

# The Rhetorical Mission: Barthes's Seminars from 1964 to 1969

Claudia Amigo Pino

*Translated by Sam Ferguson*

It would be difficult to identify a rhetorical mission from a reading of Roland Barthes's published works.<sup>1</sup> Only three of his essays refer to rhetoric in their title: 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), 'Rhetorical Analysis' (1967), and 'The Old Rhetoric: An Aide-mémoire' (1970), which cover quite different topics, such as advertisements for food products, the textual analysis of narrative, and the history and concepts of ancient Rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to understand the relationship between all these topics, and it is almost impossible to bring them together to form one 'mission'.

Furthermore, although Barthes's biographers recognise the importance of the study of Rhetoric, they never refer to a 'rhetorical' period of his work, which would follow on from the 'semiological' period. This is the case with Marie Gil's biography, which devotes no more than a paragraph to rhetoric before discussing the controversy surrounding *On Racine*, and this only says that it would be 'subjected to a new, linguistic reading'.<sup>3</sup> The subject has a little more importance for Tiphaine Samoyault (taking up precisely one page), who refers to the first seminar on rhetoric (1964-1965) and the seminar for the following year on the disappearance of Rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> As for Andy Stafford, although he refers very little to this rhetorical moment, he establishes links between the *Elements of Semiology*, the seminar on Rhetoric of 1964-1965, and the essay 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', which allows us to see the importance of the rhetorical approach.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Barthes himself always kept this mission hidden. In his autobiographical volume *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Rhetoric is completely absent from his system of 'phases', and there are almost no references to this discipline in the book's other fragments.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, Rhetoric was the subject of five seminars that Barthes led at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), between 1964 and 1969. This article aims to describe these seminars with a view to constructing an account of this *mission*, which begins in 1964 (contrary to the impression given by the order of the published texts) with the exploration of ancient

Rhetoric, and ends by proposing a new method of literary analysis, namely textual analysis, which is set out in his 1970 essay *S/Z*.

The present article derives from part of an ongoing research project on all of Barthes's seminars at the EPHE between 1962 and 1974 and then, from after 1975 to 1977, at the renamed École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), and for which I intend to set out the major projects or missions that he pursued even though Barthes always denied their existence. Indeed, according to Barthes, he published only because of a desire for the other, or in response to being *commissioned*.<sup>7</sup> The notes for five of the fourteen seminars led by Barthes at the EPHE and then at the EHESS have been published in full by the Editions du Seuil/IMEC, most notably the seminar on Balzac's *Sarrasine* (edited by Claude Coste and Andy Stafford), which will be discussed here. However, most of the notes remain unpublished and can be accessed only at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.<sup>8</sup> I would therefore like to thank Éric Marty and Michel Salzedo for the permission to consult these notes, as well as the help of Marie-Odile Germain and Thomas Cazentre, who repeatedly brought out the endless folders and envelopes in which Barthes kept his documents for the seminars.

### The Inexistent Great Work

Unlike other authors contemporary with him, Barthes did not publish a work of reference that explained (at least provisionally) his system of thought, such as Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* or Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, to suggest well-known examples. But that does not mean that he did not write it. Taken as a whole, the notes from the seminars on rhetoric could constitute an enormous work of reference: firstly, because they constitute a substantial work of research on the origins and on the most important discussions of rhetoric; secondly, because the subject of Rhetoric allowed Barthes to develop an original vision of the role of literature in society; and thirdly, because the perception of the role of literature would lead him to propose a new method of literary analysis.

Barthes never hid this work on Rhetoric, and he did publish aspects of it – albeit scattered across a range of different publications. For example, a heavily edited version of his research on the origins of Rhetoric was published in 1970 (six years after it was initially presented) in the journal *Communications*. Around the same time, his new conception of

literature was presented in his paper delivered in Baltimore in 1966 called 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', and which was first published in 1970 in the United States. As for the method of analysis, this is set out in one of his most hermetically self-sufficient books, *S/Z*, published by Seuil in 1970. A reader of Barthes's works could be perfectly familiar with these publications and still not realise that they belong to an interconnected system. So, an understanding of this system could contribute to a much better understanding of his ideas on Rhetoric.

This places me in a rather complicated situation. As a specialist in genetic criticism, I am supposed to form hypotheses about the process of creating a work, based on the transcription and analysis of handwritten documents.<sup>9</sup> But in this case, it is a question of doing the opposite: the handwritten notes to which I shall refer here do not help me to reconstruct the process of creating a work, but rather to understand why this work was not written or, more precisely, published. It is therefore important to underline, before undertaking an analysis in this article of Barthes's 'rhetorical mission', that it consists in a methodological subversion, or even in form of provocation.

