes, vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. The French Revolution caused most nations in Europe to question *en masse* the legitimacy of an elite ruling and very limited suffrage. The political changes in Britain were not keeping pace with social and economic transformations. Byron's satire thus exposes the folly of a corrupt nation, whereas Tirso shows the tenuous

nature of his societal structure through the figure of Don Juan who undermines the most fundamental principle of a civilized man, his word of honour. Byron goes even further by presenting Don Juan as a participant in his society's turmoil in which he naively demonstrates complacency. The satire in Byron's poem critiques the moral lassitude of the British nation that proclaims itself as pure and upright during the beginning of the Victorian era.

Lord Byron's "Don Juan" (first edition of the sixteen cantos published 1819-24) should be read for the sentiment it produces rather than the story line. The narrator, in some ways, is more essential than Don Juan himself. The poem is told as a monologue from a narrator who seems to be older than Don Juan, and who states at the beginning that "he is in search of a hero" (1.1). The hero he creates, however, comes out of the mock epic tradition. The narrator presents Don Juan as a naïve, cheerful, good-looking youth who is subject to follies. In a world full of trickery, he bumbles along with none of the control or finesse that one would normally associate with Don Juan. In his passivity, he seems more acted upon by the women than active himself: "With women he was what/They pleased to make or take him for" (501). Don Juan provides a palimpsest for the women's imaginations: to Doña Julia he is the bud of youth; to Haidee he is her one true passion; to Gulbayez he represents an androgynous, sentimental potential lover; and to Fult-Fitz he constitutes someone willing to take on the challenge of her phantom appearance. This parody – not directed at the epic itself – satirizes a corrupt English society, whose heroes will never be those of epic proportions.

In his book *Abandoned Women*, Lawrence Lipking discusses the letter of Doña Julia to Don Juan as one of the most sincere and truly moving moments wrought in the

poem. Lipking posits that the trope of the abandoned woman is shown in Doña Julia's letter, the way she is in fact "everywoman." The letter triumphs in its sentimental force. Seduction, according to Jean Baudrillard, is centred in artifice and ritual rather than in the naturalized world. The letters of abandoned women are thus a part of the ritual of seduction. Women try to relive the scene of seduction by re-presenting it in the letter, albeit in new forms with the seduction scene now being interpreted in terms of melancholy, recrimination, or nostalgia. Lipking notes, however, that abandoned women also pose a threat to society in that they have been put outside the realm of conventional authority. Their passions may indeed have no bounds. In this sense, they pose as much a threat of anarchy as does Don Juan.

Byron's Don Juan differs, however, from the superficial treatment of Don Juan that had been the vogue of the last century. He wrote his long poem between 1818 and 1823, and he published it in stages between 1819 and 1824. His figure differs in that he is meant to represent a series of values rather than the development of one specific character. For such reasons this poem should be read satirically, as Smeed suggests: "Indeed, in the later cantos set in England, Don Juan's role seems to be chiefly that of an outsider against whom the absurdity, artificiality, corruption and hypocrisy of English high society can be measured" (36). For example, Smeed points to Don Juan's attitude towards what he claims was once his only true beloved. He states at one point that it is only natural that he should stay true to the memory of Haidee, yet he is quick to claim that it would be unnatural for him not to move on to other relationships: "Here we see the link between Byron's conception of Don Juan and his attacks on society: a hero for whom 'obedience to nature is the only virtue' is shown first overcoming an unnatural

upbringing, then enjoying an idyllic interlude in which unspoiled nature and unaffected love combine to make him happy, only to be pitchforked into a series of thoroughly artificial milieux (Turkish harem, Russian court, English *haute monde*)" (38). Smeed argues, then, that the discourse of seduction in this poem is really a Romantic form of political critique: "Byron's hero is clearly depicted as more admirable than society at large, which is shown as going against nature and as thoroughly hypocritical, both in sexual matters and in its general moral conduct" (43).

Byron is well aware of the artifice in the discourse of seduction and how it can be used to manipulate. Byron-as-narrator in his personal letters, for example, shows a radical change in tone between his letter written to his lover and another to one of his confidantes. He writes to the Lady Caroline Lamb, "but I shall have pride, a melancholy pleasure, in suffering what you yourself can scarcely conceive, for you do not know me"(August, 1812, to Lady Caroline Lamb, Vol. 2, p. 192), and he agonizes to her over the fact that she cannot conceive the depths of his love for her. In the next letter to his friend Lady Melbourne he writes, "It is true from early habit, one must make love mechanically as one swims, I was once fond of both, but now as I never swim unless I tumble into water, I don't make love till almost obliged"(Sept. 10, 1812, to Lady Melbourne, Vol. 2, p. 193). This personified Byron and Byron's Don Juan share a trait found in many libertines: the use of women for their convenience. One detects a misogynistic impulse in the desire to undercut a woman by making her one of a multitude while simultaneously exalting her as unique and beloved.

The figure of the Don Juan seducer in Giacomo Casanova's *The History of My Life* is most certainly a misogynist. This autobiography has the complexities of narrative

usually inherent to this genre. For Casanova-the-narrator seems to reflect the author's life in many respects. Casanova has many torrid love affairs and spends much of his time asserting his precarious position in society, wanting to be recognized as a gentleman, although failing frequently to attain this status amongst his peers. Like Byron, he is affected by the French Revolution, although his are feelings of disdain. Against the background of what must have seemed overwhelming social and political circumstances beyond his control, Casanova takes solace in his writing, a creative outlet which allows him to construct a character who thrives on chance and his own manipulative abilities. Working unhappily as a librarian in Dux, the Czech Republic, Casanova dies while completing this History. On his deathbed, he gives his manuscript to his nephew Carlo Angiolini, who in turn has it published between 1822-28.

Casanova-the-narrator is active in seduction but also comes across as having a huge ego incapable of accepting rejection. In the short section of Vol.1 section 5, his letters show that he attempts to seduce five women and has success with three of them, yet he claims that there will be more in the future to come, as if to compensate for present failures. There is an underlying tone of violence when he writes, "I almost hit her," or says that he felt "righteous indignation" (5.134) which demands his revenge. In fact, Casanova-the-narrator uses revenge as a main motivation to continue seducing women. He coerces one woman into having sex with him in a carriage because, if she were to cry out for help, then her honour would be placed in doubt by the carriage man and anyone else present. As seen in a previous chapter, this logic also pervades Pope's "Rape of the Lock" when the narrator implies that Belinda is more concerned with the appearance of honour that her lock of hair remains untouched, for example, rather than her true honour

(her virginity) be protected. Whether her virginity is lost or not is immaterial to her as long as her reputation in society remains unblemished.

The nineteenth century, then, starts to construct Don Juan more and more as a psychological seducer. As suggested earlier in chapter two, Foucault identifies a shift in this century to a greater regulation of the self *through the self*. The individual's constant self-vigilance, which allows for and simultaneously averts sexuality, leads to greater internal control. Thus, perhaps this historical shift in perception accounts for Don Juan now being socially constructed as one who plays mind games.

This psychological emphasis is certainly true of the aesthetic seduction in Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843), a philosophical exploration that treats the discourse of seduction as crucial to the process of identity formation. In two volumes, originally intended to be published as one, he offers two very distinct views of life through imagined persona – the aesthetic and the ethical. Kierkegaard does not care to influence the reader to think more highly of one philosophical outlook than the other. Rather, he seems to hope that the reader will become more informed and observant through reading both fictional examinations of existentialism, and perhaps choose for him – or herself. “In combination with the incessant play of irony and Kierkegaard's predilection for paradox and semantic opacity, the text becomes a polished surface for the reader in which the prime meaning to be discerned is the reader's own reflection”

(<http://plato.stanford.edu>).

By the year of *Either/Or*'s publication in 1843, Kierkegaard's Danish homeland has undergone great social, political, and economic change within a short period of time: “Denmark had recently and very rapidly been transformed from a feudal society into a

capitalist society" (<http://plato.stanford.edu>). Recent introductions to society include universal elementary education, large-scale migration from rural areas into cities, and greatly increased social mobility. The social structure thus changes from a rigidly hierarchical one to a relatively heterogeneous one. Contending with his social milieu, Kierkegaard perhaps recognizes in the seducer an agent of social change – one who will show society that its norms are the product of artifice rather than a natural progression. In his writings, he discusses a fear of his society moving forward without properly engaging in a dialectic with the past and making unthinking choices.

In a section of *Either/Or* entitled "Diary of the Seducer," the narrative becomes fairly complex in that it is filtered through at least two voices. All of *Either/Or* is introduced through the commentaries of the fictionalized Victor Eremita who, for example, comments on the organization of the papers of the seducer known as "A" or "Johannes". This narrator claims that he has left the papers in a random order: "I [Victor] preferred to leave it to chance, and everything is in the sequence in which I found it" (10). Thus, the sphere of our understanding is widened because of our access to other perspectives. For instance, Victor, supposedly a friend of Johannes, is therefore able to comment on his life as a seducer from a more "objective" viewpoint. So, he interprets for the reader how Johannes' life can be read: "His life had been an attempt to realize the task of living poetically" (300). Furthermore, Victor is able to furnish the reader with a number of letters given to him by the seduced, which are not included in the diary itself. Alternatively, the narrative is also filtered through the first-person voice of Johannes as he writes of his exploits.

"Diary of the Seducer" is the ultimate aesthetic seduction. Johannes seduces Cordelia, a young, innocent girl whom he picks out as his prey; as he puts it, "No impatience, no greediness, everything should be enjoyed in leisurely draughts; she is marked out, she shall be run down" (313). Thus, there is a cruel edge to this artistic masterpiece. Johannes is not interested in physical passion. As he writes, "A man could make a girl with her passion do anything he wished. However, that would be all wrong from an aesthetic standpoint" (362). He wants to take a young girl's spirit, develop it, and turn that spirit in on itself through the process of seduction. He wants to move her from being the seduced to being the seducer, who in the end, ironically, will be seduced by her own seduction. The seducer helps her realize within herself that seduction is a game of appearances. Thus, she moves from the limited world of the real to explore life as a system of signs; that is to say, she is led to the level of dual consciousness: an awareness of how signs are mapped out in the metaphysical world and how those signs can be played with. This is similar to Baudrillard's point when he writes: "Merely to seduce is interesting only in the first degree; but here it is a matter of *what is interesting in the second degree*" (117). There are many double plays – for instance, Cordelia abandons herself at the same moment that Johannes abandons her. Thus, at the moment when she tries to constitute his feelings as "true," he shows her what she has known all along – that those feelings are an appearance. Evidently, this must be so because Cordelia is far more intelligent and sensitive than the majority of people who surround her. She is clearly capable of recognizing in retrospect that a number of brief meetings under the eye of her aunt, a few letters, and one night of lovemaking do not constitute love. More importantly, she must acknowledge that her own feelings, no matter how sincere, are also

an appearance. When love is aesthetically wrought, it is shown for the illusion that it really is.

The opposition of nature/artifice also operates at the level of structure in this text. In a sense, the diary is seen as a "natural" means to convey the seducer's inner thoughts, whereas letters are presented as a form of high art and artifice on the part of both the seducer and the seduced. This binary is undermined, though, when one considers that the diary is also part of the domain of artifice, rather than as a "pure" state, a direct confession of the seducer's thoughts as if he could transparently divulge the secrets of his being (and his identity as a seducer).

A relationship is thereby formed between the seducer and the reader that Johannes articulates in his discussion of virginity: "Virginity is, namely, a form of being, which, in so far as it is a being for itself, is really an abstraction, and only reveals itself to another" (425). Johannes emphasizes the secretive nature of this abstract concept when he writes, "As is well known, there existed no image of Vesta, the goddess who most nearly represented feminine virginity. This form of existence is, namely, jealous for itself aesthetically.... This is the constriction, that the being which is for another *is not*, and only becomes visible, as it were, by the interposition of another" (425). The reader is positioned as this Other who brings about the revelation of the seducer's confession.

Like Victor Eremita, however, the reader is confined by the knowledge that this secret is revealed in an illicit way because Victor reads the diary without the author's permission or knowledge and thus feels bound to keep the confidence silent. As he writes, "There is really nothing else which involves so much seduction and so great a curse as a secret" (306). The reader is made privy to the seducer's thoughts only through

the unethical prying of the interlocutor, Victor. The border between writer/reader blurs as Victor starts to script some of his own bias into the telling of Johannes's narrative, thus shifting Victor from being only a reader. He is seduced by Johannes much in the same way Cordelia has been, for he cannot resist participating in the seduction even if he is not meant to be the seduced nor the addressee of this correspondence.

The reader is left with the impression that the diary is actually the true confidante, down to the admission on the part of Johannes that he is an actor and that this diary helps to refine his script. As he confesses at one point in the seduction: "What I must principally impress upon my mind is that the whole affair is only a fictitious move. I have held several rehearsals in order to discover which one would be the best approach" (367). So, even though Johannes links seduction to performance, the diary itself still seems to offer the "true" seducer, free of artifice in his writing. Johannes claims he does not want a confidante, yet that is exactly what the diary comes to be for him.

Letters, on the other hand, highlight the artifice of seduction in this discourse. Even Victor names these letters as "artistically perfected, calculated carelessness" (299). Letters are sly and wily; they deceive through appearing as one thing while constituting another. Thus, the irony of Johannes' letters to Cordelia in which he constantly refers to her as "My Cordelia" (383) without having any intention of ever truly possessing her is only evident when the letters are contrasted with the diary. Only then does the irony of his words become part of the reader's knowledge and complicity with the seducer. One of his strategies as a seducer is to make himself absent from the beloved; thus, Cordelia has constant small reminders of his presence, yet has to contend with his simultaneous elusiveness. Through this strategy, Johannes intends to cultivate in Cordelia passion and

an active desire on her part to chase *him*. He explains, "With such emotion she will soon feel that the engagement is too narrow, too confining. She herself will become the tempter who seduces me to go beyond the usual limitations. She will do this consciously, for me that is the principal consideration" (420). He uses letters as a means to present the vision of an ideal, which can be more intriguing than the real: "A letter is a mysterious communication; you are master of the situation, and I believe a young girl would really rather be alone with her ideal, that is, at a given moment, and particularly at the moment when it exerts the strongest influence upon her mind" (410). When Johannes has finally made his conquest, and orchestrated it so that it was Cordelia who broke off the engagement, she takes recourse in letter writing. Her pleas for him to return her affections and for them to return to a state of true lovers is a testament to her belief in and conversion to the strength of persuasion embedded in the form of epistle.

Johannes is a classic seducer, which is why this tale deserves consideration in the tracing of the Don Juan legend. As we have seen with other nineteenth-century seducers in previous chapters, he is a man of greater wealth and social status than the young girls that he seduces: "I constantly seek my prey among young girls, not among young women. A woman is less natural, more coquettish" (320). Even though the diary focuses on his seduction of Cordelia, the narrative also insistently includes references to other young girls whom he is simultaneously seducing, as if to remind the reader of seduction's number one rule – never fall in love with the seduced more than temporarily. He even goes so far as to justify his actions through a discussion of numerical odds: "For every pair I make happy, I select one victim for myself; I make two happy, at the most only one unhappy" (369).

Johannes is also a seducer who operates in a social context. Although he denies the need for a confidante, he certainly recognizes the necessity of accomplices, albeit unwilling or unconscious ones. In other words, he manipulates Cordelia's aunt and even her suitor to act as his accessories. He recognizes from the beginning of his pursuit that overcoming her isolation in relation to society will prove his greatest challenge: "I [Johannes] have never known a family so isolated. There are only herself and her aunt. No brothers, no cousins, not a thread to get hold of, no relatives however distant that one might lock arms with" (334). Cordelia's aunt and Edward, her suitor, are both seduced by Johannes. They feel great affection for him, unaware that he is using them as pawns in his game of seduction. Having feelings for Johannes while being the known object of Edward's affections puts Cordelia in a moral dilemma. Further, to give drama to a situation with people who would never create it on their own, Johannes also ensures that Edward becomes first his confidante and then later his enraged rival.

Sometimes the role of the seduced and the confidante blur into one another. It is certainly a trick of many seducers to confide in the seduced to attain a new level of trust, which will later be turned against the seduced. One example in a British restoration play, for example, shows how the seducer manipulates the sympathies of the seduced victims. In Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, when the seducer, Horner, presents himself to society as emasculated, he not only allows himself access to ladies of reputation, he also gives them the chance to have an affair without putting their reputations at risk because he does not appear to society as a potential seducer. Thus, he turns the seduced women also into his confidantes. No matter what the culture or time period, the seducer shares certain attributes. In "Diary of the Seducer", this fluidity of roles is seen in the case of Edward

who is rival/seducer/seduced/confidante – yet he is all of these things under the cultivated efforts of Johannes.

