

PETER FRANCE

ROLAND BARTHES, A RHETORIC OF MODERNITY

One of Barthes's last published writings was a piece called 'Délibérations', which appeared in Tel Quel in 1979. It concerns the problems of writing a journal, and includes the following anecdote:

13 août 1977

Ce matin, vers huit heures, le temps est superbe. L'envie me prend d'essayer le vélo de Myr, pour aller à la boulangerie. Je n'ai pas fait de vélo depuis que j'étais gosse. Mon corps trouve cette opération très étrange, très difficile, et j'ai peur (de monter, de descendre). Je dis tout cela à la boulangère - et en sortant de la boutique, voulant remonter sur ma bicyclette, naturellement, je tombe. Or, par instinct, je me laisse aller à tomber *excessivement*, les deux jambes en l'air, dans la posture la plus ridicule qui soit. Et je comprends alors que c'est ce ridicule qui me sauve (d'un trop grand mal): j'ai accompagné ma chute, et par là je me suis donné en spectacle, je me suis rendu ridicule; mais, par là aussi, j'en ai amoindri l'effet.

Tout d'un coup, il m'est devenu indifférent de ne pas être moderne. (BL, 408)

The relevance for my subject of this little story will, I hope, become clear. Barthes the non-modern is associated here with the emphatic gesture; the deliberately assumed rhetoric of falling (a kind of amplificatio) saves him from harm. He is like one of those wrestlers depicted in a very early piece from Mythologies, 'Le Monde où l'on catche' and finds himself enacting the Baudelairean phrase which occurs so often in his writing: 'la vérité emphatique du geste dans les grandes circonstances de la vie' (M, 13). He is like an ancient masked actor or indeed an orator, but he is also a modern clown - Buster Keaton perhaps, or one of the protagonists from Godot. Ancient and Modern meet here.

My subject is in fact a new development of the old quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns; I shall be concerned with the ambiguous relation to the ancient (and in particular ancient rhetoric) of a writer who often seemed the arch-priest of the modern, championing the most recent developments in all the arts, opposing the modern 'scriptible' to the ancient 'lisible', and recurring constantly to the refrain of 'notre

modernité'. At the same time, it is obvious that in our time - and long before our time for that matter - the modern may seek models or allies among the old classics (whether Greco-Roman or more recent) against what has happened in between - so the Pre-Raphaelites, so Stravinsky, so T.S.Eliot. Or else the modern may turn out to be a closet ancient, or at least a doubter. In another late work, Incidents, we read the following piece of private journal. Barthes has returned home in the evening and dutifully reads a piece of new fiction

mais ce sont comme des devoirs, et, une fois ma dette payée (à tempérament), je referme et reviens avec soulagement aux Mémoires d'outre-tombe, le vrai livre. Toujours cette pensée: et si les Modernes se trompaient? S'ils n'avaient pas de talent? (I, 80).

Chateaubriand is in fact one of the great values of Barthes's later years; he is far from being an uncomplicated Ancient, indeed it appears that for Barthes much of his appeal lies in the frontier position he occupies - the source of a new sensibility and a new attitude to writing, and yet a lover of the old and one who makes unashamed use of the full resources of the old art of writing. The way he describes his position in the 'Préface Testamentaire' to the Mémoires d'outre-tombe, swimming hopefully and regretfully between two worlds, may be applied to Barthes, or to many other writers of our time for that matter. In literary terms at least the tension of the Ancient and the Modern is still with us and as in the seventeenth century the battle-lines often pass through the middle of a great writer's work (think of Perrault or Racine). In this tension attitudes to rhetoric and eloquence are central.

Rhetoric was a constant point of reference for Barthes, from the youthful writings of his wartime years to La Chambre claire, the last book published in his life time. His reflexions on the ancient discipline and its modern possibilities are long and complex, and they have a good deal to teach us. So, rhetorically dividing my material into three parts, I shall deal in turn with rhetoric as model, rhetoric as enemy, and rhetoric as springboard.

### Rhetoric as Model

In many of Barthes's essays of the 1960s in particular, one encounters the notion that the theoretical practice of rhetoric was the precursor of modern linguistics and semiotics. In a piece published on 28 September 1967 in the Times Literary Supplement, for instance, he speaks of it as 'that impressive effort by a whole culture to analyse and classify the forms of speech, and to make the world of language intelligible'. This comes from the high period of structuralism, when Barthes shared with Genette, Todorov and others an interest in the revival and renewal of the old discipline in a modern science of literature - or more generally of sign systems. Of course the term was familiar to him before the 60s; Philippe Roger has written interestingly about his frequently positive use of it as early as 1942, in the articles written at the sanatorium of Saint Hilaire du Touvet<sup>1</sup>. But it was in the 60s, at the time of his 'petit délire scientifique' (RB, 148), when he was writing his Système de la mode, that Barthes was led to study the rhetorical tradition more closely and present it at his seminar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1964-65. The result is 'L'Ancienne Rhétorique: aide-mémoire', published for the first time some years later in 1970, in a number of the structuralist journal Communications devoted to 'recherches rhétoriques'.