### **Research Project: Barthes's 1964-1965 Seminar**

Barthes's choice of Rhetoric as a subject was a consequence of the first two seminars on semiology, whose aim had been to propose a method of analysis based on a few key concepts of structural linguistics which could be used to analyse any system of signs. When Barthes decided to apply this method, he realised that some systems (especially those that interested him the most, such as photography, food, and literature) could not be explained only by way of a combination of signs, as they also produced secondary or tertiary signifieds which were not normally accounted for in a description of the system. Barthes called this second level of signification in systems 'connotation', drawing on the ideas of Louis Hjelmslev. In the following seminar, he proposed to study the only discipline, in his view, that had analysed closely these phenomena of connotation evident in discourse, namely Rhetoric, or more specifically meta-Rhetoric, a discipline that attempts to reflect on the forms through which a certain effect is produced by means of words.

Therefore, on the one hand, we can speak of a continuity between Barthes's semiological mission and then his rhetorical mission. On the other hand, the move from semiology to Rhetoric represents also a radical shift, since Barthes would no longer be concerned with 'contemporary systems of signification' – such as fashion, food, or decoration – but instead with the secondary signifieds of verbal language, or in other words, with literary effects.<sup>10</sup> However it was not simply a matter of developing various concepts of criticism, as Barthes also wanted to use this knowledge in order to produce, for himself, a set of secondary signifieds. He thereby moved, according to Tiphaine Samoyault, from analysis to technique.<sup>11</sup>

Barthes began the seminar with a long foreword, in which he reminded listeners where he had come from and proposed to tell them where he was going and what he would encounter on the way. It was clear, in his view, that he was expanding on Hjelmslev's connotative semiology. The subject of this seminar, the object that he and the seminar students were going to 'encounter on the way', would be meta-rhetoric: 'the metalanguage on the articulation between the two systems of signification, from the fifth century B.C. up until the nineteenth century'. But he proposes a broader reflection, beyond the rules of organisation or style: for example, he reflects on rhetoric as an instrument of the ruling classes to control the language of societies, and also on the death of meta-rhetoric at the end of the nineteenth century, when it began to disappear from university curricula and became an 'empty' discipline:

However, meta Rhet: mortal: dead in the last century (while Rhet-as-object certainly remains) at the dawn of our modernity. Why this collapse? How? Replaced by what? This will be our question: the fall of the rhetorical empire.<sup>12</sup>

As early as the seminar's foreword, Barthes outlines some possible answers to this question. According to him, rhetoric does not coincide with what one learns at university, namely, that the quality of writing depends on the talent of the author – Barthes had not yet written 'The Death of the Author', but he already saw the author as a founding myth for a university type of literary criticism that he wanted to call into question.<sup>13</sup> However, rhetoric focuses on writing at work, in use, which corresponds neither to literary criticism (which is concerned with individual talent) nor to structural linguistics as such (which deals with the system and not individual use); that is why, for Barthes, rhetoric was becoming a sort of 'hole' within knowledge:

A taboo? At the very least let's say: there's a very bad distance from the subject, poorly focused in relation to academic values: neither the history of literature (of 'creation' with its myth of the individual) nor the history of language (yet it's on this side, so often taken up, but so little work done), since it's a secondary code: between 'philology' and 'biography': in a hole. Add to that 1) distrust of 'great' subjects (a subject of great synchrony), 'syntheses' of knowledge; 2) lack of interest in literature as instrument; 3) break between the history of language and linguistics (even for Brunot); 4) contempt for rhet, as artifice. All this: condemns the vice of French academic classifications, naturally based on a mythical idea of literature.<sup>14</sup>

But the fault lies not only with literary criticism. Barthes knows very well that something has happened to literature as well: it is literature itself that has prompted the critic to be no longer concerned with writing techniques. This explains why Barthes claims, in the section of the foreword on 'where he is going', that his goal is the 'essence' of contemporary literature:

[W]e aim for understanding. However, a historical aim: what we are questioning is the collapse of the system, in order to understand the *essence* of our lit. Final goal: contemporary lit.: a (fatally) connotative lit. without a declared system of connotation. Our horizon: he who wishes, is going to write.<sup>15</sup>

Barthes did not get as far as to answer these questions in that year's seminar, but they would be answered little by little in the following seminars and in the various publications over the course of the years studying Rhetoric, as we have already seen in relation to 'The Death of the Author'. It is important to note, however, that these questions are raised at the very beginning of the research, and that whenever Barthes refers to systems for classifying rhetorical figures in the medieval period, for example, he always keeps on the horizon his concern for the way in which the rhetorical system has been rejected in the contemporary period.