In sum, Johannes displays all of the salient features of a seducer. His seductions are numerous, he manipulates the seduced to bring her to a "higher level" (333) of awareness and eroticism, he uses his social context to play a role in the seduction. And once he has made his conquest he abandons the seduced. As Johannes cruelly puts it, "I do not wish to be reminded of my relation to her; she has lost the fragrance, and the time is past when a girl suffering the pain of a faithless love can be changed into a sunflower" (439). The aesthete's prime objective is to transform the boring into the interesting: "His real aim is the manipulation of people and situations in ways which generate interesting reflections in his own voyeuristic mind. The aesthetic perspective transforms quotidian dullness into a richly poetic world by whatever means it can... That is, the aesthete uses artifice, arbitrariness, irony, and wilful imagination to recreate the world in his own image" (<http://plato.stanford.edu>).

Johannes and Cordelia's relationship suggests to Baudrillard an ironic engagement of the sign with the referent in which meaning is played with and displaced. In *Baudrillard's Challenge*, Victoria Grace defines his reading of Kierkegaard as follows: "The seduction Baudrillard alludes to is about the reversion of those qualities of 'self' that fix the 'identity' of the 'subject' within a kind of addictive formulation which precludes being seduced; in other words, which precludes becoming 'nothing', dying to oneself and being reconstituted as an illusion" (162). Thus, according to this reading, Johannes gives to Cordelia an ability of "rebirth" in the form of appearance. As an appearance, she has

more power through constituting herself in terms of illusion rather than of the "real"; she can conceive of power relationships in new ways.

Thus, she is no longer confined, for example, by the traditional binary of male/female as she learns how to play with this equation. If thought of in social terms, however, this is a dangerous proposition because it means that Cordelia should be thankful to Johannes for seducing her and allowing her to see the true light. It might be better simply to follow Grace's point that Baudrillard is interested in how power relations work at the level of signs, rather than to conclude that his theory is implicitly anti-feminist, reading sexuality as figurative and as part of the symbolic realm rather than in terms of a biological drive. Of course, Baudrillard does view masculinity/femininity as social constructs: "the feminine is not a sex (opposed to the other), but what counters the sex that alone has full rights and full exercise of these rights, the sex that holds a monopoly on sex: the masculine, itself haunted by the fear of something other, *of which sex is but the disenchanting form: seduction*" (21). According to Baudrillard, seduction problematizes the process of signification in language by showing that the referent is of little consequence in relation to the sign.

In "Diary of the Seducer", this more tenuous relationship of the signs can be seen in Johannes's ability to seduce as well Cordelia's suitor, Edward. Although male, he is as much a "feminine" force to be dealt with as is Cordelia because of his character. For such ambiguity in a person's character signifies that s/he is open to possibilities; therefore, this quality of undecidability should not be read as an inherent weakness. Part of Johannes's conquest is thus to seduce Edward, whom he entices to experience a range of emotions. Edward's emotions are no longer just for his intended, Cordelia. For his

feelings are divided and confused. His alternately passionate feelings of admiration and enmity he feels for Johannes surpass the emotional heights of "love" which he feels for Cordelia. Ironically, he is more emotionally engaged with his rival suitor than with the object of his love. Edward does not need to be physically attracted to or romantically involved with Johannes to feel completely influenced by his powers of seduction. This accords with Baudrillard's idea that the biological referent of the male or female is not what defines femininity or masculinity, or the exchange of signification in which it moves. As he puts it, "Can one imagine a theory that would treat signs in terms of their seductive attraction, rather than their contrasts and oppositions. Which would break with the specular nature of the sign and the encumbrance of the referent?" (103). To Johannes, Edward may still be the referent, yet he is clearly an unimportant element in the seduction of signs. His role as either the lover of Cordelia or the seduced victim of Johannes is irrelevant in a sense. Of greater importance is his constantly changing relationship with both of them. The relationships of power between the players are more seductive than any one person.

There are also relationships within a history of ideas, relationships which one might say are both illusory and substantial. We have spanned several centuries and diverse philosophies in this discussion of Don Juan. In the seventeenth century, Don Juan, as written by Tirso, is still repentant of his actions. The seducer is being asked to overthrow his penchant for rebelling against society, which in the end, is perceived as being for his own good. When he refuses, the consequences are evil and Tirso's audiences went away with no doubt as to the moral of this social play.

Nineteenth century Romanticism speaks to the need to separate from older forms of poetry and politics. The Romantics, only named as such half a century later, reject the strict meter, verse, and subject matter of their predecessors in favour of “a spontaneous overflow of emotion.” In other words, rather than imposing a structure, the organization of their work is “inherent” to the nature of the content. Byron’s *Don Juan* pits the spontaneous individual against the repressive nature of society. In Byron’s hero, we find that the individual must look inwards to his own spirit to overcome the obstacles that society places in the way of the seducer, but ironically, the seducer will not always want nor be capable of overcoming these temptations in search of a greater “truth”. In the nineteenth century as well, Kierkegaard’s *Don Juan* offers another version of the seducer, although similar to Byron’s emphasis on individualism. Considered the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard uses irony in his writing as a means to get people to move beyond pat answers and think for themselves. He takes this view in relation to faith as well as philosophy, arguing that neither religion nor thought can be assimilated without a constant renewal of one’s own beliefs.

By contrast, as we move into the twentieth century, van Herk sees *Don Juan* as operating very much within a social context. Only now, he shows us that artifice is self-construction, which means that the biological code of man/woman does not have to be upheld. In fact, this woman seducer is an unrepentant seducer who is not punished for her actions. The assumption that male attributes are “naturally” associated with the powerful position of seducer undergoes severely playful questioning in this novel. Furthermore, the parody extends to the narrative form itself, which moves beyond a structure that would encode the woman seducer as still objectified.

van Herk is most like Byron in writing mock epic which requires a third-person narrator, and yet most unlike him in rejecting nature as the norm which only a romantic could value in that ideological manner. While Byron uses second-person narrative to engage the reader and act as guide, van Herk's narrator addresses the reader directly because he is in need of a confidante. Tongue in cheek, Byron occasionally utilizes second-person narration, as if to pinch the reader, telling her authoritatively how to interpret his text. For example, at the end of the first canto, the narrator exclaims, "The four first rhymes are Southey's every line/For God's sake, reader, take them not for mine" (I.222). By contrast, the narrator in *No Fixed Address* refers to the reader in a more ambiguous way as "you." The narrator confides in the reader the telling of his/her story of Arachne. This shift from nineteenth to twentieth century narrative, which has the reader as confidante rather than seduced, points to a changing power dynamic.

In the twentieth century, Don Juan is glorified for being part of the realm of artifice. According to Dudek, Arachne prefers "to construct herself as the sensuous subject, rather than the displaced object, Arachne refuses to fetishize her body" (31). This discourse of seduction is neither purely psychological nor grounded solely in the body and sexuality. With gender politics being foregrounded, we see in *No Fixed Address* a body constructed out of narrative – a body we never actually get to as it is only presented through retrospective narratives – yet a sensual body, nevertheless, which continues to seduce the reader. To quote Dudek again, who elaborates on how she defines "fetish", she states, "Fetish is always illusion, since the aesthetic surface replaces one's desire for tactile substance" (32). Thus, Arachne's body is an "aesthetic surface" in

the sense that it proves illusory for others, although for her it is grounded in a real sensuality that she has the pleasure of trying to satiate.

Reading Arachne's body is an act of intertextuality. It is a playful game of decoding in which her body must be read as part of a metonymic chain of signifiers. It is not merely a reversal of gender roles because the fact that Arachne clearly invokes the Don Juan figure is an invitation to repetition with critical thinking. By deliberately evoking this literary and historical past, the purposefully cryptic Arachne ensures that the reader engages in the unfolding of expectations and the artifice attached to such expectations. Arachne must develop herself as a subject in an environment that still prefers to perceive her only as an object. She uses this desire of others to see her as an object to her own advantage by always displacing the desire; the narrative resists closure in this way.

Arachne is an unlikely contemporary version of the Don Juan figure. The novel starts with a critique of the history of underwear in the western world, and how it has constrained women. This section ends by saying that no one has ever studied the influence of underwear in relation to "petty rogues" (10). A rogue, like a burlador (trickster), comes out of the Spanish picaresque tradition of a young man who journeys and encounters many unexpected problems along the way. Thus, from its outset, *No Fixed Address* offers a parodic retelling of the Don Juan myth. Arachne is on a journey that resists closure; she shows how a woman can also have "conquests without possession" (*Tales* 195), although this phrase taken from Kristeva takes on a different meaning when it is applied to women. For, in this tale of seduction, pleasure is never enumerated by the number of conquests, nor are there any victims from the act of

seduction. Seduction and pleasure complement one another, and, although Arachne is also a trickster, her seductions defy the power imbalance of the old binary, in which the seducer is always privileged over the seduced. According to Marlene Goldman, this novel is best understood as an “attempt to address and transform the traditional narrative structures of western Canadian regional fiction” (21).

As a feminist text, this novel refuses to punish the female protagonist for her desires, which we have seen is usually the case for women, whether they be named seducer or seduced. In an interview, van Herk calls her book an “anti-repentant novel” (6). She queries, “Why can’t a woman behave as badly as a man and get away with it? ... Arachne is amoral, but so what? She’s an earthy, sensual, exciting woman. If she were a man, we’d be saying, ‘Oh God, isn’t he virile and interesting’” (6). Most of the characters in this novel at some point express sympathy for Arachne’s one true love, Thomas, because he is in a relationship with a woman seducer. (Never mind that he constantly reiterates that this is his choice.) As Isabel Carrera observes, “If Thomas appears ‘too good to be true’ as has been said, it is as well to remember that no realistic characters are intended in the novel, that we are moving in a genre of exaggeration (the picaresque) and of fantasy. Thomas is the female fantasy of a lover who ‘knows what she wants before she wants it’, and whose gentleness and understanding have long been a female sexual fantasy trying to assert itself against the male belief in the magic attribute of potency” (436). If roles were reversed, and Thomas were the seducer, it is doubtful that so much genuine concern and sympathy would be expressed. However, the sense of communal effrontery towards Arachne lies even more so in the mediated narrative, which peeled away like onion layers, holds no centre. The role of the reader as confidante is

crucial to this narrative because the reader is helping to decide if there is an answer to the following question: Can a female seducer in the twentieth century exist?

Thena, Arachne's best friend and confidante, seems to espouse a viewpoint similar to that of the narrator. The narration of this novel is not as straightforward as it might at first appear. Outside of the pagination, the first words of this text appear to be the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator. Already, the narrator shows an intimate acquaintance with Arachne's thought process, although observing her externally: "Bikini wearers favour phosphorescent colors. They will buy panties patterned with spiders or eggplants or pigs or skulls. She's learned to pick them out, these women. They dress conservatively enough on top but underneath there's more to be found than flowers or polka dots" (1). The narrator takes a slightly more neutral attitude towards Arachne herself, as if the fascination with this female seducer surpasses questions of morality. The narrator is like Thena, though, in believing that underwear is a good example of women's oppression. The narrator, again at the beginning of the novel in what sounds like an objective historical viewpoint, comments on the symbolism of how women's lingerie has constrained them throughout history: "For centuries women have suffered the discomfort of corsets, padding, petticoats, girdles, bustles, garters and bust pads....And who will be responsible for what those tortures have created? The existence of smelling salts, hysteria, frigidity and shrewdness can all be attributed to uncomfortable underwear" (9-10). A conversation between Thena and Arachne reveals that Thena clearly echoes the narrator's views: "'You love it,' says Thena. 'Selling men the instruments of repression for women'" (199). The narrative likewise emphasizes the role of the confidante in a position similar to that of the reader: "For what is a traveller without a confidante? It is

impossible to fictionalize a life without someone to oversee the journey" (154). By the end of the novel, we realize that the narrator herself desires Thena's role of confidante. The narrator's quest is to recover Arachne's story, and this of course is the privilege of the confidante: to be privy to the secrets; to gauge the various seductive strategies' measures of success; and to temporarily relive the moments of passion vicariously.

And yet, the narrative is more complicated than that. The narrator's only reference to his/her personal past and motivation for telling this story comes in the last four pages of the novel: "'No', you say and begin at the beginning, your interest in women's underwear and how that led you onto the track of this underwear seller and her life" (313). The narrator must keep pursuing and keep failing to tell the story, never quite getting it right, because he is the writer of Arachne, through the "missing notebooks," yet first and foremost he must be the reader of her. In a Lacanian moment of misrecognition, the narrator tries to see him/herself in the distant reflection of Arachne that s/he constantly tries to bring into focus. Primarily, though, the narrative stays focussed on Arachne as subject rather than object, even if she does prove elusive. As Carrera puts it, "She [Arachne] is persistently the grammatical subject of the sentences, and it is her consciousness that is conveyed, directly and often painstakingly, through the third-person narrator; it is through her eyes, her mind, and her body that we perceive her sexual encounters, her attitudes and desires. Although we occasionally are tuned to the minds of other characters, notably that of her stable love, Thomas, Arachne remains the main focalizer of her story" (436).

The combination of second- and third-person narration utilizes aesthetic distancing, not only to create or withdraw sympathy for Arachne, but also to highlight to

the reader that she is always going to be somewhat beyond everyone's grasp. Set aside in italics, the narrator fills in gaps of the story, but the use of "you" in this narrative ensures the reader will engage in the construction of this story. The narrative shifts between second and third person. In the third person, there is a character whom, we eventually learn, is some sort of researcher or journalist who is obsessed with the life of Arachne. The second-person narrative seems to be the reader being directly addressed. The "you" is also taken up by the heady passions of maps and motion, and thus the reader as confidante is also seduced by the narrative. But what makes this text a repetition with critical distance is not a particular satire of previous Don Juan manifestations but rather a reworking of the type into new configurations that in some ways reflect current problematic feminist issues.

The reader as confidante has to be a careful listener and a willing, if limited, participant in the exploits of the seducer. Precisely because the confidante is not the seduced, the confidante gains the confidence of the seducer in a way that no love object ever will. The confidante gets to go backstage, so to speak. Suddenly, the seducer's performance is gloried in all of its artifice, and the confidante/reader understands and appreciates the elements of the staging. There is certainly more of a partnership between seducer and confidante than what is to be had between seducer/seduced.

The name of Arachne's confidante – Thena – clearly alludes to Athena, Homer's goddess of wisdom and battles, but with a twentieth-century feminist twist. "Already written into mythological beginnings, Arachne unwinds herself from the ideological legend of her metamorphoses by befriending Thena rather than competing against her" (Dudek 34). Friendship rather than jealousy presides in *No Fixed Address*, transfiguring

the tragic outcome found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when Athena beats Arachne the weaver because she proves more skilled in her craft. The unfailing loyalty between Arachne and Thena reveals a changed paradigm. Really, this is a new version of the Don Juan code of honour, only it is better. Their fidelity to one another is not based on whether a few lies are told or not; rather, they find in each other unconditional acceptance that does not revert to societal codes for permission. Battle is being done in a different way that does not rely on male standards of reference.

Every seducer requires a good confidante. Thena is Arachne's confidante and a good friend: "For what is a traveler without a confidante? Every adventuress requires a teller of her tale, an armchair companion to complete the eventualities" (146). Theirs is a mutual dependence and clearly beneficial. Although belligerent towards men, Thena is also intrigued by Arachne's adventures. In this sense, Arachne is unlike the other women in her life. For Thena has been embittered by her divorce and tries unsuccessfully to turn her daughters into man-haters. Lanie, Arachne's mother, on the other hand, is only interested in men insofar as they might prove useful to advancing her own ambitions. Conversely, Arachne is neither man-hating nor demanding of them; she takes her pleasure and leaves them. Even when she uses her seductive powers to sell underwear, for example, her interest is clearly more in the game of seduction than in any profit from selling underwear. She only follows the traditional pattern of seducers by taking on a confidante, and Thena is the ideal confidante for Arachne.

Despite her griping about Arachne's unfaithfulness to Thomas, Thena is discreet. She has no interest in betraying her friend. Not that it is clear to whom she would betray such confidences, as Thomas clearly already knows; the point is that Thena is the only

person in Arachne's life that she *trusts* besides Thomas: "Indeed, they tell each other everything, they are brutally honest. Thena is privy to all Arachne's current indiscretions, the road jockeys, travels, thefts and dishonesty. It does not make her like Arachne less, although she is blatantly sceptical, disapproving" (142). In addition to offering an occasion for talk (gin and tonics under a hot afternoon sun), Thena is astute. While Arachne rejects Thena's predictions regarding Josef, the old man, Thena shows how well she knows her friend when she cautions Arachne against sleeping with Josef and then later "kidnapping" him. Arachne hotly denies that she would commit either of these acts, but Thena's reading of the situation proves correct: "Arachne tells her everything, lays out the intricate spirals she lives, so that Thena probably knows more about Arachne than she does herself" (53).