Some specialists of the history of rhetoric belittle Barthes's work as the condescending invasion of their territory by an amateur. It is true that he touches on the subject somewhat rapidly and then moves on. Nevertheless, he was by training a classicist; the fact that he writes history from the perspective of modernity only adds to the interest of his account of what he calls a 'voyage mémorable' (AR, 222). And even when he came to publish his 'aide-mémoire' there was not a lot published in French to guide students over this vast ocean. At the time, then, it met a need; looked at today, it is above all interesting as a record of the confrontation of a modern writer and an ancient tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup>. This paper owes a great deal to Philippe Roger's subtle and passionate book, Roland Barthes, roman.

His starting point is 'le texte moderne'. He speaks of the need to 'savoir à partir de quoi et contre quoi il se cherche' and thus to 'confronter la nouvelle sémiotique de l'écriture et l'ancienne pratique du langage littéraire'. Nor is rhetoric confined to history; the modern world too is 'incroyablement plein d'ancienne Rhétorique' (AR, 172). One cannot fail to notice the tone of hostility, or at least suspicion, in this presentation, but Barthes goes on to note that in working on his subject he has been filled with excitement and admiration by the force and subtlety of this old system - and also, importantly, by 'la modernité de telle de ses propositions'. Read in the light of the new, the old can give support to the new.

At the outset, Barthes proposes a distinctly modern - and suggestive - classification of six 'pratiques rhétoriques' (AR, 173-4):

1. An art - the art of persuasion.
2. A discipline - something taught in schools.
3. A science (or at least a proto-science) of the 'effets de langage'.
4. A prescriptive code - involving a set of rules and norms.
5. A social practice - rhetoric as a source of power and prestige.
6. A game - involving a para-rhetoric of parody and derision.

It will be seen that from a modern, subversive point of view, good and bad are intermingled here, rhetoric offering scope for development and distortion. At all events, Barthes stresses the need for moderns to know rhetoric without censuring it (without imposing an orthodoxy which would downgrade certain rhetorical practices, notably the extravagant ones) if they are to understand European culture of the past and of the present. Already in the 60s he is declaring the need for a proper history of rhetoric such as the International Society for the History of Rhetoric exists to provide.

Not surprisingly, Barthes insists above all on the debt of literature to rhetoric (he is barely interested in public speaking). He notes the fusion of rhetoric and poetics which has been so important a feature of European culture. Already in an earlier work, Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture, he had argued that rhetorical norms of intelligible communication (with speech as the model for writing) governed a literature that was unproblematic and rested on a common social code (to which he tends to give the label 'bourgeois'). Thinking mainly of seventeenth-century France, he writes:

'Poétique', aux temps classiques, ne désigne aucune étendue. aucune épaisseur particulière du sentiment, aucune cohérence, aucun univers séparé, mais

seulement l'inflexion d'une technique verbale, celle de 's'exprimer' selon des règles plus belles, donc plus sociales que celles de la conversation. (DZ, 34)

Clearly, the young Barthes had little time for this view of the poetic, but this did not prevent rhetoric being valuable -- with due modification -- as a science of connotations appropriate for analysing the function of most literary texts today. The connotations involved are primarily linguistic, and concern the use of figures and the way in which words acquire secondary, socially determined meanings. In certain articles of the years 1966-7 we find Barthes relating these concerns to Jakobson's 'poetic function' (Jakobson's Essais de linguistique générale had appeared in French in 1963). Indeed he suggests in a paper given in Brussels in 1966 that the word 'rhetoric' could be substituted for 'poetic' to designate the element that makes of any verbal message a work of art (BL, 133). This of course was precisely the position of the Belgian rhetoricians who in 1970 published the Rhétorique générale.

One apparent advantage of rhetoric for the structuralist was that it privileged the impersonal system against the notions of personal expression or creativity. In rhetoric, Barthes writes, in the 'aide-mémoire', 'ce que nous appelons l'auteur n'existe pas' (AR, 184). It was in 1968 that he published his article 'La Mort de l'auteur' (BL, 61-7), but the idea had been around for some time. In the early sixties, in an article in Annales later reprinted in Sur Racine, he had called for a history of literature which would give an account of the evolution of institutions rather than a set of critical biographies (SR, 147-67). Clearly rhetoric would have to be one of these institutions.

