

"Irony, Dialogue, and the Reader in the Novels of Nathalie Sarraute"

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Short abstract:

This thesis explores the concept of dialogue, and of reading as a dialogue, in relation to Sarraute's novels. Its view of dialogue draws on various theories of (spoken and written) communication which see dialogue as transcending the limits of linguistic expression (Ch.1). This transcendence of language through language is epitomised by the ironic exchange, where communication succeeds in spite of the utterance which is openly recognised to be defective. Full participation in dialogue entails ironically recognising the inadequacy of one's discourse; if the subject's language constitutes his identity, then engaging in dialogue further involves acknowledging one's lack of authority as a subject.

However, reading Sarraute complicates this idealistic notion of dialogue: despite her writing's formal dialogism, it not only represents but also enacts aspects of communication which oppose rather than promote consensus. The way the authorial voice inevitably reasserts an initially renounced unitary identity (something her fiction condemns), demonstrates how speaking always unifies the subject despite itself, reaffirming that authority which the aspiration to dialogue should reject (Chs.3 & 4).

Secondly, reading as a form of dialogue raises the question of the relationship of writing to speech: their structural identity means that spoken communication cannot offer mutual presence but always involves alienation (Ch.2). Thus Sarraute's attempt to counter the alienation of writing by simulating speech cannot succeed, and so she replays a conversational strategy of her characters -- to control the distant reader's response she defines him (as passive and assenting) in her address. But the mediation of writing preserves the reader from this definition, and so Sarraute finally rejects this uncontrollable other (Ch.5).

However, spoken dialogue also illuminates the text-reader exchange: its reciprocity, which counters the alienation of writing, indicates how the text too can "answer" the reader by resisting his interpretation and making him revise it. Some text-reader communication *is* possible, for the text's language exceeds both its author's intention and its reader's interpretation, uniting them in the symbolic universe within which they define themselves (Ch.6). But their linguistic self-definition means that their dialogue around the text will always be oppositional as well as consensual.

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Long abstract:

In this thesis, the novels of Nathalie Sarraute are read in the context of an examination of the concept of dialogue. The understanding of dialogue established in Chapter 1, and against the background of which the reading of Sarraute takes place, is based on a variety of theoretical studies of intersubjective communication, drawn from pragmatic linguistics, Romantic literary philosophy, and psychoanalysis. These all have in common a belief that meaning is not achieved through expression alone, but requires the active contribution of an addressee for its constitution. If the subject's identity is considered to be defined by language, accession to language conceptualising a heretofore ineffable self and setting it in a differential relation to others, then the value of dialogue clearly extends beyond merely establishing meaningful utterances, and it becomes the means to full subjectivity. Both Romantic philosophy and psychoanalysis, represented in this thesis by the work of Friedrich Schlegel and Jacques Lacan respectively, share this belief that the truth of the subject is experienced in dialogue. The implications which this emphasis on the nature of truth as dialogic has for literature, and specifically the novel, are considered in Chapter 2: prose narrative, insofar as it both contains utterances and is itself one, can be the vehicle for a dialogic worldview on both levels, on that of the representation of discourses and on that of its own address to a reader.

This theoretical discussion is relevant to Sarraute's writing in terms of both the conception of identity her fiction presents and the way that conception is articulated. On the one hand, her characters are seen to depend on the response of an interlocutor for their sense of identity. On the other, the formal evolution of Sarraute's writing away from an overarching narrative perspective and toward the ever more direct representation of utterances in juxtaposition to one another, seems to be an authorial acknowledgement of the fact that no single perspective can provide a total representation of reality (Chapters 3 & 4). Further evidence for this view is provided by the way that in her two most recent works, *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, the opposing utterances in dialogue are all located within the authorial subject, who thus seems to be denied access to a singular truthful discourse which would adequately represent the world. The great emphasis placed by Sarraute on the role of the reader in relation to her work, her suggestion that reception is vital to its existence, enhances this impression of a strong authorial investment in dialogue.

However, this thesis does not simply identify an affinity between Sarraute's writings and the view of the subject of language as incomplete, attaining an ideal completion only in dialogue. Far from merely illustrating the theories discussed, her fictional practice in fact draws attention to aspects of communication which counter the idealism inherent to those theories. Her works can be seen to abandon their apparent commitment to dialogue at a certain point (Chapters 3-5). Yet this, I argue,

should not be seen simply as a failure to match up to a certain theoretically determined definition of truth as dialogic. Instead it raises questions about the practicability of that theoretical vision of dialogue.

These complications which Sarraute's writings introduce into the concept of dialogue concern firstly the way the subject invariably affirms his singular identity through the simple act of speaking; no matter how great his commitment to dialogue, the nature of the language in which it takes place means that his participation in it will automatically perpetuate the illusory coherence of his linguistically-determined *moi*. Sarraute illustrates this inevitable reconstruction of identity, and the way it works against the commitment to dialogue, in the autobiographical *récit Enfance* (Chapter 3). What starts out as an enactment of the constitution of the subject's (biographical) truth through dialogue, collapses dramatically as a singular authorial voice reestablishes itself and asserts its authority to represent reality (here literally to make present once again the past experiences of childhood) to an addressee who figures the reader.

In the case of *Enfance*, this failure to dissolve the authority of the authorial narrator is exacerbated by the text's autobiographical project, which is clearly incompatible with the formal attack on the concept of the individual as an autonomous entity. *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, on the other hand, is free from the obligation to recount a single life, a project which implies a continuity of identity both throughout the period narrated (in Sarraute's case childhood) and between narrated and narrating subjects. It seems to take advantage of this freedom, for it presents a subject lacking all definition or sense of identity, a lack of cohesion embodied in the multiplicity of voices which make it up and which, unlike in *Enfance*, maintain their equal status with one another. Yet Chapter 4 argues that despite this, *Tu ne t'aimes pas* demonstrates the same tendency to coherence and unity identified in *Enfance*; thus if this tendency is most vividly illustrated by the autobiographical text, it is evidently not peculiar to it but instead seems to be a function of speaking as such.

A second element of dialogue which the theoretical discussion of Chapter 1 fails to acknowledge, but which is clearly illustrated in Sarraute's fiction, is the way that speaking, aside from defining the identity of its speaker, also defines its addressee. This definition of one's interlocutor anticipates his likely response; to the extent that the response desired is one which understands and approves the speaker's intention, the attempt to bring that response about will involve the addressee's definition as entirely in agreement with the addressor. This definition will evidently be stronger the less the addressee manifests a distinct identity of his own; the totally unknown reader of the published text epitomises such an anonymous interlocutor. Chapter 5 deals with the way Sarraute, despite the sensitivity of her fiction to this dynamic of control as it occurs in spoken exchanges, herself enacts it in her attempt to control the unknown reader by characterising him as identical to the author and as such in total agreement with her from the start.

The reason for this definition of the other and of his response is also the reason why it will necessarily fail to control him. It is because the other (in this case the reader) cannot be known, and his interpretation of the utterance cannot be monitored, that an identity is imposed on him; yet his unknowability and freedom of interpretation will by definition survive this imposition. Sarraute's awareness that

the reader cannot be controlled by the text ultimately leads her to turn her attention away from him and inward onto the self (Chapter 5). The reader's distance from the text's attempt to define him is due to the highly mediated nature of written communication. Yet if we take writing as paradigmatic for speech, specifically for the way utterances exceed the intention behind them and persist as structures independently of their enunciation, we can see how the same definition of the addressee and request for his *assent* to the intended message rather than for the independent response which would *complete* the speaker's discourse, must also be a feature of spoken dialogue. Similarly, the liberating distance of the reader from the situation of enunciation, which is what keeps him from being controlled by the text's definition of him, will also be identified in spoken dialogue in the addressee's maintenance of his different perspective.

Chapter 6 discusses the position of the reader in relation to the text, and assesses the nature of his independence. In fact, the alternative between seeing the text as either controlling the reader (as Sarraute desires) or being appropriated by him (as she fears) turns out to be a false one. Insofar as the language which gives each partner in the dialogue his sense of identity also unites them by being common to them, the responsibility for what the language of the text should mean, a language which author and reader *share*, lies in neither one alone. Communication (spoken or written) can only take place if language is shared, and this communality of language means that textual meaning is irreducible to either authorial intention or readerly interpretation. It also means that some degree of consensus is possible between the writing and reading subjects, even while their dialogue around the language of the text simultaneously reaffirms their sense of independence.

The thesis thus ends with a revised understanding of dialogue as proceeding through opposition as well as cooperation, yet an opposition which is itself transcended by the fact that both parties are united by the language they share. This revised conception of dialogue is linked to a deeper understanding of the nature of reading, one which goes beyond the approach taken by most reader-response criticism, where reading is claimed to be controlled by text or reader alone.

In relation to Sarraute, I have tried to elucidate an aspect of her work which has been neglected in much criticism, namely the way her texts not only represent the relations of power underlying intersubjective communication but also *enact* them in their attitude to the reader. In addition, by considering the way her writing seems simultaneously to invite and to prohibit an independent dialogic response (to acknowledge that language is a limiting structure while simultaneously claiming that it *can* be a means of authentic expression), in relation to the question of what is at stake in communication in general, I have attempted to account for that dichotomy in her view of language. Sarraute's writing is often associated by critics with one of two theoretical conceptions of language which are in fact opposed: that which sees it as a conventional form and that which considers it to be an authentic mode of expression. This thesis aims to show, through the particularly striking way in which Sarraute allows these contradictory views to coexist in her work, that they are not as easily divorced from one another as often appears, but coexist to some degree in all language use.

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ABBREVIATIONS

References to Nathalie Sarraute's works in the text of this thesis use the following abbreviations:

T	<i>Tropismes</i> (1939).
PI	<i>Portrait d'un inconnu</i> (1948).
M	<i>Martereau</i> (1953).
P	<i>Le Planétarium</i> (1959).
FO	<i>Les Fruits d'or</i> (1963).
EVM	<i>Entre la Vie et la mort</i> (1968).
VE	<i>Vous les entendez?</i> (1972).
DI	<i>"disent les imbéciles"</i> (1976).
UP	<i>L'Usage de la parole</i> (1980).
E	<i>Enfance</i> (1983).
TTP	<i>Tu ne t'aimes pas</i> (1989).
Th.	<i>Théâtre</i> (1978).
POP	<i>Pour un oui ou pour un non</i> (1982).
ES	<i>L'Ère du soupçon</i> (1956).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis looks at the concept of dialogue, both the kind that occurs within texts and that which exists between a text and its reader, in the context of a reading of the novels of Nathalie Sarraute. The aspect of dialogue from which I start out is its demonstration of the importance of the addressee's response for the constitution of meaning. This view of meaning as arising through interlocution rather than through expression alone, seems to offer a solution to the predicament of the speaking subject whose language, as a transindividual, conventional structure, fails to express a unique personal truth. Evidence for this optimistic view of intersubjective communication as validating the language of its participants is provided by those theories of irony discussed in Chapter 1. Rather than confining themselves to the standard view of irony as simply articulating the problem of language's expressive inadequacy (and as such either escaping this inadequacy or being itself informed by it and thus unreliable), these theories emphasise the way the ironic utterance also actively enlists its addressee's help in order to constitute dialogically a meaning its words do not articulate. This focus on the dialogic, constructive dimension of irony may seem surprising, given irony's common portrayal as an instrument of criticism or even destruction, applied to another's discourse or to one's own. Yet it is an emphasis which, as I hope to show, is not only valid but fruitful. Thinking about irony and dialogue in terms of each other, firstly, I have said, makes evident the nature of the power attributed to dialogue (that of transcending the limits of language). In addition, the deeper understanding of

dialogue which this thesis will develop through a reading of Nathalie Sarraute's novels, will in turn have consequences for the dialogic quality of irony (especially self-irony), and specifically for the attempt to enact this in the dialogue of text and reader.

Insofar as my exploration of dialogue is developed in the context of Sarraute's work, what results is neither a straightforward theory of dialogue nor a comprehensive critical analysis of her writings. Rather, the relationship between both strands of my argument could itself be described as dialogical. On the one hand, my reading of Sarraute is clearly guided by the notion of dialogue which I develop in the first chapter, and which is itself heavily influenced by Lacan's conception of the linguistic subject and its accession to truth in the psychoanalytic dialogue. Yet on the other, the ways in which Sarraute's texts resist assimilation to this view of dialogue will in fact lead to its reassessment. Thus what we have is more a dialogue of theory and writing practice than the mere application of one to the other. This interaction between both lines of my argument, while mutually enriching, also, however, illustrates what I shall argue to be an equally important but less positive feature of dialogue: the fact that it takes place across the definition by each participant of the other in his own terms. Reading Sarraute in the light of theoretical works on dialogue thus unavoidably involves some imposition of the terms of one onto the other. However, this tendency is redeemed by being reversible, as in dialogue the roles of addressor and addressee are constantly reversed. Thus dialogue, while it remains reciprocal, is more complex than the initial, consensual conception of it might suggest.

The fact that my reading of Sarraute is guided to some extent by the notion of dialogue her writing simultaneously helps to elucidate, means that the order in which I approach her texts is not chronological, but corresponds instead to the different stages in my examination of what is involved in dialogue. Thus my suggestion in Chapter 2 that the fragmentation of a monologic authorial narrative into a dialogic structure of interacting, autonomous voices within the text, will nonetheless be unable to evacuate authorial control entirely, is developed through readings of *Enfance* (Chapter 3) and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* (Chapter 4). Both of these texts are written entirely in dialogue form, and so appear to take the subversion of narrative control to an extreme, all the more so since the various voices are all identified with the authorial subject whose monologic authority seems thereby to be definitively abolished. Yet I shall argue that despite appearances, this authority is never entirely forfeited. Because language gives rise to the subject, making one's identity a function of one's discourse, I follow my examination of the way Sarraute fails, in *Enfance*, to dissolve the singular intentionality of her authorial discourse, by considering the implications of this for her subsequent attempt, in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, to dissolve her own singular authorial identity through that discourse.

Another point raised in Chapter 2, and which is what complicates the view of dialogue as cooperation, is the way published writing exacerbates an alienation of addressor from addressee inherent to all discourse. The impossibility of perfect communication will thus mark dialogue both between individuals and, more intensely, between the written text and its reader.¹ (Wolfgang Iser discusses which of the "discernible conditions that govern interaction generally [...] will [...] apply

¹ The reader will be gendered as male throughout this thesis, in opposition to Sarraute as author.

to the special text-reader relationship" [1978:163], and identifies as common to both "an indeterminate, constitutive blank which underlies all processes of interaction" [167].) Chapter 5 looks at the way Sarraute represents both relations between individuals and those of a reader to an (unavoidably singular) textual subject. The text-reader relationship is dealt with most explicitly by Sarraute in *Les Fruits d'or*, *Entre la Vie et la mort*, and *L'Usage de la parole*; for this reason, Chapter 5 focuses primarily on these works. The closing chapter considers, in the context of theories of reading, the possibility of a text-reader dialogue on terms other than those Sarraute dictates. In order to relate Sarraute's ideal of aesthetic response to the range of possibilities identified by reader-response criticism, I take the narrator's response to the portrait in *Portrait d'un inconnu* as an illustration of that ideal. Its particular relevance to this discussion is due to the close echoes which its image of the relation to an artwork finds in theories of reading, most notably in those of Wolfgang Iser and Georges Poulet.

This sequence of readings immediately raises the question of the importance of chronology in interpreting Sarraute, for the order in which the texts are discussed is almost exactly the reverse of that in which they were written. This might seem to be a serious issue, especially given that on the level of form, I emphasise Sarraute's chronological development from the first-person narration of fictional author-figures, through free indirect discourse, to the total dissolution of narrative unity in the dialogues of *Enfance* and, even more dramatically, *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. However, despite this apparent evolution, Sarraute's attitudes toward language, authority, and the relationship of writer and reader to the text which unites them, in

fact remain remarkably constant throughout her whole writing career.² The striking uniformity of her outlook over the years not only compensates for the reverse chronology of my discussion; it is clearly illustrated by it, as features discerned in her most recent novels show themselves subsequently to be present also in some of her earliest work.

Why choose discussions of dialogue in particular as a context in which to read Sarraute? What makes her work seem particularly well suited to such a reading is the fact that the level of lived experience on which she focuses is that of instinctive reactions to other individuals; for her, the essence of human behaviour is the tropism, and the tropism exists as a form of primal response to others. Tropistic reality is dramatic, a series of "drames intérieurs faits d'attaques, de triomphes, de reculs, de défaites, de caresses, de morsures, de viols, de meurtres, d'abandons généreux ou d'humbles soumissions", all of which have in common the fact "qu'ils ne peuvent se passer de partenaire" (ES 99-100). This other with whom we interact is "le catalyseur par excellence, l'excitant grâce auquel ces mouvements se déclenchent" (100); engaging with him gives us access to the reality of our existence, opposed to the illusory nature of the public image we and he present. Thus for Sarraute too, the truth which transcends illusory appearances is a function of intersubjective relations; this is why in 1956 she dreams of creating in literature a form of dialogue "qui ne serait pas autre chose que l'aboutissement ou parfois une

² Agreeing with Pierre Boncenne's observation, after the publication of *Enfance* in 1983, that "pour l'essentiel, vous n'avez rien changé depuis votre premier livre", she comments: "D'ailleurs, si je voulais faire quelque chose d'autre, je ne le pourrais pas, parce que ça ne m'intéresse pas. Je n'arrive pas à sortir de cet univers qui est le mien" (Sarraute 1983a:88).

des phases de ces drames [...] tout vibrant et gonflé par ces mouvements qui le propulsent et le soustendent" (ES 117).

The fact that this subjective truth to which relations with others give access, is located prior to a language inadequate to it, further encourages one to associate Sarraute's outlook with that which sees dialogue as transcending the limitations of man's expressive ability (limitations of which he is ironically aware). This is a view which has gained currency in Sarraute criticism: Monique Wittig considers that Sarraute's dialogic worldview exceeds even that of Socratic irony, for in her work, "il n'y a pas d'interlocuteur privilégié qui soutiendrait son point de vue (à la différence du *Socrate* de Platon)" (1984:70). For Arnaud Rykner, her work manifests "l'incapacité du langage à restituer intégralement et directement [le monde]", an inability which "tient au caractère castrateur du mot, meurtrier du réel qu'il enferme dans des cellules bien cloisonnées, des prisons sans issues" (1991:24). The Lacanian overtones of this analysis are echoed by Sabine Raffy, who emphasises the importance of intersubjective relations to the "castrated" subject of language: "Le thème des ouvrages de Nathalie Sarraute, s'il en est, c'est celui d'un sujet en proie à l'Autre, dans ce que Lacan nomme la dialectique de l'intersubjectivité" (1988:185). (The ironic nature of the castrated Lacanian subject, and the way dialogue allows him to transcend his condition, are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.) This perception of Sarraute's sensitivity to the "dialectic of intersubjectivity" is of course supported by the importance she places on the act of reading, itself an enactment of the intersubjective relations on which her texts concentrate.

Yet reading Sarraute in the context of theories of intersubjectivity shows up the limits as well as the extent of her affinity to the view that dialogic response is

what invests language with meaning. There is a curious dichotomy in her work between a perception of the inauthentic and conventional nature of the language in which people express themselves, and a faith in the expressive power of her own literary discourse (as well as in that of her fictional representatives). I shall discuss in Chapter 4 the criteria according to which she distinguishes the authentic language of the writer from that of others (a distinction noted by Celia Britton [1982 *passim*]), and the untenability of that distinction. Her simultaneous view of language as conventional *and* expressive will evidently have major consequences for what she conceives the addressee's role in dialogue to be, consequences evident both in her fictional representations of authentic discourse, and more specifically in her own textual address to the reader.

However, it is not only the initial perception of Sarraute's texts as articulating a dialogic view of language which changes as a result of their juxtaposition with theories of dialogue. Because dialogue involves the reciprocal transformation of *each* perspective through its engagement with the other, it is only to be expected that the interaction set up between Sarraute and the theoretical work on dialogue discussed in Chapter 1 will also lead to a reconsideration of what is at stake in dialogue itself. Thus I see the way Sarraute simultaneously acknowledges and denies the lack of any essential connection between language and the reality it describes, as illustrating the way the conscious subject, however sensitive he may be to the conventional nature of language, is unable to relativise his own discourse completely, for it is the filter through which he understands himself and the world (including what he knows about language in general). Because his very identity is linguistic, he is bound to see his language as to some degree his own, and not

simply as a transindividual structure which contains him. Thus the addressor in dialogue will always retain *some* faith that his intention is invested, however imperfectly, in the language he has chosen to articulate it (even the intention to articulate the meaninglessness of language implies a belief in the ability of language to express that intention).

The way Sarraute's faith in the expressivity of her own discourse affects her view of dialogue, and specifically of reading, can thus tell us something about the way participants in dialogue generally behave. In this way, I shall argue that not only Sarraute's attempt to control her real readers by defining an ideal reader, but also the nature of what she sees to be the ideal response (namely affirmation), merely magnify, without being qualitatively different from, attitudes all speakers bring to dialogue. All utterances, I shall suggest, while they rely on their reception by an independent other to give them value, attempt to ensure that what is understood corresponds exactly to what was intended, by requesting the affirmative reception they desire. This strategy results not only from a fundamental faith in the potential of one's own discourse to mean; it simultaneously anticipates the way the expressive intention which informs the utterance will inevitably be alienated in the reception of its language. Once again, this alienation, and its anticipation by speakers who resist it in this way (seeing the problem in terms of reception alone), is a phenomenon inherent to all linguistic communication; it is simply more explicit in Sarraute due to her awareness of the intensely mediated nature of the text-reader dialogue which takes place across the process of publication and dissemination. Thus her work reminds us, by exaggerating it, of a factor which must be taken into account in any consideration of the nature of dialogue.

Finally, it is necessary to explain why this thesis, which explores the dialogic aspect of Nathalie Sarraute's work, concentrates on her novels rather than on her drama which will by definition take to an extreme the privileging of dialogue as a formal principle. Looking at the increasingly dialogical quality of her narrative writing emphasises the way this tendency develops in a form traditionally considered (though less so since Bakhtin) to be distinct from, if not opposed to, that of drama.³ Thus Sarraute's move into theatre, as Arnaud Rykner has pointed out, merely underlines a dramatic quality already inherent in her novels with their "mise en scène des voix qui se répondent, se contredisent, s'ignorent"; for these voices, "la parole [...] est un enjeu vital, *dramatique* par excellence, et c'est pourquoi le théâtre s'est toujours trouvé au coeur de l'écriture sarrautienne" (1991:110).⁴ She further blurs the distinction between the genres by thematising, in her first play, this move from narration into dialogue which was already under way in the novels: *Le Silence*, Rykner notes, opens with narration in crisis and dissolving into dialogue, as a speaker abandons his description of an idyllic landscape to let his voice become merely one of many (Th. 129; Rykner 1988:56).

If I have chosen to focus on Sarraute's "dramatic prose" rather than on her self-consciously "post-narrational" drama, it is because I am interested not only in the way she represents dialogue within her texts, but also in the kind of dialogue she attempts to establish *through* the textual address. While drama is written to be

³ For Jean Pierrot, Sarraute's abandonment of narrative synthesis in favour of a total "dialogisation" of the novel form means deserting the novelistic altogether: "Après avoir traversé le roman, auquel elle doit certainement ses réussites les plus incontestables [...] Nathalie Sarraute a divergé sans doute définitivement vers une forme inouïe qui n'est guère définissable que par son caractère dialogué, et dans laquelle des voix anonymes, parlant depuis un endroit lui-même assez indéfinissable [...] continuent à développer devant nous tout une série de choses souvent passionnantes, mais qui ne constituent plus une histoire" (1990:467).

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all italics in quoted passages belong to the texts cited.

performed before a large public, novels are generally read silently, in a private one-to-one relationship of text to reader which can be related to the kind of dialogue that takes place between individuals (indeed, as we shall see, it is in many ways paradigmatic for it). Moreover, the text-reader relationship in Sarraute is intimately linked to an aspect of the dialogues within her novels which is absent from the dialogues of drama proper. This is the unifying authorial discourse which in dialogic prose gestures towards a renunciation of its all-embracing perspective within the text, as well as appealing for the reader's perspective to complement its own from without. What I wish to do is explore what happens to this discourse on both levels of its attempted self-relativisation, and trace the way it unavoidably reasserts in both spheres the authority it tries to renounce.

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNICATION AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE:

IRONY AND DIALOGUE

The concept of irony has been analysed and utilised in such an enormous variety of ways that it is virtually impossible to give a single, comprehensive definition of it. If one of its basic qualities is that it complicates further the already complex relationship between signification and meaning -- it opposes any tendency to equate the two in an ideal of transparent expression, of "meaning what one says" -- the motivation for this wilful semantic opacity remains unarticulated by the ironist. For the theorist of irony, the question of why the ironist should desire not only to say something he clearly doesn't mean, but also to have the inaccuracy of his statement recognised and approved by his addressee, is compounded by the mystery of how this is actually fulfilled. For if the irony is successful, the addressee instantly recognises not only the inaccuracy of the utterance's overt signification but also the reason why this erroneous statement, and not the truth of which it so blatantly falls short, should be communicated. It is thus easy to see why, as Philippe Hamon puts it, "le discours ironique, chose du monde semble-t-il la mieux partagée, et de l'usage le plus quotidien, embarrasse le théoricien" (1982:165).

My concern, in this thesis, with the relevance of the concept of irony for Sarraute's novels, is chiefly related to the question of communication: I wish to suggest that there is a relationship between the kind of dialogue enacted by irony,

and the way Sarraute's texts both represent and work to transcend the difficulties which attend our attempts to relate to one another in language. My reading of Sarraute will thus take place on two levels, on that of the dialogues represented in her fiction, and on that of the address her writing enacts and the response it invites from its readers. While the question of irony in Sarraute has already been approached (Racevskis 1977; Minogue 1987a), these discussions have tended to focus on local instances of ironic expression in the text, and their possible motivations. Thus in Valerie Minogue's reading of Sarraute, "l'utilité de l'ironie c'est [...] de suggérer sans définir" (1987a:8), and forms part of Sarraute's ongoing project to articulate the inner movements which precede language. For Karlis Racevskis, her irony is a vehicle of social criticism, specifically of the "cultural establishment" (1977:37) which includes both the represented readers and writers of her novels, and their real readers insofar as these reflect her fictional readers. My emphasis, in contrast, will be on the way the ability of irony to be communicated in spite of the blatant discrepancy between what is said and what is to be understood, seems to offer a solution to the problems of intersubjective relations and the expressive inadequacy of conventional language, problems which are such a central concern of Sarraute's writing.¹

This view of the way the communicative dimension of irony transcends the shortcomings of the ironist's language by promoting the addressee from passive interpreter to active co-creator of meaning, contrasts with the widespread view of irony as simply a weapon which undermines the validity of a given discourse, that

¹ Racevskis does gesture to the importance of "the basic intersubjectivity of the phenomenon [of irony]", and he claims that "an ironic style both requires and permits a greater degree of intimacy between reader and author" (1977:44).

of another or of the speaker himself. In the latter case, irony is seen to lead to paradox, with the speaker aware of the limits of his knowledge, and hence defeating them. The concept of irony as dialogic resolves this paradox, identifying the ironist as concerned as much with his relation to other subjects, on whose response he depends, as with his own subjective capacities and limits. Yet the value of seeing how dialogue is central to irony goes beyond rehabilitating irony: if dialogue highlights irony's potential to exceed what it criticises, the way both concepts interact also suggests an affinity at some level between intersubjective relations as such and the oppositional nature of irony, its manifestation of an attitude (to oneself or another) which ranges from mild criticism to overt hostility. Focusing on the relationship between irony and dialogue can thus lead to a deeper understanding of *both* concepts as each is elucidated by its relation to the other.

This chapter will explore in detail the kind of communication enacted by irony, the dynamics of the dialogue it involves. In Chapter 2, I shall develop this discussion to cover the specific situation of the text-reader dialogue, and the complications introduced by the relationship of writing to speech. Both chapters together will then provide a background against which to approach Sarraute's fictional treatment of the same issues of communication, the inadequacy of language, and the relationship of the reader to the text. Rather than defining Sarraute's work in terms of this theoretical background, I would hope that a dialogic juxtaposition of these two bodies of writing might also give rise to the reevaluation of that background. Sarraute's fictional practice raises issues relating to language, identity, and intersubjectivity, which will have major implications for the way dialogue is seen to operate. The way, specifically, her writing both endorses yet at a certain

point also resists the ideal of a dialogic constitution of truth, shows up the persistence, in dialogue, of attitudes opposed to it, and whose transformation is a major part of the dialogic process.

If the understanding of irony which this chapter will establish, sees it as enacting the way truth is created through the dialogic interaction of discourses, that understanding itself emerges out of a dialogue among studies of communication conducted in pragmatic linguistics, Romantic philosophy, and psychoanalysis. The way these studies interact will be outlined below, in the context of the hostile critique of irony to which they can similarly be seen as offering a dialogic response. To facilitate an exchange between these different approaches (yet which all see communication as essential to the constitution of meaning), I shall give their perspectives priority over my own, attempting to summarise their positions accurately. (This authorial attitude corresponds to what Bakhtin, reading Dostoevsky, calls dialogism [1984a *passim*]; as a mode of narration which privileges the productive interaction of discourses, it will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.) In this way, the view of irony which will continue to evolve throughout this thesis, is acknowledged from the start to be the product of interacting discourses on which its meaningfulness depends.

For any theoretical examination of irony as a form of communication between subjects, the status of those subjects and the nature of the social context which defines them and relates them to one another will be a major issue. Successful irony depends after all on the recognition of an ironic *intention*, and this recognition depends in turn on interlocutors sharing a cultural environment. Philippe

Hamon asks if it is even possible to imagine irony "en dehors des possibilités matérielles sémiotiques de la référence à un sujet, sujet individuel comme sujet collectif défini par sa participation à un ensemble de règles de prescriptions et de proscriptions" (1982:172-73). But if the nature of the subject and its defining context is an issue for many theorists of irony, this is not necessarily to say that it is ignored or dissimulated by the ironic texts on which they focus, and only brought to light when these are subjected to criticism. In *Irony and Ethics in Narrative*, Gary Handwerk argues that irony itself actively poses the ontological questions theorists have raised in relation to it: "The same dynamics at work in the Lacanian subject or the Beckettian narrator can be traced back through hermeneutically self-conscious novelists such as Meredith to the initial Romantic posing of this problem - - what, or where, is the subject?" (1985:viii).

The failure to acknowledge that irony may itself raise the same questions about the nature of identity which have become commonplace in contemporary "poststructuralist" critical and theoretical writing, explains its loss of prestige in recent criticism (in contrast to the importance accorded to some of the other classical tropes with which it was traditionally associated -- most obviously, metaphor and metonymy). Poststructuralist criticism sees the human subject as "decentred", a view heavily influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan for whom metaphor and metonymy are the very foundations of subjectivity. This leads it to condemn irony, an attitude exemplified by Candace Lang in *Irony/Humor: Critical Paradigms* (1988). In her view, "the assumption and affirmation of the discontinuity and inherent otherness of the self is humor: the denial of it, irony" (1988:15); irony,

she claims, is grounded in "the notion of a unified autonomous subject, whose conscious intent gives meaning and unity to his work" (45).

Lang's argument is based on an understanding of irony as a *trope* which opposes meaning to expression in rhetoric and, by extension, reality to appearance in philosophy ("the fundamental problem raised (explicitly or implicitly) by the ironic work is the expression of meaning" [6]). She finds support for this condemnation of the implicit Platonism she sees in irony (where language is one manifestation of the veil of phenomena concealing eternal truth), in Barthes's comments on irony in *S/Z*. More or less equating irony and parody (the ironic "code" is "en principe une citation explicite d'autrui", and parody "en quelque sorte l'ironie au travail" [1970:51-52]), Barthes sees the latter (and thus both) as "menée au nom d'un sujet qui met son imaginaire dans la distance qu'il feint de prendre vis-à-vis du langage des autres, et se constitue par là d'autant plus sûrement sujet du discours" (1970:52). The potential multivalence of a discourse of quotation is destroyed by irony's failure to reject respect for origins and paternity, to "détrui[re] la voix qui pourrait donner au texte son unité" (51). Only where it is mitigated by uncertainty -- as in the case of Flaubert -- does irony redeem itself, by taking on the nature of *écriture* which is "d'empêcher de jamais répondre à cette question: *Qui parle?*" (146).

However, this escape route which Barthes provides for Flaubert should not necessarily be seen as opposed to the nature of irony. If Barthes and Lang condemn irony out of hand, it is because they fail to take into account to what extent it participates in the "plurivocity" they oppose to it. In fact, as I shall argue, the refusal of univocity, far from being contrary to the mechanism of irony, can be seen

to be as much an ideal of ironic discourse as of "humorous" poststructuralist *écriture*. The following brief sketch of the basis of this argument will be followed by more detailed discussion of the studies on which it draws, and of the alternative conception of irony which these let us develop.

A more favourable assessment of irony than Lang's or Barthes's is provided by Gary Handwerk in his discussion of "ethical" irony as a discourse which exploits the necessarily interactive nature of the ironic utterance in order to "generate and regenerate reflective community" (1985:vii).² For him, the intersubjective nature of all ironic discourse, even the most casual instances of "verbal irony", acknowledges that meaning is constituted rather than revealed: irony becomes "ethical" once this quality is exploited to convey "the ironist's awareness of how dependent the signifying process is on the constant relocation of meaning within verbal interactions" (viii). Handwerk's perception of the relationship between Romantic irony (specifically as conceived by Friedrich Schlegel) and the decentred (specifically Lacanian) subject thus runs totally counter to the analyses of irony by Lang or Barthes.³ I shall discuss Handwerk more fully later in this chapter; for now it is enough to note his rejection of the traditional idea of Romantic irony as expressing despair at the inadequacy of language to the self in favour of a view which sees it as acknowledging and exploring the intersubjective nature of identity. Given his reliance on the Lacanian view of language as imposed by the Other on the

² That irony manifests the speaker's awareness of the social interdependence of individuals is claimed also by Richard Harvey Brown (1983) who sees it as revealing individual ignorance and showing knowledge to be constituted through dialectic (thus intersubjectively). David S. Kaufer also sees irony in the context of intersubjective communication -- for him it is an aesthetic enactment of perspectival differences in interpersonal situations (1983:461).

³ Lang translates Barthes's idea of irony into Lacanian terms as follows: it is "the subject's futile attempt to defend an illusory ego [...] against the onslaught of alterity, by staking out its own territory, its personal property in the realm of discourse" (1988:60).

subject (which it constitutes), Handwerk's perception of irony can clearly have little to do with the classical view of irony as a trope opposing expression to meaning or appearance to reality.

But if Romantic irony is thus redefined in such a way that it is no longer seen as a trope, can it then continue to be related to verbal irony? Indeed, once the subject's determination by language is claimed, discrediting the opposition between expression and meaning, what happens to the definition of verbal irony itself, in which the speaker is usually described as saying one thing and meaning another? Could one perhaps reconceive verbal irony too in a nontropological way which would also allow one to retain a connection between it and irony seen as a philosophical stance (what Handwerk calls "epistemological irony" and defines, quoting Paul de Man, as "the systematic undoing of understanding", based on an awareness of the limitations of human knowledge [Handwerk 1985:10; de Man 1979:301])?

A nontropological definition of verbal irony is exactly what Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson offer in the context of their pragmatic theory of communication outlined in *Relevance* (1986). Focusing on how utterances are *used* in communication, their discussion of irony is freed from the question of whether and how the individual can express meaning. Like Barthes, they see irony as a kind of implicit quotation, yet their claim that the ironic quotation conveys *no* unspoken meaning, however implicit, creates a bridge between their theory and the post-structuralist view of subjectivity and language, and so allows for fruitful comparison with the conception of irony predicated on that subjectivity by Handwerk. By no longer conceiving verbal irony as a trope, one dissociates it from the ideological

presupposition that meaning exists outside language; epistemological irony in turn, commonly considered as the translation of the trope from rhetorical into philosophical terms, is exonerated in the same way. This rehabilitation of irony (verbal and epistemological) defends it against poststructuralist charges of authoritarianism and even invites a reassessment of its relevance to postmodern thought -- a relevance demonstrated by the discussion later in this chapter of the affinity Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony bears to Lacan's theory of the subject.

This close kinship between the ideas of the nineteenth-century German theorist and practitioner of irony on the one hand, and Lacan's much more recently formulated psychoanalytic theory on the other, accounts for the more detailed consideration of Lacan's concept of linguistic subjectivity which closes this chapter. While references to irony are not frequent in his work, he does speak of "l'ironie propre du langage" (1966:258; if, for Lacan, language is ironic, then so by implication is the subject it constitutes).⁴ He also numbers irony among the mechanisms of the unconscious (and, interestingly, avoids defining it as a trope); it is one of the ways in which the linguistic unconscious is given form in the analysand's discourse.⁵ And of course, the whole structure of psychoanalytic praxis is, as Lacan acknowledges, modelled on the Socratic maieutic and its dramatisation

⁴ One analyst of irony whose ideas seem to owe much to Lacan's theory of the subject's determination by language is Bertrand Rougé. For him, irony, by not meaning what it signifies, exposes the conventional nature of sign systems, "cherche à contourner le signifié, cette représentation que le signe impose, pour mieux contourner la clôture qu'ainsi il opère" (1988b:117). Though his belief in a prelapsarian immediacy of meaning from which language cuts us off can be viewed with scepticism, his perception of human meaning as an effect of language, and of irony as enacting that perception, illustrates his closeness both to Lacan and to the nontropological conception of irony I am arguing for here.

⁵ "La périphrase, l'hyperbate, l'ellipse, la suspension, l'anticipation, la rétraction, la dénégation, la digression, l'ironie, ce sont les figures de style (*figurae sententiarum* de Quintilien), comme la catachrèse, la litote, l'antonomase, l'hypotypose sont les tropes, dont les termes s'imposent à la plume comme les plus propres à étiqueter ces mécanismes [de l'inconscient]" (Lacan 1966:521). Vaheed Ramazani also sees Lacan's theory as inherently ironic: "What is Lacan's subject if not the subject of irony itself? Subversion, misrecognition, fading: the psychoanalytic metaphor continually points to a gesture of rupture, evasion, negation -- the classic gesture of irony" (1989:555).

by Plato, the search for truth through a form of dialogue in which verbal and epistemological irony combine (1966:293; cp. 837). In addition to his relevance for the discussion of irony, dealing with Lacan's writings and specifically with the question of his style, will provide an opportunity to consider the relationship, in the ironic and psychoanalytic dialogues but also in communication generally, of speech to writing. This will prepare the way for the discussion, in the next chapter, of how the concept of dialogue is complicated by the nature of language (spoken as well as written) as representation.

1. Verbal irony and the question of communication:

Irony is perhaps most frequently encountered in the form of remarks made in the context of a conversation or, in literature, of the larger textual discourse. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson have devoted a number of studies to this kind of occasional or verbal irony; what is of particular interest for my discussion is the emphasis they place on irony as a form of communication rather than expression, and the way they integrate their conclusions into a general theory of communication (based on the concept of relevance [Sperber & Wilson 1986]). All communication, they argue, contains an element of *inference*, where the addressee infers, with reference to the context of enunciation, which specific assumptions the speaker intended to make manifest to him by his words. The addressor's utterance comes with an implicit guarantee that it is relevant to its addressee, and so the addressee's inferential activity is governed by a search for relevance. Irony simply exploits the

inferential dimension of communication: the obvious irrelevance of the linguistically encoded semantic component of the utterance leads to a heightened dependence on context in the attempt to determine how the utterance may be relevant.

Sperber and Wilson argue that the relevance of the ostensibly irrelevant ironic utterance lies in the fact that the speaker is manifesting an attitude *to* it rather than *by means of* it. The addressee's task is thus to infer this attitude rather than any figurative meaning the utterance might contain.⁶ They first formulate this distinction between speaking to convey a meaning and speaking to convey an attitude to what one says, as one between *use* and *mention*: "USE of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to", whereas "MENTION of an expression involves reference to the expression itself" (Sperber & Wilson 1981:303). Irony is implicit (because not linguistically signalled) mention of propositions, while parody mentions linguistic expression.

They integrate irony into their theory of communication by generalising this distinction between use and mention into one basic to language, between description and interpretation. They argue firstly that all utterances have a relationship of resemblance, rather than identity, to the propositional form of the thoughts they articulate, and so are ultimately interpretative rather than descriptive in character. On top of this, the thoughts those utterances articulate, because they have a propositional form, can themselves also be interpretative (of other representations

⁶ Sperber and Wilson reject altogether the notion of figurative meaning, and thus the traditional definition of irony as meaning the opposite of what one says, arguing that disambiguation -- the process of extracting a single meaning from an utterance despite its generally multiple ambiguities -- is already complex enough when confined to the literal meanings of an utterance. If it also had to take into account figurative senses derived via relations of resemblance, contiguity, inversion etc., the set of possible interpretations would become "to all intents and purposes nonenumerable" (1981:299).

with a similar propositional form, like thoughts or utterances), or descriptive (of states of affairs).

In irony, then, the speaker's thought, interpreted by his utterance, is itself an interpretation of an attributed thought, and achieves relevance in relation to the speaker's (implicitly derogatory) attitude to that thought. It is just one type of "echoic interpretation" (1986:238) in which anything from outright acceptance and approval to outright rejection and disapproval of the echoed idea can be conveyed. Extending their definition of irony from "mention" to "interpretation" lets Sperber and Wilson integrate it into the range of kinds of interpretation, and so into their general typology of communication.⁷ However, the definition of irony as mention remains valid: in its requirement of linguistic as well as logical identity between the original and its representation, it is simply the most veiled and thus subtle form of echoic interpretation. More importantly, when a propositional form resembles the original to the point of identity (identity being the limit-case of resemblance), and all the more when, as is common in ironic discourse, that original is created by the utterance at the moment of its ironisation rather than having an independent prior existence, representation shades into self-representation. In this way, Sperber and Wilson's theory lets us relate the generally "other-directed" verbal irony they discuss to the phenomenon of self-irony. Directed to the present, speaking self, this form of irony enacts the recognition of the self's own limited understanding and so indicates a point of overlap between the irony of utterances and the more

⁷ Wayne C. Booth too sees irony as exemplifying the interpretative character of communication in general: "Irony is an extraordinarily good road into the whole art of interpretation. Though ironic statements are only a small part of all that men say to each other [...] they bring to light the hidden complexities that are mastered whenever men succeed in understanding each other in any mode, even the most flat and literal" (Booth 1974:44).

philosophical orientation of what, after Handwerk, I have called epistemological irony.

Another pragmatic theorist, Alain Berrendonner, has actually made this connection between irony as mention and self-irony. The simultaneity, in all ironic discourse, of the utterance and the ironic gloss, means for him that irony, even when other-directed, automatically also throws the speaker's own discourse into question. "Faire de l'ironie, ce n'est pas s'inscrire en faux de manière mimétique contre l'acte de parole antérieur ou virtuel, en tout cas extérieur, d'un autre"; rather it is to "s'inscrire en faux contre sa propre énonciation, tout en l'accomplissant" (Berrendonner 1981:216). The contradiction is operated by the enunciation itself, which is double: both a function of the *énoncé* (and as such contradicted), and symptomatic of an attitude to the *énoncé* (thus enacting the contradiction). The divergence, in irony, of *énonciation* from *énoncé*,⁸ the simultaneity of affirmation and negation, undermines the authority of the speaker as it is constituted through his discourse, and so enacts the denial of any necessary identity between language and authority.

In this view, then, ironic language cannot but expose the conventional nature of all language, its lack of any essential link to the intentional act of enunciation and so to the truth to be expressed. For Bertrand Rougé:

L'ironiste réintroduit une distance perdue et comme originelle dans les systèmes de signe. Là où l'habitude a figé les trajectoires interprétatives, jusqu'à suggérer un rapport de signification quasi immédiat entre le mot et ce qu'il signifie, ou entre l'image et ce qu'elle représente, l'ironie restaure

⁸ Bertrand Rougé's opposition, after Jankélévitch, of *gramma* to *pneuma* seems to be a highly Platonised version of that between *énoncé* and *énonciation*: "L'ironie est un signe qui cherche à se défaire de sa gangue de grammaticalité pour révéler sa nature essentiellement pneumatique, mais qui, pour ce faire, n'a d'autre solution que de passer par cette grammaticalité même" (1988b:118).

la distance, le recul et l'incertitude, elle insuffle du médiat dans le pseudo-immédiat. (Rougé 1988a:35)

In fact, Sperber and Wilson's theory of communication, and their broader definition of irony as interpretation, accommodates the epistemological consequences of their earlier and more restrictive view of irony as mention, a view in which the ironic utterance can be seen as displaying self-difference and expressive inadequacy in the very act of enunciation. Not only is the ironic proposition an interpretation of a posited other, "straight" proposition, the fact that their communication theory sees all verbal expression as interpretation means that it in turn must undergo a second, this time involuntary interpretation in its translation from logical proposition into language. Sperber and Wilson fail to make any connection between both levels of interpretation, and so overlook the irony of this situation. Yet such a connection seems unavoidable, especially when the original which is interpreted is merely posited and has no real existence. For in this case, the identity between represented and original utterance suggests that the relevance of the remark doesn't lie simply in its expressed attitude to an idea perceived to be held by somebody (since this proposition doesn't exist prior to its ironisation). Equally relevant is the fact that the utterance chooses to enact an interpretation of something which it must *create* in order that that interpretative act may take place. In irony which creates its object, interpretation is removed from any external reality, and announces itself as existing in a referential vacuum. Thus while Sperber and Wilson neglect the possibility that all irony may potentially be ironising the language which embodies it, there is place in their theory for this idea that irony in general "represents a stage of consciousness in which the problematical nature of language itself has become recognized. It

points to the potential foolishness of all linguistic characterizations of reality as much as to the absurdity of the beliefs it parodies" (White 1973:37).⁹

This understanding of verbal irony as implicitly criticising naïve faith in language by identifying as an indirect focus of irony the act of expression in general, extends the ramifications of the ironic utterance beyond its (real or posited) object and onto the level of a whole discourse or, in literary terms, of the whole text in which the local ironies are situated. How can an "epistemologically ironic" author articulate the ironisation of his whole text, extending the linguistic scepticism implicit in verbal irony to the text's own existence in language?¹⁰ One of the most common ways in which authors have their works solicit their own ironisation is by inscribing within them objects which reflect -- or, in Sperber and Wilson's sense, interpret -- the nature of the works themselves: books within books, plays within plays etc. (This is of course a major feature of Nathalie Sarraute's work, and one of the most striking senses in which her writing can be called ironic: *Les Fruits d'or* presents a book within a book, *Entre la Vie et la mort* the writing of a novel which doubles the narration and subject-matter of the real novel -- as when the "pantin articulé" witnessed by the writer at the start is written into his novel at the end [EVM 7, 168]. In her drama too, *Le Mensonge* features a play within a play.) By

⁹ This elaboration of the use-mention distinction to address the quotational nature of all discourse, thereby undermining the perception of language as unproblematically referential, in fact gestures towards a school of thought with which pragmatic linguistics otherwise seems to have little in common. Jacques Derrida defines writing (and so language generally) as citational in its basic iterability: "Cette citationnalité, cette duplication ou duplicité, cette itérabilité de la marque n'est pas un accident ou une anomalie, c'est ce (normal/anormal) sans quoi une marque ne pourrait même plus avoir de fonctionnement dit 'normal'" (1972:381). This fundamental scepticism as to the possibility of an utterance whose language would be simply used and not at all mentioned, was, as Ian Maclean points out, one of the major points of contention between Derrida and speech-act theorist John Searle, in the exchange to which the essay just quoted gave rise: "Searle takes the distinction between 'use' and 'mention' to be obvious; Derrida pushes hard at the distinction until he has found an undecidable frontier case and begins his analysis from there" (1985:13).

¹⁰ This authorial articulation of the irony of language cannot of course master it, but merely acknowledge its existence. The way the irony of the text exceeds the author's "epistemological irony", no matter how self-annihilating it makes itself, will be a major factor in my reading of Sarraute.

inviting their audience to complete the irony through recognising or inferring the relevance of the embedded work to the work which contains it, such texts seem designed to ensure that the authorial perspective will be complemented by another. It seems as though this combination of perspectives should permit the dialogic completion of the work, as the reader articulates that ironisation of the text which its author can call for but evidently not articulate himself (for to do so would be to transcend it, reasserting in the process the very authority he wishes to deny).

2. Self and other in Romantic irony:

The way self-reflexivity lets a text become the object of its own irony was of course widely exploited by the German Romantics, in their attempts to represent in artistic form the mind's reflective activity. What is less often noted is their attention to the *intersubjective* quality of irony. Gary Handwerk has observed in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel how this principal ironic thinker among the German Romantics relates the inherently social nature of irony, the way it implicates its addressee in its self-articulation, to the better-known Romantic concern with ironic self-reflexivity as it concerns the nature of subjectivity. This emphasis on communication distances Schlegel from the irony of the infinitely self-negating subject, abhorred by Hegel and Kierkegaard who saw it as the essence of German Romantic (and principally Schlegelian) thought.¹¹ Such "abyssal" irony,

¹¹ Walter Benjamin in 1919 (see bibl. 1974) was one of the first (and remains one of few) to contest this view of the German Romantics. Handwerk's reading of Schlegel relies heavily on Benjamin's reconstruction of Schlegel's epistemology from his fragments.

represented today in the writings of Paul De Man, is dismissed by Handwerk as "from Schlegel's perspective preliminary" (1985:14).¹² Instead, Handwerk sees in Romantic art and philosophy a view of identity as intersubjective, a function of dialogue. The individual as it exists in language and in isolation is incomplete; self-definition is seen by the Romantics (specifically those concerned with the Schlegel brothers' journal *Athenaeum*)¹³ as a social activity, and comes into being in dialogue. Irony, on this basis, by enacting the individual's appeal to the other for self-completion, can, according to Handwerk, "continue and foster an awareness of the nature and dynamics of consensus, a procedure by which relative but adequate social, if not ontological, verities might be established" (14).

How did the Romantics conceive of the incomplete subject and of the role of ironic self-reflexivity in relation to it? Concerned with the relation of the ego to a transcendental Absolute which grounds it and which is intuited in rare moments of revelation, they were faced with art's incapacity to recover that Absolute. Any attempt to reconnect this transcendental realm to that of finite consciousness must be limited to consciousness and so will suffer under the mind's imposition of order on chaos, an action which in fact simply cuts it off entirely from the (chaotic) Absolute. The artist's attention thus shifts to the inevitable reappearance in the artwork of his own subjective limitations. This is the point at which Kierkegaard wrote off the Romantics, accusing them of a narcissistic slide into infinite negativity, and it is at this point that Handwerk detects the beginnings, in Schlegel and Novalis

¹² In Handwerk's view, De Man, by focusing on the polarisation between language's representational and figural roles, excludes its communicative dimension -- for him, "intersubjective feeling is immediately hierarchical, converted into a quantitative relation that abolishes difference" (Handwerk 1985:14).

¹³ These included, aside from the Schlegel brothers, Caroline Michaëlis, Dorothea Mendelssohn-Veit, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Tieck, and Schelling. For an account of the *Athenaeum* group and its philosophy see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1978:16-17 and *passim*).

at least, of an alternative philosophical development which would result in self-elevation rather than self-loss. This development entails the engagement with irony as a social phenomenon which provides the ultimate step in the subject's enactment of its relation to the Absolute.

To understand this use of irony it must not be seen as simply representing the necessary inadequacy of language as an object to the spiritual essence it should convey, the inadequacy of expression to meaning (this would be the philosophical equivalent of the rhetorical understanding of irony as a trope opposing meaning to expression).¹⁴ Such a view creates the paradox whereby ironic self-representation is defined as intending to show the limits of representation and thus the subject's own illusion, while "at the same time the ironic subject seems to be fully adequate to its dilemma, absolute in regard to its own finite flounderings" (Handwerk 1985:46). In this view of irony, the creative ego, by fixing its materialised empirical self in the work, takes on a Godlike role, thus repressing rather than enacting its relation to the Absolute and rendering any real self-transformation impossible.

Schlegel's understanding of irony differs from this by reason of a new perception of subjectivity, one based on the epistemological presuppositions of German Romantic thought (as influenced by Fichte and outlined in Walter Benjamin's 1919 essay on the concept of art criticism in German Romanticism [Benjamin 1974]). For the early Romantics, the basis of all epistemology was not logic but reflection as the immediate recognition of thought, the "thought of

¹⁴ In an early fragment Schlegel stresses the importance of communication over expression in literary writing: "Man muß [etwas] wirklich mitteilen, mit [jemandem] teilen können, nicht bloß sich äußern, allein; sonst wäre es treffender, zu schweigen" [one must really communicate something, be able to share it with someone, and not just express oneself; otherwise it would be better to stay silent] (Schlegel 1958:II 158; all translations from German are mine).

thought". But if the Schlegelian subject is rooted in reflection, that reflection exists in a constant state of *relation*: thought, as reflective, relates in the first instance to itself, and beyond that to the world. Though reflection is immediate, the infinity of other relations within which it exists is only mediately accessible to the subject.

Before looking at how Schlegel puts irony in the service of this fundamentally reflexive subject, we should consider the implications of such reflexive subjectivity for intersubjective relations. The infinitely relative nature of reflection makes a subject-object relation impossible for Romantic epistemology. Within the infinity of relations, reflection creates only its own *form*, but not its *object*.¹⁵ The impossibility of constituting subject and object is due to the fact that once the duality of the reflective self ("thought of thought") is exceeded and a third element introduced, the new complex, "thought of thought of thought", makes it impossible to determine whether the reflective self is subject or object. The limitations of consciousness (for which reflection [thought of thought] is immediate but for which its existence in infinite relation is only mediately perceptible) mean that the intensification of reflection causes a dissolution of form. In fact for Schlegel (so Benjamin), this dissolution, recreated as we shall see by irony, coincides with the revelation of the *Real*. Absolute reflection in its totality of relations is absolute Reality; conscious thought can only know this reality indirectly.

All things are located in the Real and are accessible to the thinking subject through reflection within that infinite system of relations. But because the Real is

¹⁵ The activity of intelligence is a *form*, for Fichte, and in reflection becomes the content of a new form (see J.G. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1845-46, p.67; cited in Benjamin 1974:21). While Fichte would eventually excise the endless quality of reflection from his idea of self-consciousness, by coming to see reflection as creating its own object (a previously posited *Ich*), Schlegel and Novalis rejected this paradoxical use of thought to limit reflection's capacity for endlessness (a move which contradicted Fichte's own awareness of the inseparability of thought from reflection; see Benjamin 1974:28-32).

a medium in which thought is carried out, it can only be filled by thinking beings which, we have seen, think themselves (i.e. recognise themselves) before they can think anything else. This is again why object-relations do not exist: not only can the thinking self not constitute itself as subject in relation to an object, but everything, thinking itself, is as much a subject as it is.¹⁶

The belief that all real entities exist for consciousness in the medium of reflection which mediates their reality, ultimately obliges the Romantics to endow even lifeless objects, as experienced by a conscious subject, with reflexive ability.¹⁷ If, however, one restricts oneself to an understanding of thought as constituted symbolically and as communicable (specifically in language, my area of concern here), the Schlegelian Absolute as the medium in which thought is carried out can be redefined as the medium of symbolic forms and so as a specifically human universe. What we can take from Schlegel's concept of subjectivity is his conviction that there is no such thing as the isolated or stable subject; instead, the

¹⁶ "Jedes Erkanntwerden eines denkenden Wesens setzt dessen Selbsterkenntnis voraus" [every becoming-recognised of a thinking being presupposes its self-recognition] (Benjamin 1974:55). "Wo keine Selbsterkenntnis ist, da ist gar kein Erkennen, wo Selbsterkenntnis ist, ist die Subjekt-Objekt-Korrelation aufgehoben, wenn man will: ein Subjekt ohne Objekt-Korrelat gegeben" [where there is no self-recognition, there is no recognition at all; where there is self-recognition, the subject-object correlation is completely dissolved (aufgehoben), as it were: a subject is given without object-correlate] (56).

¹⁷ "Alles, was im Absolutum ist, alles Wirkliche denkt [...] Für die Romantiker gibt es vom Standpunkt des Absoluten aus kein Nicht-Ich, keine Natur im Sinne eines Wesens, das nicht selbst wird" [everything in the Absolute, everything real, thinks [...] For the Romantics there is from the point of view of the Absolute no non-I, no nature in the sense of a being which does not become a self] (Benjamin 1974:55). Lacan, whose Symbolic order, we shall see, bears a striking affinity to Schlegel's medium of reflection, turns this assimilation of inanimate objects to thinking beings right around, attributing to the linguistically constituted moi the object-quality of a lectern, based on the fact that "ce pupitre n'est pas moins que le moi tributaire du signifiant" (1966:421). "La différence est-elle donc si grande entre le pupitre et nous quant à la conscience? [...] A être placé avec l'un de nous entre deux glaces parallèles, il sera vu se refléter indéfiniment, ce qui veut dire qu'il sera beaucoup plus semblable à celui qui regarde qu'on n'y pense, puisqu'à voir se répéter de la même façon son image, celui-ci aussi se voit bien par les yeux d'un autre quand il se regarde, puisque sans cet autre qu'est son image, il ne se verrait pas se voir" (423-24; my emphasis).

self exists in a constant state of relationship, inseparable from other self-consciousnesses (themselves also relative).¹⁸

Self-reflexivity and intersubjectivity thus merge for Schlegel, making abundantly clear why irony should be the vehicle for his worldview. I shall end my examination of his ideas by looking briefly at the way irony's affinity with the truth of the subject lets it enact this truth in art. First, though, the striking compatibility of much of his work with contemporary ideas on subjectivity should be underlined.

The Schlegelian subject's location in a medium of symbolic forms where its position is always relative to that of all other subjects, invites comparison with Lacan's conception of the subject as "ce que le signifiant représente, et il ne saurait rien représenter que pour un autre signifiant, à quoi dès lors se réduit le sujet qui écoute" (1966:835). If the psychoanalyst must "faire de son être l'axe de tant de vies" it is because of a dialectic which "l'engage avec ces vies dans un mouvement symbolique" (321). In fact, Romantic epistemology, especially in Benjamin's articulation of it, anticipates Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in several important ways. We can compare the mystical nature of the Romantic Absolute to the (for consciousness) mysterious quality of the unconscious: Schlegel's representation of "total subjectivity" in terms of a transcendent Absolute which cannot be appropriated, becomes internalised by Freud *within* the subject with the discovery of the ubiquitous but never wholly accessible unconscious. Lacan's interpretation

¹⁸ There are clear connections here to the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theory of dialogue is of course relevant to this whole discussion (his work will be discussed in the next chapter, in the context of the novel form). Though Michael Holquist opposes Bakhtin's ideas to those of Romanticism (1990:22), he sums up his philosophy in terms which suggest close links to that of Schlegel: "Existence is *sobytie sobytiya*, the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it" (41).

of Freudian theory in linguistic terms, his reconception of the unconscious as structured by the suprapersonal Symbolic order and like a language, emphasises the kinship of psychoanalytic theory with Schlegelian Romanticism. While only the subject can articulate the unconscious, the fact that that unconscious both comes from without and only articulates itself without (in address) means that his articulation of it exceeds him and is transindividual (see Lacan 1966:258).

Seeing the Symbolic order as a "medium of reflection" allows us to trace the ancestry of the post-Freudian psyche back at least to the plight of the Romantic subject. For Schlegel (unlike Kant), the perceiving self is a false source of recognition and can attain full subjectivity only through the mediated discovery (via reflection) of its infinite relations. Similarly, Lacan's subject must transcend the false consciousness of the ego (the product of the mirror-stage), and become conscious of the irreducible relativity of his position in the Symbolic order which mediates the Real to him.¹⁹ Schlegel's belief that, unlike perception, *thought* can grasp the nature of identity, further encourages us to draw a parallel between the medium of reflection and Lacan's Symbolic order: "We cannot look at ourselves, the self always disappears from us in the process. We can certainly think ourselves, however. Then to our astonishment we appear to ourselves as infinite, whereas in daily life we feel so thoroughly finite".²⁰

¹⁹ In a late lecture, Schlegel formulates the ego-subject distinction in terms strikingly close to Lacan: "Wo der Gedanke des Ichs nicht eins ist mit dem Begriffe der Welt, kann man sagen, daß dies reine Denken des Gedankens des Ichs nur zu einem ewigen *Sich-Selbst-Abspiegeln*, zu einer unendlichen Reihe von Spiegelbildern führt, die immer nur dasselbe und nichts Neues enthalten" [where the thought of the self is not one with the concept of the world, one can say that this pure thinking of the thought of the self leads only to an eternal mirroring of the self, to an endless series of mirror-images which contain nothing new but only ever the same old thing] (F. Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen* II, 1846, p.38; cited in Benjamin 1974:35; my emphasis).

²⁰ "Anschauen können wir uns nicht, das Ich verschwindet uns dabei immer. Denken können wir uns aber freilich. Wir erscheinen uns dann zu unserm Erstaunen unendlich, da wir uns doch im gewöhnlichen Leben so durchaus endlich fühlen" (F. Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen* II, 1846, p.13; cited in Benjamin 1974:32). Benjamin notes that in his later Windischmann lectures, Schlegel shifts from a view of the origin of

There is even justification for taking language as the archetype of Schlegel's medium of reflection. Benjamin points out that for Schlegel, language in fact gives us an intuition of the Absolute System (1974:47). Hence the importance of the concept of *Witz* (wit/joke) in early Romantic terminology, an importance it would retain for Freud and Lacan. *Witz* for Schlegel was the explosion of a mind which was tied up (Schlegel 1958:II 158). As such it was the very "principle and organ of universal philosophy", providing us, through its nature as "combinatory thought", with "*échappées de vue* into infinity" (200). This combinatory quality is evidence that language is a system with its own secret internal relationships ("geheime Ordensverbindungen" [364]), that words often understand themselves better than their users do ("daß die Worte sich selbst oft besser verstehen, als diejenigen, von denen sie gebraucht werden" [364]). In the same way, according to Lacan (in a lesson he attributes to Freud), the *Witz*, by surprising the subject, illustrates how "le signifiant joue et gagne [...] avant que le sujet s'en avise"; what it illuminates by its flash is "la division du sujet avec lui-même" (Lacan 1966:840). The only major difference between the role of language in Schlegel and Lacan appears to be that while for Schlegel it reveals the Absolute System (the Real, in his view), for Lacan it reveals the ordering principle of the unconscious, which in turn governs the individual. For Lacan, in other words, the closest we can ever get to the Real is the (ironic) awareness of our definition by language, its mediator.

Given the nature of identity as both reflexive and intersubjective, that irony should be its privileged vehicle makes sense. Seen against this ontological

being as a "thought-act" to seeing it as emerging from pure desire or love. Unfortunately, Benjamin doesn't pursue this development; rather he dismisses Schlegel's train of thought at this time as "verschwommen" [vague] (39 n.74).

background, how does Romantic irony work? In literature, prose, specifically the novel, is for Schlegel the principal ironic form, for as the medium of reflection of all poetic forms it is the artistic incarnation of the status of language as the medium of reflection in which all individual utterances partake. Like the reflexivity of subjectivity, the reflexivity of artistic irony is both formal and operates in an infinity of relations. Form in art ("form", given the formal nature of symbolic thought, operates at the level of language as well as of structure) enacts for Schlegel the self-limitation of reflection; thus for him the novel manifests the highest degree of poetic reflection, since its lack of imposed formal limitations requires it to impose its own reflexive limits. The *ironic* work's dissolution of that form from within itself (dissolution of form, as we saw, coinciding for the subject with the revelation of the Real as the totality of relations) aims at the integration of the limited work as an instance in the medium of art, into the infinity of relations of the Absolute of artforms.

The intersubjectivity of irony enacts the intersubjectivity of being, by implicating the reader in this absolutisation of the artwork. The Schlegelian ironist with his finite consciousness understands his incomplete nature in relation to the Absolute in terms of his existence-in-relation with other subjects, the impossibility of whose objectification enacts the impossibility of appropriating that Absolute. Every shared experience will thus be a microcosm of the Absolute. To achieve this microcosmic totality through art, the artist must not simply represent himself in the ironic work (for this would imply that he himself had transcended his limited knowledge). The work itself must also manifest through formal irony its dependence on the reading subject. For Schlegel, this ideal of dialogue was

embodied in Socrates: his method of argument through dialogue, his dismantling, through negative ironic questioning, of the conceptual frameworks and certitudes of his interlocutors, testified to his total participation in the finitude and ignorance of human nature.²¹ In the same way, the writing subject must acknowledge his own permanent *Dialogzustand* ("state of dialogue" [Jochen Hörisch's term, quoted in Handwerk 1985:53]), and make his dependence on the reader evident in his text. Thus the thoroughly ironic text will ultimately suspend itself, as every utterance is suspended, in the anticipation of a response.

Given the impossibility of simple object-relations, the artwork cannot be the mere passive object of the critical gaze, but is instead for Schlegel a centre of reflection within the totality of artforms, with self-imposed formal (structural and linguistic) limitations. This leads him to claim that the work itself will actively participate in the dissolution of its form which restores it to the totality of art, by registering the reader's recognition of it as formally self-limited reflection. Formal irony thus becomes the text's way of actively appealing to the reader to make that recognition which it can then share. This certainly seems to be a somewhat mystical formalism, with the work recognising itself as self-limited reflection through communion with the reader in a transcendently-determined medium. Yet much of its occult quality disappears if we substitute for the transcendental realm of

²¹ Schlegel doesn't see Socrates' negative viewpoint as confined to one side of the dialogue, transcendent in relation to its "object" (the words of the interlocutor); rather Plato's representation of Socrates' philosophy of human ignorance had to be in dialogue in order to represent a fundamental duality of thought which "in the alternating current of speech and counter-speech or rather of thought and counter-thought, moves in a living manner" ("im wechselnden Strome der Rede und Gegenrede oder vielmehr des Denkens und Gegendenkens sich lebendig fortbewegt"; Schlegel 1958:X 353; cited in Behler 1972:64). Dialogue, by refusing a position of authority, acknowledges in formal terms the limited nature of any expression of knowledge. Hence, for Schlegel, Plato's attempt "to represent artificially in conversations this ever onward-striving movement of his mind toward complete knowledge and recognition of the Highest, this eternal becoming, shaping and development of his ideas" ("diesen immer weiter strebenden Gang seines Geistes nach vollendetem Wissen und Erkenntnis des Höchsten, dieses ewige Werden, Bilden und Entwickeln seiner Ideen [...] in Gesprächen künstlich darzustellen"; 1958:XII 120; cited in Behler 1972:98).

communion which attempts to account for what is inaccessible to the conscious Romantic subject, the idea of a shared linguistic unconscious which is similarly inaccessible to (and so also "transcends" in some way) consciousness, and which is located within language rather than beyond or beneath it. The coexistence in language of reader and text means that the reader can recognise the formal limitations of the text, a recognition which the text as limited form "demands" by the way its language exceeds its intentional limits (in the "unconscious" of its language). The text's demand thus subtends the writing subject's demand to be read ironically, the latter reinforcing the former and merging with it in language's conscious and unconscious aspects, in what it acknowledges and what its endless relativity lets it include without acknowledging. The distinction between the text's irony and the author's irony, or between the work's conscious and unconscious irony, is a major one and, as my reading of Nathalie Sarraute will aim to show, remains valid even when the conscious authorial irony appears to endorse fully and indeed demand the subversion of the work's intentionality by its linguistic unconscious (represented by the reader as a linguistic subject). The way Schlegel's theory lets us postulate the existence of a textual consciousness and unconscious justifies Benjamin's comment that "he captured the laws of the mind in the artwork itself, instead of making the artwork the mere by-product of subjectivity",²² a comment which, as we shall now see more closely, is equally if not even more relevant to Lacan.

