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The Weak Survival of French Rhetoric

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theory and Criticism

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Abstract

In the 1960s, Roland Barthes sparked a renewed interest in a monumental, ancient, and largely forgotten institution: the literary-pedagogic-social "empire" of rhetoric, an empire that often commanded French letters, culture, and education until its baffling decline and alleged "death" in the final decades of the nineteenth century. This dissertation argues, however, that rhetoric did not actually die in France. Instead, through a process of "weak survival," an enduring institution of rhetoric shaped postwar French thought. Through a pedagogic reading of the rhetorical *longue durée*, I approach a series of political-religious-social quarrels rather than an assemblage of rhetorical theories. These quarrels span from early victories of the Collège de Clermont against the University of Paris to the late nineteenth-century Republicans trying to purge the Jesuit legacy from French education. Educational reforms, the rise of the *explication de texte*, and triumph of Lansonian literary history ensured that intellectuals born in the early twentieth century would encounter the term "rhetoric" as a pejorative. But when we consider everything from classical languages to agonistic classroom cultures as part of a comprehensive institution of rhetoric, reports of its death would seem greatly exaggerated.

After elaborating rhetoric's weak survival over multi-century period, I shift to shorter timescales, and take up the rich interwar scene of Rhetoric and Terror as conceived of by Jean Paulhan and encountered by Jean-Paul Sartre. Finally, I end where I began: with Barthes' passionate relationship to rhetoric, and his anxieties and declarations about its institutional fortunes. I argue that Barthes was more rhetorician than strict structuralist (or poststructuralist), and his intense, mercurial relationship to rhetoric both haunted and inspired him. This dissertation explores rhetoric's creative potential within French literature and philosophy, as well as an education tyranny that marks the biographies of so many humanistic intellectuals traumatized by elite (and elitist) pedagogy.

Keywords

Rhetoric, intellectual history, French Theory, structuralism, pedagogy, Jesuits, Barthes, Paulhan, Sartre, Derrida

Summary for Lay Audience

Rhetoric, the art of persuasion or crafty use of language, played a key role in French education and society for centuries, but seems to have died by the twentieth century according to many scholars. This dissertation, however, argues that rhetoric underwent a process of "weak survival" and did not actually die. I explore the role of rhetoric in the work Jean Paulhan and Roland Barthes, who are among the greatest literary critics of twentieth-century France. In general, I assert the importance of rhetoric in shaping modern French intellectualism.

Acknowledgments

I have been held together, shaped, and supported by so many admirable people that I scarcely exist outside of them. Dr. Tilottama Rajan and Dr. Jan Plug, my supervisors, patiently guided my project through its excesses of Rhetoric and Terror, for which I will be ever thankful. Dr. Charles Stocking has been a generous γυμναστής at Western, and I still appreciate the mentoring I received from Dr. Michael MacDonald and Dr. Ken Hirschkop at the University of Waterloo.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents, to Rachel, and to my family for their limitless support. I hope I did not squander the love, kindness, and freedom vested in me by friends and strangers, people known and unknown, nor waste the opportunities I have been granted by institutions, with and without their human faces. In any case, I must return and amplify what has been given to me. No one can be blamed and everyone must be thanked.

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0 Introduction

"As we know, *Rhetoric,* that is to say *the teachable art (*from *Techné) of speaking with the aim of producing certain effects* no longer exists: it's no longer possible to conceive of language as a mechanism for producing effects. I'm not going to dwell on the institutional Death of Rhetoric, since this was the topic of my EHESS seminar in 1965-1966**.** Rhetoric has been degraded, technocratized → "techniques of expression" (what ideology!). … Rhetoric = the art of writing (≠ art of reading → arts of language no longer exist)."—Roland Barthes, lecturing at the Collège de France in 1980[1]

"I'm not going to dwell on the institutional Death of Rhetoric," claimed Roland Barthes a few months before his own death in 1980. Supposedly, he had finished excavating the ruins of *l'empire rhétorique*[2] back in his 1960s seminars, and there was little more to be said on the matter. In reality, however, Barthes ruminated on rhetoric—and its apparent institutional absence and intriguing apparitions—across his entire life's work: he proclaimed "The Future of Rhetoric" as far back as 1946, deployed the word *rhetoric* and its lexical and thematic derivatives many hundreds of times across his career, and explored the sophists in his late Collège de France lectures, constantly asserting rhetoric's historic and imperial proportions within literature, pedagogy, and the study of language. "Barthes spent his life," according to his student Antoine Compagnon, "endeavouring to revive rhetoric, until the moment when he realized what he was

[1] Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 289.