Rhetorical analysis might serve then to deflect critical attention away from the sacrosanct author to the medium he used (or which used him, according to a certain structuralist theology). But it had a particular usefulness, being concerned with general and repeatable semiological phenomena, for the description of mass culture. In the 'aide-mémoire' Barthes makes a specific link between Aristotle and the mass media. Aristotle's rhetoric, he writes, is 'une logique volontairement dégradée'. As such, 'mutatis mutandis et toutes proportions (historiques) gardées, elle conviendrait bien aux produits de notre culture dite de masse, ou règne le vraisemblable aristotélicien, c'est-à-dire à ce que le public croit possible' (AR, 179). So, in an article entitled 'Rhétorique de l'image', Barthes dismantles the way signifying systems operate in publicity

photographs. The vendors of pasta (Pâtes Panzani) use visual topoï (a shopping bag spilling over with vegetables indicates genuine home cooking, etc.) to persuade their audience in the same way as the unscrupulous orator uses words (OO, 26-9). Rhetoric is seen here as 'la face signifiante de l'idéologie' (OO, 40). It therefore gives a new sharpness, and apparent scientificity, to the type of analysis that he had performed so memorably in Mythologies, where the fringes of the actors in Mankiewicz's Julius Caesar signify 'Romanity' and the vaseline on their faces, read as sweat, signifies strenuous moral dilemmas (M, 27-30). Sometimes Barthes apparently enjoys and even celebrates the rhetoric he analyses (thus in the pieces on wrestling or the Tour de France), but more often the analysis is at the same time a warning or a denunciation. Rhetoric here provides the model for a critical approach to verbal messages of all kinds - much as it was later to do for Terry Eagleton in the closing pages of his Literary Theory.

Why do we find this type of denunciation in Barthes's writing? Is it simply the left-wing, vaguely Marxist stance which was more or less obligatory for French intellectuals at the time? Certainly he refers respectfully or admiringly to Marx, Sartre and Brecht, for all of whom the demystification of illusions had a political purpose. However, in Barthes - and one says this with hindsight - we seem to have to do rather with an exacerbated consciousness of codes of all kinds. The world oppresses us with its multitude of signs, and his response is often a kind of semioclastic fury, in which he mocks and exposes the falsity of so-called natural modes of expression. In this, perhaps in spite of itself, rhetoric is a great help. But in so far as rhetoric actually inculcated such codes, it had also to be the enemy - and this brings me to the second panel of my triptych.

### Rhetoric as Enemy

For Barthes the modern, however useful rhetoric might be as a tool for analysing the productions of others, there could be no question of an uncomplicated nostalgia for a lost golden age of rhetoric such as we find, for instance, in Marc Fumaroli L'Age de l'éloquence. Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture shows him committed to the tragic twentieth-

century view of a divided language. On such a view, 'La rhétorique ancienne' could not offer a model for his own practice or for that of the serious writer of today. The last sentence of the 'aide-mémoire' speaks of the need to 'faire tomber la Rhétorique au rang d'un objet pleinement et simplement historique' and to 'revendiquer, sous le nom de texte, d'écriture, une nouvelle pratique du langage' (AR, 223). The eloquence taught by rhetoric is not compatible with the writing practices embodied in such moderns as Philippe Sollers. What then made old rhetoric unacceptable?

In the first place, as I suggested above, there is the political argument. From Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture, rhetoric is associated with the classical period, which Barthes cavalierly labels 'bourgeois'. It is, moreover, an instrument of class domination. It will be recalled that the 'aide-mémoire' includes among the uses of rhetoric its social function; it is, he says, 'cette technique privilégiée (puisqu'il faut payer pour l'acquérir) qui permet aux classes dirigeantes de s'assurer la propriété de la parole'. The 'classe de rhétorique', as it still existed under the Third Republic, was a 'consécration initiatique de la culture bourgeoise' (AR, 223). Barthes's use of the term 'bourgeois' is a loose one, but it clearly marks at least some sympathy with a Marxist view of cultural history. In this view, rhetoric is part of a formidable and repressive institutional system. At the limit, 'bien parler' becomes an enemy of the people.