It is impossible in this space to summarise all the fields of knowledge that Barthes mobilises in the pages following the foreword. In the first part of the seminar, whose notes make up ninety-nine pages of very tightly packed writing, he tries to present a sort of history of rhetoric (which he calls a 'journey'): beginning with the work of Gorgias, he passes at length through Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, rhetorical works of the Middle Ages (especially St. Augustine), finally arriving at the rhetorical

textbooks of the nineteenth century. For an overview of this journey, one can of course refer to Barthes's own summaries of his seminars; but his 1970 article 'The Old Rhetoric' is a long way from a being faithful reproduction of the work that he had developed in his hand-written seminar notes.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the content is similar, there is very little reference in the published text to what had been the horizon of Barthes's rhetorical research ('he who is going to write'); on the other hand, the notes have a stated aim of always considering how we have arrived at the current concept of literature (that of Barthes's time, and perhaps our own too). In addition, in the published version we get the impression that each rhetorician has a similar importance, whereas in the notes there are long pauses to discuss certain philosophers who would be fundamental for everything that then follows.

This is the case for the section on Aristotle, which includes a reflection on Aristotle's three works on language: *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*. Barthes's observations go well beyond the immediate subject of his 'journey', and address questions of philology or even the circulation of Aristotle's work in the Middle Ages. It is precisely in the relationship between Plato and Aristotle in this first section that Barthes finds the first elements for reflecting on the 'essence' of literature in the twentieth century.

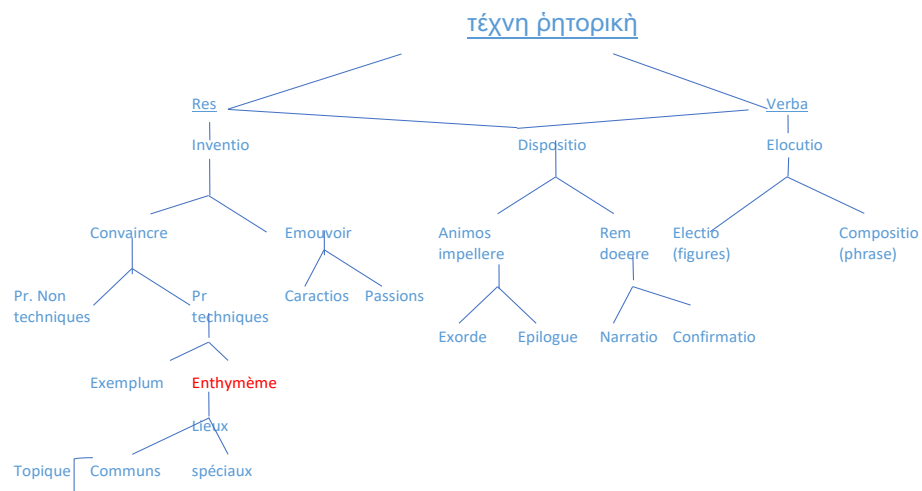
For Barthes, Plato is a rhetorician of the paradigm on the one hand: a good speech depends on the units that are chosen in order to compose it. He focuses on the classification and recognition of these units (which we might call 'ideas'). On the other hand, Aristotle is a rhetorician of the syntagm: for him, everything depends on the order in which these units are presented:

The opposition [between Plato and Aristotle] is not only moral, but structural: Aristotle: his Rhet = intellectual and syntagmatic (the **enthymeme**); for Aristotle, ideas are not paradigmatic → paradoxically, there is a subsequent opening onto an aesthetic of the syntagma. The opposite case in the Platonic division: ideas, intellectual units: dichotomisable, opposable as marked/unmarked.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, in Plato, discourse is not enough in itself, there must be a call on ideas, which are external to language, since they belong to the 'real'. In contrast, for Aristotle, everything depends on the order of discourse, there is no need for any 'real'. Yet it is this independence from

the real that allows the assimilation of fiction, or, in the terms used today, literature.