²² "Er hat die Gesetze des Geistes in das Kunstwerk selbst gebannt, anstatt dieses zum bloßen Nebenprodukt der Subjektivität zu machen" (1974:71).

3. Lacan: the subject, irony, and fiction:

The affinity of Lacan's theory of the subject to Schlegel's epistemology is clear. To justify fully calling it an ironic theory, in the absence of any detailed discussion of irony by Lacan (but see pp.19-20), demands that we engage more closely with it. In fact, as I shall argue, Lacan's importance for the discussion of irony is double: not only can the conception of subjectivity he articulates be called ironic; the articulation itself takes account in striking fashion of the aspects of language ironists have long been at pains to expose -- its conventionality and its nature as a transindividual medium which determines its speaker.

How does Lacanian theory accommodate the questions which have been of concern to us: identity and linguistic communication, and their relation to irony and the act of reading? His "return to Freud" emphasises the way Freudian analysis focuses on the analysand's use of language in a dialogue situation; in this way, he argues, it reveals how the subject constantly speaks his unconscious desire, but in a transindividual articulation which exceeds him: "L'inconscient, à partir de Freud, est une chaîne de signifiants qui quelque part (sur une autre scène, écrit-il) se répète et insiste pour interférer dans les coupures que lui offre le discours effectif et la cogitation qu'il informe" (Lacan 1966:799). Lacan sees the functioning of the unconscious as governed by key linguistic processes, the psychic activities of condensation and displacement being founded along the axes of metaphor and metonymy which structure language in paradigmatic and syntagmatic terms (505-11; 689).²³ This means that the subject's integrity is located within the symbolic

²³ He acknowledges his debt to Roman Jakobson (1956) for this view of linguistic structure.

structure, but his linguistic identity is veiled from him through language's signifying function: once the individual assumes conscious control of his discourse, his subjectivity can only be spoken between the lines.

How is desire as the essence of subjectivity conveyed in language? The closeness of the language-desire relationship is illustrated by Lacan's elaboration, in the essay "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir", of the *graphe du désir*. It is based on the *point de capiton*, which is the graphic representation of the retro-active working of signification, of the way "le signifiant arrête le glissement autrement indéfini de la signification" (805).²⁴ Desire in fact grounds the subject's accession to the symbolic register. This happens in the Oedipus complex with "the assumption of a desire which is originally another's and which in its displacements, is perpetually other than itself" (Mehlman 1972b:45 n.11). The father's intervention breaks open the infant's dualistic relation with the mother first into a triad (an echo of Schlegel's "thought of thought of thought") and through it into the endless network of relations of the Symbolic order.²⁵

The subject represents himself in discourse as *sujet de l'énoncé* by means of the linguistic place-holders which, condensed into one imaginary representation,

²⁴ This establishment of signification happens on the level not of the sign but of the utterance as a whole, the sentence which "ne boucle sa signification qu'avec son dernier terme, chaque terme étant anticipé dans la construction de tous les autres, et inversement scellant leur sens par son effet rétroactif" (805).

²⁵ For reasons of space, I assume familiarity with Lacan's version of the Oedipal complex. Its key aspect is the way the father's intervention inaugurates symbolisation in the child by the child's attribution to him of the primordial signifier of desire, the phallus. The repression, by the Law of the Father, of the original phallic signifier in the subject institutes the unconscious in a metaphorical substitution of one signifier for another: the replacement signifier (the Law) causes the implied one (the phallus) to move under the bar which separates signifier from signified and act as a signified. Naming thus begins with the repression of the desire to be in favour of the desire to have (the phallus); the child's continued existence in language prolongs this engagement with substitute objects. Language thus both creates and maintains the unconscious: the subject as it exists in language is split right from its origin, with the unconscious a chain of signifiers repressed in the ego's engagement with substitutes. Like Schlegel, Lacan sees the conscious subject as incomplete in a totality of language, although here it is the individual's very experience of language which, through repression, creates a plane of his being inaccessible to him.

form the ego with which he can more or less identify. It is not here, for Lacan, that the truth of the subject's unconscious (i.e. desire) articulates itself, but in the speaker's directly subjective participation in discourse as *sujet de l'énonciation*. It is through the *act* of enunciation that the subject comes to be and that *Spaltung* constantly recurs (as *refente*) along the chain of discourse; the product of the enunciation (the *énoncé*) only represents half the truth of the subject. Thus "la présence de l'inconscient, pour se situer au lieu de l'Autre, est à chercher en tout discours, en son énonciation" (Lacan 1966:834).

This explains how, through language which constitutes the *moi* of the *énoncé* by repressing the subject of desire, so limiting communication to an exchange between egos,²⁶ full subjectivity can still be experienced. If the subject of desire manifests itself in *énonciation*, the only way to bring the subject of language to full self-awareness is through awareness of his *énonciation* which can only be perceived by a fully receptive and responsive addressee. The act of dialogue thus makes possible full self-knowledge mediated through the interlocutor, the one to whom the *énoncé* is addressed.

Understanding the subject of the unconscious as the subject of desire makes clear why authentic communication is necessary to the establishment of full subjectivity. The birth of the desire which lets the child become a subject depends on the presence of the Other. The subject is inscribed only in terms of its relation to the Other and through the desire of the Other. This happens in the infant-mother

²⁶ Communication between subjects is always mediated by a relationship of the *moi* to a "moi autre mais semblable": "Fondamentalement, ce sont [de vrais sujets] que je vise chaque fois que je prononce une vraie parole, mais j'atteins toujours aa' [the "moi-moi autre" axis] par réflexion. Je vise toujours les vrais sujets, et il me faut me contenter des ombres. Le sujet est séparé des Autres, les vrais, par le mur du langage" (Lacan 1978:286).

relationship when the mother introduces the child to the universe of communication by responding to a cry which she interprets as a demand (for food etc.). Her status as specular other is here conflated with that as absolute Other, place of language, for by interpreting the cry as a demand she inscribes the child in the Symbolic order, subjecting it to the universe of her own signifiers.²⁷ As a result of this encounter with "la mise en forme signifiante comme telle" and the fact that "c'est du lieu de l'Autre qu'est émis son message" (Lacan 1966:690), the child's lived experience becomes "lesté du réseau signifiant de l'Autre" (Dor 1985:187). This initiation into symbolic communication will culminate in the "Nom du Père" metaphor and in the consequent mastery of articulate language.

The fact that the mother's original response was not demanded gives it a quality of *excess* of love which demand can by definition never recapture. Because this unsought love appeared prior to symbolic communication, desire of it can never be articulated; it is unnameable. Thus this excess of love is the cause and eternally displaced object of a desire the genesis and paradox of which is that it is founded and articulated *within* demand in order to transmit an unconscious truth *beyond* that demand. Language thus articulates and constantly recreates a desire beyond itself, a desire aroused and simultaneously repressed in the very origin of that language in the subject (and of the subject in language). In other words, because the language of the subject is founded in that of the Other, and because desire, created by language, perpetuates itself through the inadequacy of the linguistic demand the

²⁷ The imposition of the signifier onto the child's manifestation of need results in "une déviation des besoins de l'homme du fait qu'il parle, en ce sens qu'aussi loin que ses besoins sont assujettis à la demande, ils lui reviennent aliénés [...] Ce qui ainsi se trouve aliéné dans les besoins constitue une *Urverdrängung* [primary repression] de ne pouvoir, par hypothèse, s'articuler dans la demande: mais qui apparaît dans un rejeton, qui est ce qui se présente chez l'homme comme le désir (*das Begehren*)" (Lacan 1966:690).

subject addresses to the Other, we can say that the desire of the subject is born and ever renewed at the level of the language of the Other.

This external origin of the unconscious subject as subject of desire elucidates the importance of dialogue in self-understanding. In fact, the role of the "completing other" in the subject's self-*énonciation* within language, illustrates the importance to Lacanian theory of *inference*, which, we have seen, is also central to Sperber and Wilson's theory of communication. By grounding both speaker's intention (twofold for Sperber and Wilson: to inform, and to communicate that informative intention [1986:29]) and addressee's inference, the two mechanisms by which verbal communication is achieved, in unconscious forces which determine them and which are located in language as a whole, Lacan can define interlocution as constituting not only the transmission of a message but an intersubjective truth. For him, the coded message is the place of the *moi*, not of the whole subject. Although discourse originates in the Other and only produces itself reflexively in the subject, the subject-Other relationship of self and interlocutor lapses repeatedly into an exchange between egos, the inevitable result of language's repression of desire in the subject. As a result of the mother's original identification of the child's cry as a demand, full communication will always entail the recognition of one's own message as actually coming from the other in inverted form ("l'émetteur reçoit du récepteur son propre message sous une forme inversée" [Lacan 1966:298]). This in turn requires recognising the other as an

Autre absolu, visé au-delà de tout ce que vous pourrez connaître et pour qui la reconnaissance n'a justement à valoir que parce qu'il est au-delà du connu. C'est dans la reconnaissance que vous l'instituez, et non pas comme un élément pur et simple de la réalité, un pion, une marionnette, mais un absolu irréductible, de l'existence duquel comme sujet dépend la valeur même de la parole dans laquelle vous vous faites reconnaître. (Lacan 1981:62-63).

Yet this presence of the Other in one's own discourse as origin of it is implicit and unconscious to the speaking subject. How precisely can signifying articulation make it explicit, become a "parole pleine"?

The (unintended) joke provides a vivid example of the role of the Other in the creation of meaning. It is the archetype of meaning-creation for Lacan, since it illustrates how meaning is distinct from the code, and created on the level of the signifier rather than of the signified. That the joke can have the status of a message implies that the Other -- the particular interlocutor as representative of the totality of language -- authorises its violation of the code as meaningful. In intentional articulation, for which the joke is the model, the interlocutor provides the same authorisation, his response attesting to the subject that the sequence of signifiers articulated in his demand is not an enigmatic proposition but conveys a certain signification. While in intentional communication the subject of desire does not manifest itself as openly as in the involuntary joke, the demand for the other's response and affirmation is itself always, for Lacan, an expression of desire for the other. As Joël Dor explains it:

Le sens de la demande reste tributaire du "bon vouloir" de l'autre qui va accorder, par la nature même de sa réponse, telle signification plutôt que telle autre à la concaténation signifiante de l'appel [...] En effet, parce que les signifiants de la demande ouvrent à l'autre la possibilité d'un choix commutatif, le sens de la demande sera donc délivré, en dernière extrémité, par la sélection commutative des signifiants retenue, donc désirée par l'autre et dont témoignera le sens de sa réponse. L'autre *fixe* ainsi la signification de la demande en inscrivant d'une barre des signifiés sous les signifiants de l'appel du sujet. (1985:235)

Thus Lacan understands interlocution as manifesting in the speaker's desire that the addressee lend meaning to the sequence of signifiers and make this meaning manifest in his response, the fundamental human "desire of the desire of the other".

The inferential character of this attribution of meaning by the addressee suggests that it is quite possible to reconcile the pragmatic focus on the "how" of communication with Lacan's description of the coming into being of subjectivity and the unconscious, a description which attempts to explain *why* communication takes place as it does by defining its unconscious motivation.

The ironic dimension of Lacanian subjectivity is of course that the Other, embodiment of the totality of language, is also and primarily for consciousness the specular other, just as its own *moi* inevitably dominates its subjectivity. Imaginary relations persist on into the Symbolic order from the infant's identification with the mother who, by conflating the positions of other and Other, founded this imbrication of the Imaginary in the Symbolic. Verbal irony can be seen in Lacanian terms as acting out the self's determination by the Symbolic order which represses and thus contains its unconscious. By demonstrating that signification is not meaning, verbal irony reminds us that what we take to be expression and truth is a function of linguistic convention or the Symbolic order, and by its feigned ignorance of the falsity of its utterance it simulates consciousness's unawareness of its unconscious determination, of its split subjectivity and problematic identity. Finally, by appealing to the interlocutor for interpretation it acts out the recognition of the unconscious as governed by the Symbolic order which the other as interlocutor represents.

The self-reflexivity of "epistemological irony", if defined in Lacanian terms, aims not only to *recognise* but actually to *unseat* the Imaginary self (the ego), product of the desire for affirmation of identity (in the mirror-stage), and which

subjects use to pose the question of identity (through substitute desires) at a level that avoids confrontation with its provisional nature. Yet the ineffability of the Symbolic order means that the most the ironic subject can do alone is recognise the constitution of identity by language: given the shared limitations of its language and consciousness it can never abolish through language its historically constituted ego, the persistent presence of the Imaginary in its psyche. In literature, then, the most that the *énoncé* can achieve is the revelation of the symptoms of the Imaginary that block the full emergence of the Symbolic. Irony's intersubjectivity, considered in a Lacanian context, comes into play at this point, for it seems to offer the possibility of transcending that Imaginary. This transcendence which the text can anticipate is dependent on the reader, addressee of the *énoncé*, perceiving its unconscious as embodied in its *énonciation*, in the necessarily unrepresented dialogue to which the text invites the reader. The dynamics of this invitation, and the implications which the particular nature of the text-reader dialogue may have for it, will be discussed in the next chapter.

The concept of irony I have just outlined is evidently far removed from the self-possessed irony condemned by Lang, Barthes and others. The original complexity of Romantic irony may have been suppressed or overlooked by subsequent writers who preferred to put themselves in a position of omniscience than to accept the dissolution of identity. Yet this, as I hope I have made clear, is to betray the insights of the early Romantics, insights for which irony was the privileged vehicle. In throwing expression into question, the ironist is not necessarily opposing to it a meaning independent of language and to which he implicitly claims to have access. Nor is he simply undermining intentionality in

discourse by pointing up the conventional nature of all language: this is the activity Lang calls "humour" and favours over irony in its foregrounding of the signifier over the signified, its production of texts where meaning is shown to be an effect of language. Yet in their aim of foregrounding the signifier, and of having the reader recognise this foregrounding as intentional (Sperber and Wilson's informative and communicative intentions), such "humorous" texts have a clear intentional agenda of their own (a fact dissimulated by them and ignored by Lang). Instead, irony, though it accepts that language governs thought, still uses language and manifests intention, yet it does so in order not simply to convince but rather to create a situation of dialogue in which an intersubjective truth may emerge: through language but not in language. Thus we can define as an ironic conception of language and communication one which shares Lang's belief that meaning is an effect of language, but which differs by its emphasis on the role of the addressee in the constitution of that meaning, and on the validation which this involvement brings. Such a conception sees that communication depends not only on the author's intentional articulation but also on its authorisation through the inferential participation of the addressee.

The intentional articulation does, however, remain active in the dialogic address, and this fact, I wish to suggest, is bound to complicate the terms on which the addressee is invited to constitute meaning. The status of Lacan's own exposition of his theory illustrates the problem: he argues that, as a result of the "castration" of the subject by language, truth can emerge only in dialogue; yet that argument, monologically represented by his text alone, has its own powerful truth-claim. This

problem largely accounts for the extremely complex nature of Lacan's discourse, the self-conscious motive for which Malcolm Bowie caricatures thus: "The more ragged, desiring, intentional, overdetermined, uncircumscribable my theorising becomes, the more it resembles the unconscious that my theorising postulates" (Bowie 1987:173).²⁸ The problem is the conflict between, on the one hand, Lacan's concept of language as both unconsciously determined (thus uncontrollable) and untrue to reality in its repression of the subject's desire, and, on the other, his reliance on language to give form to this theoretical insight. The complexity of his writing seems to be an attempt to let the unconscious articulate itself freely in his discourse and so counteract the way language, as symbolic, ironically works to reinforce the ego and Imaginary relations. Though there may be some question as to how far this can be achieved, his strategies for going beyond the propositional language of theory do at least demonstrate the limits of that language, and also suggest the paradoxically greater capacity for "truth" of a language which doesn't conceal its fictional status. To close this discussion of theories of irony, I should like to look briefly at the way literary (and specifically fictional)²⁹ discourse seems to offer some mitigation of the linguistic subject's ironic predicament, to the point where Lacan has it usurp his own logical argument. How far this resolution works

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, in a reading of Lacan's "Séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée'", claims that "le 'style' de Lacan était fait pour déjouer longtemps tout accès à un contenu isolable, à un sens univoque, déterminable au-delà de l'écriture" (1975:101). Yet Derrida highlights the way Lacan's text seeks, and claims to represent, a truth, and shows how, in the discussion of Poe's story, "la requête de vérité conduit à mettre de côté la scène d'écriture" (110). In his reading of Poe's text and in his own writing, the play of the signifier (the letter) is subordinated to the claim to stable meaning: "Le déplacement du signifiant est donc analysé comme un signifié, comme l'objet raconté dans une nouvelle" (105).

²⁹ On the identification of fictionality as one of the dominant ways in which literature is defined, see Genette (1991:11-40), who traces this tendency back to Aristotle. While he opposes to it the criterion of form, perceived as either intrinsic to the text or imposed by the reader, he does acknowledge that, given the affinity of fictionality to Kant's aesthetic disinterestedness, if there existed "un et un seul moyen pour le langage de se faire à coup sûr oeuvre d'art, ce moyen [serait] sans doute bien la fiction" (20).

is another issue, and one that will be a topic of concern in the next chapter, in the context of a discussion of dialogue in the novel.

The imbrication of fiction in psychoanalytic theory, acknowledged already by Freud ("the theory of the instincts is so to say our mythology" [1964:XXII 95]) and given another self-conscious turn by Lacan, is discussed in detail by Shoshana Felman (1987).³² Both Freud and Lacan build their theories around the story of Oedipus. For Freud, *Oedipus Rex* bears witness to the universality of wish, wish-fulfilment and primordial incestuous and parricidal desires; Lacan, on the other hand, reads "beyond Oedipus" (and Freud) to see illustrated in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Oedipus recognises and assumes responsibility for his unknown history, the vital importance to self-knowledge of the performative speech act in which the speaker takes responsibility for his "other" (unconscious) life. From Freud to Lacan, the focus on the Oedipus fiction changes from the initial telling to Oedipus of the difference of his history from what he knew, to his own performative articulation of that history and acknowledgment of responsibility for the "discourse of the Other" (here the Oracle) in his life (Felman 1987:131).

How does the literary/mythical foundation of psychoanalysis influence its theoretical status? Lacan reads Freud, and specifically *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in terms of the literary Oedipus. Freud's late insights regarding the death-instinct and the repetition compulsion are prefigured for Lacan in the final stage of the Oedipus story where Oedipus's curse on his sons repeats his own tragedy of cursed existence and parental rejection. Freud's discussion of the way the

³² See especially Ch.5: "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis". This is an extended and slightly modified version of an earlier article bearing the same name (Felman 1983).

compulsion to repeat exceeds the wish for pleasure also approaches *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to the Lacanian view of the unconscious and of the insistence of the signifier in the signifying chain (of the text as of life [Felman 1987:136-39]). But this text is also important for what it says about the status of psychoanalytic theory: Freud's telling and retelling of the story of psychoanalysis is itself active, performative as well as cognitive, and suggests that we can only talk about the libido in mythical terms. To demystify literal belief in, and simplified interpretation of the first myth of Oedipus, he creates a new myth (the death instinct), based on the later Oedipus story; thus his strategy of demystification involves a new narrative mythification. For Lacan (so Felman), Freud's passage from one myth to another, his expropriation of his own earlier theory and/or narrative, enacts the "inherent, radical, and destined self-expropriation" of psychoanalysis (148). For this reason, Felman sees the rejection of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* by the psychoanalytic establishment as censoring Freud's ultimate narrative announcement of the inherent exile of psychoanalysis from any non-mythical access to truth, "an exile, that is, from any final rest in a knowledge guaranteed by the self-possessed kingdom of a theory, and the constrained departure from this kingdom into an uncertain psychoanalytic *destiny of erring*" (149).³³

The Oedipal myth, as that which constitutes psychoanalytic theory, is thus its Other, and so the self-conscious discourse of psychoanalysis is obliged in the cause of truth to recognise and assume its irreducibly mythical determination. The psychoanalytic story is thus always the scene of its own theoretical self-subversion:

³³ Felman sees the censoring of Lacan's protestation in turn as a repetition of the repressive Oedipal gesture of self-blinding, the eradication by psychoanalysis of the threat of its own self-expropriation. The psychoanalytic establishment has thus, she claims, censored what is in fact the essential, revolutionary feature of psychoanalytic discourse: its radically self-critical and self-transgressive movement.

as the Oedipal myth overturns the hero's mastery of his life story by having him, in telling it, repeat its hold over him (in making him repeat the curse), so, in its own discourse, psychoanalysis should assume and enact the irreducible presence of its own mythical unconscious. (The myth is thus doubly determining: it is not only the source text of psychoanalysis but also itself illustrates the self-subversive nature of any discourse which attempts to analyse the self.) Hence, for Felman, the idiosyncrasies of Lacan's style:

The psychoanalytic narration, in Lacan's conception (modelled as it is on analytic dialogue), is always, necessarily, *different from itself*. In the very way it is narrated, the psychoanalytic theory inscribes (is constituted by) a radical *self-difference*. And this self-difference, this *Spaltung* in (within) the theory, this unavoidable *breach of theory*, is embodied by the myth, *is the myth*. (1983:1046)

But how far can Lacan's style of narration reproduce the inclusion of its Other which the analytic dialogue (its model, according to Felman) can achieve? A central problem in this regard seems to be the representational nature of his discourse. Felman herself, while arguing the necessity of Lacan's style to the truth of his insights, indirectly acknowledges that his writing is the *representation* rather than the enactment of dialogic interaction with the Other: his style is "modelled [...] on [the] analytic dialogue" (1983:1046; 1987:153), and his narrative is a "symptom", a "dramatic repetition" of the impossibility of burying the speech of the unconscious (1987:149-50). There is thus much conscious intentionality in this self-proclaimed "style ironique d'une mise en question des fondements de cette discipline" (Lacan 1966:238), and the quotation from Felman above, with its tension between "inscribing" and "being constituted by" self-difference, between intentional activity

and passive experience, betrays this.³² How far can this ironic representation really be seen as incorporating the unconscious of theory within it, as manifesting a dialogue of theory with its Other? There are (at least) two dimensions to the question: as (however problematically) theoretical discourse, Lacan's psychoanalytic writing must have a strong propositional content and informative intention which will have implications for its desire for dialogic relativisation. Secondly, as the representation in writing not only of a theory but of the oral dialogue born of the analytic praxis, his texts raise the question of the compatibility of writing (and, by extension, representation in general) with the dialogue to which irony aspires.

It could be argued that such questions ignore the nature of the terms in which Lacan, given his understanding of identity and language, demands to be read. After all, his view of the subject of language involves an utterly new paradigm for understanding the psyche, with a fundamental split running through all the linguistic functions of subjectivity we are accustomed to seeing as unitary (narrative coherence, intention, representation, interpretation etc.). However, readers are not to be censured for the "inevitable ideological bias" they bring to interpretation, for continuing to give credence to such unitary concepts, if only in an attempted "'suturing' over of the fundamental split [of the Lacanian subject] with the various commitments (threads) of ideology" (Davis 1983a:857). In fact, Lacan's own understanding of language recognises the inevitability of ideologically determined readings. For despite the eruption of the unconscious into discourse, that discourse remains, on the surface at least, a conscious one, given that language in the first

³² In the 1987 version of this passage, the nature of Lacan's writing as representing rather than enacting self-difference is more openly acknowledged: here his theoretical language is claimed only to "inscribe" self-difference, not to be "constituted by" it (1987:153).

instance causes the repression of desire and establishes communication along the *moi-moi autre* axis (see p.39 n.26), and that the subject of desire is manifested in the *énonciation* rather than the *énoncé*, to be recognised by an addressee. There is clearly a conscious agenda in Lacan's discourse, one which demands that *both* aspects of the double-edged nature of language be borne in mind, the ego-presenting as well as the desire-repressing. This conscious agenda justifies engaging with his writings in terms of issues like intentionality, propositional content, and the conscious act of representation.

To turn to the first question: how far is the aim of a dialogue of theory with its Other in Lacan impeded by the propositional nature of the theoretical element? The problem is that there is a conscious body of knowledge to be articulated despite the distorting nature of that articulation. The fact that language distorts is indeed part of that body of knowledge, as is the awareness that the only way to overcome the self-ignorance produced by language is in dialogue. Thus Lacan's writing has, at a certain point, to deal with the act of dialogue as referent. In order for his claim that truth lies in intersubjectivity to be itself true, his writing should be both a statement of this truth and fulfil the conditions of truth -- be somehow intersubjective, dialogic. Lacan's *practice*, his actual behaviour as psychoanalyst in the analytic situation, is certainly dialogic, acknowledging that, given the unconscious forces at work in the analyst's own interpretation, the *performative* aspect of his intervention will take priority over the *informative*. Yet though his writing tries to manifest that insight by embodying both performative and informative dimensions of language, it is clear that he has the answer to the question of the subject (the performative practice has resulted in information) before getting

it -- as the theory dictates and the performative aspect of his language implies -- through interlocution, in this case with the reader. The pedagogic function of his writings is certainly a factor here: if Lacan wishes his teaching to be effective and his writings to communicate a method, then he cannot entirely escape propositionality.

In assimilating the performative nature of his practice, the *énonciation*, to an informative, pedagogic intention, Lacan compromises it, neutralising its nature as appeal to the reader by didactically indicating its interpretation in advance, thus turning it into a kind of signified. Though the reader is encouraged to make his own spontaneous associations the exact nature of which Lacan cannot foresee, the fact that they take place at all has a certain signification, intentionally sought by his text. Rather than letting the unconscious speak in his discourse (an event which depends on an other acting as Other), Lacan's use of language can, then, be seen as a *parody* of unconscious speech, a simulation of what should come into being through communication in what is only one side of a communication with the reader. Thus Malcolm Bowie can ask why, if *all* language is the metonymic displacement of desire, "a sumptuously polyvalent language [is] to be preferred to the one-thing-at-a-time languages of logic, or conceptual analysis, or empirical description, or traditional psychoanalytic theory" (1987:130).

On this score, ironic fiction's avowed ignorance -- it professes in its address to the reader no claim to know the answer to the questions about knowledge and truth which it implicitly poses -- certainly seems to put it at an advantage. The lack in literature of any obligation to inform means that the ironic profession of Socratic ignorance (knowing that one knows nothing) can be made without contradicting any

propositional content to be transmitted beyond the text. In literature, irony can take precedence over the fictional referent, thus avoiding any conflict between simultaneous claims to knowledge and ignorance while at the same time transcending the naïve assumption that unproblematic expression is possible in language. Insofar as it appeals to the addressee for its completion, ironic fiction can be seen to embody the belief shared by Lacan's discourse, that truth only emerges in a situation of dialogue; yet by not stating this in propositional form (which would be a self-contradiction), by articulating itself in an *énoncé* which is openly inadequate to the truth the work seeks, it locates that truth entirely in the reader's ironisation of it, his completion of its *énonciation*. As the Lacanian analyst remains silent in order to allow the unconscious of the analysand's language to make itself heard, the ironist depends on the reader's silent actualisation of the text's ironic *énonciation* in order that a transindividual truth may become audible against his own articulated discourse.

However, if the text wishes the reader to actualise its ironic enunciation, it must contain some indications to this end, implicit instructions that such an enunciation is necessary (I have suggested *mise en abyme* to be one such indication). But in soliciting its ironisation by the reader, the text indicates the kind of response it desires; and by indicating the desired response, it potentially provides it. In its projection of an ironic worldview, it manifests fiction's own kind of conscious intentionality, albeit a non-propositional one. That fictional texts too should contain their own conscious agenda is not so surprising when we consider that if fiction is the Other of theory, that relationship must work both ways. Thus fiction will have its own theoretical dimension (acknowledged or not) which will affect the terms on

which the reader as other is invited to respond to it. A text with a thoroughly ironic outlook will thus prescribe an ironic response which will only give the reader the illusion of independent activity, for in ironising the text he is ultimately only following its instructions. Aside from *mise en abyme*, another example of a textual yet non-propositional manifestation of an epistemologically ironic worldview is the rejection, in prose narrative, of an authoritative point of view on reported discourses, something the next chapter will discuss in more detail. This of course extends the discussion of the dialogue between reader and text to include consideration of textual representations of dialogue. Both of these registers of intersubjective relations are highly relevant to Sarraute, as later chapters will show.

Aside from their intentional dimension (propositional or otherwise), fiction and theory in general share as well the basic quality of being *written* discourses, lasting representations of the transitory intentions responsible for their composition. This timeless quality of the written text emphasises the main problem with the concept of representation: the unviability of its claim to make *present* the original of which it is the place-holder. Jacques Derrida (1975) accuses Lacan of repressing the problems which writing poses for the idea of presence, and by extension representation, in language. Lacan, he claims, declares a belief in the "parole présente, vivante, authentique" as the bearer of truth: "C'est l'effet de parole vivante et présente qui garantit, en dernière instance, la singularité indestructible et inoubliable de la lettre, l'avoir-lieu d'un signifiant qui ne se perd, ne s'égare, ne se divise jamais" (Derrida 1975:127). But written discourse, Derrida points out, exists in a situation of mutual *absence* of author and reader. This factor is bound to complicate the kind of dialogue in which these can participate through the text. My discussion

up to now of irony as a mode of communication was in fact based mainly on theories of *spoken* dialogue: Sperber and Wilson's work on inference and context related mainly to spoken conversation, and Lacan's work is based on the oral event of the psychoanalytic dialogue. (The fact that the Romantics fail to discuss the problems writing poses for intersubjective communion has been pointed out by Paul Ricoeur [1976:75].) The inherently solitary nature of writing, the absence of the addressee from the situation of address, are aspects of the text's existence which the examination of dialogue in the context of narrative form will have to deal with in more detail. Moreover, if we take into account Derrida's extension of the concept of *écriture* to cover all language use, spoken as well as written,³³ spoken dialogue too can be seen to be governed by mutual absence. This fact will necessarily have consequences for the concept of dialogic irony which has emerged from the speech-based theories considered above.

³³ For Lacan, according to Derrida, "la voix [...] a les caractères phénoménaux de la spontanéité, de la présence à soi, du retour circulaire à soi". But "il en irait tout autrement si l'on se rendait attentif à l'écriture dans la voix, c'est-à-dire avant la lettre [...] L'instance de la lettre lacanienne est la relève de l'écriture dans le système de la parole" (1975:126).

CHAPTER 2

DIALOGUE, WRITING, AND REPRESENTATION

I suggested at the end of the last chapter that the nature of writing complicates the idea of dialogue and, by extension, of irony insofar as it is a form of dialogue. The particular dialogue this thesis is concerned with is that which takes place around the literary text (and specifically the novel), between its author and its readers. In this chapter I shall look at this subject in the context of the forms of intersubjectivity represented *within* novels, the relations of characters to one another and to the narratorial and authorial discourses which represent them. The way the relationship between representing and represented discourses in novels acts as an index of the openness of those novels to dialogic interaction, has been argued at length by Voloshinov (1973), on whose work this chapter will draw.

This organisation of the text's discourses at two levels -- the represented discourses of characters and narrators (the latter represent characters' words but their own narrative is ultimately also represented), and the representing "meta-discourse" of the author -- in fact reflects the two-tier nature of irony discussed in the last chapter. Irony, understood as an attitude to utterances and their incomplete nature, is on the one hand a mode of representing the cognitively incomplete statements of others, from which the speaker takes his distance; more profoundly, it is a means of acknowledging the inherent incompleteness of all language, including the speaker's own, as supposed "expression", its intrinsic inadequacy to the truth of

subjectivity. In terms of representation, irony involves on one level the unproblematised portrayal of others' words and thoughts, on another the engagement with the text's own status as a convention-bound linguistic representation of subjective reality.

If all language, as *écriture*, is ultimately a conventional construct cut off from the intentions of its author, this is bound to be more emphatically the case with texts which are not only written but also published; the process of publication and dissemination consolidates the divorce between addressor and addressee. I shall argue in the last section of this chapter that this very practical but extreme instance of the alienation produced by writing, creates problems for the invitation to the reader to respond freely to the text, no matter how enthusiastically certain novels may seem to extend that invitation.¹ A major instance of the way the reader's freedom of interpretation is challenged by texts whose authors are necessarily absent from the moment of reading, has been pointed out by Ross Chambers: he identifies a tendency in "art stories" to assign a specific response to their readers by writing an ideal reading position into the fiction (1984 *passim*). It further seems likely that while this tendency to dictate the desired response is extreme in the case of writing, due to the remoteness of the author from the reader of his published text, a similar request for the addressee's assent to the speaker's proposition, rather than for his uninfluenced contribution, may also be a feature of spoken dialogue. This would correspond to the way *écriture*, with its implications for intersubjective relations,

¹ In fact for Umberto Eco, the more ostensibly "open" the text, the more it defines the reader's role: "An open text outlines a 'closed' project of its Model Reader as a component of its structural strategy" (1979:8).

characterises spoken as much as written language.² In the light of this chapter's conclusions, Chapters 3 and 4 will explore the ways in which dialogue is represented in Nathalie Sarraute's two most recent -- and ostensibly most emphatically dialogical -- prose works. The two final chapters will then examine the relationship between text and reader in Sarraute, examining both the texts' attempts to dictate their readers' response, and the extent to which real readers can transcend these.

1. Dialogue in narrative:

The way novels represent the words and thoughts of characters has long been a focus of attention in literary studies. As speech within speech is, according to V.N. Voloshinov, also speech about speech (1973:115), forms of representation of another's words invariably tell us something about the reporter's attitude to those utterances. The range of forms and of the attitudes they imply is determined by the relationship of dominance between the two voices involved, the one quoted and the one doing the quoting. In indirect quotation, the narrator takes the liberty of replacing the character's discourse with his own, often summarising, explicating, or judging the original idea as he reports it. At the opposite pole, where the narrating voice makes no alteration to the quoted discourse, it is reproduced as originally uttered or thought, directly. Voloshinov, who believes that all language forms, and

² For Derrida, "l'absence de l'émetteur, du destinataire, à la marque qu'il abandonne, qui se coupe de lui et continue de produire des effets au-delà de sa présence et de l'actualité présente de son vouloir-dire, voire au-delà de sa vie même [...] appartient pourtant à la structure de toute écriture -- et [...] de tout langage en général" (1972:372).

especially forms of reported speech, are determined by the "*social purview* of the given time period and the given social group" (21), sees the preference for indirect reportage of utterances as the product of a "Cartesian, rationalistic period, during which an objective 'authorial context', self-confident in its power of reason, had analyzed and dissected the referential structure of the speech to be reported and created complex and remarkable devices for the indirect transmission of speech" (127). Direct discourse, on the other hand, is a "monumental" style which conforms to a perception of "another's utterance as a compact, indivisible, fixed, impenetrable whole" (128).

What is probably the most frequently theorised form of reported discourse, as well as being the one most commonly associated with verbal irony, lies between these poles where one of the two voices retains total control of expression. It is the peculiar blend of both voices known as free indirect discourse and defined by Dorrit Cohn (who prefers the term "narrated monologue") as a "technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration" (1978:100). For Voloshinov it marks a "completely new, positive tendency in active reception of another person's utterance, a *special direction* in which the dynamics of the interrelationship between reporting and reported speech moves" (1973:142). He warns against seeing it as marking a drift from indirect analysis toward direct discourse (Charles Bally's view): it is not a matter of one abstract form moving towards another but of "the mutual orientation of two utterances changing on the basis of a change in the active perception by the

linguistic consciousness of the 'speaking personality', of its ideational, ideological autonomy, of its verbal individuality" (146).³

Of all the forms for articulating irony, free indirect discourse, with its "dual voice" (Pascal 1977), is, I have said, the one most commonly associated with verbal irony, where a derogatory attitude is taken to someone else's utterance or thought. Before considering how its status as quotation, as representation of another discourse, prevents it from ironising the quoter's own speech, I shall look briefly at the kind of irony it does convey. We can then consider how prose fiction might attempt to transcend the limited dialogism of free indirect discourse and manifest a fully dialogic irony which would appeal for an independent response to its own deficient discourse.

In line with my analysis of irony in Chapter 1, I shall start with what Sperber and Wilson have to say about the role of free indirect discourse in verbal irony. Their definition of irony is, we recall, based on the idea of ironic utterances as "mentions", or, more loosely, interpretations of posited meanings, rather than as utterances with meanings of their own. It is on the basis of what it mentions -- ideas rather than words -- that verbal irony both distinguishes itself from parody and renders itself highly compatible with free indirect discourse: "Both irony and parody are types of mention: irony involves mention of propositions; parody involves mention of linguistic expressions. In other words, parody is related to direct discourse as irony is to free indirect discourse" (Sperber & Wilson 1981:311). Thus

³ The combination of voices in free indirect discourse, and the resulting difficulties attending any attempt to attribute responsibility for different aspects of its expression, have given rise to a sizeable body of literature. Roy Pascal (1977) gives a concise account of the controversies which followed its first full description and analysis (by Charles Bally in 1912), and more recent discussions of the phenomenon have been outlined and compared by Brian McHale (1978).

one can both distinguish irony from parody and understand the close relationship between them: whereas the parodist focuses on features of the speaker's language and exaggerates them, the ironist "reproduc[es] in his or her own words and tone of voice [...] the content of the words or thoughts that he or she is attributing to the victim" (Sperber 1984:135). The parodist's quotation is direct insofar as the victim's style of expression takes priority (though given the inclusion of authorial evaluation through exaggeration, Voloshinov would perhaps see it as approaching indirect quotation of a "texture-analysing" rather than "referent-analysing" type [1973:130]). The ironic narrator, by contrast, is able to integrate his derogatory attitude into his free indirect representation of the idea quoted.

The limited scope of other-directed verbal irony -- its lack of attention to the question of the speaker's own authority -- coincides with the perspectival limitations of free indirect discourse. Located between the extremes of direct quotation and indirect paraphrase, free indirect discourse certainly diminishes the authority of the omniscient narrator; yet by stopping short of a fully dialogic relationship between representing and represented discourses, it also demonstrates that this abdication of authority is not total. This tension accounts for diverging tendencies in critical writing on free indirect discourse, where it is depicted as either rejecting authority or covertly maintaining it. Its function can indeed fluctuate depending on the environment in which it is found, as Dorrit Cohn points out (1978:106): by contrasting with the predominant technique (be it narration or direct discourse) it can evoke (in the case of narration) the explicit formulations of a character, or (if set beside direct discourse) it can give the impression that it is the narrator who is formulating the character's inarticulate feelings. Emphasising the synthesis of voices

rather than the duality, Cohn sees free indirect discourse as the point in narrative "when the thought-thread of a character is most tightly woven into the texture of third-person narration" (111).

A major advantage of this welding of the voices of narrator and character, one due precisely to the residual narrative authority it maintains, is its ability to give a voice to subverbal states, in a surreptitious attribution of narratorial language to the character's consciousness. The directness of quoted discourse, even in the form of interior monologue, connotes articulate thought with a fairly high degree of reasoning; it is therefore restricted to the depiction of mental activity capable of being verbalised. A narrator, by contrast, is free to use images in order to evoke and give substance to prelinguistic sensations, while by exploiting the impersonal and timeless reference of analogy he can create the impression of a fusion with the character's unarticulated experience. Hence, no doubt, the frequency of free indirect discourse in the early novels of Nathalie Sarraute, who focuses on the border between articulate language and preverbal sensation.⁴ Cohn in fact comments on the profusion of images in Sarraute's *Le Planétarium*, and points out how the dominance of the present tense throughout the narrative lets the imagery which conveys subverbal mental activity blend more smoothly into its free indirect context. Such an authoritative narratorial element is for Cohn indispensable to any attempt to represent the deeper levels of the mind:

⁴ In the essay "Conversation et sous-conversation", she describes "ce qui se dissimule derrière le monologue intérieur: un foisonnement innombrable de sensations, d'images, de sentiments, de souvenirs, d'impulsions, de petits actes larvés qu'aucun langage intérieur n'exprime, qui se bousculent aux portes de la conscience, s'assemblent en groupes compacts et surgissent tout à coup, se défont aussitôt, se combinent autrement et réapparaissent sous une nouvelle forme, tandis que continue à se dérouler en nous, pareil au ruban qui s'échappe en crépitant de la fente d'un téléscripateur, le flot ininterrompu de mots" (ES 97-98).

The novelist who wishes to portray the least conscious strata of psychic life is forced to do so by way of the most indirect and the most traditional of the available modes. The correlation drawn by critics of the stream-of-consciousness novel between the relative depth of the levels of consciousness portrayed and the relative directness of the techniques used to portray them is therefore entirely erroneous. (56)

Yet Sarraute's novels show an unmistakable progression away from free indirect discourse and towards dialogue, culminating in the drama-like composition of *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* which are made up purely of internal dialogues with no connecting narrative passages.⁵ What might be the attraction of a more thoroughly dialogic form over the evocative power of free indirect discourse whose imagistic potential Sarraute had previously exploited so successfully? It can hardly be a belief in the greater mimetic accuracy of the direct utterance, for Sarraute had very early rejected interior monologue as inadequate to the prelinguistic psychological depths she wished to explore (see p.62 n.4; in fact, even Joyce, who for Sarraute is the principal representative of interior monologue, dropped the technique when his explorations of mental activity moved to less conscious areas in the "Circe" section of *Ulysses*). If it is not for the descriptive accuracy of the spoken word, then, the attraction of dialogue as a form seems likely to be more a function of its structure. Divorcing the blended perspectives in free indirect discourse, it on the one hand restores the straightforward utterance, in itself "monologic", while simultaneously introducing one or more opposing voices, each with a separate single perspective of its own.

This dissolution of all remaining narrative authority in favour of a multiplicity of independent perspectives can be seen as an authorial refusal to take

⁵ This evolution will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter in the context of a reading of *Enfance*; it has already been the subject of critical studies by A.S. Newman (1976) and Celia Britton (1983).

any degree of expressive responsibility for the thoughts and words of others. Historically, the twentieth century's gradual abandonment of free indirect discourse in favour of a greater dispersal of perspectives coincides with the final collapse of the notion of the autonomous individual in control of his own destiny (the period of free indirect discourse was for Voloshinov one of "relativistic individualism" [1973:123]; thus if the individual had lost his omniscience, he still retained his subjective integrity). This dissolution of the subject's autonomy is associated primarily with Freud's analysis, at the beginning of this century, of the unconscious and its influence on conscious behaviour. Thus Roy Pascal sees free indirect discourse as "so characteristic of the nineteenth century" (1977:134), depending as it does on the narrating subject being regarded as still to *some* degree in control of the world he describes. Once this authority is finally abolished, it becomes difficult to justify the technique, and so problems arise when it is used by twentieth-century authors whose aim is to usurp narratorial credibility. In texts where the narrator has no more, and indeed often less knowledge than other characters (Pascal's example is Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur*), free indirect discourse becomes "an inner contradiction" (140) insofar as it still implies some power to penetrate the minds of characters and interpret their unspoken mental processes.

While Pascal confines himself, in answering the question of the possible obsolescence of free indirect discourse, to suggesting that it may be "inappropriate to certain types of narrative, irrelevant or hostile to their vision and purposes, and hence in certain periods meaningless and functionless" (141), Bernard Cerquiglini has no qualms about burying it: "L'époque du style indirect libre est unifiée et close par l'harmonie de préoccupations d'esthétique littéraire et de recherches sur le

langage; elle est une des plus belles réussites du dix-neuvième siècle. Lequel s'achève, et pas seulement en linguistique, à la fin des années 1960" (1984:14). The task for linguists now, he continues, is "approfondissant en somme le projet de Vossler et de Bakhtine, d'examiner les périodes pré- (et sans doute post-) modernes dans leur singularité historique non vectorisée, afin de mettre au jour les formes qu'elles donnent à la représentation de la parole, et d'en éclairer les raisons" (14).

Sarraute's gradual desertion of free indirect discourse in favour of dialogue could thus be seen to be part of this "postmodern" change in attitudes to the representation of discourses, and by extension to intersubjective relations generally. Choosing the "democratic" juxtaposition of voices over the annexation of one by another can be interpreted as manifesting an awareness of the lack of authority of one's own discourse over the discourses (and lives) of others. This interpretation of the choice of dialogue as a prose form by people like Sarraute in this century simply endorses Voloshinov's argument that language forms are directly related to social configurations: "In the forms by which language registers the impressions of received speech and of the speaker, the history of the changing types of socio-ideological communication stands out in particularly bold relief" (1973:123). When changes in any such form take place, this is a sign that an age's "dominant tendencies in understanding and evaluating the messages to be reported are not properly manifested by that particular form" (118). Dialogue as a form implies that the text can provide no transcendent or all-embracing perspective: the partial nature of the diverse voices means both that their perspectives cannot be synthesised into one supreme vantage-point and that no one of them has the right to claim to be "the whole story".

Such an understanding of the motivation for the extreme dialogicality of Sarraute's recent prose in particular, seems encouraged by the way the discrete voices into which her narratives fragment all belong to the authorial self which, thus decomposed, appears to lose all monological control over the text. The assumption of a singular authorial perspective and discourse is challenged by the internal dialogue of the "subselves" of *Enfance* and, even more strikingly, *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. Dialogue thus becomes the medium for the treatment not only of intersubjective relations (including those between author and reader), but also of the subject's lack of internal coherence which is what gives rise to the need for dialogue in the first place.⁶ Making the mind the locus of a multiplicity of perspectives, as *Tu ne t'aimes pas* does, in fact picks up on the frequently neglected *dialogical* element of interior monologue, despite Sarraute's earlier rejection of that form. Thus, when Dorrit Cohn describes the dialogic pattern of monologues in literature, a phenomenon she sees (after Mukarovsky) as rendering stylistically the way different semantic contexts coexist simultaneously in the mind, she could be describing *Tu ne t'aimes pas*:

Vying for simultaneous linguistic expression, these many voices are forced by the temporal dimension of language to wait and take their turns. They cancel, support, variously interrupt, or interfere with each other, and generally shape for interior monologues a highly discontinuous syntax. (1978:92; see also Voloshinov 1973:38)

The way free indirect discourse falls short of manifesting fully the dialogic nature of existence is acknowledged even by its advocates: while Voloshinov

⁶ This dual function of dialogue initially appears unproblematic; yet it contains a latent tension between, on the one hand, dialogue seen as a request for otherness, and, on the other, the desire for a response whose perspective would be identical to the addressor's (coming from another of the self's voices), and would thus in fact reinforce his identity. This conflict is of great significance for dialogue in Sarraute, both within the novels and on the level of their address to the reader, and will be a major factor in my discussion of her work.

stresses its attenuation, rather than its retention, of narratorial authority, he cannot deny its inability to achieve a fully dialogic relationship between quoting and quoted languages. The dialogic reality to which it is not quite adequate is for Voloshinov as later for Lacan the result of the fact that consciousness is linguistically constituted.⁷ Understanding, consequently, can only take place within the semiotic realm: it is "a response to a sign with signs", part of a proto-Lacanian "chain of ideological creativity and understanding" which links sign to sign and consciousness to consciousness (Voloshinov 1973:11). Signs themselves emerge only in the process of interaction between individual consciousnesses. "And the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction" (11). So, if understanding is only possible in terms of signs, and signs are social products, understanding itself must also be a social phenomenon: "Any act of understanding is a response, i.e., it translates what is being understood into a new context from which a response can be made" (69 n.2). Every utterance, including the literary text, is a response to previous performances as well as calling for a response itself (95). This dialogic quality of the utterance, simultaneously response and address, is a function of the nature of language, whose every word is "*a two-sided act* [...] determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship*

⁷ Lacan, of course, goes farther and sees the unconscious too as linguistically constituted. Given the Marxist orientation of Voloshinov's theory, he would be unlikely to argue the importance of the unconscious in human action (see his closing polemic on the need for "the declaratory word [...] the word that really means and takes responsibility for what it says" [1973:159]; this may of course have been tacked on for political reasons).

between speaker and listener, addressor and addressee [...] I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view" (86).

The dialogic nature of reality, resulting from the two-sided character of the uttered word which is the basic unit of consciousness, is thus founded on the phenomenon of *reciprocity*. It is here that the limits of free indirect discourse become most apparent. Even Voloshinov concedes that it captures only one aspect of the dialogism of language, the active reception of another person's speech; it fails to embody the reciprocal nature of the addressor-addressee relation, where reception becomes response and is responded to in turn as a new address. Because it remains within a syntactically unified narrative, its active relation of one message to another is restricted to the incorporation of the utterances of others "into a bound, monologic context" (112). Voloshinov's language reveals that "quasi-direct discourse" by no means abolishes the power of the representing voice over what it represents: that voice "*imposes* upon the reported utterance its own accents, which *collide and interfere* with the accents in the reported utterance" (154; my emphasis). In dialogue, on the other hand, "the lines of the individual participants are grammatically disconnected; they are not integrated into one unified context [...]. *There are no syntactic forms with which to build a unity of dialogue*" (116). It seems, then, that as long as narrative unity is maintained, the full implications of speech as dialogue cannot be enacted in literature.

In the context of my discussion of irony, dialogue can be seen as aiming for the full structural realisation of that demolition of speaker-authority toward which free indirect discourse gestures but which its relationship of domination and submission, of quoter and quoted, keeps it from attaining. The ambiguous status of

authority in free indirect discourse -- attenuated in relation to indirect discourse, but nonetheless still there -- makes it a pivot on which irony can swing from being a weapon or at least a means of consolidating power, towards the speaker's own acknowledgement of his participation, as a member of the linguistic community, in the dilemma of expression. But this pole can never quite be reached within the limits of free indirect discourse. Dialogue goes beyond it not only in completing the dissolution of narrative authority, but also in the way it provides a means for overcoming the dilemma of the subject in language. Recognising the value of the other's response as a complement to the text's perspective, it is an act of faith in the power of intersubjective relations to transcend the plight of the subject and his discourse.

However, this shift from free indirect discourse into dialogue is not as simple as it may appear, for if it rejects representation it may be questioning the whole nature of literature. Brian McHale argues that free indirect discourse is a microcosm of literature as such: it is the prime site for literature's enactment of the nature of language as verbal interaction (he takes this definition of literature from Bakhtin and Voloshinov [McHale 1978:284]). Given that the verbal interaction free indirect discourse stages is that of a represented and a representing discourse, a relationship, I have said, of domination and subordination, then if it is exemplary of literature, it must be of its nature as *representational*. The move into dialogue, on this argument, by renouncing the authority of a representing discourse, would appear to establish a text like *Enfance* or *Tu ne t'aimes pas* outside the category of literature altogether.

This is not the case, because, I would argue, if dialogue refuses to mime the representation of discourses characteristic of literature, this does not make it *itself* any less representational as a form. While free indirect discourse may illustrate the nature of literature as a discourse of representation, its abandonment in favour of dialogue ultimately doesn't diminish this representational nature and the questions of authority it implies, but instead simply dissimulates them. There is still a representing voice behind the supposedly autonomous discourses of independent textual voices -- a point made by Paul Ricoeur in relation to the ostensibly unrepresented status of dramatic dialogue: "La dimension théâtrale consiste en cela: oublier la situation de citation que produit la représentation. Le spectateur croît entendre de vraies personnes. Mais que le rideau retombe, et l'illusion aussitôt s'envole, la pièce entière retourne à son statut de fiction rapportée" (1991:43). The authorial perspective is thus never entirely dissolved.

Texts, whether in direct dialogue or in indirect discourse, are also of course representational in a more fundamental way. As Derrida argues, all utterances, spoken as well as written, are not only events, but also, as *écriture*, have a structural permanence which allows them to exist and be meaningful independently of both their source (whom they represent but fail to make present) and their addressee. The utterance is thus never exhausted by the utterer's intention, even in speech; the "oral signature" which supposedly marks the presence of the speaker in his words, because it must be repeatable in order to be identifiable as his, becomes detached from the person it represents and from his intention in supplying it on a specific occasion (Derrida 1972:391-92). It thus paradoxically represents him *because* he is absent from it. All utterances are possessed of an "inconscience structurelle"

which is "l'absence essentielle de l'intention à l'actualité de l'énoncé" (389). Thus Derrida concludes that:

En tant qu'écriture, la communication, si l'on tient à garder ce mot, n'est pas le moyen de transport du sens, l'échange des intentions et des vouloir-dire, le discours et la 'communication des consciences'. Nous [...] assistons [...] au déploiement historique de plus en plus puissant d'une écriture générale dont le système de la parole, de la conscience, du sens, de la présence, de la vérité etc., ne serait qu'un effet et doit être analysé comme tel. (392)

These two dimensions of the status of fictional writing as representation may seem contradictory: the author is both present behind the dialogic discourse of his text, and absent insofar as that text stands independently of his illocutionary intention. They can be reconciled, however. The author's absence from his text is experienced at the moment of the text's interpretation -- even where an enunciator senses his own alienation from his discourse, he is considering it from the point of view of an addressee. This doesn't mean that the author, at the moment of enunciation, doesn't "sign" his text. It is probably impossible not to (especially if we see discourse in Lacanian terms as motivated by the speaker's unconscious, itself an effect of the particular form taken by his unique experience of primary repression), and it is certainly possible to emphasise that signature. The problem is simply that, however emphatic, the signature itself is from the outset detached from the person and act it represents, and so the author's gesture of control, of ownership of his text, itself becomes uncontrollable, readable independently of the intention behind it.⁸ These complexities arising from the representational nature of even the most dialogic text will be returned to in the final part of this chapter. First, though, I wish to discuss briefly the role of narration in psychoanalysis, and specifically in

⁸ "L'écriture se lit, elle ne donne pas lieu, 'en dernière instance', à un déchiffrement herméneutique, au décryptage d'un sens ou d'une vérité" (Derrida 1972:392).

the psychoanalytic dialogue whose affinity to the understanding of irony as dialogue has already been established.

2. Narration in dialogue:

We have seen how the concept of an intersubjective, dialogic irony, promoted at the turn of the nineteenth century by Friedrich Schlegel, finds a clear echo and reinforcement in contemporary (specifically Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory. The relationship of dialogue to forms of narration has also been an issue for psychoanalysis, with basically the same ironic relativisation involved as in the case of language in general. This is because, as Robert Con Davis explains, narration "operates like a language, is a language, and manifests linguistic operations in various ways. Narration exists [...] within the context of an unconscious 'discourse', within the bounds of what Lacan calls the 'discourse of the Other'" (Davis 1983a:848). It thus "repeats and represents unconscious discourse in the only way the unconscious can be known: as a sequence of opportunities for linguistic substitution and (re)combination" (853). Thus the role of dialogue, on the model of its potential regarding language, will be to expose and ironically transcend the limitations narration suffers as an aspect of the speaker's unconsciously motivated discourse.

The relationship of dialogue to narration within the field of psychoanalysis is discussed by Roy Schafer (1981) in the context of approaches to biography in psychoanalytic discourse. He criticises the tendency of psychoanalysts to compile

normative life histories of their analysands, pointing out that the "sequential life historical narration" thus developed is based on clinical analyses of which it is "no more than a second-order retelling" (1981:48), one which makes no reference to the analytic procedure. Instead of the narrative form of the case history, which is a "simplified form of traditional biography" (48), Schafer suggests a form "methodologically more adequate to the psychoanalytic occasion" -- the history of the analytic dialogue. It is the "first-order history" (49) on which the second-order life history is based. It is true to the nature of psychoanalytic reality in beginning "in the middle", the present, and constitutes more a set of histories told from multiple perspectives than one seamless narrative. This new kind of biography starts not at the chronological beginning ("Freud's wish-fulfilling hallucination of the absent breast" [49]), but with "a narrative account of the psychoanalyst's retelling of something told by an analysand and the analysand's response to that narrative transformation" (49). The dynamics of dialogue are the proper focus of a narration concerned to establish the truth of the subject. To the extent that the analytical nature of the psychoanalytic narrative demands that it contain a propositional argument, the unfolding of this will be dictated by the shape of the dialogue: "The account of the origins and transformations of the life being studied is shaped, extended, and limited by what it is narratively necessary to emphasize and to assume in order to explain the turns in this dialogue". (49).

Insofar as the analyst, in Schafer's view, possesses the professional authority to establish an analytical history on the basis of the dialogue, his commentary will retain narratorial authority (during the dialogue itself, in contrast, the analyst does forgo this authority, being frequently unreliable as a narrator of the analysand's

experiences; by the end, the analysand is as reliable as he is). Thus Schafer ultimately stops short of calling for a dialogic psychoanalytic writing (his monologic exposition contrasts sharply with the obliquities of Lacan's style), stressing the importance of dialogue simply as the origin and guide of the psychoanalytic narrative. Yet he calls for changes in the focus of that narrative: emphasis on the dialogue as a present event, subordination of the commenting narration to the "turns" in the dialogue, and the commentary's awareness of its own status as a narrative structure chosen at the level of the analyst's precritical assumptions, for its efficacy in *constituting* its data (26-27). These changes spell out compromises which psychoanalytic narration must make in the light of its own discoveries.

Fictional discourse, as I said in Chapter 1, is in a position to capitalise on dialogue's capacity to explore and reveal truths about the constitution of identity. Having a much less strongly propositional nature than didactic psychoanalytic discourse,⁹ it is not obliged to betray the notion of dialogic truth by asserting an illusory authority. Instead it can remain within the structure of the dialogue of which any narrative is an arbitrarily chosen interpretation at one remove, and tell less directly, in an uncommented dialogic representation, the "several histories" (Schafer 1981:49) of the individual. This seems to be exactly what is going on in Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance*, whose narration-in-dialogue of the writer's past Valerie Minogue has described as "always ironically aware of the perils inherent in

⁹ The status of fiction will be discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter. The notion of fiction as propositionally indeterminate has been argued by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1978) who sees literature as designed to be experienced as the representation of an utterance (a definition which bears out the view of free indirect discourse as a model of literature as a whole). Thus, while the literary text inevitably arouses interpretative activity, its fictive nature (all literature, as the representation of discourse, is fictive for Smith) means that its propositional content is a function of its reading, and this allows for the inference of innumerable meanings: "Every literary work [...] can be seen to exemplify [...] an infinite set of propositions and can correspond analogically to an infinite number of other objects and events" (1978:142-43).

narrative, and always reaching out to the reader, inviting participation, challenge, verification or dissent" (1988:221). Whereas the different narrative structures adopted by the psychoanalytic profession to construct an authoritative account of the analysand's history "control the telling of the events of the analysis, including the many tellings and retellings of the analysand's life history", the literary dialogue seems better able to enact the truth that "the time is always present. The event is always an ongoing dialogue" (49).¹⁰

If the truest narration of the analysand's life history is from the perspective of the present dialogue which explores and constitutes it, this does not mean that the subject's narration disappears; it merely becomes subordinated to the dialogic structure which contains it. The analytic dialogue is an "interweaving of texts" (the patient's stories about himself and the analyst's retellings of those stories), and their gradual transformation into "a radically new, jointly authored work or way of working", a "cluster of more or less coordinated new narrations" (32). This tension of narration and dialogue corresponds to Schafer's view that "the self is a telling" (31), a telling of stories about oneself and about others which constitutes these entities.¹¹ The function of the analytic dialogue is to formulate, in cases where this is beneficial, new leading questions to the tales we tell ourselves and others about

¹⁰ While I have concentrated on the role of dialogue in psychoanalytic theory, it is of course not the only discipline to privilege dialogue as constitutive of truth. As we saw, dialogue was central to Romantic philosophy; in a more modern context, Richard Kearney's "A Note on the Hermeneutics of Dialogue" deals with the emphasis much twentieth-century philosophy places on dialogue, and with the implications of this for the act of reading. Heidegger's pre-reflective being-in-the-world "expresses itself primordially in the existential category of 'discourse'"; involving one in "a historical community of speakers", it reveals itself "historically in and through language as a dialogical being-in-the-world with others" (Kearney 1984:127). This insight is developed in the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur: consciousness can only come to know itself via symbolic mediation; it must "interpret (*hermeneuein*) itself by entering into dialogue with the texts of a historical community or common tradition to which it belongs" (128).

¹¹ "We narrate others just as we narrate selves. The other person, like the self, is not something one has or encounters as such but an existence one tells. Consequently, telling 'others' about 'ourselves' is doubly narrative" (31).

our lives: "We change many aspects of these histories of self and others as we change, for better or worse, the implied or stated questions to which they are the answers. Personal development may be characterized as a change in the questions it is urgent or essential to answer" (31).

Similarly, in literary writing, the framing of narration within a dialogic structure doesn't leave narration behind entirely, but critically weakens its power to convince, to create a plausible fiction. By rejecting any overall perspective, even the limited one of the unreliable narrator, dialogue as a form offers the writer a means of undercutting speaker-authority to an unprecedented degree. A text entirely in dialogue, by enacting polyphony, can draw attention to the act of narration through the constant interruption and contradiction of different narratives by one another, displaying for the reader the doubtful validity of any given narration, the inherent bias and concealed motives in the way we relate events. Where the dialogue to which the different narratives belong takes place within a single mind, as in a novel like *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, it becomes possible to emphasise particularly clearly the simultaneous existence of a multiplicity of possible "histories of self" (and so to undermine just as graphically their individual plausibility). In this case, the diversity of internal voices will compare to the range of roles Schafer sees the analysand play in free association: "Each of these parts [hero, victim, dodger, stranger] is one of the regulative narrative structures that one person, the analysand, has adopted and used simultaneously with the others, whether in combination, opposition, or apparent incoherence" (Schafer 1981:40).¹²

¹² It should be underlined that while such diversity represents what dialogue as a form is capable of, its use in practice may fall short of this potential. Texts which are structurally dialogic can still end up for one reason or another limiting or even counteracting entirely the potential for polyphony their choice of form seemed to provide (without, of course, ever entirely evacuating the multiplicity of registers inherent to

I have concentrated up to now on the place of dialogue within the literary text. What about the second aspect of dialogue as a literary principle, its drive to transcend the limitations of the text it constitutes (and of which the limited perspectives it represents are the image) by actively inviting the reader's dialogic response to it? How are the intratextual and the text-reader dialogues linked? The dialogical novel illustrates how language acquires meaning through its reception by a responsive interlocutor, how "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (Bakhtin 1981:280). On the level of the literary work, this interlocutor is of course the reader. While the exact nature of the relationship between textual dialogism and the dialogue of text and reader is not easy to define, some homology between the two is generally assumed. David Shepherd (1989) discusses the issue of the reader in Bakhtinian dialogism and underlines the importance of extending that concept beyond the limits of the self-contained work. In the context of the limitations of Wolfgang Iser's view of reading, Shepherd warns against uncritical acceptance of the concept of dialogism as "a description of the immanent characteristics of a certain generically defined type of text (the novel)" (1989:94). In reality, "Bakhtin's account of the novel and dialogism, even as it seemingly accepts and bolsters the self-sufficiency of 'literature', insistently gestures to a world outside it; and as the intratextual gives way to the intertextual, it is possible to glimpse a reader no longer threatened by Iserian redundancy" (94).

language use). In fact, as I shall show in the next two chapters, both *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* ultimately resist the total dissolution of the singular authorial voice even as their structures gesture towards it.

A more explicit articulation of the connection between these two levels of dialogism comes from Susan Yell (1990). She argues that dialogue in prose fiction works to construct the text-reader discourse situation as well as that of the fictional world, seeing the specific ways in which fictional dialogues are constructed and articulated within narrative discourse as establishing particular reading positions in relation to that discourse. The participants in the intratextual discourse situation (narrator and characters) necessarily engage in power relations realised through certain textual strategies. These include consistent initiating of dialogue, non-compliant responses, giving of information establishing one's position as possessing superior knowledge etc. (we shall in fact see some of them at work in the ostensibly non-authoritarian dialogue of *Enfance*). This power structure of the world of narrator and characters is reflected for Yell in the reader's relation to the text. Thus polyphonic texts allow for more dialogic relationships between character, narrator, text, and reader than do monologic ones; in the latter kind, the narrator's control of his characters' discourses "allows for the text to construct a relationship of control with the reader, by constraining in different ways the reading positions which can be taken up" (Yell 1990:145). The totally dialogic text should thus be structurally best placed to engage the reader dialogically¹³ (though Yell does suggest that all texts may have a combination of monologic and polyphonic features; it is certainly possible for a polyphonic structure to accommodate a hierarchy based on knowledge).

¹³ In philosophy, Richard Kearney too sees the written dialogue as extending to include the reader: "The written dialogue is in itself an open invitation to the reader to fill in the gaps between the original speakers' words. It summons the reader to re-create and reinterpret the authors' original meanings according to his or her own hermeneutic and experiential presuppositions. In this sense, we might say that once the reader has entered the dialogue, it becomes a dialogue that never ends" (1984:129). Rolf Kloepper (1980) also discusses the relationship between the text's internal dialogism and its relations with the reader.

Whether or not the relationship is this straightforward, it does seem plausible that the dialogic, polyphonic text will be especially concerned to establish its own dialogue with the reader. A text which spurns the falsity of narrative authority in favour of a democracy of unanchored voices none of which is all-knowing, and where knowledge is a function of address and response, is by extension likely to want the reader to play an active role in the constitution of meaning out of the textual utterance. Thus the dialogue within the text can act as a bridge to the text's reading: through its egalitarian representation of discourses, the dialogic text can invite a response by its reader which might ironically transcend its own limits.