Such motives are undoubtedly present at times in the bourgeois Barthes's hostility to traditional rhetoric, but I do not think, if we take his work as a whole, that they are the determining ones. As I suggested above, the essential thing seems to be a more personal resistance, a difficult and deeply felt relation to language. One needs to remember his constant desire to be a writer, not just someone who uses words instrumentally (an 'écrivain') but one who works on and with words (an 'écrivain', EC, 147-54). Ideally, this would imply the ability to make words carry a powerful reality. So, in Le Degré Zéro, Barthes describes how in modern poetry, eloquence falls away and we are faced with 'le Mot qui nourrit et comble comme le dévoilement soudain de la vérité' (DZ, 37). There is a sort of mystical desire for presence at work here, the same desire which in La Chambre claire found a fulfilment in photography, since the chemical nature of this art guarantees that a physical reality is transmitted through all the codes of representation ('Je vois les yeux qui ont vu l'Empereur', CC, 13). But, alas,

language is not usually like that; it is utterly permeated by codes (many of them transmitted by rhetoric) which mediate and deform any expressive intention. Barthes demonstrates this neatly in the introduction to his Essais critiques. A friend has lost a loved one, and I write to express my sympathy. What happens is that 'je fais des "phrases" avec le plus aimant de moi-même' - thousands of speakers and writers have been there before. So I try to avoid such phrases and reduce the message to one word: 'Condoléances'. But this won't do either; it has inescapable connotations of coldness. And so on... (EC, 11-12). In a word, Barthes, like many moderns, suffers from an excessive sign-consciousness<sup>2</sup> which makes it virtually impossible for him to adopt the practices of traditional rhetoric. One might distinguish between three types of objection.

Firstly, and most simply, there is the reliance on the 'vraisemblable', which often means the cliché or 'idée reçue'. We have seen how Barthes uses this Aristotelian notion to pursue the ideologies of the mass media. Likewise, in analysing Balzac's story Sarrasine, he speaks with some disgust of what he calls the 'cultural codes' which produce an spurious effect of truth to life. Notice the Sartrean images in these concluding remarks:

La "Vie" devient alors, dans le texte classique, un mélange écoeurant d'opinions courantes, une nappe étouffante d'idées reçues: c'est en effet dans ces codes culturels que se concentre le démodé balzacien, l'essence de ce qui, dans Balzac, ne peut être (ré-)écrit. (SZ, 211).

Seen in this light, rhetoric is fraudulent and repulsive.

Secondly, there is the notion, implied in much traditional rhetorical theory, that form and content can be separated. Language is seen here as the optional clothing of an essential idea, and this clothing may be varied according to the circumstances. Writing at the beginning of his essay on Loyola about the Jesuit teaching of language and rhetoric, he notes that they bequeathed to modern Europe 'l'idée du bien-dire'. Paradoxically, Loyola himself was seen as a bad writer in this perspective, but this of course didn't matter, since what counted was the message. Indeed, 'bad writing' in this tradition can easily become a sign of saintliness - another cliché! Barthes concludes:

---

<sup>2</sup>. On this question, see the illuminating essay by Gérard Genette, 'L'Envers des signes' in Figures I, pp.185-204.



Ainsi se confirme une fois de plus la place que notre société assigne au langage: décoration ou instrument, on voit en lui une sorte de parasite du sujet humain, qui s'en sert ou s'en revêt, à distance, comme d'une parure ou d'un outil que l'on prend et dépose selon les besoins de la subjectivité ou les convenances de la société. (SFL, 46)

'Les convenances de la société' - this implies an idea of decorum, and therefore of censorship. The central rhetorical tradition, like Polonius, required a dress that was 'rich, not gaudy' - or in the terms of art, Attic rather than Asiatic. Realising the aberrations that the idea of language as clothing might lead to, traditional rhetoric stamped hard on what it described as the abuses of figural language<sup>3</sup>) seeking to subordinate all language use to that 'pseudo-naturalisme rhétorique' (the rule of clarity and so-called 'natural' style) which still dominates schoolroom practice. Against this, Barthes warms to the type of playful attitude to words that was often stigmatized as 'sophistry', the other face of rhetoric which finds a distant and tragic descendant in Paul de Man.

Above all, against the rhetorical separation of form and content, Barthes praises a language which avoids instrumentality and becomes as far as possible consubstantial with the subject, with the writing body. This is more and more obvious in his writings of the 70s. A good example, from the non-literary domain, is his championing of the music of Schumann, in particular an article entitled 'Rasch' and published in 1975. What he hears in this music is not notes, themes, grammar or structure, but 'des coups: j'entends ce qui bat dans le corps, ce qui bat le corps, ou mieux: ce corps qui bat'. The music won't stay put ('gros défaut rhétorique' says Barthes); it avoids development and composition (OO, 265-6). The reasonableness of rhetoric is short-circuited by the presence of the body.