Thena also occasionally plays the role of her accomplice. For instance, she snorts in derision at Arachne's tactics, yet she acts as her "fiancé" over the telephone in Arachne's efforts to lose one of her conquests: "Thena snorts. Arachne's tone is clearly intended for someone else. 'What fantasy am I helping you [Arachne] act out now?'" (110). On another occasion, she plays "the executioner" to Arachne's "straightman" act (202). Thus, her disapproval for Arachne's seduction of "road jockeys" (34) is tempered by her limited participation in seeing these scenes of seduction played out.

The narrative, which seeks out the reader as a confidante, is further complicated by the disruptions of play within the text. The narrator's quest throughout this narrative changes in the course of the telling, finally mediating the story for the reader in such a way that the reader must suspect the narrator's reliability. Initially, the narrator sets out to uncover the fascinating tale of a seducer, Arachne, and uncover her "essence," define

her personality. However, the impossibility of this project becomes increasingly apparent as the attempts of the narrator become more strenuous. The alternative is to understand that the closest one can get to Arachne's story is to act in a manner true to the discourse of seduction, that is to say, through play.

The text eventually incites the narrator and the reader to move beyond a metaphysics of presence, or the desire for a speaker. As Derrida puts it, "Besides the tension between play and history, there is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence" (*Writing* 292). Thus it is that we start to see play at the level of structure of the novel; the novel is divided into four parts and there is play through the repetition of identical section titles: "Notebook on a Missing Person". Expectations are played with because, of course, the reader expects that section titles will suggest a progression in the narrative. The notion of presence is disrupted in the sense that the centre of this narrative, the protagonist, Arachne, is missing, and nowhere to be seen by the end of the novel. The centre is displaced, and the narrator is sent reeling in search of another centre.

The narrator learns that there is nothing hiding under the exterior of this novel; it is all surface play. There is no "essential" meaning to be derived from Arachne's journey. She circles as she travels, and her map does not lead anywhere in particular. Initially, the narrator/reader feels an urgent need to seek out Arachne: "It's the present you're after, maybe even the future. With a past like that, what chance does she have? For here you

are, taking stock of her life, and if eternity is comprised of all moments gathered into one, where can you put Arachne now, at what point in that momentum will she stop?" (183). The narrator here and elsewhere in the text will suggest that there could be some kind of essence to Arachne, that the "centre will not hold" without her, much as Derrida defines the paradox of metaphysics as the way in which "the center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality is not part of the totality, the totality *has its center elsewhere*" (*Writing* 279). Most of the narrative suggests the narrator feels nostalgia for the presence of the "true" Arachne that is "her real self" (193). However, the narrator abandons the notion of a centre by the end of the novel because s/he realizes the possibility of closure is insurmountable. The narrator follows Arachne to where there is "no end" (319) to the road, to where no one comes back. Underwear becomes the trailmarker, or signs of the journey: "The panties are gray with dust but their scarlet invitation has not faded. Ladies' Comfort" (319). The narrator opens up the possibility of a further play of interpretation in the last words of the novel: "There is no end to the panties; there will be no end to this road" (319). The text thus broadens its possibilities and boundaries as it melds with other previous versions of the Don Juan myth through parody.

Arachne cannot be the centre because she is only one of many Don Juans. This does not mean that Arachne becomes an anonymous sign in the larger metonymic chain of Don Juans. Rather, as a seducer, her role becomes all the more playful when understood in the specific context of this narrative and the larger ironies of local interpretation set off against the trope. As Derrida writes, "Henceforth, it was necessary to be thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of

a presence-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (280). Even the title of this novel, *No Fixed Address*, implies that it is a text which will give itself up to "the seminal adventure of the trace" (*Writing* 292). Goldman indicates even further play that can be traced out in the title of this text: "The term 'address' refers, on the one hand, to both physical location and the linguistic notion of address; the latter entails an understanding or, as in this case, a lack of understanding, concerning the ideological 'location' of speakers in a given discursive situation. In this way, the title playfully signals the disturbance created in the linguistic terrain when women choose to become invisible within the terms designated by traditional representations of Woman" (27).

The narrator does on rare occasions still intrude into the narrative as if to advocate on Arachne's behalf with further interpretations of her personality and motivations. For instance, the narrator intercedes on the subject of marriage. Lanie is visiting Arachne, and she continually pressures her daughter to marry Thomas so as to "sew him up" (60). The narrator's and Arachne's voices collide: "'Marriage, *Mother*, is not the haven of refuge for me that it was for you.' No – what she really said was, 'I don't want no ring in exchange for screwing'" (60). The narrator takes on a high-handed manner as if s/he were so excited by the discussion as to need to chime in with a more articulate, feminist reading of what Arachne thinks. This intercession can also have the effect of intimating that the reader is not deft enough to appreciate Arachne's meaning, despite her crude expression of words. The narrator's reading of Arachne thus proves unreliable at times. For example, the narrator observes, "Arachne knows she is working-class. She has never

thought of her narrow life as disabled" (76). While there may be some truth to this statement, Arachne's every move, even as a young child, is affected by her lower-class circumstances and contributes to her defensive attitude.

In many respects, however, Arachne does not fit the characteristic image of the Don Juan seducer. She comes from a working class, immigrant background, has one true sentimental love, and never uses the gaze as a technique in her seductions. She is extremely impolite, awkward, and, in general, hostile. She also does not ruin anyone's reputation; rather, as a woman seducer, she gives men a sense of new life. Such is the case for her eighty-year-old seduced, Joseph, who is made to feel younger; upper-class Thomas, who can only feel natural around her; and the black pianist who plays his best music when they have an affair. Arachne's boundless passion thus transcends age, class, and race. Although in the larger picture, she defies being castigated for being a seducer, Arachne is still punished at times in minor ways. Arachne does still get punished according to male rules, for instance, she still gets the ticket from the cop, Basilisk uses her, and she is eventually charged for kidnapping Josef. Arachne is often sullen and defensive with good reason. She struggles to define herself as a seducer in a cultural context that still would have it otherwise. Her feat is no small one, for her work is not only to seduce, but also to avoid being colonized as one of the seduced.

Thus, Arachne has to define desire in a way that moves outside the parameters of traditional seduction. As Goldman puts it, van Herk is attempting "to explode genre and plot, and her portrayal of women who flee to or create unmapped territory in an attempt to escape the grid which fixed the image of Woman" (23). "There is no map for longing," says the narrator (171). This is a journey that will not be confined within the

conventions normally associated with the Don Juan legend. While Arachne challenges the social fabric, as does Tirso's Don Juan, this novel seems to offer a greater focus on women's psychological exploration of desire. *No Fixed Address*, in some ways, reflects current problematic feminist issues of how to address a seemingly misogynistic Don Juan figure. *No Fixed Address* redirects the focus away from the relationship of honour and seduction to concentrate instead on how the position of the seducer changes when it is a woman who acts more like a cunning trickster than a beautiful seductress.

In fact, van Herk gives the reader a Don Juan who can have a sentimental relationship, and also one who has a working class immigrant background. This is truly an amorous journey, as the book's title declares in the subtitle. Yet appearances can be deceiving, because that is only a part of the story. Arachne Manteia has roots. In many ways, her story is her own personal reconciliation with her past. The narration slowly reveals salient features of her upbringing in the rough east end of Vancouver. Arachne finds it hard to think of her parents as anything more than strangers with whom she has lived: "she does not think of them as hers. They are Toto and Lanie, two people she lived with as a child, people who occasionally insisted on oatmeal and bed at nine, but never often enough to make a difference" (41). Arachne is neglected as a child (from early birth when Lanie leaves her alone in her crib while she goes to work), and she is consciously ashamed of their low-class status and relative poverty. Her mother immigrated as a war bride, and her father has only ever done physical labour; neither of them is educated. On a regular basis, Arachne acts defensively by either withdrawing or behaving in a brash way when she feels that any allusion has been made to her own lack of class. She almost leaves Thomas, the one true love of her life, when his brother-in-

law, Terry, insinuates that she used her position as a bus driver to seduce men, including Thomas. Unaware that Thomas's family's censure turns on Terry for his crass innuendos, rather than being directed towards her awkward table manners, Arachne becomes all "paws" (131).

In this parody of Don Juan, it is absolutely essential that class play a central role. Historically, for the most part, the upper-class status of Don Juan is understood rather than stated (as good taste, would have it). In *No Fixed Address*, the narrative confronts issues of class, and makes them central. Arachne is a talented individual. She is someone who could have grown up to become an artist (her fascination with painters and artists suggests her unique vision might have taken her along this route). Instead, she turns into a criminal and a seducer. Her talents are thus put to different use. Instead, she is the artist turned criminal: "Arachne's natural inclination to dissemble helps a great deal. She is not so much an actress as a double agent, an escaped criminal who has survived by relying on what slender veneers are available" (141). Typically in literature, the seducer is an older, wealthier man of high social standing, and the seduced is a younger woman who is socially in a position of less power and wealth. The reversal of this structure in *No Fixed Address* proves that seduction does not have to be about refinement – Arachne manages to be "coarse" (113) and "sullen" (109), she "spits" and has "bad habits" (18), and yet she is also able to seduce any man she chooses. Elements such as high-class or good looks, which are usually understood as essential for a seducer, are seen in this narrative as unnecessary details. Arachne's success is not only independent of, but even in spite of, these factors.

This is not to say that Arachne does not pay homage to the world of wealth and glitter. She is profoundly embittered by her earliest experience with underwear. She knows before going in to purchase her first bra as a young woman that her lack of knowledge puts her at a serious disadvantage. Arachne is a seducer with vulnerabilities and the usual accoutrement one associates with a seductress is clearly outside of her territory. Arachne vividly recalls the scene of her encounter with a lingerie salesperson: "are you wearing a bra now? This said in a disdainful tone that confirmed Arachne's worst fear about herself. She knew she was hopelessly scrubby, hopelessly coarse, and she did not want this contemptuous clerk to see her round breasts constrained by the too-small, puckered child's bra" (122). Finding herself short of cash, Arachne resorts to criminal measures, but in a rather absurd way yells, "Stick'em up" (124), and makes her escape out the door. Her tentative effort to fit into society, and particularly to conform to expectations for women, is curtailed because of fiscal restraints.

Thus, her pride causes Arachne at this early stage of her life to reject feminine apparel. Of course, her decision to become an underwear salesperson while never wearing the stuff herself, forms an ironic reply to that formative experience: Arachne can do *their* job (the snobbish sales girls who treated her disparagingly), but she does not rely on the props of the trade for her own self-image. At the same time, Arachne still feels stigmatized by her background. After a fateful dinner when she almost leaves Thomas, she confides that she has always hoped secretly that she had been adopted: "I believed it right up until tonight...[but] I belong where I am. It's no accident. There's no mistake. I'm nobody except an East End kid" (135). Clearly, then, Arachne represents a new class of seducer. For her confidence is not founded on the assurance of class position and

wealth or gender privilege; instead, it is her own desire to survive, and her belligerence in the face of tenacity, which give her an air of uncharted desire.

And yet one metaphor for parody in the novel is also a metaphor of maps as a depiction of desire. Just as maps are redrawn to explore old territory or as the result of political wars, so too is parody a rewriting of old texts to re-examine their aesthetic mores. Arachne drives into an unexplored psychic landscape when she becomes a female Don Juan. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she is always in the process of becoming a seducer. Now she is, and now she isn't, what we expect. This text provides a rereading of previous Don Juans, and it also acts as an elliptical map. That is to say, this is a map with twists and turns and instructions that might flow over the map's edges. In many ways, this seems like a straightforward narrative with a simply quirky protagonist. Yet Arachne must be understood on several levels. At times, the text seems to confirm a metaphysics of presence in which the narrator's task is to uncover the "true" story of Arachne. As the narrator comments at one point, "but she is still Arachne, underneath it all she is still herself" (193). Yet at the same time, we know that it is her "natural inclination to dissemble" (141). This text manages to seduce previous Don Juan narratives by taking the familiar tale of love and seduction and turning it into a game.

Thus, we quickly realize that Arachne's travelling to get somewhere is only an illusion. As Kristeva writes, "Indeed, freedom is not a value in this universe; it is nothing more than a game, an ease rather than a claim" (*Tales* 198). Even though Arachne eventually travels off the edge of this narrative, there can be no escape. Likewise, narratives are of the past, not independent of the texts that precede them. The "freedom"

that comes from travel is only illusory. Arachne's only freedom seems to come from her relationships with her true love, Thomas, and her confidante, Thena.

So, what kind of a seducer is Arachne exactly? She uses men to satiate her desires, yet feels that her encounters are of a reciprocal nature. Arachne, up until she meets Thomas, does her best to avoid personal contact with other people. And only Thomas and Thena are ever fully allowed into her life as much as she is able to permit them. As a bus driver in her first career path, she never responds to the passengers' friendly gestures out of fear of involvement: "If she does, their leaking, thinned-out lives will overwhelm her, she will be sucked down. And so she refuses to raise her eyes, refuses to look beyond their hands or beyond the street" (64). Arachne seeks out the pleasure of men's bodies, but she avoids emotional contact. As a result, many of the men that she seduces are simply another "notch on the belt". However, this description is not quite accurate as Arachne's objective is never to brag about her conquests or accumulate trophies. Instead, she is motivated as a seducer out of curiosity and a desire for immediate pleasure.

Arachne is not ostensibly a psychological seducer. She only reads the men she is with through their bodies; their bodies are the true text of her learning. She confides in Thena that she always has an orgasm and explains her method, "You just come – fast. Make sure you beat them, and don't count on having time for more than one" (34). The narrative reiterates this sentiment at a later point in the text: "There isn't much point in playing around, waiting for an appropriate moment, because it never comes: it's never the right time. Arachne has learned to get her pleasure fast, catch what she can, has trained her body to pleasure itself" (70). There is parodic play with the expectations of what is a

seducer. According to the trope, only a seductress and never a seduced, willingly enjoys the pleasures of the body from the outset. Traditionally, most seducers in literature have been men. It is important to understand how a female seducer fits into this paradigm. Through parodic play, van Herk successfully opens up a new playing field for female desire. If Arachne knows the world of seduction through touch, it seems to recall her lesson regarding knowledge and power: "It was then she decided that the only reliable things in the world are tangible" (166). In this way she finds her own way of reinscribing the flesh. However, this is not an essentializing of the female body. As Dudek puts it, "Arachne embodies sensuality in the contours of her flesh transgressing the capitalistic, patriarchal world that writes the female body as a fictional absence" (37). Hers is a political body, one that understands that illusion resides in the flesh, thus confirming that artifice and reality are contingent upon one another. If anything, reality must do the bidding of artifice because there is no substantial body in the end; Arachne's reality is that of myth, much in the same way that Don Juan is referred to as legend. The only thing that is "tangible" for Arachne is her body, yet her body is always in motion, on a journey, unable to be pinned down.

Arachne's focus on the physical pleasure of her conquests has important ironic undertones. Suddenly, the women's needs and desires are foregrounded. And so it is revealed time and again in this narrative that the men are only just adequate lovers, if that. The woman's perspective and all of her potential to have multiple orgasms is limited within a restricted economy of male lovers. In addition, Arachne as a female seducer belies any stereotype of women who are depicted as frail and with an aversion to physical joy: "There is nothing slender and light about Arachne; when she walks she

thumps, the floor-boards shutter. She knows she contradicts every ideal. Women are cherished for being soft and pliant, for their grace" (113). There is irony in the fact that this is a woman who wants sex, not talk, and that her idea of seduction does not involve foreplay but rather the quickest route to orgasm.

At least, this "wham-bam-thank-you-monsieur" attitude that Arachne has holds true for the road jockeys that she seduces all over the prairies. With the men in her life who offer significant experiences to her, she finds a little more time to explore the psychological terrain. Just as the paradigm has shifted so that the female's confidante becomes her friend rather than her jealous enemy, so too now the seduction is not at the expense of the seduced. Arachne seduces by allowing each man to step outside the realm of social pressures each must confront. She draws out each seduced beyond his initial level of comfort to explore parts of himself that he did not know that he had or was capable of experiencing. She is able to identify in each of her key lovers what is their innermost fear or desire. Like any seducer, Arachne insists that the seduced also take up the challenge implied in the illicit exchange; seduction must involve pushing the boundaries – both social and personal. She uses tricks and deception with them as much as she does with anyone. Her possession of any one of them, though, is not her ultimate conquest because, as she says of Thomas, "He's not mine to lose" (175).