3. Dialogue and representation:

It is time now to discuss in more detail the dialogue which takes place between author and reader in the space of the text. I have suggested that texts which privilege a dialogic irony (an irony which undermines the authority of narration, or of language in general, by setting different perspectives in a relationship of opposition and mutual completion to one another) are likely also to cultivate the reader's active involvement more assiduously than more monologic texts do. However, the *kind* of communication in which the source and receiver of the text can engage must be considered: it is bound to be complicated by the distance which separates the composition of the textual address from the moment of its reception by the reader. In this section, I wish to raise the question of what consequences the literary text's nature as a written representation will have for its

capacity to solicit an independent response from the reader, no matter how dialogic the text itself may be. The dialogic novel, like all novels, combines the qualities of fictionality and "writtenness"; it is in relation to these two representational characteristics (the novel represents both a fictional world and an authorial utterance) that I want now to consider the nature of its address to the reader.

The question of fiction was touched on above in the context of Roy Schafer's retention of an authoritative narrative perspective in the writing of psychoanalytic case histories; fictional prose, by contrast, is free from any obligation to promote a particular proposition. The unclear propositional status of fiction is taken by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (see p.74 n.9) as evidence that the nature of fictive discourse (and for her all literary discourse is fictive) is to provide an opportunity for the reader to engage in "cognitive play" (1978:121).¹⁴ The lack of propositional responsibility of literary/fictive discourse is the result of its status as "second-degree" representation: it takes everyday discourse out of its pragmatic context in which it has performative value, and makes it into the image of such verbal acts which take place in the world. This definition of literature is reminiscent of Sperber and Wilson's distinction between use and mention, or between description and interpretation. They see both irony and metaphor, modes of expression frequently seen as markers of "literariness", as involving the creation of simulacra of already existing propositions: "Metaphor involves an interpretive relation between the propositional form of an utterance and the thought it represents;

¹⁴ Which she defines as "the exploration of the formal and symbolic properties of language, the contextually unrestricted interpretation of verbal structures -- that is, the playing out of their potential 'meanings' -- and the playing with or playing at the conventions of linguistic transactions" (1978:121).

irony involves an interpretive relation between the speaker's thought and attributed thoughts or utterances" (Sperber & Wilson 1986:231).

Yet as we saw, Sperber and Wilson ultimately attribute interpretative status to all language: "We see verbal communication as involving a speaker producing an utterance as a public interpretation of one of her thoughts, and the hearer constructing a mental interpretation of this utterance, and hence of the original thought" (230). Smith's identification of "representedness" as the defining feature of fictive (thus literary) discourse, despite (or perhaps because of) its simplicity, thus fails to distinguish it adequately from everyday (her term is "natural") language use. Yet in a different context she asserts that what is at stake is not an absolute definition of the objectively verifiable qualities of each mode of discourse. Rather, the difference between them is a question of reading decisions: it is the reader who chooses to read a text as fictive or non-fictive discourse, depending on whether he perceives it as stating or as merely representing the statement of one or more propositions. "Correspondence of intention and reception is not required for a given verbal structure to function as either natural or fictive discourse on any particular occasion" (Smith 1978:49). The difficulty of distinguishing literary from non-literary discourse thus draws attention to the freedom the reader possesses in relation to the text, his power to read it beyond or against the intentions which gave rise to it.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gérard Genette, on the other hand, stresses "les diverses façons qu'a le langage d'échapper et de survivre à sa fonction pratique et de produire des textes susceptibles d'être reçus et appréciés comme des objets esthétiques" (1991:31); he sees the reader's choice of mode of reading as only one of these. Though he doesn't go so far as to say, like Smith, that all literature is fictive discourse, or discourse read as fiction, he does see fiction as always constitutively literary. And he agrees that fictionality can be determined by the reader: "De même qu'une phrase dont le sens vous échappe, vous répugne ou vous indiffère peut vous séduire par sa forme, de même, peut-être, une histoire que d'autres tiennent pour véritable peut vous laisser totalement incrédule, mais vous séduire comme une espèce de fiction: il y aura bien là une sorte de fictionnalité conditionnelle, histoire vraie pour les uns et fiction pour les autres" (34).

In this way, dialogic prose (like all prose) can be read in fictional or in propositional terms, as a mode of representation of discourse or as a medium for the transmission of certain ideas. Bakhtin stresses the priority of structural over ideological concerns in the prologue to his study of Dostoevsky:

The topical acuteness of [the ideological problems raised by Dostoevsky's work] has overshadowed the deeper and more permanent structural elements in his mode of artistic visualization. Critics are apt to forget that Dostoevsky is first and foremost an *artist* (of a special type, to be sure) and not a philosopher or a publicist. (1984a:3-4)

Yet in fact, despite his claims, he himself doesn't read in purely structural terms, for his view of polyphony in Dostoevsky seems ultimately inseparable from the ideological content of the dialogues in the novel.¹⁶ This perception of dialogism in ideological rather than formal terms seems to be responsible for Bakhtin's claim that the authorial voice engages in a free and equal exchange with his characters: it is the real validity of the *ideas* which are being exchanged that gives them equal status, those of the created characters paradoxically on a level with those of the creating author who is responsible for representing them. This approach to dialogism avoids the issue of representation (in the sense of the orchestration by the author of the ideas concerned), and the implications which that issue has for the ideal of the author's full integration into the dialogic world of his text. Before examining this problem for dialogism as Bakhtin conceives it, I shall briefly set his concept of

¹⁶ What takes shape in dialogical interaction is the idea: "Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse [...] The idea is inter-individual and intersubjective -- the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion between consciousnesses. The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses" (Bakhtin 1984a:88).

dialogue in the context of the Schlegelian and Lacanian versions considered so far.¹⁷

Bakhtin sees the Socratic dialogue as the carnevalesque origin of dialogic prose, showing as it does the intersubjective, dialogic nature of truth (1984a:109-10). For him, Dostoevsky's creation of the polyphonic novel takes up the thread of this dialogic form, giving independent voices priority over any plot. This form will appear chaotic only to a monologic vision of the world. If the polyphonic novel is regarded as a microcosm of the world and its multiplicity of independent and clashing voices, we can see its affinity to Schlegel's Absolute System, or to Lacan's Symbolic order, both of which defy the attempts of the consciousnesses they contain to embrace their (linguistic) totality. Thus the monologic viewpoint which this Dostoevskyan chaos exceeds can be considered the aesthetic equivalent of the restricted viewpoint of consciousness (whether Schlegelian or Lacanian) in the face of the Real. Yet this homology suggests already that the assertion of monological authority at some level of the individual's (here specifically the author's) relation to language may be such a basic human tendency that it cannot be dissipated by a conscious anti-monologism in writing practice.

Schlegel and Lacan, as we saw, look to dialogue as the means to overcome the limitations of human awareness, and in many respects Bakhtin has it fulfil a similar task. Though Dostoevsky's heroes engage in dialogues of ideas, and the truths they result in pertain as much to moral questions as to identity (for

¹⁷ Interestingly, Bakhtin, like these two, fails to make any distinction between speech and writing, as David Shepherd (1989:94) and Caryl Emerson (Bakhtin 1984a:xxxiv) have noted.

Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, sees the two as inseparable, the individual being a point of view on himself and the world, conscious of everything about himself [48]), still, for that self-consciousness to become total, to find its own ultimate word, necessitates dialogical interaction. The "depths of the human soul" (251) are revealed for Dostoevsky only in "an intense act of address"; only in interaction can the "inner man" be revealed, for in dialogue a person "not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is [...] To be means to communicate dialogically" (252). Insofar as Dostoevsky's crucial dialogues leave plot behind to enter "the abstract sphere of pure relationship" (265), they maintain an affinity to the Schlegelian worldview. At the same time, Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's works as "a word about a word addressed to a word" (266), stressing his view of identity as residing in discourse (albeit ideological discourse), strikingly anticipates Lacan's claim that the subject, "c'est ce que le signifiant représente, et il ne saurait rien représenter que pour un autre signifiant, à quoi dès lors se réduit le sujet qui écoute" (Lacan 1966:835).¹⁸

Bakhtinian dialogism exists at all levels of a text, from the individual word or utterance which bears the several accents of the contexts in which different voices have spoken it (this is "microdialogue"), to the compositional dialogues that take place among characters, right up to the "great dialogue" constituted by the novel as a whole (1984a:40). The phenomenon of microdialogue makes language the arena

¹⁸ Regarding the extent of the affinity between Bakhtin and Lacan, I have said that the knowledge the former sees as resulting from dialogue is generally ideological or moral; as such it is far removed from the irrational desiring self the Lacanian dialogue reveals. Thus in Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, Nastasya's dialogues with Myshkin and with Rogozhin cause her to oscillate between two already constituted positions of which she is aware. However, there are dialogues, like those of Ivan Karamazov with Smerdyakov, which are closer to the Lacanian conception of what one learns through dialogue (the truth of the unconscious). In these, Ivan's will is properly unconscious, "hidden even from himself", and is recognised by him, "dimly and ambiguously at first and then clearly and distinctly [...] in another person" (Bakhtin 1984a:259).

for a double assault on the autonomous individual: both on the opinions he expresses and on his very autonomy as a speaker. The several accents words acquire when attributed to different characters who give them different, often conflicting meanings, result in the infiltration of one's point of view by those of others. Because Dostoevsky focuses on the individual's consciousness and shows the world through it, all that can be juxtaposed to it are other consciousnesses: "To the all-devouring consciousness of the hero the author can juxtapose only a single objective world -- a world of other consciousnesses with rights equal to those of the hero" (49-50). For Bakhtin, as I have said, the dialogical relations this causes extend even to the author's position relative to his hero, which is "*a fully realized and thoroughly consistent dialogic position*, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not 'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'thou'" (63).

It is at this point that the intratextual dialogue extends to include its creator: the author speaks *with* his characters rather than about them. The parties in this interaction can be considered as equal only as long as it is seen simply as a confrontation of ideas independent of their representation. Once the text's nature as representation is considered -- a status which, I have said, involves both the inscription within it of the author's authority over the whole text as his created utterance, and the necessary alienation of those marks of authority due to their status as *écriture* -- the idea of an author-character dialogue is seen to be impossible. The author's existence is of a completely different order from that of his characters who are rhetorical constructs created by him. Necessarily elevated above what he represents by having created it, an author who conducts a dialogue with his

characters, the objects of his creation, will remain in control of it, making such a dialogue a rather one-sided affair.

What about the second aspect of representation just mentioned, the author's alienation from the actual reception of his text, his unavoidable absence even from his authorial signature? To close this chapter, I wish to suggest that the attempt to achieve a similar kind of control to that possessed over his characters marks to some degree even the most dialogic author's relationship, via the text, to the reader. This aspiration to a relationship which is *not* a dialogue of equals but is modelled on the author's Godlike elevation over the created object of his representation, results from the way the text's nature as representation, if it makes its *characters'* discourses subject to that of its author, simultaneously, as "written", makes its *addressee's* interpretation of it uncontrollable. Because the moment of reading is beyond the writer's purview, he has no way of knowing what kind of reader will take up the position of the text's addressee, and how far the actual interpretation formed may differ from what the text is intended to convey. For, as I argued in Chapter 1, even fictional texts, with all their propositional indeterminacy, and even when an ironic claim to ignorance and expressive inadequacy is central to them, have their own intentional agenda; their very form (e.g. their way of reporting speech) manifests, in non-propositional terms, a particular worldview which they desire to have understood. Thus even the formal demonstration that truth is dialogic and requires an independent response, is a monologic position and, paradoxically, demands that the independent respondent it desires first assent to that view. Even (or most emphatically) the most open texts, I would argue (after Umberto Eco; see p.57 n.1), to ensure the "correct" response which they need to survive, are forced to try to

influence and limit possible interpretations, so diminishing the equality of their desired dialogue with the reader who finds his response to the text guided in certain ways.¹⁹

The problems which writing as representation poses for the aspiration to a dialogue of author and reader in the text have in fact already been dealt with by Paul Ricoeur (1976), whose discussion bears out my argument so far. Distanced in time and space from its source, the status of the written text as an utterance becomes problematic. For Ricoeur, this is what gives the reader freedom of interpretation even before any decision to read as fiction or otherwise is taken: writing divorces the author's mental intention from the reader's experience of the text by diminishing the "event" quality of discourse. This has important consequences for the notion of reading as a dialogue with the text: although discourse is by its nature dialogic, for it always both addresses someone and points self-referentially back to the speaker through marks of his meaning in the event of interlocution, yet because this dialogic quality is a feature of discourse as an event, it is not fully preserved in the written text. Unlike in spoken discourse, where the fact that the speaker belongs to the situation of dialogue allows speaker-meaning and utterance-meaning to be harmonised (the speaker is aware of the addressee's interpretation and can respond to it in turn), in writing, authorial intention and the text's meaning no longer necessarily coincide.

How, then, can the reader's interpretative options be limited, if the text excludes reference back to its origin? In a way not all that different from how

¹⁹ Barbara Herrnstein Smith too notes that verbal art doesn't simply provoke interpretative activity but also shapes it: "Even as certain possibilities of interpretation are opened, they are also directed, lured, and redirected by the poet through the verbal structure he has designed" (1978:145).

Derrida sees the text as retaining the mark of its author (his "signature") but without the illocutionary force the moment of signing wished to embed in it, Ricoeur sees the written text as retaining some evidence of its moment of enunciation. This link back to its origin, seen by Ricoeur in dialectical terms, is, although attenuated in relation to the situation of speech as he sees it, still more emphatic than Derrida's. Nonetheless, his view that the event of utterance can only be construed on the basis of the text is compatible with Derrida's account of presence and intentionality as an effect of the authorial mark (Derrida 1972:392). In fact Ricoeur sees all discourse, not just written, as a dialectic of event and meaning, and so shares Derrida's attitude that self-presence is never total in speech either. Seeing the question of authorial input to the text in dialectical terms makes it a more complicated issue than a mere alternative between the "intentional fallacy" on the one hand and the authorless text on the other. Authorial meaning is instead a dimension of the text (as the possibility of discerning a non-propositional authorial intention in formal features shows): "The authorial meaning is the dialectical counterpart of the verbal meaning, and they have to be construed in terms of each other" (Ricoeur 1976:30).

The attenuation of authorial control in written discourse is for Ricoeur symmetrically reflected in the increased responsibility given to the reader over the addressee of spoken dialogue. The reader responds to the text's dialectic of event and meaning with that of understanding and explanation: the loss of situational reference, which in oral communication is grounded in the dialogic situation, means that the reader must create a new event going from the text in which the original event was objectified. So on the one hand, writing shows up the fact that all authorial expression is a dialectic of event and meaning, presence and absence, in

contrast to the way speech conflates the two by making speaker-meaning and utterance-meaning appear to coincide. At the other pole of the would-be dialogue, the reader's dialectical interpretation and creative input is the full development of an attitude dissimulated in the interpretative activity involved in spoken conversation.

Ricoeur judges the absence of situational reference in the written text as a good thing: making the reader project a world from the text, it liberates him from the constraints of face-to-face exchanges. It reveals that the nature of discourse is to project a world. Writing, and specifically for Ricoeur literature, entails an abstraction from the surrounding world, and this lets the reader "imaginatively actualize the potential non-ostensive references of the text in a new situation" (81). This is how the text points toward a "possible world" which is disclosed in front of it rather than being concealed behind it in some relation to the situation of writing.

How much is the discovery of the text's "possible world" controlled by the text and how much does the reader's interpretative activity supply in its constitution? For Ricoeur, "it is the response of the audience which makes the text [...] significant" (31); thus "a specific kind of onesidedness is implied in the act of reading" (78). Every reader's interpretation begins with a guess as to the nature of the text, a guess determined by and illustrating his limited perspective; this interpretation is then validated according to a logic of probability rather than one of truth or falsity. Thus as many interpretations are possible as there are reading perspectives. Ricoeur further emphasises a major difference between spoken dialogue and the text-reader interaction, namely the fact that while the speaker knows his addressee (though, I would suggest, never completely), written discourse

is open to a potentially universal audience: "Only the dialogue has a 'thou' whose identification precedes discourse. The meaning of a text is open to anyone who can read" (93). It is easy to see how the interpretative authority given to the reader can lead to a divergence from the author's ideas on how his text should be interpreted.

The text's semantic autonomy thus creates considerable tension between the author's claim to authority and the reader's rights of interpretation. The reader's relationship to the text, as Ricoeur sees it, is anything but collaborative: "The right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation" (32). Given that the author of texts is himself a reader of texts,²⁰ and as such is aware of the liberties readers can take with the texts they read, it is only to be expected that he will try to arm his text in anticipation of a battle for control of its interpretation. One obvious way of attempting to influence the reader's perspective and values in advance is by embodying "good" and "bad" readers within the text. It is a strategy, as we shall see in the next chapter and again in Chapter 5, that Sarraute makes great use of in works like *Les Fruits d'or*, *Entre la Vie et la mort* and *Enfance*. In the context of Bakhtin's author-character dialogue, we can see this strategy, which at first seems to acknowledge the importance of the reader as "other", as in fact turning him from the representation's *addressee* into a character and so into an *object* of representation. In this way, all the implications of authorial Godliness in the earlier relationship of control are now extended to the relationship with the reader too. The

²⁰ Antoine Compagnon discusses at length the nature of both reading and writing as quotation of others' words. Writing, specifically, is always a rewriting of what one has already read: "Toute l'écriture est collage et glose" (1979:32).

reader's options, faced with such an attack on his freedom of response, will be examined in my final chapter.

How does this concept of reading as a struggle for control over a writing unmoored from its source and with no fixed destination, fit in with the theory of the ironic text as a dialogic invitation to overcome its own limitations? I have already pointed out the oral bias of the discussions of irony dealt with in Chapter 1; in fact, irony is itself marked as a primarily oral phenomenon by its privileging of *énonciation* over the *énoncé*. In writing, this location of the ironic intention in the *énonciation* is not a problem when it is a case of local, verbal irony: in the absence of speaker-intonation or gestures, the context of the ironic utterance indicates how it is to be enunciated. The fact that the text thus dictates the correct interpretation is similarly not an issue, for to ironise other people's words as it does, necessarily implies such a position of authority. The difficulties arise with the "epistemological" ironisation of a whole text, where the reader is asked to complete rather than merely recognise the enunciation. In Ricoeur's terms we could say that because irony is an oral phenomenon, it is much more heavily weighted toward the event pole of discourse -- the context of enunciation -- than to meaning. For this reason, a written text which wishes to be responded to ironically, must try to fix this event. Yet because the event in question, the dialogue with the reader, has in fact not yet taken place for the writer, it is less a matter of *fixing* it than of *positing* it. Thus the epistemological ironist who wants the *énonciation* of his text to be completed is obliged to posit the addressee who will do so; even where what he intends is a conscious enactment of the importance of the other as (in Lacanian terms) the

representative of language in the subject's self-understanding, his abdication of control cannot be total.

How far is this dynamic specific to written discourse? The solitary situation of the writer can be seen as simply an exacerbated version of the solitary character of any use of language, including speaking. Thus the "placement" of the reader even by the ironic text, a strategy which, by feigning a situation of speech in what is a situation of writing, undermines that text's attempt to disclaim its discursive authority, is in fact an illustration of the limitations of the linguistic subject in general, limitations of which the ironist is theoretically fully aware. The limited perspective of the linguistic subject means that, like the author, he can never know his addressee in all his otherness, but only from his own standpoint; thus he too is obliged in his address to recommend implicitly the desired response. Even the ironic discourse which focuses on the limitations of linguistic consciousness, cannot itself avoid enacting them, and this in its very invitation to an absolutely other reader to help transcend them. Thus its dialogic address shares the constant tendency of the subject of language to relapse into Imaginary relations with the specular other, despite all awareness of the fabricated nature of identity and the omnipresence of the Symbolic order. The ironic address itself thus cannot escape the frustrations of the Lacanian subject, the fact that "fondamentalement, ce sont [de vrais sujets] que je vise chaque fois que je prononce une vraie parole, mais j'atteins toujours *aa'* [the "moi-moi autre" axis] par réflexion [...] Le sujet est séparé des Autres, les vrais, par le mur du langage" (Lacan 1978:286). This is the kind of "monologism" which, I suggested, is a fundamental tendency of human existence in

language, in the irreducibly plural chaos of the Symbolic to which Bakhtin's multivoiced universe can be compared.

To see the (ironic) text's address to the reader as a way of controlling his choice of interpretation of the text in the absence of a coincidence between what Ricoeur calls verbal meaning and mental intention, is thus to see it as attempting to overcome the problems of written communication by feigning the nature of spoken dialogue, despite all awareness of the shared shortcomings of speech and writing.²¹ These shortcomings are the effect of the conscious subject's limited perspective, principally (in the context of communication) his incomplete knowledge of his interlocutor. This, I have suggested, leads the speaker too, on the model of the writer alienated from the reception of his text, to offer his interlocutor in his address the desired response of assent to his words. In this light, the notion of dialogue as an unproblematically consensual meeting of minds in the service of truth seems to be not quite adequate to reality in its failure to include this oppositional, or at least persuasive aspect, and the (however mild) struggles for power it must generate.²²

I wish now, in the light of this exploration of the role of dialogue in narrative form, to turn to Nathalie Sarraute's most fully dialogical texts, *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, both highly unusual in being constructed entirely as dialogues, with no governing narrative voice. My main concern in the next two chapters will be to see

²¹ Though the address I am chiefly concerned with here is the usually implicit invitation to the reader to ironise the text (an invitation which often takes the form of *mise en abyme*), cases of direct address by the text to the reader, while rarer, are even more prescriptive. Sarraute's *Les Fruits d'or*, aside from being constructed around a *mise en abyme* (it revolves around a book called 'Les Fruits d'Or') goes even farther than to address the reader and actually provides his response. This example will be returned to in Chapter 5.

²² Even Bakhtin, in his account of how utterances are oriented toward the listener and his answer, recognises the element of hostility present in dialogue, and the way the shaping role of the listener in the formulation of the address is often an aggressive one: the listener's "apperceptive background [is] pregnant with responses and objections"; it is "made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments" (1981:281).

what happens to the narratorial discourse in these works, and to what extent an authorial monologism persists, as I have argued it will, through the fragmentation of the narrative into a dialogue which seems to be opening up the text to the reader. In relation to *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, I shall discuss the tension between the ironisation of linguistic convention and the textual discourse in which this takes place. The kind of response Sarraute attempts to impose on the reader of her work will then be discussed in the two final chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIMITS OF IRONY:

SARRAUTE AS IRONIST, AND AUTHORITY IN *ENFANCE*

The discussion, in Chapters 1 and 2, of theories of irony and of narrative, showed the action of representing discourses to be common to both. Verbal irony represents a proposition while simultaneously distancing itself from it through gesture, intonation or context. By making the represented discourse into an object to which an attitude is taken, it associates itself with the authorial representation of the discourses of fictional characters, specifically with the technique of narrative representation which most thoroughly fuses quotation with critical distance, namely free indirect discourse. Whereas verbal irony shows up the flaws in a proposition ascribed to another (including the speaker himself, in different circumstances), epistemological irony acknowledges the intrinsically flawed nature of all language and its inadequacy to the speaking subject even as he attempts to articulate this insight.

Both verbal and epistemological irony contain a cooperative dimension which complements their critical thrust: while all communication depends on inference for its success, this is all the more true of the ironic utterance whose lexical signification is by definition at odds with what it wishes to communicate. For epistemological irony, this involvement of the addressee in the constitution of meaning, by supplying

a provisional and ever to be renegotiated validation of language, seems to offer a momentary transcendence, through dialogue, of the linguistic subject's fallen state.

Yet as we saw, this view of irony, being based on spoken language, fails to take account of the element of alienation involved in written communication -- an alienation which, as Jacques Derrida has argued, is equally though less obviously a structural feature of spoken dialogue. This problem led to the conclusion, in the last chapter, that the published text, as a particularly alienated form of communication, can never entirely transcend its own linguistic limits by enacting a dialogue with its reader. It can only ever be the *representation* of such a dialogue, for, driven in its address to its unknown future readers to limit the potential for aberrant interpretations their anonymity provides, it ends up dictating how it wishes to be read. Furthermore, if writing really is the structural model for speech, then the similarly alienated nature of spoken discourse will lead speakers too to attempt to control their interlocutors' reception of their discourse, thus complicating the generally held perception of dialogue as consensual and cooperative.

1. Narration and irony in Sarraute:

It is now time to consider the relevance of the ideas outlined above for Nathalie Sarraute's work. I shall discuss shortly the extent to which her views on language and identity, as given in interviews and essays, concur with those theories I have identified as ironic (i.e. which see the speaking subject as trapped in a web of symbols within which he can only articulate a truthful utterance by interacting

with another subject). Her fictional writing certainly appears to endorse the ironic worldview which holds our conceptions of reality to be inadequate and considers dialogue to be a means of transcending these limitations of language and perspective. The recurring subject of her novels and plays is the opposition between appearance and reality in discourse, between the words of a speaker as they appear to a listener and those words as the product of a *sous-conversation* which prepares them. Moreover, the fact that from the first, her work has concentrated on the problems of communication and the attempts of speakers to understand one another, sets this disparity between appearance and reality in an intersubjective context and allows one to hope for a dialogic resolution to it. While interpersonal relations within the text generally remain unsatisfactory, I would maintain that Sarraute presents the text-reader relationship as providing such a successful dialogue (and thus as compensating for the inadequacies of relations between individuals). But given the conclusions of the last chapter, the relationship she offers her readers is unlikely to escape those pitfalls of social relations which her fiction amply illustrates. However, the ways in which it falls short of dialogic equality are themselves instructive, in that by pointing up the limitations of her commitment to dialogue, they illustrate the predicament of all subjects in language.

This chapter will focus on the level of intratextual, rather than text-reader dialogism in Sarraute, specifically on the attempt to dissolve an authoritative narrative discourse into the plurality of points of view of the fully dialogic text. It will involve a close reading of *Enfance*, the first of Nathalie Sarraute's prose works to abandon all vestiges of narrative unity in favour of the unmediated juxtaposition of direct utterances, in the manner of dramatic dialogue. In fact, the way the

representation of discourses develops throughout Sarraute's work as a whole, to culminate in the fragmented discourses of *Enfance* and -- even more emphatically - - *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, can be interpreted, in the light of the last chapter's discussion of irony and narrative, as constituting an ever stronger structural attack on narrative monologism. As the development of this aspect of her work up to *Vous les entendez?* has been closely analysed by Anthony Newman (1976), I shall briefly summarise his observations before outlining the way her more recent work continues the trend he perceived.

Newman, after Benveniste (1970:18), sees the text as an enunciation on two levels, the utterances of the fictional characters taking place within the global enunciation of the writer (Newman 1976:1-2,11,83). This perception of the text as itself an utterance as well as containing fictional utterances is in line with my focus on both the representation of dialogue within the text, and the text's attempt to establish a dialogue with the reader. However, Newman doesn't discuss at any length the kind of *énonciation* Sarraute's texts enact; moreover, he sees no obstacle to their dialogue with the reader, holding that they overcome the problem of representation (which he sees only in terms of the portrayal of a fictional world) by privileging present-tense discourse over the narration of a story (18).

His examination of the status of reported discourse within Sarraute's novels starts from Cranaki and Belaval's observation that "de plus en plus le dialogue devient le centre de gravité de ses romans" (Cranaki & Belaval 1965:113; Newman 1976:23), a comment which contradicts Sarraute's own impression of a reduction in dialogue from *Les Fruits d'or* to *Entre la Vie et la mort* (Sarraute 1967b:285; Newman 1976:23). The conflict of views is explained by the fact that reported

discourses are not always overtly announced as such, but instead are indicated contextually, so perhaps dissimulating "la presque omniprésence de l'‘oral’ dans les oeuvres de Sarraute" (Newman 1976:32-33). Furthermore, Newman describes as character discourses not just articulate statements but all prelinguistic manifestations of a point of view. He shares Gerda Zeltner's view that "nulle part vous ne trouverez un passage qui ait le ton neutre et raisonnable de la description objective" (Zeltner 1962:596).

Newman traces the development of represented discourse in Sarraute, noting techniques like her use of images of physical motion to replace the indicators of speech ("he said" etc.) she so dislikes. Character discourses eventually usurp narrative authority in a more fundamental way by infiltrating their own narrative context: "Le sujet de l'énonciation dans le Contexte est aussi le locuteur" (Newman 1976:48). In other words, from *Le Planétarium* on, the speaker himself becomes the narrator of his utterances; that novel's abandonment of the first-person narrator is "un grand pas vers l'effacement de toute conscience centrale et organisatrice" (61). These speaker-narrators, for each text is made up of many such, provide a bridge between the first-person narration of *Portrait d'un inconnu* and *Martereau*, and the later dissolution, with *Enfance*, of the narrative into opposing voices. Once freed not only from narratorial representation, but also from that by other characters (a function Alain in *Le Planétarium* still provides), individuals from *Les Fruits d'or* on are presented directly, as "lieu et objet éphémères des émotions entourant une situation particulière" (62).

Moving from the level of discourse as *énoncé*, Newman bases his "para-linguistic" study of *énonciation* (again, only that of characters)¹ on a reading of *Entre la Vie et la mort*, the opening sequence of which enacts the lesson that narration always originates in a point of view. The reader's discovery that the narrator of the first paragraph is a participant in the action creates a "personnalisation radicale du texte et de l'expérience qu'il évoque" (92). While this "je" disappears immediately into the group, to become a "chaînon anonyme" (EVM 10), its initial identification affirms a "présence affective, diffuse dans le "nous" de la suite", and, in a "dialectique de l'objectivité et de la subjectivité, du 'il' et du 'je'" which for Newman is "l'essence de la narration (au sens large) sarrautienne", reminds the reader that every "il" is a potential "je" (Newman 1976:92).

In order to represent the experiences of such character-narrators, which take place on the level of prelinguistic affect rather than of articulate discourse (in fact, rather than narrators they are generally silently recording consciousnesses [153]), Sarraute is still obliged to lend her authorial voice to the narration, in a "discours pour le personnage" (95). The wordless nature of their perceptions calls for an authorial articulation: "C'est toute la périlleuse entreprise des romans de Sarraute que ce prêt de sa voix à ce qui n'en a pas chez le personnage, que ce discours pour les tropismes" (96). Hence, as Dorrit Cohn also noted, Sarraute's predilection for free indirect discourse which, in Newman's view, "de procédé syntaxique [...] est devenu principe d'écriture, lieu privilégié de l'écriture de Nathalie Sarraute" (99).

¹ While acknowledging the presence of a global enunciation, he prefers to concentrate on the reproduction of this level of the text within it, something he sees as characteristic of Sarraute. Invoking Todorov's three "registres de la parole" outlined in "Poétique" (*Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* [Paris, Seuil, 1968, pp.99-166]), the referential, the literal, and the enunciative, he argues that though the last generally refers to the "énonciation globale du texte", "c'est [...] en réalité la projection de ce troisième registre sur l'ensemble du texte, mais en fonction des personnages, qui est typique de *Entre la Vie et la mort*" (118).

However, he discerns in Sarraute's "style libre relâché" (106) a drive to occlude the author as far as is possible given her task of articulating the unexpressed. He notes the increasing use of dialogue to represent *sous-conversation*, and sees it as a way of linking the outside, tangible world of conversation (where characters don't need an authorial voice to speak on their behalf) to the inner world of tropisms (102), a world which of course doesn't have such linguistic autonomy. It thus seems likely that Sarraute's attraction, even at this early stage, to dialogue as a vehicle for representing the tropism, is part of an attempt to disappear from her own text.²

This prominence of free indirect discourse, combined with the focus on the often comic disparity between conversation and subconversation (appearance and reality), makes Sarraute's early novels ideal terrain for verbal irony (the ironic quotation of another's discourse). Newman comments that:

Une *ironie* irréductible traverse ses oeuvres. Le projet de confrontation des tropismes avec la surface traduit cette vue profondément ironique. Outre cette donnée générale, chaque fois que l'on est tenté d'attribuer une opinion exprimée dans le texte à la romancière elle-même, on la voit s'esquiver dans une pirouette. C'est en filigrane, et non pas directement, que les opinions de Nathalie Sarraute peuvent être aperçues. (129)

Verbal irony takes different forms in her work. While the authorial ironisation of the characters' discourses is generally conveyed in free indirect discourse, the characters themselves, who exist primarily in terms of their language³ and so refer to one another through quotation, vent their hostility more directly. Of course a

² Celia Britton has also drawn attention to this tendency: "An examination of the novels in chronological sequence shows that *sous-conversation* tends more and more to be represented textually as speech" (1983:72). She, however, sees the invasion by reported speech of the theoretically prelinguistic, tropistic realm of *sous-conversation* as symptomatic of a thematic paradox, namely "Sarraute's representation of communication as both predictable, inevitably intelligible [...] and, on the other hand, elusive and treacherous" (78). This relates to the conflict I shall discuss in terms of Sarraute's attitude to the reader, one between the desire for immediate contact with and total knowledge of the other, and the fundamental alienation that makes it impossible.

³ In Sarraute, according to Bernard Pingaud, "le personnage [...] se fait en se disant. Avant d'être visage, habillement, attitude, il est discours" (1963:28; my emphasis).

whole range of attitudes, not just that of irony, can be taken to a discourse one quotes, and relations within the web of discourses (of individuals as discourses) in Sarraute's universe are not always ironic (they can even, though rarely, be approving: "Très bon, l'article de Brulé sur Les Fruits d'Or" [FO 33]). Yet the fact that relations among her characters are almost always hostile means that reference to others, motivated by aggression, frequently uses to critical ends the space for interpretation provided by mention of others' propositions (the mechanism of irony) or language (that of parody). Before exploring the degree of affinity between her stated views on language and identity and those theories which Chapter 1 identified as manifesting an epistemological irony, I shall look briefly at the way verbal irony is exploited in one of her novels, *Les Fruits d'or*, the one which most overtly parodies a defined social group (those who read, write, but most of all talk about literature).

At one point in the novel, a rebel against the hermetic discourse of two literary critics mentally harangues the other listeners who refuse to challenge the elitism of this pair's jargon, by mimicking their likely reaction if he were actually to confront them. In the words he attributes to the others, he refers to himself first in the third, then in the second person (as the object and then the addressee of their supposed comments), thus emphasising that he is mentioning rather than using what he says: "On est tout incrédule, tout surpris lorsque quelqu'un -- mais comme il est indélicat, indiscret -- insiste, veut à tout prix vous les montrer... on se rebiffe... Mais qu'est-ce que vous allez encore chercher? Vous voyez le mal partout" (FO 67). To the extent that the words he attributes to his victims, though not actually theirs, represent their likely response, they have the status of irony. This overt *invention*

of the other's discourse before ridiculing it, asserts an authorial omniscience which exceeds even indirect quotation or paraphrase.

The rebel goes on to present the mystified submission of earlier victims in the same way, allowing Sarraute to engage in a simultaneous critique of contemporary theoretical fashions and the unwavering allegiance they inspire (his self-appointed role as a secular seer who destroys the protective wall of cliché these critics have constructed around themselves echoes the public profile Sarraute too presents, as we shall see shortly). Imagining an initiate recounting to others his introduction to one of the great men, he employs the straightforward ironic strategy of attributing to the other words which articulate his opinions and which he then quotes as though they were his own, but in a context which clearly ridicules them: "Alors nous avons vu le souverain s'avancer vers nous et nous relever... Ah nous ne l'aurions jamais reconnu... il est si simple, charmant" (70). He thus exploits to the full the authority of an all-knowing narrator, by imposing words on the others who thereby become his characters; he then represents these words (and their speakers) from a derogatory point of view. This, we have seen, is an authority his author disclaims; and for that reason her authorial irony prefers the more muted form of critique provided by free indirect quotation, where the utterances are presented as having some degree of independent existence.

Authorial verbal irony comes into play almost immediately in this passage, as the central character loses his status as narrator and is portrayed from without, from an unidentified point of view in which we can see residual traces of a global authorial perspective. His closing narratorial claim that "Moi je tiens bon" (72) is immediately undone when, in a caricature of human fickleness, he attaches himself

to a kindred spirit, only to ditch her almost as quickly. The free indirect narrative irony is here less authoritative than the character's own attacks on others were, for the discourse is seen to come at least partly from its victim rather than being peremptorily imposed on him: "Il est prêt à tout abandonner, à renoncer à toutes les richesses qu'il a amassées [...] pour être semblable à elle" (75). He promptly distances himself from "cette demeure" (77; a judgement based on her short hair and clipped nails) when he realises that association with her would undermine his status in the eyes of the "grands" whom he had earlier professed to despise. Social pressure makes him submit to an image of her which, in its utter incongruity in terms of the actual social context, is highly comic. Narratorially, moreover, its absence of indications of tense or person intensifies the ambiguity of free indirect discourse and, by dissimulating any authorial presence, lets the discourse be seen as largely the character's:

Visage d'extatique, de fanatique... tête peu encombrée où viennent peut-être s'installer, occupant toute la place, quelles croyances... absurdes... Christian Science... sciences occultes... yogi... adepte de sectes bizarres... errant loin des chemins tracés... nudisme... sandales grecques... tables tournantes... (76-77)

Deflating the status of a fictional spokesman could be seen to deny authority to all but the author. Yet although verbal irony is essentially authoritative, Sarraute does seem to expose her own discourse to it. Admittedly, in some cases, such as when typically Sarrautean language is mocked by a character, its authority never really comes into question. Thus when one voice rejoices because in the fictional 'Fruits d'Or' "on [ne] trouve pas de 'profondeurs'. Pas de grouillements de larves, de pataugeages dans je ne sais quels fonds bourbeux qui dégagent des miasmes asphyxiants, dans je ne sais quelles vases putrides où l'on s'enlise" (42), the irony

instantly rebounds on the speaker, for the whole tone of the novel in which his discourse is embedded provides a wordless ironic commentary on his opinion.

Sarraute's self-mockery appears more thorough and less recuperable later, however, when one of the fictional voices parodies a female apologist for a "new reality":

Il fallait l'entendre, la brave dame, elle était toute rouge, toutes ses plumes hérissées: 'Mais Monsieur, moi je trouve Les Fruits d'Or factice... c'est trop littéraire... ce n'est pas ça, la réalité [...] Les sentiments, c'est tellement plus complexe... Il pépie... on nous a appris... à l'heure actuelle nous savons' [...] La pauvre était hors d'elle: 'Ce que nous appelons la réalité aujourd'hui -- c'est bien autre chose... Depuis un demi-siècle, toutes ces découvertes [...]' (79)

So familiar are these phrases from Sarraute's critical writings that we have the impression of hearing snatches from essays like "Nouveau Roman et réalité" (1963) or "Les Deux Réalités" (1964). Yet even here, the tables are silently and ironically turned by the context of the utterance. If the woman's highly Sarrautean opinions are ironised by the male voice, the fictional ironist himself becomes a victim of the author's irony too, for the form of the novel in which he speaks reaffirms the values he ridicules. The Sarrautean self being mocked is never coextensive with the authorial self which orchestrates the mockery and which ensures that it has the last laugh. Mediating the self-irony through a fictional representative, as Sarraute does here, simply enhances the way the self-quoting ironist will always remain untouched by his own ridicule, which is ultimately addressed not to his speaking self but to a fabricated stand-in. A barrier thus remains which keeps self-directed verbal irony, where the author's status is reinforced rather than undermined by his ability to make an effigy of himself, from the total self-subversion by the speaking voice which is the aim of what I have called epistemological irony.

If local instances of self-irony within the text are always overcome by the nature of the text itself, how can it make the transition to subjecting itself to the same kind of treatment meted out to its characters' ideas? As long as the text presents a superior vantage-point which embraces and transcends the discourses it represents, a narrative authority, however mitigated, like that which we saw step in to deflate the would-be narrator in *Les Fruits d'or*, then its scope for self-criticism will not exceed that of verbal irony which always retains its own speaker-authority. Both verbal irony and narrative, given the authority of their enunciating voices, can only simulate the state of ignorance of the subject and consequently the dialogue which transcends this individual ignorance: the dialogue their text initiates is really a monologue to which the addressee is invited to assent rather than to contribute. Thus while the verbal ironist, through context, tone etc., encourages his interlocutor to grasp an unspoken thought which his language fails to articulate, nonetheless the fact that his true, unnamed attitude to his words is already established prior to his interlocutor's interpretation makes his irony an authorial *representation* of the intersubjective transcendence of the limits of language rather than an acknowledged instance of it. Similarly in narrative, the authority which allows the inadequacy of characters' discourses to be enacted but also overcome in a "discours *pour* le personnage" (Newman 1976:95; in Sarraute's case the discourse is that of *sous-conversation*), distances the narrative voice from the epistemological plight of its characters and offers the reader no active role in the text beyond appreciating the disparity between surface appearance and a deeper reality to which the author, if not her characters, has immediate access.

In this light, the fragmentation, in Sarraute's two most recent works, of the authorial point of view into first two and then several voices, suggests itself as a solution -- through dissolution -- to the limits which narrative authority imposes on the ironic worldview. The dialogue among the exploded elements of the authorial discourse not only exploits the spontaneity of conversation to give these works the air of events in progress, free of the textual order a unified narrative discourse imposes. In addition, the diversity of voices presents itself as the ideal way to subvert any attempt by a single narrative thread to prevail. Both the structure of opposing voices and the idea of the text as an event in progress (a feature I shall return to in Chapter 5) had been explored by Sarraute in works written since Newman's study: *"disent les imbéciles"* continues the tendency towards representing *sous-conversation* as dialogue, and *L'Usage de la parole* incites the reader to cooperate in the task of revealing tropistic reality, and so help write the text. *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* thus appear as further explorations in a mode of writing which aims to erode narrative authority by privileging the diversity and unpredictable actuality of a dialogue in whose development the reader is actively involved. Rather than simulating transcendence as verbal irony does, the self-ironising dialogic text will seek to renounce any monologic claim to knowledge, privileging instead the ideal of an equal dialogue where the very otherness of the interlocutor is the key to the constitution of a truth not governed by the limits of an individual consciousness.

However, given that, as the last chapter argued, the attempt by an author to engage in a dialogue with the reader is impeded by the need to anticipate that reader's response, for writing is always a deferral of communication (and with an

unknown interlocutor in the case of the published text), we can expect to encounter problems in Sarraute's attempt to set up such a dialogue around her work. Her treatment of the reader will be the subject of the two final chapters of this thesis; in the rest of this chapter I want to consider the way problems arise already at the level of composition, namely in the structural project of dissolving narrative authority and discursive unity into a fully dialogic text, in this case the autobiographical *récit Enfance*. We shall understand why Sarraute should come up against these problems in a particularly striking way once we see how her own comments on writing, while they promote a view of her work as an anti-authoritarian and dialogic engagement with the dilemma of the linguistic subject in the search for truth, reveal at the same time major limitations in that view. It seems inevitable that these limitations will exacerbate in her writing the obstacles to dialogue (or the tendency to monologue) inherent in the written text as such.

Sarraute's view of the writer, a view outlined frequently in interviews and essays, places itself directly in the tradition (associated with Romanticism) of the poet as seer, one who intimates an Absolute beyond the limited perception of the average human being, and who captures some part of that transcendent reality in the work of art:

Cet invisible que l'art rend visible, qu'est-ce que c'est? C'est quelque chose de très difficile à définir, quelque chose qui est fait d'éléments épars, que nous devinons, que nous pressentons très vaguement, d'éléments amorphes qui gisent privés d'existence, perdus dans la masse infinie des possibilités, des virtualités, fondus en un magma, recouverts par la gangue du visible, du déjà connu, du déjà exprimé. Ces éléments l'artiste les dégage, les réunit, les construit en un modèle qui est l'oeuvre même. (Sarraute 1964:72)

For Sarraute, this reality is transcendent not in some divine sense, nor quite in the "worldly" way in which the concept of the unconscious, I have suggested, by being simultaneously beyond and central to consciousness, relocates the ideal of transcendent truth within the bounds of the subject. The reality which the Sarrautean artist perceives is a conscious one, yet concealed from the common run of humanity by the wall of conventions which surrounds us. This point, and the concomitant isolation of the artist who is alone in seeing the true reality ("Devant cette réalité inconnue que l'écrivain a l'impression d'être le premier à voir, il se trouve seul [...] Il est seul juge des formes qu'il lui sera nécessaire de créer pour rendre compte de cette réalité qui est la sienne" [73]), is of major importance, for it suggests already an anti-dialogic strand in Sarraute's concept of writing, one which threatens to undermine from within her experiments with dialogue.

In many respects, the wall of conventions within which Sarraute sees the individual enclosed, remains within the tradition I have examined where the conscious self is held to have only a limited understanding of his full identity as subject, being unable to grasp alone the chaos which contains him. For Sarraute as for Schlegel, Freud and Lacan, our blindness in this respect is related to our use of language: she equates the "déjà connu" with the "déjà exprimé", and our present ignorance is attributed largely to those texts which inform our view of reality. "La réalité banale, celle du lecteur et de l'auteur, c'est une image du monde donnée par toutes nos connaissances, notre culture, par toutes les oeuvres qui constituent l'expérience littéraire, philosophique, artistique de chacun" (1963:433). Thus both reader *and* writer are trapped within the pseudo-reality of convention and cliché: this

"monde en trompe-l'oeil" is "tout un ensemble de notions à travers lequel chacun de nous voit la réalité".

The affinity of Sarraute's ideas on the problems of literary creation with the analyses of language and selfhood outlined in Chapter 1, becomes even more pronounced when she discusses what she holds to be the epitome of conventionality in fictional writing, the fictional character or *personnage*. Just as in life, for psychoanalysis, the *moi* is a mask held up by the self over the chaos of subjectivity, so the character in a novel, "cette pure convention romanesque", is no more than "le support, fragile et mouvant, de la matière nouvelle qui le déborde de toutes parts... une matière devenue si complexe que les contours bien définis, épais et rigides, du héros de roman traditionnel ne peuvent plus la contenir" (436). If the Freudian critique of the concept of identity relates so closely to this critique of the traditional novel, it is because, for Sarraute, literature has informed our perception of reality: we see others and ourselves in the terms in which fiction has taught us to see them, and so we judge new literary characters in turn according to a false standard of human verisimilitude acquired from nineteenth-century novels. "Lifelike" characters in fiction are those who behave as do (or as we see them behave) "ces types humains facilement reconnaissables dont nous sommes entourés, que nous a appris à voir une certaine littérature, que nous retrouvons partout et jusque dans les grandes oeuvres du passé" (437). Thus the dismantling of characters in the novel, and that of the fictional *moi* we construct daily above the vastness of the self, are inseparable processes. Sarraute, like Bakhtin, singles out Dostoevsky as a pioneer in the attack on the unitary fictional character: "Chez Dostoievski [...] des traits de caractère tout à fait opposés s'affrontent constamment dans le même personnage" (1967b:288).

The ostensible kinship between Sarraute's view of the conventionality of language and identity, and the Lacanian theory of the subject of language, seems to be reaffirmed by the value she places on dialogue, specifically on its role in constituting a more authentic selfhood founded in intersubjectivity. Beneath the false sense of singularity and autonomy which language gives to the subject, is the "fond commun" of prelinguistic experience which Sarraute famously calls tropisms; because this level of experience is universal, it provides a founding intersubjectivity from which language as a conceptual medium alienates the self, and to which all our efforts at spoken communication aim to be adequate:

Quand je parle de 'fond commun' c'est tout simplement que je pense que ces tropismes, ces mouvements, existent absolument chez tous [...] C'est eux qui créent certains rapports entre les gens, qui forment les sympathies, les antipathies, qui déterminent les conduites que nous avons les uns à l'égard des autres. (289)

But if language causes the isolation of the individual, it is also seen by him as his one way out of it, potentially providing access to the secular human Absolute of a fully realised intersubjectivity: "Je crois que s'il y a un absolu que mes personnages recherchent c'est toujours le besoin de fusion et de contact avec autrui. Le silence de quelqu'un rompt le contact. Et de même le mensonge: c'est une rupture. Il s'agit chaque fois d'une rupture qu'on essaye de réparer" (293-94).

What implications for writing does language's inadequacy to its speaker have, its "action asséchante et pétrifiante" on the "régions silencieuses et obscures où aucun mot ne s'est encore introduit" (1972a:32)? One of Sarraute's earliest strategies to counter the conceptual opacity of words was to concentrate on evoking through images "ces tropismes [qui] ne sont pas exprimables par des mots" (1967b:289). By letting her avoid recourse to a conceptual vocabulary, simple

textual images seemed to be "des équivalents de sensations qui me paraissent impossibles à exprimer".

Yet the implication of this -- that the literary image renders the language which composes it transparent before the sensation to which the image refers -- suggests that alongside the proclaimed awareness of the conventional nature of language there persists a belief in a different, authentic because non-conceptual, register of language, one which doesn't distort its referent. In other words, Sarraute's early confidence in the efficacy of imagistic expression seems to oppose from the outset the idea of all language as inherently defective and of truth as dependent on dialogue. Moreover, her choice of imagery compounds the authority of the text in relation to its reader -- not only is its language ultimately considered to be expressive and transparent, but by choosing images which will already be familiar to her readers she further distracts attention from their rhetorical status: "Je suis obligée de choisir des images très simples pour que le lecteur n'ait pas à se creuser la tête, pour qu'elles lui soient transmises directement" (289).

The familiar early Sarrautean imagery of biological reaction and primitive instinct disappears, however, from her more dialogical recent work with its fragmentation of the authorial discourse.⁴ The question is whether this abandonment of imagery is a symptom of a loss of faith in the transparent register of language on which it depended, one unmarked by convention; this would simply mean that language was now recognised to be as much a problem for the text as for its characters, its conventionality no longer able to be concealed by the fore-

⁴ This tendency was already detectable in 1965: Cranaki and Belaval note that "le complexe d'images -- masse molle et étouffante, bave, tentacules... -- déjà apparent dans *Tropismes*, proliférant dans le *Portrait* et déjà moins dans *Martereau*, s'exprime à peine dans *Le Planétarium* et finit par disparaître dans *Les Fruits d'or* (1965:79; cited in Newman 1976:38).

grounding of sense perception. If the textual discourse is identifying in this way with the plight of its characters who struggle to overcome their linguistic isolation through address to an interlocutor in a constant struggle against silence and lies, it too will be bound to seek a more equal dialogue with the reader, requesting of him a more active response than the passive recognition which was all Sarraute's choice of imagery wished to allow. The hypothesis of an increased linguistic self-consciousness and even scepticism on the part of the text's own discourse, is thus supported by the presence, in her most recent works, of a concern to present the text as coming into being through negotiation (as in the frequent addresses to the reader in *L'Usage de la parole*: "Ne nous hâtons pas, allons au plus près d'abord" [11]).

This interpretation of the significance of Sarraute's stylistic evolution away from imagistic narrative into dialogue is encouraged by her discussion, in an interview with Lucette Finas in 1978 (i.e. between "*disent les imbéciles*" and *L'Usage de la parole*), of the role she sees dialogue play in the self-definition of the subject. Though the conversation centres on the play *Elle est là* (which opens the just-published collection of plays *Théâtre*), this is because for Finas "elle résume, sobrement et dramatiquement [...] l'essentiel de votre oeuvre: la hantise et le refus d'une certaine forme de *résistance* [...] la résistance qu'opposent, à celui qui tient la parole, ses interlocuteurs réels ou imaginaires" (Sarraute 1978:4). Thus dialogue appears in Sarraute's work as an ideal, menaced by the other's indifference to a self who not only, for Sarraute, "tient la parole" but also "tient à la parole". This speaker in search of dialogue stands apart from the conversational power struggles so often represented in Sarraute's fiction: "[Il] n'a pas en vue la soumission de la personne de son interlocuteur. Il souhaite la soumission de sa parole à un ordre qui

les dépasse tous deux et auquel il se soumet lui-même" (4). This order which embraces the *parole* of both interlocutors, again evokes Lacan's Symbolic order or Schlegel's concept of language as enacting the infinitely relative position of the subject in the world. In response to Finas's suggestion that this transcendent order is that of dialogue, and that "le postulat implicite de vos textes est que la rectitude du dialogue se porte garante de la bonne marche du monde", Sarraute affirms: "J'en suis, pour ma part, convaincue" (4).⁵

Nonetheless, this rectitude of dialogue remains largely unrealised in Sarraute, with the values of each speaker failing to coincide in a jointly fashioned truth. Such an establishment of values is the speaker's ultimate goal in his dialogic interaction with an interlocutor, and insofar as such characters are authorial representatives (Sarraute calls them "mes chevaliers" [4]), it is her goal as well. These "knights" "se jettent presque livre après livre, pièce après pièce, contre cet obstacle [la nécessité d'évaluer... et l'impossibilité de le faire]. Seuls, ils ne peuvent rien. Que faire d'une valeur reconnue d'un seul? Alors, ils communiquent, silencieusement ou non" (4). There follows, in Finas's words, "le drame de leur exclusion possible lorsque l'interlocuteur haï d'être trop aimé se dérobe à la communication cherchée avec, pour conséquence, la mise à mort du monde".

The fact that the dialogues focus on values is of major importance, for there is a significant epistemological difference between dialogue seen as constituting *values* and as constituting *meaning*. In fact, the implicit belief in an adequate

⁵ We can compare her response in 1981 to Carmen Licari's observation that "le langage fonctionne à travers une série de non fonctionnements: la mésentente, le conflit": "Au moins s'efforce-t-on à travers ce conflit de rechercher l'entente, de parvenir à une certaine fusion. C'est à ce moment-là qu'on existe l'un pour l'autre, tandis que le reste du temps on garde ses distances et on reste dans l'isolement" (Sarraute 1985c:14).

language persists within Sarraute's engagement with dialogue, for neither on the level of the speakers' investment in the dialogue nor on that of Sarraute's position as author of that dialogue, is the status of language or the authority of the one who uses it entirely undermined. The words of the dialogue-seeker's address to the other are described by Sarraute as "pleins. Ce ne sont pas les mots pour les mots" (4). Though the adjective may recall Lacan's idea of the "parole pleine", the similarity is misleading. These "mots pleins" represent an idea which the speaker holds prior to the dialogue and which in the course of the exchange is in fact, as in *Elle est là*, "happée au passage... enfermée là-bas, livrée sans défense, étranglée en silence" (Th. 14). The value of these words is thus not instituted by the dialogue but preexists it, for they come to it already living -- "émis ou reçus comme des vivants" [Sarraute 1978:4]) -- rather than depending on reception and response to enliven them (on the contrary it threatens to annihilate them). Language, in other words, is still expressive for Sarraute, and if dialogue fails more often than it succeeds, it's because it is the collision of two already constituted *values* embodied in their speakers, and each of which can only prevail at the cost of the other's annihilation.⁶ The struggle which the Sarrautean dialogue enacts aims not to *establish* a value for language but to *impose* a value and the language in which it is unproblematically conveyed. Sarraute's battleground is ideological rather than epistemological: she enacts a conflict between preestablished "good" (spontaneous) and "bad" (alienated) points of view, rather than exploring whether a single point of view can be true given the limited nature of consciousness and the language which informs it.

⁶ While this may recall Bakhtin's concept of dialogue as ideological, there remains the all-important difference that for him, the idea itself is a product of intersubjectivity (see Ch.2 p.82).

Dialogue thus retains the same goal narrative imagery had -- "la recherche de l'assentiment" (5) -- rather than searching for a new truth.

Thus Sarraute never goes more than half-way toward seeing language as restricting one's ability to grasp a truth, and this ambivalence is visible also in her account of her own writing practice: "Quelquefois la sensation vous fait partir à la découverte du mot, mais quelquefois un mot surgit et ce mot à son tour produit une nouvelle sensation" (1976b:285). The ultimate expressibility of sensation, of the *sous-conversation* normally described as unnameable, is clearly demonstrated by the fact that it surfaces into the spoken dialogue of Sarraute's dramas. While the uncanny nature of these dialogues is often emphasised (including by Sarraute herself in the essay "Le Gant retourné" [1975]), their strangeness lies not in any lexical or syntactic distortion of spoken language but simply in the way they articulate feelings not normally considered suitable for conversation: "Les gens parlent d'une manière qui paraît tout à fait naturelle, mais en réalité ils disent des choses qu'on ne dit jamais, ils expriment ce qui se passe en eux [...] Le dialogue est irréel parce qu'il contient le pré-dialogue: ce que d'ordinaire on ne dit pas" (1976b:288). That the would-be *indicible* is thoroughly compatible with ordinary language is clear from the fact that, as Sarraute complains to Lucette Finas, readers of her drama are capable of not even noticing the unreal nature of its dialogues (1978:4).

The fact that Sarraute's characters ultimately become able to articulate their prelinguistic mental processes in a dramatic dialogue, without the help of authorial imagery, suggests that what she sees the subject of language as lacking in order to articulate a personal truth is not so much a lexicon adequate to experience as a social sanction. Similarly, if the writer must struggle in order to articulate a view

of reality, as Sarraute struggled to overcome the "action asséchante et pétrifiante" of language (1972a:32) through the use of imagery, it is not because language is held to be *inherently* insufficient to that reality but because large areas of it have been colonised by the speaking masses and have thus lost an ability they originally possessed to refer directly. Instead they have become so marked by their frequent use that their referent has been occluded behind the veneer of convention. This enduring faith in the expressive potential of language for those who can seek out spaces not yet conventionalised into cliché is made very clear in something Sarraute says about Flaubert in her address to the 1972 colloquium on the *nouveau roman* at Cérisy-la-Salle. She is incredulous at his admission that "A chaque ligne, à chaque mot, la langue me manque et l'insuffisance du vocabulaire est telle que je suis forcé à changer les détails très souvent", and sees it as running entirely counter to Modernism. In her view, "c'est précisément vers ce qui ne se laisse pas nommer, vers ce qui échappe à toute définition, à toute qualification pétrifiante, que se portent tous les efforts des modernes" (1972a:33).⁷ For Sarraute, the perception of what is unnameable is only the starting point of the modern writer, whose goal must be, beyond indicating its existence, to make it nameable: "Toute écriture vivante doit mettre au jour quelque chose qui n'a pas encore été pris dans l'écriture" (1984b:41).

Thus the apparent contradictions in Sarraute's attitude to the status of language are explained by the fact that she sees it as a two-tiered structure. Language in its most familiar manifestation is certainly limited and limiting, a web of convention in which the speaking subject is unable to articulate anything truly his

⁷ In the discussion following her talk, Jean Ricardou defended Flaubert's "considération du langage comme matière signifiante dont il faut respecter les lois" as on the contrary "une prise de conscience tout à fait moderne" (42).

own, and which cuts him off from any possibility of understanding his position in the world. But where she differs from much contemporary critical thought is in seeing this web of convention as only partial, concealing behind it not just reality but in the first instance a purer language in direct contact with that reality. This view is very useful in that by going along to a certain extent with the idea of expression as problematic, it creates a general picture of a mystified linguistic community; yet by claiming that this mystification can be overcome within language, it provides a space for literature.⁸ Sarraute makes clear in an interview conducted in 1981 that writing, far from epitomising a lack of self-presence true of all language use, can express what spoken language cannot; she agrees strongly with its definition as "un autre discours [...] la tentative d'exprimer de manière plus subtile et moins limitée cette complexité de choses que le discours parlé n'atteint pas" (1985b:306-07). If Germaine Lemaire in *Le Planétarium* feels Flaubertian anguish at the banality of her writing, it is only because "cet écrivain n'était pas un véritable écrivain; c'était un écrivain académique" (307); Alain Guimier is the real writer, for "il patauge dans une matière trouble; il n'a pas encore trouvé le langage à travers lequel il pourra faire passer une sensation encore intacte". Thus the Romantic isolation of the Sarrautean artist is explained: just as her speakers only engage in dialogue *after* they have established certain values, and purely to get

⁸ Ann Jefferson elucidates Sarraute's attitude to linguistic representation in terms of Gérard Genette's notion of "secondary cratylysm", where cratylysm denotes the belief in language's organic and necessary relation to what it names, and secondary cratylysm sees language, though imperfect, as nonetheless "perfectible dans le sens d'une plus grande mimésis" (Genette 1972a:394; cited in Jefferson 1978:524). She discusses how Sarraute's imagery works toward this second-level mimesis by "deconstruct[ing] both the more traditional realist reading whereby the language of the text behaves as if it were a copy, and the more radical anti-representational reading implied by pure scriptural activity, in order to produce as much meaning as possible" (524). This combination of the subversion of conventional representational discourse with an insistence on their own realist motivation puts Sarraute's texts "on the conservative side of that fundamental division between representation on the one hand, and pure scriptural activity on the other".

confirmation of these, the writer's search for truth is also solitary. He finds a true language not in dialogue but in a private struggle to name "ce qu'il est seul à voir [...] ce qui exige pour se révéler, qui ne peut se révéler que par un nouveau mode d'expression, par de nouvelles formes" (1963:432; cp.1972a:32).⁹

This differentiation between true and conventional language explains how Sarraute can claim that the writer creates new forms *ex nihilo*, transporting himself outside "ces régions déjà en tous points occupées où le langage littéraire dress[e] ses modèles admirables et écrasants" (1972a:35) while remaining able to write.¹⁰ Positing this pure language which has a direct, organic relationship to experience (to write in this register is to "laisser circuler le plus librement possible à travers le langage la sève qui monte de ces régions inconnues où il plonge ses racines" [34]), allows Sarraute to blur constantly the boundary between the domain of sensation and the status of the writer as a linguistic subject. Ultimately, her strategy is to divide language into articulation and "naming", the latter being equated with abstract definition ("Je ne les [les choses informes] ai jamais nommées. Vous ne trouverez pas une seule fois une définition d'un de ces états dans un de mes livres" [48]). The former means simply "rendre communicable", and shores up its shaky independence from convention-bound "naming" by presenting itself as more inventive than

⁹ The problems which attend the concept of expression for modern critical thinking were evidently not an issue for Sarraute in 1963. We can contrast her lively reaction, some years later, when asked by Alain Robbe-Grillet whether the world she writes about exists for her before the writing or is produced by it: "Je n'ai pas employé le mot 'expression', que Dieu m'en préserve! Je sais parfaitement dans quel piège vous essayez de me faire tomber" (Sarraute 1972a:50). She goes on to assert that the fictional world doesn't preexist the text but that "ce qui existe, ce sont des sensations vagues... qui ont besoin du langage, qui vont à sa recherche".

¹⁰ The idea that one can remove oneself entirely from literary language when writing in a received literary form and acknowledging Dostoevsky, Kafka, Proust, and Joyce as forebears seems somewhat implausible. The confidence it displays in the separability of one's own artistic creation from the context the genre provides is perhaps comparable to Sarraute's belief that the tropism as a mental creation develops, and can be represented, independently of the specific social or mental context in which it occurs, "à l'état pur" and in a "porteur anonyme, à peine visible, un simple support de hasard" (1972a:35).

representational: "Ce que j'ai cherché, c'est de *faire exister* quelque chose *d'encore inconnu* et qui *exigeait une nouvelle forme*" (49; my emphasis). The reluctance to admit what certainly looks like a view of writing as expression (see p.119 n.9) is reflected in Sarraute's hesitation between the terms "innommé" and "innommable" to define her subject matter (1972a:36): both are problematic, for while the unnamed can be not only "articulated" (expressed) but represented, the unnameable cannot be put into words at all. Only by regarding representation as an aspect of definition alone can "articulation" be made to seem innocent, letting Sarraute vindicate her writing as inventively articulating the "innommé" without representing it; thus she can aspire to "investir dans du langage une part, si infime fût-elle, d'innommé", while claiming simultaneously that tropisms attracted her because "ils ne portaient et ne pouvaient porter aucun nom" (34).¹¹

Given this view of language in which, despite the elevation of the concept of dialogue, the role of the writer as seer remains, what is the reader's place in Sarraute's literary universe? The two-tier view of language, which combines a belief in words as inadequate conventions with a simultaneous belief in truth as expressible, seems finally to generate an aesthetic not of epistemological but of verbal irony where dialogue is only partial: the inadequacy of language has already been overcome by the ironist, and that victory requires simply to be endorsed by the disempowered interlocutor. If the writer can break free of the bonds of convention and cliché, escaping the mystified state of the Lacanian subject of language, the reader has no such insight, for he personifies convention and so is dependent on the

¹¹ Celia Britton has recently discussed the ambivalence in Sarraute between writing seen as creation and as expression, and sums it up as follows: "[The unnamed] is on the one hand the only reality worth expressing, and on the other hand the modality of its existence is so fragile and elusive that it can also be said not to exist until the writer creates it in a text" (1992:127).

writer for enlightenment. Left to his own devices, the reader's unfailing response to a text's dismantling of convention will be to restore it, to "ramener l'inconnu au connu le plus banal" (1972a:38) by abandoning that text's revelation of reality for the world of appearances.¹² The appearance dismantled by the text "se reconstruit fatalement dès qu'on se détache du texte et qu'on le reprend dans un autre langage, un langage banal déjà rempli de définitions, de catégories" (52-53).

It seems, then, that to read Sarraute's texts on her terms means to deprive oneself of any metalanguage and simply assent, for any conceptualisation of the text beyond a direct and unselfconscious engagement with it (like that extolled in *Les Fruits d'or* for example), is condemned as convention-bound in its recourse to abstract language. Bernard Pingaud elaborates on this idea:

Il est quasi impossible d'exprimer la saveur d'une lecture sans poser sur l'oeuvre un nouveau masque, sans la reconstituer en objet, bref sans en faire encore, toujours, un personnage [...] Si je cherche à me tenir au plus près de l'oeuvre, à "l'amadouer", je ne pourrai que la paraphraser. Si je m'en écarte, pour la considérer avec le recul de 'l'esprit critique', je lui imposerai cette figure qu'elle ne veut pas avoir, je la classerai, la définirai, l'étiquetterai, la nommerai, elle deviendra *mon* oeuvre, et par là même une image qui m'échappera aussitôt. (1963:34)

Sarraute puts it more bluntly: "Les critiques prennent l'apparence pour la réalité" (1987b:123).