A third objection to rhetoric is that it is based on speech this being especially objectionable to what one might call middle-period Barthes, round 1970, when the ideal

---

<sup>3</sup>. See for instance Fontanier's strictures on 'l'abus des tropes' in Les Figures du discours: 'Quels ne doivent donc pas être les inconvénients, les dangers d'un abus qui tombe sur la signification ou sur l'expression? Et peut-il y en avoir de plus graves, de plus funestes? Que cet abus existe, et voilà infailliblement le style, recherché, précieux, incohérent, inintelligible, absurde, ridiculement outré, emphatique, et n'offrant partout qu'un horrible amas de sottises, d'extravagances' (p.189).

of 'écriture' is at its most powerful. On this view, eloquence signifies the arrogance of the orator, of what is called the 'discours fort'. The speaker dominates, monologically. A particular bogeyman here is the teacher or professor. Barthes had attacked Picard as a 'Sorbonne professor' in their quarrel about Racine, so it was ironically painful to him to be seen as a professor, and indeed to become a professor at the Collège de France, where he gave what one might call an inaugural anti-lecture. In a 1971 article entitled 'Écrivains, intellectuels, professeurs' he speaks of the 'liaison fondamentale entre l'enseignement et la parole' and gives a neat analysis of the discomforts of the professor, who must choose either to assume the role of an authority, speaking well, or to try, by deliberately speaking less confidently, to soften the harsh role that makes of every speaker a policeman, since 'la phrase nette est bien une sentence, *sententia*, une parole pénale'. Either way, the professor cannot escape. The law is manifest not in what he says, but in the fact of speaking; 'parler, c'est exercer une volonté de pouvoir' (BL, 345-7). Naturally, therefore, Barthes prefers writing to speaking, and a form of writing (which the words 'écriture' and 'texte' signify) which does not follow the rhetorical patterns of speech.

In all this, he is on the side of what Jean Paulhan, in Les Fleurs de Tarbes, called 'la Terreur' - that modern attempt to get away from traditional eloquence. This is visible in his own writing practice. In his early books and articles, he more or less plays the game, conforming, if playfully at times, to norms and genres - the essay, the thesis, the book review, the newspaper article. His later work tends towards uncoded, fragmented forms. In Roland Barthes par lui-même and Fragments d'un discours amoureux, the basic unit is something like a Nietzschean aphorism, a short text, in which reflexion and anecdote mingle (the narrative becoming much more prominent in the second text). There is quotation and self-quotation, the rubbing together of different voices and different styles, and in Roland Barthes the play between the first and third person pronouns. Rhetorical *dispositio* is avoided (or apparently so) by the adoption of the seemingly arbitrary alphabetical order.

All this might seem like an anti-rhetorical form of writing. But of course rhetoric is not so easily eluded. As Paulhan, that subtle defender of the old discipline, noted in 'La Rhétorique renaît de ses cendres', rhetoric envelops anti-rhetoric: 'si Montaigne

connaît Cicéron, Cicéron s'attend à Montaigne' (Oeuvres, II, 164). The enemies of rhetoric often turn out to be its reformers. So perhaps it can be understood differently and as such be welcomed as an ally after all.

### Rhetoric as Springboard

It is interesting to see that in the 'aide-mémoire' Barthes speaks of rhetoric as 'un dialogue d'amour' (AR, 177), echoing his earlier statement in the preface to Essais critiques: 'la rhétorique est la dimension amoureuse de l'écriture' (EC, 14). In his writing, such words carry a strong positive connotation, and they certainly go against a certain image of rhetoric, dry, formalistic, unscrupulous. What does he mean by such phrases? Essentially, that if we want to communicate emotion (and such is 'la disposition profonde de la littérature' (EC, 13), we need a special attention to language such as rhetoric can provide. Returning to the example of the letter of condolence cited above, one finds that Barthes concludes his oscillation between unsatisfactory formulations by declaring:

pour redresser mon message (c'est-à-dire en somme pour qu'il soit exact) il faut non seulement que je le varie, mais encore que cette variation soit originale et comme inventée', [puisque] 'seule la forme permet d'échapper à la dérision des sentiments' (EC, 12, 13).

Writers and speakers (but Barthes is only concerned with writing) need to use figures, to act parts, to wear masks. Adopting the role of actor-orator gives pleasure and allows real communication to take place.

