

2.

In the comic vision the *animal* world is a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds, usually a dove. The archetype of pastoral images. In the tragic vision the animal world is seen in terms of beasts and birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and the like.

3.

In the comic vision the *vegetable* world is a garden, grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell's green world or of Shakespeare's forest comedies.⁵ In the tragic vision it is a sinister forest like the one in *Comus* or at the opening of the *Inferno*,⁶ or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.

4.

In the comic vision the *mineral* world is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone—in fact the whole comic series, especially the tree, can be conceived as luminous or fiery. The archetype of geometrical images: the "starlit dome"⁷ belongs here. In the tragic vision the mineral world is seen in terms of deserts, rocks and ruins, or of sinister geometrical images like the cross.

5.

In the comic vision the *unformed* world is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humors.⁸ In the tragic vision this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth. The combination of the sea and beast images gives us the leviathan and similar water-monsters.

Obvious as this table looks, a great variety of poetic images and forms will be found to fit it. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium,"⁹ to take a famous example of the comic vision at random, has the city, the tree, the bird, the community of sages, the geometrical gyre and the detachment from the cyclic world. It is, of course, only the general comic or tragic context that determines the interpretation of any symbol: this is obvious with relatively neutral archetypes like the island, which may be Prospero's island or Circe's.¹

Our tables are, of course, not only elementary but grossly over-simplified, just as our inductive approach to the archetype was a mere hunch. The important point is not the deficiencies of either procedure, taken by itself,

5. Shakespeare's forest (that is, pastoral) comedies include *As You Like It* (ca. 1599). For the "green world" of Andrew Marvell (1621–1678), English metaphysical poet, see especially "The Garden" (1681).

6. The first book of DANTE ALIGHIERI's *Divine Comedy* (1321). *Comus* (1634), a religious masque by Milton.

7. See, for example, Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" (written 1797; pub. 1816), which refers to Kubla Khan's "stately pleasure-dome."

8. The four fluids of the body—blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile—whose relative proportions were thought to determine a person's disposition and general health.

9. Poem (1927) by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939).

1. In Greek mythology, a sorceress who lived on the island of Acaea (where Odysseus and his men land in Homer's *Odyssey*). Prospero's island: the setting of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1611).

but the fact that, somewhere and somehow, the two are clearly going to meet in the middle. And if they do meet, the ground plan of a systematic and comprehensive development of criticism has been established.

1951

ROLAND BARTHES

1915–1980

Generally considered one of the leading figures in French structuralism, Roland Barthes is, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "famous for contradictory reasons." On the one hand, there is the scientific Barthes: the one who sought a universal grammar of narrative in his influential essay "Introduction to the Structural Study of Narrative" (1966), or who explored FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE's notion of semiology—a broad science of signs in human culture, of which linguistics would provide a model—in such works as *Elements of Semiology* (1965) and *The Fashion System* (1967). But on the other hand, there is the hedonist and connoisseur: the Barthes who wrote playfully and allusively about pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977). Even his literary tastes seemed contradictory: he promoted avant-garde writers (Robbe-Grillet, Brecht, Sollers), but he also loved and wrote about the most traditional of French authors (La Bruyère, Racine, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Proust). And he who questioned the importance of the author was himself preeminently an author—indeed, the only author to have written his own volume in a series of "perennial masters" (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 1975). A quintessential "man of letters" in the traditional sense, he was also a man of letters in an idiosyncratic, literal sense, organizing three of his books alphabetically so as to avoid thematic or logical organization, and highlighting the material form of letters in one of his book titles, *S/Z* (1970). He was less a path breaker than a habit breaker, resolutely committed to unlearning the routines of intelligibility, even those he himself had helped promote.

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg. His father, a naval officer, was killed a year later, and Barthes's mother moved to the paternal family home in Bayonne in southern France. The theorist of the death of the author thus grew up without a father, living with or near his mother until her death in 1977, three years before his own. In 1924 mother and son moved to Paris, where Barthes progressed to the *baccalauréat* in the Parisian schools and began studying for entrance into the prestigious École Normale, until his promising academic trajectory was interrupted by the first of several attacks of tuberculosis. Meanwhile, his mother's already strained relations with her Parisian family worsened in 1927 when she gave birth to an illegitimate child—Roland's half-brother, Michel Salgado. Although Barthes's grandparents were well-off, they refused Henriette Binger Barthes and her two sons any financial support, with the result that Henriette had to scrape by on what she earned as a bookbinder.