To understand this better we must move on to the second part of the seminar, in which Barthes proposes to set out the rhetorical system in its entirety in the form of a tree of concepts (and so, as a taxonomy), and then to retrace this tree step by step. These are the most important branches of the system:



The 209 pages that make up this part of the seminar are summarised in the section entitled ‘The Network’ in ‘The Old Rhetoric’.<sup>18</sup> Here Barthes goes through the *inventio* (the ‘thing’ that will be discussed), then the *dispositio* (the order in which this thing will be set out), followed by the *elocutio* (the form used to set out this thing), and then by all the elements on each branch. As in the case of the ‘journey’, some elements of this taxonomy will be foregrounded, notably those that help him to find answers for the questions concerning the contemporary conception of literature.

One of the most important parts of this development is precisely the concept of the enthymeme, the basis of Aristotelian rhetoric, to which Barthes refers in the citation above from the first part of the seminar. The enthymeme, as we can see in this model, is part of *inventio* (the ‘thing’ that is to be discussed) and can be defined as a type of syllogism, a proposition with two premises and a conclusion, but from which the conclusion is removed.

Here is the classic example of a syllogism, as set out in Barthes's seminar notes:

All men are mortal Premise 1	Socrates is a man Premise 2	Therefore, Socrates is mortal 3 (conclusion) <sup>19</sup>
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In the case of the enthymeme, it is only necessary to present the premises, and the people will come to the conclusion by themselves that Socrates is mortal. These two starting points are not necessarily 'real', they are only 'realistic' (the people must believe that they can be real). And here we return to the differences between Plato and Aristotle. Plato's objective involved showing that these ideas were real; Aristotle's goal was to convince, to seduce, and seduction is not made from reality, but from what others think can be real.

In this sense, Aristotle, compared with Plato, is apparently amoral, since he does not want to know if these ideas are true or not. For him, it is not important to tell the truth, but to reach an agreement, 'to be convinced':

Does Aristotelian amorality have a social meaning? We know Aristotle's politics: for a balanced democracy, because it's a middle-class democracy (cf. the happy medium), which is supposed to reduce tension, antagonisms between poor/rich and majority/minority. In a sense, Rhet is in ideological agreement with (bourgeois) pragmatism (≠ Platonic aristocracy) = rhetoric of the people (what is plausible).<sup>20</sup>

The 'essence' of literature that Barthes pursues in this seminar is precisely related to this rhetoric of the people. In a way, for Aristotle and those who follow him (for Barthes, almost all rhetoric is Aristotelian), speech (*parole*) serves to reach an agreement with the world:

For centuries, thanks to Aristotelianism, *Parole* was in agreement with the world. Rhetoric: instrument and permanent pact of reconciliation. Does not divide, separate, the world and *Parole*. Rhetoric: path of well-being – None of the malaise of the writer. Rhet: path of integration – when Rhetoric ceases: malaise of *parole* in being written down; appearance of suicidal forms (Rimbaud, Mallarmé), indecisiveness, difficulty of writing.<sup>21</sup>



Literature can emerge from Aristotelian rhetoric because it finds in it its very foundation: *parole* is not supposed to be true, it can even be fictional if the aim is to arrive at a reconciliation. Literature is then conceived not as a fictional parallel world, imagined by an author, but as a world built with the reader, based on what can be considered true.

However, Rhetoric disappeared in the late nineteenth century, when these suicidal forms that Barthes mentions emerged. From that moment on, literature no longer wished to reach an agreement: it could now refer to facts that may not be true, or use words or grammatical structures that do not exist, etc. What is this new 'essence' of literature? How do we get at it?

### **Rhetorical Mission Divided in Two: Barthes's Seminar of 1965-1966**

Barthes's second series of seminars on Rhetoric, entitled 'La rhétorique aujourd'hui', set out to explore what has become of Rhetoric in the twentieth century. However, as in several of Barthes's texts, the seminar also shows a change from the initial idea, based on findings from the exploration of ancient Rhetoric.

This does not mean that the second set of seminars did not accomplish its original purpose of exploring the modern avatars of Rhetoric; but this task would be left to Barthes's students or those attending the seminars. So, Gérard Genette intervened in the seminar with a paper on the disciplines that have replaced Rhetoric in education (stylistics, literary analysis); Philippe Sollers spoke on Mallarmé and the incorporation of a reflection on form into literature itself (which Barthes would call 'meta-literature'); and Tzvetan Todorov, on the linguistics of narrative developed by the 'Soviets'. As for Barthes, his contribution was to address two other rhetorical missions. On the one hand, he continued his research on the 'essence' of literature, by trying to understand why criticism was no longer concerned with *inventio* (the 'thing' to be said) nor with *dispositio* (the order of elements in discourse). We only ever refer to *elocutio* (the form in which we say things). With regard to *dispositio*, Barthes related it to the crisis of genres: how can one establish a narrative order when we do not know what genre will be used? Since we write fewer and fewer novels or poetry, only writing remains:

Unclassifiable writers, unclassifiable texts. Acute awareness of this: [Sollers'] Drama = Novel. In fact, only one class remains: writing. Le Clézio (preface to *Fever*) 'Poetry, novels and short stories are strange old objects which hardly anyone today is deceived by. What's the use of turning out poems or stories? All that remains is writing...'. In short: writing/non-writing: new relevance. Capital to be explored.<sup>22</sup>

But rather than the crisis of genre, Barthes is particularly concerned with the crisis of the 'thing' (*res*), or what one wishes to say:

*Inventio* is at the heart of the modern problematic: 1) what to say? 2) Creative value of forms in relation to content. 3) Is there anything other than language [langage]? Lit.: what is placed ~~at the ori~~, in us, at the deepest origin of language [langage] (Blanchot): *Inventio* is no longer here the birth of an existing Signified, but the accomplishment of a void (already in Mallarmé).<sup>23</sup>

But how can we describe this void? At this point, Barthes opts for an anthropological explanation. Unlike an animal, whose cries serve to communicate with someone (a human, another animal), man can speak without the presence of the other. Literature seems to mimic this anthropological problem: if you write something, it is always to say that the other is not there, to talk about the void of communication.<sup>24</sup> Here we find sketched out the early elements in Barthes's first rhetorical mission, a mission which – still precarious at this time – would lead onto the linguistics of enunciation.

At the same time, Barthes realises that ancient Rhetoric – especially Aristotelian – is still valid for a certain, more popular form of literature. And this would be the basis for his second rhetorical mission, that of developing a method for the analysis of non-modern literature ('mass-market' literature, commercial literature, literature of the nineteenth century), using the concept of the enthymeme, or agreement with the reading public.

This seminar, composed mainly of the presentations made by students and other guests, finishes with a long reflection on the first rhetorical mission. It becomes part of a paper given by Barthes in 1966 at the Johns Hopkins conference on 'The Structuralist Controversy', and published in 1970 as 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?'. Here, once again, Barthes addresses the void produced (and transmitted) by modern

literature. From a reading of Émile Benveniste's work, he distinguishes between two types of 'I' in literature, the 'I' that is written and the 'I' that is spoken of in the narrative; this division is such that the 'I' who writes is deemed by Barthes to be not the same as the 'I' who is read by 'you'. Modern literature, Barthes argues, makes the parallel existence of the 'I' explicit: 'the case of the Proustian narrator is exemplary: he exists only in writing, despite the reference to a pseudo-memory'.<sup>25</sup>

This explains why Barthes suggests that in modern literature it is impossible to write about something, it is now only a matter of *inventio*. The modern writer knows that he cannot speak of himself, and that his 'true I' is elsewhere: he therefore abandons the pursuit of agreement and destroys discourse. His mythical goal is to find enunciation:

The meaning or the goal of this effort is to substitute the instance of discourse for the instance of reality (or of the referent), which has been, and still is, a mythical 'alibi' dominating the idea of literature. The field of the writer is nothing but writing itself, not as the pure 'form' conceived by an aesthetic of art for art's sake, but much more radically, as the only space possible for the one who writes.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Rhetoric of History (and Modern Literature): The Seminar of 1966-1967**

Barthes seemed to continue his reflections on the first rhetorical mission into the seminar of 1966-1967, but they very quickly gave way to the second rhetorical mission. This second mission dominates the next two series of seminars, which, from 1966 to 1969, are concerned with Balzac's *Sarrasine*. However, this new mission was but a pause in its development, as it would return in force in Barthes's more experimental texts of the 1970s, in which he places himself in the position of a writer and attempts to pursue a sort of mythical enunciation.

Strange at first as it might seem, the 1966-1967 seminar entitled 'The Discourse of History' is actually devoted to the crisis of enunciation in modern literature. But the title of the seminar series is misleading, to a certain extent: the reference to History becomes a necessary step towards understanding the difference between what is literary ('fictional discourse') and what is not ('historical discourse'). To appreciate the difference,

Barthes proposes a linguistic approach, but it is no longer the structural linguistics that dominated the first seminars. He once again uses what he calls 'the linguistics of discourse', which borrows elements from Benveniste, Jakobson, and, in this seminar in particular, Austin and Searle's work on performative discourse.