One may cite here two quotations which recur in his writing. The first, which one finds from Le Degré Zéro to La Chambre claire, is the Latin larvatus prodeō (I advance masked). He envisages literature as a figure pointing to the mask it is wearing. Only through this deliberate and open assumption of artifice is truth possible, or as Barthes puts it in Le Degré Zéro. 'la sincérité a ici besoin de signes faux, et évidemment faux, pour durer et pour être consommée' (DZ, 32). The second quotation has already been mentioned, Baudelaire's phrase 'la vérité emphatique du geste dans les grandes circonstances de la vie' (M, 13). Barthes uses this as an epigraph to the opening piece in Mythologies, where modern wrestlers are compared, only half in jest, with actors in

Aeschylus. Unlike the 'Romains au cinéma' with their unacknowledged conventional signs masquerading as natural, the wrestlers use (according to Barthes) a whole elaborate code (of gestures, actions, appearances) to signify emotion in an open and emphatic manner.

Such, as Paulhan suggested in Les Fleurs de Tarbes was the value of rhetoric to the writer: it taught a deliberate use of language through which the modernist Terror might be overcome, even today. As Philippe Roger has shown, the young Barthes writing on 'Plaisir aux classiques' for the sanatorium journal, had formulated 'le rêve conciliateur d'une fusion de l'usage de la parole et de l'être-là des mots, de l'art du discours et de la "force" du silence' (Roger, p.335). For all his modernist anguish and adventure, the dream did not disappear. The problem for the older Barthes, in his ambition to be an 'écrivain' rather than a mere 'écrivain' was to find the appropriate rhetoric. How was he himself to put on the mask?

Certainly, he recognizes often enough that he writes to woo the reader (he tends to use the less decorous verb 'draguer'). In Roland Barthes par lui-même there is an interesting fragment entitled 'Hypocrisie?' in which he distances himself from a certain type of anti-rhetorical modernity:

Parlant d'un texte, il crédite son auteur de ne pas ménager le lecteur. Mais il a trouvé ce compliment en découvrant que lui-même fait tout pour le ménager et qu'en somme il ne renoncerait jamais à un art de l'effet. (RB, 106)<sup>4</sup>.

'Un art de l'effet' - this is what rhetoric is all about. It may be seen as classical and therefore outdated ('démodé'), but the 'démodé' increasingly becomes a positive value for Barthes who admits (or proclaims) in Roland Barthes par lui-même: 'J'écris classique' (RB, 96). To use a term which had apparently been downgraded in S/Z, he is always 'lisible' - even if his particular brand of readability is not to the taste of every reader.

One must not exaggerate of course. There is no question of a return to Cicero. Barthes will never be happy with clear, eloquent sociable speech, good rhetorical disposition, the confident and unproblematic use of commonplaces. If one is looking for

---

<sup>4</sup>. Philippe Roger has shown that the author in question here is Philippe Sollers (Roland Barthes, roman, pp. 313-4).

historical parallels, he is more like Montaigne, making original use of an old art, indulging himself quite consciously in classical forms, but never in a simple-minded way. The old rhetoric is subverted and renovated, but it retains its power to affect the reader. There is obviously no space here for a proper study of Barthes's own rhetorical strategies, which could be observed for instance, in Mythologies, L'Empire des signes or Roland Barthes par lui-même, some of his most successful pieces of writing. I shall confine myself to a very brief discussion of two of his late works, saying a few words about Fragments d'un discours amoureux (1977) and a little more about La Chambre claire (1980), which seems to me his masterpiece.

In Fragments, the wooing of the reader is visible from the introductory 'Comment est fait ce livre'. Barthes's rhetoric is not to persuade readers by overwhelming them with eloquence, but to involve them as partners, to offer them a stimulus for their own reading/writing. Ideally the book is placed under the cooperative sign 'Aux Lecteurs - aux Amoureux - Réunis' (FDA, 9). Like so many of Barthes's publications, the work is also presented in quasi-academic form, as a study of discourse. However, this study is not given in discursive form; instead a 'dramatic' method is chosen: 'on a donc substitué à la description du discours amoureux sa simulation, et l'on a rendu à ce discours sa personne fondamentale, qui est le je, de façon à mettre en scène une énonciation, non une analyse' (FDA, 7). And so the text proper, a series of dramatic fragments, is preceded by the framing words: 'C'est donc un amoureux qui parle et qui dit:' (FDA, 13). The theatrical mode (the mask) allows Barthes to speak emphatically, like an orator. And indeed the larvatus prodeco makes its appearance in the fragment 'Cacher': 'je m'avance en montrant mon masque du doigt: je mets un masque sur ma passion, mais d'un doigt discret (et retors) je désigne ce masque' (FDA, 53). Like an orator, the delirious lover has repeated recourse to all the old topoi, topoi which are at the same time ridiculous and necessary. Barthes was increasingly fascinated by what he (like Flaubert) called 'la bêtise'; one could say that the problem with rhetoric, with its formulae and commonplaces, is that to the subtle it is stupid, and yet indispensable if we are to communicate. This, it seems to me, is the point of the following remarks:

L'amoureux délire...mais son délire est bête. Quoi de plus bête qu'un amoureux? Si bête que nul n'ose tenir publiquement son discours sans une sérieuse médiation: roman, théâtre ou analyse (à bout de pincettes) (FDA, 209)

In Fragments d'un discours amoureux, Barthes has found a strategy which allows him to commit himself to this dangerous eloquence.

La Chambre claire goes further. It is worth noting that not long before writing it, in a lecture with the Proustian title 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure', Barthes had shocked some modernist listeners by declaring his wish to write a novel. In this lecture, he speaks of the emotion, the pity, he has felt in reading 'un grand roman, comme hélas on n'en fait plus', War and Peace. Here and in Proust's novel, literature has created moments of truth, which are based, he says on 'une reconnaissance du pathos' (note the rhetorical term). He concludes that the novelist he would like to be must 'accepter que l'oeuvre à faire...représente activement, sans le dire, un sentiment dont j'étais sûr, mais que j'ai bien du mal à nommer, car je ne puis sortir d'un cercle de mots usés, douteux à force d'être employés sans rigueur' (BL, 322-3). One sees here still the discomfort with the clichés of existing rhetoric and at the same time the recognition that some form of literary rhetoric, albeit indirect ('sans le dire'), will provide the answer.

Without being quite the desired novel, La Chambre claire is the beginning of a solution to these problems. Barthes has found a way to write his book. It is worth noting that unusually for him, there is no prefatory material here, except for the teasing cover. The text presents itself, apparently straightforwardly, as a 'note on photography' - published under the imprint of Cahiers du cinéma. One might expect, therefore, an academic continuation of such earlier writings as the article 'Rhétorique de l'image'. And indeed at times Barthes does use - or imitate - the discourse of science, with its terminology (semiotic, phenomenological, etc), and its taxonomies (studium/punctum, the four types of studium). All this, however, is cast into the narrative form of a quest, written in the first person. This is not meant to be read as actual autobiography, but is a fictional narrative, a rhetorical strategy. One may compare it to Descartes's Méditations, or indeed, 'toutes proportions gardées' to A la recherche du temps perdu. It begins with these words:

Un jour, il y a longtemps, je tombai sur une photographie du dernier frère de Napoléon, Jérôme (1852). Je me dis alors, avec un étonnement que depuis je n'ai jamais pu réduire: 'Je vois les yeux qui ont vu l'Empereur'. (CC, 13).

Thus, with striking simplicity, is launched a voyage of discovery, apparently a search for the nature of photography, in fact a quest for a more fundamental reality. And the end, carrying the same eloquent resonance as the end of Proust's novel, is:

A moi de choisir, de soumettre son spectacle [that of photography] au code civilisé des illusions parfaites, ou d'affronter en elle le réveil de l'intraitable réalité.

The 'je' in these sentences both is and is not Barthes - just as Proust's narrator is only fleetingly Marcel. He does express the desires, fears and thoughts of the author, yet he is also a masked figure, the narrator. In the same way, Barthes had said of the 'autobiographical' Roland Barthes par lui-même: 'tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman' - or by an orator, we might say.

The particular 'réveil de l'intraitable réalité' which La Chambre claire gives us concerns the way in which the chemical reality of photography gives us the shock of a living presence which is now dead - a banality, and yet, like other rhetorical commonplaces, an essential truth, rendered harmless by familiarity, yet capable of being reactivated by the power of words. The centre of Barthes's book, and its point of maximum power, is about his mother's death, one of the commonest of themes, as common as love and as difficult to write about. The disguise of the note on photography has led him, as if by accident, to the heart of the matter, and now he writes without embarrassment and with a classic beauty of phrasing worthy of Chateaubriand, Tolstoy or Proust. Rather than try to analyse this prose, let me just quote a few sentences:

Or, un soir de novembre, peu de temps après la mort de ma mère, je rangeais des photos. Je n'espérais pas la 'retrouver', je n'attendais rien de ces 'photographies d'un être, devant lesquelles on se le rappelle moins bien qu'en se contentant de penser à lui (Proust). Je savais bien que, par cette fatalité qui est l'un des traits les plus atroces du deuil, j'aurais beau consulter des images, je ne pourrais jamais plus me rappeler ses traits (les appeler tout entiers à moi). Non, je voulais, selon le voeu de Valéry à la mort de sa mère, 'écrire un petit recueil sur elle, pour moi seul' (peut-être l'écrirai-je un jour, afin qu'imprimée, sa mémoire dure au moins le temps de ma propre notoriété)... (CC, 99)