From 1934 to 1950 Barthes's life alternated between tuberculosis sanatoria (he was exempted from military duty and spent the years of the Occupation in a sanatorium in the Isère), academic institutions where he studied, and, when his health permitted, teaching jobs in Biarritz and abroad in Bucharest and Alexandria. Despite—or perhaps because of—his forced convalescences, he read avidly, founded a theatrical troupe, and began to write. From the first Barthes's writings reflect both his idiosyncratic creativity and his attunement to the intellectual milieu in which he found

himself. His first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), initially published as articles in Albert Camus's journal, *Combat*, analyzes the history of literary styles in terms derived from Marx and from Sartre. In this book Barthes looks at the relations between Literature with a capital L and the various modern forms of its demystification, from STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ's "vibratory near-disappearance" to Camus's "blank" style (the "zero degree" of the title).

A second, quite different, project Barthes undertook at the same time was an extensive study of the imagery used by the nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet. Scribbling passages on index cards, Barthes organized Michelet's "imagination" in ways that did not correspond to the explicit intentions of his writing. Like the work of the phenomenological critics Jean-Pierre Richard and GEORGES POULET, Barthes's analysis was a way of structuring Michelet's writing around its unconscious "obsessions." This research was published as a book titled *Michelet* (1954) in the same writers' series in which Barthes himself later appeared.

Barthes's third project in the mid-1950s, different yet again, was a series of short occasional pieces later published as *Mythologies* (1957). In this work, of which we give three examples, Barthes does a kind of Marxian semiology of mass culture and everyday life. His object is to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions ("myths") presented as if they were natural and self-evident; the result in many ways anticipates what is today called "cultural studies." Barthes combines a sharp eye for the social life of signs with a subtle critique of the naturalizations of the ethnocentric, patriarchal, petit-bourgeois French worldview. Critical of the covert functions of *what-goes-without-saying*, Barthes nevertheless enjoys the exhibitions, advertisements, photographs, articles, films, wrestling matches, and commodities that provide the occasion for his little feats of writing. In the essay on soap powders, for example, he both ends up revealing that the competing products are owned by the same company and—in his descriptions of these products in terms of foam and fire, the depth of linen and the triumph of cleanliness—enjoys the process of "frothing" rhetorically himself. In fact, in a perfect illustration of how capitalism devours its critics, an executive at France's largest advertising firm found Barthes's work on advertising so compelling that he began studying with Barthes and persuaded him to work briefly as a consultant for the automaker Renault. Barthes was critical of the myth-making operations of petit-bourgeois culture, but he was also intrigued by the meaning-making functions of cultural objects themselves.

As a researcher in Paris for ten years at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research), Barthes—like many others in Paris at that time, including CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS in anthropology, JACQUES LACAN in psychoanalysis, and TZVETAN TODOROV and Gérard Genette in literary studies—continued his exploration of the possibilities of extending Saussure's synchronic linguistic analysis to larger cultural structures. In 1962 Barthes was appointed to a tenured post in "the sociology of signs, symbols, and representations" at the École des Hautes Études (School for Advanced Study), where his seminar became legendary. His book *On Racine* (1963) raised hackles in the traditional academic community for its concentration on the structures of Racine's *textual* world rather than his biographical or historical world. Raymond Picard, a Racine scholar at the Sorbonne, countered with *New Criticism or New Fraud?* (1965). Barthes responded to Picard by arguing that traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities.

The Picard affair is the backdrop for one of Barthes's most notorious essays, "The Death of the Author." Written at the height of the antiestablishment uprisings of May 1968, it assails academic criticism's typical focus on "the man and his work" (which is in many ways the organizing principle of the present anthology). Indeed, Barthes was surprised to find himself caught in 1968 between generations: while he was attacking the generation of Picard, the students—brandishing the antistucturalist

slogan "Structures don't take to the streets!"—were rebelling against the generation of Barthes himself.