It is important to note that the seminar's objectives do not seem to have been achieved in any precise way. Here, as in many other texts, Barthes develops an argument that does not reach a conclusion, or even a summary, but arrives rather at a sort of negation of what he had proposed earlier. We will now set out the different parts of this seminar, in the knowledge that they will lead us somewhere unexpected.

The seminar's subject proceeds from the following hypothesis (already present in the conclusion to the previous seminar, and in the published essay 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?'): contemporary literature revolves around the void of discourse. But here Barthes introduces a new argument: the disturbance of the subject/predicate relationship.

For Barthes, everyday discourse continues to predicate the 'person', whereas literature always tries to escape this obligation of predicating the person, by proposing new modes and new levels of predication. From the nineteenth century onwards, we start to find more radical experiments in the suppression of the subject (Mallarmé) or predicate (Beckett). But, for Barthes, the clearest experiment remains that of Proust, because he puts language in the place of the subject and the predicate:

In fact, what is unquestionably predicated: the book. The written book predicates the book that the narrator wants to write (that does not mean that they coincide, since one ends when the other finally begins). The great revolution introduced into the relation between the subject and the predicate: liberation from the gratuitousness of predicates: the subject of language [langage] is language [langage].<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the subject/predicate relationship, Barthes also considers the intermittences of enunciation, which lead him to argue that, in modern literature, there is often a disintegration of the person and, consequently, of the author (this is the same period as the composition of 'The Death of the Author'). For Barthes, 'the problem is not to depersonalise the subject (the author), and ultimately not even to make it absent, but to decentre it', as we have seen in Proust.<sup>28</sup> One might

conclude that literary discourse is special in that it shares out the moment of enunciation: thus it is no longer possible to speak of only one author, but of several, since, in addition to the narrator, the reader takes the place of the author in order to resolve the differences of this plural subject.

Before turning to the 'discourse of History', Barthes undertakes a long digression on a new subject, which has just been presented to him by one of the seminar's participants, Julia Kristeva. In his view, everything that had just been described was only a 'long introduction to the linguistics of discourse', based on a linear definition of *parole*. He then states his intention to consider the depth of discourse and to 'recall that it is a space (and not a line)'. To this end, he first refers to Saussure's *Anagrammes*, to draw attention to the fact that one message always contains another. But he prefers to use the word 'paragramme', proposed by Julia Kristeva, allowing a perception of a message as a space where several other messages gather. Starting from this concept, and that of dialogism created by Bakhtin, Barthes proposes a distinction between 'monologic discourses' and 'stereophonic discourses', and recognises that the discourse he is using, critical discourse, is of course a monologic discourse evoking an object – literature – that is never monologic. This idea would go on to become a guiding phantasy in the series of seminars that followed, but only properly taken up in the seminar on 'Le Lexique de l'auteur' in 1973.

The second part of the 1966-1967 seminar addresses the historical discourse of great, classical historians such as Herodotus, Machiavelli, Bossuet, and Michelet. A brief summary of this section was published in 1967, in the proceedings of a conference on Lucien Goldmann, and reprinted in the *Œuvres complètes*.<sup>29</sup> In it, Barthes considers the emergence of grammatical categories in historical discourse, with a view to understanding the differences between historical and literary discourse. In this regard, it is important to recall that, for Barthes, literary discourse highlights the time of enunciation, which is shared by both author and reader. In the case of the enunciation of historical discourse, he observes that the position of the subject can be spotted by two rather hidden means: in the marks of listening (when sources are made explicit) and in the organisation (where the text begins, if it is organised chronologically or in a zigzag, if it accelerates...). Consequently, the foregrounding of enunciation is a common feature of very different discourses. But Barthes is not satisfied with this conclusion, and he moves from the analysis of enunciation to the actual statement [énoncé].

In historical discourse, the *énoncé* produces real 'collections'. It brings together various types of subjects (kings, nobles, generals, but also

historical themes) with predicates (of war, conquest, ruin), but these collections always make for an assertive, constative discourse: 'historical fact is linguistically linked to a privilege of being: one recounts what has been, not what has not been or what has been questionable'.<sup>30</sup> In short, historical discourse contains very few indices of its enunciation; on the other hand, it manifests an overwhelming recourse towards an *énoncé* that is always both assertive and constative.

Barthes then realises that his journey has led him to an empty conclusion. He sees that, even though historical discourse seems to be a constative discourse, it is in fact a type of performative discourse whose accomplished action is – quite simply – to make reality appear. When we read a historical text (it does not matter if it is a classical narrative or a more modern and therefore thematic discourse), we have the impression that it refers, in fact, to reality; and this is the major difference from literary discourse. Barthes arrives at this conclusion at the very end of the seminar, when it is too late to develop it further.