I shall look more closely in Chapter 5 at the way Sarraute's views on language hamstring the reader by condemning critical discourse as intrinsically

¹² Like most of Sarraute's views, this opinion of the reader remains remarkably constant over the years. In 1981 she outlined to Carmen Licari a view of the reader's role in her work which is in fact highly undialogical: "Beaucoup d'auteurs modernes renvoient à du non-dit; et cet énorme non-dit, où le lecteur est libre de mettre ce qu'il veut, il l'emplit souvent de sentiments d'une grande banalité, comme ceux qu'on lui a appris à connaître. Cette sorte de collaboration-là avec le lecteur chez moi n'existe pas: rien n'est sous-entendu, c'est là, on est allé aussi loin qu'on le pouvait [...] Mon langage emplit les trous, je ne laisse pas ces vides dans lesquels on peut s'ébattre à son aise" (Sarraute 1985c:13). Thus when the double of *Entre la Vie et la mort* approves the gaps in the writer's text, it is a sign that he has sold out to conventional public opinion: "Ces creux sont excellents [...] Chacun va s'empresse de les remplir, tout fier d'exhiber ses propres richesses" (EVM 171).

contrary to the spirit of her writing. In this way she promotes as the only valid approach to the text an engagement with it as a present event (the reasons of power behind this view were explored in the last chapter): "Il est certain que le lecteur dès qu'il quitte le texte, retrouve l'apparence. Ces mouvements se révèlent par le texte, existent en lui, disparaissent hors de lui" (Sarraute 1972a:45). The question of the reader's ability to read Sarraute's texts on terms other than those inscribed in them will be the subject of the final chapter. Now, though, we must look more closely at the way dialogue actually works in Sarraute's writing, given its problematic status in her view of language. I shall focus on *Enfance*, the first of her prose texts to subordinate narrative authority entirely to dialogue by fragmenting the speaking voice into two opposing perspectives.

2. *Enfance*: The fragmentation and restoration of the self:

Many critics writing on *Enfance* see its fragmentation of narration into two voices, one largely narratorial and one critical and doubting, as problematising the conventions of autobiographical discourse, in terms of both the accuracy of recollection (especially when the focus is a childhood long past) and the influence of the narrative act on how remembered events are recreated. For Bruno Vercier, "l'interrogation en forme de dialogue permet à Nathalie Sarraute de déjouer tous les pièges que pose l'écriture autobiographique" (1985:164), while Sabine Raffy sees "cette conscience surmoïque qui travaille le texte d'un questionnement très attentif" as giving rise to "un mouvement de glissement qui déstabilise la narration et rappelle

sans cesse au lecteur que 'la vérité' n'existe pas, et que sous chaque phrase, chaque mot, des pièges sont tendus" (1988:238).¹³ Aside from the fact that the very presence of another voice opposed to the dominant voice of narration relativises it and so exposes it to critical attention, the characters of the voices in *Enfance* emphasise the problems of recollection and representation respectively, as these are encountered in the narration of childhood. Valerie Minogue says of them, "the one is that of the burrower, who delves into and tries to merge with the recollected sensation: the other that of the critical sifter who challenges, warns of self-indulgence, exaggeration, falsification, and points to the gap between the sensation of *then* and the words and images of *now*" (1986:72). Thus the two voices by their separate emphases keep in the foreground "the flaws of memory and the processes of composition involved in this 'roman de la mémoire'".

This description of *Enfance* as a "roman de la mémoire" raises the question of its relation, as (however problematised) autobiography, to Sarraute's fiction. Sarraute herself has constantly stressed that her novels too have their origin in her lived experience (something borne out by the "real" events described in *Enfance* and which already featured in her fiction). In 1980 she spoke to Carmen Licari of her project to "écrire des textes où je retrouverais, dans mes propres souvenirs d'enfance, la même substance que celle qui se trouve dans mes livres" (Sarraute 1985c:4). Aside from supporting the truth-claim of her fiction (see Jefferson 1990), *Enfance* of course also raises questions about the truth of autobiography: for François-Olivier Rousseau (from whom Minogue takes the description "roman de

¹³ In a similar vein, Raylene O'Callaghan sees the dialogic movement of *Enfance* in Derridean terms as a metaphor for "the 'différance' that the writing (symbolic) process introduces into the 'real' of unmediated feeling" (1988:92). Elsewhere she praises Sarraute's "meta-textual deconstruction of a Western logocentric psychology and system of thought that is limited, limiting" (1989:457).

la mémoire"), "les deux voix feutrées, hésitantes, qui se répondent tout au long d'*Enfance*" tell us principally that "la mémoire [n'est] qu'une longue invention" (1983:26). The imbrication in *Enfance* of the problems of self-definition, fiction and narration, strongly recalls Roy Schafer's analysis (discussed in Chapter 2) of how the psychoanalytic dialogue constructs the analysand's biography. It also, in my opinion, justifies reading this "roman de la mémoire" in the same way as the novels proper: as neither wholly fictional nor wholly autobiographical.

Enfance is, however, first and foremost the story of a child up to the end of primary school, and it is in the framework of this story that the general questions regarding identity are posed. It is thus at the same time the particular account of one child's maturation and the more general story of the maturation of the subject in literature (as character, as writer, and as reader); this broader concern is not only with the way the self becomes a problematic concept but also with the consequences for the way we represent it. The limits of the autobiographical enterprise correspond to the limits of the child's perspective on life, one marked, thanks at least in part to the primary school system, by a faith in the knowability of the world.¹⁴ Setting the child's unitary point of view within the divided voice of the adult recalling it, emphasises the way the child's unproblematic perception of the world and of others collapses when it enters the *lycée* (an event significantly just outside the bounds of

¹⁴ This faith is described when the narrator recalls Natacha's reaction to her mother's offer to have her return to live in Russia, after the child had joined the *école communale*:

-- Quelque chose s'élève encore, toujours aussi réel, une masse immense... l'impossibilité de me dégager de ce qui me tient si fort, je m'y suis encastrée, cela me redresse, me soutient, me durcit, me fait prendre forme... Cela me donne chaque jour la sensation de grimper jusqu'à un point culminant de moi-même, où l'air est pur, vivifiant... un sommet d'où si je parviens à l'atteindre, à m'y maintenir je verrai s'étendre devant moi le monde entier... rien ne pourra m'échapper, il n'y aura rien que je ne parviendrai pas à connaître... --Il est curieux que tu aies éprouvé précisément le sentiment que l'enseignement primaire cherchait à donner [...] Et quelle perte d'équilibre, quel désarroi après, au lycée, quand tu t'es aperçue que ce monde bien clos, entièrement accessible, s'ouvrait de toutes parts, se défaisait, se perdait... (E 173-74)

autobiographical recollection, even one relativised by outside voices). It further evokes the way the twentieth century lost faith in the narration of identity when it reached the age of suspicion and recognised the lack of a stable self either as subject or as object of language.

However, I wish to argue that while *Enfance* raises questions regarding memory, identity, and the consequences of the subject's inconsistency both for the kind of self it represents and for the act of narration, it not only fails to engage seriously with these issues but in fact ends up using them to restore all the more powerfully its own narrative authority. The second voice may seem designed to remove the reader's confidence both in the memory of the autobiographical narrator and in the authority of a narrating voice to recount other lives (including the past life of childhood). Yet the way the dialogue of *Enfance* actually develops diminishes the second, critical voice's capacity for narrative disruption to the point where it ends up collaborating in a surreptitious reaffirmation of memorative and narrative authority. The unequal authority of the two voices, which is what allows this relapse into monologism, is itself, I shall argue, simply the manifestation within the dialogue of a false opposition at its origin.

Before seeing how narrative authority is covertly reinforced in *Enfance*, I shall briefly outline the ways in which the text gives the impression of dismantling such authority, an impression to which, I have said, much Sarraute criticism has been receptive. Indeed, it is not only the intrusions by the second voice which pose a challenge to narrative authority: the narrating voice itself appears to reject the authority over others' discourses which its position as narrator offers, generally choosing to represent the words of others as direct speech. Thus not only on the

basis of the work's form as internal dialogue, but also on that of the way discourse is represented within the first voice's narration, *Enfance* offers us every encouragement to interpret it as undermining all the foundations of narrative monologism.

The critical voice is undeniably the most extreme embodiment of textual dialogism. Its autonomy is asserted from the start: it opens the dialogue which forms this autobiographical *récit* by ironising the narrator's project to "évoquer [s]es souvenirs d'enfance" (E 7). Thus it establishes its relationship to the other voice in terms of the verbal ironist's superiority over an interlocutor who is also the target of the irony (for the narrating voice's project of recollection has the same propositional form as the autobiographer's cliché mentioned by the second): "Comme ces mots te gênent, tu ne les aimes pas. Mais reconnais que ce sont les seuls mots qui conviennent. Tu veux 'évoquer tes souvenirs'... il n'y a pas à tortiller, c'est bien ça" (7). The narrating voice is at a disadvantage from the start, with doubt cast on the value of its narration before it even begins. (We should note however, that despite this confident start, the critical voice will open only two other sections [pp.27, 162].)

Having introduced the narrative project, the critical voice is also responsible for the direction it takes, initially at least. In fact, the entire narration is seen as a response to its opening comment, not just in terms of being a challenge to its opposition, but also by picking up on its actual language. Its opening sceptical "Alors, tu vas vraiment faire ça?" (7) arouses the memory of similar words spoken long ago, by a German-speaking governess to the child Natacha: "'Nein, das tust du nicht'... 'Non, tu ne feras pas ça'" (10). The similarity of the phrases, with their

varying degrees of disapproval ranging from scepticism to interdiction, bridges the years between their enunciation, the years which separate the act of narration from the first of the periods of time recalled. As with almost all the recollections which will follow, the past is here remembered initially as language, an utterance around which a whole experience will be recreated before the critical interlocutor.

The founding role of the critical voice's question is emphasised by the nature of the childhood memory it resuscitates, an event which is clearly an allegory of the act of writing as Sarraute envisages it. All the features of the writer's activity are represented in the child's transgressive desire to tear away the silk covering of the sofa and reveal the formless matter beneath. As an image of the autobiographical project, and of all Sarraute's writing as an attempt to articulate experienced sensations, it evokes the isolation of the misunderstood and unjustly criticised writer whose writing is an attempt to make contact ("vous laisser le temps de m'en empêcher, de me retenir" [12]). It also suggests the nature of writing as the revelation of an amorphous reality behind the superficial solidity of appearance; the struggle of the seeker after truth to formulate something for which she has no ready terms and thus working in a "foreign" language;¹⁵ and of course the writer's persistence in her lonely task despite the hostility of the literary "authorities". The allegorical memory fuses with its narration at the end of this opening sequence, through the double reference of the "je" which designates the adult narrator as well as the remembered self to whom it lends its voice. In this way the text to come is

¹⁵ Here German, as in "Ich sterbe" where Chekhov announces his death in the foreign doctor's language which paradoxically alone allows him to "opérer... ne suis-je pas médecin aussi?... la mise en mots" of that for which he has no language: "L'indicible sera dit. L'impensable sera pensé. Ce qui est insensé sera ramené à la raison. Ich sterbe" (UP 13). Bruno Vercier compares the opening of *Enfance* to that of Tolstoy's *Enfance et adolescence*, where the first memory described is also of words spoken in German (1985:170 n.7).

both equated with the exposure of truth just evoked, and also presented as an event about to take place (reasons for which were outlined in Chapter 2 and will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5): "Voilà, je me libère, l'excitation, l'exaltation tend mon bras, j'enfonce la pointe des ciseaux de toutes mes forces, la soie cède, se déchire, je fends le dossier de haut en bas et je regarde ce qui en sort... quelque chose de mou, de grisâtre s'échappe par la fente" (13).

Thus, at the very start of this dialogical text, we have what appears to be a striking example of the emergence of the truth of the subject in dialogue, a concept we have seen propounded from Plato through Schlegel to Lacan, and in Roy Schafer's study of the relationship between biography and the psychoanalytic dialogue.¹⁶ In an exchange reminiscent of the Lacanian dialogue, the words of the critical (analytical) voice reverberate in the totality of language which makes up the writing subject's unconscious, and recall from a forgotten past an utterance which echoes them. The recalled incident is further clearly intended to be read as exemplary of the writer's total identity, not only that remembered but also that doing the remembering, the present explorer of the amorphous matter of subjectivity as well as the past child and its transgressive urge.¹⁷ There are limits to the Lacanian overtones of this opening dialogue, however, as will become clear shortly when I

¹⁶ Arnaud Rykner certainly reads *Enfance* in this light, and extends its dialogic lesson to the act of reading: for him, Sarraute "postule l'existence d'une complicité entre l'auteur et son lecteur, complicité qu'emblématise l'«autobiographie» constituée par *Enfance*. Tout ce dernier texte avance, de fait, selon un mouvement dialogique, où le narrateur confronté à son double cherche à entraîner celui-ci sur la voie d'une révélation totale de soi et de l'autre, à travers une exploration de l'univers tropismique" (1991:16).

¹⁷ It is possible to hear Véra's later catchphrase "Ça ne se fait pas" (191) as another indirect echo of "Tu ne feras pas ça". This would link both mother-figures to the theme of transgression through writing which this passage exemplifies, (the silk of the sofa, as Valerie Minogue has pointed out [1986:80], is associated with the mother). As both women embody non-communication (Maman's words with their air of final judgement render Natacha "muette, comme pétrifiée" [104, cp. 95], while "'Ça ne se fait pas' arrête tout examen, rend inutile toute discussion" [191]), the new kind of revelatory writing which transgresses their law seems designed to be a reaction to monologue as much as a tearing away of the smooth surface of the already written.

discuss the way Sarraute's dialogical text surreptitiously restores the narrative authority it overtly undermines.

The second voice's subversive role as critic of memory is manifested in situations ranging from the most trivial (as when it counters the narrator's mention of a "devoir de français" with "N'est-ce pas plutôt rédaction qu'on disait à l'école communale?" [207]), to more considerable corrections. In these it restrains the adult narrator from lapsing into a present interpretation of past events rather than maintaining its effort simply to recreate them.¹⁸ Examples are generally linked to literary topics, as if to emphasise the relevance to this particular literary work of the fact that the first voice's narration is an interpretation and as such always influenced by its agent as well as by its object. The reminder "Il n'est pas possible que tu l'aies perçu ainsi sur le moment" (86) refers to the criticism by a family friend of the poor spelling in Natacha's first novel. Similarly, when the narrator recalls Véra telling her as a child that she had been "dumped", her typically Sarrautean musings on the various pejorative connotations of the Russian phrase "Tiebia podbrossili" ("un rejet brutal en même temps que sournois") are interrupted by the second voice which objects: "Tu ne t'es sûrement pas occupée à ce moment-là à découvrir toutes les richesses que ce mot recèle" (183).

It must be pointed out already at this stage, however, that this kind of incursion by the second voice is relatively rare, for it is generally the first, narrating voice which is obliged to remind the second to respect the limitations of the child's point of view on events. Furthermore, even in the situations just mentioned, the first

¹⁸ i.e. to "faire surgir quelques moments, quelques mouvements qui me semblent encore intacts, assez forts pour se dégager de cette couche protectrice qui les conserve, de ces épaisseurs blanchâtres, molles, ouatées qui se défont, qui disparaissent avec l'enfance..." (277).

voice's responses to the other's objections emphasise its commitment to rediscovering the past ("ce qui est resté là, enfoui" [86]), unsullied by the adult mind recalling it, and even deny the accusation of *ex post facto* analysis. Regarding its response to Véra's words, it insists: "Je n'en étais pas émerveillée comme je le suis maintenant, mais ce qui est certain, c'est que je n'ai pas perdu une parcelle... quel enfant la perdrait?... de tout ce que ce verbe et le 'tu' qui le précédait 'tiebia podbrossili', me portaient..." (183).

Occasionally, however, the second voice does seem to make a real difference to the way memories are recreated in narration. At points where the memory is not already firmly established in the mind of the first voice, and where the other's interventions are neither confined to providing minor details nor dismissed immediately, we do get the impression of a narration emerging out of a dialogue which works backward and forward, simultaneously narrating, exploring, and revising its narration. Not surprisingly, the principal instance of this is highly evocative of a psychoanalytic dialogue. Here the recalled occasion centres on Natacha's intervention in a playful struggle between her mother and Kolia, her mother's second husband. Her mother rejected the child's attempt to defend her, saying "Laisse donc... femme et mari sont un même parti" (74). The memory of this scene emerges as a result of the second voice's distrust of the narrator's claim that as a child Natacha always benefited from the warmth of her mother's and Kolia's relationship. The narrator initially resists but ultimately gives in to the doubt cast by the other on its version of the past; in good analytical fashion this doubt is not accompanied by an alternative interpretation but simply jogs the narrator's recall:

--Une fois pourtant... tu te rappelles...

--Mais c'est ce que j'ai senti longtemps après... tu sais bien que sur le moment...

--Oh, même sur le moment... et la preuve en est que ces mots sont restés en toi pour toujours, des mots entendus cette unique fois... un petit dicton. (73-74).

The first voice then follows the prompt and tells of the incident and the mother's words. Yet its resistance to the second voice's probings continues, as it clings for a time, despite a doubting question from its interlocutor, to an initial, benevolent interpretation of the meaning behind the mother's phrase: "Il m'a semblé sur le moment que maman avait pensé que je voulais pour de bon la défendre, que je la croyais menacée, et elle a voulu me rassurer... Laisse... ne crains rien, il ne peut rien m'arriver... 'Femme et mari sont un même parti'" (74-75). Questioned again on the accuracy of this version, it hears the other re-narrate the incident, in the present tense this time, and with the suggestion that the mother seemed "un peu agacé[e]" (75). The clear echo of its own narration in the other awakens the truth of its feeling at the time, and the "analyst's" suggested interpretation is accepted as true: "C'est vrai... je dérangeais leur jeu". With more exhortation (but no more suggested interpretations), it arrives at the end of the analysis having worked through the past experience to a full recognition of how these words affected it when it first heard them: "J'étais un corps étranger... qui gênait..." (75).

Yet even here, the apparent success of the second voice is qualified towards the end, when it risks the logical conclusion that to feel oneself to be a foreign body implies the expectation of expulsion. But, "Non, cela, je ne l'ai pas pensé [...] Non, tu vas trop loin..." (76). This suggestion by the dialogue that the truth of what the subject has experienced can never be fully established, evokes the interminable nature of analysis, where even the analyst's interpretation is ultimately only that, and

is itself open to further analysis.¹⁹ An interpretation is chosen on the basis of an instinctive recognition of personal truth, and neither partner in dialogue holds a monopoly on that truth. The sequence ends unresolved, with the last word given, unusually, to the analytical voice:

--Non, tu vas trop loin...

--Si. Je reste tout près, tu le sais bien. (76)

It should be said, though, that this acknowledgement of the impossibility of separating the past from the present representation of it is not taken any further. Moreover, sequences like this one, where the disagreement between the voices centres on the actual truth of the child's feelings during the recalled incident rather than simply on the deforming power of the discourse used to narrate a solidly established memory,²⁰ are rare in *Enfance*.

There is, however, a problem with interpreting passages like the "Femme et mari..." sequence or like the opening section where the memory of a former interdiction was triggered by a similarly worded question, as enacting the constitution of truth through dialogue. The problem lies in the relationship of the

¹⁹ The second voice again takes on the role of analyst, but much more briefly, when it interprets Natacha's complicity in her humiliation by the "uncle" who criticised the spelling in her first novel: "On dirait même qu'on le désire, que c'est cela qu'on cherche...". Here too the narrator agrees: "Oui, ça vous tire... une drôle d'attraction..." (84). Yet for the reader as for the voices, there is no security of interpretation, for the very next page warns against facile psychoanalysing, when the conversation moves from recollection to remind us of Sarraute's writing career and so of our role as readers. The narrating voice, on the other's prompting, acknowledges having spoken publicly about this incident which it used as a convenient but false explanation for having begun to write rather late: "C'était si commode, on pouvait difficilement trouver quelque chose de plus probant: un de ces magnifiques 'traumatismes de l'enfance' [...] Tout de même, j'y croyais... par conformisme. Par paresse" (85).

²⁰ as with: "Ne te fâche pas, mais ne crois-tu pas que là, avec ces roucoulements, ces pépiements, tu n'as pas pu t'empêcher de placer un petit morceau de préfabriqué [...] un joli petit raccord, tout à fait en accord..." (20-21). Yet while some of the description's excesses are recognised and disowned, the essence of the narrated memory is defended: "Bon, tu as raison... mais pour ce qui est des clochettes, des sonnettes, ça non, je les entends... et aussi des bruits de crécelle, le crépitement des fleurs de celluloid rouges, mauves, tournant au vent..." (21). Thus this interruption, close to the beginning of the text, in fact allows the first voice to emphasise its concern for authenticity and its general reliability.

voices to each other, and an inconsistency which occurs in the "Tu vas vraiment faire ça?" sequence will point up the way it manifests itself and the important way it qualifies the comparisons with contemporary theories of subjectivity, dialogue, and the constitution of (auto)biography, which the text seems otherwise to invite. On the surface, the opening exchange evokes as much as the later one the dynamics of the psychoanalytic dialogue where full self-knowledge depends on the speaker's awareness of his utterance's enunciation beyond its lexical signification as *énoncé*. This awareness, we recall, is mediated through the analysand's interlocutor who represents language as a whole (the Other), including the chain of repressed signifiers which is the linguistic unconscious of the speaker; thus the speaker ultimately comes to realise his identity as subject of desire through the echoes of his utterance in an addressee who stands for the whole Symbolic order. In psychoanalytic terms, then, the question "Tu vas vraiment faire ça?", beyond its lexical signification, allows through its articulation in a dialogue the revival of an unconscious memory which, we have seen, has exemplary value in terms of articulating the writer's personal truth.

At odds with the dynamics of the psychoanalytic dialogue, however, is the fact that in this exchange the voice which enunciates the question and the voice which experiences the involuntary memory are not the same. If this seems to pose a problem (for the speaker's utterance becomes a "parole pleine" not for himself but for another), it is resolved by the fact that both voices do ultimately belong to the same linguistic subject, the adult self from whom all the recalled scenes depart and to whom they return. Thus the long-forgotten utterance ("Das tust du nicht") can be seen as influencing, and, once remembered, elucidating the self's own discourse.

But this sameness poses another, more serious problem, for the whole status of the dialogue is thrown into question once we realise that the same subject is at the origin of both sides of the interlocution. The invitation which the text extends in passages like the opening one, to interpret its dialogic structure in terms of the concept of intersubjective truth associated with dialogue, shows itself to rest on a false foundation by revealing the lack of any real difference in terms of subjectivity between the two voices, the lack of any "otherness" which would provide a genuine possibility of self-discovery. The echo of "Das tust du nicht" in "Tu vas vraiment faire ça?" is based on an artifice, specifically on the self's address to itself as "tu". The dialogic basis for the elaboration of an intersubjective truth is skewed by the fact that both sides of the dialogue originate in the same consciousness and so within the same linguistic limits.

This has two important consequences for the text: firstly, it necessarily reduces, if not eliminates altogether, the possibility of any real engagement by the narrating voice with the "Other" of its language, that area of language which is specifically *outside* its consciousness. The artifice revealed by the first sequence's elimination of difference between the two voices must also be present in the later analytic dialogue around "Femme et mari...", which is also located within a single consciousness and so within a single discursive subset of the totality of language. The analyst and the self are ultimately the same, the speaker not only displays the symptoms but is his own diagnostician. This gives rise to the possibility of one voice (the critic, in this case) being constantly subordinated to the authority of the other (the narrator), for the same consciousness controls both, "tire les ficelles", in the words of Philippe Lejeune (1990:32). For him, *Enfance* presents "des voix

fabriquées qui prêchent le naturel" (33). He sees this fabrication as a ruse to conceal *authorial* control by focusing on the question of *narration* alone: "En exhibant ses soupçons sur le travail de la voix narratrice, la voix critique détourne l'attention du lecteur du véritable objet à soupçonner: le travail de l'écrivain qui a inventé les deux voix et mis en scène minutieusement leur recherche 'spontanée'" (34). I shall show in more detail shortly the way this controlling consciousness manifests its command over both sides of the dialogue. Chapter 4 will then continue this exploration of the monologism behind the textual dialogue, this time in relation to *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, but will also look at ways in which the text itself exceeds this assertion of authorial control.

The second consequence of the absence of otherness in this dialogue has to do with the act of reading the text as a whole. Because the narrative voice (as we shall see) dominates the intratextual exchange to the point where it virtually takes over the text, its relationship to the critical voice becomes a figure of that of the text as a whole to the reader. As the critical voice's role is to listen to (uncritically, as it turns out) and interpret the other's narrative, it clearly figures the activity of reading (its dual status as both the writing subject's externalised self and its model reader identifies it with the writer's double, who was also his first and closest reader, in the earlier novel *Entre la Vie et la mort*). Modelling the text-reader interaction on a relationship where difference is only simulated, attempts to resist the introduction of a really other voice into the text, that of the ever unknowable real reader. If the other in the dialogue is not beyond the limits of the speaker's perspective, his recognition is both guaranteed yet also redundant, for his understanding of the speaker is coextensive with the speaker's own rather than being

that of an external embodiment of the totality of language which would give objective value to what the individual says by inferring a meaning from it. Similarly, the way the text marks out the role of the real, reading other, given that this role must necessarily remain within the sphere of what the author herself can know, runs entirely counter to what Lacan sees as the aim of dialogue, namely the awareness of the presence of the Other in one's own discourse as its origin and what makes it meaningful.²¹ This rejection of otherness in Sarraute's projection of the reader as *alter ego*, is moreover simply the most extreme case of the element of sameness which is unavoidable in any authorial projection of an ideal reader.

Having established that *Enfance*'s dialogic structure is based on the monologic artifice of a single consciousness addressing itself as "tu",²² I wish now to look more closely at how the apparent dialogue between the two voices in fact reaffirms a single narrative perspective, that embodied by the first voice. This has two aspects: firstly, the narrating voice reveals itself throughout the text to be more or less equivalent to the writer of *Enfance*; secondly, this means that the critical

²¹ Michael Sheringham comments on the ambivalence of the dialogic structure of *Enfance* as it concerns the reader: "Initially it seems quite liberating, to open up the process of autobiography, to involve the reader more. But often it seems to do -- and to be designed to do -- precisely the opposite: to forestall the reader's response, to shut us out of the action, to protect the writer from us" (1989:30).

²² Occasionally the second voice uses "je", but its rarity is evident from the effect of surprise it creates. Moreover, because the adult voice of the narrator is essentially the same as that of its interlocutor, the effect of this second "je" is to run the two perspectives into one rather than to distinguish them from each other, so that instead of the impression of an opposition we get that of a single dominant train of thought with occasional digressions:

-- [...] Le Monsieur...
 -- Qui était-ce? je me le demande.
 -- Impossible de me le rappeler. (83)

An even more striking example of the way the second voice's use of the first person simply continues the narration rather than introducing an opposition, occurs when it mentions Véra's wartime nursing career: "Lorsque mon père y faisait allusion, elle l'arrêtait, agacée... 'Oh je t'en prie, qu'est-ce que tu dis? Je n'ai rien fait d'autre que ce qu'il fallait'" (201).

interventions of the second voice stand in much the same relation of subordination to the first voice as they do to the writing consciousness behind the whole text.

The imbalance in authority between the two voices of *Enfance* is manifested in the way the very dimensions of the text are dictated by the first voice. It is the one which undertakes the project of recollecting childhood, and although, as we have seen, the second voice opens the dialogue on a critical note, it is responding to a decision which founds the work and which, being outside it, is beyond independent criticism or interpretation by the reader. Similarly, the decision to stop is taken by the narrating "je", in a comment which indicates the dominant role it has held in the whole enterprise: "Rassure-toi, j'ai fini, je ne t'entraînerai pas plus loin..." (276).

This authority is reflected in the way the act of writing is always associated with the first voice rather than with the second, right from the patently symbolic sofa scene described in the opening sequence. I have referred to the way the use of the historic present in this scene conflates the past trivial transgression with the present one of writing, while mapping the "je" of the child onto that of the adult rememberer underlines that the narrator too is an agent of transgression. Thus the bulk of the *récit* which follows this anecdote is presented as a revelation of hidden reality on the plane now of memory rather than upholstery. This conflation of represented event and narration supports the illusion promoted earlier by the first voice, that all is still unwritten: "Quelque chose d'encore informe se propose [...] Aucun mot écrit, aucune parole ne l'ont encore touché" (9). In this way, the reader is encouraged to believe that the text is a currently occurring event rather than a product of writing; this illusion of course presents the text-reader dialogue in the

guise of spoken interaction, so dissimulating (but without eliminating) its highly mediated nature, as well as the "donné d'avance" status of the response it seeks from the reader. It is telling but not surprising that already in this anecdote which acts as a paradigm for the rest of the *récit*, the second voice is almost entirely silent, leaving the narrative floor to the first. (Its one intervention in the narration of the anecdote, to question how Natacha could have understood the German phrase as a child, although it is often cited as undermining the authority of the narrator, is in fact not taken up at all; and the claim that the child *did* utter "Ich werde es zerreißen" is repeated twice afterwards, emphasising its truth if not to the letter -- though even this is not conceded -- then at least to the spirit of the event narrated.)

The first voice's authority is perhaps most decisively established when it is referred to as the author of "*disent les imbéciles*" by the second. When the narrating voice comments that Véra's mother "n'a pourtant pas grand-chose dans son aspect de ce qui rend exquises les grand-mères décrites dans les livres", the critic interjects: "Pas grand-chose de commun avec celle que tu as montrée plus tard dans l'un des tiens..." (226). This overt reference to Sarraute's work, and the consequent identification of the first voice with the author of *Enfance* as of "*disent les imbéciles*" (the fact that the novel is "un des tiens", not "des nôtres", implies that the critical voice doesn't have the right to be considered a co-author of either of the works), seals the narrator's authority. It openly acknowledges within the dialogue what we saw to invalidate that dialogue as an instance of intersubjective communication of the kind privileged by Lacan. For if the first voice is coextensive with the consciousness in which the whole text originates, then it must also embrace any point the second voice might make, and the discourse in which it might make

it. Once again, the second voice's ability to make a difference is shown to be an illusion.²³

It could be argued that references like this to the existence of the author serve to underline the artificial nature of the work and to destroy the illusion it creates of truth and reality, in a way familiar since Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. However, although this self-reflexivity does remind us of the process of composition, it has the effect not of emphasising the text's fictional status, but on the contrary of verifying the authenticity of the speaking voice. Because of the text's autobiographical subject, which justifies and even demands reference to the author's writing career, the revelation of the author's voice behind the narrator strengthens the narrator's authority rather than relativising it, convinces us of its truthfulness rather than of its artificiality. Its effect is to endorse as true the convention necessary for the autobiographical project to succeed, namely that the narrating "je" and the author are one.

3. The restoration of authority and its consequences for language:

The predominance of the first voice is in fact a necessary condition if the child's perspective is to emerge intact from the narrator's memory. Ultimately, it is this entirely monologic ambition of *Enfance*, with the belief it implies that the

²³ The second voice seems to be in much the same position of powerlessness as the servant Françoise in *A la Recherche du temps perdu* when Tante Léonie imagines her dishonesty and invents dialogues in which she confronts her: "Habitée, quand elle faisait seule des parties de cartes, à jouer à la fois son jeu et le jeu de son adversaire, elle se prononçait à elle-même les excuses embarrassées de Françoise et y répondait avec tant de feu et d'indignation que l'un de nous, entrant à ces moments-là, la trouvait en nage, les yeux étincelants, ses faux cheveux déplacés laissant voir son front chauve" (Proust 1987:I 223). In both cases, one of the interlocutors has the advantage of being the author of the dialogue as well as a participant.

actual past perspective of the child can be recovered, uncontaminated by the context of its recollection, which makes a fully dialogic structure unsustainable. Though the first voice includes an adult's and a child's perspective, its attitude that the restoration of the child's view of events is both what matters and possible, precludes dialogue with another purely adult voice which refers only rarely to the past (it thus by extension sidelines the reader too).²⁴ It also, as I shall show shortly, betrays a fundamental belief that language and present context don't necessarily condition what one can experience.

This domination of the adult perspective by that of the child is emphasised when a purely superficial description is given of scenes which had received much fuller treatment in Sarraute's earlier works, where their apparent innocuousness was exploded. Thus a reference to Natacha's father's tendency to mock any acquaintance he doesn't like, to "s'emparer de lui et [...] en faire un personnage si inquiétant, si compliqué et si comique que tous l'écoutent comme fascinés" (197), mentions only in passing the vague unease this mockery causes in his listeners, Natacha and Ivanov. Natacha's recreated voice simply claims "J'ai un peu mal, un peu peur", and Ivanov's reaction is not guessed at beyond its physical symptoms: "Tout à coup on dirait que son sourire se fige un peu, dans ses yeux passe comme un mouvement, il me semble que quelque chose en lui se contracte" (197). This treatment of the event contrasts sharply with the development of an almost identical

²⁴ The adult interventions of the second voice are constantly dismissed as irrelevant to the recreation of the child's version of events. When it contradicts the family myth that Natacha's father fell ill with grief at the death of his first daughter (in fact he caught scarlet fever from her), it is answered: "Je le sais maintenant, mais ce n'est pas ce qu'on m'avait dit et que je croyais encore" (119). Occasionally it is simply ignored, the narrating voice picking up exactly where it had left off before the intervention of an adult analysis. Thus the narrator's comment that "Lili [n']avait pas peur [de Véra]" gives rise to the other's analysis of Véra's passionate love for Lili and its motivation; yet the narration resumes unaltered with "Quant à moi, je n'avais pas peur non plus de Véra" (145; cp.157).

situation in *Le Planétarium* when Alain ridicules his aunt for the amusement of his listeners; there the tropistic reactions of his interlocutors, which their outward appearance barely suggests, are described in great detail (P 24-33). Similarly, the whole text of *Vous les entendez?* comes to the mind of the reader familiar with it when Natacha mentions the obligation and the inability of the children playing at the Péréverzev house not to give way to a fit of laughter, for the parents working next door must not be disturbed:

Dans la chambre des enfants les objets, les jouets cassés, les meubles défoncés ont un air de liberté, d'insouciance [...] Ces fous rires auxquels [Boris] s'abandonnait, qu'il nous communiquait, que l'interdiction de faire du bruit entretenait et fortifiait, qu'interrompaient des silences pleins à craquer, prometteurs de dangereuses, de voluptueuses explosions [...] (124)

Unlike in *Vous les entendez?*, where we have an identical situation told from the point of view of the adult in whom the absence of signification of laughter, and the resulting inadequacy of any rational explanation he can provide for it, produce profound uncertainty and anguish, here Sarraute's narrator is allied instead with the laughing children, and so confined to the simplicity of the child's view of events. It is equally this simple view which leads Natacha to take the Florimond couple (269-70), clones of Martereau and his wife, at face value; unlike her creator, the child believes that nothing in her parents' world could be the subject of literary interest (here literature is, admittedly, equated with works like *Rocambole* [265-67]).

This implicit reference to Sarraute's previous works in fact draws attention to the way *Enfance* tries to limit the interpretative freedom of the reader. Though the descriptive gaps in the text may seem to be encouraging the reader to make his own inferential contribution, they will only be evident in the first place to those readers already familiar with Sarraute's writings (and for whom the second voice's

reference to "*disent les imbéciles*" is a model). Thus they will already be filled in advance with material provided by Sarraute. Otherwise, attempts to fill out the picture are discouraged: when the critical voice as interpreter attempts to make the narrator fill in gaps in the story, it is criticised. A prime example is one which is often cited as displaying Sarraute's awareness of the limited access an autobiographical narrator has to the truth of the events he narrates, especially when these are long past; but the critic's status as proto-reader also makes this passage a warning against independent interpretation of the facts of the narrative. In the *Jardin du Luxembourg*, we are told, Natacha runs to the maid to collect a snack, and then returns to play:

--Pour faire quoi?

--Ah, n'essaie pas de me tendre un piège... Pour faire n'importe quoi, ce que font tous les enfants qui jouent, courent, poussent leurs bateaux, leurs cerceaux, sautent à la corde, s'arrêtent soudain et l'oeil fixe observent les autres enfants, les gens assis sur les bancs de pierre, sur les chaises... ils restent plantés devant eux bouche bée...

--Peut-être le faisais-tu plus que d'autres, peut-être autrement...

--Non, je ne dirai pas ça... je le faisais comme le font beaucoup d'enfants... et avec probablement des constatations et des réflexions du même ordre... en tout cas rien ne m'en est resté et ce n'est tout de même pas toi, qui vas me pousser à chercher à combler ce trou par un replâtrage. (23-24; cp. also 71-72)

This careful control of the text's interpretation lets us see *Enfance* as a structure built in such a way as to limit its possible readings. Any impression it gives of being a loose weave of spontaneously interacting voices, down to the blank spaces between their utterances which heighten the impression of this text as open and unconstraining of the reader, even unfinished,²⁵ is in fact evidence of the success with which its strong constraints on the way it is to be read have been

²⁵ For Philippe Lejeune, "l'absence de 'régie' d'ensemble nous contraint à fournir [les] interprétations qui, ostensiblement, font défaut" (1990:31).

concealed. This idea of *Enfance* as a construct whose gaps are a conscious part of its design and not something perceived independently by its readers, is highly reminiscent of the description in Sarraute's first novel, *Portrait d'un inconnu*, of the portrait which embodies the narrator's (strongly Sarrautean) view of reality and of art. I shall return, in Chapter 6, to this model of the ideal work of art as in appearance open to interpretative completion while in fact entirely in control of the way it is received; it finds a clear echo, I shall argue, in one branch of contemporary reception theory, that associated with Wolfgang Iser and his questionable claim to give the reader power over the text.

Aside from monologising the text and so according the reader minimal freedom, the determination to restore the child's perspective has major implications for Sarraute's view of the relationship of language to reality. As we have seen, this is a somewhat clouded issue, for she tends to blur the distinction between language as representing or as creating reality.²⁶ In the narration of Natacha's epiphany in the Jardin du Luxembourg, language's ability to revive past sensation, though openly questioned, ultimately seems to be endorsed. Despite doubting the very point of trying to narrate this experience -- "Pourquoi vouloir faire revivre cela, sans mots qui puissent parvenir à capter, à retenir ne serait-ce qu'encore quelques instants ce qui m'est arrivé" (66) -- a description of the "sensation d'une telle violence" and a series of inadequate definitions ("bonheur", "félicité", "exaltation" etc. [67]) follow. Yet while these terms are rejected as soon as they are uttered, the fact that

²⁶ This is an ambiguity reflected in some Sarraute criticism also: Valerie Minogue, for example, remarks that it is "with words that Sarraute the mature writer attacks glittering verbal surfaces to uncover and create the real" (1986:73; my emphasis).

something of the experience is mediated to us suggests that the description somehow succeeds despite the limitations of language.

In fact, the successful communication of this particular experience seems to result from *exploiting* those very limitations: by using negation as a stylistic technique, Sarraute manages to define or at least gesture toward the nature of the sensation in question. This is because negative description actually evokes the experience in its effect on Natacha as a subject of language, for the absence of a language in which to define the epiphany is a symptom of the loss of self which takes place in this experience of "[la] vie à l'état pur, aucune menace sur elle, aucun mélange" (67). Life in its pure state is finally that of everything but herself: "Je suis en eux [walls, blossoms, grass, air] sans rien de plus, rien qui ne soit à eux, rien à moi", not least her language.

Thus language, despite the denials of its user here, does succeed in representing, albeit negatively, the sensation in question; but this negativity is perfectly suited to the representation of the absence of self-consciousness and of the language through which that self-consciousness operates. The very inadequacy of language is here harnessed by Sarraute and made to articulate the unnameability of life beyond or prior to language. What is most important here is the fact that despite the text's dialogic form, dialogue is not actually exploited as a means to overcome the inadequacy of language; the principle of composition remains firmly representational. In this light, the fact that the "epiphany" sequence is a monologue with no intervention at all by the second voice is telling: the problems of expression are overcome by the first voice alone, in a narration which only it may problematise.

The total redundancy of the second, adult voice in the face of a narrator with access to both adult's and child's perspectives is nowhere clearer than here.

Sarraute's distinction between authentic and inauthentic language is central to *Enfance* where, as we might expect, inauthenticity, characterised by abstraction, is associated with the second voice. Even if what Natacha's father feels for her mother can be defined as "de la rancune, de la réprobation... osons le dire... du mépris", the first voice (the voice of authenticity) finds these terms inadequate, for as a child "je n'appelle pas cela ainsi. Je ne donne à cela aucun nom, je sens confusément que c'est là, en lui, enfoui, comprimé..." (127). The analytical adult's abstract language is thus a reflection of its loss of an immediate link to the reality of events, the implication being that the return to a child's view of the world such as the first voice seems able to effect, will restore an authentic relationship of language to reality, necessary if its narration, and by extension the *récit* as a whole, is to be a work of art.

Ultimately, this accessibility of the child's language, and the rejection of adult labels as a feature of the critical voice alone, all imply that the adult mind is not confined to its own discourse for its perspective on the world. Rather, the availability of past sensation to the first voice suggests a Proustian faith in a sensory memory which preserves sensations intact over time and outside language. The fact that the sensations recalled in *Enfance* are responses to words does blur the role language plays in the recollection of the past, but it remains true that these words act simply as stimuli to emotions which, for Sarraute as for Proust, can be rediscovered without first passing into symbolic form. Thus the narrator can experience street names in terms of their present associations ("des noms [...])

charmants quand tu les entends maintenant" [123]) but can just as easily relive the earlier gloomy atmosphere they aroused: "Mais quand je les retrouve tels qu'ils étaient en ce temps-là, ces noms, Lunain, Loing, Marguerin, ils reprennent aussitôt, comme ces petites rues, leur aspect étriqué, mesquin" (123).

This Proustian ability to find the past again exactly as it was experienced is a commonplace of *Enfance*, and even when that past is rendered in the metaphorical language of the adult rather than in the child's terms, it is not occluded by it: "Tu n'as pas besoin de me répéter que je n'étais pas capable d'évoquer ces images... ce qui est certain, c'est qu'elles rendent exactement la sensation que me donnait mon pitoyable état" (98-99). It seems then, finally, that for Sarraute, imagistic language is still effective, and so the old aesthetic of expression is endorsed, with its belief that language can be rendered transparent before the sensation it conveys, and its ideal of leaving as little as possible to the reader. Seen in this light, the nature of the second voice as the voice of the present -- it breaks into the historic present of the narrative to remind us of the actual present of narration -- seems designed less to shatter any illusion created by the narration than to emphasise the way these memories have survived intact over several decades. It may well be reminding us that the narration is only a reconstruction, but Sarraute's faith in the ability of that reconstruction to make the memory present without deforming it, means that this reminder is not of an illusion but of the power of a metaphorical language to revive past sensations.

The principal implication of a belief in language as transparent and able to represent, if only negatively, even what is inherently irreducible to it, is that

narration is possible and dialogue thus dispensable as a means to truth. The superfluity of the second voice as regards the recollection of the truth of the past, its primary usefulness as a foil to the integrity of the narrator's reconstruction of the child's perspective, can thus be seen to be part of a tendency in *Enfance* to disable its dialogue from within and return as far as possible to monologic narration, forgoing the search for a new truth in favour of the representation for a listener/reader of one already established. The dialogue in fact becomes an *elimination* of difference on several levels: the first voice refutes the interventions of the second, and within the first voice, the intention is to restore the child's perspective at the expense of the adult's. As the fact that the narration takes place through the adult's perspective and language is not considered a problem, there are ultimately no limitations of perspective that need to be overcome dialogically.

It seems, then, that despite initial impressions, dialogue in *Enfance* doesn't actually work according to the intersubjective principle of epistemological irony where truth is not stated by one interlocutor to the other but emerges through the dynamics of response to an address. In fact, the kind of intersubjectivity *Enfance* manifests has more in common with that of verbal irony, bearing out the conclusions of my discussion, in the first part of this chapter, of Sarraute's stated views on writing and reading. The second voice almost always remains under the control of the first (even when it plays the role of ironist in the opening scene, the validity of the other's project is reaffirmed and so the irony is defeated). On the rare occasions where it seems to take the initiative in the dialogue, it is still under the control of the author which the first voice figures. The meanings it is capable of inferring from the words of the narrating voice are always either known to and intended by

that voice already, as is the case in verbal irony, or, if not, are still choreographed by the author. In this case, the fact that they exceed what the first voice anticipates is compensated for in terms of ironic control by the fact that they prescribe a response by the reader whom the second voice figures, thus enacting similar control by the author on the level of *her* dialogue, through the text, with the reader. Where the interjections of the second voice bring no new insight to the first, they can be a way of airing certain opinions without these being attributable to the authorial consciousness represented by the first voice who neither confirms nor denies them. This principle of letting the interlocutor infer something without claiming responsibility for that inference is of course basic to verbal irony and is occasionally used in *Enfance* where the second voice's unsanctioned interpretation informs the reader. Thus when Véra's passion and ambition for Lili are analysed by the second voice (145), or when it gives us the background to Natacha's mother's contempt for formal education (251-52), information is conveyed without the intention to convey it being ascribable either to the first voice or, by extension, to the author it represents.

Given this tendency of *Enfance* to enact the power structure of verbal rather than epistemological irony, with the tone of the exchange one of assertion and assent rather than of ignorance (not feigned but real) and cooperative discovery, it is not surprising to find that within the first voice's ever more authoritative narration, its own representation of other discourses becomes ever less dialogical, that is, ever more indirect. The increasing slide into indirect discourse towards the end of the *récit* is all the more striking as it is accompanied by more retrospective narration by the first voice. This stands in sharp contrast to the otherwise determinedly "eye-

witness" approach we have seen to the recreation of the child's perspective, where the refusal to analyse involves both adhering to the historic present tense and reporting the words of others as they were experienced, directly. (For example, in the discussion of Véra's subjugation to Lili, the first voice limits itself to venturing only: "Elle avait dû se borner à me dire 'Ne la touche pas, je t'en prie. Laisse-la.' Et j'avais dû répondre 'Mais je la laisse'" [147].) It is as though the first voice's consolidation of its authority in the course of the text entitles it, towards the end, to assume the position of a traditional narrator, all-powerful in relation to the other lives and discourses it recounts from a Godlike distance:

Adèle m'emmenait parfois à l'église de Montrouge où je faisais les mêmes gestes qu'elle [...] Avec grand-mère à l'église russe de la rue Daru, je me prosternais front contre terre auprès d'elle, je faisais le signe de croix [...] Mon père me laissait aller dans toutes les églises où l'on m'emmenait [...] Mais plus tard, chaque fois qu'était soulevée cette question, j'ai toujours vu mon père déclarer aussitôt, crier sur les toits qu'il était juif. Il pensait que c'était vil, que c'était stupide d'en être honteux. (234-36)

The reassertion of narrative authority by the first voice is perhaps most explicit in the sequence relating Véra's decision to hire English *au pair* girls in order to teach Lili English. Continuing the increasing trend to retrospective narration,²⁷ the first voice here narrates the two-page account of the English girls' effect on the household almost entirely in the preterite tense (where the preterite was used earlier, it was for commentary rather than narration), lapsing into "eye-witness" mode only midway through the last paragraph. The words of others are quoted indirectly, with free indirect discourse used for ironic purposes:

²⁷ The previous sequence (259-60), relating a visit by her mother to Paris in 1914, had no critical intervention and no use of the historic present, while the one preceding that, recalling their first reunion, includes indirect discourse in this past tense narration: "Elle m'a annoncé qu'elle allait partir, rentrer en Russie le soir même, elle avait déjà retenu sa place dans le train" (257).

Peu de temps après le départ de grand-mère, Véra a décidé que le moment était venu où Lili devrait absolument avoir une gouvernante anglaise. Si l'on attendait davantage, Lili n'aurait plus le bon accent.

Ne sachant pas elle-même l'anglais, elle faisait soigneusement contrôler la façon de parler des jeunes Anglaises qui se présentaient par une amie qui s'y connaissait, et ne choisissait que parmi celles qui avaient la prononciation la plus pure.

Véra leur faisait bien comprendre qu'elles n'étaient engagées que pour donner leurs soins à 'la petite', 'la grande' n'en avait pas besoin. (261)

This passage is a clear illustration of the way the reemergence of narrative authority out of dialogue establishes that hierarchical distance between quoting and quoted speech which gives the narrating voice the power not only to replace reported utterances with indirect propositions, but also to represent these with an interpretative (here ironic) gloss.

As the first voice's narrative authority finally becomes overtly asserted, the fiction of the critic's independence loses its importance, and so its discourse too, like those of recalled characters, can be integrated into the authorial narration of which it was only ever a projection. Thus the narrator can incorporate the critic's role of analysing in the present the past events of childhood: "Il me semble maintenant que c'était peut-être là un effort de sa part pour équilibrer entre Lili et moi les avantages, les chances... Je parlais très bien le russe, quelque peu l'allemand, je n'avais pas besoin en plus de l'anglais..." (261-62).²⁸ Even where it remains within the recalled period, the first voice now no longer recreates but analyses: where words like "rancune" or "mépris" were earlier deemed inadequate (127), now we are told of "les passions obscures, les réactions sauvages de Véra", the "puissant système de défense

²⁸ Again, when Natacha meets her mother for the first time since her "abandonment", retrospective analysis and subsequent information, until now the domain of the second voice (and regularly rejected as irrelevant), appear in the narration: "Je ne peux qu'imaginer, l'ayant mieux connue depuis, sa froideur calme, cette impression qu'elle donnait d'invincibilité, comme si elle avait elle-même reçu une impulsion à laquelle il lui était impossible de résister... c'est ce que mon père, au moment où elle le quittait, a dû ressentir... je l'ai compris beaucoup plus tard" (257; cp.138, 219).

disposé autour [de Lili] par sa mère" (262). The appearance of metaphors of military aggression familiar from Sarraute's earlier works seals the identification of the narrating voice here as firmly adult and with an authorial status which makes its interlocutor superfluous:

Celles qui commettaient tant soit peu l'imprudence d'amener Lili à mettre en branle par ses plaintes, ses pleurnicheries, ce dispositif toujours en état d'alerte, devaient se dépêcher de battre en retraite... Si elles osaient se défendre, elles recevaient la volée de mitraille de ces mots lancés par Véra sur son ton sans réplique: 'Lili-ne-ment-jamais'. (262)

I have looked up to now at the way *Enfance* seeks to consolidate the authority of its narrative voice despite apparently disintegrating it, and have mentioned the fact that this also serves as a strategy to control how the text is read. However, if, as I have claimed, writing distances the reader from the intentions behind the text, no matter how much those intentions are focused on the very issue of reading, then it should be possible to read Sarraute's text differently from the way she prescribes. The freedom of actual readers will be the subject of the final chapter; to conclude this discussion of *Enfance*, I would like to give a brief example of how one can read even the text's intentional definition of its own meaning (or at least what one infers as such) against that intention. I shall consider two images *Enfance* provides of its own textual dialogue, one positive and one negative, and look at how each can be read as relating to the text which contains it in ways other than those which first suggest themselves.

The view of dialogue which *Enfance* promotes through scenes like the "Femme et mari" one discussed earlier, is one where narrative truth is the result of the joint activity of teller and addressee. This view, seen by many critics as the

principal message of *Enfance*, is embodied in a *mise en abyme* towards the end of the work, when Véra's mother tells Natacha about her own childhood. The grandmother is not only a narrator here, but is also a good listener when she plays narratee to Natacha's narratives: "Je lui raconte tout ce qui s'est passé à l'école et elle le rend intéressant, amusant, par sa façon de l'écouter..." (227). Teller and listener by turns, the old woman and the child enact a model dialogue.

The grandmother is also a reader, and by reading aloud to Natacha becomes for her a source of literature, so linking the act of reading to that of producing a text of one's own (her narration of her childhood).²⁹ Reading is not just linked to composition, however; by casting the grandmother as reader as well as listener, and as source of literature as well as oral storyteller in dialogue, Sarraute also conflates again oral communication with writing, and so the critical listener of *Enfance* with the reader of the text whose interpretative freedom should thus be limited. This attempt to cross the barrier of writing to attain an (ostensibly) unmediated form of communication is emphasised in Véra's mother's choice of texts: the genre she mediates is drama (e.g. *Le Malade imaginaire*), which is both internally fully dialogic and bridges the divide between speech and writing, event and text, through the actor's direct address to the audience in the dramatic performance.

The emblematic relationship to *Enfance* itself in which the dialogues between Natacha and Véra's mother are set, is heightened by the fact that both talk about their lives. Natacha tells the old woman about her immediate experiences at school, an immediacy recreated throughout the text by the first voice when its narration slips

²⁹ The relationship between writing and reading has been explored by Antoine Compagnon, for whom all writing is a rewriting of what one has already read: "Toute l'écriture est collage et glose" (1979:32). This implication of reading and writing in each other is of course given a particular twist by Sarraute when, as in *Entre la Vie et la mort*, she defines the model reader as the alter ego of the writer.

into the historic present in order to circumscribe even more carefully its present discourse within the confines of the child's experience. The grandmother, on the other hand, tells of the past, of her youth in Russia, in a narration which both in its retrospective focus and in its referent is doubly representative of the narrative focus of *Enfance*, and which thus places Natacha in a position similar to that of the narrator's listening double: "Installée par terre, adossée aux genoux de grand-mère, l'écoutant parler de son enfance, je voyais revenir les vastes places enneigées aux reflets bleutés, les façades à colonnes des palais peints de délicates couleurs" (230). The grandmother's narration recalls to Natacha her own forgotten past, as she hears her own earlier childhood in the other's recollections in the same way as the second voice of *Enfance* does. The dialogue becomes a way of recalling to the listening child a past life which she had left behind, much as we saw the opening words of *Enfance* act as a stimulus to the narrator's memory, though there on the level of the signifier rather than of the referent. There is another difference here of course -- the fact that the interlocutor is a different character makes for a more authentic dialogue than one where both voices are aspects of the same consciousness.

Yet there is a problem with the way the old woman's discourse is presented here, and it is this which allows us to read the passage as ultimately a negative rather than positive *mise en abyme* of *Enfance*. It in fact reflects the nature of the textual dialogue not as the productive meeting of differences it seems to be, but as the simulation of such a meeting, one which aims to neutralise the danger of difference by feigning it. For the representation of speech here confirms my analysis of the whole text's dialogue as a smokescreen concealing the fact that the *récit* is actually carefully choreographed in a fundamentally monological way. The

dialogue between Véra's mother and Natacha is given as direct speech only towards the end, when the old woman talks about her children, a subject distant from Natacha. Her memories of childhood in Russia, on the other hand, while they appear to be uttered directly, are in fact narrated by Natacha; the avoidance of personal pronouns only dissimulates the status of the grandmother's words as indirectly quoted. Thus, that part of the dialogue which recalls to the listening Natacha her own past, far from being presented to her in its "irreducible otherness", is represented by her, assimilated into her own narrative which then feigns the appearance of the grandmother's direct discourse: "Un jour de la semaine sur deux on ne parle entre soi que le français... un autre jour l'allemand [...] Des Françaises, des Allemandes, des Anglaises surveillent sans cesse, ne laissent rien passer..." (230). In this way, a would-be dialogue which is in many ways a microcosm of the whole text, on a closer look reveals itself to be in fact a dissimulated monologue, and as such even more representative, but unwittingly, of the text which contains it.

This dissimulation is heightened by the fact that the illusion of discursive autonomy is double, as is the narratorial frame in which the ostensibly direct utterance is held. The impression that Natacha's representing discourse is autonomous is as illusory as was the same impression regarding the grandmother's words; her childish discourse belongs to the narrator, whose presence is concealed by the conflation of its "je" with that of the child. Thus the suggested independence of the grandmother's voice is undermined by Natacha's self-effacing control, and Natacha's narration is in turn revealed to be dictated by the narrating adult's dissimulated presence. This situation enacts in miniature the way in *Enfance* as a whole, the impression of two autonomous voices working out the truth of the

writer's childhood between them is also an illusion, with here again the same consciousness responsible for both, while giving the first voice power over the second within the dialogue.

Given this underlying domination concealed behind a series of false representations of voices in juxtaposition at the different levels of narration, the image of the reciprocal relationship of Natacha and her grandmother as alternately narrator and narratee, ceases to be an accurate emblem of the text which contains it. Instead, another sequence of *Enfance* suggests itself as a more suitable *mise en abyme* of the way the *récit*'s would-be dialogue conceals the control of every level of exchange in the text by one of its participants. This control, most clearly manifested in the second voice's puppet-like role as straight man to a narrator who turns almost all of the other's interventions to its own advantage, culminates in the author's inscription of the reader's role within the text. A solitary game played by Natacha before Véra's mother arrived, and which she claims no longer to have need of once the old woman is there, presents in microcosm the dynamics behind the text's various levels of interaction.

Before the grandmother came on the scene, Natacha used "cocottes en papier" to teach herself difficult lessons (but of a primary-school, thus resolvable level of difficulty). These were paper figures of her classmates which she directed in a kind of primitive puppet show: "Je les dispose sur ma table, côte à côte, en plusieurs rangs et moi, leur maîtresse... pas la vraie qui nous enseigne cette année... une maîtresse que j'invente... je m'installe sur ma chaise en face d'elles" (220). It is possible to see this scene as a figure of Sarraute's writing in two ways. One which initially suggests itself and which is in keeping with her own diagnosis of

contemporary literature and of her position within it, associates the child Natacha with a kind of writing previously criticised in works like *Entre la Vie et la mort* (e.g. pp.50-55), where literary invention focuses on the creation of characters and is associated with mimicry ("J'aime beaucoup imiter les gens et souvent mes imitations font rire..." [220]).³⁰ In the home-made puppet-show too, characters are caricatures: "des inspecteurs de toutes sortes... des gros poussifs qui ne prononcent que quelques mots en soufflant... des méchants livides et maigres qui sifflent des remarques aigres-douces ou acerbes... et moi aussi je me transforme, je change comme je veux mon aspect, mon âge, ma voix, mes façons..." (221). Certainly the fact that this scene precedes the other major *mise en abyme* would suggest that it is intended to figure a stage, of writing as of childhood, to be outgrown. It thus seems to be a negative *mise en abyme* (what Ross Chambers calls an "antimodel" [1984:29]) of the narrative situation of the whole work.

However, in light of the way the structure of discourses in *Enfance* both derives from and conceals undeniable strategies of control, it is possible to read this scene as a model rather than an antimodel of the text, an unintended image of Sarraute's writing as it is rather than as it encourages us to see it. The image of a chorus of voices, some knowing and others ignorant, all monitored by an authoritative figure who lends them words and sets them against one another, bears a certainly unintentional similarity to the way the voices of *Enfance*, reported by an adult in the voice of a child, are subjected to a series of authorities. These culminate in the consciousness which underlies both voices heard at the topmost

³⁰ Natacha's childish writing has already been associated with literary cliché: in her "first novel" with its consumptive hero and kidnapped princess (83-88), and in the school exercise on "Mon premier chagrin" where she avoids lived experience in favour of a fictional account of the death of her dog, "un modèle de vrai premier chagrin de vrai enfant" (209).

level of narration and which contains any errors they might make, just as in the game, wrong answers given to the inspector can be rectified by an author who is both on stage and running the show, in control both within the fiction and behind it.³¹

The structure of control which operates in *Enfance* and which the "cocottes en papier" sequence figures, seems designed to exclude the possibility of any unknown voices coming into the act. Even the inspectors who come from outside the classroom, the scene of the fiction, have their roles written out for them and are at the mercy of the other voices within the class:

Cet inspecteur est un peu dur d'oreille... 'Qu'à donc répondu cette élève?... Je transforme aussitôt la mauvaise réponse... Elle a dit cela? Il m'a semblé pourtant... -- Non Monsieur l'Inspecteur, toute la classe l'a entendue... N'est-ce pas? (d'un air doux) mes enfants?... et toute la classe en chœur, comme un bêlement... Oooui Maadaame...' (221-22)

Insofar as this projected dialogue is a pact which keeps outsiders in their place, it figures the way the reader of *Enfance* enters the text only to find his interpretative role already incorporated into it in the shape of the critical voice, his possible criticisms both absorbed structurally and disposed of thematically by the work whose narrating voice rarely takes any criticism on board.

Yet the fact that we can read passages like the two just examined against the intentions which animate them, reading the model of the text's narrative structure as its antimodel and *vice versa*, indicates that the texts themselves may solicit, or at least tolerate, readings other than those they seem officially to promote. Thus if the

³¹ This "puppet-master" approach to fictional characters was openly used as an authorial principle in one of the prose texts of *L'Usage de la parole*, "Ne me parlez pas de ça", of which this scene is highly reminiscent. There the authorial voice admired in the characters "cette docilité qui fait un des charmes de ce jeu" (UP 123), an attitude far removed from the Bakhtinian ideal of a full dialogue between the author and his autonomous characters.

originally identified dialogic motivation of *Enfance* is countered by an authorial desire to establish narrative authority both within the text and in relation to the way it is read, this reaffirmation of control over the text is itself outdone by what I called in Chapter 1 the text's "unconscious irony" (p.36). This is an effect of the way its language, which transcends both the expressive intention of its speaker and the interpretative ability of any given reader (while simultaneously defining those subjects), refuses to be confined to the expressive function assigned to it, and retains its ability to be read otherwise.

The impression *Enfance* initially creates of wanting to relativise its authorial discourse, to undo the claim to authority and truth which autobiographical discourse makes in a particularly emphatic way and which, given the combined distortions operated by memory and narration, even it can never entirely justify, is thus first of all dissipated by the text's increasingly overt assertion of narrative authority. This relates to my claim in Chapter 2 (pp.92-93) that a certain kind of monologism is inherent to all language use, even to the claim that truth (in this case biographical truth) is dialogic. Moreover, the resulting desire to ensure the correct interpretation of this monologic intention leads to an attempt to control the reader's response, an attempt epitomised in the way, in *Enfance*, the reader's (passive) role is figured within the text itself. Yet despite this tendency, the relativisation of the authorial discourse does unavoidably take place, as its monologic intention, objectified in the (written) language of the text, rejoins the totality of possible significations of that text, and is reconstructed by the reader out of them.

Before discussing the question of reading as such, I shall explore in the next chapter the way Sarraute's writing exceeds her intentions as author, to the point

where it can even be seen to contradict them. I shall look specifically at the relationship between the authorial subject and its language in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. The less overtly autobiographical nature of this text seems to allow a more thorough engagement with the question of identity than ended up taking place in *Enfance* -- the authorial self's loss of unity is here much more emphatic than in the earlier text where Sarraute finally succumbed to "les pièges que pose l'écriture autobiographique" (Vercier 1985:164) and which she at first appeared to have found a way around. Yet if, as I have claimed, the reconstruction of a unitary identity is a function of speaking as such, and not just of speaking about one's life (though it will obviously be accentuated here), we can anticipate that the language of the fragmented authorial subject in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* will remain to some extent marked by that unifying force which the autobiographical discourse of *Enfance* illustrated so vividly.

CHAPTER 4

DOUBLE STANDARDS:

SUBJECTS AND EGOS IN *TU NE T'AIMES PAS*

If the dialogic enactment, in *Enfance*, of the subject's lack of a singular, truthful discourse, ultimately relapsed into a conventional authorial monologue, with the narrating voice consolidating its authority as autobiographer in the face of its critic (and by extension of the reader), the attack by *Tu ne t'aimes pas* on the integrity of the subject's discourse seems more radical and less reversible. This attack has repercussions for the issue of identity insofar as this is an effect of the subject's language; the particular identity which is at stake here seems, though in a less overtly autobiographical way than in *Enfance*, also to be authorial. *Tu ne t'aimes pas* resembles *Enfance* in that its central, plural subject has close links to its creator -- Sarraute's conversations with Simone Benmussa while the novel was being written show her affinity to its "nous" in terms of both the lack of a unitary sense of self, and the experiences that plural subject describes, such as the death of its partner (see TTP 122; Sarraute 1987a:151-56). The fact that the authorial identity of the work's central subject is less explicit seems to allow a much more extreme dissolution of that identity than in *Enfance*. Instead of a binary opposition between two voices which could be characterised in a largely stable manner as respectively right and wrong, knowledgeable and ignorant, close to childhood sensations and alienated from them, we now have a view of the mind as composed of innumerable

voices, no one of which predominates in the text. Moreover, here too, but more rigorously than in *Enfance*, this lack of discursive authority influences the way others' utterances are represented: whereas in the earlier work the restoration of a single authorial voice was marked by an increase in the indirect representation of others' words, the greater dissolution of the subject's language and hence identity in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* seems to have definitively eliminated any such authorial power to incorporate the discourses of others into its own.

The first chapter of this thesis outlined the way the concept of dialogue has been used as a solution to the dilemma of the ironic subject trapped in an inauthentic language, a subject to whom Sarraute's fragmented self bears a certain resemblance. Arnaud Rykner certainly considers the Sarrautean subject of *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* in terms of that dialogic tradition, whose history I traced from Lacan through Schlegel back to Socrates. For him, the Sarrautean self is founded in the Other and constitutes itself as subject through interaction with foreign subjectivities: "Je ne suis que dans la mesure où je suis en relation [...] L'être sarrautien est un être social qui doit affronter des subjectivités étrangères, lesquelles donnent consistance à son existence et lui permettent de se constituer à son tour en sujet" (1991:19). Thus in Rykner's view, the internal dialogues of Sarraute's two most recent works do in fact enact a self-Other dialogue, despite, as *Enfance* demonstrated, the presence of a single consciousness behind all the voices:

Même lorsque le narrateur se laisse aller à être son propre interlocuteur, comme dans *Enfance*, il devient autre, il devient l'Autre: sa voix se dédouble, voire se démultiplie comme dans *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. Le Je n'est Je que dans le rapport qu'il entretient avec un Tu, que lorsqu'il se détache d'un Tu qui est encore lui et ne l'est déjà plus. (20)

However, we have seen how the actual performance of the "tu" in *Enfance* is greatly at odds with its supposed dialogic status as independent of the narrating voice and as such founding its subjectivity. The autobiographical project of *Enfance*, by asserting the identity of narrating and narrated subjects, was certainly inimical from the start to any attempt to challenge the notion of the self's autonomy and coherence. Yet in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* too, I shall argue, all the signs which point toward an anti-authoritative, dialogic conception of the authorial subject and its relation to truth, in fact end up being similarly neutralised by the text itself. It seems as though a fundamental sense of identity paradoxically opposes and survives all attempts by the Sarrautean subject to undermine its own integrity.