"The Death of the Author" begins with an example taken from Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*—the tale of a sculptor who falls in love with an Italian diva subsequently revealed to be not a woman but a castrato (*Sarrasine* was the text analyzed that year in his seminar, and Barthes went on to publish a full-length study of it in his book *S/Z*). Barthes focuses on a sentence in the text in which a series of exclamations about femininity cannot be clearly attributed to the conscious intentions of any one person, whether that be the author, the narrator, a character, or even "universal wisdom." Barthes argues that the effective, productive, and engaged reading of a text depends on the suspension of preconceived ideas about the character of the particular author—or even about human psychology in general. The text itself is feigning a set of assumptions it will subsequently reveal to be misguided. From the moment that writing detaches itself from an immediate context, "It is language which speaks, not the author." The author, the text, and the reader are each composed of a universe of quotations without origin or end. In its celebration of the birth of the reader, "The Death of the Author" explores the consequences of freeing the reading process from the constraints of fidelity to an origin, a unified meaning, an identity, or any other pregiven exterior or interior reality.

The publication of *S/Z* marks a turning point in Barthes's relation to structuralism. It is a multilevel analysis that refuses to structure the text otherwise than by cutting it into hundreds of little pieces of varying lengths (called *lexias*) and also by identifying five broad functions (called *codes*) at work in the text. Written as if it were meant to constitute a methodological exemplar, it exaggerates the performance of methodology to such an extent that it becomes inimitable and perhaps parodic. When commentators look for a break between structuralism and poststructuralism, *S/Z* stands as a revealing hinge. In it Barthes pursues not so much a *critique* of structuralism (as does JACQUES DERRIDA, for example) as an *explosion* of it. The hints of larger structures at work are fragmentary and multiple, not sustained, and the theoretical comments are printed as digressions, numbering almost a hundred. Boredom with the structuralist project of reducing all narratives to a common grammar combines with delight in the foretaste of a multitude of grammars and rhetorics hinted at but not developed in *S/Z*.

Barthes's subsequent essay reprinted here, "From Work to Text" (1971), is one of the clearest available summaries (including the obligatory disavowal of such a summary) of the poststructuralist theory of the "text" as it was developed not only by Barthes but by all the writers associated with the vanguard journal *Tel Quel*, including Philippe Sollers, JULIA KRISTEVA, Derrida, and others. This description of "textuality" can be seen as one way of marking the transition between structuralism and poststructuralism. Whereas culture and language for Lévi-Strauss and Saussure were structured like a game (chess is the favorite example), the text is structured like *play*—children's play, musical performance, or the excess motion in a machine. But both structuralists and poststructuralists would contrast their analyses to the classical study of literary and other cultural objects ("work"). The *text* is a process; the *work* is a product. *Works* can be found on library shelves; *texts* are signifying fields into which one enters. (The development of the Internet has perhaps made this distinction seem less radical than it did in the 1970s.) Their point is not that literature can be divided into works and texts but that the reader can activate either the closure of the signified (the coherence of a meaning) or the "play" of the signifier (the dissemination and disruption of meanings). The text deserves no vital "respect"—it is not alive and can thus be "broken" or "manhandled" in ways that would violate organic forms. The death of the author turns out to be based not on a murder but on an elimination of the metaphor of life in the first place. The work is "consumed"; the text is "produced" (in *S/Z*, Barthes called these the *readerly* and the *writerly* aspects of a text). Barthes ends the essay by opening onto pleasure, a topic that would engage him more and more from then on.

In later writings (*The Empire of Signs*, 1970; *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1973; *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 1975; *Camera Lucida*, 1980; and the posthumously published *Incidents*, 1987), Roland Barthes seems to resurrect precisely the author he had killed off. But the contradiction is more apparent than real. While the disembodied, abstract author of the network of signs does indeed become an embodied and particular author, the body and biography are both seen as historical, and both are structured like a text. The author is still not an extratextual identity determining meaning. The body can be read like a text, just as the text can be read like a body. Gaps in meaning, like the gaps in a garment, are equivalent sites of pleasure. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* does not create a person retrospectively but gives an alphabetically arranged mosaic of the preoccupations of someone who is just like a character in a novel. Indeed, in an interview Barthes called autobiography a "novel that dares not speak its name." He thus subtly alludes to Wildean homosexuality ("The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name") in a context in which Barthes's own homosexuality is being, by that very expression, *detached* from any real person. This sophisticated relation to homosexuality (neither hidden nor claimed) is readable throughout Barthes's work.