Arachne's version of seduction defies male-defined female desires by presenting their inversion. She falls outside of the categories traditionally reserved for women: whore, virgin, wife, or mother. Arachne is a seducer who determines her own destiny as much as such a thing is possible. In a sense, Arachne also refutes the notion that femininity "naturally" must be linked with the "purity" of spirituality and learned cultural

behaviours prescribed for women. Certainly, Arachne objectifies many of the men that she sleeps with, but perhaps this is more noticeable because as readers we are trained to expect that the reverse will be true, that is to say, that the woman will be objectified.

However, Arachne is different from other Don Juans in that, when she does enter into an emotional relationship with one of her seduced, it is not to dissemble. On the contrary, Arachne's personality becomes more fully explored in the moments when she reveals herself emotionally engaged with one of her lovers. She becomes fascinated with Basilisk, the large, black piano player who uses her "for practising" (71). She is seduced by his "peach-colored palms, one hand as big as both of hers, the map of lines innocent and unrelenting" (66). Arachne as a seducer wants to read that map, but she is unprepared when their passion is translated into a public performance on the stage where he plays before a packed house. She recognizes that he has betrayed their private interludes, which is why he must say, "Forgive me" (73) following the final performance that she attends. It is really his look which makes Arachne stand outside herself, "knowing he is performing those intricate motions for her, that the stretching of his fingers and the half smile on his face are for her, a way of watching her, an invasion" (73). Furthermore, Arachne reads his performance in terms of class difference: "he is skinning her with the razor blades of his damnable breeding, his culture, his learnedness" (73). These invisible "razor blades" are what leave her "shredded" (74) after their affair, and Arachne decides she must maintain some emotional distance from men to preserve her own identity as a seducer.

However, she is again drawn into a relationship that is not typical of a Don Juan seducer. Thomas is the true lover of her life. He recognizes her as she is: "Arachne's

greatest consistency has always been her faithlessness. Thomas knows but does not reproach her....In life she betrays him a hundred times, but in secret never" (211). She knows him by his smell and touch. Theirs is physical, tangible language that often speaks through the metaphor of maps: "Arachne touches the maps, runs her fingers along its frayed edge. Thomas brings out another and another....He never imagined a woman would be interested, would touch these maps with reverence and desire, caressing the paper between thumb and forefinger" (118). What Kristeva calls the semiotic enters into their language as they communicate through their lovemaking and through touch. The only hidden map in this novel is Arachne's search for her true love, who waits patiently for her: "He is going to stay her Apocryphal lover, provide her with an ultimate map" (173).

Indeed, the whole project of writing and language as opposed to this world of touch is seen as suspect, thus undercutting the realm of the Symbolic. Both of Arachne's encounters with the literary world show it as fraudulent. Twice she meets acclaimed poets who turn out to be impostors in the sense that she identifies in them a lack of passion and even the ability to perform passionately because they are confined by their own sincerity and egoism. Her boredom with those literary types that are adulated by others provides a satiric commentary on the trustworthiness of writers and their works. Her boredom with a poet who presumes that he is a perfect Don Juan himself is evident when "she [Arachne] wonders if he can stop talking about himself long enough to seduce anything" (206). A deconstructivist scepticism appears not only in regard to the narrative, but towards critical interpretation itself. Reading and writing tend to end badly in this novel. Lanie reads palms for a living, yet we know that she is an impostor,

exploiting the desires of others to have their future's interpreted. Lanie's downfall as a palm-reader is that she must always try to read "deeper" into situations, which leads her on many occasions to misinterpretation. Arachne survives because she understands that her story is on the surface: "She [Arachne] believes in the transformative power of surface, especially when surface is skin or road. It is hidden desire she resists" (Dudek 31-32). On the other hand, the lines of maps also prove only illusory means of tracing out lives. Arachne writes her own script founded in the motions of her ever-elusive body as she enacts her own disappearance.

Thus, Arachne opens up the playing field further for seducers. She is a seducer capable of "deeper" emotions as well as her enjoyment of the game. The majority of her seductions involve a performative element. Arachne is the best of "travelling salesmen" of the year at Ladies' Comfort because she knows she must create a scene of seduction, however temporary, to bring in the sales. However, she is not really interested in profit so much as the game. She knows that her customers "won't place orders if she doesn't look right" (145). Arachne's method of seduction also varies from the mainstream strategies. She says to her confidante, Thena, about the men whom she seduces that, to her 'you could put a paper bag over their heads' (33), she is so indifferent to them as individuals. Thus, as Carrera observes, in this "*ungendered* fantasy" Arachne exhibits "*unrepentant* promiscuity, another literary barrier parodically broken by this picaresque female character" (436).

Her performance also differs from most seducers in that she does not use the gaze as part of her technique. For instance, Arachne is stopped at one point in the narration by a policeman for speeding, and she decides to seduce him to avoid paying the fine. She

would like to make eye contact to read his expression, but not to seduce him with her gaze. She makes a habit, or so the narrative tells us, of drawing her object's attention towards her body, and away from her eyes, which always emanate hostility. Thus, she starts to scuff her foot on the ground in an attempt to draw his attention to her legs, and even uses her car, a Mercedes Benz, to pique his sexual curiosity by rubbing it slowly while talking to the officer: "Arachne looks down and scuffs her toe in its neatly strapped white sandal. It is a way of making him look at her feet, at her legs and body instead of her face, which is always wearing the wrong expression, rebellion or rage" (107). In this scene, she shows her familiarity with all of the techniques of seduction and her acute perception in gauging which will be most effective. Nevertheless, the eyes, often referred to as the mirrors of the soul, are separate for Arachne and never used as part of her arsenal of seduction.

Significantly, it is Thomas who tells Arachne how to bridge the gap of languages by showing her it is within her realm as a seducer to take on new roles. In a chapter entitled "Eat or be Eaten", when Arachne meets Thomas's family for the first time, Arachne's self-consciousness is apparent: "She is in a game where everyone knows the rules except her" (128). Arachne knows that acting must be involved, but she turns to a form of oblivion as her strategy: "She enacts her own performance: a very large eraser, pink and rubbery, that scrubs across her visual memory, sweeping the edge back and forth, erase, erase, obliterate" (132). She allows Thomas to "turn her into a respectable woman, or at least the appearance of one" (137), because she is intrigued that she can create an appearance that will be read by some one as true. Thus, Arachne emphasizes the artifice of language; it is only a changing semblance of truth.

Even Arachne's name comes out of a desire to dissemble. Like many Don Juans, Arachne's name poses the question, "Who am I?" – to which there is no one fixed answer. Lanie surreptitiously names her daughter Arachne because she hopes to profit from her acquaintance with Gabriel Greenberg who comes to her house to have his tealeaves read. She realizes that he is wealthy and hopes that by flattering him through naming her daughter Arachne, after he has expressed an interest in spiders, that he will see himself connected to her, Lanie. However, his feelings for Arachne will always remain autonomous of Lanie. It is Gabriel who foreshadows Arachne's future as a trickster when he comments on the spider: "A good thing it caught something. Spiders are rogues. They eat each other when there is nothing else to catch" (83). He points to her spirited nature that will direct her fight throughout life. However, Arachne's tough upbringing and her vulnerability are also alluded to in this passage: "Lanie saw that the spider only had been injured; it had only seven legs. But that did not hinder her design or ambition. The silken web grew while Lanie watched" (82). In the end, Gabriel will become Arachne's guardian angel, as his own name might suggest, but only to benefit her with his love as well as the inheritance of his car, which is a reminder that he recognizes in her a need to travel.

Significantly, Lanie gets it slightly wrong when she decides to name her daughter after a spider. When Gabriel observes this spider in their home, he calls it, "Arachnid," (83), but in the end the baby is named "Arachne". Arachne means "spider" in Greek, and etymologically refers to the Latin word "aranea", which means "web" or "spider", but more importantly, it is also part of Ovidian myth in *Metamorphoses*. van Herk's allusion to the Ovidian context establishes both a context for parody, and yet a change in the

cultural context. Ovid is really like Byron in satirizing Augustan hypocrisy, and undermining social norms of the era. Ovid's Arachne is a moralist who exposes the double standard of divine (and upper class) morality, and who gets her revenge on lordly seducers, until she is crushed by a hypocritical deity such as Athene. van Herk engages in similar comic subversion, but without making moral judgements.

In the Ovidian context, Arachne is a woman from Lydia who is famous for her beautiful weaving. This mythical Arachne is similar to van Herk's in her station in life: "The girl/Had no distinction in her place of birth/Or pedigree" (VI.9-11). She is challenged by Pallas (Minerva/Athena) to a contest, and when she produces the better picture, the enraged Athena, strikes her several times in the forehead. In response, Arachne tries to hang herself, and finally in pity Athena turns her into a spider so that she will live but continue to hang in a different way:

Her head shrinks tiny; her whole body's small;
Instead of legs slim fingers line her sides.
The rest is belly; yet from that she sends
A fine-spun thread and, as a spider, still
Weaving her web, pursues her former skill.

VI.147-151

Athena provokes a fight with Arachne with the expectation that her opponent will succumb to her will. The goddess insists that Arachne should pay homage to her skills as a weaver, even though she has never had Athena as her teacher. Arachne's independence is taken as blasphemous, but Arachne refuses to capitulate: "With blazing eyes/Arachne stared at her and left her work/She almost struck her; anger strong and clear/Glowed as

she gave the goddess (in disguise)/ Her answer: 'You're too old, your brains have gone' (VI.36-40). Arachne of Lydia takes on the warrior goddess because she knows that there has been an injustice against her.

Arachne in *No Fixed Address* likewise counters injustices against her. She shows bravado as a teenager when the reputation of her gang, secretly named The Black Widows, is being contested. Arachne wins the faith of her followers by taking on her opponent: "They only had time to see her streak forward, knock the leader to his knees" (192). Twice in her life she is robbed unfairly of her money by men who use their brute strength against her: a bully in her childhood and a man who wants to sell her a non-functioning mine. In retaliation, both times, she fills a sock with rocks, which unmistakably symbolizes an imitation of the Phallus, and clobbers them over their heads to regain her property. As Dudek also notes: "She [Arachne] trades her car for twenty-five thousand dollars. And then keeps both. Arachne knows how to play the commodity game. She uses working-class knowledge as a power play to refuse the rules – and wins" (35). Both of these women named Arachne are rogues willing to defend themselves at all costs. They are wily survivors, much like the spider that they are named for that weaves its web and waits patiently for its prey.

Analogously, Arachne of Lydia tells a story of the "crimes of Heaven" (VI.133), as much as of the crimes of men. Her weavings are a tactile depiction of narratives: "And on the loom an ancient tale was traced" (VI.71). The gods and goddesses of her narrative are delinquents who have rebelled against the inherent system of divine law. These are the stories of seduction in which injustices are felt, and all of them involve disguise and betrayal: "She wove, and pictured Leda as she lay/Under the white swan's wings, and

added too/How Jove once in a satyr's guise had got/Antiope with twins, and as Amphitryon, Bedded Alcmena; in a golden shower/Fooled Danae, Aegina in a flame, And as a shepherd snared Mnemosyne" (VI.112-118). Her vivid, non-linear account contrasts greatly with Athene's symmetrically ordered narrative. This is a defiant rereading of the moral code presented in Athena's own tapestry. Arachne in the novel also feels that she must rebel openly: "There was nothing she could do about her difference, nothing to do but exploit it, call attention to the fact that she was crossing every boundary" (143). If Ovid's Arachne of Lydia is a judge, or satirist, van Herk's Arachne is a seducer who one-ups her "betters." Both women are marginalized by their societies, and waiting for the opportunity to tell their stories from their own viewpoints. Ovid's Arachne calls Athena's whole moral code (and religious power) into question. By contrast, van Herk's Arachne is an amoralist, not averse to occasional lying and cheating, and very capable of taking care of herself. She sees the system for what it is – a system that as it stands will never benefit her – and so she moves beyond its endeavours to curb her thoughts and actions as a seducer.

In addition to modernizing Ovidian satire, *No Fixed Address* retells the Don Juan myth from a feminist perspective. Arachne is a seducer who breaks with the traditional codes associated with classic tales of seduction. She is a seducer even though this narrative sets her apart through a parodic retelling of the libertine's narrative. In this way, she undermines the notion that masculinity is a defining point in the seducer's identity. In the last chapter, she confronts some of the darker aspects of her own identity such as her doppelgänger, a ghost of a soldier, and a man who attempts to rape her.

As we come to the end of *No Fixed Address*, the novel moves into the realm of magic realism. Much like a pícara, the text uses exaggeration as well as a travelling motif. Arachne drives away from civilization and right off the map. As Isabel Carrera observes, “The genre of the picaresque, for its part, having traditionally explored, in the first person, the life-story of its protagonist, leads easily into female subjectivity, and its openness and amorality permits an unorthodox view of femaleness without the constant reminder of intrusion. In this particular version, there is a possible female chain of subjectivity, moving from author to text/protagonist/storymaker and to the reader” (438). As the story becomes less likely in terms of realism, the reader is invited to participate more fully in an identity politics based on female erotics – an erotica which focuses on women’s pleasure, not the objectification of the female body.

As Arachne makes her escape from the police after having “kidnapped” Josef, she drives as far west as possible until she is on the lip of the coast and her body is about to collapse. Her resistance to staying even a few hours in Vancouver signifies Arachne’s desire to repress her past. We are told earlier in the narrative that she “refuses to drive west, circles north and east and south from Calgary but never west, hardly even looks in the direction she came” (47). She feels panic when the physical demands of her body – and the extension of her body, the Mercedes – require nourishment, in Vancouver, the last place she wants to be, where there is “nowhere to hide, no refuge” (280). Yet this time in Vancouver strangely represents a coming to terms with herself in some measure.

When Arachne enters a sushi bar in search of basic nourishment, she instead finds spiritual healing through an unlikely orgasmic experience. In the soothing environment of the sushi bar, the chef ascertains her consent twice before giving her fugu. Fugu is a

type of sushi fish, popular amongst Japanese. It is possibly lethal, as Arachne herself acknowledges later when she states, "It can kill you" (285). The heart rate is slowed and people often feel euphoric after eating it. Some consider fugu an aphrodisiac because of the adrenaline rush associated with this food which may lead to death. The coma-like state experienced by some fugu eaters has forced the Japanese government to pass a law stating that anyone dying of this cause must not be buried until three days have passed, following several unfortunate incidents of people being buried alive, their coma-state mistakenly being interpreted as death. There are erotic overtones in Arachne's acceptance of the fugu which the chef feeds to her, and she "takes the flesh between her teeth" (283). Certainly, the overt connection between death and the phallus is here.

Arachne is also taking communion with her namesake; she is seduced by the nefarious spider. The chef has shaped the fugu "into a spider sitting in the middle of its web" (283). She is seduced by her own image artificially carved into the shape of "diamond slivers of fish" (283). Ironically, neither Arachne nor the fugu can actually lay claim to being a "true" spider, yet they borrow and trade on the spider's traits. No doubt is left in the reader's mind that this is a moment of revelation for Arachne when she twice calls the fugu her "manna" (283). The feminist plot thickens, though, because this revelation does not fit into a typical masterplot; Arachne has not come back to find her "origins" nor is she planning to stay. Thus, her revelation is not the coming to terms with her past. Vancouver is not her final destination.

In fact, what is so interesting about this segue in the narrative is its inconclusiveness. Arachne "feels her breathing catch" (284) as all is "magnified into possibility" (283) under the effects of the fugu, but nothing beyond her orgasmic

satisfaction is revealed. And then, even the body of Arachne disappears. That is to say, there is a large gap in the narrative, one that even Arachne is unable to supply. She goes from being in a lethargic state under the spell of fugu in a Vancouver sushi bar to a ferry where she is newly outfitted yet does not remember how, why, or when she got there. Perhaps Arachne really *does* die or maybe she just disappears. She is like other fugu eaters – risk-takers who chance going into limbo between life and death, or even confrontation with death itself. Closure is pointedly sidestepped and the seducer succumbs only temporarily to this direct narcissistic confrontation with herself.

Arachne extends the boundaries of her self by seeking out new boundaries. As Goldman writes, van Herk's project "is not so much to change the map as it is to change the process of mapping altogether" (36). Female identity becomes permeable and beyond the reach of the voyeur-narrator and even the reader-confidante. She heads north, eluding any scripted roles. For the "process of mapping" involves taking the western narrative, which has focalized on male desires, and seducing it to the parody of this narrative. Yet, who is to say what is the original story? This is not just a revamping of old narratives, a transposing of the female over the male body. Instead, this narrative poses a question: how can we legitimize the process of territorialization at all? As Derrida observes, the "original" must always feel indebted to the "imitation" for its continuation. There is nothing predetermined in this narrative and the way it has been traced out, and the reader-confidante takes too much for granted if s/he believes they now "know" Arachne by the end.