[2] Antoine Furetière's *Nouvelle allégorique ou Histoire des derniers troubles arrivés au royaume d'éloquence* (1658) used this term long ago in perhaps the most interesting meta-rhetorical document of its century: "Long has the Most Serene Princess Rhetoric reigned in peace, governing with such grace that she was obeyed without restraint. She wields no other violence than dispatching her Provost Persuasion, attended by Fair Speeches, her Archers, who seizing subjects by the ears transport them fettered in gold and silken chains. Her chief Minister is Good Sense, and she has governed by address rather than force, yet she keeps certain regiments of Figures and Arguments on hand, which she distributed throughout all her domains. …. Yet just as the greatest calm oft yields a tempest, the Empire of Rhetoric was not entirely exempt from war." My trans. Antoine Furetière, *Nouvelle allégorique ou Histoire des derniers troubles arrivés au royaume d'éloquence*, ed. Mathilde Bompart and Nicolas Schapira (Toulouse: Société des Littératures classiques, 2004), 5-6.

doing and expressly devoted a seminar to it."[3] After Barthes and many of his peers experienced the pedagogical "tyranny" of so-called Lansonism, which sought to replace rhetoric at the height of its disrepute with the philology-inspired *explication de texte* and a new "scientific" discipline of literary history, they gazed hopefully upon pasts and futures dignifying *rhétorique* as both word and thing.[4]

Yet Barthes sometimes doubted whether rhetoric had truly and fully died.[5] And to speak of rhetoric's general "death" and "revival" in France—or the innumerable variations thereof—is perhaps to fall victim to a convenient half-truth. This shorthand formula, a necessary but inadequate simplification, sums up rhetoric's fate: death, or something infinitesimally close to it. Hundreds of scholars correctly note rhetoric's decline (over a debatable period that precedes the twentieth century) and eventual comeback (in the mid to late twentieth century). In France—and I will only be speaking of France unless explicitly noted—this formula runs roughly as follows: "eclipsed at the end of the nineteenth century, rhetoric is reborn from its ashes over the course of the second half of the twentieth century."[6] Many scholars go so far as to declare rhetoric institutionally "dead." My overarching argument, however, is that *rhetoric did not actually die in France*—not in the eighteenth century, not in the nineteenth, and not where it counted most: the upper echelons of French education during the Third Republic (1870-1940). Instead of a true "death," I contend that rhetoric underwent a process of "weak survival," weak in a sense I will soon define. The argument that rhetoric survived speaks to at least two audiences of scholars: those interested in rhetoric's French history, and those interested in postwar intellectualism, French Theory, or structuralism and its successors.

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[3] Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 131.

[4] Barthes refers to the "Lansonian tyranny of influence, milieu, rapprochement" in 1946. Roland Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," in *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, ed. Marty Éric (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 106.

[5] Cf. Roland Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 11,15.

[6] My trans. Antoine Compagnon, "La rhétorique à la fin du XIXe siècle (1875-1900)," in *L'histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne 1450-1950*, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 1261.