In 1976 this critic of academic criticism was elected to the Chair in Literary Semiology at France's most prestigious institution, the Collège de France. In his inaugural lecture, published as *Leçon* (1978), he explains why he is an unlikely choice for such a post and then goes on to recapitulate many of his thoughts about semiology and literature. Barthes thus ended up as one of the most established of antiestablishment academics.

Barthes's last book published during his lifetime, *Camera Lucida*, is both a meditation on photography and an act of mourning for his mother. Whereas in *Mythologies* he had revealed the contrived nature of the "reality" inherent in the campaign photograph, in *Camera Lucida*, on the contrary, he finds something in a photograph, particularly a snapshot, that is real. Neither a rhetorical sleight-of-hand nor an arbitrary contrivance, the photograph has a way of telling us "This has been." Although Barthes was only sixty-four years old at the time of its publication, the book reads in many ways like a voice from beyond the grave. That same year Roland Barthes was hit by a laundry truck in the street; his injuries proved fatal.

Writing on the cusp of structuralism and poststructuralism, Barthes was a master of the provocative essay, weaving together science and pleasure, critique and eloquence, and never simply choosing between them. For him, specialized vocabularies were delicious in themselves, and ordinary language already multidimensional.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the thirteen book titles cited above, there are several volumes of Barthes's essays available in English. Barthes published four collections of essays in French, which have all been translated by Richard Howard (*Critical Essays*, 1972; *New Critical Essays*, 1980; *The Responsibility of Forms*, 1986; and *The Rustle of Language*, 1986). A *Barthes Reader*, edited by Susan Sontag (1982), has a good selection but does not include some of the best-known essays. The collection edited by Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (1977), is perhaps the best short selection available. A collection of interviews, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews, 1962–1980*, was translated by Linda Coverdale (1985), and an additional informative interview published in *Tel Quel* has been translated in *The "Tel Quel" Reader* (ed. Patrick French and Roland-François Lack, 1998).

There are numerous studies of Barthes's life and work. The biography by Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography* (trans. Sarah Wykes, 1995), is excellent. Of the general introductions to Barthes's work as a whole, the essay on Barthes by John Sturrock in *Structuralism and Since* (ed. John Sturrock, 1979) and the short *Roland Barthes* by Jonathan Culler (1983) are brief and meaty. Longer studies include

books—all called *Roland Barthes*—by Philip Thody (1977, rev. 1983; an early conservative reading), Annette Lavers (1982; an early admirer and expositor), and Steven Ungar (1983; focusing on Barthes as "professor of desire"). More recent studies—still called *Roland Barthes*—include those by Michael Moriarty (1991; closely argued and extensive) and Rick Rylance (1994; readable and useful, organized in terms of Barthes's "hot" and "cold" writing). Among the numerous critical studies, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* by Réda Bensmaïa (1986; trans. 1987) deserves mention as an interesting study of the essay in Barthes and Montaigne. And, published together with Barthes's posthumous *Incidents* (1992), there is D. A. Miller's *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, an analysis of the movement of gay desire through Barthes's texts. The annotated bibliography published by Sanford Freedman and Carole Anne Taylor, *Roland Barthes: A Bibliographical Reader's Guide* (1983), is useful but dated.

From Mythologies¹

Soap-powders and Detergents

The first World Detergent Congress (Paris, September 1954) had the effect of authorizing the world to yield to *Omo* euphoria: not only do detergents have no harmful effect on the skin, but they can even perhaps save miners from silicosis. These products have been in the last few years the object of such massive advertising that they now belong to a region of French daily life which the various types of psycho-analysis would do well to pay some attention to if they wish to keep up to date. One could then usefully contrast the psycho-analysis of purifying fluids (chlorinated, for example) with that of soap-powders (*Lux*, *Persil*) or that of detergents (*Omo*). The relations between the evil and the cure, between dirt and a given product, are very different in each case.