Derrida scolds the impatient reader: "the *bad* reader: this is the way I name or accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding

(in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wished to expect what has happened, one wished to expect (oneself)). Now, it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestine one's reading, it is always bad to foretell. It is bad, reader, no longer to like retracing one's steps" (*Postcard 4*). In this chastisement, spoken directly to the reader, Derrida insists that the seduction of reading lies elsewhere than in a seeking out of the image of oneself. To read to know oneself through fulfillment of predetermined expectations is not to embrace new possibilities. Instead, it is to work within a closed circuit – repetition without critical distance – to recuperate old narratives as a way to hang on to known power relationships and in the hope of recuperating a "whole" identity. Such hope is nostalgia for total, individualized control of the text. It is important "to like retracing one's steps" but only with critical distance. The reader, seduced by this text, understands that *No Fixed Address* has seduced previous texts to its own desires. The metaphor of deterritorialization affirms the need for writer/reader to think of self-conscious detours that elude pre-determined endings: "With its emphasis on the north as anonymous territory, *No Fixed Address* develops a link between the unmapped northern landscape and the cognitive space where women can plot radical alternatives to traditional representations of female identity" (Goldman 30). Part of this radical alternative is that the reader also moves from being sideline object to sensual subject. As confidante, the reader engages with Don Juan on somewhat equal footing because she is "behind the scenes"; she knows the trappings of the seducer being used on the seduced. Ultimately, the reader takes Arachne's place in performing a narrative that will seduce new readers.

7: Language of the Body in *Ana Historic*:

The Reader/Archivist's Performance of History

What happens to power relations between seducer/seduced when both halves of the binary are of the same sex? Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* takes on a new dimension – how the story has evolved beyond woman seducing man as in *No Fixed Address* to woman seducing woman, and yet raising doubt about who is the seducer and who is the seduced. Furthermore, this shift towards unstable categories and deconstruction of categories also takes one away from hierarchical relations of power in the reading act, since the seducer (Zoe) turns into a reader/editor, and the seduced (Annie) turns into the author/archivist of a story of seduction, in which seducers change roles, as do readers and authors. The implied reader is most likely a woman, and one who wishes to help script further scenes of seduction which extend beyond the authorial boundaries of the text. Writing, in the hands of the new reader-author, is thus instrumental to a politics of decolonization.

Ana Historic offers a postcolonial reading of power relations in the discourse of seduction, but it does so on three fronts, all of which destabilize old binaries: fact/fiction; male/female; author/reader. In resisting the colonization of memory by “fact,” the text also resists the colonization of the (female) body by male power, as well as the colonizing of the imagination by an all-controlling author. By destabilizing the old categories of history/fiction, seducer/seduced, and author/reader, this novel makes it impossible to privilege any single term, while making it possible to establish mutual relations of power between each of these categories. And so the ambiguity of the settler/invader's position

is replayed on a larger level of the ambiguity of each of these other positions, as the old boundaries between them are collapsed, and each turns into the Other.

Marlatt's text refuses to reify conventional narratives of seduction that construct women's experiences and accounts of their sexual relations and differences through male-dominated perspectives. The very framework of this fragmented text rejects and undermines the authority of master narratives, which make claim to factual knowledge. The implications of this narrative are greater than just immediate power relations (sexual colonization); they also include the colonization of memory. The establishment of discourses of power and the erasure of historical subjects occur in the process of writing history. Through privileging the imagination's role in reconstructing history, *Ana Historic* impedes the colonization of memory, and calls for another sort of re-membering, a narrative of women "giv[ing] birth to each other" (131) in the reading act. Now the point of seduction is not to reverse roles with the male but to write "the real history of women" which "runs through our bodies" (131). This text is part of a greater postcolonial project because it attempts to rewrite the historical positioning of the speaking subject in relation to the readers of history. The reader, in turn, becomes involved in the production of meaning as the text solicits the collaboration of "same-sex" writer/reader.

Ana Historic provides an alternative model for seduction narratives, revisiting history through a female voice that resists the conventions of dominant discourse. It is not only the writings themselves, but more importantly the systems by which writings are produced, that must be examined. Glen Lowry observes that Marlatt looks "directly at the nature of the writing upon which it is built" in an effort "to undermine the *truth*—which has been created in and perpetrated by the dominant discourses" (86). To draw

attention to the fiction of any inherent logic or “naturalness” in narrative sequence, Marlatt’s own narrative multiplies and interconnects several stories in process. Generally told from the first-person viewpoint of Annie Torrent, this narrative is also the awakening love story of Mrs. Richards, a historical figure who appears briefly in the Vancouver archive of the 1880’s, and whom Annie baptizes Ana. Annie names Mrs. Richards “Ana,” which in turn suggests that she wishes to identify with or feel an affinity for this little known historical personage as she (Annie) reinvents or newly constructs ‘herstory’ for Ana. “Ana” is also a prefix of reversal, a calculated choice to reverse the power of traditional history. She creates a parallel in their life experiences as they both meet challenges and confront fears of change, of social redefinition. As is the case with any historian, Annie relies to some extent in writing Ana’s biography on imagination and educated guesses. She undercuts the assumptions of dominant discourse by privileging shared women’s experiences over (apparent) facts. This is also the story of Annie’s mother, Ina, now dead, where Annie seeks to give her a voice and validate her mother’s experiences. By giving these other women voices, Annie also creates one for herself.

Annie reimagines Ana Richards for us in the present, giving life to this historical figure in her imagination. By contrast, the archives provide an extremely limited description of Mrs. Richards: “Mrs. Schwappe sold it [a piano] to Mrs. Richards, school teacher, who lived in a little three-room cottage back of the Hastings Mill Schoolhouse...” (29). Perhaps she is intrigued with this particular archive because, in Mrs. Richards’ desire to play the piano, Annie recognizes someone who might understand the semiotic subtext of language, how writing most often runs through the body. Annie, for the most part, focuses on what she imagines Ana’s private life to be, yet

the text also gives clues to a larger historical context. Ana Richards is a member of a settler/invader culture, a role which is not easily identifiable: "For in this imperial murder story she is both killer and victim; writer, reader, pupil and teacher; accessory to murder, yet often a (complicit) victim herself. Consequently settler-colony contestation of imperial textual interpellation proceeds from a deeply compromised and ambiguous position" (Tiffin 215). Tiffin's description identifies some of the ambiguities that surround Ana Richards. She is privileged in that she has mobility: the financial means to escape England and an over-bearing father. And yet she still becomes an instrument of empire building; as the local teacher, she is a disseminator of British history, values, and aesthetic tastes. Yet, as Heather Zwicker notes, Ana panics when she encounters two Siwash men in the woods because of her preconceived notions and prejudices: "This scene, the colonial woman face-to-face with the figures that refute the legitimacy of British colonialism, suggests fear of contamination by the prenational or precolonial. Gendered *and* raced, the tension enacts, in other words, the complicated desire for and fear of miscegenation that underlies the colonial nation" (168).

Alternatively, Ana has limitations placed on her because of her defined role as a woman in society. Her authority as a teacher is contingent upon her identifying with the white minority because she is accountable to the school's trustees of white, British descent. Yet, at the same time, her position is ironically guaranteed by the number of students that attend class, since mandatory minimum registration can only be obtained by having a mix of cultures represented in the student body. She champions the rights of one of her Native students, risking her own career. In this reimagining of Mrs. Richard's

life as a schoolteacher, what is important is that Annie manages to articulate some of the ambiguous power relations cultivated in the settler/invader environment.

The conflict of interest and ethical questions raised by the settler/invader position are also true for the history of colonialism in general, leading up to the present day.

Firstly, Ana Richards is involved in the historical process of colonization because of her position as a white settler; she is not an innocent bystander. But Annie has also entered into a compromised position in her own attempt to recreate a history of Ana Richards.

For Annie, in her attempts to claim and to rewrite Ana's history, rejects the archival documents as definitive truth, yet in her own way, imposes another sort of memory on the past. When we talk of the colonization of memory, one of the dangers is that history

becomes so ahistorical that no one is left responsible for the devastating effects of

colonialism. While post-colonialism is heterogeneous in the vast number of theoretical perspectives offered under that name, its most basic definition refers to European

countries colonizing other nations and the attending effects of such practices. As

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin contend, "In particular the tendency to employ the terms 'post-colonial' to refer to any kind of marginality at all runs the risk of denying its basis in the historical process of colonialism" (*Empire* 2). Thus, the ambiguity leads to a double

bind: "historical facts" such as dates and events serve their purpose in relaying

information about the past, but they are insufficient. The interpretations that surround

such information, compounded with other factors often ignored by historians, such as

feminists' interest in the role of women, must also be part of this "substance" that we call

the real, which ironically can only be borne out in large part through the use of our

imaginations. Thus, the way in which the imagination has been colonized – that is, how

it has been suppressed or marginalized – is of crucial importance to understanding what vested interests have helped shape the construction of the memory of our communal past, taking into account that there are competing interpretations vying against one another.

Abdul Janmohamed pinpoints the function of political allegory, which maintains hegemony and thus allows "the writer to transform social and historical dissimilarities into universal, metaphysical differences" (22). He further elaborates on the outcome of an ahistorical narrative position: "The ideological function of this mechanism, in addition to prolonging colonialism, is to dehistoricize and desocialize the conquered world, to present it as a metaphysical 'fact of life,' before which those who have fashioned the colonial world are themselves reduced to the role of passive spectators in a mystery not of their making" (22). I would argue that Janmohamed's position should be taken even further to consider how an "actual" historical process can be the foundation for colonialism if it fails to recognize an element of fictionality in its own narrativity. By acknowledging its complicity in the construction of empire, history can in fact become quite another sort of history.

By acknowledging Ana's complicity in the settler/invader culture, Marlatt's novel begins this process of transforming the old colonial archive. Significantly, these archives refer to the year 1873, just six years after the British North America Act, and two years after the colony's inclusion in that Confederation. Indeed, British Columbia had been for more than a century an administrative unit of the Hudson's Bay Company, a separate colony which set particular conditions on joining Canada, before Sir John A. MacDonald could realize his imperial dream of a nation from sea to sea. Canada itself would prove to be an imperializing nation within a larger Empire which first granted it legal status of a

dominion (1867), though it would not be free to set its own foreign policy, for example, until the Statute of Westminster (1931); and even then it would not be free from British *subject* status until the Citizenship Act of 1947. Thus, the date of Mrs. Richards' arrival – 1873 – places her at the foundation of the province, when British Columbia gave up its status as a colony to join the Dominion of Canada (itself an imperial formation) in 1871. The nation-state unfolds within several frameworks: Britain's colonization of Canada; Canada's colonization of British Columbia; Britain, Canada, and British Columbia's joint colonization of the First Nations' land and people.

Despite the First Nations' presence, the settlers believe they have claim to this "virgin" land. In one of the archival excerpts, set off from the rest of the text by italics, the text alludes to this colonial belief: "Why! The country hadn't been touched!" (63). Annie's questioning of colonial relations is a new form of writing that interrogates the archival records written by whites, and acts as a challenge to colonial discourse. As Tiffin observes of this text, "[T]he instrumental linear trajectory of the male/imperial/textual adventures is deliberately fragmented. The author/ity of his/tory is re-placed by the cyclical interplay of fictional shapes and cycles" (226). Any exclamation that Canada is virgin land is then repeatedly and ironically undercut by references to the many times the land has already been clear-cut.

In a similar way, historical memory has a tendency to be written and erased repeatedly without any acknowledgment of this editing process, which changes to meet the imaginations of current historians reinterpreting a past to justify present systems of power. C. Annette Grisé says as much with respect to the relationship between women, history, and nation in *Ana Historic*: "The text makes connections between the

phallogocentric excising of women's history and the colonization of British Columbia. The uneasy relationship between Father History and mother hystery in *Ana Historic* points to an ambivalent power dynamic which parallels that of the colonizer/colonized" (93). The colonization of writing implodes, though, as women become better readers. For as women learn to read in critical ways, they come to the realization that there are gaps in the narratives before them that need to be addressed. Thus, Annie "reads" herself as the addressee of the Mrs. Richard's fragmented narrative and knows that she must in turn address the silences of her predecessor's past by becoming a writer/archivist.

In another example, one of the male settlers makes Ana Richards uncomfortable through his sexual colonization of the landscape when he refers to the mountains as "Sheba's Paps" (31). Even the landscape does not escape the male gaze, or its desire to colonize: "When the cultural identity in question is that of a people transported to a new and strange place, the physical environment assumes unexpected importance and the language undergoes great strain" (Lawson 169). Having lived all of her life in England up to the point of her immigration, Ana is very aware of the respect due to her as a lady, and she knows a line has been crossed in this geographical aside: "Should I have shown displeasure at a remark a gentleman would not utter in the company of a lady?" (32). Although perhaps considered superficial by many, the rules of etiquette, especially in Victorian England, do play a crucial role in defining not only the propriety of people's demeanor but their very identities. In the "new world," such rules can at times be overlooked, which in turn is one of the first real displacements of British colonialism. The strict rule that governs relations between men and women – or more precisely, gentlemen and ladies – "undergoes stress" and thus reveals the impossibility of the

colonial process to mark the empire fully on foreign territories. Homi Bhabha sees this ambivalence as a site of resistance for the post-colonialist seeking ways to reinscribe subjectivity already so heavily encoded through the colonization of memory and imagination. As Stephen Slemon observes, "But one of the ways in which Bhabha articulates this fracture is to show how the subject-forming strategies of Colonialist Self onto Colonized Other produce an 'impossible object', an impossible subject-position for both the colonizer and the colonized, because a purely 'colonial identity' is always already radically overwritten by the differential play of colonialist ambivalence" (24).

The ambiguity of the settler/invader-subject's position is further complicated in the case of Annie's mother's colonial past, which calls for "two languages, two allegiances" (23). Annie, as the daughter of an immigrant, feels alienated through her difference. Even though her mother Ina is of British descent, and Annie is thus privy to a heritage founded on the authority of colonialism and the "Queen's English," she is nevertheless ridiculed as a child, and called "Miss Goody-Two-Shoes" (23). Ironically, her "authentic" British vocabulary, learned through her mother, becomes a source of humiliation rather than a legitimization of her position in Canadian culture. Her mother attempts to give Annie a more cultured and high-class language; Annie recalls her mother's advice: "sweater's such a common word, darling, can't you say woolly, say cardigan?" (23). Annie becomes sensitized to how she must negotiate between two cultures growing up, despite the fact that she has never been to England. Her mother's native British dialect is internalized as Annie's private language, which marks her as different and "foreign" (23). Her personal history is an inversion of Ana Richards' experience of language. Colonial memory and its privileges, rooted in British tradition,

lose hold as they fade in the imaginations of Annie's childhood, taking place in the 1950's during the Cold War. Thus, while British heritage is still "honoured" with pictures of the Queen on Canadian postage and currency, the privilege of the colonial past undergoes metamorphosis as it fails to translate into the current realities of Canadian society.

Her mother Ina's past is thus deeply embedded in the question of colonial privilege. However, Ina is only an emissary of the British culture, which has largely shaped her identity. Her claims to a British identity are tenuous; she was not actually raised in England, although she attended boarding school there as a child. Instead, her family raised her in another colony: India. Thus the notion of an "original" becomes suspect and convoluted as British India – a colonial model – provides the educative model for what is British and proper to young Canadian children born to English/Canadian parents.

Annie refuses the seduction of the tropics and a romanticizing of the exotic when she seeks to understand the power dynamics of her mother's childhood. Ina's world is first split between an English boarding school and her home in India, and then further divided by her immigration to Canada. We see the microcosm of power relations within the family unit in India; there is no one locus of power. Annie imagines Ina's childhood from her mother's viewpoint as a child and its ever-changing allegiances: "colonial children holding power over adults who were our servants but seemed more like us, wily as us at circumventing rules, at keeping us mum with horror stories and illicit treats, while the governors, Tuan and Mem, remained benevolent and remote, a small model of the government of the state, this house in which we took our place, when we could, on the side of the servants, on the side of secret trespassing, though we knew it was no side,

that they too would punish us on command" (136). Although never directly stated, the reader knows that the servants are Indian and the family is white. As a white child being raised in colonial India, Ina's life is doubly encoded. On the one hand, her position of privilege, even as a child, gives her some authority over the servants who in a systematic fashion are culturally and economically oppressed, left in a subservient position. On the other hand, the children partake in the unofficial discourse of the servants that circumvents the controls placed upon them. There is a seductive power to this ambiguity of borders. It is no wonder that Ina grows up with an accentuated self-consciousness of her husband's and society's opinion of her because she learns to see herself as a split subject, identifying with Self/Other, or in this case, Master/Servant. From an early age, Ina knows that the rules of life involve persuasion more than obedience to any official discourse, although in the end she is unable to manage successfully in her Canadian domain.