In this light, it is not surprising to note that Rykner's analysis of Sarraute's work as dialogically motivated, itself reenacts the tension evident in her attitude to dialogue. This is most obvious when he notes the affinity of the Sarrautean self to Husserl's intentional consciousness, a mode of being characterised by "phenomenological reduction", the solitary return to a primordial *Lebenswelt* concealed beneath the "sediment" of thought (64). Rykner never resolves (or even acknowledges) the conflict between this return to a "protofondation qui seule permet une saisie du monde qui soit à la fois authentique et consciente de sa propre préhistoire" (64), and the always already socialised self implied in the dialogic view of identity he simultaneously ascribes to Sarraute. The conflict is not just a product of his choice of incompatible interpretative grids, but reflects the dichotomy we saw in the last chapter to exist within the Sarrautean view of language he is elucidating. By distinguishing between the privileged language of the writer and the conventional language of the masses (including the anonymous reader), Sarraute simultaneously

appeals to the opposing views of language as the expression of a consciousness, and language as a limiting structure which moulds that consciousness.¹ This dichotomy explains how *Enfance* can appear to be a critique of authoritative authorial (specifically autobiographical) discourse, while in fact endorsing the authority of its own autobiographical narrative; and insofar as it informs *Tu ne t'aimes pas* as well, it undermines its dialogic potential too from the start. Thus, as *Enfance* gestured toward the dissolution of narrative authority but covertly maintained it, *Tu ne t'aimes pas* even more emphatically rejects the idea of a coherent, unified subject, yet nonetheless reinstates that coherence, and the expressive authority that goes with it, in ways to be looked at more closely.

What repercussions does this inevitable shortcircuiting of Sarraute's dialogism have for the reader of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, particularly given that, unlike in *Enfance* (or *L'Usage de la parole* which immediately preceded it), his role is not represented within the novel? On the one hand, not assigning a clear and limiting role to the reader within the fiction could be seen as giving him more freedom, as an attempt to permit his unconditioned response to the text. This would correspond to the side of Sarraute's self-contradictory view of language which sees it as a soulless structure, hostile to communication; recognition by the reader would then become a vital part of the establishment of meaning. But on the other hand, the absence of the reader from the text could simply mean that he has ceased to matter, for literary meaning is *expressed* rather than constituted, and readers, for Sarraute, are notoriously unreliable as partners in dialogue. To an outlook which sees the

¹ This repeats the conflict noted by Celia Britton between a deterministic and an idealist-humanist outlook in Sarraute (Britton 1982:581-83). I shall return to this analysis at the end of this chapter.

artist as privileged with an authentic language, the contribution of the absolutely other reader can only be inferior. This second interpretation is supported by the fact that the internal dialogue of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* has an undeniably self-sufficient quality, greater than that of *Enfance* or *Entre la Vie et la mort* where the status of the *alter ego* hovered between that of writing self and reading other. For the Sarrautean subject of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, self-other relations with all their attendant traumas are something now past: "Il y a longtemps que nous ne sommes pas allés de ce côté" (TTP 157). It seems that the engagement with a reader may have become equally superfluous.

However, Sarraute's limited dialogism should not be understood as a "failure" to reach a certain standard of truth established by theory. Instead, I shall suggest at the end of this chapter, what happens to dialogue in *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* may tell us something about the nature of language and of dialogue in general. Firstly, both texts demonstrate the way using language at all, whether in speech or in writing, necessarily unifies the subject in spite of itself. Looked at in the light of the theories of subjectivity and language discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, the collapse of the non-authoritative, differentiated authorial psyche of Sarraute's recent work into a unitary discourse, in fact appears as a necessary aspect of linguistic self-representation. In this way, Sarraute's open statement of her belief in the authenticity of her own language in contrast to that of others, merely caricatures contradictions also inherent to more self-conscious articulations of the limitations of the linguistic subject and the dialogic nature of truth; these are bound to betray their stated beliefs to the extent that they believe in what they say and try

to convince their addressee of it.² But this unavoidable monologism is not the whole story: given the alienation which is constitutive of linguistic communication, the addressee can never quite evacuate the transindividual aspect of his discourse and limit it to its intended meaning, nor can the reader, however much he may wish to submit to the writer's intention, read only this. This is what permits readings of texts like those of the two images *en abyme* of the narrative structure of *Enfance* discussed at the end of Chapter 3; in this chapter, Sarraute's inability to de-conventionalise her own discourse will be illustrated on the basis of "*disent les imbéciles*" and *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. With the transcendence of the text's inevitable monologism, the possibility of some kind of dialogue returns, for the alienation which appears to prohibit it (by leading each speaker to posit the response of understanding he desires to his monologic expressive intention), in fact makes it possible, by preserving the reader's otherness from the text's attempt to define him.

1. The self in society: Sarraute and Lacan:

We can gauge both the extent to which the Sarrautean subject, in particular that of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, is conceived as existing dialogically, and the ways in which it is independent of or even hostile to dialogue, by considering it in the context of Jacques Lacan's theory of the role of dialogue in the constitution of the subject. This use of Lacan as a criterion for assessing degrees of dialogicality is not

² On the way deconstructionist theories of the conventionality of language and the nature of meaning as an effect of that language, enact the "Cretan liar" paradox (where the statement by a man from Crete that all Cretans are liars must disprove itself in order to be true), see Prendergast (1986:18).

intended to imply that his work represents the truth about dialogue or the subject, or by extension that the value of Sarraute's vision should be measured by its closeness to or deviation from his. Instead, I see reading one in terms of the other as instituting a relation not of mastery but of dialogue between them, and with all the complications I have suggested are inherent to that relation (I shall return to the question of what is involved in this kind of dialogue at the end of Chapter 5.)

The representation by *Tu ne t'aimes pas* of the mind as an ongoing conversation between innumerable participants, corresponds to Sarraute's stated conception of the self not as a singular entity, reducible to social roles like those of mother or writer and which are themselves based on outdated literary models, but as "quelque chose [...] d'incommensurable" (Sarraute 1987a:76). It is empty in the sense that it contains no solid unchanging kernel, yet full of contrasting selves whose constant commentary qualifies any attempt to present to others a stable, unitary personality:

Suppose qu'un journaliste vienne interviewer l'écrivain. Il veut l'écrivain? Il va recevoir ça aujourd'hui, c'est ça qu'il est venu chercher [...] Mais c'est une petite part infime de tout le reste [...] Il y a toujours une multitude en nous, puisque nous sommes si nombreux... et qui souffle [...] 'Mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes! Qu'est-ce que tu vas leur dire?' (82-83)

The social persona is merely the appearance beneath which, in the old Romantic opposition, lies the reality of tropisms: "[Les personnages] ne sont qu'apparences, par derrière se déroule la vie anonyme des tropismes" (119). A primary feature of this sense of self as "rien, rien, rien" (163) is its passivity: it is when it is ingesting impressions from outside that the self is ineffable, not when it is active:

Le monde entier est là et s'engouffre à chaque instant, se transforme à chaque seconde, passe à travers moi. Ma propre personnalité n'existe pas à ce moment-là. Je ne sais même pas ce qu'elle est. Je ne suis que ce qui

passe à travers moi: ce que je regarde, ce que j'entends... le monde entier.
 (163)

It is significant that Sarraute here equates personality with self-consciousness ("Je ne sais même pas ce qu'elle est"); this tendency will be a central element in my assessment of how far her thinking on subjectivity is compatible with Lacan's theory of the dialogic subject.

The way relations to another unify the incommensurable self and give it an identity is, as Rykner claimed, a major theme in Sarraute. Before I look at the way this phenomenon is represented in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, a brief reminder of Lacan's version of how identity is mediated through the other will be useful. The infant's experience of the mirror stage lays the foundation for the later assumption of a linguistic identity imposed from outside. Here the infant projects its perception of the integrity of another figure back onto itself, and so intuitively its own identity on the model of that other. The calling into being of the social subject is completed by the way its parents (in the paradigmatic family structure) refer to it and name it, replacing the mirror's unifying power with that of language. That aspect of the self which cannot be named (desire of the mother) is repressed in the Oedipus complex, a move which creates the unconscious. Hence the subject of language is only part of the self whose originary division (the *Spaltung*) brought it into being. Every engagement with others and their language deepens the gulf between the subject and its truth, in a repetition Lacan calls the *refente* (1966:842).

When relations become mediated by language, they consolidate a distinction between self and other not acknowledged prior to this. Language, by letting us name other things, circumscribes our sense of self as different from those things, just as the first encounter with the Symbolic order gave the child a fixed place in the

family (via the *Nom du Père*). Anika Lemaire sums up the fate of the Lacanian subject for whom access to the Symbolic order means "l'impossible coïncidence du (Je), sujet de l'énonciation, et du 'Je', sujet de l'énoncé" and so "amorce la dialectique des aliénations du sujet. Le sujet se fige en ses énoncés, en ses rôles sociaux et la totalité de ceux-ci s'édifie peu à peu en un 'moi' qui n'est plus qu'une objectification du sujet" (1977:127). The *moi* is an imaginary construct, "par un autre et pour un autre" (Lacan 1966:374). Thus for Lacan the reductive influence of the other on the self is inseparable from the fact of using language, and as such is generally invisible to us. The dependence on the other for one's sense of self explains the aggression inherent in human relations and which, I have suggested, is manifested in dialogue in the attempt to impose on the other the response of recognition one desires from him:

L'homme *obligé de se façonner en référence* à l'autre ou contre l'autre, en rivalité, obligé d'attendre de l'autre la reconnaissance ou le jugement, est naturellement enclin à toute la gamme des conduites agressives, depuis l'envie, en passant par la jalousie morbide et l'agressivité réelle, jusqu'à la négation mortelle de l'autre ou de soi-même. (Lemaire 1977:277)

So far there seems to be a clear kinship between the Lacanian and Sarrautean subjects. Lacan's focus on the way social roles and the language which supports them reduce an undefinable self to a false *moi* encourages comparison with Sarraute's critique of the way individuals draw on received novelistic models to constitute fictional social personae for themselves. Well before the ineffable Sarrautean subject was given structural prominence in the multiple voices of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, her work concentrated on the uncharacterisability of the self and the illusory nature of the *moi* which conceals it. In "*disent les imbéciles*", the central figure's sense that he is "rien... un vide... un trou d'air... Infini" (DI 126) is

complemented by the experience of acquiring an illusory identity, imposed by others, which turns him into an object. In one instance this subject, confronted with a photograph of himself, feels alienated in an image which fails to match his sense of self, just as the mirror-image causes the alienation of the formless Lacanian subject in an illusion of integrity:

Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça? mais ce n'est pas moi... -- Allons donc, vous ne vous reconnaissez pas? -- Si, si, bien sûr... Je retrouve mes traits, je les ai vus reflétés dans des glaces, fixés sur des pellicules, mais jamais je n'ai vu... je n'ai jamais imaginé... Avouez que ce n'est pas ressemblant... (30)

Aside from the several instances where the self is objectified through reflection of its image in mirrors, photographs, and even in people's eyes, it also undergoes the Lacanian experience of being reductively (and arbitrarily) defined through others' language:

Lui on le connaît... il n'y a pas plus délicat, plus modeste, je dirais même plus humble... oui, humble... Non? Pas humble? Humble ne vous convient pas? Je crois que j'ai trouvé: orgueilleux plutôt? Vous voyez, orgueilleux lui va. Un monstre d'orgueil [...] C'est évident, qui ne le voit? Vous êtes cela. Vous êtes un monstre d'orgueil. (77)

It is always social pressure which leads Sarraute's characters to accept false social identities, just as the Lacanian subject is exposed to "tous les mensonges ou aliénations voulus ou non [...] toutes les distorsions inscrites au principe même de la dimension symbolique conventionnelle de la vie en groupe" (Lemaire 1977:108). But the phenomenon of having one's identity conferred from without is not distasteful to all: for some, being the object of a gaze can arouse a "délicieuse sensation d'être enfermée en sécurité dans cette forme que dessinent nos regards déférents" (DI 96). As the object of admiration of a group, a "maître" can say anything, however irrelevant (like crying "Debout les morts" in a conversation about the Moors), secure in the knowledge that his ideas will be admired on the basis of

his social status rather than on their intrinsic merit. Here the other's gaze is empowering rather than restrictive:

C'est leurs regards réunis sur lui qui lui donnent cette aisance, cette liberté de mouvements, tout en le contenant à l'abri d'une forme... la sienne... qu'ils modèlent, qu'ils caressent [...] Il regarde son gros poing couvert de poils roux qui s'abat sur la table... c'est à lui, tout cela, c'est lui. Il a envie de se tâter pour s'assurer que c'est vrai, il lève le bras plus haut, il abat son poing plus fort, sa voix claque: 'Debout les morts! Debout les morts!' (71)

This image of the alienated subject who relates to himself as to an object, to the point of looking at his hand as something distinct from himself yet in which his identity is somehow contained, reappears in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, this time to be analysed by the authorial voices: the man who gazes at his hand on the table has "dans son regard tant d'amour... C'est ainsi chez ceux qui s'aiment... leur amour va d'abord à tout ce qu'ils peuvent apercevoir d'eux-mêmes... leurs mains, leurs pieds, leurs avant-bras... et puis dans la glace leur reflet" (TTP 20).

Embracing one's alienated image, including seeing one's body from without, is thus a symptom of self-love; it is the inability to cooperate in one's objectification that leads to the diagnosis "Tu ne t'aimes pas". The several voices of the self in this novel are incapable of such self-observation: contemplation of their reflection has never exceeded "de brefs moments, plutôt d'étonnement... Est-ce moi, vraiment?... Mais venait très vite un autre et encore un autre reflet... Et puis nos regards occupés ailleurs ne s'arrêtaient guère pour contempler" (21). Nor is the body ever an object of awareness for the voices of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*; it exists in the Real and functions without being conceptualised, independently of consciousness:

-- [...] Nos mains sont des objets utilitaires, des ustensiles limités à leur fonction, elles n'ont rien à faire ici...
-- Et tout notre corps à nous, en ce moment nous ne sentons pas sa présence, c'est comme s'il n'existait pas [...] (21)

The reflections of the self which others provide no more enable it to establish a stable identity than does contemplation of its own body: "Ces images de nous-mêmes que les autres nous renvoient, nous n'arrivons pas à nous voir en elles" (15). The Sarrautean plural self is the exception in society, an aberration among those unitary individuals who see themselves "reflétés dans les yeux des autres" (15): "Chacun d'eux est sain, normal, chacun d'eux s'aime, et nous... on ne s'aime pas" (12). It is impossible to pin down as an object of love this being which is made up of "tant [de personnes]... comme des étoiles dans le ciel... toujours d'autres apparaissent dont on ne soupçonnait pas l'existence [...] Je suis l'univers entier, toutes les virtualités, tous les possibles" (17-18).

For Sarraute, then, self-definition from the point of view of the other is clearly not an *integral* part of being a conscious human being. It is on this point that her concept of subjectivity (whether embodied in the multiple self of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* or in the distressed reaction of the young man in "*disent les imbéciles*" who fails to recognise himself in a photograph) most sharply diverges from that of Lacan. By *Tu ne t'aimes pas* such unwelcome definitions are, moreover, no longer even perceived as a threat: the infinite subject is so confirmed in its difference from the fictional characters who populate the real world and believe in their reflected images, that it can recall even hostile engagements with indulgence. However much its interactions with others may compromise it, it knows now that it will always recover its internal multiplicity: "Quelle souillure peut-elle trouver une place dans notre mouvante immensité? Quelle trace peut-elle laisser?" (70). What then is Sarraute's concept of subjectivity, and what kind of consequences does this portrait of a self happy with its own (admittedly considerable) company have for the

question of intersubjective relations, both within the fictional universe and in terms of the text's interaction with a reader?

For Sarraute, as we have seen, there are two kinds of subject, distinguishable by the way they react to images of themselves: these images can be perceived directly by the self (in mirrors or by viewing one's own body, a necessarily incomplete mode of self-objectification), or they can be provided by others, who communicate to us verbally or visually the way we appear to them. Unquestioning acceptance of these images as equal to the self distinguishes the vast majority of individuals in Sarraute's universe from those whose experience of such imposed definitions on what is felt subjectively to be an infinite self causes distress and alienation. Nonetheless, the status of each kind of subject is not stable: just as the solid individual, evocative of a character from a traditional novel, can undergo a vertiginous loss of identity if the certainty of his reflected image is taken away, the formless subject which gets its most extreme articulation in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* can find itself lured by others into asserting a reductive self-definition. Thus the "maître" in *"disent les imbéciles"*, immediately after his "Debout les morts" apotheosis and his admiration of his "gros fort poing des forts tempéraments" (DI 75), experiences a total loss of identity on the basis of a loss of confidence in his admirers' judgement:

Cette place que vous m'avez attribuée avec tant de générosité... je me demande s'il n'y a pas eu une méprise... Vous vous en souvenez, quand je levais le poing, quand je frappais la table, quand je roulais de gros yeux globuleux injectés de sang... c'était vous, vous qui me poussiez... un effet de suggestion, d'hypnose [...] Je n'ai pas pu y tenir, je me suis échappé, je suis dehors de nouveau... un souffle, une ombre, un vide où tout s'engouffre... (76)

By contrast, the "nous" of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* can ruefully recall a time (significantly past) when outside pressure led them to construct "un beau 'je' présentable, bien solide" (TTP 37). This construction (of the self as a character who never seeks revenge) quickly went out of control:

- On ajoutait ceci... et encore cela...
- Comme la pipe qu'on plante au milieu du visage... le chapeau de feutre qu'on pose sur la tête...
- Oui, d'un bonhomme de neige... (39)

However, this effigy dissolved again once the self escaped the objectifying power of the other and returned from the intersubjective encounter to the authenticity of its own internal dialogue: "Avec quelle rapidité, quand il est resté seul parmi nous, il a fondu..." (39).

The temptation to turn one's authentic self into an object is thus the result of associating with others who believe in their own characterisations, a fact which augurs ill for the whole idea of intersubjective relations. Self-objectification is contagious, and any engagement with it, even the very attempt to tear away the mask which others present to us, ironically leads to the self constructing an identity of its own (that of the aggressor). Both "*disent les imbéciles*" and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* provide striking and near-identical examples of this. In the earlier novel, the riposte "C'est vous que ça juge" to a criticism of a popular idea, sparks off an extended reaction in the mind of the addressee who is immediately objectified by its pronoun ("Vous. Vous. Vous. Plus d'infinis, d'espaces sans bornes" [DI 133]). Reduced to a *moi*, the self responds in kind: "Sous le 'C'est vous' il y a... ça saute aux yeux... il y a 'Ce n'est pas lui' [...] Nous avons été mis en balance. Placés à chaque bout de la bascule. Nous nous faisons face, lui et moi" (DI 135). By destroying "lui",

the "moi" hopes to free himself from his accuser's imprisoning definition, for he only exists as "vous" in opposition to the "lui" whose idea he has attacked.³

The speaker perceives his opponent as wilfully turning himself into a character by matching his demeanour to a familiar model of genius. Yet though he perceives the other's falsity, he cannot destroy it without engaging with it on its own level, thus becoming embroiled in a demeaning battle of egos. In the attempt to dismantle the other's persona, the subject becomes highly individualised, evident in the way the pronoun "je" proliferates during what turns out to be a struggle to the death: "Je tourne autour de lui, je bondis, je mords, j'arrache des lambeaux [...] Je ne peux plus m'en détacher, je me colle à lui, je pèse sur lui, je l'étreins, je reçois sur moi son souffle, sa sueur, son sang" (138). Utterly counterproductive, the attempt to unmask an opponent, by forcing the self into a position of aggression which unifies him ("tout ce que je sais, c'est qu'au point où j'en suis, il faut que lui ou moi l'emporte" [138]), makes him an easy target for others' reductive characterisations of him in turn. Their image of him -- "roquet aboyant aux chausses, les chiens aboient la caravane passe, le pou dans la crinière du lion, la grenouille et le boeuf" -- and his reduced state as single aggressive impulse overlap: "et je saute et je jappe et je pique et je me gonfle" (139).

In the comparable nightmare recalled in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, the object attacked by the ineffable subject is not a character but a concept, "bonheur" (denounced already by Sarraute in the essay "Le bonheur de l'homme" [1984a]). What is striking about this passage is that the concept of happiness it explodes by

³ "Lui" is the pronoun of character in fiction, comparable to the "moi" of psycho-analytic discourse. For Ann Jefferson, "to see a character as a he is to see him as a 'character', and so to be denied any communication with him. Just as one cannot say he of someone one loves, so one cannot say you to a 'character'" (1980:103).

showing its inadequacy to lived experience, has much in common with the ideal of dialogue: "Où est ici cette totale liberté? Cette absence de toute contrainte? Ce détachement parfait? Ces nobles sentiments que personne n'a encore éprouvés? Ces conversations à travers lesquelles on voit circuler les belles, puissantes, vivifiantes idées?" (TTP 69). Similarly, the reality it replaces it with, "cet insupportable esclavage, ces jalousies, envies, mesquineries, agressivités... et ces conversations d'où tant de conformisme, d'ennui se dégage", expresses a total lack of faith in the power of communication. In an attempt to discredit those who claim to live in happiness and who thereby dominate others (like the self) who lack such unifying concepts to apply to their lives, the self, as in "*disent les imbéciles*", is transformed into an agent of destruction (and so bears out its own scepticism regarding communication):

Alors plus rien ne nous retient, aucun scrupule, aucun respect de la vérité. Tout nous est bon pour essayer de venir à bout de ces destructeurs, de ces tueurs... nous lançons sur eux n'importe quoi... n'importe quelles pitoyables et basses histoires, quels humiliants déboires colportés par leurs plus vils ennemis, probablement inventés...

Et nous sommes repoussés de toutes parts, chassés avec dégoût... nous rentrons salis, les mots qu'on a crachés sur nous nous couvrent, dégoulinent... (69-70)

Even recollection of the event from the safety of hindsight awakens the clichéd language of convention -- "nous jeter à corps perdu [...] nous perdre corps et âme [...] ne pas nous rappeler que 'Charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même'" -- which the self rejects as "pris au-dehors, ce ne sont pas des mots de chez nous" (70).⁴ The internal multitude has its own language, and reference to the body isn't part of it, for, as I mentioned earlier, the body is not conceptualised, it is simply

⁴ Similarly, in "*disent les imbéciles*", the self's obligation to argue on others' convention-bound terms forces him into cliché: "Quand on s'est mis dans un si mauvais cas, quand on a fait un si dangereux faux pas, quand on a été, ainsi, fait comme un rat, on ne sait plus à quel saint se vouer" (DI 140).

there, unobtrusively doing its job. The relationship between language and the body is not that simple, though, and I shall return to it in connection with Sarraute's validation of her own language's authenticity.

The "true" state of the Sarrautean subject is thus solitary and passive, for any kind of social engagement is doomed to end with the self drawn into a struggle which falsifies its infinite nature (another example from *Tu ne t'aimes pas* follows a perceived insult which caused an immediate though shortlived unification: "Je m'aime. -- Nous avons de nouveau osé aller jusque-là" [102]). Withdrawal from intersubjective relations is the necessary condition for personal authenticity; only in *intrasubjective* dialogue can the cliché-ridden language of social intercourse be replaced by the genuine, expressive discourse "de chez nous". But this disdain for dialogue with others raises the question of the nature of the relationship between Sarraute's text and its reader. How can Sarraute reconcile her view of what communication does to the self with her activity of writing which manifests a desire to communicate that view nonetheless to a reader?

The fact that Sarraute persists in writing for a reader despite the gloomy view of communication her writing depicts, is related to her belief that the writer possesses an exceptional language; this lets her set her own work outside the complex of domination and submission she describes so frequently as unavoidable when humans address one another. (The fact that it is not outside that complex, as the treatment of the reader in *Enfance* shows, only bears out the accuracy of her observation of what is really involved in communication.) Seeing her own literary language as expressive rather than conventional, originating in a self which is not a symbolic construct, she perceives the ideal recipient of this authentic address not

as a symbolised other encountered only in language and thus unknowable, but as another unsymbolised self, known prior to the intervention of a mediating language. (This reading double of course features prominently in *Entre la Vie et la mort* and *Enfance*.)⁵

Insofar as the Sarrautean subject and its ideal interlocutor/reader are obliged to manifest themselves in language, what distinguishes them, in her view, from the alienated subjects of conventional language, is an absence of self-consciousness. This is what marks the limit of Sarraute's apparent affinity to the Lacanian concept of subjectivity: for her, the alienation of the truth of the subject in language is confined to language use which is not only conscious but self-conscious, aware of its status as utterance, and of its speaker. It is not the mere fact of using language which turns the self into a singular *moi*, for Sarraute; it is the use of language in a particularly self-reflexive way, epitomised in speech about oneself, which objectifies not only the speaker but also, by extension, his interlocutor.

Thus the self-objectifying, self-loving masses are marked by the reflexivity of their language. It is a language the subject of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* claims to lack: even when it assumes it, carrying out the splitting of the self into subject and object explored in depth in *Entre la Vie et la mort* and epitomised linguistically in the reflexive verb, this language is always seen as consciously borrowed from others:

Attendez un instant, ne m'enfermez pas... pas entièrement... *je me suis scindé* en deux... une opération que vous recommandez, je sais la faire aussi, je sais *me regarder* du dehors, je peux *me voir*, *me connaître* [...] J'ai su assimiler vos enseignements, j'ai retenu vos classements, j'applique vos règlements, je suis d'ici, de chez vous, un des vôtres. (TTP 209-10; my emphasis)

⁵ In *Les Fruits d'or*, though the good reader is not characterised as the alter ego of the writer, his contact with the text is likewise evoked through the sensory metaphors of touch and taste, and is claimed to take place prior to the language which names those experiences: "C'est ce parfum qu'ils dégagent, mais ce n'est pas un parfum, pas même encore une odeur, cela ne porte aucun nom, c'est une odeur d'avant les odeurs" (FO 153).

The language of others is a pernicious one: it kills what it names by conceptualising the ineffable (oneself, the other, two decades of emotional life in "vingt ans de bonheur" [47]). The speaker of this language thus commits a sort of linguistic suicide by suppressing his presence as expressing subject ("sujet de l'énonciation") in favour of a linguistic sign. His language is full of reflexive verbs like "s'aimer", which triggered *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, or "s'amuser" (131); he is liable to use phrases like "Que je me sois fait ça à moi", where "le voilà plus net que jamais, ce dédoublement" (138), or even simply "Si c'était moi" (141). This way in which reflexive language, where the self objectifies itself in a pronoun, cuts itself off from the living sensation in which it is born and which it should express, reaches an extreme in the use of the future perfect. In Sarraute's example, "Je m'amuse", which already kills its speaker by naming her, escapes even farther from the life and the event in which it originated by becoming "Ce que je me serai amusée" (131). As a result, "d'un seul coup ce qui était en train de s'accomplir s'est accompli... Cela s'étale derrière nous, immobilisé, offert, comme un souvenir... pour le voir il faut qu'on se retourne..." (132).

The fault of others, then, is their alienation from the truth their own consciousnesses can provide; they are thus condemned to ignorance. The seat of truth for Sarraute is the tropism, and the tropism is conscious, if only just. (Its ambiguous location "aux portes de la conscience" [ES 97] is exploited by Sarraute in ways to be looked at more closely: it belongs to a physical realm prior to conceptualisation, yet is both a source of language and can -- though with difficulty -- be articulated in language.) Self-ignorance is ignorance of the tropism which

emerges from within us, and fidelity instead to a view of life and, worse, of ourselves which comes from without, frozen in a second-hand language.

Thus Sarraute remains faithful to the Romantic opposition between reality and illusion, a detranscendentalised version of which informs the opposition between the unconscious and consciousness in the theories of Freud and Lacan. In fact, she continues the demystification of truth operated by psychoanalysis: whereas it circumscribed the illusion-reality opposition within the self by locating absolute truth in the unconscious rather than in the cosmos, she holds consciousness itself to be the seat of truth, but only when it is in touch with its own tropistic activity. For Sarraute, it is when consciousness becomes self-consciousness that it enters the alienated realm of illusion. In the context of irony, the fact that Sarraute locates the truth of the self in consciousness rather than in the unconscious explains why, as we saw with *Enfance*, her work ultimately seems governed by the principle of verbal rather than epistemological irony. For unlike the way epistemological irony acknowledges the speaker's own Socratic ignorance, in verbal irony, the truth of which the inadequate utterance so obviously falls short is itself in fact known, and as such is potentially expressible.

Sarraute's criticism of how individuals rely on external definitions of themselves for a sense of identity, illustrates the way her version of the self's externality to itself is located a notch higher in consciousness than is Lacan's. For her, this dependence on the other operates on the level of *values*, rather than being an *a priori* implication of living in language; for this reason it can be rejected. The other's definition of one's identity matters because of who he is, not as such: "On m'a dit de vous que vous êtes quelqu'un. -- Quelqu'un? Moi? -- [...] Ah vous

voulez savoir qui... vous avez bien raison, si un imbécile me l'avait dit... mais je ne vous l'aurais pas répété..." (DI 144). Moreover, the loss of this other-constituted identity doesn't entail a loss of consciousness or necessarily of language: "Si tout à l'heure, lorsqu'il sera seul, la nuit, étendu dans son lit, il perdait de nouveau ses contours [...] redevenait immense, un océan" (145). In Sarraute's ontology, the self which is left behind when identity flees is the conscious self of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* which still possesses its own language, its "mots de chez nous" (TTP 70).

Thus Sarraute can acquit her own literary language, emerging as it does from the supposed authenticity of the writer's solitude, of any participation in turning self or other into a *moi*, or sensation into a coded structure. In her view of communication, the Lacanian *moi-moi autre* axis of language is replaced by a "*sujet-moi autre*" opposition, where the other's conventional language alone is what objectifies speaker, addressee, and referent. Yet her representation of how the other's language alienates himself, his interlocutor, and his referent from their truth, can in fact be mapped onto her own authorial language too. It too reproduces in a less overt but for all that no less fundamentally alienated way what it condemns: it confers a unitary identity on its author who seeks to guarantee her addressee's reception of her discursive intention across the written symbols in which it is embodied, by reducing his otherness to sameness. (While *Tu ne t'aimes pas* no longer represents the ideal reader-as-double, the very fact that a text which is ultimately addressed to a reader consists of the self's addresses to its listening subselves, aligns the reader with the self as co-addressee and so continues, though less explicitly, the characteristic Sarrautean conflation of the ideal reader with the writer.) Thus even as she rejects intersubjective dialogue, Sarraute unintentionally

demonstrates the limitations of the linguistic subject which give rise to the need for dialogue. The last part of this chapter will examine how language unites the multiple speaking voices of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* into a *moi*, while Chapter 5 will deal with the way Sarraute dictates the ideal reading she desires. Now, though, I wish to look at the way the social conditioning she condemns goes deeper than conventional social behaviour, revealing itself even in the language she uses to combat it. How does Sarraute vouch for the authenticity of her language, its source within the self rather than in the convention-governed social world, and how does that guarantee prove invalid?

2. Metaphor and metonymy in Sarraute:

We have seen how much Sarraute's criticism of conventional discourse and its effects on its speakers and hearers has in common with Lacan's account of the conventionality of language in general and its consequences for the subject. The vital difference between them is that she equates convention with self-consciousness and so with a manner of *wilful* self-representation which the conscious individual can reject. Lacan (after Jakobson) sees language as structured along the axes of metaphor and metonymy which organise it as a self-contained entity (1966:505-09, 799-800). Similarly for Sarraute (always taking into account the different level on which her attention is focused), the distance from truth at which conventional social intercourse operates can be measured as the space of social metaphors and metonymies which alienate those who engage in such relations from the reality in

which they live, and which by blindly repeating they turn into a self-sufficient substitute for truth. The metonymic drive in the social (and aesthetic) construction of characters is ridiculed in *Entre la Vie et la mort*, where the writer finds that his possessions, accidentally acquired and relating to himself only in terms of their proximity, are seized on by his admirers, distorted, and used to define his personality:

C'est surprenant, c'est agréable... comment ne pas se sentir un peu ému, flatté par cet intérêt... une curiosité presque avide avec laquelle ils observent tout autour d'eux, le plus discrètement possible [...]

Qu'est-ce que c'est? D'où ont-ils ramené ça? De chez lui? C'est sur lui que ç'a été prélevé? [...] C'était exquis, ce thé préparé par vous, paraît-il un mélange savant de qualités rares... infusé dans une théière d'une forme étrange posée sur une sorte de récipient... -- Mais c'est une simple bouilloire... j'avais renversé le couvercle pour que la vapeur... -- Non, ils ont dit que c'était un samovar... -- Un samovar? Chez moi? Ils l'ont vu? -- Oui. (EVM 128-30)

The writer becomes assimilated into society's discourses by being turned into a character, a process in which an eye for metonymy is extremely useful and where the failure to anticipate such metonymic extrapolations leaves one at the mercy of other people's eagerness to caricature: "A-t-il oublié, mais connaît-il seulement le rôle si important des gants, des cannes de Balzac, des pantalons de Baudelaire, de tant de pipes, de gilets brodés, de plastrons, de lampes, de monocles" (132). In this process, metonymy is finally arrested by metaphor, as a selection is made from the potentially endless list of the individual's real and imagined attributes, and from the chosen elements a metaphorical figure is constituted whose outlandish distance from the truth is humorous precisely because of the foundation of similarity on which it is constructed:

Ce thé préparé dans sa chambre, cette théière, cette bouilloire... ces gestes, c'est une question d'arrangement, de présentation [...] il suffit de les transformer légèrement... de ralentir les mouvements... de lents gestes

solennels comme ceux d'un prêtre quand il lève le ciboire [...] ça se faisait dans un silence religieux... c'était un rite sacré... (134)

It is not just the social mania for characterisation that is governed by the derealising force of metonymy and metaphor; at the most basic level of social constructs, conventional clichéd language betrays the same creation of distance from reality. Proverbs serve as primitive and reductive metaphors for human behaviour in all its unpredictability and illogicality, by constantly translating it into the terms of the familiar. Thus "Nul ne dit autant de sottises qu'un homme d'esprit" (DI 56) covers all sorts of excesses which would otherwise defy reason, subjecting them to a seemingly infallible law (again the metaphorical equation depends on an initial metonymy from the "sottise" to the person it is claimed to typify, who is thus defined as an "homme d'esprit"). The law of cliché claims authority over the body too: a physical attribute or gesture is interpreted as a sign, so that the hand which hesitates over how much change it should give as a tip becomes a metonym of its owner, instantly defined on that basis as "un pingre" (112). Once labelled in terms of familiar concepts, the victim becomes vulnerable to all kinds of other metaphorical transformations: in common opinion, avarice is a social evil similar to all other vices, and so this once-off gesture of hesitation is not only defined as a sign of meanness, but as a result is held to obey the law "Qui a bu boira" (114), thus defining its agent forever. From the hand to the person to the diagnosis and the equation with vice of all sorts, the same trajectory is followed as in the case of the "homme d'esprit": from perceptible reality through metonymy to a metaphorical generalisation which can then be offered as proof of that metonymy's truth. ("Pas de fumée sans feu" [152] repeats this derealisation of reality through the same metonymic and metaphoric process: an event becomes a sign of something greater

to which it is connected, just as smoke signals fire; the fact that smoke signals fire then "proves" by metaphor that it is valid to extrapolate from a detail to a whole in any context, just as the fact that drinkers will always drink "proves" that the young husband is a miser.)

A prime example of the way the code of proverbs and clichés relies on metaphor and metonymy to reduce reality to the terms of the familiar, occurs in the same section of *"disent les imbéciles"*. The inauthenticity of such expression is illustrated by the way the faceless "ils" who have diagnosed the young man's gesture as that of a "lamentable grippe-sou" (116), cite the authority on which their diagnosis is founded:

Que pouvons-nous contre les règles qui nous régissent, des préceptes fondés sur la sagesse, sur une expérience qui remonte à l'Antiquité? Celui-ci: tu le connais bien, à quoi bon essayer de l'oublier? Elle se bouche les oreilles... Doucement, fermement ils écartent ses mains... Il faut que tu aies le courage de l'écouter: Ab ungue leonem. (117)

The proverb here does more than just express a metonymy (the lion's clawmark reveals the whole beast) and imply a metaphoric equation between lion and miser which again validates the young man's metonymic definition as a miser. The fact that only a few words need to be recited to suggest a universal truth actually *enacts* the metonymic principle the proverb as a whole expresses. Not only is the stock of human character-types so circumscribed that one gesture immediately calls up a whole personality, the language in which that outlook receives expression is similarly so limited and familiar that a few words serve to indicate a whole utterance. Public language is so predictable that it has almost become superfluous, and its predictability is the result of its constant reference to a received and familiar reality rather than to anything original, expressed for the first time. Thus the

validity of this highly limited language and frame of reference cannot be guaranteed by its speaker, for he is not its expressive origin; instead he must refer back to a past original speaker from whom it has been inherited. Expression is replaced by quotation in this register of language where an utterance is deemed to be true on the strength of its origin in a nameless and probably unknown representative of classical antiquity, but who merely by being ancient authorises the truth of contemporary opinions. The fact that truth is articulated in a foreign language only emphasises its externality to its speaker who not only quotes another's ideas but does so in the other's language.⁶

The way this invocation of an absent ancestral authority to ground a highly conventional language resembles Lacan's identification of the *Nom du Père*,⁷ is borne out by a scene from *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. The plural self's interlocutor here is another of the many mystified subjects of conventional language who populate Sarraute's work; a bad "reader", he is unable to imagine any of the fictions suggested by the "nous", in which an absent other might experience typically Sarrautean embarrassment or distress (TTP 141-42). Not surprisingly, he is also unable to perceive the inadequacy of his words to their referent -- "pity", for example, is to him a sufficient label for an indefinable sensation which the Sarrautean subject can only define negatively as not jealousy, almost but not quite melancholy or nostalgia (148). The fact that this subversive and unnameable feeling

⁶ Nor is quotation always acknowledged as such, for even when ostensibly based on personal experience, the discourse of the alienated social subject is derivative: "Un jour... nous étions à Rome ensemble... -- A Rome? -- Oui, rappelez-vous... nous étions jeunes... et le guide... Oui, ça, il l'a déjà entendu, il a lu quelque part, il ne sait plus où, cette histoire, elle s'appliquait à quelqu'un d'autre..." (DI 73).

⁷ For Lacan, "c'est dans le nom du père qu'il nous faut reconnaître le support de la fonction symbolique qui, depuis l'orée des temps historiques, identifie sa personne à la figure de la loi" (1966:278).

is directed toward one's father (and that the interlocutor can't conceive of such a lack of respect: "Ça me dépasse" [146]), again relates the opposition between conventional and authentic language to the issue of ancestral authority, now invested more immediately in the literal father rather than in Roman antiquity. The conception of reality which the "nous" possess, specifically here their sympathy with the son's nameless feelings for his father, locates them among "ces gens sans pudeur qui osent lever les yeux sur leur père dénudé [...] des gens qui manquent de ce respect qu'on doit à un père, de ce respect qu'on se doit" (149). The affinity to the Lacanian *Nom du Père* is obvious, always bearing in mind the specificity of Sarraute's view of what conventional language is, and her belief that authentic expression can transcend it. It is because for Sarraute too the father is the representative of the Law (however it is conceived), that the "nous" who reject what she defines as linguistic convention are "des hors-la-loi, des parias" (149).

However, given that Sarraute's representation of the ways in which the language she rejects is artificial and removed from the reality to which it claims to refer, matches Lacan's (Jakobsonian) interpretation of *all* language as structured along the axes of metaphor and metonymy, it seems likely that her own language will reproduce what it condemns. Indeed, in the examples from "*disent les imbéciles*" and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* just examined, metaphors abound which cannot be ascribed to the mystified language of self-loving others, but which stem from the authorial voice(s). When the young wife in "*disent les imbéciles*" approaches the anonymous others who will only offer her received truths about "the mark of the lion", we are told that "elle embrasse leurs genoux"; on hearing what they have to say, she -- implausibly in any real sense -- "se bouche les oreilles... Doucement,

fermement ils écartent ses mains..." (DI 117). Similarly in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, while the "nous" imagine that the conventional thinker must regard pre-conceptual reality in terms of familiar metaphors for a threatening absence of differentiation:

- C'est tout mou, flageolant, bourbeux, qu'on y mette le pied et on s'enlise... des marécages...
- De la soude caustique où l'on va se dissoudre...
- Un grouillement de choses fuyantes qui se cachent dans des trous sombres, des fentes humides... (TTP 146)⁸

their own perception of reality is equally couched in metaphor. For if Sarraute rejects one set of metaphorical equivalents of "ces choses", it is to replace them with another (or at least a simile which operates on the same axis of substitution as metaphor does):

- Des mots comme sournois, inquiétant, répugnant ne les atteignent pas.
- Elles pourraient faire penser aux maillons serrés d'une trame toujours mouvante qui se tisserait sans fin... s'étendrait toujours plus loin... (147).

What's more, this simile, by drawing attention to the ever-changing nature of tropistic reality, explains why the language which attempts to express it is forced to trace a metonymic path. This is illustrated at the phonetic level in "*disent les imbéciles*" when an "objet de piété" becomes an "objet piégé" (DI 52): the response to the inadequacy of one metaphor is to follow it with an alternative in a way which demonstrates clearly both the metonymic move from term to term and the way that Sarraute, like her characters, attempts to make that movement meaningful and approach some kind of stasis through maintaining similarity between the terms. In this example, it is as though the desire to make a series of different words say the

⁸ These metaphors are also of course highly typical of Sarraute's early imagistic prose -- she has explained her recourse to "banal" imagery as necessitated by the shortcomings of her readers: "Il faut au lecteur une image tout à fait facile [...] Si je ne donne pas une image qui ne soit pas banale, volontairement banale, le lecteur perd pied" (Sarraute 1987a:148-49; cp.197). This paradox, the result of the fact that language is not only expressive (the aspect Sarraute emphasises) but also communicative, illustrates well how tenuous the distinction is between Sarraute's language and that which she criticises.

same thing, and so refer beyond themselves to a truth not itself constituted by the language used, acknowledges its own impossibility and compensates for it through phonetic rather than semantic similarity.

In fact, the same dynamic governs the meandering dialogic representation of *sous-conversation* in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, where the juxtaposition of utterances takes the metonymic impetus in all expression to an extreme (and is thus as much a metaphor of language's metonymic motor as of the internal infinity of the mind). As the writer's guests in *Entre la Vie et la mort* go from object to object in an attempt to pin down the social persona which will sum up their host, Sarraute's attempt in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* to express the truth of a volatile self leads her on a similar path though in a different sphere (utterances rather than personal attributes). Given the linear nature of expression, the movement from voice to voice can only ever reproduce as a sequence something held to be ineffable. Yet the utterances themselves restore the sense of homogeneity they set out to undermine, their general consensus (which I shall show in the next section of this chapter) freezing an original metonymic tracking of the ever-changing nature of tropistic life into an image of unity in diversity. This compares to the way the figure of the priest froze a series of observed actions and objects, none of which on its own provided a key to the individual. Just as the cane, the trousers or the gesture can never sum up a whole person, no single utterance can sum up a whole self. Yet the sequence of utterances in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* as so many "attributes" of the "nous", demonstrates both the potentially endless accumulation of details which is a response to the impossibility of expressing the inner void, and the way that is halted through the unifying concept of a plural self but which can speak in a united chorus as "nous".

If Sarraute's own discourse can in no way be said to be in unmediated contact with the reality she describes, how then can she claim that it is somehow truer than the conventional discourse she holds in such contempt? Within the mind "rien ne porte de nom. Personne n'exerce aucune fonction. Il n'y a ici ni père ni mère" (TTP 149). Instead of language there is sensation, and it is by positing an area of overlap where physical sensation ends and language begins that Sarraute can claim to have a language for the tropism. Thus it is in sensation that the proliferation of Sarrautean metaphors is held to originate, reaching outward from within the body in the same way that she shows her heroes attempting (generally in vain) to communicate what they feel. Authentic language rushes outward from within, escaping the control of the social speaker and brushing aside his conventional language: "[Les mots] nous traversent, nous sommes un espace vide, ouvert, rien ne se soulève sur leur passage, ils repoussent, bousculent notre délégué et de la bouche du porte-parole par lequel ils l'ont remplacé ils sortent..." (107-08).

Involuntary (thus true) sensations, occurring at the outer limit of consciousness where the physical and the psychic merge, manifest themselves uncontrollably in the body which can thus be trusted to reveal what the mind might choose to conceal.⁹ In this way we can read off a person's emotions from the signs his body offers us: "L'énorme machinerie aussi compliquée que celle qui fait respirer nos poumons, battre notre poulx, d'un seul coup, sans qu'il sache comment, sans qu'il puisse expliquer pourquoi, lui fait monter le sang à la tête, son visage

⁹ In Jean Pierrot's view, one of Sarraute's main achievements is to have "mis en lumière le rôle essentiel que dans tout dialogue humain effectivement réalisé, jou[e] chacun des corps mis en présence, en tant que récepteurs et qu'émetteurs d'informations incessantes, à partir desquelles s'opèrent ces corrections et ces adaptations continuelles en quoi se résolvent tous les dialogues réels" (1990:461). For a detailed discussion of how Sarraute uses the body to anchor truth, see Jefferson (1992).

rougit... 'Jaloux? Moi!'" (DI 16; cp. TTP 88-89). This immediate readability of the body means that Sarraute can give us the physical reaction of someone who overhears himself defined as gifted but not intelligent, rather than describing his response less accurately in emotional terms: he feels "une sensation inconnue, étrange, c'est elle que doivent éprouver ceux qui gisent, la moelle épinière blessée, quand ils veulent se relever et s'aperçoivent que leurs réflexes habituels ne jouent plus, que leurs jambes sont paralysées... un point vital en eux a dû être atteint" (DI 36).

Yet the body which for Sarraute is the source of true language is itself always already metaphoric at the point at which she invokes it. The example above makes this particularly clear: what the individual feels when he hears his intelligence denied is compared to what people feel when their spinal cord has been damaged, namely paralysis or numbness. While Sarraute avoids these abstract terms which are in fact commonly used to describe metaphorically the sensation of shock, her extended description basically elaborates them, and so remains within the conventional lexicon of comparisons. What she is in fact doing is going from language back not so much to the body as truth but to the body as already a metaphor. If we perceive the physical sensation described as in some way a true correlate of the sensation experienced, it is primarily because this metaphoric relation (of physical numbness to psychic trauma) has become so familiar in public discourse that it has ceased to be regarded as one. The metaphor is in fact not that much less "dead" than those by which others live; the only difference is that it is given in other, certainly much more developed terms.¹⁰

¹⁰ There is a similar instance of the bodily vehicle of a dead metaphor being reactivated in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, this time in relation to the experience of being "wounded" by another's words. Here too the return to the body as the ultimate index of truth or falsity (i.e. whether the self had actually been insulted or not) is in fact a return to the familiar metaphors of public discourse:

Moreover, even where there is a natural connection between the physical sensation described and the psychic sensation for which it stands (blushing and embarrassment, for example), to see it in terms of this connection is itself an indication of the way consciousness is governed by symbolisation. By seeing a sudden blush (or any other physical reaction) as a sign of an emotion, Sarraute is giving it the status of something to be read, and is thus engaging with it from within an order where things stand for other things, rather than simply being there. She has already given it the role of symptom before she refers to it: it is not because it happens to be in the text that we can make the identification of jealousy; rather it is because a symptom of jealousy must be provided that it is introduced. From the start it is a symbol rather than a chance phenomenon. And of course symptoms, as well as being metaphoric (they represent something different, be it an emotion or a virus), are in the first instance metonymic (they are linked in space -- on the body - - to what they represent, whether that is physical or psychic).

Behind every alienating form imposed by society there may well be a truth, but Sarraute can only represent this truth as another metaphor. Asserting that true language originates in the body fails to halt this endless linguistic regression; it merely results in the construction of yet another set of metaphors. To represent the body as source of truth by describing the way it physically betrays actual emotion rather than what language is capable of feigning, is not to go back from language to the body but to make the body linguistic, by defining it as something to be read, as signifying. Moreover, of course, the symptoms manifested by the fictional bodies

-- Peut-être s'en trouve-t-il encore ici qui ne sont pas certains, qui voudraient demander à encore quelqu'un d'autre, parmi ceux qui savent, si ce que tu as reçu en plein visage était de vrais crachats?
-- Si quand il a poussé ce rugissement, posé sur toi sa lourde patte, enfoncé en toi ses griffes, c'était vraiment blessant? (99-100)

in Sarraute's texts are not simply there to be deciphered; as her literary invention they are yet another linguistic fabrication, rather than the authentic product of sensation. Thus Sarraute first writes onto the body what she then presents that body as reading off from the self. Her demonstration that the body is the source of language necessarily takes place entirely in language and not in the Real (whatever the claims of the voices of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* that the body for them is outside conceptualisation [TTP 21]). Because invoking the body as a prelinguistic guarantor of truth necessarily symbolises it, it automatically loses its authority to underwrite the truth of expression, for insofar as it is represented, it is the effect of the metaphoric and metonymic order it claims to guarantee. Sarraute is thus ultimately on the same shifting sands, though at a more fundamental level of conceptualisation, as the young wife in "*disent les imbéciles*":

Ça va la reprendre. Tout va se remettre à bouger. Le pingre ne va pas tenir en place. Il va s'éloigner, remplacé par le Prince charmant. Et puis revenir, et puis repartir. Elle a mis le doigt dans un engrenage, le pied sur des sables mouvants, elle est prise dans un affreux dilemme. (DI 120)

While metaphor and simile are alike in that both are principles of linguistic substitution, one major difference between them is the way simile advertises its distance from the reality it represents -- it doesn't claim, as metaphor does, to *be* that reality. In this light it is telling that Sarraute's writing repeatedly moves from simile into metaphor, in what could be seen as an immediately repressed acknowledgement of language's inability to capture reality, its restriction to translating the Real into its own terms. Thus the sensation provoked by engaging with a particularly distasteful idea is first represented in terms of the simile of unpleasant smells and tastes:

Réprimer en soi cette répulsion, s'efforcer d'examiner cela comme font ceux qui analysent des crachats, des excréments, dissèquent des cadavres. Mais cela fait plutôt penser à un de ces fruits de mauvaise qualité... quand on y a goûté, on a la sensation que les muqueuses de la bouche se contractent... (DI 50)

But the simile slides imperceptibly into metaphor, and the problem of representing sensation, acknowledged in the "as if" quality of the simile where the body's ability to anchor expression is only a wish, disappears from view. Suddenly the experience of an unpleasant taste is adequate to describe the much more elusive unease caused by ideas which are only metaphorically unpalatable: "Que c'est donc mauvais... Mais il n'est pas question de le cracher... Il s'efforce de le mâcher... et il sent comme tout en lui se resserre, se ratatine... c'est du poison" (50; cp. TTP 131). The fact that bodily metaphors are part of a lexicon of symbols and have no organic relation to the reality they describe, is illustrated here by the way a familiar metaphor recurs in this new context: "Un engourdissement le gagne... une paralysie... il voudrait se dresser, appeler" (50).

3. Sarraute and the Imaginary:

If Sarraute's resistance to the Lacanian conception of language is exceeded only by her submission to it, what does this imply for the status of the Sarrautean subject and the nature of its relations with others? I have focused up to now on this subject's relationship to language as it appears in the light of Lacan's analysis of the way language constitutes identity. In this final section I wish to extend the

comparison by examining the way the Sarrautean subject relates to others, in the context of self-other relations as these are conceived by Lacan.

Social interaction, for Lacan, is inaugurated by the Oedipus. At this mythical moment, the child's total involvement with the mother, for whom he desires to be everything in a relationship of mutual absorption, is interrupted by his awareness that she is already in a relationship with the father. As a result, mother and child are each seen to have a fixed place in the elementary social structure of the family. The father is the representative of language, and so relationships from now on will be between discrete, named individuals rather than unconceptualised bodies.

Given that Sarraute sees the body as the prelinguistic source of truth, it is not surprising that her conception of true relations with others should have more in common with pre- than post-Oedipal relations in Lacan's schema. This applies to relations with inanimate objects too: in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, when a privileged name (Venice?), associated by the self with "un petit pont en dos d'âne au-dessus d'une eau verdâtre" (TTP 176), is scorned by a prestigious figure, this privileged entity and the self are both turned into objects, into observer and observed watched in turn (and with derision) by another. The way this experience of suddenly seeing something which had been part of the self from the point of view of another¹¹ arouses a feeling of lack and nausea -- "une déception... un manque [...] un léger écoeurement" (178) -- emphasises its affinity to the Oedipal relativisation of self and Imaginary other. There, seeing the desired object now mediated by representation (the father's language) also results in a sense of lack. Yet as we can expect, the

¹¹

-- [...] Recouvert d'une mince couche, d'une pellicule...
-- Faite de tous ces contacts, descriptions et reproductions. (TTP 177)

similarity is not total, for the text gives no indication that a fundamental mediation is at work in our experience of the world. On the contrary, we are encouraged to see the conceptualisation of the loved object and the one who loves it as falsifying both of them; and it is further condemned by being attributed to a "genius" of self-love. Once again, it is other people with their conventional language who objectify the world and ourselves. What this scene also tells us is that by doing this, they further sabotage our true, immediate relationships with those rare privileged others (and objects) deemed to be authentic by the way they affect us at a prelinguistic level (the level of response which in turn gives rise to authentic expression).¹²

What happens when the authentic relationship is broken up? In this passage, the plural self escapes the other's condemnation by strategically joining his camp: "Nous ne faisons pas partie de ces foules moutonnières qui défilent sur les vieux petits ponts, se penchent sur les eaux glauques [...] Heureusement il ne s'attarde pas, il est déjà loin, et nous avec lui, nous nous arrêtons comme lui, nous regardons..." (177-78). This identification with a powerful other entails the blind assumption of his values which are entirely opposed to one's own: "La force qu'il y a en lui nous soulève, nous sommes projetés hors de chez nous [...] Nous en avons été tirés, pas fiers d'y avoir vécu, assez honteux d'avoir pu être aussi amollis, asservis, apeurés" (179-80). In Sarraute's view, this clearly degrades the original relationship; it

¹² Setting aside her belief that language can be authentic, Sarraute's descriptions of how others' inauthentic language affects the self's relations frequently recall the Lacanian Oedipus. Words like "ton père" or "ta soeur" reenact something close to the subject's fall from the infantile Imaginary: "Sous nos yeux un enfant est arraché à cette crèche jonchée de paille soyeuse, emplie de souffles chauds" (UP 51). They make him aware of his unchangeable place in the family, "la même place qui lui a été assignée une fois pour toutes" (52). Interestingly, it is the mother here who causes this Oedipal relativisation by naming relations within the family in the anonymous voice of the public: "Elle est à une si grande distance [...] On dirait une étrangère... quand elle prononce ces mots: 'Ton père' 'Ta soeur', sa voix résonne comme ces voix anonymes, venant on ne sait d'où, qui dans les lieux publics diffusent des informations" (53). John Phillips has discussed the role of the mother in Sarraute at length (Phillips 1991 *passim*).

betrays its authenticity in a shift of loyalties highly evocative of Lacan's concept of secondary (Oedipal) identification, where the subject ceases to desire to be everything for the other and one with it, and identifies instead with the paternal figure as possessor of the (now discrete) object of desire. In what for Lacan is the step which constitutes the subject socially, by giving it a language which symbolises it too, that object is related to no longer on the mode of being but on that of having (and so can be evaluated as a possession). In *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, as in Lacan, the powerful figure is the one who breaks up and forbids the taboo dual relation, so "castrating" the subject by showing its intimacy with the other (the mother for Lacan) to be based on an illusion (here the self's unique relation to a town which is in fact loved by many). His authority comes from the way he is recognised by others: in the Oedipus complex, the mother herself; here, the great man's coterie (thus in Sarraute's case, the loved object itself does not betray the self by cooperating in the relationship's relativisation, but retains its absolute quality). As in *Enfance*, this alienated perspective is associated with adulthood: the self-lover is "un adulte" opposed to the "enfant curieux qui veut voir comment c'est fait, qui s'amuse à arracher l'enduit, qui donne des coups partout, démonte, démolit..." (62).¹³

The intrusion of the powerful figure, as I have mentioned, creates a lack in the Sarrautean self's relation to the loved object;¹⁴ this too has a Lacanian

¹³ This association of childhood with closeness to truth recurs in the later evocation of true contact with an object (200). As in *Les Fruits d'or* ("Cela ne porte aucun nom [...] Quelque chose d'intact, d'innocent... comme les doigts fluets d'un enfant qui s'accrocheraient à moi, la main d'un enfant qui se blottirait au creux de ma main" [FO 153]), truth is found by a single individual communing with an object (there a text, here the rim of a well), and the renunciation of language in favour of sensation which it involves is linked with a return to a lost innocence, erasing the "enduit" of adult perception.

¹⁴ This recurs in a second attack on another of the self's attachments:
 -- [...] Ce qui avait toujours été là a disparu, ça a peut-être été déplacé, non, ç'a été enlevé, ç'a été anéanti et maintenant il y a là, à cette place un vide... et ici, mais c'est ébréché, c'est fissuré, déchiré...
 -- Et nous sommes ébréchés, fissurés, déchirés... (179)

counterpart in the "manque à être" which is central to the existence of the subject of language, and which results from the paternal (and symbolic) taboo on fusion with the mother. When the reality of desire is repressed in favour of a symbol (the domain of the father's law), the nature of the word as the absence of the thing gives rise to a subject structured by lack. Again the parallels between Sarraute's concept of social intercourse and Lacan's theory of language and identity are both striking and nonetheless limited. Sarraute's location of alienation solely in the self-conscious discourse of the self-lover and his admirers, her retention of a belief in an authentic conscious discourse independent of that, strongly oppose Lacan's argument that authenticity and truth are confined to unconscious desire from which any use of language necessarily sidetracks the subject. In his view, *all* language creates a *moi*, and not just the particularly objectifying, self-reflexive language of particularly alienated victims of social convention.

What kind of *intersubjective* relationship (rather than one with an object) can escape the consequences of social mediation? The ideal, least socially determined relationship is evidently that of love, and love, for the subject of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, is correspondingly defined not as overcoming mediation but as somehow never being subjected to it. The loved one is another "part inséparable de nous-mêmes" which it simply augments: "On dirait que notre immense masse mouvante s'était encore accrue... était plus dense, plus vibrante" (122). Love as a relation comes before self-consciousness in the same way that the body does: it is similarly simply there, unconceptualised: "Perçoit-on quand on est en bonne santé sa respiration, le mouvement de son sang, le jeu de ses muscles?" (122). Its habitat is prior to individuation and expression, so that to make an excursion "là-bas où les mots

circulent, se posent, désignent" (123), to say "je t'aime", meant that "une part de nous se détachait, allait dehors, revêtait pour l'occasion la tenue de sortie, celle de deux êtres distincts l'un de l'autre" (124).¹⁵ Yet it is no surprise to note that the nature of love, even before it is dressed up in other people's language, can itself be grasped by the plural Sarrautean self only in metaphor ("Ça ouvrait, creusait en nous un chemin à travers une même substance, remontait à une même source" [123]), or in the simile of the body's "thereness" just cited. In addition, despite the feeling of total unity and the attitude that the distinct public personae of the lovers are a game, the other in his public role manifests an unpredictability, and thus an unknowability, at odds with this. "Tu" can become "un étranger confortablement installé chez lui" (125), of whom one can't be sure that he won't "pousser le jeu trop loin" (126). Although this fear isn't realised, the very fact that there is room for it points to the awareness of an irreducible difference between self and loved one, and so implicitly undermines the perception of this other as "une part inséparable de nous-mêmes" (122), expelled only by the intrusion of a conventionally-minded third figure.

This mode in which the Sarrautean subject relates to the loved other or to a privileged object (incorporating it into itself rather than treating it as a distinct entity), in its opposition to the kind of conceptualisation Lacan sees as inaugurated by the Oedipal moment, invites comparison with the pre-Oedipal mode of being Lacan terms the Imaginary. The pre-Oedipal, Imaginary self desires to be what the other (in the first instance the mother) desires, for it has not yet renounced the desire

¹⁵ The way this conventional phrase can actually kill the shared emotion it names is the subject of the short prose text "Le Mot amour", in *L'Usage de la parole* (UP 63-79).

to *be* in favour of the desire to *have*, or acquired symbolic representation in a signifier. It consequently appears in Symbolic terms as a lack,¹⁶ just as the subject of "*disent les imbéciles*" or *Tu ne t'aimes pas* feels itself to be empty and nameless ("Nos flots agités toujours changeants ne peuvent porter aucun nom" [TTP 129]). Yet the Sarrautean subject exists and speaks in a text, and so is necessarily in the Symbolic. Its self-characterisation as undifferentiated and unconceptualisable thus presents itself as a nostalgic reconstruction from within a differentiating and conceptualising language. In this way we can expect that, just as Sarraute's claim to authentic expression is undone by the way her writing reproduces the metaphoric and metonymic alienation she criticises in others' language, similarly, the subjectivity she presents as remaining untouched by the effects language has on others (on the grounds that her language is different) will in fact manifest those same effects.

How does Sarraute's text undermine the kind of subject it represents? The formless and passive Imaginary self of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* may prefer to merge with objects on the level of sensation rather than seeking to communicate with other individuals (even love is now in the past). Yet the fact that it *speaks* (if only to itself) acknowledges from the start its metaphoric status. As such, its voices will necessarily bear marks of the active, symbolised consciousness which articulates them (marks comparable to those which identify the victims of self-conscious language). The language of this ineffable authorial self cannot but impose on it a

¹⁶ "En s'identifiant à l'objet du désir de l'autre, soumis passivement, assujéti, dépendant, l'enfant n'est pas un 'sujet' mais un manque, un rien parce qu'il n'est pas situé ou repéré individuellement dans le circuit symbolique de l'échange" (Lemaire 1977:141).

conventional symbolic singularity, by constantly recreating a monologic unity among the multiple, metaphoric voices.

The metaphoric status of the "masse agitée" of the self is in fact revealed in the very way Sarraute uses the body to ground truth. If truth originates in the body, this causes a problem for the disembodied voices of the self who must have bodies in order to have any authority. Thus they become personified: "Cela ferait rire ceux qui du dehors nous observent, s'ils voyaient en nous ce que nous y voyons par moments... tant de jeunes gens fringants, d'adolescents se rassemblant chez des 'vieillards croulants' et tant de vieillards chez des jeunes... et partout tant d'enfants..." (32).¹⁷ They fall asleep and wake up ("ils se secouent, ils se grattent" [92]); they "can't believe their ears" (76). The metaphoric status of their bodies is concealed by the fact that they generally map directly onto the single body which contains them: when "we" go for a walk or when "we" can't believe our ears, for example. The fiction of a plural self thus relies on the undeclared acceptance of the body as a unit, an acceptance which, we recall from Lacan, launches with the mirror stage the whole process of self-objectification completed by the assumption of language (Lacan 1966:93-100).

At one point, the fictional status of these bodies is acknowledged, as one voice laments that the lack of bodies keeps them from behaving in a certain way: "Si nous avions des corps, des visages, on pourrait nous voir en foule nous bousculant, nous serrant les uns contre les autres, tendant le cou pour regarder ce

¹⁷ This perception of the voices of the self as so many independent subselves distances somewhat Sarraute's idea of internal multiplicity from that of Roy Schafer with whom she otherwise seemed to have much in common (see Ch.2 p.76). Schafer warns explicitly that the narrative structures the self adopts should not be taken to be autonomous subselves, and he criticises the concept of multiple selves as "itself only a narrative structure that begs the question" (presumably by positing an unproblematic notion of the self to start with; Schafer 1981:40).

qui se passe maintenant là-bas, chez eux, ce qu'ils sont en train de faire de nous" (108). The image would be true if only it really referred to a body (or bodies) instead of having to posit one in which to ground itself. In the absence of the truth which the body guarantees ("Et on verrait dans nos yeux, sur nos lèvres une expression..." [109]), there is only a verbal simulacrum which occasionally acknowledges but more often conceals its metaphoric status. Thus, while it criticises others for "executing" not the real self but an effigy which "les mots fournis par nous leur ont permis de fabriquer" (109), the bodies which the text associates with the real self are similarly only the effect of the text's language. The ideal reader is thus put in the same position as the misled others here, for the metaphorical bodies of the self's many voices which one is encouraged to imagine are not so different from "cette poupée [...] ce mannequin qu'ils ont construit à l'image de ce que nous avons fait apparaître devant eux" (110).

It is not only the voices' bodies which are metaphorical, relying for grounding on the idea of the single physical body of the self which really does walk and talk and have observable digestive processes ("Pourtant en nous aussi deux cigarettes..." [23]). This recourse to physical singularity in order to become true betrays the metaphoric status of the whole notion of plurality which is itself a product of the attempt to express a self originally held to be empty. A proliferation of utterances results from the attempt to articulate the self yet remain free from the limiting effects of language on subjectivity. These utterances will necessarily be so many examples of the limitations of the singular subject of language -- not surprisingly, it seems to be always the same set of limitations, always the same

subject that is being presented, for the exchanges can regularly be reduced to one train of thought.

Throughout the text, the dominant tone of the different voices is one of consensus. All work together: "Tâchons de nous rappeler" (16), and they do. Conclusions on the nature of the self are concurred with once articulated:

- [...] Décidément, nous ne sommes pas faits pour le Bonheur...
- Pas faits... c'est ça... pas faits [...]
- Cette tare... nous n'avions pas vu sa gravité [...] (57)

If other people are analysed as being (wilfully) unitary, the self which makes this diagnosis is also a block, the pronoun "on" blurring the fact that this would-be plural self is acting as a unit: "Et comme maintenant on la comprend" (137). Every recognition of a self-loving other ironically (and presumably unintentionally) unifies the self:

- Mais maintenant que c'est tombé en nous subitement... cette illumination... tout s'est éclairé d'un coup...
- Et ça ne pourra jamais s'effacer, ce que nous avons vu. (170)

As with *Enfance* (though to a much lesser extent), a structure of dialogue which in theory subverts narration in fact fails to evacuate it totally, along with the singular perspective it implies:

- [...] Dans ce visage à peine visible, pas même des yeux... juste le regard...
- Il regarde intensément sa main posée sur la table.
- Et dans son regard tant d'amour... (20; cp. 38).

In fact this singularity is a necessary consequence of the novel's whole concern: to talk about the nature of the self as it does (despite its criticism of self-regarding others), implies a self which can be conceptualised, even if only in terms of its incoherence. Although in the novel, an external perspective on the self as a

unitary entity is associated with the construction of a *moi*,¹⁸ yet every time one voice talks about what "we" are like it betrays a similarly external point of view on a similarly homogeneous self:

- 'Je' 'me'... Voyez-vous ça...
- Mais ce n'est pas tout: Je m'aime.
- Nous avons de nouveau osé aller jusque-là. (102)

The voice that conceptualises what "we" have just done speaks for the whole self and so reproduces the act of homogenisation it criticises. There is a sense that every speaker is fully aware of the characters of all the other members of this community, and this undoes the impression of the self as infinite and unknowable: along with "ceux d'entre nous que le Bonheur et sa perfection agacent" there are "nos possédés de l'esprit de contradiction", "nos 'éternels enfants'", "ceux qui rampent prudemment", and "vous qui êtes toujours [...] mus par votre bon coeur" (54-55). Thus one voice can speak for "nous tous ici" (56), despite the previous assertion that "nous sommes ici plus nombreux que nous le savions" (55).