These two audiences should overlap more than one might think. The relatively arcane quarrels between Jesuits, Jansenists, and Oratorians, between Louis-le-Grand, Port-Royal, and the Sorbonne, bear upon thoroughly modern questions: in particular, the origins of the profound stylization of postwar French thought and its reciprocal interest in rhetoric. Having never been entirely satisfied by the strictly philosophical justifications given for this phenomenon ("idea X requires rhetorical form Y"), I turned to pedagogic investigations. Though my "weak survival" account remains far from an exhaustive explanation, I think it illuminates the rhetorical richness of modern French thought in a rather different way from the standard explanations appealing to the Analytic/Anglo-American versus Continental rubric (a fork in the road after Kant that is a rather young rift by pedagogic standards). Even in Racine's day, the "war" between the Sorbonne and the Jesuits was old news.[7]

The history of French rhetoric should not be written in the passive voice or the *passé simple*, for the actions of the centuries-old *ordres enseignants* reverberate to this day. Already in 1542, we find Ignatius imploring the first Jesuits to zealously perfect their epistolary art "for the greater glory of God our Lord," a rhetorical zeal central to the evangelical and educational efforts of their order, deeply infused into their French secondary education régime, and still perceptible to Barthes four centuries later during his famous quarrel with Raymond Picard (who fittingly defended a traditional Racine, the most illustrious product of Port-Royal).[8] The secular rhetorical cultures of the Third Republic enveloping Barthes and other notable students of Louis-le-Grand selectively appropriated and rejected features from their Jesuit antecedents. Every pedagogic

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[7] Cf. Jean Racine, *Abrégé de l'histoire de Port-Royal* (Paris: Oudin, 1908), 39.

[8] Cf. Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, ed. and trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 65.

Ignatius writes to Pierre Favre: "I urge you, then, as I am obliged to do for the greater glory of God our Lord, and I beg you, for his love and reverence alone, to correct your faults in writing, making it a point of pride and having a real desire to edify your brethren and others through your letters. Let this time you waste on this be upon my head; it will be time well wasted in the Lord. I make the effort to write two drafts of any main letter so that it will have some order. … Even this one I have written out twice in my own hand. All the more reason why each member of the Society [of Jesus] should do the same." Ignatius Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, ed. Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 92. Cf. Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 95-96.

"rupture" we will encounter, Lansonian or otherwise, seemingly smuggled in something of the past.[9]

One cannot argue that French postwar thought reanimated a "dead" rhetoric out of a purely theoretical need, for despite the cobwebs over rhetorical theory, an ideological-pedagogical-cultural aspect proved continuous and tenacious. As we will see with Jacques Derrida, for instance, he did not simply take his "thoughts" and then choose to "express" them in a suitable rhetorical form (this is the "expressive" view of rhetoric that Barthes rightly loathed). Though Derrida of course had certain *freedoms* in choosing his rhetorical means, he also struggled to work within and around numerous institutional and pedagogical *constraints*.[10] Rather than postwar French thought simply appropriating rhetoric as an object out of a bag of possibilities, a weakened rhetorical institution forms part of its very constitutive matrix, already on the scene before Barthes gave elaborate justifications for blurring the rhetorical subject into the rhetorical object.

Though Pierre Bourdieu offers a relatively light treatment of (explicit) rhetoric within his educational critiques, he quite lucidly perceives the "error … [in] trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically."[11] Within the institutional perspective I develop here, this is perhaps the mother of all errors in traditional rhetorical scholarship: overestimating individual "rhetorical choices" and underestimating the social relations and positions that invariably obscure the line between persuasion and coercion (is the mobster's "offer you can't refuse" indeed an *offer*?). Though certain cultures feature wide degrees of rhetorical latitude—allowing for freer, more genuine "choices"—we will see that elite French intellectualism yields scant opportunities for those hoping to opt out of its games, which are far more institutionally and geographically concentrated than their American analogues.

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[9] Cf. M. Martin Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[10] These constraints were partly formative, as Edward Baring has argued regarding the *agrégation de philosophie* and deconstruction. Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[11] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 109.