Nonetheless, in his 'inconclusion', Barthes sets out one of his most important theoretical findings: reality is not a given that precedes the existence of the text, but rather an effect produced by this text itself. This idea is the beginning of his work on the 'reality effect' – developed in the essay called 'The Reality Effect' and published in 1968; and it leads also to the 'that has been' found in photography that he will describe in *Camera Lucida*.<sup>31</sup> This discovery (or failure) would encourage him to change his subject of enquiry and lead him to devote himself to his second rhetorical mission, on non-modern literature, explored in the two series of seminars on Balzac's *Sarrasine*.

### **Rhetoric as Method: The Seminars of 1967-1968 and 1968-1969**

Following the 'inconclusion' on the discourse of History, Barthes moved onto the study of a narrative by an author considered to be a 'Realist' (and whose work might therefore be expected to produce this same 'reality effect'), Honoré de Balzac. A reading of the nineteenth-century writer's 1830 tale *Sarrasine* allows Barthes to develop the second part of his rhetorical mission: the search for a method with which to study Aristotelian literature, the literature of agreement. As the seminar notes on *Sarrasine* from 1967-1968 and 1968-1969 have been transcribed,

published and commented upon, we will briefly examine the relation between the method envisaged here by Barthes and his work on Rhetoric.<sup>32</sup>

The relationship between the seminars on *Sarrasine* on the one hand, and those on Rhetoric on the other, is quite clear: the method for reading Balzac considered by Barthes emerges from the concept of the enthymeme. It concentrates therefore on what information the Balzac text gives to the reader so that they can come to a 'conclusion' by themselves, and then on asking what sort of conclusion we are talking about in the case of the literature.

Of course, there is no question of arriving at a sentence such as 'Socrates is mortal' with which to explain the whole development of a narrative. Instead, Barthes's reading of Balzac produces a network of associations, reflections, and sensations, which Barthes calls a 'Text'. Once we know the conclusion of literature, it is then a matter of understanding the enthymemes of literary production, or, in other words, the premises that require the participation of the reader in order to complete the syllogism.

According to Barthes, there are two types of enthymemes: firstly, those that allow the reader to reconstruct a determined space-time (description of characters, clothing, temporal indications, etc.); and secondly, an enthymeme that provides narrative information (for example, a revolver in the drawer) that leads to predictions about the action and the constitution of characters.

The first example of Barthes's reflections on these two types of enthymeme (even though he does not use the term) can be found in the classic structuralist essay that Barthes published just before the seminars on Balzac were about to begin. 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' uses the term 'index' for the first type of enthymeme (that which allows us to characterise the narrative); and for the second type, 'function' (that which, in the syntagma of the narrative, allows us to predict a future event).<sup>33</sup> These terms are borrowed from various authors who had already worked on the grammar of narrative (Propp, Tomachevsky, Bremond, and Greimas, for example); but they are linked to the reflection on Rhetoric from Barthes's earlier seminars.

In the seminars on *Sarrasine*, Barthes goes on to explore the two types of enthymeme, further divided into 'sub-enthymemes' and which he calls 'codes'. These codes are conceived as follows:

In fact, they are fragments of this something that has *already* been read, seen, lived; the code is a furrow, a trace of the

already-there. That which relates to the book (of culture, of life as culture): an inexhaustible corpus, infinity of quotations. This perspective makes the text into a prospectus.<sup>34</sup>

Code in this conception has nothing to do with Jakobson's: it is a much vaguer concept. The code is what makes it possible to interpret a piece of information in the narrative (an allusion to a neighbourhood in Balzac's Paris, for example) and to make an association with information already known by the reader (for example, that it is a rich neighbourhood) and, in so doing, build an idea of what a house in this neighbourhood would be like. This is one of the threads of the narrative's syllogistic fabric, of the 'Socrates is mortal' type; and there are several of these threads, and various types of them.<sup>35</sup>

It remains to be seen how we can identify these narrative premises, or codes. Barthes offers an unusual method that was probably unsettling for the students attending his seminars. He decides to divide the narrative into minimal units, which he calls 'lexias', and to observe how these codes intersect in each lexia of the narrative. Consequently, in each session, he would dwell on only two or three sentences of the narrative. By the end of the first year of the seminar, he had progressed no further than the first third of the text, which is only about thirty pages long. It was an analysis in slow-motion, or indeed an analysis on drugs.