Sarraute, in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, thus turns out to be offering us once again singular expression in another guise. At first sight she appears to have found, through the fictional structure of the interior dialogue, a way around the paradox of ironic self-expression where the articulation of the limitations of the conscious self is either itself informed by those limitations or disproves them. Thus she can appear to avoid the contradiction of conceptualising a "manque de 'conscience de soi'" (71) by ascribing the observation to only one of the self's many voices. Yet the tacit agreement of the other voices does make this assertion ultimately self-contradictory.

¹⁸

-- Tous unis. Quelle discipline. Quel ordre.
-- Tous soumis à un pouvoir central puissant [...]
-- Un 'Moi'... C'est ainsi que nous pouvons le nommer... (100)

The multi-voiced structure seems in the end to be little more than a rhetorical strategy for allowing the self to be self-conscious without seeming to be, to focus on itself in a way which, though less affirmative, is no less reflexive than the "Je m'aime" of the others. (The discussion of the "manque de 'conscience de soi'" is also noteworthy for the way the "nous" there act in such a singular manner that the pronoun could easily be replaced by "je": "Nous étions seuls enfermés avec une de ces fortes personnalités" [71]. In addition, the structure of dialogue here dissimulates a highly monological narrative thread, with the ability of the other voices to identify an event without the speaker naming it demonstrating how far the different perspectives are reducible to one.)

This representation of an incommensurable self whose elements take turns to speak but whose whole dimensions are never given, again links Sarraute to the strategy of the verbal ironist. The ironic utterance is manifestly not the whole truth, and so can be seen to act out in microcosm the inadequacy of language to truth; yet the speaker, by knowing his own real sense (an attitude to his utterance) which he could conceivably formulate, merely gestures to this inadequacy while exempting himself from it. Likewise, the way *Tu ne t'aimes pas* suggests an infinite number of internal voices behind any one utterance in fact gives Sarraute enormous power over her interlocutors, these being in the first instance the self-conscious others represented in the novel, but ultimately the readers who engage with it. Readers are kept from identifying any single utterance as true, for the fact that the self has many other voices implicitly relativises it (but only in terms of other possible utterances the self could formulate and not with reference to any inherent inadequacy in the self's language). This power that the self's multiplicity gives it over others is

illustrated by its social interactions in the novel. It is always more than it appears to be, concealing its vastness from the one-dimensional selves it encounters. It is frequently not fully present in conversations: "Nous sommes là, par-dérrière, vacants, détendus, écoutant à peine les propos anodins qui s'échangent" (105). When others form a personality for it on the basis of its words (which are only those of one of its "delegates"), the greater self looks on in amusement at those who have taken what it says at face value, just as the verbal ironist enjoys having his words taken seriously by those not in the know:

- Quant à nous... et c'est de là aussi que nous vient ce détachement, ce contentement, nous, nous sommes toujours là, nous les observons...
- Contre nous ils ne peuvent rien...
- Nous, il n'y a pas moyen d'en venir à bout... (110)

Though infinitely more vast than other individuals, the greater self knows its own infinity, just as the verbal ironist knows his own mind.

If others are consistently seen as singular, this is because they are encountered through their language, and language necessarily singularises the self by forcing it to represent itself with a symbol. Yet if representing the self by "nous" instead of "je" cannot avoid this singularisation,¹⁹ the distinction between the Sarrautean self and those whose submission to convention it condemns becomes difficult to maintain. The text does implicitly recognise that speaking makes even its own "nous" into a single unit: when one voice acknowledges that "les porte-

¹⁹ This impossibility can be understood in terms of Émile Benveniste's definition of the pronoun "nous" as identifying, along with the speaking subject, an element external to it. It thus does not indicate the kind of multiplicity of "je"s presented by *Tu ne t'aimes pas*: "L'unicité et la subjectivité inhérentes à 'je' contredisent la possibilité d'une pluralisation. S'il ne peut y avoir plusieurs 'je' conçus par le 'je' même qui parle, c'est que 'nous' est, non pas une multiplication d'objets identiques, mais une jonction entre 'je' et le 'non-je', quel que soit le contenu de ce 'non-je'" (1966:233).

parole que nous envoyons au-dehors continuent à se servir de ces 'je', de ces 'moi'", it is told "Il le faut bien, sinon comment arriveraient-ils à se faire entendre?" (87). Yet the other's use of "moi" and "je" is condemned on the grounds that this must be the register in which his inner self speaks too:

-- C'est ainsi que se parle à lui-même celui qui s'aime...
-- Oui, nous ici, entre nous, ces 'moi', ces 'je', nous ne les employons pas...
(86)

The other, known only through his language, is characterised on that basis in much the same way as the self was misrepresented by the "mannequins" which others created and which were a source of amusement to it. Others are no more than what they appear to be, not being granted the luxury of another scene on which authentic mental activity might be taking place.

Maintaining the distinction between a true self and false others becomes ever more problematic as the novel progresses. It is acknowledged that the self's public manifestations of unity, though generally presented as a conscious artifice, can also be the unintentional effect of utterly sincere behaviour. This happens when emotional language, which for Sarraute is true in coming spontaneously from within, unifies the self; yet this unity is presented as qualitatively different from the public images others present. The fact that what might look to others like a 'moi' isn't one, is not seen to have repercussions for the self's own diagnoses of others but (as so often) is presented as more evidence of others' inability to grasp the self's enormity. An outburst of anger where "il n'y avait aucun délégué, qui aurait pu le choisir, l'envoyer? Nous n'étions qu'un seul élément traversé par un seul mouvement... Saisis tout à coup, envahis, ça déferlait en nous, jaillissait de nous en paroles précipitées, véhémentes" (212), results only in the fact that "nous [...] leur

avons donné pendant quelques instants ce que leur donne constamment celui qui s'aime [...] celui entre tous le mieux doué pour s'aimer" (215).

This acknowledgement that the self can appear to others as "un seul bloc serré, refermé sur soi" (213), however authentic its spontaneity lets it remain, nonetheless implicitly concedes the unifying nature of even unselfconscious language. It seems to be in order to sustain, in the face of this recognition, the claim that even the self's periods of singularity are somehow emanations of its internal truth and not the product of a set of conventions, that the language which created this single self is said to be forgotten. The suggestion is that the words' once-off, expressive nature makes them unrepeatable, and so they have the truth of a unique event rather than being elements of a structure which preexists and survives its use in any utterance:

-- Quelles paroles?
-- Impossible de se les rappeler... Et même sur le moment nous n'avons pas dû les entendre... (212)

The message is here driven home that this speech, if it is conscious, is (in keeping with where Sarraute locates linguistic inauthenticity) not self-conscious: the self didn't even hear its own words. It is also, significantly, indifferent to its addressee, emphasising that truth for Sarraute seems in fact to have little to do with intersubjective cooperation: "Impossible de revoir ceux qui les écoutaient, qui nous regardaient" (212).

Sarraute's conscious self and the self-lover's self-conscious persona converge most unmistakably in her discussion of the "genius of self-love" who, paradoxically, bears no sign of his nature. Those signs of self-love previously identified in the novel -- the self-objectifying gaze, the presence of an internal

tribunal "qui applique les lois du Ciel" (193) -- are absent in his case: "Chez lui, on a beau chercher, on ne trouve aucun signe" (192). He further defines things according to an internal rather than a received law: "Lui seul a le pouvoir de [...] nommer [le Mal, le Bien]" (193). Thus his diagnosis as "[le] plus grand génie dans l'art de s'aimer" (194) rests purely on the sensation he arouses in the "nous":

-- Nous n'arrivons toujours pas à [...] désigner ce que nous avons entrevu quand il nous est apparu pour la première fois [...]
-- Nous pouvons seulement affirmer que c'est en lui, nous en sommes plus sûrs qu'avant, nous ne nous sommes pas trompés, c'est tout à fait certain... (191)

An explanation is ultimately found, as the very absence of signs of self-love becomes its ultimate sign:

-- Et si ça se trouvait dans l'absence même de ces signes...
-- Des signes qui 'brillent par leur absence'...
-- C'est ça... quel espoir, quel soutien dans ces mots qui viennent sans être appelés, qui se présentent d'eux-mêmes, à point nommé... (192)

Here the features of the self-lover are entirely sublimated. He is not self-aware in the manner of those examined earlier; he is simply there, unselfconsciously being himself, for he has so assimilated the quality of self-love that he has no need to monitor himself from without. But if the other can be unconscious of the principle governing his attitude to the world and himself, the same can presumably be true for the "nous" which seem to share so many of his characteristics. For the genius of self-love sounds very like the Sarrautean subject in his adherence only to his own law, in his lack of self-observation, his irreducibility to another's judgement: "Peu importe comment il est. Personne n'est capable de le juger" (193). Like the "nous", he is indefinable: "Tous les mots qui se présentent ne sont pas de taille" (194). If what distinguishes this individual from the "nous" is his "certitude [...] absolue", his "inébranlable assurance" (193) in his particular sphere of activity,

this applies to the plural self too in its own sphere: in its contentment with its own company and above all in its faith in its own expression of truth. What's more, the self's confident diagnosis of the other as a self-lover is itself clearly governed by an internalised law: the way the phrase "briller par son absence" provides the key to the other's nature is an example of how a familiar cliché can give rise to a perception which is then accepted as true. As the other's social self-assurance is seen to be determined by the laws of an entirely assimilated self-love (his genius lying in this assimilation), the authorial subject's certainty regarding its expression of truth is also shown to rest on an internalised linguistic code which unifies the self without its knowledge and dictates the way it understands the world.

Given this affinity of the plural self with the most refined form of what it defines itself in opposition to, it is not surprising that it should react to the "genius" by desiring, like him, to be the arbiter of good and evil for another (according to its own "internal tribunal" where subjective truth is good and the submission to others' views is evil). It attempts in vain to persuade a victim of the great man's cult that his views are determined by his leader's personality rather than being independently formed: "S'il avait promené sa main sur les margelles des puits, sur les parapets des vieux petits ponts, avec quelles délices vous aussi..." (202). Yet while its desire to free the other from the influence of the "grand" is presented as an attempt to lead him to the truth, this truth is undeniably what the self, rather than its interlocutor, identifies as such. Although it describes its addressee's imagined moment of physical contact with the rim of the well as a return "chez vous" (201), its own strong investment in the image to the point of making it part of the self, makes this evocation more an invitation "chez nous". The text refuses to acknowledge that:

- [...] notre besoin de répandre la vérité, de libérer malgré eux...
- De faire reconnaître ce qui ne peut pas être reconnu...
- Et qui est là pourtant. C'est sûr. (203)

itself imposes a point of view as much as the great man does.

The failure of the other to adopt the self's conception of truth means that the self can only repeat its conviction "seulement pour nous. Pas pour essayer de nous faire entendre" (203). Yet of course the one who still hears when all the fictional interlocutors stop listening is the reader, and the representation of a belief maintained in the face of general hostility and in apparent unawareness of the reader's presence, works to persuade the reader all the more of the sincerity of the argument. The two final chapters of this thesis will look first at the ways in which Sarraute attempts to persuade the reader into her own perspective, much as the "nous" of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* attempt to convince the credulous other of his slavery to the "genius of self-love". Finally I shall consider the way the actual practice of reading relates to yet also exceeds what Sarraute dictates. On the basis of the way we have seen her writing repeatedly attempt to conceal its own conventionality by stressing its visceral rather than intellectual source in the self, one way for the reader to transcend the role her texts provide for him is through the recognition that even at its most apparently physical, her language is still subject to the axes of metaphor and metonymy. By reading her work like this (taking one's lead from her own criticism of the way the same conventional structure governs others' language and alienates it from the truth), the reader can reaffirm the status of Sarraute's writings as symbolic structures rather than, as she asserts, an expressed self (body and mind).

The reader's ability, indeed his obligation as recipient of the text's alienated discourse, to read as symbol what is presented by the author as truth, corresponds to the alternative between the same object seen in Symbolic or Imaginary terms: "Un terme d'un ordre symbolique peut être imaginaire, s'il est considéré absolument ou symbolique, s'il est une valeur différentielle corrélative d'autres termes qui le délimitent. C'est l'intelligence de ces corrélations latérales qui suspend l'imaginaire, parce qu'elle fonde le concept" (Lemaire 1977:106). Whereas Sarraute always considers the represented body as an absolute, and so as an index of the truth of her language, for the reader on the other hand, that truth-founding body, encountered in the text, is always already linguistic. Located from the start in language, the reader-text relationship is always a mediated one, in contrast to Sarraute's ideal of reading which is self-loss in the text: "Ce qui s'est emparé de nous, cette fois, ce qui a tout occupé en nous, ce qui a fait en nous place nette, c'étaient les mots d'un vieux poème" (TTP 79). Reading as a kind of unmediated Imaginary relation where text and reader merge into one, seems now to be the only form of dialogue Sarraute sees as viable: the self-other relations of the earlier novels, equally envisaged in Imaginary terms,²⁰ are doomed by the struggle for domination they involve. Yet domination is undeniably also a feature of the privileged relationship of reading -- the difference is that here, for Sarraute, there is no struggle, for from the start the text has mastered us, "a fait en nous place nette".

²⁰ The nephew's experience, in *Martereau*, of dialogue as a "jeu de miroirs où je me perds -- mon image que je projette en lui ou celle qu'il plaque aussitôt, féroce, sur moi" (M 241), is a near relative of the Imaginary defined as "une opposition immédiate entre la conscience et son autre où chaque terme passe l'un dans l'autre et se perd dans ces jeux de reflets" (Lemaire 1977:112).

Tu ne t'aimes pas then clearly fits into the whole problem of the subject-language relationship looked at in Chapter 1, and it does so doubly in both criticising the conventional language of others which objectifies them, and in unwittingly reproducing what it criticises in its own, supposedly authentic and original language. It exemplifies the ironic predicament of being aware of the limited nature of the subject of language but being by definition unable to transcend that limitation as it informs one's own discourse. Sarraute's reaction is to assert the truth of her own discourse in contrast to that of others, yet this truth-claim is undone by the fact that the body which guarantees it is necessarily already symbolised. This situation is an instance of a conflict Celia Britton has pointed out in Sarraute's work, between opposing deterministic and idealist-humanist worldviews, and in which the latter is presented as a solution to the former. However, as she argues, the humanist position which is supposed to transcend the view of intersubjective relations as "alienated, self-referring, and dehumanised", is not only superseded by that view but is actually *produced* by it (just as the body which is seen as conquering linguistic alienation is itself a product of that alienated language): "Ideas of pure creativity, and so on, arise simply as inverted *reflections* of determinism -- its mirror-image, rather than a true critique of it" (1982:583).

Britton sees an awareness of historical change as a way out of this deadlock (for Sarraute's pseudo-solution -- idealism -- to the deterministic world of her unfortunate "others", is as static and unchanging as that which it opposes). I prefer to focus on how a certain conception of dialogue allows us to read Sarraute's work both on her own terms yet beyond it, though still taking our cue from it. Sarraute gives us at once evidence of the need for dialogue, by showing language to be a

symbolic structure which undermines the claim to express truth, and evidence of the obstacles to it, for her writing enacts the way the nature of the subject of language leads it to try to control the language which informs it, by halting the deferral of signification in a transcendental signified of its utterance. The resulting assertion of the truth of one's own utterance becomes a request for the interlocutor's assent to one's intentional meaning, rather than for the uninfluenced response which is valuable specifically for its "otherness" to the speaker. If linguistic expression requires a dialogic response to make it true, it also resists dialogue by claiming to be true.

What kind of text-reader dialogue can we then envisage, bearing in mind that writing simply intensifies problems central to all communication? The written text is only ever potentially part of a dialogue, for it is always only the opening move in one, unable to acknowledge its interlocutor's response and respond to it in turn. As an address which cannot know who its addressee is, or defend itself in terms of its reception, it has a much higher stake in determining that response in advance than spoken dialogue has. In the case of Sarraute, I have suggested that the reader's "escape route" from the predetermined role she offers him, may lie in recognising the way she fails to sustain the opposition she sets up between expressive and conventional language. As a linguistic subject, she is unable to see her own language from without in the way she can others' utterances, and so falls victim to the illusory integrity that language use reinforces even in its attempt to subvert it. This is where dialogue, with its inclusion of another perspective (in this case the reader's), comes in as simultaneously necessary to the establishment of any provisional linguistic truth, and impossible for the text to determine. For even if the

authorial subject is aware of its own conscious limitations and invites another to help overcome them, that awareness and that invitation, once articulated (alienated in the 'writtenness' of language in general), must themselves be informed by those same limitations (as was vividly shown by *Enfance*).

Only the reader, as other, can read Sarraute's language as she reads other people's, as a structure which reveals its conventionality even as it tries to deny it. The distance from its origin (the addressor) which language affords the addressee and which writing augments, doesn't just cause the writer's attempt to write the reader into the text; it is also what allows the reader to read even his represented role model as part of the text rather than as the true way to approach it. The other perspective his own linguistic subjectivity provides, means that he meets the Sarrautean subject in the Symbolic order rather than in Sarraute's Imaginary (which he only construes through it), and so avoids that self-loss in the text which she prescribes. It need only be added that the reader's own subjective limitations and desire to procure assent replace Sarraute's, with the result that any interpretation of her writing requires to be further engaged with by an other in turn. And so on. The concept of dialogue as a cooperative constitution of truth in the intersubjective encounter thus seems to give way to a less optimistic but perhaps more realistic one where the prejudices inherent in one subject's language give way to those of another, yet with the consolation that every new set can at least recognise and engage with those it is responding to. The fact that language is simultaneously shared and individual (both "système de signes" and "assumé comme exercice par

l'individu" [Benveniste 1966:254]), creates undeniable obstacles to communication; yet while these may be considerable, they are not insuperable.²¹

²¹ Nonetheless, for Anika Lemaire they do seem to cast doubt on the overall communicative efficacy of language: "La psychanalyse nous a appris à [...] discerner les traces [de l'Imaginaire] aussi dans le langage où les mots recouvrent des symboles cent fois démultipliés et dont l'organisation finalement tient à un fil si ténu qu'il n'est pas aberrant de se demander si le langage est vraiment l'agent du dialogue inter-humain" (1977:113).

CHAPTER 5

READING AND OTHERNESS IN SARRAUTE

The readings of *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* in the last two chapters dealt with the way their textual dialogues, being located within the authorial subject, gesture towards the insufficiency of a singular discourse when it comes to articulating the truth of the self (the autobiographical quality of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, though less explicit than in *Enfance*, is nonetheless still discernible). The idea of dialogue as alone permitting the constitution of the subject's truth is central to the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. It also informs Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's work on narrative form, which explores the way modern fiction (particularly that of Dostoevsky) has increasingly favoured more unmediated representation of characters' discourses and their productive interaction, over an omniscient narrative perspective which would translate these into its own, necessarily limited terms.¹ Yet a singular authorial discourse reasserts itself in Sarraute's internal dialogues, along with the singular identity informed by that discourse. This reemergence of a claim to speaker-authority out of its ostensible dissolution is, I have suggested, simply an extreme version of the way all language use turns its subject into a *moi*, and, being motivated by a particular expressive intention, is unable consciously to overcome its own monologism. (It will still of course retain the unintentionally

¹ Sarraute too admires the way Dostoevsky forgoes authorial analysis to let his characters themselves express "ces mouvements subtils, à peine perceptibles [...] des ébauches d'appels timides et de reculs" (ES 33) which accompany their ongoing struggle to "se frayer un chemin jusqu'à autrui" (37).

dialogic quality of being formed out of other discourses.) Thus the establishment of a transindividual dialogic truth will only take place in the context of this conscious monologism. The alienation of language from its intentional source (see Derrida 1967b, 1972) will further lead each participant to attempt to ensure recognition of his intention; one way I have suggested in which speakers do this is by implicitly attributing to their addressee in the address itself the response of assent they desire.

In the two final chapters of this thesis I wish to extend the concept of the dialogic text to include its address to the reader and his response to it, looking specifically at the experience of reading Sarraute. While Bakhtin himself in his writings on literary dialogism provides no specific theory of reading, David Shepherd has argued that certain aspects of his work seem "relevant and useful to a reader-oriented project" (1989:91). Bakhtin, he continues, sees the whole text-as-utterance, as well as the utterances it contains, as "oriented towards and shaped by an anticipated response", that of the reader and his role of "active understanding" (92). Yet this view of the text-reader interaction is clearly modelled on *spoken* dialogue -- Shepherd notes a "constant sliding throughout ['Discourse in the Novel'] between speaking and writing, listener and reader" (94). While the mediated nature of written communication may be paradigmatic for spoken dialogue too, the distance between published writer and anonymous reader is certainly much greater than that between speaker and listener. This, I have suggested, may lead authors sensitive to the way the process of publication and dissemination distances them from their readers, to try to dictate more vehemently than happens in spoken utterances the

desired response to their texts, in an attempt to discourage "aberrant" readings to which they would be unable to give a corrective response.

The next chapter will discuss from the reader's point of view the question of reading Sarraute. In this chapter I want to look at the way Sarraute's texts treat their readers, and how they dictate the kind of affirmative reading they desire. The first two sections will examine the representation of "good" and "bad" readers in Sarraute, focusing in turn on each of the two novels which deal most exclusively with readers, writers, and books, *Les Fruits d'or* and *Entre la Vie et la mort*.² The last section will then consider how Sarraute's evaluation of ways of relating to a text influences the way she addresses her own readers in *L'Usage de la parole*. While she presents a certain kind of text-reader dialogue as a positive alternative to public intercourse which is clearly shown to define its addressee as an object, this privileged dialogue itself, I shall argue, necessarily fails to achieve that mutual presence and recognition of the interlocutor as a subject to which it aspires. In fact, it takes to an extreme the way all utterances, by inviting assent to their proposition rather than an absolutely other, uninfluenced response, impose an attitude on the other whom they simultaneously define in the speaker's own terms. In this way, all address could be said to objectify to some degree the subject it addresses (even where specific responses other than assent are anticipated, these are still the effect of one's characterisation of the other and reinforce it in turn). Sarraute tries to counter the lack of mutual presence of author and reader by adopting a strongly oral

² Alan Clayton (1989:39-40) sees three kinds of represented reader in Sarraute: the good double, the bad readers who read Sarraute as though she were a traditional novelist, and a third group who, in their criticism of Sarrautean language, provide a kind of textual self-parody. However, this last group can be assimilated to the company of bad readers; moreover, their criticism is overturned by the text itself. I have discussed (Ch.3 pp.104-05) the ironic function of this subgroup who enact what Clayton calls the "repentir feint d'une écriture qui brave alors ironiquement l'image de ce qu'elle n'est pas" (42).

tone in her writing;³ yet the "writtenness" of all language means that even the spoken quality of her work cannot dissimulate this distance entirely. Her increasing tendency to present her texts as events which unfold as they are read, by creating a similar effect of immediacy also works toward undoing the reader's distance from their intentional enunciation; I shall discuss this strategy in more detail later in this chapter.

Yet all these efforts to domesticate the reader are simultaneously reminders that he really is other, for if the mediation introduced by language makes the addressee into a projected figure which assents to the speaker's proposition, it is also what ensures that in reality he remains irreducible to that figure. The one who receives the message is never entirely identical to the one for whom it is intended. The refiguring of the authorial intention which results, shifts power to the addressee who construes an intended meaning from the linguistic evidence (including, it must be acknowledged, the image of himself he attributes to the text). Thus from an optimistic view of mutually self-present and cooperating subjects we move to one of opponents in competition for control of the text, and in the process projecting identities and intentions on each other.

This focus on the coercive aspect of the text-reader relationship in Sarraute distinguishes my discussion from those based on a more consensual notion of dialogue. Alan Clayton, for example, also mentions the way the approach of Sarraute's texts to their reader mimes the attempt by their fictional protagonists to find a sympathetic, responsive other -- he in fact describes Sarraute in *L'Usage de*

³ Her composition of plays for live performance (first on radio, later in the theatre) can also be seen in this light, as can the growing number of recorded readings of her texts.

la parole, the first of her texts to address the reader directly, as "pastichant presque ses propres procédés de narration" (1989:15). Yet while for him this migration of the appeal for understanding from the fictional world to its authorial frame turns the reader into a co-writer, I see it as aiming instead to deprive that reader of any creative role by subordinating his point of view to the text's.

One critical work, though not on Sarraute, which does pay close attention to the relations of power underlying the text-reader dialogue, is Ross Chambers's study of the nineteenth-century "art story" in *Story and Situation* (1984). While working from a Marxist perspective, he too identifies a desire by the text for the reader's submission: for him it is the commodification of literature which has forced texts to "designate themselves as contractual phenomena and produce the transactional situation that gives point to their narratives" (1984:9-10). Since the eighteenth century, he claims, the writing of literature has become ever more removed from the circumstances of direct communication, to be regarded instead as an "alienated discursive practice" (12). The text has lost its use-value for an exchange-value, "its interpretability as a complex sign for which other discursive signs can be substituted"; it has consequently had to make itself seductive in order to acquire a readership which will actualise its meaningfulness by interpreting it. Chambers's analysis thus clearly sees the alienation of the literary text as a historical and economic development rather than, as I have argued, innate to the nature of language as representation. For this reason, his focus is on texts that clearly

announce themselves as art, rather than on writing in general as inherently alienated (and language as inherently "written").⁴

Yet adducing different causes for the text's alienation from both author and reader, doesn't prevent agreement as to the effects of this on the text. My examination, in this chapter, of how Sarraute's texts provide models of the kind of reading, and by extension reader, they desire, clearly matches Chambers's identification of the creation of fictional addressees as a major textual strategy of seduction. As he asks, "When we are seduced, are we not always seduced into conforming ourselves with an image: the simulacrum of one whom we believe can be loved?" (15). Such "situational self-reflexivity" (24), where texts represent *en abyme* their own communicational function, is for Chambers primarily a feature of "readerly" texts which, by claiming the status of artistic discourse, assert the power to produce ever new meanings in new interpretative contexts, yet simultaneously lay down the range of possible meanings they will admit.⁵

As I have said, the reader is not doomed to succumb to the text's seductive strategies; in the case of Sarraute, his distance from the text's expressive intention enables him to read as a linguistic construct what it presents as an expressed truth. Chambers too (within the terms of his Marxist perspective) sees the reader as able to free the text from the (for him ideological and cultural) limitations of its self-

⁴ In his conclusion, he does call for an attempt to situate the specific phenomenon of literary communication within the total range of modes of verbal communication available to social beings (206); and he claims that literary theorists can correct the "unproblematic view of the nature of the communicational subject and of the addressee, as well as of the relationship that prevails between them" (207).

⁵ "It is as if for them the deferring of meaning from which they benefit as art requires careful control so as not to get out of hand" (26). Chamber's designation of texts as readerly or writerly draws of course on Barthes's opposition, in *S/Z* (1970:10), of the *lisible* and the *scriptible*, two modes of writing which make of the reader respectively a passive consumer and an active producer of the text. The limited relevance of this opposition to Sarraute's writing has been discussed by Ann Jefferson (1975:87-95), who concludes that it fails to account for Sarraute's ambition to create a new language which would still be expressive, but of an equally new reality (94).

conception, while his own discourse will remain subject to comparable restrictions. In this view, the reader in fact becomes the saviour of the text's own claim to artistic status: he rescues its power to create ever more meanings in new contexts of reading from its own tendency to limit its meaningfulness through strategies of control like the *mise en abyme* of the act of communication (27).⁶

1. Sarraute's represented readers:

A striking feature of Sarraute's fiction is the way she repeatedly uses the same restricted context -- the conversations of middle-class Parisian intellectuals about art -- to represent human relations at a level which she nonetheless clearly holds to be universal.⁷ Why does she always choose the same culturally and socially specific surface situation for "la mise au jour d'une matière psychologique nouvelle [...] une matière anonyme qui se trouve chez tous les hommes et dans toutes les sociétés" (ES 95)? One consequence of focusing so exclusively on this particular milieu is that it allows her to represent the way people relate to one another in tandem with the way they relate to art. There is a strong sense in Sarraute that human relationships have a great deal in common with the interaction with a work of art, especially perhaps (given its linguistic nature) with a literary

⁶ Thus *mise en abyme*, when it concerns the reader, appears to be a textual strategy of self-preservation opposed to the ironic self-relativisation which the text's *mise en abyme* of itself seems to invite (see Ch.1, pp.25-26).

⁷ Hannah Arendt is one critic to single out for praise the element of social parody in Sarraute: "*Le Planétarium et Les Fruits d'or* pris ensemble constituent le réquisitoire le plus sévère jamais adressé aux intellectuels" (1986:25). Yet she also sees the society represented in *Les Fruits d'or* in broader terms as "un macrocosme du 'je', le je en grandes lettres" (26).

work. For an exploration of this homology, which involves not so much the aestheticisation of intersubjective relations as the humanisation of the text, the variety of social contexts available is necessarily restricted.

The comparison of relations between text and reader with those which exist between individuals is perhaps made most explicit in *Les Fruits d'or*. The opening scene plunges us into the whole issue of intersubjective relations and their success and failure; and the two encounters it represents (one recalled within the other) significantly focus on the issue of aesthetic response. A couple⁸ analyse an evening just spent with a third individual who showed them a postcard of a Courbet painting he admired. When this action failed to unite the three by calling up an identical reaction to the painting in all (the husband refused to manifest any reaction, despising the other's conformity to current fashion), the woman attempted to compensate by appealing to the other for his reaction to a novel called 'Les Fruits d'Or'. The question failed to restore relations, as the non-committal answer could not be decoded in terms of rejection or acceptance of contact with the asker. A recalled or imagined epilogue to the dialogue between husband and wife shows her return to the host to make him admit that his comment on the book was meant as a rebuff to them: "Quand j'ai essayé de me rapprocher, quand j'ai tendu les bras vers vous, quand je vous ai demandé pour Les Fruits d'Or... vous avez voulu nous repousser, marquer que c'était trop tard, que la rupture était consommée..." (FO 16). But no definitive interpretation is forthcoming, and the anguish of uncertainty as to her relations with the other remains.

⁸ Though they are not explicitly identified as husband and wife, I shall describe them as such for ease of reference.

The scene offers a positive and a negative model of dialogue, all in the context of reactions to art and literature.⁹ In opposition to the breakdown of contact between the host and his guests, contact which only ever existed through the wife's great effort (13-14), communication within the couple is unproblematic, their dialogue betraying none of the estrangement that attempts to communicate with the other dramatise so intensely. Unlike their host's words, their utterances are transparent to each other, and in their analysis of the recalled dialogue, the motivations behind the words and gestures of each are not only clear to the partner (while they can also be inferred by the host, he never has the comfort of certainty), but are also openly admitted: "Tu ne regardais rien. -- Non, rien" (7); "Tu m'amusais beaucoup quand tu cherchais à rattraper ma 'gaffe', à me faire pardonner [...] -- Bien sûr, tu as montré que tu refusais ce qu'il t'offrait" (11-12). Even the *sous-conversation* which in this section acts, unusually, not to evoke the utterance's (concealed) background in the speaker, or its effect on the hearer, but as a highly imagistic expansion on its meaning (unambiguous for both), illustrates that mutual understanding isn't a problem. (There is an unusually high proportion of spoken dialogue to *sous-conversation* here, presumably because it doesn't need to be glossed to be comprehensible.) The source of the *sous-conversation*, in addition, is not always clearly located in one rather than the other, suggesting an identity of perspectives in the couple. In fact, the tone of the exchange which, while not without its disagreements, seems preserved from the pitfalls of public intercourse,

⁹ Sarraute repeatedly compares literature to painting, as when she quotes Paul Klee on the way art makes visible rather than representing the visible, to define her own literary enterprise (e.g. 1962:49). Thus the portrait in *Portrait d'un inconnu* can act as a model of a kind of writing which refuses characterisation. Like her cultivation of a spoken quality in her writing, comparing it to visual art also seems designed to overcome the alienation of writing through a heightened immediacy. Yet the immediacy of pictorial representation is also illusory: as Paul Ricoeur points out, painterly expression too relies on a restricted semiotic code (1976:40-43).

anticipates the evocation in *Tu ne t'aimes pas* of dialogue with a loved one as the only unproblematic kind of interaction in language (and a thing of the past for the later novel).¹⁰

The instances of non-communication, the host's overture and also the woman's subsequent attempt to salvage the situation when that overture is ignored, are both attempts to talk about art. As with 'Les Fruits d'Or' which is "le dernier cri" (13), talking about the Courbet painting is associated from the start with conventional behaviour and inauthenticity: "C'est exactement la même reproduction qu'ils ont tous chez eux, qu'ils portent tous sur eux en ce moment" (6). As such it is rejected in favour of an authentic, and thus private, relation to art (the original work, not a reproduction) by the husband who refuses to play along: "J'ai essayé de les voir, les fameux Courbet, j'y suis allé à l'heure du déjeuner pour ne rencontrer personne" (7-8). Relating to art seems to be inherently at odds with social interaction. The third figure who intrudes into the dualism of the couple, causing the wife to detach herself from her husband in order to speak to him alone, destroys the intimacy of the relation to the artwork too by making it public. As in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, the intrusion of an outsider breaks up the unity of the self with its chosen object, whether that object of love is a person or a work of art.

¹⁰ Towards the end of the novel, we see how the relationship of a couple, like that of reader and text, can be dragged from the private into the public sphere, where they resemble "un de ces couples admirablement entraînés, ces voyantes et leurs comparses, ces Lud et Ludila qui de la salle à l'estrade échanget leurs questions et leurs réponses devant un public ébaubi et méfiant" (123). Both kinds of relationship, that with the text and that with the loved other, are explicitly associated in the woman's report on her husband's reading of 'Les Fruits d'Or': "Jacques le lui dit souvent, modeste, détaché comme il est... il suffit de se laisser aller, il suffit de s'abandonner à sa sensation, de s'y accrocher, de ne rien laisser s'interposer, d'entrer toujours en contact direct, intime, avec l'objet" (121). As the ideal immediate relation the woman aspires to with the text is in fact mediated by Jacques's authoritative recommendation, that exchange with her husband also becomes mediated by her indirect, public report of his words to her.

The familiar Sarrautean opposition between conventional and authentic language operates here too -- for the couple whose easy exchange is built on a prior understanding, the outsider seems to speak a foreign language: "Ce sont des pièces que vous avez sans doute rapportées d'un pays étranger où je ne suis jamais allée... Elles n'ont pas cours ici, où je vis" (17). This foreign language is a *currency*, and so gives even the artwork a relative (exchange-) value ("Moi je le dis toujours: Shakespeare et Courbet" [FO 6]), rather than the absolute status it holds when interacted with directly. Because public discourse turns ineffable subjects into unitary objects which can be compared and contrasted, it is bound to objectify the artwork too, whereas this is something to be related to as another subject, rather than talked about as an object. Ann Jefferson has pointed out how in *Les Fruits d'or*, the privileged mode of relation to the text is address; talking about it introduces another addressee and so reduces its status to that of referent: "When the 'I' realises that his discourse may be addressed to 'Les Fruits d'Or' itself [...] the referent of [his] discourse becomes its addressee" (1977:216). The relation to a text cannot be spoken about (hence Sarraute's refusal, discussed in Chapter 3 [pp.121-22], to sanction a metalanguage for her work); it can only be experienced as a currently happening event.

Yet we can anticipate that the dialogue with the artwork will not be as unproblematic as Sarraute suggests. In the first place, the social discourse associated with the host's "foreign currency" conceptualises not only its *referent* but also its addressor and addressee (thus its reflexivity is embraced by those who wish to give themselves the illusion of coherence: "*moi je le dis toujours*"). And as the last chapter showed, the structure of social discourse remains fundamental even to the

Sarrautean subject. Unable to undo its own symbolic integrity, it will similarly be unable to avoid turning its addressee into a unitary construct. We should note that in *Les Fruits d'or*, the process of objectification is recognised as not being unique to the convention-bound host. Seen from his perspective, the couple become the agents of aggression, suggesting that even for the sincere subject, such behaviour is unavoidable in social interaction. The couple turn the host into an object through their gaze in which he is imprisoned, and which is a function of their distance from him if not from each other: "l'immense distance où ils se tiennent et d'où ils me voient, pris, enfermé tout entier dans le champ de leur regard" (24). The only defence against this distant gaze which marks alienated social relations, the only way to control the image others form of one, is to offer them one ready-made: "cette image de moi que je leur présente en gros plan, ce bon regard ouvert, confiant, que je pose, voilà, tout droit sur leurs yeux..." (24). Already in *Les Fruits d'or*, presentation of a unitary self is seen as a selfconscious act (here a reaction to the threat of being defined by the other), rather than as an involuntary consequence of being conscious; behind this singular image and its wilful deception which is necessary for survival, there lies once again the formless Sarrautean self.

Just as this "true", formless self hides in public behind a self-conscious posture, and so becomes incapable of relating sincerely to another, an authentic relationship of the reader to the literary text also becomes impossible under the public gaze, and is replaced by a sham. The host is still under the imagined gaze of the couple when he approaches 'Les Fruits d'Or' (his resulting self-consciousness strongly evokes the opening scene of *Entre la Vie et la mort*, where a writer performs in public the act of critically rereading one's writing): "Je détourne la tête,

je marche -- regardez-moi -- vers la table où le livre est posé sur des feuillets couverts d'une large écriture. Je l'ouvre... Comme on pose la main sur un verre pour arrêter son tintement, je fais en moi le silence. Que tout s'immobilise, se fige" (FO 26). The public relationship to the text is one of non-response: the host announces to the imaginarily present couple, "Je suis content de pouvoir vous le dire: rien ne passe, pas la plus légère vibration" (26-27).¹¹ Evidently, then, when an authentic reading does impose itself, a reception of the text's address which cannot be ignored ("Il faudrait pour ne rien entendre me boucher les oreilles" [27]), it will be incompatible with the public sphere. When this happens, the host is led to reject even the imagined presence of the others as reducing his ability to "hear" the text:

Mais écarterez-vous donc, vous me gênez... votre présence, là, autour, nuit... quand vous êtes là, j'entends mal, les sons me parviennent brouillés, je me sens, quand vous êtes là, comme dans une salle qui a une mauvaise acoustique... sortez, on vous l'a déjà dit, vous êtes inertes, mous, grossiers... Votre présence, votre contact est salissant... Votre place n'est pas ici, entre nous... (27; cp.111-12)

Relations with the other and relations with the text remain closely matched through to the end of *Les Fruits d'or*. The pernicious public form of each is associated with an oppressive law which again bears a superficially striking but ultimately limited resemblance to Lacan's Law of the Father. Thus the opinion "Très bon, l'article de Brulé sur Les Fruits d'Or. De tout premier ordre. Parfait" (33), which is both a reaction to a text and a communication with others, is articulated as a truth which may not be contradicted, and carries totalitarian

¹¹ The archetypal public reader is in this way the critic who, rather than dialogue with the text, regards it as "une danse solitaire" (32) and makes it the object of a discourse in which it is an entity comparable to others rather than a unique subject: as Courbet was related to Shakespeare, 'Les Fruits d'Or' is "ce qu'on a écrit de plus beau depuis Stendhal... depuis Benjamin Constant" (32).

overtones: "Inutile de fouiller à droite ni à gauche: toute velléité de résistance est écrasée" (33).¹² The alternative mode of relations suppressed by this law is correspondingly described as a kind of primordial formlessness evocative of the Lacanian Imaginary (but a linguistic version, with all the contradictions that implies): "tous les dérèglements, foisonnements, grouillements, magmas informes, sombres fouillis, nuits traversées de sinistres lueurs" (34).

If the evaluation of relations between self and other or reader and text is predicated on the same opposition of an authentic expressive language to conventional discourse which the last chapter argued to be untenable, then the attempt to locate the privileged dual relation outside the conventional public one is bound to run into problems. It seems valid to suspect that, as with the notion of an authentic self in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, Sarraute's view of authentic dialogue is projected from *within* the rejected conventional order rather than being established independently of it.¹³ To ascertain whether this is so, we should look more closely at the way the aggression which characterises conventional relations is manifested, and see if these symptoms of a power-based relationship recur in the "authentic" alternative.

¹² cp. "Il a été tiré de sa retraite et obligé à jouer son rôle, à tenir son rang. A revêtir la robe rouge et l'hermine, à se couvrir de sa toque et à rendre, devant l'assistance qui se lève et attend en silence, son jugement [...] La sentence est définitive: 'Les Fruits d'Or, c'est un très beau livre'" (39). Yet it is possible to break this Law, at the price of exclusion from the community it unites: "Violant tous les accords tacites, les pactes secrets, enfreignant les règles que le respect d'autrui impose, que dicte la pudeur, bravant tous les interdits, il s'élance" (115).

¹³ Making what seems at first to be a similar point, Françoise Dupuy-Sullivan's argument that Sarraute in *Les Fruits d'or* is trying to move outside the power relations between reader and text, also concludes with the recognition that such an attempt is bound to fail (1990:45). Yet in a shift of perspective which suggests her own submission to the power of Sarraute's discourse, the "rapport de force" which she identifies as remaining inescapable for the reader of this novel is that with the community of other readers, not with the text itself. The momentary escape from social into solitary reading which she sees *Les Fruits d'or* as offering the reader is not considered by her (as it will be below) to entail also his submission to the text.

It is impossible not to be struck by the number of references to the *regard* in the accounts of public encounters in *Les Fruits d'or*. The gaze provides a constant accompaniment to the things people say to one another, and confirms the generally hostile function of those addresses. The other's gaze, as we saw in the host's experience with the couple, always turns one into an object -- even, in one Kafkaesque case, into an insect: "Il se débat comme un insecte qu'un souffle a renversé et qui bat l'air de ses petites pattes affolées [...] On le prend, on le pose sur un doigt et on l'inspecte de près" (117).¹⁴ All the variations of the gaze, down to its withdrawal in an unmistakable gesture of annihilation ("Il l'effleure un instant de son regard vide et détourne les yeux..." [FO 85; cp. 90]), build on this objectifying power. The distress it causes to its object increases with the number of observers; witnesses are made into accomplices of the one leading the attack, purely through the fact that they see. Those who refuse to be accomplices must become blind: "Nous le menu peuple, nous les braves gens qui nous trouvons là par hasard, trop tard pour fuir, nous ne devons ni regarder ni détourner les yeux. Nous devons être aveugles, sourds, totalement inertes" (57). Yet this refusal turns one into a lifeless object oneself: "Nous devons être [...] durs, figés, des objets disposés là, des poupées bourrées de son avec des visages de porcelaine et des boules de verre à la place des yeux". If one wants to be a living subject in the terms of the public realm, one must be the subject of a *regard* (thus social subjectivity implies the power -- and even obligation -- to turn others into objects, along with the

¹⁴ The echoes of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and of Gregor Samsa's gradual blindness and immobility become even stronger later with the experience of the social pariah: "Ils me regardent apitoyés, personne ne peut plus rien pour moi [...] Mais c'est de moi qu'à mon insu sort le courant [...] Je suis rejeté dans un coin, je tourne sur moi-même enfermé dans l'étroit espace que borne ma courte vue" (134). Hannah Arendt (1986:22) points to echoes of *The Metamorphosis* in *Portrait d'un inconnu* as well (PI 46, 116).

constant experience of being objectified oneself). For Jacques Lacan, seeing and being seen are part of the whole complex of individuation (the infant encounters this aspect of subjectivity in the mirror stage); for Sarraute, they govern the public mode of relating to the other as a personage. If social interaction is based on the illusion of coherent and unitary selves, the gaze fosters this illusion, both for those who see the self as an object, and for the self which takes for the truth others' definitions of its own identity (or which, as in "*disent les imbéciles*", gazes on itself and so defines itself).

What mode of dialogue does the objectifying gaze allow? If the looked-at individual looks back, a kind of deadlock can be achieved -- this is presumably why the voyeur, who is in the powerful position of seeing without being seen, savours his perspective so much: "C'est presque une joie pour elle, une sorte de jouissance douceâtre de le connaître si bien, de voir comme protégé par sa carapace [...] il les épie [...] Cela l'amuse, elle le sait, de voir sans être vu -- il se croit si bien à l'abri des regards" (58-59). The deadlock of the reciprocated gaze brings only a highly precarious equality characterised by conflict, both with those excluded from the exchange and also, more importantly, between the participants. The two *savants* whose academic discourse alienates their hearers certainly exclude all others, especially the woman whose request for book-in-hand proof of the excellence of 'Les Fruits d'Or' their words follow as a non-response to it: "Il ne jette pas un regard à la pauvre écervelée. On dirait qu'il n'a pas entendu son appel. C'est sur l'autre, qui lui fait face, que par-dessus leurs têtes à tous il fixe les yeux" (63-64). Yet their exchange of glances -- "Ses paupières mi-closes [...] s'ouvrent maintenant toutes grandes sous le regard brûlant. Leurs yeux s'interrogent" (64) -- is, like their

dialogue, only superficially consensual. Their opaque language conceals a hostility betrayed by the (for Sarraute inherently truthful) body when an apparently complimentary address elicits contrasting physical and verbal responses: "L'autre, en face de lui, a une brève contorsion, comme traversé par une soudaine et courte bourrasque, et aussitôt s'apaise et incline la tête lentement: 'Oui. Évidemment'" (65).

In this register of self-other relations, a valuable relation to the text as other is clearly impossible. All these conversations which objectify their addressees also of course make 'Les Fruits d'Or', their ostensible referent, into an object. But subordinating the relation with the text to the public relation with another not only turns that text into an object referred to instead of a subject engaged with; it also embroils it in the conflicts which characterise social relations. Thus it is used either as a weapon to harm the other (as with the announcement in front of a recently published author that 'Les Fruits d'Or' is the best book to have appeared for fifteen years [55]), or as a target which stands for the other (as when the defender of recently published authors attacks 'Les Fruits d'Or' in order to deflate its protector [59]). Reading as a relationship with a text, once it enters the public sphere becomes reading for social power. Even those who ask in all humility to be taught how to read in social terms ("Ils consentent à redevenir des petits enfants. Ils sont si démunis, si humbles [...] Qu'on ait pour eux un peu de bonté... juste un seul geste généreux... Qu'on leur montre, qu'on leur explique, le livre en main..." [60-62]) fantasise about using this social skill to acquire power. If what was explained was something they had seen but rejected as trivial, they could overthrow their teachers and establish their own superiority (the evocation of which exploits once more

Sarraute's equation of social corruption with adulthood as opposed to the innocence of the child):

Ils auraient si honte pour ces misérables, ils se sentiraient si gênés qu'ils feraient comme les grandes personnes quand des enfants leur tendent dans leur menotte un caillou, une brindille, un morceau de papier, en disant: Tiens, voilà une orange, voilà du pain, mange, c'est un bonbon... ils feraient claquer leurs lèvres, ils rouleraient les yeux, ils dodelineraient la tête pour montrer leur délectation: 'Oh que c'est donc bon. Oh que c'est beau, Les Fruits d'Or. Oui, vous avez raison. Comme c'est admirable. Comme c'est profond.' (62-63)

Les Fruits d'or, then, claims very strongly that once enacted according to the rules of social interaction, all exchanges, be they with other individuals or with texts, will involve the objectification of the other in relation to oneself, in an aggressive gesture of domination. Yet if, as I have argued, the social order Sarraute condemns is inseparable from the Symbolic order which governs all communication (including, manifestly, her own writing), then the private dialogue of self and other or of self and text which is opposed to social exchanges can hardly be exempted from this dynamic. In fact, this very predicament of Sarraute's, her assertion of the existence of enclaves of authentic communication and her attempt to establish such a "good" relationship with her readership while remaining subject to the fundamental conventionality of language she rebels against, is actually figured in *Les Fruits d'or*. It can be seen in the plight of one character who attempts to establish an authentic self-other relationship on the fringes of the public community. The way this fictional attempt at "internal emigration" into a zone of authentic communication within the public arena, fails to escape the social dynamic which conditions it in spite of itself, illustrates how the kind of self-other and reader-text relationship the text privileges cannot escape the analogous Symbolic order and its implications for

dialogue, for this order determines even the kind of communication which is presented as exempt from it.

The individual who tries to stand aloof from the games of power which characterise social interaction, is a descendant of the narrator-figure of Sarraute's earlier novels in his sensitivity to the tropistic undercurrents of social behaviour. He has recognised the nature of the gaze -- here, both that exchanged by the critics and those to which their behaviour is a response:

J'ai suivi à la trace ce qui sortait de ces regards échangés [...] Je l'ai suivi jusqu'à sa source, jusqu'à ce lieu secret où autrefois, il y a longtemps, cela a pris naissance, et là, j'ai vu s'accomplir sous mes yeux leurs tout premiers mouvements [...] quand ils se sont barricadés en eux-mêmes [...] pour empêcher de pénétrer en eux, de s'insinuer en eux douloureusement ce qui filtrait de chaque regard posé sur eux. (68)

By refusing to be seen, he realises, they refused others' definition of them, "la vague petite image négligemment esquissée de pauvres bougres, de gens obscurs, d'auteurs inconnus d'écrits illisibles rejetés partout" (68). Instead they wrote for "une image d'eux-mêmes aux proportions gigantesques [...] A elle seule ils s'adressaient, avec elle seule, au moyen d'un langage fait pour elle seule ils communiquaient, elle, leur lecteur unique et leur seul juge". The only form in which outsiders can hope to be included in this discourse is as its object, never as a speaking subject: "Mais dites de quoi vous avez parlé... de qui? De moi, peut-être, ô joie" (71). This abdication of subjectivity extends even to making the powerful critic the subject of one's own discourse; his interpretation, at odds with a writer's own (and here we have an ironic indication of where Sarraute thinks the truth of interpretation really lies), is nonetheless immediately taken on board: "Qu'a-t-il dit?... Ah! cela?... Mais comme c'est étrange... Déconcertant... Juste à l'opposé de ce que... Mais qui sommes-nous, ici, pour en juger?" (71).

The narrator looks on at this game of *regards* from the sidelines, and it is this status as himself a subject of the gaze ("j'ai vu s'accomplir sous mes yeux" [68]) that keeps him within the structure which will ultimately defeat him. His whole narration is an exhortation to others to see what he does; it begins and ends with a plea for another to join his perspective to his own and see with him:

Revenez à vous, regardez, voyez-les, ces deux compères qui viennent d'exécuter sur vous un de leurs tours. Observez-les attentivement. (66)
Que quelqu'un entende son appel, qu'un seul d'entre eux veuille bien venir se ranger à ses côtés... Qu'un seul autre regard que le sien perçoive ce qu'il voit [...] Il lui faut juste cela: un seul témoin. (73)

He seems to find the identical perspective with which his own can fuse, in a woman who is also on the sidelines of the group and who betrays none of the signs of otherness which lead one to seek out their tropistic origin: "aucun de ces mouvements sournois qui, d'ordinaire, vous donnent l'éveil et vous font vous élancer, sous l'effet d'une irrésistible poussée, à la découverte du point secret d'où ils sont partis [...] Il n'y a aucun doute: elle a vu, elle aussi, elle a découvert le lieu secret" (73-74). Though she too is the subject of a gaze, it is so clear that he can interpret it as the double of his own: "Son regard le rassure: voyez, vous n'êtes pas seul" (74). Her first words to him strengthen his impression of their sameness (a union which thus precedes the moment of communication rather than being created through it): "Vous êtes comme moi, je crois, vous n'êtes pas, vous, de ceux que cela affole, n'est-ce pas, Les Fruits d'Or?" (74).

Yet if this desired sameness is seen by him as existing prior to communication, its existence can nonetheless only be ascertained *through* communication: thus she must ask him about their similarity, or communicate it via her gaze (or rather, he must *infer* this communicative intention in her gaze,

emphasising the distance which still separates them). But the fact of having to communicate in order to establish their sameness actually reinforces their difference from each other. In the text, it is the specifically self-conscious nature of social communication, its objectification of self and other, which is blamed for the failure of this attempt to establish their oneness. Because the man's attempt to reject the power-based social order ("il a dépouillé ses habits de patricien, renoncé à l'amitié des puissants" [76]) originates within it, the alternative relationship he envisages remains governed by its laws. (The very fact that the fusion he desires is designed to oppose the group, of course illustrates the way it is determined from the outset by the group's conflictual structure.) From the start, his attempt to cast off all individuating characteristics and share the other's gaze -- "Il est prêt à tout abandonner, à renoncer à toutes les richesses qu'il a amassées [...] pour être comme elle [...] pour pouvoir comme elle poser sur le mal un regard dont rien ne peut altérer la sérénité, pour être semblable à elle" (75) -- is made in a self-conscious act of imitation which never leaves the individuality of the social persona behind: "Il sent sur ses propres lèvres un sourire d'enfant, il lui semble qu'un pur rayon fuse de ses yeux" (75). Because he remains a subject of the gaze, and so of the social order based on it, he can only posit the fusion which would result in a shared perspective retrospectively from within that order, through establishing that their separate gazes are identical. Yet the whole structure of *regard*-based social relationships, with their dynamic of objectification and domination, means that this identity can only be achieved at the price of turning the other into his double. Thus he exploits the absence of individualising features in the woman's "transparent" gaze

to annexe her necessarily other perspective to his own, reducing her from an other into his double, from an autonomous subject into an object defined by him.

This inability to found an authentic relationship independent of the social dynamics he wants to escape, culminates with his imagining and finally subscribing to the negative public perception of the woman. This happens when she draws back from his attempt to make her into a fellow judge; by refusing the distance from others that judging them implies (and so emphasising the way he remains in a structure of opposition to them), she asserts a distance from him which establishes her as other. No longer able to imagine her as his mirror-image, the man now begins to fill her "transparency" with markers of otherness rather than of sameness. He instantly falls back on the conventional lexicon of physical signs of personality to characterise her, on the basis of her appearance, as a "*vieille femme solitaire vivant Dieu sait comment*" (76). This relapse into negative caricature reveals how, once he no longer sees her as the would-be co-subject of his own gaze, he openly considers her as its object (rather than recognising her status as subject of a different gaze). The reassertion of the objectifying nature of his gaze, which he had never entirely managed to dispel, is completed when he realises that they have both been the object of the gaze of "*les deux grands*", to whose hermetic critical discourse and its exclusivity his whole search for an ally was originally a reaction: "*Ils l'ont associé, lui, avec cette demeurée. Qui se ressemble s'assemble... Ils l'ont vu, naïf, sentimental comme elle, rempli d'‘idéal’*" (77). He thus reintegrates his new perspective on her into that which he attributes to the representatives of power; in addition, by seeing himself through their eyes as similar to her, he turns himself too

into an object (and ironically makes the two of them identical after all, not now as private subjects but as objects of the public gaze).

How does Sarraute's ideal private relationship, whether intersubjective or of reader to text, betray comparable subjection to a Symbolic order, one which, by turning subjects into unitary individuals and making all communication mediate, keeps dialogue from being an ideal, consensual, mutual presence of selves, and introduces coercion and resistance into it? The novel's closing representation of a single good reader and his address to 'Les Fruits d'Or' (no longer part of public discourse for it has fallen out of favour), aside from being a model for how its own readers should relate to it, also sustains the homology between the ideal reader-text relationship and the human relationship of love, with its prelinguistic shared understanding. Before seeing how this relationship cannot help betraying its "social origins", I shall sketch briefly the way it is presented as the ideal of both aesthetic and intersubjective dialogue.

The fact that the fictional novel is addressed at the end humanises it, giving it equal status with any of the individuals whose dialogues *Les Fruits d'or* represents; moreover, the tone of the reader's address is that of a lover to a loved one, underlining the identity between a true relation to the text and a true relation to another human.¹⁵ In fact the description of the ideal reader-text relationship here is almost identical to the evocation of love much later in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. What passes from 'Les Fruits d'Or' to its reader is "comme une vibration, une modulation,

¹⁵ Jean Pierrot points out already in Sarraute's first novel the privileging of the relation to the artwork over the unsatisfactory relation to others: "Dans l'univers de Nathalie Sarraute, l'intersubjectivité ne prend qu'exceptionnellement la forme heureuse et apparemment réussie qui caractérise, dans *Portrait d'un inconnu*, les retrouvailles du narrateur avec ce portrait auquel il demande, et dont il obtient sans doute, compréhension, appui et reconfort spirituel" (1990:105). Pierrot too sees this exchange as a onesided imposition ("une intersubjectivité feinte"), though he reverses the roles and gives power to the one responding to the work (a point I shall return to at the end of this chapter).

un rythme... c'est comme une ligne fragile et ferme qui se déploie [...] un tintement léger... qui d'eux à moi et de moi à eux comme à travers une même substance se propage" (136). In *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, love, now past, is remembered thus: "Était-ce une couleur, une ligne, une à peine perceptible nuance, une intonation, un silence [...] Ça ouvrait, creusait en nous un chemin à travers une même substance, remontait à une même source" (TTP 123). Both descriptions also emphasise physical fusion and anteriority to public language, though given the immaterial and linguistic nature of the text, the metaphoric status of the description is much more explicit in *Les Fruits d'or*:

Ce silence où vous baignez, dépouillé de tous les vêtements et ornements dont vous aviez été affublé, nu, tout lavé, flottant à la dérive, avec moi cramponné à vous, rend très étroit notre contact. Nous sommes si proches maintenant, vous êtes tellement une partie de moi, qu'il me semble que si vous cessiez d'exister, ce serait comme une part de moi-même qui deviendrait du tissu mort. (FO 157)

The amorous nature of the relationship of reading is in fact explicitly acknowledged: "Personne n'a le pouvoir d'interrompre entre nous cette osmose. Aucune parole venue du dehors ne peut détruire une si naturelle et parfaite fusion. Comme l'amour, elle nous donne la force de tout braver. Comme un amoureux, j'ai envie de la cacher" (FO 136).¹⁶

The intensity of this relationship both permits and obliges one to abandon the social community, with its destructive language and gaze:

Qu'ils ne voient pas ce qui est là, entre nous, qu'ils ne s'approchent pas de cela, c'est tout ce que je leur demande [...] N'importe quel mot venu d'eux, qui se poserait sur nous ou seulement nous frôlerait, me ferait me rétracter,

¹⁶ The relationship of love, for Sarraute, requires, I have said, that the other be seen as identical. Bernard Pingaud shows how the reader-novel relationship in *Les Fruits d'or* fits this criterion, in a comment which anticipates Sarraute's creation of the writer's double as ideal reader in *Entre la Vie et la mort*: "Celui qui dit 'je' à la fin du roman est à la fois auteur (de ce roman) et lecteur (des 'Fruits d'Or'), c'est en quelque sorte à lui-même qu'il s'adresse, dans la proximité du vrai contact" (1963:34).

me replier sur moi-même et hérissier tous mes piquants [...] Mes yeux vides fixés devant moi ne verront pas leurs regards se rencontrer et échanger l'assurance de leur confiance, de leur entente, de leur supériorité. (136-37)

Thus the reader renounces public discourse to speak to the text alone. The relationship involves his repeated seduction by the text: "N'importe quel petit bout, pris au hasard, s'insinue en moi ou non. Et quand il le fait, il tire après soi tout le reste [...] Comme un être vivant" (155). This counteracts the reader's lack of fidelity, for he is often "prêt à reconnaître que je suis trompé" (155) until the text seduces him again.

This seductive power of the text, and the reader's ongoing susceptibility to public opinion, are the first indication that this relationship, for all that it shuns the public sphere, doesn't entirely succeed in escaping its dynamics. Like the narrator-figure earlier, the reader continues to hope for an answering human voice: "Et s'il se trouvait tout d'un coup quelqu'un qui réponde, juste une autre voix... quel soulagement" (151). Again, this other would demonstrate an identical attitude to his: "Il doit y en avoir bien d'autres comme moi à travers le monde. Timorés comme moi. Un peu repliés sur eux-mêmes. Pas habitués à s'exprimer" (156). A dialogue of same with same, free from the vices of social interaction, thus remains an ideal, and if its unfeasibility is realised, it is not because the attempt to establish it is recognised to be itself governed by the social (as was the case with the earlier figure). Rather it is now the addressees alone whose conventional attitudes would sabotage the exchange. They equate their response to 'Les Fruits d'Or' with that to other less admirable works, in the relativising gesture already defined as typical of the social response to art: "Il est certain que cette même impression, que vous leur donnez comme à moi, ils l'éprouvent devant Dieu sait quoi, que j'aime mieux

ne pas imaginer" (156). Yet the good reader's desire to see in others signs of similarity (timidity, introversion) which would let him infer in them an identical perspective on 'Les Fruits d'Or', recalls the kind of dialogue the earlier figure attempted to establish, and which never escaped the social attitude of characterisation and domination. The aggression which the text explicitly showed to be a feature of that identification of another's sameness manifests itself here too, though less overtly, once that sameness is seen (now in advance) to be an illusion. Evaluation and condescension again destroy the anticipated "fusion" as others' tastes are considered with horror -- as much later in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, it is others and their conventional values who are held responsible for the failure of such a specular dialogue, but the role of the self here is not innocent.

More important than the fact that the good reader's attitude to others remains governed by the social, is the way the kind of interaction with the *text* which he describes in his final address to it also exemplifies the social relations he is trying to escape. The features we have seen to be characteristic of these are the role of the gaze as mediator between individuals, and the hostile footing on which this puts any exchange by turning its addressee into an object. An exchange of glances involves the uncontrollable objectification of each by the other, and if the other's definition is not embraced for the illusion of a coherent self it offers, the only way to resist it is by projecting an alternative image. A struggle results both to counter the other's imposed image of oneself with one's own, and to impose one on the (often equally resisting) other.

If the ideal text-reader relationship presented at the end of the novel appears to have escaped this complex of aggression and counter-aggression, it is only

because one party, the reader, is willing to be the submissive partner of a text which literally captivates it. Opposite the text as a linguistic entity (a state only dissimulated by its anthropomorphosis into a lover), the reader is openly represented as somewhat inarticulate.¹⁷ He is unfamiliar with "le vocabulaire perfectionné de ces savants docteurs" (152) and speaks hesitantly; the soulmates for whom he hopes will be the same, "pas habitués à s'exprimer" (156). His difficulty in expressing what he feels ("Je le sens très bien, mais je ne sais pas l'exprimer... je n'ai à ma disposition que de pauvres mots complètement usés à force d'avoir servi à tous et à tout" [152]) means that he offers no competition to the writer, no danger of an independent response which would evaluate the work critically (i.e. as an interpreter rather than a passive receptor):

Car enfin, qui suis-je? Qu'ai-je fait? Je n'ai même jamais songé à essayer d'écrire un roman [...] Je ne me rends même pas compte, par exemple, en vous lisant, s'il y a eu des difficultés à surmonter, et de quel ordre [...] Tout me paraît couler de source. Se développer naturellement. (154)

Unable to take a critical stance toward the text, he humbly desires only to "m'en montrer digne" (153), and so gives himself up to this "quelque chose qui me prend doucement et me tient sans me lâcher" (153). If the fact of addressing the text appears to give the initiative in the exchange to the reader by making him active, what he actually says to it shows him renounce the power of the addressor and thus reinforces his passivity.

It seems, then, that a primordial fusion of self and other, an Imaginary relation where both cease to be distinguishable, can even in the intimacy of reading only be approximated in a relationship of domination and submission. The creation

¹⁷ Thus the author shares the belief of her fictional characters, that "la maîtrise d'autrui passe par son asservissement à leur parole" (Rykner 1991:47).

of sameness always involves the (voluntary or imposed) suppression of one party's otherness. Text and reader here only appear to lose their discreteness through the reader's willingness to give in to the text. This perception of the submissive role of the reader will remain constant right up to *Tu ne t'aimes pas* where a text "s'est emparé de nous [...] a tout occupé en nous [...] a fait en nous place nette" (TTP 79). The dialogue around the text remains subject to the same structure of power and aggression that governs the social exchanges represented in Sarraute's novels, with power, for Sarraute, ideally located at the writer's pole of the exchange.

If Sarraute needs to inscribe within the text the writer's authority over it, and the response of the good reader as one of submission, this can be regarded as a consequence of the way the author's controlling presence as enunciator is even more attenuated in the written (and published) text than in speech. Her creation of a model reader simply magnifies the way all address projects the interpretation it desires, and which is never assured due to the alienated nature of linguistic communication. The total anonymity of the real reader, which is the reason the desired interpretation is projected so forcefully by Sarraute, is itself just the limit-case of the way even the familiar other encountered in the face-to-face exchange, indeed even the lover, can never be known fully. As Sarraute creates an identity for this unknown other to conform to, all speakers (though not so emphatically) attempt to reduce the unknowability of their interlocutors by conceptualising them in a personality (which in cases where the other is known is of course defined on the basis of the data he provides).¹⁸

¹⁸ Émile Benveniste comments on how the second person pronoun is used to represent to oneself a person other than oneself (primarily, though not necessarily, one's addressee). This enlarged definition of the sense of "tu" allows one to recognise a certain fictional quality in the "you" I represent, although Benveniste acknowledges this as merely a possible feature rather than a constitutive element of address: "Quand je

The identity Sarraute creates for the reader is, I have said, that of the double. To circumscribe his response further, she also provides a number of *negative* models of readers and their readings. Yet the presence of these is in fact a reminder that the reader really *is* other: if he needs to be seduced into a specular identification with the humanised text, it is because these other, undesirable responses to the text are available. Thus in *Les Fruits d'or*, the fact that readings are uncontrollable because readers are unknowable, forms a constant, menacing backdrop to the presentation of the reader-as-double led by the text-as-subject. Yet the novel's presentation of a progression from inferior (powerful) to superior (submissive) readers, suggests some optimism at this stage that the desired metamorphosis of actual readers from other into same might actually occur.