After making a historical case for rhetoric's weak survival in the first two chapters, I will ultimately focus upon two twentieth-century thinkers spellbound by the life and death of rhetoric, and all the messy states in between: Jean Paulhan and Roland Barthes. Though far from the only French critics fascinated by rhetoric, they share a unique position in that rhetoric's indeterminate state—weakened, "terrorized," maybe dead, maybe alive—is absolutely central to their work (a centrality obvious in the case of Paulhan, and requiring more work in the case of Barthes). Along the way, we will meet a great many thinkers directly and indirectly engaging with rhetoric's ambiguous institutional fortunes, from Paul Valéry to Michel Foucault (but my treatment of this supporting cast is far from complete—Francis Ponge, for instance, does not get his due). Paulhan and Barthes ultimately exceed all their contemporary critics in their devotion to thinking through rhetoric's institutional status. And although Paulhan's name is more obscure to Anglophones and his thinking is harder to instrumentalize, the originality of his rhetorical thought is at least equal to that of Barthes. Through Paulhan, Barthes, and adjacent thinkers, we will encounter three modern rhetorical anxieties or obsessions: fixations with banalities and clichés (Paulhan), with the power, politics, and finality of the spoken word (Barthes), and with figurative language (in the general rhetoric-structuralism rapprochement). All of these partake in this dissertation's fundamental worry: that our histories have buried the "old" rhetoric alive, or in other words, that we have underestimated its ability to play dead. The old rhetoric does not break off so easily from the new—if it is truly new at all.

Almost a century ago, Jean Paulhan sensed that such a break might be impossible. Decades before the structuralist fervour of the 1960s that would successfully promote rhetoric, he argued that Rhetoric (in his sense of it, usually capitalized) could not actually be killed off by its arch nemesis (which he calls Terror). Despite his clever self-effacing philosophical and literary arguments, and despite anticipating the 1960s "spell" or "prison-house" of language, he failed to truly convert his peers—especially Sartre—to pursue a rhetorical paradigm. And although he anchored his theory in the explosive symbol of the Terror (1793-94), he did not give a thoroughly historical account of rhetoric's decline and possible survival. Like Paulhan, Barthes navigates the space between a living and dead rhetoric, but Barthes renewed rhetorical inquiry far more successfully than the old "grey eminence" of French letters. Paulhan plays on the ambiguities of Rhetoric and Terror; Barthes swings between the "former" rhetoric and a possible "new rhetoric" (invigorated by structuralism and other contemporary theories).

Ultimately, my final two chapters will argue that Barthes should not be regarded as a structuralist (or any kind of "theorist") with a mere *interest* in rhetoric, whether passing or passionate. Rather, between 1946 and 1980, Barthes' career plays out over a bewitching and ambiguous space between the former rhetoric and an inchoate "new" rhetoric (whose existence, he suggests, is malleable and debatable). By amassing Barthes' engagements with rhetoric, before, during, and after the peak structuralism of 1966, it is not hard to show that most scholars deeply underestimated his rhetorical dimensions. He is both rhetorician and thinker of rhetorical institutions.

But over the course of this dissertation, I hope to suggest and perhaps demonstrate something broader and more ambitious. Rhetoric's weak survival plays a vital role in the emergence of structuralism and of "French Theory" in general. If we want to understand how France could yield its Derridas and Sartres—writers who torched the norms of "neutral" writing, at far remove from "rhetoric degree zero"—during rhetoric's "dead" period, we come face to face with the full cultural, pedagogical, political, religious, and social expanses of rhetoric's weak survival in France. Structuralism, poststructuralism, and other French wagers upon language constitute theoretical rationalizations and extensions of the "social fact" of rhetoric which had never been entirely purged. And if one believes Paulhan, then any movement seeking to embrace—or reject—a linguistic paradigm risks getting caught up in the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic. Though he identified the vicissitudes of Rhetoric and Terror within interwar France, his thought extends to the general problem of fully enacting or annihilating "misology," the hatred of the word.