J'allais ainsi, seul dans l'appartement où elle venait de mourir, regardant sous la lampe, une à une, ces photos de ma mère, remontant peu à peu le temps avec elle, cherchant la vérité du visage que j'avais aimé. Et je la découvris.(CC, 105-6)

\*\*\*

**What is the moral of this story? Is it simply a case of 'How I learnt to stop worrying and love rhetoric' - Barthes finally managing to do what everyone else does and fall off his bicycle with the necessary brio? Not really, I think. La Chambre claire may be his most successful performance, using a narrative rhetoric to suggest what is not easy to say, but his work as a whole shows a constant and fascinating interweaving of the three threads I have distinguished. In his theory and practice we see, not an unproblematic celebration and continuation of ancient rhetoric, nor a naïve modern rejection of its artifice, but a complicated love-hate relationship which is exemplary for the modern writer and indeed for the modern student of rhetoric.**



a) Works by Roland Barthes:

- AR** = "L'Ancienne Rhétorique: aide-mémoire", Communications, 16 (1970), pp.172-223.
- BL** = Le Bruissement de la langue (Paris: Seuil, 1984).
- CC** = La Chambre claire (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).
- DZ** = Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture (Paris: Seuil, coll. Points, 1972).
- EC** = Essais critiques (Paris: Seuil, 1964).
- FDA** = Fragments d'un discours amoureux (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
- I** = Incidents (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
- M** = Mythologies (Paris: Seuil, Coll. Points, 1970).
- OO** = L'Obvie et l'obtus (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
- RB** = Roland Barthes par lui-même (Paris: Seuil, 1975).
- SFL** = Sade, Fourier, Loyola (Paris: Seuil, coll. Points, 1980).
- SR** = Sur Racine (Paris: Seuil, 1963).
- S/Z** = S/Z (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

b) other works

J.Dubois et al. (Groupe  $\mu$ ), Rhétorique générale (Paris: Larousse, 1970).

T.Eagleton, Literary Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

P.Fontanier, Les Figures du discours, ed. G.Genette (Paris: Flammarion, 1968).

M.Fumaroli, L'Age de l'éloquence (Paris, Geneva: Droz, 1980).

G.Genette, Figures I (Paris: Seuil: coll. Points, 1966).

R.Jakobson, Essais de linguistique générale, tr. N.Ruwet, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1963).

J.Paulhan, Les Fleurs de Tarbes (Paris: Gallimard coll. Idées, 1973).

J.Paulhan, Oeuvres complètes, 5 vols (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966-70).

P.Roger, Roland Barthes, roman (Paris: Grasset, 1986).

with the world in God (19) from modern feminist views on this aspect  
CHRISTIAN MASON SUTHERLAND

Peter France is Professor of French at the University of Edinburgh. His publications include: Racine's Rhetoric (1965), Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot (1972), Racine: Andromaque (1977), Diderot (1982), Poets of Modern Russia (1982), Rousseau: Confessions (1987).

moderate feminist views on this aspect

in many of them, in particular

in the approach to the feminist

in Edinburgh for Winter 1987, Kathy Eden begins her article "Hermeneutics and

the Ancient Rhetorical Tradition" with a quotation from Zelbstbetrachtung "the only to

hermeneutics and rhetoric result from the fact that every act of understanding is the

observers of an act of discourse, in that one must come to grasp the thought that was at

the base of the discourse" (29) It is this matter of the thought at the base of the

discourse that I particularly want to address. Specifically, I want to look at two

women's approaches to Christian theology: Mary Daly's Beyond God the Father and

Sally McEvoy's Metaphorical Theology

Christian theology is often considered to be the last stronghold of the male. The

scriptures were written, or written down, by men, and throughout the centuries have

been interpreted primarily by men. The community which theology serves—the church—

has until recently excluded women from the priesthood and for the most part from the

teaching ministry, and even today a large part of the church still denies important and

influential positions to women. It is not surprising, therefore, that feminists are troubled

by an institution which appears to exclude them. To quote Mary Daly: "If God is male,

then the world is male, and the church is male, and the Bible is male, and God is male,

and Jesus is male, and the Holy Spirit is male, and the angels are male, and the saints are

male, and the church is male, and the world is male, and God is male, and Jesus is male,