Barthes's rhetorical mission came to end when he took a sabbatical year in Morocco, a moment marked by his starting to outline his highly personal work called 'Incidents' (and not published until after his death) and by his first experimental essay, *Empire of Signs*. It would appear then that the result of the whole theoretical journey through Rhetoric was that it finally allowed Barthes to write. And what had he learnt during this journey? That he should take something from the two rhetorical worlds, that of Aristotelian literature, and that of modern literature. In this way, he would now go on to include in his own texts, on the one hand, modern literature's intermittences of enunciation (for example, in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and *A Lover's Discourse*); and, on the other, he would always try to produce text, associations, that would prompt the reader to build worlds, experience sensations, to be carried along by the narrative. This is how we can be convinced by literature.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This research has been funded by FAPESP (São Paulo Research Foundation, Brazil) and CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Brazil).

<sup>2</sup> These three pieces have been translated into English and are available in the following volumes, respectively: *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 32-51; *The Rustle of Language*, ed. by François Wahl, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 83-89; *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 11-94.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Gil, *Roland Barthes. Au lieu de la vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), p. 284.

<sup>4</sup> Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> See Barthes's interview 'Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes' with Jean-Jacques Brochier, where he claims that all his books, except the first, were written to order; *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. IV, pp. 864-65. Barthes's *Œuvres complètes* are henceforth referenced as *OC* followed by the volume number.

<sup>8</sup> Parts of the 1966-1967 series of seminars called 'La Linguistique du discours' have been published by Maria O'Sullivan as 'Roland Barthes: genèse d'un séminaire inédit', in *Genesis. Manuscrits, recherche, invention*, 39 (autumn 2014) – available at <https://genesis.revues.org/1414>

<sup>9</sup> Almuth Grésillon, *Éléments de critique génétique. Lire les manuscrits modernes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> This phrase was in the title of the first two seminars.

<sup>11</sup> Samoyault, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 408-09.

<sup>12</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder I, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, pp. 142-49.

<sup>14</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder I, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder I, p. 14 bis.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Old Rhetoric' article corresponds to what Barthes calls a 'text reduction' in 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers' (see *Image, Music, Text*, p. 193). To explain this concept, he refers to the practice of mummification by the Jivaro tribe in the Amazon, who shrank the heads of their ancestors. The reduction of a text is, for Barthes, also a technique of mummifying a text: a form of preserving these texts, transforming them into objects of worship, but without life.

<sup>17</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder II, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, 'The Old Rhetoric', pp. 47-93.

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- <sup>19</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder III, p. 130.
- <sup>20</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder II, p. 40.
- <sup>21</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1964-1965'. Folder II, p. 92.
- <sup>22</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1965-1966'. Folder I, p. 9.
- <sup>23</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1965-1966'. Folder I, p. 9.
- <sup>24</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1965-1966'. Folder I, p. 10. Here already we can see the most important argument from *A Lover's Discourse*.
- <sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 143.
- <sup>26</sup> Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', p. 144.
- <sup>27</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1966-1967'. Folder I, p. 8.
- <sup>28</sup> BNF, NAF 28613, 'Séminaire 1966-1967'. Folder I, p. 12.
- <sup>29</sup> See Barthes, 'Rhetorical Analysis'.
- <sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 135.
- <sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 141-48.
- <sup>32</sup> See the edition of Barthes's seminar notes, '*Sarrasine*' de Balzac. *Séminaires à l'École pratique des hautes études (1967-1968 et 1968-1969)*, ed. by Claude Coste and Andy Stafford (Paris: Seuil, 2011).
- <sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image, Music, Text*, pp. 79-124.
- <sup>34</sup> Barthes, '*Sarrasine*' de Balzac, p. 500.
- <sup>35</sup> In *S/Z* five major codes are identified: cultural, symbolic, hermeneutic, proairetic, and semic; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 18-20.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claudia Amigo Pino is Professor of French Literature at the University of São Paulo. She has long worked on French manuscripts, notably those of Georges Perec and Roland Barthes. She has published several articles in Portuguese and French and is the author of the following books: *A ficção da escrita* (2004), *Escrever sobre escrever* (2007) and *Roland Barthes, a aventura do romance* (2015). She is currently preparing a book on the notes from all of Roland Barthes's seminars.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Sam Ferguson completed a doctorate in French literature at the University of Oxford in 2014, and was a Junior Research Fellow at Christ Church, Oxford, from 2014 to 2018. His research centres on life writing and the work of André Gide and Roland Barthes, and he is the author of *Diaries Real and Fictional in Twentieth-Century French Writing* (OUP, 2018). He is also a freelance translator.

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