The description of the servants is none too flattering, because Annie suggests they are "wily" in their household dealings, rather underhanded with the morals of children, and not particularly loyal to anyone. However, this description needs to be understood in a larger context to appreciate the systematic fracturing of loyalties. That is to say, at first it may appear that Annie's description of the Indian servants is condescending, but Ina's position in this family is as unstable as theirs in a way. It has already been suggested elsewhere (chapter five) that the family unit acts as an institution to promote the reproduction and continuance of colonialism. For Ina, her family truly remains "a small model of the government of the state," since her parents are remote figures in her life. Rather than personal closeness with their daughter, they adopt the conventional colonial

model in their decision to send her to an English boarding school: "left at boarding school in a country they called 'home' which was nothing like the India you [Ina] remembered" (98). And again, she feels abandoned and cut off from her family when she and Harald immigrate to Canada where none of the logic of her previous life applies. For Ina, Canada is the wrong colony, the wrong cultural reproduction. Perhaps because she lives in several cultures, she is able to see more clearly than most the artifice of the mechanisms of colonialism which help to regulate the cultural practices of each nation-state to conform to the imperial model. The family unit serves as a mechanism of colonial reproduction that entrenches complex power relations in society, but this unit does not necessarily advocate on behalf of any of the parties involved on a personal level in a favourable way. Annie's narrative exposes the family as a political unit that has little to do with sentiment.

The colonial apparatus, though, fails in its covert actions. This is part of Marlatt's larger writing project – to consider the colonizing role of memory and writing in subject formation. These memories of Ina's, as told and remembered by her daughter, Annie, are purposefully fragmented and spread throughout the text. The fractured nature of the text underlines the notion that there is an imposed order of logic that pervades a colonialist perspective. The reproduction of an authoritative colonial text is thus halted almost before it is begun in this text. "Truth," as it has been traditionally conveyed by writers such as Annie's husband, Richard, who is an historian and expects her to be his research assistant in search of "facts," has no place in this narrative. Annie imagines Richard's reaction to her alternative reading of history, his dismissive tone and baffled expression when he complains of her "scribbles" which, in his opinion, are "nothing" (81). She

realizes that “this nothing is a place he doesn’t recognize, cut loose from history and its relentless progress towards some end. this is undefined territory, unaccountable” (81). The narrator pokes fun at the inflated self-importance that resonates in Richard’s sort of history-making: “history the story, Carter’s and all the others’, of dominance. Mastery. the bold line of it” (25). Richard is so “bold” and so sure of his position of power in the patriarchy, and so ready to be deflated by a counter-history of decolonization.

Derrida’s discussion of hierarchical binaried relations helps make sense out of the ambivalent power struggles inherent to such colonial structures of domination. For he recognizes that the project of colonization, while embedded in very real acts of brutality and dominance, is at the same time just one narrative amongst many. Colonialism is always/already enacted, and the identity and power relations of those involved in such narratives are in a constant state of flux. Marlatt plays self-consciously with Derrida’s theory of the relationship of speech to writing and his challenge to the concept of the book. She recognizes that the history of women, often colonized into master narratives not of their own making nor representative of their experiences, needs to be rewritten in a way that reflects women as subjects of their own narratives. Thus, Marlatt utilizes the “state of flux”. In this sense, the colonized-reader becomes her own colonizer-writer. To some extent, there is a repetition of violence in this imitation of the colonizing methods, which involves the reinscription of narrative. What saves Marlatt’s project from being simply reversal and repetition, instead of repetition with critical difference, is that she seduces the reader to participate in her writing project. In giving up control of the narrative to the unknown potential that the reader brings, the colonizing writer thus accepts the blurring of roles and shares her power. The discourse of seduction then opens

up in new ways in *Ana Historic* because colonization, so deeply rooted in the human psyche, undergoes re-reading as well as re-writing with critical difference as well as the play of *différance*.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida posits that speech has been privileged over writing because of its apparent "natural immediacy" and presence of being: "[R]eading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, allow themselves to be confined to secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos" (*Of* 14). However, Derrida refutes this claim by arguing that speech (phonè) involves an articulation of a signifier and signified conferred on a referent as is the case for the written word; both systems rely on the sign in relation to a referent to create meaning. Of importance to Marlatt's writing project is Derrida's hypothesis of textuality. The book, he argues, tries to present itself as a self-contained unit that deconstructionists recognize as part of logocentrism. As Derrida explains, "[T]he idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signs preexists it, supervises its inscription and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing" (*Of* 18). This theoretical approach is played out in the fragmented imagining of Marlatt's narrative; *Ana Historic* refuses to adhere to the totality normally assigned to any book. Through its porous nature, this text partially absorbs while continuing to observe the autonomy of fragmented historical archives. *Ana Historic* is an attempt to acknowledge the failure of any system of totality, which in turn invites play at the margins of its discourse.

However, although Annie's writing juxtaposes several discourses and creates a dialogue between the dominant discourse and the text, she is still implicated in colonialism. To recall one of Foucault's major points in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Annie is always inside the archive even as she tries to excavate it (*Archaeology* 130). Thus, her self-consciousness is a strategic ploy to at least disrupt, if not destroy, the reproduction of colonialism. On the postcolonialist writer's uneasy stance, Helen Tiffin comments as follows: "But hampered – or perhaps energized – by their ambivalent positions within their own systems of colonialist oppression, they have found difficulty in constructing a stable – or even unstable – identity from which to re-consider the murder plot and their roles as perpetrator-victims" (216). In a sidestep motion, Annie acknowledges that the story she is in the process of writing is also a reflection of her own identity. Her reproduction of the past does not lie in an objective authoritative position that claims to look in from the outside. On the contrary, she sees her life interwoven with Ana and Ina (much as the assonance of their names would suggest). Annie writes, "Ana/Ina/whose story is this?/(the difference of a single letter)" (67).

The body is a repository of another kind of memory, one that is both inside and outside of the "official" discourse of history. Much in the same way that New Historicists try to use ignored artifacts to gather information that has gone unseen, been dismissed, or overlooked, the body offers another text to revisit and to reconstruct history/herstory. Annie becomes the archivist of this body memory. The ambivalence that permeates archival records, as shown by Annie's interrogative approach which questions their legitimacy, is also a factor in the mind/body split. There is a certain degree of autonomy in the body's memory which ensures that it is not totally relegated

under the hierarchy of the traditional mind/colonizer, body/colony split. That is to say, when the female body in this narrative speaks, it offers an alternative version to other discourses of the past.

Instead of being written upon in a passive manner, the body becomes the subject of the narrative, giving the impression that words are only possible if the body partakes in the poetic undertaking. Susan Griffin's words provide the epigraph to this text: "The assemblage of facts in a tangle of hair" (7). History as a corpus of literature and rhetoric becomes a literal body in this text. The female body and its truths – sexual desire, birthing and menstrual cycles, to name but a few examples – are given precedence in this narrative over "facts". The word "assemblage" suggests that facts are a construct open to interpretation and manipulation, rather than accepted natural truths. The past becomes a tangle or mess of knots that refuses easy configuration when the body figures into the narrative. Annie resists her position as a colonizer when she insists that her life is tangled with the fragments of the histories she tries to imagine. And she gives us constant reminders of her own body: lying in bed beside Richard, bending over books in the archives, or longing for Zoe's hands upon her. The angst or pleasure of her own body signals to the reader what Annie is emotionally grappling with as she reads and writes "herstory." Like Annie, the reader takes on the role of archivist, seeing the memories placed before him/her as a series of artifacts which can be rearranged, not restricting them to the codes of one particular narrative frame.

The narrative framework is reconfigured so that the border of inside/outside text ceases to signify as it has in the past; the reader's body is inserted into the process of writing, which destabilizes the writer's colonization of the text because what constitutes

the text is no longer clear: text and body merge. But this is a performative body, one that cannot be colonized according to gender. In other words, Judith Butler rightly observes that “to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one’s sense of place in gender” (Preface xi). Butler is referring to the polemics of categories such as “woman” and “lesbian” when these terms are defined through how one operates within the dominant heterosexual framework, even when it is difficult not to rely on these categories to define subjectivity. Her point relates to our discussion of a performative reading body. Just because this is a lesbian narrative does not necessarily mean that it is feminist, nor that the only targeted audience fits into either of these modes. The way that the body of the reader is inserted into the writing/reading of the text is through a performance of Self that questions the framework.

The normative value has it that the frame is a text, a book – contained, whole, meaningful unto itself – but what qualifies *Ana Historic* as “emancipatory”, so to speak, for the reader, is that the expectations around reading practices have changed. This text does not privilege the mind over the body, for to really read the poetry of this text, the reading body must yield to its sensuousness. And the reading body is allowed, to some extent, to escape the materiality of the body, at least temporarily. For example, a man can take on the lens of a female, lesbian body in an extraordinary moment of giving up the phallic pen of writing to become a reader and a listener of the female body, here constructed as a political corpus, one that performs history with a new eye to power relations. The man, understanding that he is pushing the constraints of his “naturalized” framework of male subjectivity, is now waiting for the body of the text to inscribe a different type of subjectivity on him, which will illuminate on the male body’s surface a

trace he had not previously conceptualized. But whether male or female, lesbian or heterosexual, the reading body must also be willing to be a writing body, a body that will perform in relation to the text's strategic gaps and invitations.

Because of this shift that calls into question what is "gender reality" and the reading body's privileging alongside the writer's text, both the addresser and addressee of this narrative remain provisional and somewhat unclear personas, which opens up the possibilities as to whom fills these roles. This narrative breaks onto a separate page and into poetry: "worlds apart she says/the world is/a-historic/she who is you/or me/'i'/address this to" (129). The following page (130) in the text is also blank; perhaps this has been left so purposefully so that the reader may finish the sentence. The world is ahistoric in the sense that women continue to live in predominantly patriarchal societies that have no real interest in women's particular histories. This text offers an alternative: "that's what history offers, that's its allure, its pretence. 'history says of her...' but when you're so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact – what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up" (56). Through her imagination, Annie does step inside the picture to dialogue with what has been recorded as historical fact. She reframes the characters to make the reader more empathetic to them, and even allows the reader to take on the roles of the characters at the end of narrative (which will be discussed in greater detail presently).

The reader needs to be seduced into a reading of history that revises the traditional historical narrative. This metahistorical narrative is radical because it invokes the performative body of the participating reader and the archival body as a trace. How can the (male) colonizer effect the process of colonization of memory if the body it tries to

colonize is no longer delimited under the sign of female? If the whole category of "female" is considered provisional rather than essential, then the colonialist project is overridden with ambiguity, which in turn displaces hegemonic power structures. As Butler puts it, "The notion that there might be a 'truth' of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (23). This text undermines "the 'truth' of sex" to resist the essentializing of the female body.

When Zoe speaks of the female body, she understands it to be more than biologically determined within the marks of gender or discursively constrained by the framework of patriarchy. Like the discourse of seduction, the female body presses the limits of language, reaching beyond to a set of semiotic relations that refuses the colonization of the written word. Zoe states, "the real history of women...is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other" (131). What Zoe says often seems to coincide with Marlatt's own views. If women's history is thus far unwritten, it seems an insurmountable task to do so now. Yet this is precisely the project underway in this text. However, it can only succeed with the collaboration of the reader who must be willing to read history through the language of the body.

The discourse of seduction is at its most fascinating when it is at once material, linguistic, and psychological. Through the language of the body of the reader, which conjoins with the text to produce meaning, seduction is played out in exciting new ways to offer a revisionist history. The text seduces the reader through what Linda Hutcheon refers to as "historical conditioning". She argues that historiographic metafiction "thematizes its own interaction both with the historical past and with historically

conditioned expectations of its readers. If, as these texts suggest, language in a sense constitutes reality, rather than merely reflecting it, readers become the actual and actualizing links between history and fiction, as well as between the past and the present" (*Canadian* 65). Thus a crucial aspect of this writing project that challenges colonial and patriarchal power and ways of seeing is that this text provides the reader with a vocabulary that focuses on the body. The reader must be wooed away from his/her "historically conditioned expectations" that dismiss the body and its functions as irrelevant or of little importance in terms of the archival record. This feminist énonciation is another type of colonization of memory, but one that attempts to recognize the labours and achievements of women as palimpsests, or texts, which have been colonized and written over by an alien hand.

In particular, it is the female body as a site of mystery and shame that is revealed otherwise as beautiful and autonomous of the male gaze. The reader is asked to delight in and feel the sensual allure of Annie's description of her period: "My secret pleasure, feeling the flow, a sudden rush of blood slide out between my lips and onto the pad, that quick loss of hearing in class, refocus on my self, from way out there with the *coureurs de bois* or $x = \text{what?}$ to this inward trickle, this slow passage, intimate, and only from and for myself" (90). Perhaps the female reader identifies with, while the male reader is educated by, this detailed passage. The language itself is seductive. A woman's period is likened to an orgasm: secretive, pleasurable, bodily, and communicative with the spirit. Although Annie describes this experience as occurring within a closed circuit – "only from and for myself" – there is also a performative element to this language as it tries to seduce the reader. The language seduces the reader into a new aesthetic appreciation for

the female body as seen through a woman's gaze. The language itself claims to be generated from the female body: "but the words that flow out from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle. the words of an interior history doesn't include" (90). This might be the "unconditioned language" (75) of women that has historically been silenced.

To further distinguish this new aesthetics, Marlatt contrasts ways of seeing. She reveals how the female gaze differs from the male in its objective. During the birthing scene, which is based on the historical record of births in pioneer Vancouver, Annie imagines Ana's reaction to Jeannie's pregnant belly: "She [Ana] wanted to avert her gaze, yet she wanted to see, see what it would be like...not from the outside...but from the inside, what it would be like to let go , be this assertive flesh distended – beyond reason – pushing out to declare itself in the world" (117). Ana's gaze searches for identification with this opening unity rather than it opening a split between self and other. She looks to the body or "flesh" itself, instead of an external language, to tell its story.

There is also a parody of a more metaphysical sort in this moment of birth. While trying to recreate Ana Richards' personal past, Annie imagines her as witness to "a massive syllable of slippery flesh slid[ing] out the open mouth" (126). This may be seen as a parody or subversion of the Platonic/Christian metaphysics of the word made flesh. Here, instead, the "mouth speaking flesh" is the woman's body, which reverses the old credo, and turns it into the flesh made word, the woman's body as the ground of being, both material and linguistic. But this kind of inversion also seduces the Gospel of John to new ends, makes it "speak" with another kind of "mouth." The resituating of the vulva as mouth, and the flesh as a "massive syllable," effectively undoes the logocentric

identification of the priority of the Idea/Logos/Word as the origin of flesh, and restores us to the mother tongue. Appropriately, this new birth of language also coincides with the lesbian relationship Annie imagines blooming between Ana and her fellow frontierswoman, Birdie, as well as the seduction developing between herself and Zoe.

This birthing scene also clearly resonates with Kristeva's discussion of the semiotic and the maternal body. Marlatt reclaims the privilege of the semiotic as a positive force in identity formation, even though traditionally the semiotic has been treated as belonging to the realm of pariah. Kristeva observes that biblical abominations serve the purpose of "a boundary, a border between the sexes, a separation of feminine and masculine as foundation for the organization that is 'clean and proper'" (*Powers* 100). In accordance with the taxonomy of sacred Law in Leviticus, Kristeva notes, the female body becomes another repository of difference and defilement that the child must escape from so as to establish its own identity. She takes the argument further by showing how the premise of this logic is to align the mother-body against speech-logic: "Would the dispositions *place-body* and the more elaborate one *speech-logic of differences* be an attempt to keep a being who speaks to his God separated from the fecund mother?" (*Powers* 100). Thus, Ana's interest in becoming one with the child in the birth canal is not necessarily based on a biological maternal urge. Instead, it is symbolic of how she wants to understand the language of the semiotic that moves "beyond reason", and thus explore the borderlines of identity.

Only when Ana is liberated from the male gaze is she free to be a visionary: "we cannot see her and so she is free to look out at the world with her own eyes, free to create her vision of it. this is not history" (30). No longer frozen in time under the stifling gaze

of historians who ignore her place in history, Ana's recovered sight is also what gives her a narrative: "why write at all? Why not leave the place as wordless as she finds it? Because there is 'into' what? Frightening preposition into the unspoken urge of a body insisting itself in the words" (46). Under the unremitting scrutiny of the male gaze, women's bodies have been objectified and their personal sense of being altered. For, as Berger observed many years ago, not only do women constantly perform under the male gaze, they also come to see themselves through that same lens which they use to regulate their every behaviour and measure their beauty according to this standard. To become a woman has traditionally meant to become an object of the male gaze: "diminished to the tyranny of eyes: 'was he looking at me?' 'did you see how he looked at you?'" (52).