2. The reader as self and other:

The identification of the ideal reader as the writer's double is of course central to Sarraute's next novel, *Entre la Vie et la mort*. Yet within the novel, the prospect of such a reader emerging from the ranks of the convention-bound reading public, though still desired, seems to be recognised as a fantasy, and the move towards authorial self-sufficiency begins, a move that will ultimately give rise to the internal community of *Tu ne t'aimes pas*. By *Entre la Vie et la mort*, then, faith in the reading public has more or less totally disappeared, yet the fiction can still be

sors de 'moi' pour établir une relation vivante avec un être, je recontre ou je pose nécessairement un 'tu', qui est, hors de moi, la seule 'personne' imaginable" (1966:232; my emphases).

entertained that behind the appearance of conventionality there might hide that ideal reader who could then be "reclaimed" by the writer. In the central section of the novel, the fictional writer and his text are confronted with what seems to be an undesirable supporter, a man who enthuses about the work in the metalanguage of criticism where words are lifeless objects (because not animated by sensation): "Des mots sans lien visible entre eux... ils tombent durs et drus, ils tambourinent contre lui sans pénétrer. De temps à autre il parvient à en attraper quelques-uns au passage: Symbolisme. Surréalisme. Impressionnisme" (EVM 99). Worst of all, this reader's analysis focuses on what he sees as the novel's empty centre: "C'est un silence. C'est une rupture dans le temps... Cette scène dans la salle d'attente déserte d'une gare... C'est un temps mort. Un centre détruit. Tout le livre gravite autour de lui" (99-100). Not only is there no empty waiting room in this novel (thus the bad reader doesn't even read accurately); the very concept of a decentred structure contradicts the writer's view of his novel:¹⁹

Il est impossible qu'ils ne le voient pas. C'est là, surgi du néant [...] Au centre de cela il y a quelque chose d'indestructible. Un noyau qu'il n'est pas possible de désintégrer, vers lequel toutes les particules convergent, autour duquel elles gravitent à une vitesse si énorme qu'elle donne à l'ensemble l'apparence de l'immobilité. (91)²⁰

By failing to see that the centre is full rather than empty, the admiring reader seems to be just another of those whose gaze here too turns the text into an object, destroying all hope of contact: "Leurs regards passent et repassent sur cela

¹⁹ Again, Sarraute clearly gives the writer and not the reader authority over the determination of textual meaning; the reader's role is purely to confirm the truth of what the writer has felt: "Tout ce qu'il lui fallait, c'est qu'ils lui montrent qu'ils sentent comme lui cette présence, que c'est bien là pour eux aussi [...] juste qu'ils confirment cela" (93).

²⁰ This view is implicitly Sarraute's too. Aside from the fact that this discussion takes place in the centre of her novel (the twelfth of its twenty-two sections), the fictional writer's view of his work echoes her own perception of the purpose of writing: "Quand je me suis enfin décidée à écrire un roman, ce ne fut que pour que ces mouvements puissent se développer sur un plus vaste espace et rayonner d'un même centre" ("Forme et contenu du roman", unpublished lecture, p.11; my emphasis).

distraitement sans le voir [...] Ils étalent sur cela une même couche sale d'enduit" (92).

This reader is suddenly redeemed, however, for his response is based on sensation after all: the image of emptiness struck him because of the feeling it produced, not because it suggested that the whole work was a non-referential fabrication.²¹ Far from advertising the postmodern emptiness of the linguistic structure which contains it, the image has an inherent expressive power: "Voyez-vous, ce qui est important, c'est l'impression qui m'est restée. Peu importe le souvenir précis. Seule la sensation compte" (102). The conventional reader reveals himself to be a good reader, as the writer finally looks him in the eye: "Des yeux limpides d'enfant où il n'est pas possible de trouver le moindre soupçon de rage contenue, de désarroi... des yeux paisibles se posent sur les siens" (102). Here the dynamic of domination and submission underlying the perception of the other's gaze as lacking any differentiating quality is not explored, as it was in *Les Fruits d'or* when the dominant point of view was that of a social reader rather than of a Sarrautean writer. Instead what is emphasised is the way being a good reader involves bearing no trace of otherness. The admirer here seems to fulfil that requirement, for in addition to having a clear, unindividuated gaze, he has approached the writer's most recent work through his earlier writings, thus following the writer's own trajectory.²²

²¹ The empty room does in fact exist in the novel, though not in a railway station; that image came from a little-known earlier work by the writer, thus giving added cause for the reader's rehabilitation, and extending the union between writer and reader back into the past.

²² In *L'Usage de la parole*, the authorial voice is similarly gratified to find that the addressed readers remember the phrase "Si tu continues, Armand, ton père va préférer ta soeur" from *Entre la Vie et la mort* (UP 49; EVM 56). Yet as we shall see, by this point the readers are perceived to be so far from the author that their familiarity with Sarraute's earlier work comes as "une vraie surprise" (UP 49), and is not enough to reunite her with them.

Yet if in this case the menace of an "aberrant" reading (specifically a poststructuralist analysis of empty centres) is overcome, the scene also recognises that the identification of the good reader is fraught with danger, for his status as such is never entirely certain. If what starts out as an alienated critical reading can redeem itself in this way, the border between the conventional reader and the ideal reader becomes dangerously permeable, especially given that the latter speaks in the vocabulary of the former. Thus even the good reader, previously celebrated in *Les Fruits d'or*, remains, as a separate individual, susceptible to conventional discourse. Recognising this, *Entre la Vie et la mort* takes the assimilation of the ideal reader-as-double to the writing self even further by creating a model reader who, unlike the good but public reader, is *literally* part of that self: "Une moitié de moi-même se détache de l'autre" (69). The *alter ego* in *Entre la Vie et la mort* seems to be the ideal interlocutor because it is connected with the self prior to language: if language aims to convey a prelinguistic sensation to another, the bond of identity between self and *alter ego* should guarantee the realisation of that aim. It seems to represent the culmination of a progression towards perfect communication, where language, and thus the text, would become redundant once it led the interlocutors back to a common ground prior to it.

This is not what happens, however, for if the figure of the *alter ego* embodies the desire for an ideal reader identical to the authorial subject, it actually ends up illustrating the fact that the reader will always be irreducibly other. In order to be a model for the reader, this self-identical double must read, but in the act of reading it becomes different from the self. The text, at the end, remains necessary in order to call it back again: "Vous mon double, mon témoin... là, penchez-vous

avec moi... ensemble regardons" (174). The text's language becomes paradoxically a sort of line thrown out to hook a reader who has been (and will be again) made other by the very act of reading it, and draw him in to where the author is. The text thus simultaneously establishes the distance of addressor from addressee, and attempts to undo that distance by dissimulating the linguistic nature of what connects them in favour of a metaphorically sensory bond.²³

Before looking at how the double becomes invaded by otherness, we should note that the writer's conception of its initial sameness involves the same kind of domination as took place in *Les Fruits d'or*, thus preventing it from doing what it is ostensibly required to do, namely read independently. So while on the one hand the writer complains that "Vous me donnez ce que j'attends", and pleads "Écartez-vous, oubliez-moi" (70), yet when the double exercises this desired autonomy, it ceases to be condoned as a double and is rejected. If its value for the writer seems to lie precisely in its additional perspective -- "Soyez sûr. Soyez dur. Surtout pas de ménagements. Que vais-je devenir si vous aussi comme moi..." (70-71) -- it is nonetheless refused independence from and equal status with the writer who strictly monitors its input to the text. The writer's desire for the double's autonomy is thus false (the desire for a double and the desire for an autonomous other are indeed contradictory), but it allows Sarraute to link the double to the novel's real readers and imply that the closer these remain to the authorial subject of the text and the more they submit to its control, the truer their reading will be. The double, in fact, is invited to read critically only at an early stage of composition; when the final

²³ The text's language is described as secreted naturally, though the "organism" which secretes it is an image, and so itself already symbolic: "Cette image dense, lourdement chargée [...] palper encore et encore tout autour, appuyer... jusqu'à ce qu'enfin de là des mots commencent à sourdre... Voilà... Des mots suintent en une fine traînée de gouttelettes tremblantes... se déposent sur le papier..." (166).

version is produced (significantly by the writing self alone: "Maintenant laissez-moi. J'ai besoin d'être seul" [72]), its role as reader is simply to approve it, merging with the writer in a joint "nous" or an even more singular "on": "Il semble que cette fois nous ne pouvons pas nous y tromper. C'est là [...] Mais regardons de plus près, examinons mot après mot [...] Voyons... on le prend?" (74). Change to the writer's final version is resisted ("Vite, replacez ce mot où il était" [74]); where surface changes are made, in order to give the "cela" which is at the heart of the text "plus d'abondance, plus de force" (75), a nagging doubt remains that the change might be for the worse. This degradation is conceived as a loss of human presence in the text's language, a dehumanising of its voice, as though it were artificially reproduced (something clearly not associated with writing *per se*): "Ne dirait-on pas par moments que [la voix] est transmise par un haut-parleur ou bien enregistrée sur un disque? N'a-t-elle pas perdu par endroits ses intonations hésitantes, un peu craintives... son léger tremblement?" (75).

For the good of the text, then, the reading double, like the later listener of *Enfance*, must submit to the writer, since he is the expressive source of the text. But in *Entre la Vie et la mort* this doesn't happen, for once the double begins to read, its perspective becomes detached from the text's authorial intentionality. Not surprisingly, in Sarraute's terms this alienation from the act of enunciation means a fall into conventionality and artifice (the double's voice, like that which was already feared to contaminate the text, acquires "des notes métalliques" [169]). By invoking public norms of language against the writer's unique expression, it is deemed to have sold out, joining the social ranks of convention-bound bad readers: "C'est que nous ne sommes plus seuls comme autrefois, vous et moi. Ils sont tous

là [...] j'entends cette rumeur qui monte d'eux et couvre votre voix... La couvre? Ou avec elle se confond?" (169). It has abandoned its earlier criteria for artistic merit, no longer hoping to engage with the text as something alive, but turning it into an object by its gaze and its abstract critical language. The text's creator, who in the service of sensation intentionally infringes stylistic conventions, reproaches the double:

A peine vous détachez-vous de moi -- mon double qui va se placer à bonne distance et observe -- que sous votre regard étrangement tout se transforme... Comme cela paraît, terne... un peu mou... ou par endroits trop dur et clinquant... lâché... raide... contourné bizarrement... mièvre, coquet, ridiculement précieux, éloquent [...] ces termes que vous employez maintenant, que vous avez toujours dédaignés... vous vous en souvenez, deux mots tout bêtes nous suffisaient, à vous et à moi, juste ces deux mots: c'est mort. C'est vivant. (169)

The way that reading turns the double from a projected second self into a stranger who is part of the public domain, seems to acknowledge on one level the way language introduces difference not only between self and other but even within the self, between the self which utters and that which interprets the utterance. Once the self relates through the language of the text to itself as creator of the text, it forgoes any immediate relation to itself. And insofar as the language of the text is merely a subset of the language which constitutes the self's identity, all attempts to relate to oneself will be instances of self-difference. As a subject of language, the self is other even to itself, for knowing itself through the medium of symbols it can no more fuse with itself than with another. By using the double as a model reader, Sarraute paradoxically affirms that in relations conducted through language, the addressee will necessarily be different from the addressor, even when the self is its own addressee. Although the double starts out as an invalid model for the reader, given the reader's otherness to the writer, yet the way the language of the text

comes between even the self as writer and as its own reader in fact illustrates how the real reader cannot but be other to the writer.

Sarraute, however, having shown the double's metamorphosis, avoids its implications. She manages to maintain an assertion of the self's integrity by having the alienated double become an entirely different character; thus the writer can free himself from that part of him which, reading, had become different. Yet even the self which exists prior to the creation of the double²⁴ is subject to the dead language of convention; again, of course, this is attributed to pernicious outside influences which can be rejected, preserving the expressive language of true literature. This mode of almost wilful alienation in language, the act of surrendering to the language of others instead of remaining within one's own authentic idiom, is for Sarraute the only sense in which one can be (literally) a subject of language:

Les mots sont ses souverains. Leur humble sujet se sent trop honoré de leur céder sa maison. Qu'ils soient chez eux, tout est à eux ici, ils sont les seuls maîtres [...] Il est pris dans le dédale de leurs miroirs, emprisonné dans les entrelacs de leur reflets... Il tourne, renvoyé des uns aux autres... (68-69)

As we might expect, the way Sarraute has the writer escape from this conventional language retains all the marks of that subjection to language which is inherent to expression and structurally identical to the kind she condemns. Extracting an authentic utterance from the "dead" conventional text demands the kind of objectifying gaze associated elsewhere in the novel (p.92) with bad reading: "Les revoir... A distance cette fois, il les contemple [...] Son regard patine sur leurs surfaces luisantes" (69). Here the words of the dead text, already objects before

²⁴ and who also reads his own text -- this initial reading and rewriting which is not advertised as such breaks down the distinction between writing and reading which the creation of a double established, and so illustrates Antoine Compagnon's description of their inseparability: "Le travail de l'écriture est une réécriture dès lors qu'il s'agit de convertir des éléments séparés et discontinus en un tout continu et cohérent, de les rassembler, de les comprendre (de les prendre ensemble), c'est-à-dire de les lire" (1979:32).

they are gazed on ("tout lisses, rigides et droits" [69]), are held responsible for the nature of his gaze; yet wherever the responsibility lies, being the subject of such a gaze unifies the self and so makes it into a *moi*. This is doubly illustrated by the text, as the first-person perspective of the writer's "je" takes over and compounds that display of coherence by creating what is an only apparently autonomous copy of itself: "Une moitié de moi-même se détache de l'autre: un témoin. Un juge" (69).

If even the rebellion against "dead" literary discourse turns the writer's self into a *moi*, it is not surprising that the opposition it establishes between inherently expressive language, and conventional writing as the mere rearrangement of already spoken words with no regard for the unnameable "cela", should also prove far from absolute. The writer's restoration of expressive life to his text in fact follows the same procedure as did the previous alienation of that life in conventional language: the translation of the original minimal unit of language which bears the tropism ("des bribes de conversation [...] une intonation, un accent qu'un mouvement rapide traverse" [73]) into other words and images. Indeed, the sense in which the relation of the new terms to the original tropistic utterance is an organic one, is implicitly acknowledged to be purely metaphorical:

N'est-il pas possible pour qu'il se reproduise avec plus de netteté et se développe de créer des conditions plus favorables?... le faire passer ailleurs, dans d'autres images mieux assemblées, d'autres paroles ou intonations, *comme on transplante une pousse sauvage dans un terrain amélioré*, enrichi de terreau, nourri d'engrais, dans un lieu bien clos, une serre où sera maintenue constamment une température appropriée? (73; my emphasis)

If words should not be thought of as "tout lisses, rigides et droits" (69), it is not, as Sarraute would have us believe, because authentic language surges up naturally from within us, but because it is impossible to distinguish the observing self (as subject of language) from the collection of words which make up his

language. Language is in one sense external rather than expressed from within, but to the extent that language also informs the mind to which it is external, the distinction between inside and outside, between the writing subject and writing as an object, breaks down. Thus if the writer rejects the "external" language of the dead text, what he privileges instead of it, language as propelled outward, itself projecting images in turn, and all run through by the same current (EVM 73-74), is conventional from the outset and only claims to be otherwise through the basic conventional mechanism of metaphor. It is not the unmediated expression of sensation but its symbolised representation; though spontaneous, it is still "outside" that sensation. Abandoning the inauthenticity of conventional literary language leads one not to the authentic expression of sensation but to further metaphorical equivalences of this.

The mind's inevitable symbolisation of experience can thus be seen at work in Sarraute's authorial discourse which consequently enacts language's objectification of other and self. Yet Sarraute persists in the belief that her language can overcome this alienation of the self from itself and from the other. This paradoxical effort to abolish distance through the very means which establishes it perhaps accounts for the almost obsessive way Sarraute's works repeatedly return to the same themes in similar fictional situations. The text is an attempt to undo the reader's distance in a merging of perspectives: "Vous mon double, mon témoin... là, penchez-vous avec moi" (174).²⁵ Yet the authorial voice as a subject of language

²⁵ Arnaud Rykner describes this ambition (which he doesn't see as coercive), and implies that Sarraute realises it in *L'Usage de la parole*: "Destinateur et destinataire se retrouvent non plus face à face, mais quasiment côte à côte, pour aborder ensemble les épreuves de la quête [...] Par-delà le sens délivré de l'un à l'autre, domine le lien créé entre l'un et l'autre. Avant ce qui sera dit, vient la nécessité d'établir le rapport avec celui pour qui cela est dit" (1991:12-13). The attitude of *L'Usage de la parole* to the reader will be the subject of the next and final section of this chapter.

can establish communication only within the terms of what language as representation allows. Because language gives form to the ineffable subject, the act of addressing the reader confirms addressor and addressee as separate entities even as it attempts to fuse them into one. And because author and reader are and will remain discrete subjects of language, the attempt by one to create such fusion becomes an attack on the otherness of the interlocutor, an attempt to subjugate him to the addressor. Sarraute's reader can never be drawn away from his social universe because the author as a subject of language lives there too; thus her whole attempt to evict the social is conditioned by language, the code which gives form to social relations. It is because the author-reader dialogue around the text takes place fully in the social sphere that the reader remains able to respond to the text's attempts to disempower him.

Entre la Vie et la mort thus illustrates a double pull in Sarraute's writing: on one hand, there is an attempt to construct an addressee in the addressor's image, in a determined (and aggressive) neutralisation of the other's difference. On the other, the mediation prominent in the author-text-reader dialogue, and inherent to dialogue generally, reasserts the distance between addressor and addressee (between expression and interpretation). When the reader fails to be completely domesticated, and the impossibility of withdrawing his freedom of interpretation is realised, he is both rejected for his determination by convention, yet also solicited anew in the hope that this difference could be eliminated: "Il faut bien le laisser revenir, il ne m'est pas possible de m'en passer [...] Où qu'il se place, près d'eux, loin d'eux, il ne pourra pas ne pas être conquis" (171). Yet unlike *Les Fruits d'or*, this novel doesn't end optimistically as far as the ambition of fusing with the reader is

concerned, even if this reader started out as part of the self. He remains under the influence of the group and their mass hypnosis: "Il est serré contre eux, l'un des leurs, tout pareil à eux [...] je le tire, je me cramponne à lui de toutes mes forces... restez près de moi, restons entre nous, je vous en conjure, oubliez-les..." (172). This pessimism will increase as Sarraute's work continues: when, with *L'Usage de la parole*, the authorial subject comes to address the reader directly, it is not a single soul-mate of the kind envisaged in *Les Fruits d'or* which is anticipated as its audience, but the convention-bound public.²⁶

3. The reader as other and as addressee:

Aside from implying that no hope remains of finding a double of the authorial subject within the public, *L'Usage de la parole* also marks a formal change in Sarraute's approach to the question of reading: rather than representing the text-reader relationship as part of a fictional world, it addresses its readers directly, in an openly dialogical move.²⁷ From this point on, in fact, Sarraute's prose texts will

²⁶ This distance from the addressee of course prefigures the way Sarraute's two most recent works abandon the public altogether in favour of a dialogue with the self (through which they try to counter the freedom of the real reader whose presence, if it is no longer acknowledged, remains a fact). The homogeneity of the readership anticipated in *L'Usage de la parole*, echoing that of the reading public in *Entre la Vie et la mort* ("on est comme galvanisés" [EVM 172]), is recognised by Sheila Bell: "The audience does not manifest individual, potentially contradictory responses; it functions as a collective entity" (1983:56). By contrast, Valerie Minogue's claim that "the plural allows a plurality of response and shifts of stance in the reader" (1983:44) seems doubtful.

²⁷ In taking the narrator of *L'Usage de la parole* to be authorial and the narratees to represent Sarraute's perception of her readers, I follow her own indications. Introducing, in 1981, a set of tape-recorded readings from *Tropismes* and *L'Usage de la parole* (in what is a striking case of the actual authorial voice implanting itself in the text; Sarraute also claims that she alone can speak her texts correctly [Rykner 1991:157]), she comments on the later collection: "Sans le vouloir et tout à fait spontanément, dans ces textes je m'adresse au lecteur parce que j'ai comme l'illusion qu'après tant de temps [...] j'ai l'impression que j'ai tout de même fini par acquérir quelques lecteurs qui me suivent, qui me sont proches, je ne les connais pas mais j'ai cette illusion -- j'en ai besoin pour travailler -- que nous cheminons ensemble". That Sarraute sees these faithful readers as nothing more than an illusion is in fact clearly demonstrated by the way their closeness dissipates once she characterises them as real,

all cultivate the character of "work in progress", of being written as we read them. In *L'Usage de la parole*, the creation of the text is foregrounded in the way questions which spur on the narration are attributed to its readers (e.g. UP 22-23). The same impression of narration and reading being simultaneous is clear in the "aucun mot écrit" assertion of *Enfance* (E 9), as well as in its highly dramatic form, one repeated in the authorial dialogue of *Tu ne t'aimes pas* and which borrows from drama the illusion of happening in our presence.²⁸ Before looking at the kind of relationship *L'Usage de la parole* enacts to a present but distant readership, I wish to discuss briefly the way Sarraute's writing cultivates the illusion of being a currently happening event rather than a representation removed in the reader's experience of it from the moment of composition.

Even before *L'Usage de la parole* introduced this new focus on the writing of the actual text rather than a fictional one, and at the same time on the reception of that text by an addressee ostensibly present to the authorial narrator, Sarraute's writing had always cultivated a sense of immediacy. The action of the earlier novels may take place within a fictional world rather than appearing to unfold in their readers' presence as the later ones do. Yet the way this world subsumes and so dissimulates the act of representation which creates it (by making the act of writing part of the story, as in the early first-person narratives), achieves through opposite means the same apparent simultaneity of event and representation as the inverse

public readers.

²⁸ As Paul Ricoeur has pointed out, the immediacy drama affects merely conceals its real status as endlessly repeatable representation: "La dimension théâtrale consiste en cela: oublier la situation de citation que produit la représentation. Le spectateur croit entendre de vraies personnes. Mais que le rideau retombe, et l'illusion aussitôt s'envole, la pièce entière retourne à son statut de fiction rapportée" (1991:43).

emphasis on the process of composition over the story does later.²⁹ This feigned simultaneity, by concealing the nature of the text as representation, also conceals both the writer's consequent absence from it and the pre-defined nature of the role it offers the reader. While the status of the fictional narrators of *Portrait d'un inconnu* and *Martereau* as would-be writers, may on one level gesture to the act of writing which created them, as first-person narrators who give the novels a source *within* the fiction they conceal the fact that the real source of the text is absent. This use of fictional representatives of the writing self is alluded to in *L'Usage de la parole*, though the absence of the authorial subject is here presented as a conscious choice, due to timidity, rather than as a fundamental inability to be present in one's text. The authorial narrator of "Eh bien quoi, c'est un dingue" (herself necessarily such a textual representative of the writer) describes a fictional character's account of another equally fictional individual terrified by the sight of a crack in a wall and the liquid seeping through it. This obvious allusion to a seminal scene from *Portrait d'un inconnu* (PI 148-52) implicitly acknowledges that the earlier novel's embodied narrator was a stand-in for the real, absent source of the representation, by admitting how on both levels of the fiction in "Eh bien quoi, c'est un dingue", narrators write themselves into the event they narrate by means of an invented representative:

[Il s'est servi] craintivement, pudiquement, de ce pauvre homme qui se lève, parfois même la nuit, pour regarder, pour arrêter, retenir, colmater [...] il l'a poussé devant soi lâchement pour se protéger [...] Et moi, qui ai pris tant de

²⁹ In fact, the represented event begins to merge with the text which represents it already by *Les Fruits d'or*, where the names of fictional and real novel are identical; similarly, *Entre la Vie et la mort* makes the represented event part of the act of writing the text itself, when the novel being written reveals itself to be the one we are reading (EVM 168). Having the fictional novel, and the fiction of writing it, turn out to be identical to the real novel being read, seems to be a kind of auto-erasure of the fiction, the last stage before attention shifts definitively from an invented story to the act of invention itself.

précautions, qui ai cru bon de m'entourer d'une double protection [...]. (UP 117)

Sarraute abandons the first-person narrator in favour of an ever more fragmented narrative perspective after *Martereau*, dissimulating further the status of her work as representation by removing even a fictional representing perspective involved in the event. (When the "je" reappears in *L'Usage de la parole* it will be to enliven with an illusory presence not a represented event but the act of writing itself.) Instead, a narrative dominated by free indirect discourse and the present tense succeeds in virtually effacing the distance in space and time of the narratorial point of view from the events it represents. Free indirect discourse lets a character's experience be represented at a less conscious or reflexive level than would be possible if he were to speak for himself (see Cohn 1978:56), while when used in the present tense it minimises the narrative distance it must inevitably retain from that represented experience. Thus the perspectives of both narrator and character are firstly deprived of distance from the event (the narrator's perspective is located in the present and in the mind of the character, while the character lacks the distance self-expression would imply); secondly, they are harnessed together in such a way that each prevents the other from being identified as the point of view which is representing the event. On the level of the story, this dissimulation of the activity of representation gives the characters' experience of the events an immediacy which lets the reader live them vicariously, in what is often a pleasurable reduction of interpretative distance in favour of minimally reflective, imaginative participation.

Yet considered in terms of Sarraute's attitude to the reading public, and of her view that authentic language is expressive, requiring no active input but simply assent from its addressee, the kind of narrative perspective her texts favour can also

be seen as aiming to minimise the reader's perceived dangerous autonomy regarding the text. Thus a "correct" reading (of the text's expressive intention) might be assured despite the mediation of writing and the public's slavery to convention. The discursive strategies whose effects on the reader are pleasurable insofar as they concern his involvement in the story they tell, nonetheless, by involving him as a vicarious participant in the event rather than as the recipient of an alienated discourse which he is, seem also designed to keep him from interpreting that discourse in his own terms.

The direct address to the readers of *L'Usage de la parole* seems to be another such discursive strategy: if the projected ideal reader repeatedly falls back into the reading public, as in *Entre la Vie et la mort*, thus suggesting that Sarraute now sees these incompetent readers as her actual audience, then the only way to counter the freedom of this plural, distant readership, at least for the duration of the work, is by addressing it directly.³⁰ The text just mentioned, "Eh bien quoi, c'est un dingue", aside from alluding to the public's uncomprehending reaction to *Portrait d'un inconnu* (figured in the reaction of the fictional narrator's interlocutor), clearly demonstrates both a lack of faith in its present readership, and the way directly addressing it attempts to prevent a similarly dismissive judgement of this text:

Et moi, qui ai pris tant de précautions, qui ai cru bon de m'entourer d'une double protection, comment m'empêcher, pendant que je vous raconte cette histoire, de vous imaginer par moments m'observant avec cet étrange regard, ce sourire, et vous disant à vous-mêmes: 'Eh bien quoi, c'est un dingue'.
(117)

³⁰ Though studies of *L'Usage de la parole* comment widely on the way it addresses the reader, they generally don't deal with its implicit criticism of that readership. Thus Arnaud Rykner sees in the work "une intimité réelle [...] entre l'écrivain à l'écoute des mouvements intérieurs du préconscient et le lecteur à l'écoute de l'écrivain" (1991:12). Maurice Nadeau does comment on the way the text aims to overwhelm its readers (whose negative portrayal he too ignores): "Quand la guerrière déploie ses troupes, attaque, nous surprend et pourfend au moment où nous nous y attendions le moins, occupée que nous la croyions à de subtiles manoeuvres, il n'y a plus qu'à rendre les armes" (1980:7).

This is a particularly vivid example of the way direct address reduces the readers' scope of response, for it confronts them with what it takes to be their likely reaction and condemns it in advance. But even aside from this proscriptive element, the very fact of addressing readers who are absent and unidentified at the moment of writing, attempts to reduce their interpretative distance from the authorial utterance by postulating the presence of both parties to each other in the text. The author's voice, fearing to be lost once its utterance is written and open to all kinds of readings, implants itself firmly in the text in a dialogue with readers it posits. In this way, future readers whose engagement with the text will necessarily take place in the absence of its author, are nonetheless confronted with an addressing voice which, as long as they agree to identify with its "vous", is apparently directly present to them.

I have argued that writing simply magnifies an alienation also characteristic of spoken communication. Given that *L'Usage de la parole* focuses on the dynamics of conversation as these are manifested in invented dialogues, it is not surprising to find it sensitive to how, in face-to-face encounters, the power that goes with being an addressor can be exploited to control a distant addressee. "A très bientôt" describes a relationship between two friends where one talks compulsively to the other whose responses are minimal, yet where at the end of their encounters, "celui des deux qui a le plus parlé, à en être épuisé, sent au moment où ils vont se séparer comme une faim inassouvie, comme un manque" (24), and immediately arranges the next meeting. The situation closely resembles the way Sarraute's own texts function, both the way they participate in the necessarily onesided character of all text-reader exchanges and, in Sarraute's particular case, the obsessive way each

work picks up again on the themes of the previous ones, as if to complete what they had left unsaid.³¹ In the case of the two friends, the reason for this uncontrollable "flot de paroles" (22) turns out to be the reaction to a distance which is sensed in the other despite the intimacy of a friendship in which he appears to the speaker to be "un autre moi-même" (27). That this hoped-for identity of the addressee, and its disappointment, is equally a feature of the narratorial address to the readers of *L'Usage de la parole* is shown in "Eh bien quoi, c'est un dingue". There the address of the fictional narrator (who is admitted to be just a protective front for the authorial narrator) rests on a belief in the other's identity with the self (a belief exploded by the retort of the title): "Il est indispensable que celui qui se met à raconter ait la certitude que l'autre qui est là, devant lui, tout prêt à l'écouter [...] que par-delà quelques apparences, quelques détails de peu d'importance l'autre lui ressemble" (110-11).

The fictional situation of "A très bientôt" can thus be seen as a figure of Sarraute's complex attitude to a reader simultaneously desired to be identical and recognised to be other; there, protracted address is unconsciously used to counteract the alterity of an interlocutor who, if he is physically present is mentally absent. The text thus explicitly represents one-sided address like that of its own writing, as involving an attempt to bring the otherness of the interlocutor under the speaker's control by circumscribing it in his discourse. At one point it seems to be aware of this similarity between what it describes and how it itself performs, and to attempt

³¹ For the fictional speaker, "quelque chose n'a pas abouti, quelque chose est resté en suspens" (24). Examples of comparable obsessive repetition in *L'Usage de la parole* alone have already been noted: the leaking wall from *Portrait d'un inconnu*, and the mother's admonition to Armand from *Entre la Vie et la mort* (see p.246 n.22). In the latter case (which we are asked to excuse: "Il faut [...] pardonnez-moi, que j'y revienne [à ces paroles], je dois absolument les reprendre encore une fois" [49]), the lack of means to express the "si grande abondance" of what these words contain, leaves the authorial voice as frustrated as the speaker in "A très bientôt"; he feels "un manque qui peut devenir parfois exaspérant, insupportable" (49).

to undo it. Just after evoking "le volume, la longueur" of this "flot de paroles" which "s'écoule presque toujours dans le même sens" (23), it reverses its own flow by switching its focus to its projected readers: "Mais vous perdez déjà patience, vous vous apprêtez déjà à vous débarrasser de tout cela, à jeter cela à la poubelle, enfermé dans un de ces sacs fabriqués tout exprès: un flot de paroles de 'bavard intarissable', d' 'amoureux éperdu', d' 'inférieur faisant sa cour'" (23). Yet of course even this contribution by the readers is dictated by the narrator and merely creates the illusion that the communication is not all one-way, while in fact intensifying the circumscription of the addressees' otherness by speaking on their behalf. In addition, depicting the readers as capable of offering only reductive clichés reinforces the narrator's right to engage in a monologue. Incapable, according to the text, of seeing what is really going on in the fictional encounter, those who read it must be told the truth rather than being invited to help create it.

The represented speaker ultimately realises the reason for his obsessive monologues. What reveals his perception of the other as a double ("[ce] avec quoi on se fond [...] ce qui en amour comme en amitié s'appelle si bien 'un autre moi-même'" [27]) to be an illusion, is the intervention of a third figure whose relation to the would-be double (he finds him "orgueilleux" [27]) modifies the speaker's view of him. Thus here too, as earlier in *Les Fruits d'or* and later in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, a third figure breaks up a binary relation of self-loss in the other in a way not dissimilar to the Lacanian Oedipus. Moreover, as with Lacan and unlike in the other cases where the conventional values embodied in the intruder destroy an authentic self-other relationship, the third figure here represents truth, the experience of fusion having been an illusion. A second outsider seems to confirm this lesson

in relativity and discredit the whole idea of a binary relation of full mutual knowledge, by claiming an affection for the absent interlocutor which the original speaker knows is not reciprocated; this casts doubt on whether his own affection is returned. Confirmation that it is not comes with the new figure's revelation that in the presence of their shared addressee he too has the same irrepressible urge to speak and the same sense of unfulfillment on parting. The compulsive address is thus revealed to be the effect of the lack of reciprocity both experience in their dialogues with the absent other.

Yet if this third figure destroys the fusion of the first two, the text as a whole nonetheless manages to resist the seemingly inescapable conclusion that unknowability is always an element of self-other relations, despite the illusions we foster that the other is transparent to us. At the last minute, the possibility of an immediate relationship is reasserted in opposition to the alienation which causes such ignorance of the other. In a curious inversion of Lacan's Hegelian conception of human development,³² the relativistic triad itself becomes the source of a new authentic dualism which leads both parties to the truth (for Lacan, of course, the Oedipal triangle always relapses into Imaginary duality too, but this is a refuge from authentic subjectivity rather than its fulfillment):

[Il] voit dans l'autre sa propre image, vers laquelle, tel Narcisse, il se tend... il se voit, oui, c'est lui-même courant, parlant, serrant la main, sollicitant [...] Il crie: Je suis comme vous, exactement comme vous [...] Et aussitôt chez l'autre cet acquiescement, si rapide, sans une hésitation [...] ah enfin tu as vu, tu as trouvé enfin... (30-31)

³² See especially the essay "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir" (Lacan 1966:793-827; also pp.292-93, 837). For a summary of Lacan's debt to Hegel, see Dor (1985:166-73).

The text clings to a hierarchy of relations where the mutual otherness of addressor and addressee in dialogue remains an inferior option. Instead of the vain attempt to "hook" the elusive other through one's discourse, this text promotes the fiction of a preferable mode of communication, distinct from the way language mediates inadequately between the opposite poles of addressor and addressee. The members of the new dualism have both been identified as addressors (the same role Sarraute holds in the text-reader interaction); their fusion thus takes place at the same pole of dialogue and so renders that dialogue superfluous. This is of course a completely unviable model, for even these two only know each other through what they say to each other, and so their perceived sameness is inferred through their words rather than intuited prior to them. But this failure to acknowledge the founding role of language in positing a prelinguistic bond simply replays Sarraute's refusal to recognise the conventional nature of what her own language claims to express, the way the unavoidable alienation of her expressive intention will not only permit but oblige her readers to create actively their own versions of the text's meaning.

Discovering a soulmate this side of dialogue means that, for the subject of "A très bientôt", the effort to seduce the distant other can be abandoned. Yet if Sarraute continues to write for her distant public, it is because in reality there is no such fairy-tale solution to the problem of communication. The final text of *L'Usage de la parole*, "Je ne comprends pas", closes (and so ends the collection) with the recognition that the ideal dialogue it has evoked, where mutual alienation and intimidation give way to open, truthful communication, is a fantasy, "rien d'autre qu'un conte de fées" (150). In the absence of any ideal reading double, Sarraute

must make do with the real readers of *L'Usage de la parole*. How is the threat posed by these readers and their conventional language to be dealt with by the expressive text?

"Ich sterbe" opens the collection, and it can be read as a paradigm of Sarraute's whole philosophy of literature in its claim that the writer's living, expressive language overcomes not only the dead language of the other but even death itself. The other and his language are here literally foreign (developing the earlier image of the outsider's language as "des pièces [...] rapportées d'un pays étranger" [FO 17]): "Ich sterbe" recreates the subtext to the last words of Chekhov, his announcement to his German doctor, in the words of the title, that he was about to die. Relations with this foreign other are, once again, opposed to relations with the intimately known loved one who is part of the self: "Il n'y a pas de 'je meurs' entre nous, il n'y a que 'nous mourons'" (15). Thus death as that which terminates the good dialogue with the loved one, emerges as a concern of Sarraute's well before *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, although here the writer faces his own death rather than that of his loved interlocutor. If death intervenes to abolish the good dialogue with the transparent other, already united with the self in a "nous" before either one speaks, it is inherent from the outset to the dialogue with the foreign other in his foreign language (as Robert Greene comments, "the soul departs when authentic speech leaves" [1983:200]):

Pas nos mots à nous, trop légers, trop mous, ils ne pourront jamais franchir ce qui maintenant entre nous s'ouvre, s'élargit... une béance immense... mais des mots compacts et lourds que n'a jamais parcourus aucune vague de gaieté, de volupté, que n'a jamais fait battre aucun poulx, vaciller aucun souffle [...] Pas nos mots, mais des mots de circonstance solennels et glacés, des mots morts de langue morte. (UP 15-16)

The reason Chekhov chooses the dead language of the foreign (thus absolutely other) doctor is because its otherness illustrates what it should express, namely his impending separation from his wife in the solitary experience of death. By applying this dead language which kills what it talks about, to the experience of his own extinction, he (and ultimately Sarraute) in fact makes it refer: the very lack of an organic relation to a referent which would give it a living pulse makes the language of the other the ideal discourse of death. "La langue de l'autre" (12) is thus "colonised" by the expressive subject in the particular threshold situation of death; he exploits its inability to express in order to speak his own, as it takes him over: "Rassemblant ce qui me reste de forces, je tire ce coup de feu, j'envoie ce signal [...] Ich sterbe... Vous m'entendez? Je suis arrivé tout au bout... Je suis tout au bord... Ici où je suis est le point extrême" (14). That objectification which is the effect of the other's language is given validity by becoming its referent too, in the announcement of the death of the one whom it names and who by speaking this objectification assumes his death: "Avec ces mots bien affilés, avec cette lame d'excellente fabrication, elle ne m'a jamais servi, rien ne l'a émoussée, je devance le moment et moi-même je tranche: Ich sterbe" (16).³³

How does this "colonisation" of the language of the other by the expressive subject, in a dialogue which is not the living exchange of same with same but a signal to one who gazes on the self, "celui qui de là-bas m'observe" (14), relate to

³³ This suggestion that the language of the other can be exploited to express what it metaphorically enacts (objectification being a metaphor for death), seems to make it for Sarraute in this exceptional situation an agent of what Charles Sanders Peirce called *indexical representation*, where a sign signifies something by being a trace of it. When the metaphorical deadliness of conventional discourse (in Peirce's terms it is an *icon* of death) is used to express the subject's actual experience of death, it becomes a product of that death, an *index* of it. It thus takes on the character of expressive language as Sarraute sees it, for such language is the natural (organic) product of bodily sensation and so an index of it. (For a summary of the theory of signs elaborated in Peirce's *Philosophical Writings*, see Scholes 1981:200-08, esp. 204.)

the text's exchange with a public readership which is equally other, and whose presence as addressee is asserted from the first line of "Ich sterbe"? The "vous" addressed by the narrator are as distant from it as the doctor is from Chekhov in the address that narration frames. Despite a continuing attempt to assimilate their point of view to the narrator's in the slide from "vous allez voir" to "ne nous hâtons pas" to the assertion of identical knowledge in "cette humilité que nous lui connaissons" (11-12), the readers of "Ich sterbe" retain their distance throughout. Thus they are expected to see the recreation of the tropism as a mere pastime: "Si certains d'entre vous trouvent ce jeu distrayant, ils peuvent [...] s'amuser à en déceler d'autres" (17-18).

To describe the work of writing the tropism as an amusing game is to speak the language of the public as Chekhov did. Yet this is not a similar abdication of life (in this case the tropism) to his; there is no sense that Sarraute is embracing this remote attitude and its abstract discourse as articulating more accurately than her own expressive idiom a new experience of reality as alienation. In her case, the writer's expressive discourse outlives its use of the other's (projected) idiom rather than succumbing to it and the death it embodies. In fact even Chekhov did not entirely desert the writer's discourse, for his investment of the language of the other with expressive force was so intense that he immortalised even this dead discourse. After three-quarters of a century these words are still on fire, "une petite braise qui noircit, brûle la page blanche" (12), and so transcend not only the death inherent to them but also the distance in time and space which separates them as written from the moment they were uttered.

The difference between Sarraute and Chekhov is that whereas he used the language of the distant addressee to express its own lifelessness, she merely quotes it. In the vocabulary of Sperber and Wilson, Chekhov *uses* the language of the other whereas Sarraute *mentions* it, not only in phrases like "trouv[er] ce jeu distrayant" but also in the way the readers' questions are integrated into the text in "Ich sterbe" and throughout *L'Usage de la parole*.³⁴ By quoting them, Sarraute turns the readers of her work into its characters rather than its addressees (see Ch.6 p.294 n.10). If "Ich sterbe" illustrates how a staged dialogue with the reader not only fails to transcend the limited monologic world of its author, but moreover tries to subordinate the addressee by defining his response, it also shows why Sarraute feels she must exercise such close control over her readers: for her, the alternative to this monologic domination is nothing less than death, the death of the living textual voice at the hands of the reading public and its discourse.

Quotation or mention is of course the mechanism by which verbal irony works. Verbal irony is the irony of utterances which by not meaning what they say (by taking an attitude to their meaning, in Sperber and Wilson's terms), appear to enact the expressive inadequacy of language and to grant their addressee an active role in the establishment of meaning. Yet I have argued that, to the extent that the attitude these utterances take is determinate and stable, what the addressee is called on to do is simply recognise it rather than cooperate in its creation. As we saw in *Les Fruits d'or* and *Entre la Vie et la mort*, the role Sarraute accords her reader is

³⁴ Sarraute also uses what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "hidden dialogue" (1984a:197) -- indications in the speaker's words alone that his interlocutor has responded -- to represent the readers' input without interrupting her authorial discourse: "Mais vous n'aviez voulu m'entendre... il n'est pires sourds... Non, pas vous?" (49). Another even more attenuated (more monologic) form of narrative dialogism Bakhtin describes is hidden polemic, where the other's anticipated responses shape the speaker's utterance in what is just a more blatant version of the ventriloquism a represented dialogue with the reader involves: "Faut-il être à court... cela j'ai quelques bonnes raisons de penser que vous le direz [...] Mais vous vous trompez" (49).

similarly not the active participation in the text's realisation she initially appears to offer, but simple recognition of the text's truth in a passive gesture of affirmation. As verbal irony overcomes the deficiencies of its language, Sarraute's text establishes a monologic truth in spite of a largely (but not entirely) conventional language, and presents it to the reader for his assent. But by *L'Usage de la parole*, the reader's role seems to have been degraded even further, for he becomes the *object* of quotation rather than the addressee solicited through a represented ideal double. Moreover, the tone in which the projected readers are quoted is on occasion openly ironic, as when after prolonged meditation on the implications of the words "Ton père" and "Ta soeur", the narrator claims to agree with the unreceptive readers that the words are innocent:

Non? vous ne voyez rien... vous avez beau répéter: 'Ton père. Ta soeur'... je le répète avec vous... vraiment, ne dirait-on pas que quelque chose... là... 'Ton père. Ta soeur'... Non? rien ne bouge? la paroi est toute lisse, immobile. 'Ton père. Ta soeur'?... vous devez avoir raison... il n'y a rien... rien qui puisse bouger, s'ouvrir, pas de paroi. (62)

Yet of course quoting her readers immediately acknowledges a new reader of that quotation, for the reality of reading exceeds all possible textual representations of it. Ways of reading Sarraute will be the subject of the next and final chapter.

My examination, in this chapter, of the way Sarraute sees the text-reader relationship, bears out the argument of Chapter 4 that the features she ascribes to conventional discourse recur in her own writing as basic elements of linguistic communication. Thus a major referent of her writing, the way social address includes a specific perception of its addressee and so turns that addressee into a

character (which it dominates), is emphatically also a feature of it.³⁵ The power-based social relationships Sarraute condemns are governed by the *regard*, but the author-reader dialogue she strives for differs from these only to the extent that she wants to make the reader a co-subject rather than an object of her *regard*: "Qu'on se donne la peine de [...] *l'observer* avec une certaine attention et on *perçoit* [...] si l'on parvient à le *fixer* assez longtemps... *regardez*" (UP 100-01; my emphasis). Yet elsewhere in *L'Usage de la parole* (as earlier in *Les Fruits d'or*), Sarraute herself unmasks this apparently equal coexistence within a single gaze as the kind of false, social unity that can be achieved in the context of mutual objectification, and that depends on one partner's submission to the other's reductive characterisation:

Mais il peut arriver à l'un d'entre eux ou à tous deux de vouloir demeurer encore un peu dans cette forme où l'autre l'a enfermé et que l'autre continue à modeler, les rayons que son regard, son sourire laissent filtrer la lissent, la caressent [...] Il arrive que se sentant si bien maintenus, soutenus, que se sentant tout à fait confondus, ne faisant qu'un, ils se plaisent à promener autour d'eux un même regard. (90)

If it is in the nature of address to deal with an image of its addressee whose otherness is necessarily beyond the speaker's grasp, a discourse like that of this thesis, which points out the way this takes place in Sarraute, will share the same reductiveness. Insofar as a reader's interpretation of a text is also a response to it, involving him in a dialogue with it as respondent, as well as with his own anticipated readers as addressor, that response to the text's address will enact the same kind of objectification as the text's address to him does (and as his to his anticipated readers will in turn). We saw in *Les Fruits d'or* the way even the address to the text, the only kind of discourse Sarraute allows the reader, is

³⁵ That this domination is integral to all address is indicated by Benveniste when he notes that "'je' est toujours transcendant par rapport à 'tu'", a relation inverted when "tu" becomes "je" in turn (1966:232).

governed by the dynamics of objectification and control. If there the reader turned *himself* rather than the text into an object, defining himself in a way elsewhere condemned by Sarraute ("C'est que moi, pour que je sois détendu [...] [FO 152]), and surrendering to the text, it is because his address was in fact written from the point of view of the (real) text which thus established itself as the dominant party in the exchange with the good reader. If even the emphatically uncritical address to the text cannot escape the process of objectification (in whichever direction), the critic's discourse which speaks not only to the text but about it, will be all the more unable to avoid turning it into a mastered object (as Sarraute is well aware).

This chapter's study of Sarraute's attempt to make her readers submit to the discourse of the text, thus deals with only one facet (the authorial one) of the mutual coercion which the interaction of author and critical reader (the critic being merely a more self-conscious reader), across their respective discourses, sets in motion. It not only fails to examine the other side of the issue but also clearly participates in it (as does the whole reading of Sarraute it fits into in this thesis), insofar as it tries to master the texts it engages with by defining some of their motivations. This perception of dialogue, and specifically of reading, as involving each party's definition of its addressee, shouldn't however be seen as a kind of dual solipsism where each remains condemned to engage only with its image of the other. Firstly, the face-to-face dialogue has a reciprocal dimension, which means that impressions can be modified and misunderstandings rectified (despite the lack of total mutual presence there either). While the dialogue around the text lacks this reciprocal quality, it is still more modulated than considering it in the monolithic terms of a single address and a single response might imply. The writer may be unable to

monitor the text's reception in the act of reading, but the fact that this act is made up of the reader's perception of not one but countless textual addresses, connected to one another if not back to their intentional source, and of his similarly interconnected responses to these, gives rise to a certain scope for modification within each reading. Thus passages are reread in the light of others whose relation to them has a direct bearing on their significance; interpretations are formed and then revised in the light of new information etc. So though the reader always has an image of the text before him as he reads, this image is constantly being modified and reevaluated. The temporal dimension of dialogue, if it makes mutual presence impossible, does offer its own mediated reciprocity insofar as the other's perceived response leads inevitably to the modification of the image held of him, and which in some form or other is indispensable.

Aside from the way it objectifies its addressee, the monologic intentionality of Sarraute's work is, I have argued, also visible in the inability of her recent writing to sustain a fully dialogic relativisation of the authorial discourse. I suggested as an image of that aspiration and its failure, the dialogue in *Enfance* between Natacha and her grandmother, for it betrays the authorial manipulation behind it (and the whole text it figures). In the same way, one can see in the dialogue this thesis set up in Chapter 4 -- that between Sarraute's texts and the work of Jacques Lacan -- evidence of the necessarily monologic point of view in which it originated. If dialogue in general consists of the alternating attempts by each party to persuade the other of the truth of its address, the monologic representation, from a single critical perspective, of such a dialogue between two preexisting discourses, will necessarily be subject to that principle. Thus it will entail the

author's own provisional assent to the truth of each discourse in the dialogue as it speaks. In this way, Lacan's analysis of the development of the psyche in terms of Imaginary and Symbolic phases, was provisionally taken as true in order for this thesis to be able to initiate a dialogue by "speaking" on behalf of Lacanian discourse to Sarraute's writing. The difference between setting up that kind of dialogue and creating a fictional one is that when the discourses exist independently of the text which opposes them, the author is the one who assents provisionally and by turn to the arguments he or she wishes to repeat, rather than creating characters who are all in the service of his or her own beliefs. (This was the case with the "cocottes de papier" scene of *Enfance* which, I argued, because of the way it shows Natacha's total control over the responses of her addressees, represents more graphically than the dialogue with the grandmother the monologism underlying that novel's dialogic form.)

The fact that the discourses of Sarraute and Lacan exist independently of my singular authorial perspective which made them dialogue with each other, makes it possible to take both sides in the dialogue. The initial passive assent to one side of the exchange means that one's subsequent objectifying address to the other is from a point of view that is not one's own, and which can therefore be changed. This thesis has only presented one side of the dialogue, the address, in Lacanian terms, to Sarraute, where Lacan's discourse was taken as true and imposed on hers. It would be quite possible (and also necessary, if the main dialogue being considered in this thesis was that between Sarraute and Lacan, and not that between Sarraute and the reader) to establish a Sarrautean response to Lacan, for example using her texts to question his assumption that determination by language is an unconscious

process. An exchange from that Sarrautean perspective would present as true a more self-aware subject than Lacan's, and would use his writing against itself to underline the truth of that assertion (so making him "assent" to it), perhaps criticising his possession of a knowledge denied to the helpless subject he presents.³⁶ But in both cases one point of view is taken against the other and, just as in actual exchanges the self's awareness that the other is a subject doesn't change the way his address turns him into an object, creating a dialogue between two independent discourses also entails positing in turn each as speaking subject to the other as object. The next and final chapter will look not at how Sarraute could answer Lacan in the unavoidably monologic exchange Chapter 4 set up between them (and which would remain so irrespective of which perspective it spoke through), but at how, in the dialogue which has been the principal subject of this thesis, the reader as a subject can respond to Sarraute.

³⁶ This does not necessarily mean that such an argument would be equally persuasive. In fact, the theoretical construct Lacan possesses, rather than suggesting by its existence a greater degree of human self-knowledge than it argues to be the case, instead illustrates through its unintentional blind spots the same blinkered subjectivity it outlines. A case in point is his failure, like Freud, to question his use of a masculine model of sexuality; both Freud and Lacan let the phallic *moi* prevail in their own texts over the subjectivity they oppose to it as true. Malcolm Bowie has commented on this shared blindness: "[Freud] sees clearly that sexualities are cultural products, and that their ideological supports can be analysed, but the sexuality of the patriarchal male is curiously resistant to investigation. It keeps on returning as the unanalysed grid that allows other sexual dispositions to be sorted and evaluated. Lacan, dissident in so many ways, is steadfastly loyal in this area of enquiry" (1991:157).

CHAPTER 6

SARRAUTE AND THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF READING

Sarraute's attitude to the reader is, as we have seen, highly ambivalent: while the amount of attention he receives in her writing makes clear that his cooperation is considered vital ("il ne m'est pas possible de m'en passer" [EVM 171]), his ideal role in relation to the text is limited to simply recognising and acquiescing in its authority. However, the fact that her novels progressively abandon the representation of such an ideal reader seems to acknowledge at some level the impossibility of an addressee who on the one hand would be other enough for his affirmative response to have value, yet whose total approbation would deny that otherness. At the same time, the fact that Sarraute continues to write, presenting the incapable addressees of *L'Usage de la parole* and the self-sufficient internal dialogues of *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* to her real, unknown readers, suggests that she still hopes for this ideal reader to emerge from the reading public and provide the recognition she desires. I have argued that this hope is doomed to remain unfulfilled, and in this final chapter I would like to focus on the activity of reading Sarraute, not as her work depicts it but in terms of what happens when real readers with their irreducibly other perspectives come face to face with a text.

The act of reading has been theorised in a variety of ways in recent years, and it is in the context of what is generally known as reader-response criticism that I want to discuss what is actually at stake when we read Sarraute. One way to

begin exploring the relevance of theories of reading to her work is by ascertaining where her conception of the ideal reader fits into the spectrum of theoretical readers. I have mentioned the way she makes no distinction between the ideal response to literature and to painting, seeing both as involving unmediated intimacy with the work (Ch.5 p.224 n.9). Thus the description, in *Portrait d'un inconnu*, of the narrator's reaction to a painting he sees in a foreign museum, can be interpreted as another attempt by Sarraute, carried out now as far back as in her second published work, to determine the way she is to be read. The reason I want to take this early description as paradigmatic for a view of reading which has remained remarkably constant throughout her work, is because through its imagery it establishes common ground with a particular tendency in contemporary reader theory, one which while claiming to identify the reader as co-creator of the work, surreptitiously gives the text control over him by regarding his role as already inscribed within it.

Seeing the "portrait d'un inconnu" profoundly affects the way the novel's narrator subsequently represents the world. To the extent that it symbolises the mode of representation whose mastery by the narrator is the novel's story, the portrait is a *mise en abyme* of the novel (with all the potential for irony this implies).³⁴ Yet given that the portrait is represented in terms of the narrator's *response* to it, a response sanctioned by the expressive ability it confers on him, the scene can be read as the kind of seductive *mise en abyme* discussed by Ross Chambers (1984:33-35; see Ch.5 pp.220-21), one which in fact aims to *restrict* the reader's freedom by providing a model for how the novel should be read.

³⁴ For a discussion of how *Portrait d'un inconnu* is explicitly concerned with questions of characterisation and narratorial discourse, see Jefferson (1980:58-67, 119-133).

Predictably, the mode of reading which the scene promotes appears to be active, but is in fact totally determined by the portrait. The painting's ideal "reader" already shares the artist's worldview before he approaches the work, in that *a priori* unity of the poles of artist/writer and viewer/reader that Sarraute would continue to desire for the reception of her own writing. Thus the way he reads and responds to the painting's representation of an individual corresponds to the way he perceives and responds to people in general. What the painting does is teach him how to *represent* what he already feels; the revelatory rightness of its depiction of its subject gives him access to a mode of truthful representation which he develops during the rest of the novel, in his invented narrative of the old man and his daughter.²

What is this mode of representation whose truthfulness the narrator of *Portrait d'un inconnu* must endorse in order to be an ideal reader? Its refusal to name its subject is only one, specifically linguistic, aspect of its representational integrity. It confidently refuses to give in to a temptation already entertained by the narrator when he observed that to give his characters "au moins un nom d'abord pour les identifier [...] serait déjà un premier pas de fait pour les isoler, les arrondir un peu, leur donner un peu de consistance" (PI 66). It rejects the kind of typological portraiture he had previously and unsuccessfully engaged in, in his attempt to articulate the peculiar quality of the father and daughter who obsess him. The reductive, caricatural nature of his description had already been pointed out to him by a friend in terms of just the kind of representation the "portrait d'un

² This is exactly the same role that Sarraute identifies Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as having played in her own formation as a writer: "J'avais observé, étant encore très jeune, que les gens avaient parfois l'impression d'éprouver des sentiments qui leur paraissaient vrais mais qui n'étaient que la copie de sentiments véritables. Une sorte de trompe-l'oeil. Dans *Madame Bovary* j'ai trouvé ce qui confirmait et éclairait mes propres observations" ("Roman et réalité", unpublished lecture first given at the University of Lausanne in 1959, p.9; my emphasis).

inconnu" rejects (he compared the narrator's "Hypersensible-nourrie-de-cliche's" to outdated forms of portraiture of the "Jeune Fille au Perroquet" type [45]).³

The portrait's depiction of its subject is distinguished by a fragmentary, undefined quality, which instead of compensating for the inconsistency of character, simply articulates it. By privileging the "piecemeal" nature of touch over the totalising quality of sight (albeit from within visual art and so with all the contradictions of Sarraute's attempt to capture what precedes language from within language), it seems to reject the concept of unitary identity established, according to Lacan, through the visual perception of others and of one's reflection: "Les lignes de son visage, de son jabot de dentelles, de son pourpoint, de ses mains, semblaient être les contours fragmentaires et incertains que découvrent à tâtons, que palpent les doigts hésitants d'un aveugle" (80). The raggedness of the old-fashioned costume figures the abandonment of classical realist representation, along with the perception of identity it promoted. Hence the narrator's sense of recognition: for him too, the human subjects who surround him are ragged entities, "ces lambeaux informes, ces ombres tremblantes, ces spectres, ces goules, ces larves qui me narguent et après lesquels je cours" (66). Despite, or rather because of its physical dissolution, the portrait expresses an intense humanity: "Ses yeux [...] paraissaient avoir tiré à eux et concentré en eux toute l'intensité, la vie qui manquaient à ses traits encore informes et disloqués [...] L'appel qu'ils lançaient, pathétique, insistant, faisait sentir d'une manière étrange et rendait tragique son silence" (80).

³ This friend is "le vieux frère, l'alter" (PI 43) and as such is a clear forerunner of the double in *Entre la Vie et la mort*. He too functions as a critical reader by suggesting layers of complexity in the father and daughter which the narrator had failed to recognise. But, as with the later double, his intervention, however valuable, doesn't change the fact that writing is an inherently solitary occupation: "Je savais que je ferais mieux de rentrer chez moi, me terrer dans mon coin, examiner tout seul, sans la montrer à personne, ma découverte, faire encore un effort, pousser plus loin, tout seul" (48).

The portrait's incomplete, fragmentary state thus concentrates the humanity of its subject in what *is* represented, namely the eyes. These express an intense appeal to rescue the "inconnu" from the crisis of representation which has led to his remaining trapped in this (albeit disintegrating) conventional form like "ces êtres enchantés dans le corps desquels un charme retient captifs les princes et les princesses des contes de fées" (80). The viewer's response is to this appeal, and as such is not primarily aesthetic but emotional -- it is not specifically to the *representation* of the unknown man but to the way the *represented* figure addresses him.⁴ The appeal, moreover, allows for only one kind of answer, and so once the viewer perceives it, he is deprived of all independence in his relation to the work: "J'avais beau, comme je fais toujours, chercher de toutes mes forces à me retenir pour rester en lieu sûr, du bon côté, je sentais comme il lançait vers moi, avec un douloureux effort, de la nuit où il se débattait, son appel ardent et obstiné" (81). Response to art thus depends on hearing its appeal and, more importantly, is determined by it:

Il me semblait, tandis que je restais là devant lui, perdu, fondu en lui, que cette note hésitante et grêle, cette réponse timide qu'il avait fait sourdre de moi, pénétrait en lui, résonnait en lui, il la recueillait, il la renvoyait, fortifiée, grossie par lui comme par un amplificateur, elle montait de moi, de lui, s'élevait de plus en plus fort, un chant gonflé d'espoir qui me soulevait, m'emportait. (81)

The song may appear to arise from both of them together, but in fact it is called up by the painting and strengthened by it; the spectator simply offers a timid affirmation of the work's address, and is then overwhelmed by the force with which the work amplifies his response. The gaps in the fragmentary text thus have a double

⁴ The fact that the viewer responds to a human appeal in the work, engaging with it on the level not of its representational technique but of the individual whose portrait is the work of art, anticipates the humanisation of the artwork in *Les Fruits d'or*.

function: they not only intensify the way what *is* represented expresses a living subject's appeal to the reader to respond to it; they also allow the reluctantly but still predominantly representational text to absorb and magnify that (predetermined) response.

The idea of the fragmentary text as including the reader but thereby controlling him, immediately brings to mind Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading which, while it claims to show how the reader completes the text, fails to evacuate the notion of textual control. Before examining how Sarraute's view of reading relates to the main issues raised by reader-based literary theory, we should consider why the Sarrautean text, with all its gaps, nonetheless resists any independent input by the reader, beyond the affirmative response of recognition. (The fact that this distinction between responding and adding something new is unsustainable, is of course what makes the desired fusion both unattainable and constantly sought anew. The way difference invariably reappears in the relationship of text and reader is, as I shall show, equally evident in theories of reading which claim to eliminate it.)

If Sarraute can claim that the portrait's viewer provides the impossible minimal "réponse timide" of simple affirmation, it is because he is held to be from the outset entirely in agreement with what the incomplete portrait expresses; this total identity of perspectives means that he will not fill its gaps with heterogeneous material from his own experience. The reason the reader of the fragmentary text must not import extraneous information into the spaces between the representational fragments is because these gaps are *themselves* representational: they correspond to the artist's reading of the real world as itself lacking solid definition. Moreover, neither in the world nor *a fortiori* in the text are these gaps places of emptiness:

they are filled, but with a matter which resists conventional representation (and so they appear empty to the conventional gaze). This amorphous reality can only be conveyed by the true artist who finds within the lexis of representation (be it linguistic or visual) tools adequate to the task. The narrator of *Portrait d'un inconnu* perceives the hidden reality beneath the painting's fragmentary surface (a depth which heightens the investment of sensation in that residually conventional surface) just as he perceives it in real life, and just as he will learn, through his encounter with the painting, to represent it in turn. If he seeks in those around him "avec un acharnement maniaque la fente, la petite fissure, ce point fragile comme la fontanelle des petits enfants", it is to find in this gap not an empty space awaiting his free invention but "quelque chose, comme une pulsation à peine perceptible [...] une matière étrange, anonyme comme la lymphe, comme le sang, une matière fade et fluide qui coule entre mes mains, qui se répand" (66-67). It is because the reader of the painting personifies its own perspective on reality that Sarraute can afford to suggest that his response completes it, whereas in fact all he does is confirm what it already contains, the deeper reality it expresses through the gaps in its fragmented surface.

Thus an illusion of incompleteness masking a fully determinate reality characterises the artist's perception of the world, his representation of that perception, and the reception of his artistic representation by a reader who simply endorses its identification of a deeper unformulated truth underlying the fragmentary surface of reality. This ideal reader who provides recognition without addition is, I have said, an impossible dream. In the following discussion of theories of reading I shall look first at those theories which argue for the kind of ideal reading Sarraute

desires, and see how they too fail to overcome its impossibility. The second section will focus on the opposite pole of reader-response criticism, where reading is considered as precisely the kind of convention-bound, public activity Sarraute abhors and tries to deny with her ideal reader. This second view has limitations too, however, and these will be discussed in the final section, in the context of the special importance those aspects of reading which it fails to consider take on when we read Sarraute. On the basis of this analysis of theories of reading, the most valuable approach to reading Sarraute is, I shall suggest, one which recognises the shared determination of reader *and* text by conventional constraints on the production of meaning, and which as such paradoxically manages to be faithful to her text without being determined by it. This view of the text-reader relationship suggests that the nature of the alienation which constitutes that exchange, and which, as anticipated and countered by Sarraute has been central to this thesis, may need to be reevaluated.

1. The assenting reader in theory:

In his theory of reading, Wolfgang Iser seems, like Sarraute, to assert that the artwork requires the response of an independent outsider to complete its "indeterminacies" if it is to live. Yet just as the portrait overwhelmed its essentially passive viewer who was unable to "me retenir sur la pente où je me sentais entraîné"

(PI 81), Iser too, as has been widely observed,⁵ repeatedly collapses the otherness of the reader's perspective into a structural element of the text which appears to solicit it. This tendency is illustrated by his term "implied reader", which also provides the title of his first book-length study of reading to appear in English (1974). Like Sarraute's portrait, the Iserian text appeals to the reader through its "blanks" which he is required to fill in. But here too the reader is denied the right to introduce extraneous material: "The structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader *on terms set by the text* [...] The blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives" (1978:169; my emphasis). In addition, Iser, like Sarraute, strongly suggests that the blanks are not even places of pure emptiness, but paradoxically already contain in an unformulated way the truth the reader should intuit through them. While they are not filled with a material reality in the way the breaks in the surface of reality and of its representation were for Sarraute's narrator, they are still supported by an underlying textual structure, the formulated text's "unformulated double" (226). This structure regulates the connections between segments without articulating them, and so determines the intended imaginary object they outline (196-97). In fact, Iser ultimately equates the blank with this unseen structure: more than just "the empty space between segments", it is itself "the unformulated framework of these interacting segments [which] enables the reader to produce a determinate relationship between them" (198). Just as the appeal by Sarraute's incomplete painting was for recognition of

⁵ See especially Stanley Fish (1981): "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser", a review of *The Act of Reading* (Iser 1978); also Iser's response "Talk Like Whales" (1981). Other discussions of Iser's theory can be found in Ray (1977 *passim*), Holub (1984:82-106), Freund (1987:134-51).

its unformulated truth by one who would share its perspective on reality, so the blanks in the Iserian text invite no new perspective but fill themselves in, directing as well as inducing "the reader's constitutive activity" (202).

In this way, although Iser claims that the reader (here of *Tom Jones*) "is bound to insert his own ideas into the process of communication", it is clear that he also sees these ideas as produced by the text before being returned to it in "a constant 'feedback' of 'information' already received" (67). The reader's response has its source in the text, just as the Sarrautean "note timide [...] hésitante et grêle" was produced by the work which then reabsorbed it: "Cette réponse timide qu'il avait fait sourdre de moi, pénétrait en lui etc." (PI 81). Thus in Iser's own words, the reader's "affective" role (as opposed to the text's "verbal" one) in the act of reading, is simply "the fulfillment of that which has been *prestructured* by the language of the text" (1978:21; my emphasis).

What is interesting about the affinity between Sarraute and Iser is that if they both end up on the same side, their aims initially seem opposed, for whereas Sarraute clearly tries to neutralise the reader's difference, Iser in fact wants to assert the importance of what the reader brings to the text. Yet his attempt to establish for the reader a constructive role in creating the work (he claims that the text-reader interaction is governed by a "mixture of determinacy and indeterminacy" [24], and that the reader's acts of comprehension, "though set in motion by the text, defy total control by the text itself" [108]), relapses again and again into a theory of reading as the obedient adherence to a set of textual instructions. Ultimately, the constructive activity of Iser's reader is directed towards the same brand of fusion Sarraute desires and -- at least in her earlier fiction -- represents (although always

as an identity prior to reading, not one produced by it): the Iserian reader is enabled "gradually to take over the author's unfamiliar view of the world *on the terms laid down by the author*" (97; my emphasis).