Chlorinated fluids, for instance, have always been experienced as a sort of liquid fire, the action of which must be carefully estimated, otherwise the object itself would be affected, 'burnt'. The implicit legend of this type of product rests on the idea of a violent, abrasive modification of matter: the connotations are of a chemical or mutilating type: the product 'kills' the dirt. Powders, on the contrary, are separating agents: their ideal role is to liberate the object from its circumstantial imperfection: dirt is 'forced out' and no longer killed; in the *Omo* imagery, dirt is a diminutive enemy, stunted and black, which takes to its heels from the fine immaculate linen at the sole threat of the judgment of *Omo*. Products based on chlorine and ammonia are without doubt the representatives of a kind of absolute fire, a saviour but a blind one. Powders, on the contrary, are selective, they push, they drive dirt through the texture of the object, their function is keeping public order not making war. This distinction has ethnographic correlatives: the chemical fluid is an extension of the washerwoman's movements when she beats the clothes, while powders rather replace those of the housewife pressing and rolling the washing against a sloping board.

But even in the category of powders, one must in addition oppose against advertisements based on psychology those based on psycho-analysis (I use

1. Translated by Annette Lavers.

The Death of the Author¹

In his story *Sarrasine*² Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: 'This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.' Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away; the negative where all identity is lost; starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance'—the mastery of the narrative code—may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this 'positivism', the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines; as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice.³ The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism⁴ has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarmé⁵ was

doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which 'speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. Mallarmé's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader). Valéry,⁶ encumbered by a psychology of the Ego, considerably diluted Mallarmé's theory but, his taste for classicism leading him to turn to the lessons of rhetoric, he never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author; he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition. Proust⁷ himself, despite the apparently psychological character of what are called his *analyses*, was visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his characters; by making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who is *going to write* (the young man in the novel—but, in fact, how old is he and who is he?—wants to write but cannot; the novel ends when writing at last becomes possible), Proust gave modern writing its epic. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained; he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model; so that it is clear to us that Charlus⁸ does not imitate Montesquiou but that Montesquiou—in his anecdotal, historical reality—is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus. Lastly, to go no further than this prehistory of modernity, Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes—itsself moreover illusory: a code cannot be destroyed, only 'played off'), contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning (the famous surrealist 'jolt'), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together. Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid), linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying: *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht⁹ of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the lit-

1. Translated by Stephen Heath.

2. Short novel (1830) by Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), about which Barthes was in the process of writing (see *S/Z*, 1970).

3. Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), Russian composer; his 'vice' is presumably homosexuality. CHARLES BAUDELAIRE (1821–1867), French poet.

Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch painter.

4. The 'new criticism' in France at that time included structuralist, thematic, phenomenological, sociological, Marxist, and psychoanalytic criticism.

5. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ (1842–1898), French poet.

6. Paul Valéry (1871–1945), French poet and critic.

7. Marcel Proust (1871–1922), French novelist.

8. Le baron de Charlus, a character in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27), said to have been modeled on the aesthete Robert, comte

de Montesquiou-Fézensac (1855–1921).

9. Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), German poet and dramatist, whose 'epic theater' was intended to distance and alienate the audience from traditional theatrical illusion.

erary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or—which is the same thing—the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent). The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here* and *now*. The fact is (or, it follows) that *writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy,¹ call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered—something like the *I declare* of kings or the *I sing* of very ancient poets. Having buried the Author, the modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a law of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet,² those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely; something experienced in exemplary fashion by the young Thomas de Quincey,³ he who was so good at Greek that in order to translate absolutely modern ideas and images into that dead language, he had, so Baudelaire tells us (in *Paradis Artificiels*),⁴ 'created for himself an unfailing dictionary, vastly more extensive and complex than those resulting from the ordinary patience of purely literary themes'. Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense

1. That is, philosophy of language; see especially J. L. AUSTIN, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

2. The title characters in Gustave Flaubert's unfinished novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881),

who leave their jobs as copyists and unsuccessfully attempt to master all knowledge.

3. English essayist and critic (1785–1859).

4. *Artificial Paradises* (1869).

dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases:⁵ society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained'—victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law.

Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no 'person', says it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading. Another—very precise—example will help to make this clear: recent research (J.-P. Vernant)⁶ has demonstrated the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the 'tragic'); there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him—this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical⁷ recriminations

5. Stand-ins (the concrete forms of abstractions).

6. Cf. Jean-Pierre Vernant (with Pierre Vidal-Naquet), *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1972), esp. pp. 19–40, 99–131 [translator's

note]. Vernant (b. 1914), French scholar of ancient Greece.