0.1 Weak survival

"Weak" survival: what does this mean? In part, it simply means not strong. For instance, mathematicians speak of *strong* and *weak* versions of certain conjectures (the former implies the latter, but not necessarily the reverse). The first chapter, which takes up various decline-of-rhetoric narratives, will elaborate forces that worked against rhetoric between the Enlightenment and the first decades of the Third Republic (1870-1940). Critics dragged rhetoric's reputation through the mud; educational formers renamed the *classe de rhétorique* and slashed rhetorical features from curricula. Rhetoric's last defenders died off, barely remembered. Yet whereas the first chapter suggests that a "strong" continuity of rhetoric is impossible amidst innumerable

setbacks, the second chapter entails a dialectical reversal of sorts. After exploring the remarkably resilient elements of what I term the "rhetorical superstructure," we find that rhetoric appears in much better shape than initially expected in elite French education, especially in the *khâgne* milieu. In sum, the first chapter downgrades "strong" to "weak," but the second chapter argues that we may rightly speak of survival—and that weakness, in the sense of loosened strictures, has its strengths.

The later chapters will play out over this terrain of weak survival. Paulhan and Sartre get caught up between Rhetoric and Terror in Chapter Three, a neurotic oscillation between regarding words with contempt or infatuation, spanning from literature and philosophy to discourse in the most general sense. Barthes finds himself unable to fully transition from rhetoric to structuralism in Chapter Four. And in Chapter Five, I take up Barthes' overall relationship to rhetoric itself: a fraught relation spanning nostalgia to animosity, traversing his career. Barthes will take up a full two chapters since, on the one hand, he should be distanced from the "high structuralists" and the narrative that he simply discovered rhetoric as a corollary of structuralism, and on the other hand, we should explore his extensive relationship to rhetoric as a theory, practice, art, science, and institution. I do not see Barthes as necessarily more important than Paulhan, but the younger and more popular critic is weighed down by stronger *doxa*.

By weak, I also mean *weakened*: easier to appropriate, less resistant to change, less cohesive. Rhetoric became out of joint with itself and with French society: it waxed and waned at different speeds for different groups. "Not all people," writes Ernst Bloch, "exist in the same Now."[12] Thus began his essay on "nonsynchronism." But instead of Bloch's divided Germany, we will enter a world of distinctively French pedagogic-political-religious schisms, nonsynchronous and out of kilter, allowing for the rises and falls of rhetoric, its smooth stretches and punctures, to develop over different "Nows."

A weakened rhetoric would live on through what I call rhe-structuralism: the juncture of rhetoric's remains and French structuralism, a term that intends to evoke, in a lesser way, a series of repetitions and returns emanating from this mercurial meeting. Portions of rhetoric's history

[12] Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 22.

were excavated and repeated by French structuralism; what outsiders perceive as poststructuralism represents a rhetorized repetition of structuralism. The rhe-structuralism of the 1960s, which I will describe at the beginning of Chapter Four, represents a dominant vector of rhetorical revitalization in France—but far from the only possibility.

Whereas *structuralism* enjoyed an enormous and explicit marketing campaign in France under Barthes and his peers surrounding its peak in 1966, *poststructuralism* is a retroactive American category disavowed by its supposed practitioners such as Derrida and Foucault.[13] As argued by François Cusset's *French Theory,* François Dosse's *History of Structuralism*, and especially Johannes Angermuller's *Why There is No Poststructuralism in France,* this prefixed term lacks a stable referent meaningful to its French agents and historians. It must also be detached from deconstruction, which, as Tilottama Rajan details, imports and embodies much more serious phenomenological concerns than initially perceived in America.[14]

But why not go further and question *structuralism* itself in its more literary domains? Perhaps instead of structuralism "discovering" rhetoric, we find a weakened rhetoric facilitating the explosion of French structuralism, or a strange hybrid of the two. As Wlad Godzich puts it, "rhetoric's passing created a vacuum—the study of the social space of language—that would prove to be a pitfall to both linguistics and literary studies, and it would come to haunt the relationship of the two younger disciplines."[15] In Godzich's view, Saussure effectively positioned semiology as the "heir to the abandoned tradition of rhetoric" since semiology was defined as a "branch of social psychology."[16] Saussure, of course, was no conscious rhetorician. Yet when structuralism became the dominant intellectual movement in France and "discovered" rhetoric (which was already weakly on the scene), a complex and conscious relation developed between the two. Through the notion of rhe-structuralism, I will assert a range of continuities between them. The most consequential continuity is perhaps their shared hegemonic ambitions:

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[13] For an account of this peak see Antoine Compagnon, "Pourquoi 1966?," *Fabula-LhT*, no. 11 (2013).