If Iser ends up subscribing to the same ideal of reading that Sarraute desires (with the difference that for him it is the *reality* of reading), it is because his project to include the reader's activity in any definition of literature is shadowed by the same awareness her fiction displays of the potential threat the reader's independence poses to authorial intention. For Iser too, it is because the reader is other that the text must be given authority over him: "Although the reader must participate in the assembly of meaning by realizing the structure inherent in the text, it must not be forgotten that he stands outside the text. His position must therefore be manipulated by the text if his viewpoint is to be properly guided" (152). Like Sarraute, Iser is aware that the text-reader dialogue is marked by mutual alienation, and he too sees this as an exacerbation of the nature of all communication. He takes his view of dialogue as inherently alienated from R.D. Laing, who points out how each partner in dialogue is unable to experience the way the other experiences him.⁶

In this light, Iser's constant slide from the reader to the text's "prestructuring" of how it should be read seems to be an attempt, in the language of theory, to limit the possibilities of interpretation it originally seemed to be opening up, in exactly the same way as Sarraute's fictional equation of ideal reader and authorial *alter ego*

⁶ "Your experience of me is invisible to me and my experience of you is invisible to you. I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man" (R.D. Laing: *The Politics of Experience*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.16; cited in Iser 1978:165). See also R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson, A.R. Lee, *Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research* (New York, 1966), for a discussion of how this inaccessibility of the other's perspective leads us to imagine his view of us and to act accordingly: "I may not actually be able to see myself as others see me, but I am constantly supposing them to be seeing me in particular ways, and I am constantly acting in the light of the actual or supposed attitudes, opinions, needs, and so on the other has in respect of me" (p.4; cited in Iser 1978:165). This is precisely the predicament of Sarraute's characters.

is. Formulating the text's meaning, for Iser, "draws the reader into the text but also away from his own habitual disposition" (218). The text-reader dialogue thus differs from spoken dialogue in that it overcomes the difficulties of communication not through transforming the projections of *both* parties, but through the sole transformation of the reader: "As the blank gives rise to the reader's projections, but the text itself cannot change, it follows that a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections" (167). It is, in addition, a permanent transformation: the text doesn't simply suspend the reader's disposition for the duration of his reading, but actually alters his consciousness permanently. In reading, "past experiences become marginal and [the reader] is able to react spontaneously; consequently, his spontaneity -- evoked and formulated by the text -- penetrates into consciousness" (158). Thus the text creates in its reader "a new and real consciousness [...] Each text constitutes its own reader" (157). It is hardly surprising that the main strategy Iser indicates whereby fictional works can "fix" their readers' position (a strategy which suggests, against his theory, that the act of reading is not in itself enough to dissipate the reader's dangerous otherness), is that privileged by Sarraute: the use of a fictitious reader to which the real reader must adapt, "if the meaning he assembles is to be conditioned by the text and not by his own disposition" (153).

Iser's perception of the way the text acts on the reader prevents him from even entertaining the possibility that the reader might transform the text (by skipping certain parts and rereading others, by reading against the intended order, by reading literally instead of figuratively or *vice versa*, by interpreting ambiguous language in

ways not intended by the author etc.).⁷ This immutability of the text, and its simultaneous ability to transform the reader, in fact contradicts Iser's assertion that the text-reader relationship is not marked by the dualism of subject and object. He claims that in the act of reading:

Text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the 'division' takes place within the reader himself. In thinking the thoughts of another, his own individuality temporarily recedes into the background, since it is supplanted by these alien thoughts, which now become the theme on which his attention is focussed. (1974:293; cp. 1978:155)⁸

But the reader's passivity and his transformation by the text suggest that Iser's theory merely reverses these positions, making the reader into an object acted on by the text as subject. The paradox whereby theories of reading which argue the absence of such a dualism (whether by claiming that texts create their readers or that readers create the texts they read) are nonetheless unable to do without it, is of great importance to any discussion of reading. In the closing section of this chapter I shall attempt to explain why this dualism is indispensable and what implications it has for the way we read Sarraute. Now, though, I would like to look briefly at the source of Iser's view of reading as suspending the subject-object dualism (a view

⁷ This raises a point made by Stanley Fish in his critique of *The Act of Reading*, namely that even the "determinate" text, that which the reader must engage with, only exists as such by means of an act of interpretation. That is, if (as Iser argues in his rejoinder to Fish) "the words of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies" (1981:83), these distinctions are only perceived as a result of a reader's interpretation. For Fish, "the distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate [...] will not hold [...] There is no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies everything" (1981:6-7). I shall discuss this position more closely in the next section.

⁸ In *The Act of Reading*, Iser also explains how "as text and reader [...] merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" (1978:9-10). Ironically, he illustrates this fact with Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet", to which, by seeing it as giving an account of meaning as effect, he in fact attributes an objective meaning. By reading the text as a statement of his own theory, Iser himself commits the sin of "explaining" literature, although for him "explanations [...] dull the effect, for they relate the given text to a given frame of reference, thus flattening out the new reality brought into being by the fictional text" (10).

of course also central to Sarraute's conception of reading), the work of his fellow-phenomenologist Georges Poulet.

Poulet differs from Iser in the openness (and enthusiasm) with which he defines the text-reader interaction as the possession of the reader by the ideas presented in the text, which invade his consciousness. Iser certainly emphasises this difference when he claims to give the reader's conscious "orientations" a more active role in the reading process than Poulet does (Iser 1978:155). While the activity of Iser's reader is questionable, given that he "leave[s] behind that which has hitherto made him what he is" and "forget[s] [him]self" (156), Poulet takes the reader's passivity to a theoretical extreme. He openly deprives him of any constitutive role, and celebrates his total submission to the power of a text personified as a consciousness greater than the words which comprise it:

I am someone who happens to have as objects of his own thought, thoughts which are part of a book I am reading, and which are therefore the cogitations of another [...] Since every thought must have a subject to think it, this *thought* which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a *subject* which is alien to me [...] As soon as something is presented as *thought*, there has to be a thinking subject with whom, at least for the time being, I identify, forgetting myself, alienated from myself [...] Now it is important to note that this possession of myself by another takes place not only on the level of objective thought, that is with regard to images, sensations, ideas which reading affords me, but also on the level of my very subjectivity. (1980:44-45)

Poulet's view of reading is even more emphatically close to that dreamed of by Sarraute than was Iser's, not only in terms of his humanisation of the text as a dominant consciousness, but also because this conscious text seems to communicate with the reading consciousness on a level where what is involved is identity itself. He asserts that "the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of

the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside" (42). These words could be a gloss on the reader's apostrophe to the text at the end of *Les Fruits d'or*: "Nous sommes si proches maintenant, vous êtes tellement une partie de moi, qu'il me semble que si vous cessiez d'exister, ce serait comme une part de moi-même qui deviendrait du tissu mort" (FO 157). Poulet also shares the humility of Sarraute's ideal reader ("Car enfin, qui suis-je? Qu'ai-je fait?" [FO 154]) when he marvels that the book being read, humanised into "the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter", is open and welcoming (Poulet 1980:42). The textual consciousness "lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels". The reader's humility means that, as with Sarraute, reading for Poulet is an exercise in self-surrender: "As soon as I replace my direct perception of reality by the words of a book, I deliver myself, bound hand and foot, to the omnipotence of fiction [...] I become the prey of language. There is no escaping this takeover" (43). And here too, the submission of the reader to the text, his transformation into the double of its consciousness, has overtones of violence: the work, "not satisfied [...] with defining the content of my consciousness, takes hold of it, appropriates it, and makes of it that *I* which, from one end of my reading to the other, presides over the unfolding of the work, of the single work which I am reading" (47; cp. TTP 79).

There is, however, a prescriptive quality to Poulet's discourse, which seems to acknowledge the possibility that this submissive response might not be guaranteed as an inevitable element of reading. Like Sarraute and Iser, Poulet is not just describing what happens when we read; he is establishing a programme for how we

should read: "When I read as I *ought* -- that is without mental reservation, without any desire to preserve my independence of judgment, and with the total commitment required of any reader -- my comprehension becomes intuitive and any feeling proposed to me is immediately assumed by me" (45; my emphasis).

Poulet's anthropomorphic view of the text's "subjective principle" (46) as a consciousness to which the reader's mind is required to play host in a suspension of its own life, is complemented by a highly metaphorical evocation of the work as a living human body:

Such is the characteristic condition of every work which I summon back into existence by placing my own consciousness at its disposal [...] So long as it is animated by this vital inbreathing inspired by the act of reading, a work of literature becomes at the expense of the reader whose own life it suspends a sort of human being. (47)

While the similarity to Sarraute's ideal text-reader relationship is again striking here, in terms both of the text's personification and of its disempowerment of the reader in the kind of human relationship of domination and submission her novels overtly condemn, there is one significant point of difference. In Sarraute's view, the living text, while it relies on readers to give it a public forum, is not entirely dependent on them for its existence in the way Poulet's text is. Even if forgotten, the Sarrautean artwork is an organic being which will remain alive independent of readers. Thus the reader of 'Les Fruits d'Or' can ask himself "ce que vous deviendrez plus tard, sans moi... où vous allez aborder? où échouer?" (FO 157), and can reassure himself by thinking of those books which "longtemps repoussés de partout, reviennent tout à coup, après bien des années, s'installer aux tables des cafés, se pavaner dans les salons" (158). For Sarraute, the true artwork is already alive before the reader comes to it, and so it lives on after its reading. By contrast, the inauthentic text,

composed of literary commonplaces rather than surging out from within the author, is, as we saw in *Entre la Vie et la mort*, dead even when it is being read. If for Poulet the text only breathes when the reader breathes life into it, for Sarraute the reader merely provides recognition of the text which breathes independently of him, using him as a mirror not only to provide the reflection of its authorial subject but also to testify to, though not produce, its life: "Vous mon double, mon témoin... là, penchez-vous avec moi... ensemble regardons... est-ce que cela se dégage, se dépose... comme sur les miroirs qu'on approche de la bouche des mourants... une fine buée?" (EVM 174). It is because Sarraute sees the text as receiving life from its author rather than from the reader who is present as a more or less trustworthy witness of its expressive power (the less trustworthy the more he identifies with the reading public), that the act of reading could become ever more marginalised in her recent work.

Whichever side the metaphorical life-giving power is situated on for Poulet and Sarraute, its presence in their conceptions of the text-reader relationship leads to a marked de-emphasising of the work of linguistic interpretation involved in reading. I showed in Chapters 4 and 5 the way Sarraute's metaphors of the body as source of literary language seek to present the linguistic relationship formed through reading as a merging of selves prior to language. Poulet too isolates the textual subject from the language which constitutes it, though for him it transcends language rather than returning prior to it; it is pure mind rather than pure body:

When reading a literary work there is a moment when it seems to me that the subject *present* in this work disengages itself from all that surrounds it, and stands alone [...] All subjective activity present in a literary work is not entirely explained by its relationship with forms and objects within the work. There is in the work a mental activity profoundly engaged in objective forms; and there is, at another level, forsaking all forms, a subject which

reveals itself to itself (and to me) in its transcendence relative to all which is reflected in it. At this point, no object can any longer express it; no structure can any longer define it; it is exposed in its ineffability and in its fundamental indeterminacy. (48-49)

This perception of the humanised text leads him to recommend to critics an approach which, incredibly, ignores its objective linguistic form: "It seems then that criticism, in order to accompany the mind in this effort of detachment from itself, needs to annihilate, or at least momentarily to forget, the objective elements of the work, and to elevate itself to the apprehension of a subjectivity without objectivity" (49).

The view of the textual subject as either pure mind or pure body, and relating on one or other level to a passively conforming reader,⁹ thus involves ignoring the materiality of language which gives the text (and its subject) objective existence. Yet Poulet himself acknowledges that what gives the reader access to the text, or rather gives the text access to the reader's mind, is the fact that both share the same language. Moreover, he seems to recognise at one point that the reader's language is not just an instrument which he can employ to decipher the text's linguistic objectivity, but a constitutive element of his consciousness:

As soon as I replace my direct perception of reality by the words of a book, I deliver myself, bound hand and foot, to the omnipotence of fiction [...] Language surrounds me with its unreality [...] *This interior universe constituted by language does not seem radically opposed to the me who thinks it.* Doubtless what I glimpse through the words are mental forms not divested of an appearance of objectivity. But *they do not seem to be of another nature than my mind which thinks them* [...] In short, since *everything has become part of my mind thanks to the intervention of language*, the opposition between the subject and its objects has been considerably attenuated. (43; Poulet's underlining, my italics)

⁹ For Poulet, "the consciousness inherent in the work is active and potent [...] I myself, although conscious of whatever it may be conscious of, play a much more humble role content to record passively all that is going on in me" (47).

The sense of oneness with the subjective principle of the text is thus a linguistic unity, an area of overlap between the symbolic lexicon of the reader and that of the text. Reader and text meet in the language they share. Poulet doesn't follow up the consequences of the intimacy he identifies between consciousness and words, specifically its suggestion that the mind functions in terms of language. This would invalidate his assertion that the textual subject transcends the linguistic form of the text, for he would have to recognise that both the author's act of creation and the reader's perception of the text's subjectivity are governed by their language. Poulet sees the mind's translation of words into "mental objects" (43) as moving beyond language. Yet if it is the prior presence of language in the reader's mind which permits these objects to enter it in the first place, this language will remain the filter through which everything -- even the transcendent textual subject which "forsak[es] all forms" (48) -- is understood. Poulet's "transcendence of mind", like Sarraute's sensory and physical truth, is a product of the shared language of text and reader, and so it is hard to see how it could ever be perceived by critics as a "subjectivity without objectivity" (49). The rest of this chapter will argue that the linguistic nature of the text-reader relationship is what causes it to appear as a dualism even to its participants. In this context it is interesting that in the passage just quoted, Poulet himself acknowledges that the subject-object opposition is not actually dissolved but just "considerably attenuated" by this linguistic relationship.

The problems that the linguistic nature of text-reader relations raises for Poulet's (and by extension Sarraute's) conception of reading, are illustrated at a different level of the act of literary communication, in the difficulties surrounding

the notion of the narratee, a concept developed by Gerald Prince and Mary Ann Piwowarczyk. The narratee is the implied recipient of the narrator's discourse; it differs from the reader addressed by the text to the same degree that the narrator differs from the author. Leaving aside the differences between narratee and addressed reader (which will clearly be reduced to the degree that the narrator's voice approaches that of the author), it is obvious that they have in common the status of being the addressees of a linguistic communication, and so are assumed to share the same mental apparatus necessary to understand it.¹⁰ William Ray, reviewing the work of Prince (1973), Piwowarczyk (1976), and Iser (1974), sums up the very minimum or "degree-zero" requirement for the narratee. It is an addressee who, while knowing the narrator's language and the conventions of storytelling, being able to reason, and possessing a perfect memory, yet "lacks any identity or particularizing characteristics", "has no knowledge of social conventions, moral systems or values" and "no temporal extension -- no past, present or future, no existence outside of the text" (1977:20; see Prince 1973:180-82). As an addressee who lacks all personal identity and all extratextual existence, it has a lot in common with Poulet's reader who places his consciousness at the disposal of the work and whose own life is suspended by it (Poulet 1980:47).¹¹

¹⁰ For William Ray, the reader is the text's ultimate narratee, the one it doesn't thematise by overtly acknowledging its existence. If it does -- as in *L'Usage de la parole* -- the narratee is turned into a character: once "particularizing determinative references to the narratee are introduced into the narration, a radical reformulation occurs: from recipient of the message, the narratee becomes its content. And his ground shifts from his function within the narrative act as apprehending receiver, to a location within the structure of the message content itself. From co-subject, he falls to the status of object" (Ray 1977:23). In this event, the narratee-turned-character's function as addressee is taken over by a new "meta-narratee" who, as long as it remains unthematized, holds the position of the reader. While a theoretical difference subsists between them, "this distinction blurs within the confines of critical praxis" (25), for the meta-narratee's reading "remains perfectly congruent with that of the reader" (24).

¹¹ It is equally close to Sarraute's ideal reader, especially as described by Françoise Dupuy-Sullivan. She sees the final, good reader of *Les Fruits d'or* as embodying a "retrait momentané dans la lecture d'un système temporel, linguistique et social" (Dupuy-Sullivan 1990:45). Despite the obvious contradiction of an experience of language taking place outside the linguistic system, she seems to accept this as a possible, though transitory, state of reading: "L'erreur serait [...] de croire en une

Yet as Ray points out, the concept of the degree-zero narratee is riven by internal contradictions; these same contradictions will also apply to the concept of a reader who, like it, is given only as much conscious existence as will enable him to assent passively to the truth of the text. The problem with Prince's degree-zero narratee is that some of the aspects specifically denied it (namely temporal extension and a sense of causality) are inherent to its main quality, mastery of the language of the text. "For beyond the mere possession of a static nominative instrument, language confers and implies the ability to conceptualize, make abstractions, differentiate between entities, and assign causes (names) to perceived effects" (Ray 1977:21). These basic abilities in turn ground the individuation of the narratee as a concrete personality, and so prevent its suspension of all differentiating features in the service of the textual subject. It is only by ignoring the way possessing (or in a more poststructuralist perspective, being possessed by) language is inseparable from the constitution of identity, that narratee theory can see narration as progressively investing a narratee who understands everything but knows nothing, with the same knowledge as the narrator (and thus as creating a double of the addressing voice, just like that desired by Sarraute). The inadequacy of this model of narrator-narratee relations results from a view of communication as the simple transmission of a coded message from sender to receiver, with coding and decoding regarded as exactly symmetrical. It is a view which fails to take into account the particular linguistic apparatus into which the addressee receives the text, and the way this complicates the whole process.

possibilité quelconque de permanence de ce moment de lecture".

Ray considers Iser's theory of the implied reader as offering "a more post-lapsarian paradigm" (31) for the reception of a textual message than does Prince's narratee and the code-based view of communication on which it depends. This is of course because the notion of a *reader* deals with the text as written, and so acknowledges that mediate quality of linguistic communication which writing emphasises; the narratee, by contrast, as an embodiment of listening, represents a conception of language founded on spoken discourse and the illusion of mutual presence it promotes. The fact that Iser's implied reader "finds its basis in the conventions of literary production and consumption", which "accept as a given the radical separation between producer and consumer [...] imposed by the text" (Ray 1977:26), locates it within a mode of communication whose structural alienation openly enacts something Iser (via R.D. Laing) sees as inherent to dialogue as such.

Accepting that the text's "consumption" takes place in the absence of its "producer" means a new emphasis on the role the reader's personal experiences play in his reception of the text. Iser acknowledges that the reader's prior knowledge of the world is vital to the function of the novel (the genre on which his theory concentrates and which is written specifically to be read); this function is "to uncover a new dimension of human existence, [and] this can only present itself to the conscious mind of the reader against a background made recognizable by allusions and references which will thus provide a sufficient amount of familiarity" (Iser 1974:182; cited in Ray 1977:28). For this reason, Ray sees Iser's theory as showing how the reader makes the text's language relate to his world, in an

"imperative resubordination of all epistemology -- and ultimately language -- to the self" (Ray 1977:31).¹²

Thus if the narratee is like a blank page onto which the text can write itself, Iser's implied reader rewrites the text he reads in terms of the text of his own life. Yet for Ray, neither perspective -- neither the originally innocent and unindividuated narratee who acquires by the end of the narration a command of the narrated content "complete and congruent with the narrator's", nor the implied reader who "concretiz[es] the text into a statement on his own cognition and appropriat[es] its knowledge in a gesture of self-discovery" (31) -- gives the whole story of the reader's response to the text. Even if the "postlapsarian" implied reader takes into account the implications of the fact that readers have language (those implications being that they also have a specific social and cultural experience which constitutes their identity), it is still inadequate as a model of linguistic understanding. Language, Ray argues, both refers *and* creates, so that as well as evoking the personal knowledge to which the reader refers it, it also aims to give him new knowledge: "Considered as a linguistic structure, the same narrative unit [...] indexes simultaneously prior knowledge on the part of the addressee *and* innocent ignorance" (31). This "bivalency" (32) of language, as both referential and creative, means that conceptualisations of reading as either the total appropriation of the text by the reader or that of the reader by the text which posits him, ignore a large part of what is really going on by focusing on only one aspect of the text's language.

¹² Ray clearly doesn't take into account the degree to which, as I have argued, Iser still sees the reader's construction of the text and relation of it to his own life, as constituted and controlled by that text. If the reader's "persistent referentialization of the new objectivities" helps assure "his self-discovery in the proclaimed intent of the text" and "denies the narration its right to constitute a world unrelated to his" (31), the relationship he insists on between those worlds is still, as far as Iser is concerned, constructed on the text's terms.

The rest of this chapter will deal with the problems associated with identifying either the text or the reader as sole repository of literary meaning, problems that, I shall argue, derive from the attempt to define one independently of the other and of the language from which they both derive their identity while also being united by it.¹³ To see the text as either transmitting a determinate content to a reader it creates, or as being entirely "naturalised" by its reader, is to be blind to what Ray calls "that excess of language which [those views] do not comprehend" (31). Yet I shall also suggest, in line with my discussion of dialogue so far (specifically but not solely that of text and reader), that this instinct to see either text or reader as an autonomous entity in spite of the imbrication of each in the other and in the language which constitutes them, may be an unavoidable moment in representations of the reading process. Once either one is claimed to exist "in itself", to see it then as creating the other rather than encountering it in the language which creates both of them, is to see dialogue from the point of view of one or other interlocutor alone. It is thus to manifest the monological limits of consciousness, limits which the modified concept of dialogue my reading of Sarraute has helped to formulate, can -- however problematically -- overcome.

Thus representations of reading which argue for textual determinacy or indeterminacy, for language as creative or referential, for interpretative authority as wielded by either text or reader, subscribe to one or other version of this monologism where the other is an object one creates rather than a subject one encounters. This perception of reading as a non-dialogue, and the way, I would

¹³ David Shepherd makes a similar point, though in a different theoretical context from Ray's, when he argues in his discussion of Bakhtin's attitude to the question of reading, that "the dialogic act of reading is disruptive of the seemingly fixed positions of text and reader; these positions cannot come through the dialogic encounter unchanged because they do not preexist it" (Shepherd 1989:99).

argue, it can be transcended by an awareness of the relative position of all subjects within language, is obviously relevant both to Sarraute's representation of reading and to any reader's engagement with her work and discussion of that dialogue. Before dealing with the way reading as a dialogue transcends these limited views of textual or readerly omnipotence, I wish to look more closely at the second school, that which gives the reader interpretative authority over an entirely indeterminate text, and whose approach to literature is clearly condemned by Sarraute. In *Les Fruits d'or*, the view that "une oeuvre d'art n'est jamais une valeur sûre" (FO 118) betrays the integrity of the work by sanctioning a host of mutually contradictory readings: "Clair. Sombre. Perçant. Confiant. Souriant. Humain. Impitoyable. Sec. Moite. Glacé. Brûlant [...] Les Fruits d'Or, c'est tout cela" (FO 88). If Sarraute's ideal reader, silent before the text or with just enough language to articulate his submission to its truth, finds a clear theoretical echo in that area of reader-response criticism which privileges the text as source of meaning, her "bad", conventional reader has much in common with the opposite tendency in theories of reading. This tendency is most often associated not (as Ray sees it) with Iser whose reader appropriates only what the text allows him to, but with Stanley Fish and his theory of "interpretive [sic] communities".

2. Theories of the conventional reader:

For Sarraute, once the reader asserts his independence from the writer, and no longer roots his interpretation of the text in authorial intention, he becomes

condemned to read through a filter of convention. For Stanley Fish, this filter of convention is not an avoidable evil but is integral to the act of reading; the strategies of interpretation which make up our linguistic understanding shape our perception of the text from the start, denying the possibility of access to the expressive truth of the text. I argued in relation to *Entre la Vie et la mort* that Sarraute in fact comes close to acknowledging that the way language is used in our environment inevitably influences how we read. Once the double of that novel was asked to read the text of its *alter ego*, it lost its unity with it and its ability to empathise with the sentiments its writing expressed, becoming instead totally dependent on the conventions of literary language for the terms of its interpretation. Insofar as this development illustrates both a desire to make the reader into a second self and the way the activity of reading makes this desire unrealisable, it seems reluctantly to anticipate Ray's criticism of the concept of the narratee-as-double. Neither the narratee, nor Sarraute's or Poulet's ideal reader, can be provided with language and yet be deprived of particularising social and cultural features, for these are embedded in the individual's language and so govern his interpretative abilities.

Fish's collection of essays *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) charts the development of his thinking about reading from an initial, rather Iserian standpoint where the emphasis on reading was really on the way texts dictate how they are to be read, to the refusal to accord any authority whatsoever to the text. I shall focus here on the final phase of this development, Fish's "escape from the text/reader dichotomy in the monistic concept of 'interpretive communities' [...] the always already given systems and institutions of interpretive authority that engender both readers and texts" (Freund 1987:91). However, the extent to which he does in fact

abandon the dualistic approach of his earlier work will remain an issue. Fish himself later criticised his early position (articulated in the 1970 essay "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics"), seeing it as "equivocating between a reference to the action of the text *on* a reader and the actions performed *by* a reader as he negotiates (and, in some sense, actualizes) the text" (1980:3). This equivocation allowed him "to retain the text as a stable entity at the same time that I was dislodging it as the privileged container of meaning". The residual subordination of reader to text accounts for the echoes of the depersonalisation of Poulet's reader or Prince's narratee in Fish's early attempt to become an informed reader, an attempt which involved "suppressing, insofar as that is possible [...] what is personal and idiosyncratic and 1970ish in my response" (49).

Fish's solution to the way his early position persisted in attributing control of the reading experience to the text, is to claim that the formal features of the text which structure its reading are themselves imposed on it by the reader's perceptual powers. These features are *read into* the texts rather than found in them: "Rather than intention and its formal realization producing interpretation (the 'normal' picture), interpretation creates intention and its formal realization by creating the conditions in which it becomes possible to pick them out" (163). He illustrates this view by explaining how, in a previous critical reading of *Lycidas*:

I 'saw' what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned around and attributed what I had 'seen' to a text and an intention. What my principles direct me to 'see' are readers performing acts; the points at which I find (or to be more precise, declare) those acts to have been performed become (by a sleight of hand) demarcations *in* the text; those demarcations are then available for the designation 'formal features', and as formal features they can be (illegitimately) assigned the responsibility for producing the interpretation which in fact produced them. (163)

Thus for Fish, "the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself" (167). There is no such thing as pure perception: "Interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading [...] They are the shape of reading [...] They give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them" (168).

In the end, however, it is not even the reader himself who is responsible for the meanings he infers. Instead, the particular community of linguistic subjects to which we belong establishes the principles by which we interpret texts: "Meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of a reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (322). Just as for Lacan it is only from within the Symbolic that we think we perceive the Real, in Fish's view of reading, what we perceive as a "brute fact" (e.g. a line as a unit, with a clear ending) is in fact "a convention" (166), determined by our interpretive community.

Yet Fish's interpretive communities are not just another articulation of a widely-held poststructuralist notion of understanding as mediated through the general symbolic apparatus which speakers of a language automatically share. Where he goes beyond this notion is by giving these communities a localised, specific status. It is not just the fact of speaking a language which determines one's interpretative activity, but also being a member of a specific community which holds certain community assumptions (for example about what counts as literature). If these communities are more narrowly defined, they determine the individual just as much as the Lacanian Symbolic does: the strategies which proceed from "the interpretive

community of which [one] is a member [...] at once enable and limit the operations of [one's] consciousness" (14).

Fish seems to be aware of the gross limitations which this argument places on the idea of consciousness, for he is ultimately obliged to give his institutionalised readers some possibility of moving from one community to another, and of understanding not only, as he repeatedly argues, what is permitted by their own interpretative strategies, but also what other communities permit. Disagreement exists, and since, on Fish's definition, it cannot take place within a single interpretive community, it must result from a collision between different communities. Yet the fact that these disagreements "can be debated in a principled way" (15) implies that some common denominator must exist between the different communities, and thus that there is for Fish a more fundamental but unacknowledged level of understanding than the community-specific interpretative strategies which, he claims, "enable and limit" conscious processes. If understanding takes place only when words are "read or heard within the same system of intelligibility from which they issue" (316), the fact that we can understand the interpretations with which we disagree must mean that we share with our opponents a "system of intelligibility" not reducible to our separate, internally consensual, interpretive communities and their strategies, and on the basis of which these are constructed.¹⁴

¹⁴ Robert Scholes describes as "truly astonishing" Fish's conclusion that he has explained not only why disagreements exist but why they can be debated "in a principled way": "This conclusion is astonishing because principled debate is precisely what Fish's theory cannot describe [...] If every different interpretation is the product of a different community, making different assumptions and perceiving a different text, how could one possibly debate or settle such differences?" (Scholes 1985:155-56).

One of the mechanisms by which, according to Fish, we can come to see things from the perspective of an interpretive community other than our own, and so increase our understanding, is particularly enlightening in this respect. Analogy, he suggests, can establish "a new and wider basis for agreement" between opposing communities (315). Thus a student whose teacher misunderstands her question "Is there a text in this class?" as referring to the existence of a course syllabus rather than to the objective validity of a basic literary concept, can make her sense known by "find[ing] a category of [the teacher's] own understanding which might serve as an analogue to the understanding he does not yet share" (315). But if understanding can be expanded through establishing resemblances in this way, it seems that it is a function not of social beliefs but of more basic symbolic operations (similarity, according to Roman Jakobson, is one of the two basic semantic lines along which discourse is developed, contiguity being the other [Jakobson 1956:76]). The porous nature of Fish's interpretive communities suggests that these are only arbitrary divisions of the totality of the activity of interpretation, and depend on a wider notion of community within which shared symbolic operations like the identification of similarities make communication possible (and that includes the communication with texts). It seems that a basic ability to interpret, which means possessing a shared lexicon and the ability to relate different symbolic structures within that to one another, precedes and grounds the particular kind of interpretation practised by any individual. Fish in fact acknowledges this when he says that though "interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but *learned*", they are made possible by "the ability to interpret [which] is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human" (1980:172; my emphasis).

How does this dilution of the notion of discrete interpretive communities into a generalised activity of interpretation affect relations between readers and texts? For Fish, the fact that interpretation (whether general or community-specific) is basic to consciousness means that the subject-object dualism where the reader faces an independent object (the text), misrepresents the reality of reading:

The opposition between objectivity and subjectivity is a false one because neither exists in the pure form that would give the opposition its point [...] We do *not* have free-standing readers in a relationship of perceptual adequacy or inadequacy to an equally free-standing text. Rather, we have readers whose consciousnesses are constituted by a set of conventional notions which when put into operation constitute in turn a conventional, and conventionally seen, object. (332)

Because the reader creates the text he reads from within "the communal or conventional categories of thought that enable [the self's] operations (of thinking, seeing, reading)" (335), the meaning he confers on it is neither objective nor subjective: it is not objective, because it is the product of a point of view; yet it is not subjective either, because that point of view is socially or institutionally constructed. However, the Fishian reader invariably *posits* the text as an object, in a move which recalls Sarraute's representation of the way public relations to texts or others are characterised by objectification (this was of course also seen to be an unintended feature of her representation of the ideal relationship to the other or to a text). Where Fish differs from Sarraute is in his refusal to attribute any activity to the "real" text as other in this relationship.

Yet the way Fish's discrete interpretive communities rest on a general interpretative activity which unites speakers of a language and so makes communication between communities possible, in fact restores the possibility of some degree of communication within reading too. This becomes clear when we

consider that the communication made possible across interpretive communities is between humans who, insofar as they are conscious, are *textual* beings, for they are constantly producing interpretations (the interpretative act is "performed at so deep a level that it is indistinguishable from consciousness itself" [272]). Taken together, these two points -- the fact that individuals appear both to one another and to themselves as texts, and the fact that they are able to communicate beyond each one's imposition on the other of what his interpretative strategies allow him to see - - suggest that the engagement with the subjects who address us in the texts we "literally" read (rather than reading "textual humans" face to face), should also allow some input from them. Within the terms of Fish's own theory, then, the possibility of some kind of exchange between the reader and the literary text returns. It takes place not, as Sarraute would have it, through a humanisation of the text, but through our awareness of the textuality of humans and the fact that while this complicates dialogue, it doesn't preclude it.

If reading is seen in terms of the kind of process by which one establishes common ground with another individual, through "principled debate" with the textual interpretation of the world he embodies, then an ideal Sarrautean fusion of a reader with a text would involve the total coincidence of the interpretative strategies used by each to interpret reality. This is exactly what is described in the portrait scene of *Portrait d'un inconnu* (where, as in "A très bientôt", the fusion depends on the symbolic structure it desires to precede). Though such complete identity of two different interpretative perspectives is impossible, it can be assumed that areas of overlap exist. In Fish's theory this is what gives rise to an interpretive community; in the case of reading, one example would be the likelihood that a

reader's perception of lines of poetry as units of meaning which have endings (a perception seen by Fish in "Interpreting the *Variorum*" as imposing a form on the text [1980:165-66]), is also shared by many poets and so *is* inscribed in the poem in a way not dealt with by his theory.

The point of this is not to claim that reading as a dialogue must be a matter of consensus and can take place only within one of Fish's specialised interpretive communities where agreement is a foregone conclusion. It is simply to demonstrate that ultimately both reader and text are constituted (with points of overlap but also of irreducible difference) within the same macrocosmic "interpretive community". This community is formed by the fact that conscious beings perceive reality, including themselves, in terms of symbols, and articulate what they perceive in their variously individualised forms of a shared language which, as William Ray points out, exceeds the (Fishian) reader's referentialisation of its message as much as that message's determination of its addressee. The problems which beset all dialogue and which have been one of the main subjects of this thesis remain, even if they are articulated not in terms of absolute barriers between different interpretive communities, but in terms of the different positions which can be taken up within a shared community of subjects of language.

One of these problems is the fact that, as Fish points out, readers (like speakers) impose an identity on the text they confront. But Fish doesn't allow for the way texts can resist this imposed image and even lead to its correction, giving rise to a form of two-way communication on shared linguistic ground. Thus the reader may be persuaded beyond his initial interpretation, in a reading which, with its revisionary dimension, fits the description, in the last chapter, of dialogue in

general and reading in particular, as constantly hampered by, yet proceeding despite, the way each partner constantly deals with his projected image of the other rather than with the other in his reality. The Fishian reader who decides that Milton's *Lycidas* is a pastoral and reads it accordingly, certainly imposes an image on the text he confronts. He can impose the same image on other texts, for example deciding that George Eliot's *Adam Bede* is also a pastoral in the style of Milton, and reading it as such (see Fish 1980:168-69). But texts can resist the identities decided for them by the Fishian reader, and so lead him to revise them. That this is the case is clear from the many texts which would not lend themselves to being defined as pastorals and which through their resistance to such definitions would change the reader's way of reading them. The to-ing and fro-ing between text and reader which, I argued in the last chapter (pp.271-72), keeps the act of reading from being a purely solipsistic engagement by each party with its image of the other, is ignored by Fish's theory.¹⁵

If both reader and text are located within the same Symbolic community, the fact that the objectivity of the text is the reader's construction rather than a reality independent of him loses its monistic implications. The subject-object dualism doesn't really collapse into an all-creating subjectivity, because while the text as object is only the creation of the reader's interpretative (thus linguistic) activity, the same can be said for his own identity as a subject, for it is equally constructed in terms of the language he possesses (or which possesses him). If the reader is

¹⁵ Elizabeth Freund notes how "Fish's subject, imprisoned in communal norms of interpretation and coerced by their authority, has no means of engaging with the more recalcitrant features of texts, with their rhetoricity, with the infinite regress of figuration, with doubt, uncertainty, or irony, with the strangeness and 'otherness' of poetry or language. He can only appropriate them blindly as the already available terms for naturalizing meaning" (Freund 1987:110). Robert Scholes too criticises Fish's failure to consider "the extent to which a text may be said to guide or offer resistance to the things one makes of it, whether we call these products poems, works, or interpretations" (1985:152).

incapable of gaining access to the "real" text as a discrete object, he is also incapable of gaining access to his own "real" self other than through the same filter of interpretative strategies through which he relates to the text. So if the real object disappears from the reader-text encounter, to be replaced by what interpretative conventions allow the reader to construe as the object of his reading, so does the reading subject in his true selfhood, similarly replaced by what those same interpretative conventions make of him. Interpretation is the source not only of "texts, facts, authors and intentions" (Fish 1980:16), but also of the reading subject who creates these, for, as Fish himself is aware (and as Sarraute too knows but refuses to accept), "the self is constituted, no less than the texts it constitutes in turn, by conventional ways of thinking" (11). Both lose their integrity, absorbed into the set of interpretative possibilities which produces them, and both are simultaneously constructed again from within that.¹⁶

The fact that the reader's interpretative activity defines himself as much as the text, undermines Fish's vision of an all-powerful reader imposing identical interpretative grids on every text he reads, and allows us to see some exchange as taking place between them. This exchange is not, admittedly, between "real" entities, but between entities which possess the symbolic integrity of products of interpretation. The language of the text, and which the reader shares, reaffirms, as

¹⁶ The idea that the reading self as well as the text is an interpretation, is argued, via Charles Sanders Pierce, by Walter Benn Michaels (1980:185-200). Michaels recalls Pierce's famous claim that we can only know the self as an inference or thought, and that as all our thoughts are signs, this means that we can only know the self as a sign. Thus for Peirce (so Michaels), the contemporary claim by champions of a "subjective paradigm" of reading (notably David Bleich) that our minds are "more accessible to us than anything else" (199), would be unacceptable. Instead, "our minds are accessible to us in exactly the same way that everything else is. The self, like the world, is a text", not only an interpreter but an interpretation. Where Pierce's/Michael's view of the self as located in a community of interpretation or system of signs differs from that of Fish is in the reciprocity this is held to create in the text-reader relationship: "The rhetoric of the community of interpretation emphasizes the role readers play in constituting texts, while the rhetoric of the self as sign in a system of signs emphasizes the role texts play in constituting consciousness" (199).

he reads it, his own status as subject as much as it does that of the textual subject to which he attributes it (in Ray's terms, it creates its addressee as well as being given a referent by him). It thus restores a dualism which is no less perceptible for being conventional. So while it may be impossible to make an absolute distinction between the text and its realisation in the reader's mind, practical distinctions will be made all the time. The nature of reading makes these unavoidable: as an experience of language it entails the reaffirmation of the integrity of each consciousness taking part, that articulated in the text and that of the reader who, attributing the language he reads to an enunciating subject, will define his own subjectivity as receptor of the address in relation to it. The language of the text, insofar as it conceptualises and defines as well as running through all those who possess it, will reinforce the reader's sense of his own identity as an autonomous subject, distinct from the enunciating voice of the text (which becomes the object of his attention).

This distinction between the participants in the reading process is taken to an extreme in writing like Sarraute's which constantly refers to the roles of writer and reader as separate even while trying to unite them; but it is an effect of all language, even at the most basic level of pronouns (which also create to some extent those to whom they refer; see Ch.5 pp.243-44 n.18). The more self-conscious the conscious activity in the experience of the text becomes, either as the text's presentation of itself as something to be read (as in the readings of 'Les Fruits d'Or' in *Les Fruits d'or*), or as the reader's reflection on his own activity as he reads (a self-consciousness that culminates in theories of reading), the more explicit the self-definition by each partner will be. Yet, as we saw Sarraute's works illustrate but

not acknowledge, the symptoms of self-consciousness merely magnify properties inherent to consciousness, without being qualitatively different from them.

3. Reading and the recreation of identity:

It seems then that reading, because it takes place in a language which unifies and distinguishes those who participate in it as source and as recipient of the message, will always give rise to a dualism where a falsely coherent textual other is established and opposed to an equally illusory reading self. It is thus impossible in linguistic practice to see the act of reading in the monistic terms in which Fish proclaims it. If the constant recreation of subject and object in reading¹⁷ seems in one sense to be a loss, for the engagement with the text as an object is founded on an illusion, it is almost certainly a more substantial gain. For even if the perceived text is an effect of the possibilities of interpretation that construct us too (also illusorily) as readers, the fact that we and it are equally constructed means that we can engage with it as an other and so obtain some response from it, some resistance to our way of looking at the world. Seeing the text as constructed not by us but by what constructs us too, enables a practical distinction to be made between what are nonetheless the products of a single discursive universe, a distinction which allows for some reciprocal transformation within that universe, and beyond the definition by each of the other which is an indisputable feature of dialogue.

¹⁷ This recreation recalls Lacan's description of everyday dialogue as an interaction not of true selves whose linguistically structured unconscious would make present the whole Symbolic order, but of the artificial constructs of *moi* and *moi autre* (Lacan 1978:286; see Ch.1 p.39 n.26).

The theorisation of reading, I have said, simply makes more explicit the constant separation of text and reader provided for by the linguistic nature of the act of reading. Jonathan Culler (1982) points out the constant relapse into dualism on the level of studies of reading,¹⁸ but he attributes it specifically to the attempt to talk *about* the experience of reading texts, and to the fact that this attempt invariably contains an element of narration. Yet he does see this narrative element in turn as resulting from the fact that the experience of reading is itself problematic, for "‘experience’ always has this divided, duplicitous character: it has always already occurred and yet is still to be produced -- an indispensable point of reference, yet never simply there" (1982:63). The gap which causes problems for accounts of the reading process is thus not between an experience of reading and the act of talking about it; it is *within* the notion of an experience of reading which those accounts posit as singular: "To read is to operate with the hypothesis of a reader, and there is always a gap or division within reading" (67; cp. 82). Analyses of reading, Culler argues, resolve these internal divisions by incorporating them into a dualistic narrative. Thus in terms of my argument so far we can say that while the narrative element in accounts of reading is the mode in which the text-reader dualism is articulated (a text acts on a reader or *vice versa*), this dualism is an effect of the way readers, in the very *act* of reading, conform to an image or "hypothesis of a reader"

¹⁸ His sensitivity to this phenomenon may be due to having participated in it himself in an earlier essay, "Literary Competence" (1975:113-30). There, while claiming that the self is constituted by interpersonal conventions and thus that a poem "has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated" (116), he nonetheless evokes an autonomous self capable of becoming aware of his own guiding assumptions and so of acceding "painfully or joyfully [...] to an expansion of self" (130). Jane Tompkins explicitly compares his hesitation here "between a structuralist rejection of self as an organizing principle and a liberal humanism that defines moral and intellectual growth in terms of self-awareness and self-development" (1980a:xviii) to the way Fish's presentation, in "Interpreting the Variorum", of his own growth as a critic, implies an idea of the self as independent and responsible, in direct opposition to his theoretical view of that self as the product of public interpretative conventions (xxiii).

(and so show self-definition to be an effect of conscious, and not just self-conscious reading). Furthermore, this construction, in reading, of an image of one's role as a reader, is based for Culler too on the nature of identity in general as something one constructs rather than experiences unproblematically. In this context he points out how "reading as a woman" involves the creation of the feminine identity it calls on:

For a woman to read as a woman is not to repeat an identity or an experience that is given but to play a role she constructs with reference to her identity as a woman, which is also a construct, so that the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman. The noncoincidence reveals an interval, a division within woman or within any reading subject and the "experience" of that subject. (64)

I would simply add that what grounds this construction of an identity in the first place is the conceptualising, defining nature of the language which constitutes us; this is why reading, as an encounter with the language of the text, stimulates the reaffirmation of one's particular reader-identity.

The elementary level at which language defines its users seems to me to invalidate at some point a distinction Culler makes between this dualism as informing accounts of specific readings, and what he sees as the monism of abstract theoretical writing (about the act of reading in general). Theoretical discourse too operates in terms of a language which individuates its users -- its own source and addressee, as well as those implied by any experience of language it posits. The way abstract theory, though it may *assert* a monistic view of the reading experience, cannot do without the concepts of individuated readers and texts which I see the linguistic nature of that experience as making unavoidable, is nicely illustrated by Stanley Fish (a prime example of theoretical monism for Culler). Fish's language lets his theoretical claims down in an especially striking way in a remark he makes

when he points out a previous instance of such linguistic dualism in his own work. That occurred when he described *Coriolanus* as "a play about speech-acts", and so contradicted his theoretical belief in the inaccessibility of the text as such, independently of its appearance in terms of some interpretative system. But even as he indicates and condemns this past involuntary relapse into binary thinking, he is unable to avoid reestablishing the play and its reader as separate concepts: "It is with speech-act theory in mind that *I approached the play* in the first place" (Fish 1980:200; my emphasis). However much he may problematise the text-reader opposition, it cannot be entirely evacuated from his language, or by extension from the theory formed out of that language.

Indeed, it is not only the tenacity of dualistic thinking about reading that Fish's writing illustrates. His presentation of his theory is also a prime example of the narrativity such dualism, on Culler's account, gives rise to. The "narrativisation" of the reading process is taken to an extreme of self-consciousness in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, for Fish so organises this collection of essays and comments on those essays that through a reading of his own writings he can tell the story of his development as a reader of other works. The collection narrates one reader's engagements with his own texts (themselves accounts of engagements with others), and thereby tells the story of his evolution from a formalist view of reading to the dissolution of text and reader into interpretive communities. As Elizabeth Freund notes, the book's "intensely self-conscious rhetorical disposition [...] invests the collection as a whole with the dramatic air and shape of a reader's *Bildungsroman*" (1987:105).

To conclude, we should look briefly at the implications which these hypotheses on the nature of reading and the kind of relationship it institutes between readers and texts, have for the activity of reading Sarraute. How does the practice of reading as it emerges from this presentation of some of the insights and limitations of reader-response criticism, relate to the ideal of reading as aspired to and finally abandoned by Sarraute? More importantly, what response does it allow readers of her work to the submissive role her valorisation of different modes of reading attempts to impose on them?

Given the textual constitution of the reader as well as of the work he can thus engage with, we can say that the fusion of reader and text aspired to by Sarraute (as by Poulet) does in fact exist, but it is located within language rather than prior to it. When Sarraute suggests that the failure to achieve the kind of prelinguistic fusion she desires is the fault of readers who fall back on generally linguistic and specifically literary conventions on the basis of which they analyse the text, we can both acknowledge the validity of this perception of reading as proceeding according to established conventions, and also apply her identification of those conventions to the text itself. In this way, we subsume both parties into a larger symbolic body. Yet the nature of this symbolic body in which text and reader have their being, the way, as a set of signs and concepts, it gives the illusion of coherence and self-identity to everything it names, means that the language of the text, beyond being a meeting-place, is also a place where the illusory integrity of text and reader is constantly reestablished. Thinking about reading, and specifically about reading work like Sarraute's where the text-reader dialogue is a constant theme, should then

include an awareness of both the inevitability and the conceptual instability of each party's assertion of its distinctness from the other in that act.

Both *Enfance* and *Tu ne t'aimes pas* illustrated the way language, if it makes absolute distinctions between self and other impossible, is also the site of the subject's constant self-redefinition: in both texts, the "centrifugal" movement towards the dis-integration of the authorial subject was abandoned in favour of a centripetal consolidation of the self. This assertion of the self's integrity is also more generally evident in the self-conscious (and thus doubly self-defining) nature of Sarraute's writing. Constantly aware of its status as a text to be read,¹⁹ it inevitably renders impossible the fusion to which it aspires in the very act of appealing for it to a reader whose sense of his own individuality it simultaneously affirms. Yet Sarraute refuses to acknowledge this aspect of her language: through her ever more emphatic representation of the reader as prey to convention, she gives the problem of textual communication a fictional setting which identifies the failure to achieve the merging of reader and text as due solely to misreading.

If Sarraute's fictional representations of reading dissimulate the way the fictional texts being read must participate in that linguistic self-definition which makes fusion with the reader impossible and which she attributes only to bad readers, the language of her own representing text cannot conceal its subjection to the rules of symbolisation. We have seen how Sarraute's authorial discourse,

¹⁹ This self-consciousness articulates a "theoretical" dimension of her writing aside from its straightforwardly "fictional" quality (Jean-Yves Tadié notes the interaction of fiction and criticism in both Sarraute's essays and her novels: "L'Ère du soupçon a déjà le style des Fruits d'or, Les Fruits d'or sont aussi un ouvrage de critique littéraire" [Tadié 1984:59]). This dual character again undermines Culler's distinction between theory and story, in particular his claim that theory (unlike narrative) articulates a monistic view of reading. One reason for the impossibility of making a clear distinction between theory and narrative is that the temporality to which the latter gives concrete form in the shape of a story is constructed on the basis of the temporality of all discourse and not just that which is specifically narrative. Thus "theoretical" language will be no more able than the language of fiction to overcome the conceptual separation of the reader and text it names.

despite its sensitivity to the conventional nature of language, asserts its own truth-claim by anchoring itself in the body. Yet this claim to "viscerality", read in the light of her representation of inauthentic discourse, shows itself to be governed by the same dependency on the metonymic and metaphoric identification and elaboration of signs (here to establish the body which guarantees truth) that she condemns in the language of others. To read Sarraute's representing discourse in the light of the discourses it represents is a move her novels actually encourage, for right from *Portrait d'un inconnu* the act of writing the text we are reading is ever more explicitly evoked within the story it tells, to the point of overturning it in *L'Usage de la parole* (see Ch.5 p.255-57). If Sarraute intends us to perceive a contrast between the discourses, the fact that underlying similarities are also evident merely illustrates the way her written text exceeds its founding intention.

This alienation of the intentional *énonciation* in the text is of course responsible for the reappearance in Sarraute's own writing of something else to which her explorations of the difficulties of dialogue are highly sensitive -- namely the way speakers define not only themselves as they speak, but also those *to whom* they speak. This definition is compounded, I have said, by the way the appeal in address for an uninfluenced but affirmative response coexists with an attempt to *produce* that response by positing in the address itself the affirmation one desires from the (defined) other (as in the identification of the "transparent" double in *Les Fruits d'or* [FO 74-76]). Sarraute's authorial discourse tries to obtain its reader's assent in advance by figuring the response of an ideal reader within itself. Yet just as we can read her claim to expressive truth in the light of her simultaneous representation of second-hand and conventional language, we can also see the way

the characteristics of her fictional exchanges, which are struggles for control of the other, are manifest too in her own prescriptions for reading. By reading, in this way, Sarraute's whole text is marked to some extent by what she criticises in the discourses of her characters, we provide not the prescribed response (which we read as part of the text), but a real, dialogic response to it. For by recognising that what her discourse articulates as expressive truth is determined by what the conventions of language let us formulate, rather than by an immediately sensed reality which demands to be given shape in language, we evoke the whole Symbolic order and so play the role of the Other. We thus unmask the illusory authenticity every speaker's discourse holds for him, and which Sarraute can see through so well in others' words but not in her own.²⁰

If this conception of reading Sarraute seems to put the reader in a position of absolute power with regard to her text, two final points need to be made which will modify this impression. Firstly, if the real reader can see the way the ideal reader is not, as he is presented, the embodiment of the true way of reading, but simply a construct within the larger symbolic structure which is the text, he is nevertheless unable to read his own constructed nature, and the larger Symbolic universe in which his limited consciousness, which similarly appears to him to be his true self, is contained. If he cannot consciously experience the linguistic forces which have formed his conscious self, he can at least be aware that the text's

²⁰ This is the position of response the Lacanian analyst takes up toward the analysand's discourse. If the response is to avoid strengthening the analysand's self-objectification, then, Lacan tells analysts, "ce n'est pas de lui que vous avez à lui parler [...] Si c'est à lui que vous avez à parler, c'est littéralement d'autre chose, c'est-à-dire d'une chose autre que ce dont il s'agit quand il parle de lui, et qui est la chose qui vous parle, chose qui, quoi qu'il dise, lui resterait à jamais inaccessible, si d'être une parole qui s'adresse à vous elle ne pouvait évoquer en vous sa réponse, et si, d'en avoir entendu le message sous cette forme inversée, vous ne pouviez, à le lui retourner, lui donner la double satisfaction de l'avoir reconnu et de lui en faire reconnaître la vérité" (1966:419-20).

demonstration of this situation extends to his own engagement with the text as well. That is, the discursive universe of the fictional text, with the addressing subject and ideal addressee it defines and embraces, can figure for him the way the conscious opposition of the real text's authorial voice and its reader, where each attempts to impose on the other its way of seeing the world, conceals their status as symbolic entities constructed out of the language which they share and which exceeds them.

Thus Sarraute's texts, if not Sarraute's intentions as author, demonstrate the way language, and specifically the language which constitutes the text, both embraces author and reader, so permitting the transfer of the text into the reader's mind, yet also reinforces the illusory subjective integrity of each, that sense of self which has built into it for its subject the inability to see through it. The way language both transcends and defines the parties in dialogue explains not only how one can identify in the utterance a speaker-intention for whose establishment the recipient is not solely responsible (thus I have inferred Sarraute's desire to articulate the truth of the tropism, as well as the strategies by which she tries to ensure that this articulation is received as expressed). It also accounts for the way that despite this degree of communication, the partners in dialogue will always, as conscious, maintain a distinctness from each other which makes it impossible to guarantee the accuracy of what is inferred as the intended message (hence the attempt to ensure the correct interpretation), as well as allowing the identification of an utterance-meaning beyond the speaker's intention.

The final point concerns the status of Sarraute's texts, whose role in demonstrating to the reader the limits of his own subjective autonomy seems suddenly to have transformed them from being the passive object of scrutiny to in

fact dictating how we read not only them but also ourselves. Jonathan Culler, in a survey of deconstructive literary criticism, has claimed that one of its most problematic aspects is "the identification of what texts say about language, texts, articulation, order and power as truths about language, texts, articulation, order and power" (1982:279). This belief in the truth of the text is of course ultimately only a belief in the truth of what one reads as being in the text, but the fact of attributing this to the discourse which one receives rather than to that which one produces bears witness, even in the kind of criticism which might be said to be least respectful of the idea of meaning, and certainly of authorial meaning, to a certain priority of the text over our readings of it. Robert Scholes sees this priority (in the sense of authority) as a consequence of the temporal priority of the text's writing over its reading, for "the reader's choices in 'making' meaning are [...] severely limited by the writer's previous choices of what marks to put on the page" (1985:154).²¹ It is clear that despite this priority there remains considerable leeway for variations of interpretation, but it also appears that however much the interpretation may deviate from what the author intended to be understood and assented to, in some way readers still feel a desire to attribute the authority for their conclusions to the text whose address they are responding to.

What consequences does this twist in the understanding of the text-reader dialogue have for the issue with which this thesis opened, the capacity of irony to overcome the limitations of expression through a shared constitution of meaning

²¹ He demonstrates this with a criticism of Stanley Fish's example, in "How to recognise a poem when you see one" (1980:322-37), of the way a class studying seventeenth-century religious poetry construed as a poem a list of writers on linguistics left on the blackboard from a previous class. One of the names was that of Richard Ohmann, which Fish misspelled with one 'n' and which students read as the exclamation "Oh man". For Scholes the fact that had the name been spelt properly this interpretation was less likely to have been offered, simply proves that "texts have a certain reality. A change in a letter or a mark of punctuation can force us to perceive them differently, read them differently, and interpret them differently" (Scholes 1985:161).

over the head of the utterance whose inadequacy is thus simultaneously acknowledged and transcended? After outlining the -- generally overlooked -- dialogic element in irony (its cooperative dimension), I established a distinction between verbal irony as articulating, through a language which is overtly false to the intended sense, an attitude already established in the speaker and which requires only the addressee's recognition of it, and epistemological irony, where despite the inadequacy of language something is created through the equal participation of both interlocutors. I claimed in Chapter 3 that Sarraute's two-tier view of language as largely conventional, but with enclaves of authentic expression where other writers hadn't ventured, in fact generates a kind of dialogue with the reader which has much more in common with verbal irony than with epistemological irony. Her belief in the expressive power of language, and her low opinion of the reader who must be deprived by the text of any space for independent activity (see Sarraute 1985c:13), makes this aspect of her writing particularly explicit.

However, I also pointed out in Chapter 4 that insofar as her attempts to control the reader are a reaction to that alienation from one's addressee which particularly characterises written texts with an anonymous public audience but which is to some degree a feature of all utterances, they draw attention to an important feature of dialogue in general. This is the way each speaker will attempt to ensure, across the distance of linguistic communication, his addressee's correct reception of his intended meaning. This element of persuasion in the attitude of each speaker, taken to an extreme when the kind of reception desired becomes articulated as part of the message itself (as with Sarraute's ideal reader), led me to question the understanding of dialogue which sees it as involving the unrestricted cooperation of

autonomous subjects. Instead, I suggested, it proceeds more haltingly through the alternating attempts by each participant to acquire the other's assent to his proposition. Thus the open attempt by Sarraute to dictate the response of her readers ultimately leads us to question the whole concept of a dialogic, epistemological irony where language would be transcended in a moment of creative cooperation. Her strategies of control, a reaction to the intensely alienated nature of the kind of dialogue a text written for an unknown public initiates, suggest that in a more attenuated form something similar may be going on in all linguistic exchanges.

The discussion just now of the way readers acknowledge the truth of texts, seems to put the final nail in the coffin of the notion of dialogue as a moment of shared thought free from domination or submission, for the temporal priority of the written text (as, less evidently, of the spoken utterance) seems to bring with it a recognition of its authority by the reader, one not consonant with a role of equal creativity for him.²² This introduces a new dimension into the idea of the text as establishing power over its addressee, for it suggests that readers may collaborate in this assignation of authority to what they read. The degree to which the text-reader dialogue enacts the power structure of verbal irony, with the text already knowing the meaning to be interpreted, may in fact be partly the work of the reader.

However, this shouldn't be seen as a straightforward "victory" for the text over a reader who submits to it without resistance. The text whose authority the reader acknowledges is always the result of his interpretation, and is not reducible

²² The idea of reading as a submission to the text's authority was actually touched on in relation to *Enfance*, where it is only once the narrating voice takes over that its critical interlocutor really comes to figure the reader, renouncing the right to speak in order to listen to the other's narratives (see Ch.3 p.135).

to the intentions of the authorial subject. If the reader does then submit to the text, it is in a free act which is not simply passive, and it is to the text as he has "written" it in his reading. The text this reading defers to is thus the product of the reader's definition (but also of the way the resistance his definition encounters during his reading helps to shape it). Yet if his definition is to have credence before its own public (including himself), it must be justified, and so the construed meaning is claimed to be located in the words on the page, in a gesture of surrender by the reader on which his authority in the face of his own addressees paradoxically depends. Thus if, as I said in Chapter 5, talking about texts cannot avoid turning them into mastered objects, the ultimate assertion of mastery seems, strangely, to be the claim that the meaning one's reading has appropriated *was* dictated by the work after all. Reading, finally, seems to involve not only the reader's establishment of an identity for the more or less compliant text he responds to and so realises, but also his surrender of authority, in an active gesture of submission, to that text he nonetheless constituted in a process which also constituted his identity as reader. The complexity of the text-reader encounter, and the conceptual instability of its participants (a text created in a reading which validates itself by giving priority to that text; a reader who, paradoxically, exists only as the interlocutor of the text created by his reading), are such that, in the dialogue between text and reader it would be foolish to attempt to declare a winner.

CONCLUSION

Nathalie Sarraute's writing, both as a representation of a fictional world and as an authorial address to a reader, places enormous emphasis on the act of communication, the anxiety and distress caused by its repeated failure, and the tenacity with which, faced with this failure, human beings constantly attempt to reestablish contact. Yet if this seems to manifest a belief in dialogue as the completion of one's own limited point of view on the world by that of another, this impression is contradicted by the way both the represented dialogues and the Sarrautean address to the reader actually function. While the response of an independent other is certainly sought, it is sought only insofar as it might ideally (if never in reality) be *identical* with the addressor's own outlook. Thus the ideal Sarrautean dialogue is one where response would be entirely affirmative, neutralising its otherness by doubling the speaker's own perspective. The impossibility of this ideal is compounded by the fact that if what speakers seek from one another is adherence to their own views rather than the horizon-broadening experience of encountering a different perspective, then, as her fiction shows, dialogues will invariably turn into power struggles where each participant tries to obtain from the other acquiescence without difference.

Sarraute's representation of dialogue, be it dialogue with other individuals or with texts, acknowledges ever more explicitly that this ideal of mutual sameness is unrealisable. Yet the Sarrautean subject's desire for it is so fundamental that, rather than modifying its attitude to dialogue in the face of the unavoidable otherness of

its interlocutor (by perhaps appreciating that otherness for what it brings to the self), its only solution seems to be to retreat into the guaranteed sameness of the self. Thus the subject escapes not only from its inability to impose its perspective on others, but also from those others' simultaneous attempts to dominate its own internal infinity too. On the level of Sarraute's fiction (a fiction by now clearly subordinated to the process of writing which creates it), this desire for withdrawal is that "besoin de fuite... nous l'avons tous éprouvé" (UP 85), felt, in *L'Usage de la parole*, when two casual acquaintances who are in fact totally indifferent to one another, realise that they will have to make conversation. What each wants to flee is that annexation of his internal infinity by the other which will inevitably take place, the "véritable mue" which occurs when "cet indéfinissable, ce tout, ce rien, ce vide, ce plein qu'est chacun d'eux soudain rencontre ceci: une forme tracée à grands traits, un schéma grossier, un portrait robot" (85).

Sarraute's authorial discourse repeats its characters' scepticism about and withdrawal from dialogue, in its increasingly pessimistic attitude towards its own projected readers. This pessimism culminates in what seems to be a definitive rejection of intersubjectivity in *Tu ne t'aimes pas*, where the internal universe into which the authorial self escapes manifests itself as a multiplicity of dialoguing voices which release that self from any need to engage with others. This perception of the self as its own ideal interlocutor underlines the distance which separates Sarraute's understanding of dialogue from the standard view of dialogue as intersubjective communication. (The otherness which intersubjective dialogue involves is nonetheless also an ineradicable feature of the linguistic relationship to the self, something illustrated by *Entre la Vie et la mort* but not acknowledged by Sarraute.)

Yet I have argued that this Sarrautean aspiration to dialogue with one's double rather than with the others one really encounters, can tell us something about attitudes which persist in intersubjective dialogue. The way the Sarrautean double is solicited purely in order to *confirm* a point of view which the self has already established, shows how that self considers its own discourse as able to constitute a meaning on its own, rather than depending on the intervention of another to make it meaningful. I have suggested that Sarraute's (frequently reiterated) faith in the potential of her literary discourse to express a personal truth, despite her (equally acknowledged) awareness that its language is common property, is simply a particularly emphatic version of that subjective investment every speaker has in his utterance. Insofar as the subject's very identity is determined by his language, he will necessarily be unable to see beyond its limits; because he experiences the world through the filter of language, he will perceive some necessary link between what he experiences and the language in which he articulates, however inadequately, that experience. Thus Sarraute's gesture of withdrawing into herself in order to articulate this personal truth (but in a language whose transindividual nature means that the articulation, however much it rejects dialogue, remains directed towards an addressee), is reflected to some extent in the way speaking in general refers back to a lived experience as well as outward to a listener. If, as Paul Ricoeur argues, discourse is a dialectic of event and meaning, that event itself includes "the experience as experienced, as lived, [which] remains private", but whose meaning becomes public, is "expressed and communicated", in the other dimension of discourse as event, "the happening of dialogue" (1976:16).

The way every utterance aims to express an "internal" experience as well as to communicate with an "external" addressee, gives it an intentional thrust which I have identified as monologic and seen as present even in the opposed dialogic invitation to an addressee to help constitute the meaning of one's utterance. Yet I also claimed that this conscious monologism of discourse, even of that whose intention is to establish a dialogue, is itself exceeded by an *unconsciously* dialogic quality. In other words, discourse always exceeds the singular expressive intention which animates it, and reveals itself to be assembled out of a variety of other discourses, already-spoken actualisations of the language which subjects share (just as, for Sarraute, though on the non-linguistic level of the tropism, "chacun sait qu'il n'est qu'un assemblage fortuit, plus ou moins heureux, d'éléments provenant d'un même fond commun" [ES 40]). This unconscious aspect of discourse is in fact doubly dialogic, for aside from the interaction of the discourses which make it up and establish its ties to that totality of language within which it has constituted itself, the very existence and interaction of these discourses itself only becomes evident in the reception of the utterance. Thus the reader, as a subject of language, can recognise what in Chapter 1 (p.36) I called the text's unconscious irony, its unintended exposure (exceeding even an "epistemologically ironic" intention) of the way it is constituted from among the structural possibilities of the language in which it is written, rather than being purely the unique manifestation of a preexisting (in Sarraute's case "tropistic") intention.

If reading relativises the intentionality of the written text, this is not to say that the reader is all-powerful with regard to that text. As a subject of language, his perspective is as limited as that of the authorial voice. On the one hand, this

limitation of perspective raises the question of whether it is valid at all to talk about perceiving not only a text's intention but also the way it exceeds that intentionality, for the intention one perceives is always what one construes the text as intending, from within what one's own subjectivity allows one to imagine. Yet in my view, this doesn't entirely invalidate the identification of intentions. This is because the reader's perspective, though limited, is no more hermetic than the text's is. If the text's encounter with the reader's language places it in a linguistic context which relativises it, this meeting of discourses must have comparable consequences for the reader. The language of the text, in its position as both other to the reader and, as such, the representative of what grounds his (linguistic) identity, is bound to challenge the limits of that identity, providing the reader with something which is both new to him and part of him. David Shepherd, in a critique of the Fishian concept of reading where the reader remains trapped in his own "interpretive community" and naturalises every text he encounters in its terms, identifies this "other" element of the text from a Bakhtinian standpoint as the set of social and historical contexts which its language has traversed up to its reading. These are bound to influence the reader's new contextualisation of that text. Thus "determinate meaning exists to the extent that the production of meaning is contextual" (Shepherd 1989:98). This determining role played by the past and present contexts of the text's language ensures that reading a text is a dialogic activity: "If the meanings of the text are indissociable from the reader's active understanding, then that understanding in its turn must strictly speaking be equally indissociable from the encounter with the text, must be precisely context-specific" (99).

This impossibility of isolating the reader's understanding from the text's meaning seems finally to dismiss the fear which prevails in Sarraute (as well as in Iser or Poulet, whose descriptions of reading have a markedly prescriptive quality), that her readers will betray the texts they read by deriving from them meanings which are somehow inadmissible. The meanings readers attribute to texts have their source in the words on the page, but only as these words exist in their innumerable social and historical contexts. If the meanings construed differ from one reader to another, as well as from author to reader, it is because different users of language will actualise different dialogic contexts for those words from the totality available. But no speaker can assert the right to define his choice of contexts for words as the only ones permissible -- and that includes the writer, who can make no claim to have first defined the meaning of her words, for their communicative power on which she relies depends precisely on their *already* being part of the "stock commun" (UP 89) humans share, and thus on their specifically *not* having their source in her. This communality, moreover, is what guarantees some degree of consensus in terms of interpretation, for the public use of words means that their contextual meanings are also largely (though not entirely) public and shared. Thus for a writer to see her readers as making off with the text and imposing aberrant interpretations on it, is to have a false idea of her own relationship to her text and its language, to lose sight of the fact that speakers don't own their words but merely borrow them from the whole linguistic community to which they belong.

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