7. Characterized by using a word to intend its opposite.

of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

1968

From Work to Text¹

It is a fact that over the last few years a certain change has taken place (or is taking place) in our conception of language and, consequently, of the literary work which owes at least its phenomenal existence to this same language. The change is clearly connected with the current development of (amongst other disciplines) linguistics, anthropology, Marxism and psychoanalysis (the term 'connection' is used here in a deliberately neutral way: one does not decide a determination, be it multiple and dialectical). What is new and which affects the idea of the work comes not necessarily from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them. It is indeed as though the *interdisciplinarity* which is today held up as a prime value in research cannot be accomplished by the simple confrontation of specialist branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion—in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. The mutation in which the idea of work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than of a real break. The break, as is frequently stressed, is seen to have taken place in the last century with the appearance of Marxism and Freudianism;² since then there has been no further break, so that in a way it can be said that for the last hundred years we have been living in repetition. What History, our History, allows us today is merely to slide, to vary, to exceed, to repudiate. Just as Einsteinian science³ demands that *the relativity of the frames of reference* be included in the object studied, so the combined action of Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism demands, in literature, the relativization of the relations of writer, reader and observer (critic). Over against the traditional notion of the *work*, for long—and still—conceived of in a, so to speak, Newtonian way, there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories. That object is the *Text*. I know the word is fashionable (I am myself often led to use it) and therefore regarded by some with suspicion, but that is exactly

1. Translated by Stephen Heath.

2. On the economic and political theorist KARL MARX (1818–1883) and the founder of psychoanalysis SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939), see above.

3. That is, the theory of special relativity devel-

oped by Albert Einstein (1879–1955), which explains what the mechanical worldview associated with Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) could not: the interactions of radiation and matter viewed from different inertial frames of reference.

why I should like to remind myself of the principal propositions at the intersection of which I see the Text as standing. The word 'proposition' is to be understood more in a grammatical than in a logical sense: the following are not argumentations but enunciations, 'touches', approaches that consent to remain metaphorical. Here then are these propositions; they concern method, genres, signs, plurality, filiation, reading and pleasure.

1. The Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed. It would be futile to try to separate out materially works from texts. In particular, the tendency must be avoided to say that the work is classic, the text avant-garde; it is not a question of drawing up a crude honours list in the name of modernity and declaring certain literary productions 'in' and others 'out' by virtue of their chronological situation: there may be 'text' in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts. The difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field. The opposition may recall (without at all reproducing term for term) Lacan's⁴ distinction between 'reality' and 'the real': the one is displayed, the other demonstrated; likewise, the work can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses), the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules); the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse (or rather, it is Text for the very reason that it knows itself as text); the Text is not the decomposition of the work, it is the work that is the imaginary tail of the Text; or again, *the Text is experienced only in an activity of production*. It follows that the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works).

2. In the same way, the Text does not stop at (good) Literature; it cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force in respect of the old classifications. How do you classify a writer like Georges Bataille?⁵ Novelist, poet, essayist, economist, philosopher, mystic? The answer is so difficult that the literary manuals generally prefer to forget about Bataille who, in fact, wrote texts, perhaps continuously one single text. If the Text poses problems of classification (which is furthermore one of its 'social' functions), this is because it always involves a certain experience of limits (to take up an expression from Philippe Sollers). Thibaudet⁶ used already to talk—but in a very restricted sense—of limit-works (such as Chateaubriand's⁷ *Vie de Rancé*, which does indeed come through to us today as a 'text'); the Text is that which goes to the limit of the rules of enunciation (rationality, readability, etc.). Nor is this a rhetorical idea, resorted to for some 'heroic' effect: the Text tries to place itself very exactly *behind* the limit of the *doxa*⁸ (is not general opinion—constitutive of our democratic societies and powerfully aided by mass communications—defined by its limits, the energy with

4. JACQUES LACAN (1901–1981), French psychoanalyst.

5. French writer (1897–1962).

6. Albert Thibaudet (1874–1936), French critic. Sollers (b. 1936), French writer.

7. François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), French writer and statesman. In 1980 a new edition of his *Life of Rancé* (1844) was published with a preface by Barthes.

8. Received opinion (Greek).

which it excludes, its *censorship*?). Taking the word literally, it may be said that the Text is always *paradoxical*.