[14] Tilottama Rajan, *Deconstruction and the Remainders of Phenomenology* (Stanford, CA: Standford University Press, 2002), 1-7.

[15] Wlad Godzich, *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 108.

[16] Godzich, *The Culture of Literacy*, 110.

just as rhetoric ruled the trivium in its mightiest centuries, structuralism found itself on the throne of *les sciences humaines*: a new but almost analogous position, whence Barthes and close allies such as Tzvetan Todorov perceived the old rhetoric as a proto-structuralism.

As I will argue, the immense French receptivity to structuralism owes something to the formalist, logophilic tendencies deeply imbedded into its rhetorical pedagogies. Derrida welcomed (and yet prohibited) the "historian of ideas" to interrogate the remnants of the "structuralist invasion" that "leav[es] behind its works and signs on the shores of our civilization" (and yet "by the very act of considering the structuralist invasion as an object he would forget its meaning").[17] Rather than an "invasion," however, we will have reason to perceive it as homecoming. I primarily articulate *rhe-structuralism* not to replace or gainsay old terms, but to critique the very process of conceptual bundling and mobilization that invariably happens as such terms enter circulation. Whereas some terms deftly parachute into new contexts and cultures, rhe-structuralism is predicated upon a French pedagogic "civilization" predating the conceptual sparks of Saussure by centuries. Though Alain Badiou perceives the "spectacular change in philosophical writing" in the postwar period as an essential feature of "the adventure of French philosophy,"[18] this shift occurs over a much broader terrain than almost anyone has suggested, a terrain spanning from Terror to Lansonism, a terrain in need of elucidation.

0.2 Historiography

I envision the French history of rhetoric and its neighbours as if it was the ramshackle building that an Anatole France character describes: "classical instruction … is an old monument which embodies in its structure the characteristics of every period. One sees in it a pediment in the Empire style on a Jesuit portico; it has rusticated galleries, colonnades like those of the Louvre, Renaissance staircases, Gothic halls, and a Roman crypt."[19] I am particularly interested

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[17] Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 3.

[18] Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," *New Left Review*, no. 35 (2005): 73.

[19] Each part features its inscriptions: "'The Imperial University of 1808—Rollin—The Oratorians—Port-Royal—The Jesuits—The Humanists of the Renaissance—The Schoolmen—The Latin Rhetoricians of Autun and Bordeaux.' Every generation has made some change in this palace of wisdom, or has added something to it. … But I

in the groups and individuals who laboured on and lived within this monument, a structure "constantly in course of repair." Its labourers, from my perspective, were a thrifty bunch, inclined to repurpose and recycle rather than demolish and build from scratch. Though I do hope to reveal certain contingencies and a latent pedagogic-political power within, I would not call approach my approach "genealogy" or anything so theoretically sophisticated (Foucault would likely see a more capricious history than what unfolds here). Rather, I am interested in the syncretic accumulation of features in this pedagogic monument—and indeed in its status *as* a monument, a structure that stubbornly resisted attempts to destroy it.

Responding to rhetoric's mysterious French tenacity, these pedagogic readings extend beyond the explicit discourse *on* rhetoric to consider greater social and cultural formations, especially those around education. "Where one looks for a culture," as Michel de Certeau puts it, "one works to define a pedagogy": the educator is the "obscure hero linked to the greatest difficulties of his time," a contemporary "apostle."[20] To understand the rhetorical cultures of French intellectualism, we must study *who* reproduced and interrupted them. And of course, the why and how. If rhetoric is purely treated as the standard theoretical edifice of five canons,[21] its militant tenacity and evangelical reach make little sense.