Lowry argues that one technique of power has been to compare the female body to that of the male to insert women into a phallogocentric discourse. As he puts it, "The technique of describing individuals according to the norm – describing women only as they compare to men – is a one-way stare; it judges without ever being subject to judgement. In this way, the gazing subjects become the objective against which the objectified subjects are measured" (86). Annie's father, "invisible behind the camera imagining moments of this female world" (51), comes slowly to represent the subtle tyranny of the male gaze. Out of a desire to please this man who calls her "Princess" (50), Annie wants to supplant her mother in her father's eyes: "yes i tried to efface you [Ina], trace myself over you, wanting to be the one looked at, approved by male eyes" (50). On the surface it seems as if the father were reasonable and mild with his wife, the over-demanding and distraught Ina. However, we come to realize by the end of the text

that his exacting of accounts – "he had to know where every penny went" (95) – leaves her shortchanged and pushed outside of the family frame.

The reader must then be seduced into finding a way into the frame of this story, where meaning is always/already deferred. Yet, Marlatt is reticent to give the reader what s/he wants. Paradoxically, one of the most clear indications of how we can infer meaning is also a challenge to the premise of metaphysical being and experience, and thus to any fixed sense of meaning. There are several instances in *Ana Historic* when words are clearly written yet also crossed out. This strategy recalls Derrida's theories of erasure and *différance*. As he writes, "One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that the sign ~~is~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: 'what is...?'" (*Of*19). Although the words have been cancelled by crossing them out, the paradox is that these "original" words still exist and can never be fully erased. Derrida argues that the fallacy of logic in the metaphysical belief in presence is that every presence, in part by defining itself through opposition, also contains a trace of absence. Furthermore, the trace cannot be followed back to any origin, and more importantly, as Derrida himself states, "*The trace itself does not exist*. (To exist is to be, to be an entity, a being-present...In a way, this displacement leaves the place of the decision hidden, but it also indicates it unmistakably" (*Of*167). Derrida hypothesizes that metaphysics relies on the belief that there is something (some kind of Transcendental Signified) external to the system that guarantees it. He tries to displace this system of totalization (at least, temporarily) through traces in language that disrupt the logic of binaried thinking.

Derrida's theories of erasure and *différance* are themselves seduced in Marlatt's narrative as a way to subvert the implicit biases inherent to history. *Ana Historic* raises the question of the writing and revision process as a way to open debate on this point. In the instances when words have been crossed out, yet left in place in the text, women are struggling to make sense of their lives in relation to the daunting process of writing. In the first example, Annie is attempting to write down her thoughts on Ana Richards as she tries to imagine her pioneer life. In this scene, for the first time, Annie acknowledges herself in the figure of Ana Richards that she has constructed: "it is herself there though she writes 'the' eye and not 'my'" (46). Annie composes the scene as she imagines it through Ana's eyes: "trees going down into – its ~~brackish~~ waters evade the eye – 'Tis a nameless colour as if stained by the Trees themselves, darker than tea..." (46). The word under erasure is ~~brackish~~, and the word itself suggests stagnancy. She stops mid-sentence to question her position as writer of Ana Richards' history: "what is she editing out and for whom? besides herself?" (46). Annie revises her own writing and at the same time revises historical writings. To come back to Derrida's concept of *différance*, meaning is always slightly different as it is continually open to new connotation and definition (one word substitutes for another to provide a meaning for the first term), and it is constantly deferred through this impossible quest for finite precision. Thus, in this example, the word "brackish" can be supplemented; it can be added to but paradoxically it is always somewhat "originally" deficient or lacking. Thus, an originary "lack" comes to shadow the historical record, a "lack" which can only be "supplemented" to some extent by a participating reader.

Annie longs for the presence of history even as she is in the process of erasing and rewriting it. The narrative acknowledges that it is a part of the historical system that it seeks to defy; hence, the centre and the margin are in a dialogical relation. Ironically, Annie struggles in her attempt to write about Ana's struggle to write. Annie becomes the seducer of Ana whom she longs for precisely because of her absence. In her nostalgia for this woman that she desires as a solipsistic object, Annie longs to fill absence with presence: "she is writing her desire to be in the present tense, retrieved from silence" (47). Annie further insists on the confirmation of Ana's existence by imagining the voices of Ana's pupils ringing out with the words, "Present, Mrs. Richards" (47). Annie, in a sense, has to contend with the same devils that any historian faces because she now has a vested interest in Mrs. Richards' history, which has come to signify to her something of her own life's story. And so, even Annie's story, which tries to recover some of the past of the mysterious Mrs. Richards by using her imagination more than "fact," also performs an erasure of the past that has not been recorded because Annie's imaginings are selective.

In what may seem an inconsequential moment in the text, another word that remains intact yet also crossed out in the text, acts as a commentary on colonial relations. Annie pictures Ana observing a Siwash woman sent to clean the schoolhouse for a party. The voices of the subaltern Siwash women are less prevalent in this narrative than that of pioneering women such as Ana Richards. Ana attempts to describe her perceived difference from this native woman: "Our Magic is different from theirs, I see – And yet it cannot capture them – the quiet with which each seems wrapt, a Grace ~~that~~ – the Grace of direct perception, surely untroubled by letters, by mirrors, by some foolish notion of themselves such as we suffer from" (69). By crossing out the subordinating conjunction,

Marlatt draws the reader's attention to what might have been; the possibility that this sentence qualifying the "grace" of the Siwash woman, whom Annie has baptized Ruth, might have ended differently.

Marlatt uses the word under erasure as a metonym for the uneasy position of the subaltern who has been an elliptical presence in Western historical imaginations.

"Erasure" refuses metaphorical identity, and points to metonymic and contiguous re-naming. Ana's commentary serves to highlight her position of colonial power and emphasizes that there is not necessarily equality between all women. On the one hand, Ana shows a certain sympathy for this woman who has been relegated to a subordinate and almost invisible position as a servant. On the other hand, Ana talks about the Siwash culture as an exotic Other. The word under erasure is like the colonial past, which operates on an almost invisible plane and exists within a larger, imperial system, but still finds points of resistance. As Derrida elaborates, the word under erasure, which is a product of *différance*, rather than offering resistance, defers and displaces, resulting in ambiguity: "Différance does not *resist* appropriation, it does not impose an exterior limit upon it. Différance began by *breaching* alienation and it ends by leaving reappropriation *breached*" (Of 143). Similarly, Marlatt attempts to rewrite history by playing with some of its silences, interruptions, and disjunctures, which is really the only circuitous way one can hope to invoke *différance*. For example, Ana observes Ruth "pass her fingers slowly over the slate, as if the letters marked thereon might leap into her very skin" (69). This image embodies the literal translation of the trace: the Siwash woman leaves her trace on the *écriture* of Western culture. This passage seems to refer to how we have come to an impasse in language. Just as we are interrupted mid-sentence when Ana tries to describe

the quality of "grace," any finality of meaning in this passage is deferred. Marlatt thus does not assume to speak for the subaltern in any complete way; rather she acknowledges and problematizes her characters' roles in a history full of silences.

Différance shows that colonialism will always be marked by the colonized; the white settler/invader culture cannot be comprehended independently from the subaltern. The text tells us on the preceding page that this is a story that "doesn't deal with heroes" (67). Words under erasure in this narrative signal to the reader that Annie can only contrive to speak for others in a tenuous way that self-consciously recognizes the inadequacy of any colonial representation. As Judith Butler observes, representation is a double-edged sword: "On the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women" (*Gender* 3-4). Women's representation undergoes revision, when within the category of seduction – a model of power, a same-sex story unfolds. It works to replace the old model of (male) colonizer who colonizes the (female) body, which in turns offers a new model for colonialism, feminism, and nationalism. This model provides a new politics of reading and writing wherein the binary of writer/reader undergoes constant reversal, thus challenging the hierarchy.

This same-sex model, of course, means that seduction is played out in a new way, reflecting changing representations and power relations. As a discourse of seduction, *Ana Historic* might not seem very promising to some. It is certainly not titillating in the traditional sense of seduction despite the fact that the body is a recurring seductive motif.

Marlatt refuses to use any of the common ploys that typically cue the reader to know that a seduction is underway. For example, neither Zoe nor Annie's language nor their gestures are ever flirtatious. Furthermore, barely any physical characteristics are attributed to either the seducer or the seduced. Zoe has brown eyes and a tendency to hunch over while drinking hot beverages, and we know only of Annie that she is svelte. Neither of them comes from wealth, nor is there any open flaunting of sexuality in the common way, nor intrigue in dialogue or gesture. Zoe seems like a rather passive seducer who does not know the tricks of the trade. The closest we come to a traditional seduction scene would be Annie's recollection of her feelings for Donna, a girl in high school who infatuated her. As she tries to work through her current feelings for Zoe, she remembers back to what were distinctively same-sex desires: "'don't look at them,' Donna advised, 'just let them look,' as The Hunks paraded by, eyeing the choice. I looked at her instead, the soft rise of her breasts under her suit, so much fuller than mine. i wondered if at home in bed she ran her finger down between them, trying to deepen the cleavage" (82).

Even so, this narrative enacts an interesting feminist twist on the discourse of seduction. Traditionally, in seduction, women are placed in a double bind. A woman is told that if a man is seduced, it is always her fault because she has proved to be so tempting. And if she herself is seduced, that too is her fault; she is weak and not terribly virtuous. Thus, the woman has all of the responsibility but none of the choice. In this narrative, the girlfriend, Zoe, is the seducer but she is making it Annie's choice whether or not the seduction will continue. Annie's ability to choose provides a parodic play on classic narratives of seduction. For instance, in "Diary of the Seducer", the seducer,

Johannes, argues that his manipulation of the seduced benefits her because she becomes psychologically developed through the process, and thus he helps her to “know herself” through the seduction. Unlike Johannes, Zoe for the most part is more of a spectator on the sideline with encouraging words and interesting questions posed to her object of affection. This is not to say that she is distant from the seduction. “My first, my ongoing reader” (132) is how Annie describes Zoe. Annie/writer and Zoe/reader change positions several times. Annie, the archivist and documentary-style writer eventually confronts herself and must become the reader of her own story; Zoe has “read” Annie correctly, and helps to author a new script in Annie’s life. Zoe becomes more than an editor and “visual artist of some kind” (59), which forces Annie to confront the whole issue of projection – she must recognize within herself that she has been projecting her subjectivity into the objectivity of history. Thus, this is a narrative that moves beyond destabilizing older models of seduction to role reversals and re-reversals.

The seducer in *Ana Historic* does not actively seduce, which in turn affirms the narrative’s stance that “active” behaviour may be defined in very different ways. For example, Richard, Annie’s husband, cannot understand the significance of her writing project, which is not based on “facts”. In addition, Annie is a “virgin” lesbian, and she is only initiated to same-sex love through her decision to enter into a relationship with Zoe. However, there is never the question of lost innocence or unrecoverable honour as is traditionally the case in narratives of seduction. Part of the new aesthetics of seduction has it that innocence is no longer an essential value. Recall Elizabeth Hardwick’s comment that “You cannot seduce anyone when innocence is not a value” (208). Within the narrative of this text, there is a shift away from any dialogical relationship between

seduction and innocence. Traditionally, the seduced in some way has to experience a loss of innocence – be it moral, spiritual, social, physical, or financial. Although Annie is a “virgin” to same-sex love, there is no sense that she is a naïve innocent entering into this relationship with Zoe.

The seducer in this text is Zoe, Annie's only reader and editor of her manuscript. Zoe gives a model for how to read this text by Daphne Marlatt – to “read with a different eye” (107). She is a reader who listens and also actively participates in the writing process as shown in a conversation Annie recalls and incorporates into her writing: “Ana Richards, my disappointment in her fate, her *choice*, Zoe said, or maybe she didn't have any, i said. 'so what is it you want from her?' the question surrounds us sudden and floating chairs suspended outside this ordinary cafe...” (91). They feel “suspended” because the conversation has shifted with Zoe's question from Ana's life history to Annie's act of trying to write someone else's life story. “so what is it you want from her?” The question draws attention to Annie's vested interests as a historiographer, which have and always will be present/absent and are impossible to escape. Ostensibly, this question refers to Annie's disappointment with the choices made by the historical figure, Ana Richards. But the question shifts the conversation to remind Annie that she also needs to express what she wants from Zoe as well as from Ana. The three persons (Annie/Ana/Ina) conflate into one as the division between individuals becomes blurred.

Seduction in this narrative thus becomes a metaphor for knowing oneself; Annie needs to recognize herself in Ana and Ina before she is self-aware enough to choose to have a relationship with Zoe. In an interview, Marlatt comments, “Perhaps what i'm trying to articulate here is a theory of emerging interrelatedness in lesbian writing, but i

know that it also embraces women who are not lesbian, as the result, it may be, of what Luce Irigaray calls our 'plural' sexuality. I know that it also embraces our connectedness to what surrounds us, the matter, the matrix of our shared lives, our ecosphere, the multidimensional 'ground' we stand on and with" (*Readings* 147). The lesbian model, which conflates the seducer/seduced binary, "embraces our connectedness" by revealing that men are not privileged as the "natural" holders of power in seduction, any more than authors are the "natural" holders of power in the reading act.

Thus, the seduction narrative of Annie and Zoe might be more easily interpreted if read through the love story Annie creates between Ana and Birdie, the only other independent frontierswoman mentioned in the archives. Annie alludes to the possible lesbian relationship that may have bloomed between Ana and Birdie despite the restricted social conditions of the 1880's. Annie's own desires for Zoe are thus temporarily displaced through her writing. This displacement creates a fascinating change in the binary of seducer/seduced because in a sense the love object becomes this other discourse. Allusions to sexual tension between the imagined Ana and Birdie surface occasionally in the text in the grammatical position of the reader: "you turn intrigued....you have caught yourself turning in Birdie's eyes. turning because of a spark, a gleam, your eyes are green (you had forgotten that) and you know them lit with the look of something you almost meet in Birdie's brown. you had not imagined – this" (109). The reference to "this" remains unclear – lesbian love or revisionist history? Ana sees herself through someone else's eyes, which may seem like the same effect as being under the male gaze, but in this case she has the opportunity to express desire. Recalling that

the main physical detail that we have of Zoe's appearance is that she has brown eyes, it seems clear that we are meant to identify her with Birdie.

We sense that the surprise of emotions felt by Ana are also those experienced by Annie in her current awakening to feelings for Zoe. Zoe reads Annie's writing-in-progress about Ana Richards, and she acts as a listener to Annie's newly emerging voice. Zoe is not only the seducer in this text, but also the listener/reader who is seduced *into* the story, in another role reversal. In a straightforward response to Annie's question of why Zoe wants to hear/read her work, Zoe simply says, "you tell good stories" (59). Annie, accustomed to slights and innuendo from others such as Richard, feels baffled and wonders if Zoe "means i tell good lies" (59). Because Zoe is a sensitive reader, she senses in Annie that she is holding back telling the story she wants to write, and thus challenges her: "you haven't even begun to think about what it would be if it could be what you want" (90) – the "it" being both Annie's writing and her life choices. Only when Annie has articulated her own desires does Zoe invite her into the context of the rest of her life, and they spiritually and physically consummate the *jouissance* of their relationship. This is also the moment when Ana Richards' story can come peacefully to an end. Annie realizes the love story that she has created between Ana and Birdie is actually her own, and that she has the opportunity to live it without mediation through an Other.

How is it that a text can also seduce a reader's desires? Encoded within Zoe's character and her relationship to Annie is a strategy for the reader to actually participate in the text as a desiring speaking subject. Annie realizes the love story that she has created between Ana and Birdie is actually her own, and that she has the opportunity now

to live it. Seduction is far-reaching, however, and so it is also the constructed reader as well as Annie who is seduced in the closing pages. In these terms, reader and author become "same-sex" too, as joint creators, rather than in the old hierarchical relationship of author/reader. Again in the final pages of the novel, Zoe asks the question, "what is it you want?" (152), and thus gives prominence to Annie as a desiring subject. The "you" of their lovemaking shifts reference from between these two personae to also include the reader: "we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other – she and me. you. hot skin writing skin" (153). The "you" is the reader invited to participate in the writing of the literal and figurative desiring body of the female. The narrator appeals to "you," the constructed reader, in the closing scenes of the book, to "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (153). As a text with designs on the reader, this is a crucial narrative for demonstrating how a narrator seeks to engage the reader's desire for the text, for a continuation of the story/dialogue.