3. The Text can be approached, experienced, in reaction to the sign. The work closes on a signified.⁹ There are two modes of signification which can be attributed to this signified: either it is claimed to be evident and the work is then the object of a literal science, of philology, or else it is considered to be secret, ultimate, something to be sought out, and the work then falls under the scope of a hermeneutics, of an interpretation (Marxist, psychoanalytic, thematic, etc.); in short, the work itself functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practises the infinite deferment of the signified; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*. Similarly, the *infinity* of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a *playing*; the generation of the perpetual signifier (after the fashion of a perpetual calendar) in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field) is realized not according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define 'what the work means') but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die); the work—in the best of cases—is *moderately* symbolic (its symbolic runs out, comes to a halt); the Text is *radically* symbolic: *a work conceived, perceived and received in its integrally symbolic nature is a text*. Thus is the Text restored to language; like language, it is structured but off-centred, without closure (note, in reply to the contemptuous suspicion of the 'fashionable' sometimes directed at structuralism, that the epistemological privilege currently accorded to language stems precisely from the discovery there of a paradoxical idea of structure: a system with neither close nor centre).

4. The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings; but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end (someone slackened off from any imaginary); this passably empty subject strolls—it is what happened to the author of these lines, then it was that he had a vivid idea of the Text—on the side of a valley, a *oued*¹ flowing down below (*oued* is there to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity); what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of

9. The sign was divided into *signified* (the meaning conveyed) and *signifier* (the symbol or sound that conveys that meaning) by the Swiss linguist FER-

DINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857–1913).

1. Wadi (Arabic); a streambed that is usually dry, except during the rainy season.

birds, children's voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes of inhabitants near or far away. All these *incidents* are half-identifiable: they come from codes which are known but their combination is unique, founds the stroll in a difference repeatable only as difference. So the Text: it can be it only in its difference (which does not mean its individuality), its reading is *semelfactive*² (this rendering illusory any inductive-deductive science of texts—no 'grammar' of the text) and nevertheless woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?), antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas. The work has nothing disturbing for any monistic philosophy (we know that there are opposing examples of these); for such a philosophy, plural is the Evil. Against the work, therefore, the text could well take as its motto the words of the man possessed by demons (*Mark* 5: 9): 'My name is Legion: for we are many.' The plural of demoniacal texture which opposes text to work can bring with it fundamental changes in reading, and precisely in areas where monologism appears to be the Law: certain of the 'texts' of Holy Scripture traditionally recuperated by theological monism (historical or anagogical) will perhaps offer themselves to a diffraction of meanings (finally, that is to say, to a materialist reading), while the Marxist interpretation of works, so far resolutely monistic, will be able to materialize itself more by pluralizing itself (if, however, the Marxist 'institutions' allow it).

5. The work is caught up in a process of filiation. Are postulated: a *determination* of the work by the world (by race, then by History), a *consecution* of works amongst themselves, and a *conformity* of the work to the author. The author is reputed the father and the owner of his work: literary science therefore teaches *respect* for the manuscript and the author's declared intentions, while society asserts the legality of the relation of author to work (the '*droit d'auteur*'³ or 'copyright', in fact of recent date since it was only really legalized at the time of the French Revolution). As for the Text, it reads without the inscription of the Father. Here again, the metaphor of the Text separates from that of the work: the latter refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development' (a word which is significantly ambiguous, at once biological and rhetorical); the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image, moreover, close to current biological conceptions of the living being). Hence no vital 'respect' is due to the Text: it can be *broken* (which is just what the Middle Ages did with two nevertheless authoritative texts—Holy Scripture and Aristotle); it can be read without the guarantee of its father; the restitution of the inter-text paradoxically abolishing any legacy. It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed

2. A neologism—*sema* (Greek) = sign; *semi* (Latin) = half; *factio* (Latin) = making—suggesting that the reading of "text" is largely sign pro-

duction.

3. Right of the author (French).

in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological,⁴ his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary); it is the work of Proust, of Genet⁵ which allows their lives to be read as a text. The word 'bio-graphy' re-acquires a strong, etymological sense, at the same time as the sincerity of the enunciation—veritable 'cross' borne by literary morality—becomes a false problem: the *I* which writes the text, it too, is never more than a paper-*I*.

6. The work is normally the object of a consumption; no demagogy is intended here in referring to the so-called consumer culture but it has to be recognized that today it is the 'quality' of the work (which supposes finally an appreciation of 'taste') and not the operation of reading itself which can differentiate between books: structurally, there is no difference between 'cultured' reading and casual reading in trains. The Text (if only by its frequent 'unreadability') decants the work (the work permitting) from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice. This means that the Text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice. The distance separating reading from writing is historical. In the times of the greatest social division (before the setting up of democratic cultures), reading and writing were equally privileges of class. Rhetoric, the great literary code of those times, taught one to *write* (even if what was then normally produced were speeches, not texts). Significantly, the coming of democracy reversed the word of command: what the (secondary) School prides itself on is teaching to *read* (well) and no longer to write (consciousness of the deficiency is becoming fashionable again today: the teacher is called upon to teach pupils to 'express themselves', which is a little like replacing a form of repression by a misconception). In fact, *reading*, in the sense of consuming, is far from *playing* with the text. 'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself *plays* (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that that practice not be reduced to a passive, inner *mimesis*⁶ (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term. The history of music (as a practice, not as an 'art') does indeed parallel that of the Text fairly closely: there was a period when practising amateurs⁷ were numerous (at least within the confines of a certain class) and 'playing' and 'listening' formed a scarcely differentiated activity; then two roles appeared in succession, first that of the performer, the interpreter to whom the bourgeois public (though still itself able to play a little—the whole history of the piano) delegated its playing, then that of the (passive) amateur, who listens to music without being able to play (the gramophone record takes the place of the piano). We know that today post-serial music⁸

4. A neologism—*alētheia* (Greek) = the self-presentation of Truth; *theological* = relating to the study of religious faith—meaning that the author's writing no longer operates in a theological realm of truth.

5. Jean Genet (1910–1986), French dramatist.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922), French novelist.

6. Representation, imitation (Greek).

7. Barthes was an avid amateur pianist.

8. Music that was a reaction against serialism, the total mathematization of all musical variables in the atonal compositions of Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)

has radically altered the role of the 'interpreter', who is called on to be in some sort the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it 'expression'. The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration. Which is an important change, for who executes the work? (Mallarmé⁹ posed the question, wanting the audience to *produce* the book). Nowadays only the critic executes the work (accepting the play on words). The reduction of reading to a consumption is clearly responsible for the 'boredom' experienced by many in the face of the modern ('unreadable') text, the avant-garde film or painting: to be bored means that one cannot produce the text, open it out, *set it going*.

7. This leads us to pose (to propose) a final approach to the Text, that of pleasure. I do not know whether there has ever been a hedonistic aesthetics (eudæmonist philosophies are themselves rare). Certainly there exists a pleasure of the work (of certain works); I can delight in reading and re-reading Proust, Flaubert, Balzac, even—why not?—Alexandre Dumas.¹ But this pleasure, no matter how keen and even when free from all prejudice, remains in part (unless by some exceptional critical effort) a pleasure of consumption; for if I can read these authors, I also know that I cannot *re-write* them (that it is impossible today to write 'like that') and this knowledge, depressing enough, suffices to cut me off from the production of these works, in the very moment their remoteness establishes my modernity (is not to be modern to know clearly what cannot be started over again?). As for the Text, it is bound to *jouissance*,² that is to a pleasure without separation. Order of the signifier, the Text participates in its own way in a social utopia; before History (supposing the latter does not opt for barbarism), the Text achieves, if not the transparency of social relations, that at least of language relations: the Text is that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate (keeping the circular sense of the term).

These few propositions, inevitably, do not constitute the articulations of a Theory of the Text and this is not simply the result of the failings of the person here presenting them (who in many respects has anyway done no more than pick up what is being developed round about him). It stems from the fact that a Theory of the Text cannot be satisfied by a metalinguistic exposition: the destruction of meta-language, or at least (since it may be necessary provisionally to resort to meta-language) its calling into doubt, is part of the theory itself: the discourse on the Text should itself be nothing other than text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with a practice of writing.

1971

and others; in some cases the interpreter shapes a deliberately "open" work, still viewed as a network of variables.

9. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ (1842–1898), French poet.

1. French novelist and dramatist (1802–1870).

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) and Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), French novelists.

2. In French, *jouissance* (the surprise of orgasm, bliss, ecstasy) is distinguished from *plaisir* (pleasure).