The "you" in the final pages, of course, is also Annie expressing her desire for Zoe. While Tiffin restricts herself in her discussion to the concept of the body in the library seeking knowledge, Annie comes to Zoe's kitchen, exchanging empirical for domestic knowledge. Thus, Annie has been looking in the wrong place for the kind of knowledge that she is after (using the colonizer's method), while it turns out that knowledge also resides in the history of women's bodies and their imaginations. In this sense, the narrative expresses hope for the evolution of the discourse of seduction; seduction can reinterpret old paradigms, thus critiquing sexual reasoning that assumes to operate within a heterosexual and auctorial framework only. The point of view as Annie climbs the stairs in anticipation of the physical consummation of her new relationship is

happiness and elation. The end. That is to say, the end of this narrative ends in the beginning-middle of the scene of seduction, which is atypical. The text comes to its climax and refuses to end. The power of women to have multiple orgasms acts as a metaphor for the aesthetic of seduction in these final pages; desire cannot be contained within the binary of seducer/seduced. Instead, the reader is invited – not coerced – to resonate with the passion of the moment, which further multiplies the pleasure. Within this new paradigm, it is expected that the presumed reader is trustworthy of this confidence and that she has chosen to be part of this experience.

Furthermore, the fact that this narrative ends in the middle of the one identifiable scene of seduction in the whole text affirms that this new paradigm of seduction is not punitive. Traditionally, even the most noteworthy scenes of seduction in novels tend to be far outweighed in detailed descriptions, psychological analysis, character development, and sheer length of script pertaining to the *consequences* of any such scene of seduction more so than the scene itself. Seduction is the product of social relations. Thus, its outcomes must always be measured within the larger social context. This is not to argue that by contrast Zoe and Annie's scene of seduction takes place in isolation; rather, the consequences of their actions are left implicit. Importantly, there is a shift towards joy that will not be met with punitive measures.

Annie has retraced her mother's footsteps as well to better understand the maternal bond between them, to explore her own identity, and to lament the formidable pressures on her mother that led to her being given electric-shock treatment, which is of course a forcible way of removing memory. As Gris  writes, "Annie speaks into Ina's silence, Ina's life-text is retold through the female gaze of her daughter" (93). In her

mother, Annie discovers a woman who has been punished for desiring life: “that’s your voice, Ina, lucid and critical, seeing through the conventions that surrounded you, and though you saw through them, you still didn’t know what to do with the fear that found you alone on the far side of where you were ‘supposed’ to be. wrong, therefore. Guilty of ‘going to far’” (135).

In her own life, Annie is able now to move forward and embrace seduction, and there is no indication in the narrative that the strength of her desire will be curtailed. A new kind of *parlance* encodes same-sex seduction in which the body speaks: “we enter a room that is alive with the smell of her [Zoe]. bleeding and soft. her on my tongue. she trembles violently on my lips” (152). Note that it is Annie, the seduced, who is actively engaged in shaping her new lover’s pleasure. The aesthetic of lesbian lovemaking is shaped positively. As Chan puts it, “Here lesbian love is celebrated, not from the voyeuristic or omniscient perspective of patriarchy as the penetration of an ‘other,’ but as a merging interface of boundaries between two selves which are distinct and yet alike” (72). It is described from Annie’s point of view – the seduced – and the fact that she has a voice confirms her power.

Confronted with inversions of classical seductions, this same-sex narrative elides the binary oppositions of seducer/seduced. The hierarchy cannot sustain itself when faced with multiple forms of ironic play. Parody thus invites the reader to recognize the classical trope, and also to engage in rewriting that trope. The reader not only decodes the narrative and its parody, but also his/her desire for the parodic play. *Ana Historic* thus offers more than an alternative version of narrative models; it goes on to enact a modern parody. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon argues that parody is more than

what most standard dictionaries would describe as ridiculing imitation. Parody, instead, functions as a self-reflexive art form that "is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (6). Hutcheon also recognizes, with Bakhtin, that parody plays an important function in terms of the development of literature and envisioning the world: "Modern artists seem to have recognized that change entails continuity, and have offered us a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of the past" (4). Marlatt gives us such a form of parody, and not imitation, when she transposes a lesbian love story onto the classical seduction narrative. Some configurations of the game remain the same in name such as foreplay, yet foreplay also undergoes inversion. The old question in lesbian relationships that is often only answered with laughter – who is the man in this game of foreplay? – collapses the binary of seducer/seduced. The hierarchy cannot sustain itself when confronted with multiple forms of ironic play. Parody itself becomes a seductive form because it opens up the possibility of new games, which subvert older relations of power. Parody does not reject the past, but rather incorporates and inverts it. Parody thus invites the reader to recognize the classical trope, and also to play with the fun of rewriting that trope. The reader not only decodes the narrative, and its parody, but also his/her desire for the parodic play.

Zwicker further shows how this text uses parody for political ends: "Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988) parodically reproduces the comic plot of marriage and childbirth by rendering both lesbian. . . . Whereas the discourse of the ideal nation would have the nation reproduce itself by assimilating and obliterating cultural or sexual difference, accommodating the movement of people through space and time by a constant pull

toward naturalization formalized by institutions like marriage or second-generation citizenship, Marlatt's female characters, who marry (sort of) and reproduce (but not conventionally), resist the compulsory heterosexism of the comic nation from within" (166). Thus, lesbian seduction has ramifications for colonialism because it undermines traditional nodes of power in imagined communities, such as the nation-state. Certain functions can no longer be attributed to women as their "natural" functions if they skew the heterosexual paradigm with their Other-reaching desires. In a similar fashion, the "natural" borders of the nation-state are shown to be artificial and thus the legitimization of certain powers-to-be come under question as inheritance of certain forms of government need not be taken for granted. The blurring borders between male/female and the attending power dynamic also affect the permeable nation-state borders, which are not so stable as it might at first appear. With geography not on the side of imperialism in terms of "natural" extensions of borders, the appearance of inherited and rightful possession of colonies is everything. Once the appearance starts to flicker and the artifice of its positioning shows through, the consequences are that the nation-state may well not survive the flux. The model of same-sex relations in the discourse of seduction has far-reaching implications for larger paradigms of power and their politics of control.

Perhaps what is most threatening to the colonial model in this lesbian narrative is the factor of repetition. As Zwicker points out, women are still "marrying" and "reproducing," but not according to the dictates of the Empire. They are able to imitate, transform, and use the "original" model to their own ends. Does this sound subversive? An implicit aspect of the relationship between the colonial model and the lesbian story of

seduction is a great fear of the Self turning into the Other. The homogenized front of all British subjects – no matter whether they are located in Britain itself, in India, or in Canada – collapses because such subjectivity is defined within a narrower scope, which cannot maintain the plurality of characteristics encompassed in lesbian identity.

Ana Historic thus challenges colonial authority, and the narrative it claims as “truth.” The parody extends beyond Zwicker’s astute argument to directly critique the ineffectiveness of the Crown on Canadian soil. In the final scenes of the text, Annie sits in the kitchen with Zoe and her roommates making up flyers. She applies stamps to each of the envelopes with “hundreds of tiny images of the Queen passing under my thumb” (151). Again, we have a play with the word “reproduction.” For the image of the Queen has clearly been reproduced hundreds of times for purposes of the stamp. There is another kind of parody of birth implicit in this image; the Queen’s face and body are replicated to get the message out, that is to say, to allow the flow of correspondence through the mail system, yet this is also a reproduction with no actual birth. The body of the Queen acts as a guarantor that we will receive the words contained in the envelope. However, this figure of authority, which represents the majesty and the power of Empire more than any other symbol, is now – as Annie puts it – “under my thumb”. To come back to postcolonial theory, many would point out that culture is disseminated through language, but that the Queen no longer has control over the language which is ostensibly under her rule. It seems fair to postulate that the flyers going out pertain to one of Zoe’s roommate’s line of work, one of whom we know works in a crisis centre for women. The Queen’s face, then, serves the needs of a lesbian collective of women intent on social justice.

Another element of play likewise enters into this discourse of seduction. The idea that anyone can truly know him/herself operates at the level of a joke in this text. In other words, the lesbian model of seduction is not put forward as a “solution” to the perceived power imbalance in narratives of seduction; this would be a reductive reading of a complex text. *Ana Historic* opens on the first page with a question: “Who’s There? she was whispering. knock knock” (9). This formulaic preamble to any “knock knock” joke repeatedly comes up in the text. Ironically, this is a form of seduction. “Knock knock” jokes traditionally leave the reader in temporary suspense as the ritual of asking and answering the question is endured. The humour of this type of joke operates on the basis of a trick; it is a parlay of words and usually the joke lies in semantic manipulation. The person who is seduced to participate in the joke knows that the joke will, to some extent, be at his/her expense. Notwithstanding the corniness, most people cannot resist a “knock knock” joke. In this narrative, as we come to the close of the novel, the question “Who’s There?” gets answered for Annie: “i want to knock: can you hear? i want to answer here who’s there? not Ana or Ina, those transparent covers. Ana Richards Richard’s Anna. fooling myself on the other side of history as if it were a line dividing the real from the unreal” (152). Thus, to a certain degree, this is a text about the quest for self-knowledge, but only provisionally. On the other hand, the parodic play of this narrative defers any stable, fixed meaning through its subversive practices.

The stability of identity is ultimately called into question in *Ana Historic* through its parodic representations of seduction. Zwicker argues that the Frankenstein, who represents unknown fears, “is a free-floating signifier for the terror that keeps women inside the bounds of propriety – in other words, homophobia, a terror which can never be

fixed in one location because it is socially omnipresent” (171). She argues that Frankenstein, an artificial construct, undercuts any attempt to “naturalize” the lesbian subject which would be an imitation of the trope of coming out of the closet: “A literally constructed human – a queer subject? – the monster [Frankenstein] points out the limitations of concepts like ‘liberation from the past’ and a ‘true self’ for the homosexual as well as for the heterosexual subject. It is against precisely such limitations that Marlatt imagines lesbian subjectivity. Never a singular subject, and never entirely free from race or nation, the lesbian subject is, like Frankenstein, an unnatural composite of human beings which always exceeds the confines of its narrative” (Zwicker 172).

The binary of Self/Other is finally undercut because the Other, in this case the lesbian subject, refuses to remain homogenized. Judith Butler has pointed out that “gender practices within gay and lesbian cultures often thematize ‘the natural’ in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex” (Intro xxix). The discourse of seduction plays a role in foregrounding issues of sexual construction in society because scenes of seduction take the imposed normative values of any given contemporary society and reveal the codes on which that system operates. *Ana Historic* reveals how seduction is very much tied up with issues of race, gender, and nation. And yet it is only through using these different lenses that colonial memory can be critiqued, and a more polymorphous diverse understanding of sexual reasoning can come into play.

8: Conclusion

The discourse of seduction is ostensibly a politics of control, and yet paradoxically, this control is always provisional because meaning always exceeds language. Elusive, sought after, the writer/reader attempts to control meaning, tame its form, delimit its performance within the boundaries of marks on the page. However, meaning moves in a larger cultural context, where the borders between discourse and the material “real” world – which discourse attempts to read/write – blur together. In a social context, the discourse of seduction is often that force which helps to circumvent many of the conventions imposed by a traditional social order. Rather than being limited to the act of sexual conquest, seduction as a discourse is what allows people to renegotiate their identities. By exploring the discourse of seduction, it has been possible to identify shifts in relation of power, not only between individuals, but also in larger social and political contexts.

For example, *Ana Historic* offers a postcolonial reading of power relations in seduction narrative by linking the male, traditional history and the figure of the author as joint-colonizers who invade and colonize both the territory of the female body, of imaginative fiction, and of the participating reader. In resisting the (male) colonization of the (female) body, this narrative also resists the (historical) colonization of meaning in the writing of history, and the colonizing of the imagination by an all-controlling author. In destabilizing the old categories of seducer/seduced, author/reader, history/fiction, *Ana Historic* turns inside out the discourse of seduction, making it impossible to privilege any of these terms over any other, and making it possible to establish mutual relations of power between each of them (seducer/seduced, author/reader, history/fiction).

The post-colonial project in this novel also acts as a template for reading contemporary Canadian politics. There has been an increasing interest in academic circles, as well as by the general public, to better understand the complicated relations of post-colonial societies. It seems likely that much of this attention has been stimulated by Canada's own changing status from a colony to an independent nation. Only in 1982 did the British Crown sign over sovereignty in the Constitution Act, thus establishing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since that momentous date, the laws of the land have continued to test out this new measure of autonomous authority in the Canadian legal system.

However, it is not only in legal terms that these political documents have had an impact on forming Canadian identities. There is a seductive quality to nation building, and Canada as a young nation is still in the process of defining and shaping itself against its colonial past. Furthermore, the mythology of a nation, in this case, the oft-cited "Canadian mosaic," shows that – as in any society – Canada is in need of narrative, of a story to evoke an image or momentary glimpse of its imagined collectivity. Canadian writers are crucial to this process. This is not really a question of patriotism, for surely many writers critique Canadian culture in what may be considered a less than flattering way. Nevertheless, it is through the process of writing that the intangible elements of a nation, which is always/already being built/deconstructed, is realized in the resonant phrase of Benedict Anderson, as an "imagined community."

Gauging how perceptions of historical narratives will change over time is a hard bet to place. In Quebec, sovereignty is still very much a hotly debated topic, as the recent secessionist referendum testifies. This debate is one that dates back to Quebec's early

history under the colonial influence of the British and French, and, as discussed in the chapter on *Kamouraska*, the Rebellions of 1837-38. *Kamouraska* is a narrative that shows how one narrative can seduce another because the “origins” of this novel are based on a true love murder triangle, but this tale of seduction operates on a larger level as an analogy for competing nation-state power. The murderous love triangle, we come to realize, is also a story of the British keeping control at any cost in a French-Canadian uprising founded on resistance to cultural suppression. The narrative framework works to seduce the reader into the passions of revolutionary emotions, a story of “historical facts” otherwise forgotten save for the charismatic seductions of an apparent “victim,” Elisabeth d'Aulnières.

Hébert’s narrative framework has relevance for today as we see that English Canada would seduce Separatist Québécois into a legitimate union with the rest of the country, but sometimes for the wrong reasons. Problematic as the concept might be, Quebec’s secession from the rest of Canada is a possible reality. In many countries around the world, neither geography nor ethnic diversity has stopped the process of nation building. Thus, through a critique of control being played out in a drama calculated on the colonial model, Hébert shows that this is a narrative with a history which cannot be ignored if it is to be understood. Parody in this text serves to demonstrate that ideologies, not texts, are often what is under critical review, and it is through the critical distancing provided through “fiction” that “reality” is reshaped and renegotiated.

Conversely, the Canadian landscape provides a parodic reinterpretation of women’s shifting roles in *No Fixed Address*. The Wild West and picaresque narratives,

traditional male territory, come equally to do the bidding of Arachne, a female seducer. More than just a reversal of power or imitation of colonization, this narrative affirms that social construction is reality. As a woman – that is, a woman of her own making – always socially mobile and elusive, Arachne explores her life on her own terms. The artifice of the Don Juan trope is highlighted when Arachne shows that many of the “male attributes” associated with the male seducer are only selectively used as part of her seductive arsenal of trade secrets. She is starting to map out new territory for women that allows for an exploration of play in both language and in social roles.

Don Juan, the unrepentant seducer, clearly has important implications for contemporary feminist theory. The unrepentant Arachne is never punished in the narrative for her actions. This may not be so true for Canadian women who still must contend in everyday reality with the consequences of living in a patriarchy. However, in the last thirty years or so, great advances have been made in the feminist movement. Contraceptive methods, higher education, and greater access to the workforce are some of the factors greatly affecting women’s decisions. Although at times frustrating, these changes have also given women, taken together as a political entity (if that is possible with such diverse agendas), a new sense of strength. They are seduced into understanding that they are subjects rather than imagined objects on the sidelines. As such, they are able to carve out new territories, not as colonizers, but as seducers in new narratives no longer built on hierarchical relations. Rather than censor or escape from older narrative forms – ones which define the Canadian landscape in “male” terms – women use the element of illusion inherent in seduction to escape being pinned down by

maps with fixed borders. In this particular politics of control, women are seeking more freedom to script their own lives and to realize their own desires.

In each case, the seducer in these Canadian novels proves to be an agent of social change – proposing a revolution in national politics, in gender roles, and in postcolonial identities – making the seducer continuous in many ways with a long European history of the genre as the bellwether of social and political transformation. Here is the ultimate seductiveness of this discourse of seduction, that we are enticed to become Other to our Selves.

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