A few names suggest the historiographic contours of my project over the first two chapters. Barthes represented, for a time, the "Braudel of rhetoric," and emphasized its monumental timescales; my interest in a rhetorical *longue durée* is indebted to both Barthes and Braudel (who were colleagues at EPHE). Braudel regarded the *ancien régime* as "near to us in time, almost contemporary": I believe this is especially true of its pedagogical universe.[22] A dose of the *Annales* tradition—i.e. a sensitivity to long term social structures—helps us balance out the common theoretical, conceptual, and textual approaches to rhetoric, often overly invested in events and ruptures. But as the great French historian of rhetoric, Marc Fumaroli, once pointed

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can hear some ominous cracking in the structure." Anatole France, *The Wicker-Work Woman: A Chronicle of Our Own Times*, trans. M. P. Willcocks (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1922), 105-06.

[20] My trans. Michel De Certeau, *L'Etranger ou l'union dans la différence* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), 71.

[21] Invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*), and delivery (*actio*).

[22] Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France: Volume I: History and Environment*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 19.

out, the *Annales* unfortunately did not have much to say on rhetoric itself. Long after attending Barthes' rhetoric seminar, which Fumaroli termed "brilliant, but irritating," he would profoundly shape French historical inquiry through his masterpiece *L'âge de l'éloquence* (1980) and the enormous *Histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe modern* project (1999).[23] This project included key scholars such as Françoise Douay, who argues against the "rhetoric restrained" narrative popularized by structuralism; her work informs my first chapter. The second chapter draws inspiration from the sociology and history of education, as well historians debating the great Jesuit legacy in France, such as François de Dainville (S.J.) and Gabriel Compayré.

Under a pedagogic lens the total institution of rhetoric appears less defunct by the early twentieth century than most scholars believe, for its roots run rather deep: twentieth-century education inherited, as one history succinctly puts it, a "Napoleonic amalgam of Old Regime structures with revolutionary principles."[24] I am interested in the pedagogical idiosyncrasies of France dating to the sixteenth century, but as Douay suggests, one could certainly start much earlier.[25] Perhaps Ignatius' arrival at the University of Paris constitutes a beginning *in medias res*. Still, he came to the right place. Surviving its somewhat mysterious infancy in the late medieval period and entering the Renaissance, where it was to be challenged by the nascent Jesuit *collège* system, this great university represents the "womb" and "matrix," as Durkheim puts it, "within which our entire educational system developed."[26]

Paris, rhetorical capital of modern Europe, abounds with material traces of *l'empire rhétorique*. In 1470, the first ever printed book in France emerges from a brand new press in Paris: a rhetorical manual in letter form, schooling students in fine Ciceronian composition, soon

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[23] My trans. Marc Fumaroli, "La rhétorique humaniste," *Commentaire*, no. 99 (2002/3): 706.

[24] Joseph N. Moody, *French Education Since Napoleon* (New York: Syracuse University Press 1978), 15.

[25] "Contrary to what happens in the Anglo-American universe, in France rhetoric is not a university-level 'college' discipline [in the American sense], but a class, the final class in principle, of the secondary education system inherited from the medieval university as reconsidered by the humanism of the sixteenth century, which was itself inspired by fourth-century educators Christianising the heritage of antiquity." My trans. Françoise Douay, "La rhétorique en France au XIXe siècle à travers ses pratiques et ses institutions : restauration, renaissance, remise en cause," in *L'histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne 1450-1950*, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 1117.

[26] Émile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, trans. Peter Collins (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 75.

followed by further humanistic incunabula presented to cardinals, popes, dukes, and kings;[27] precisely five centuries later, the École Pratique des Hautes Études publishes *Communications* 16, "Recherches rhétoriques" (1970), presented to a new public whom had never known *rhétorique* as a prestigious signifier yet were still engaged in a de facto Parisian eloquence economy ("A single market day at Les Halles," César Dumarsais famously noted, "yields more figures than several days of academic assemblies").[28] Approaching the origins of all this eloquence, one encounters "the eldest daughter of the kings of France, and the very eldest indeed"[29]: the University of Paris. It attracted students and teachers who would help demarcate the pedagogical contours of the Reformation (Johannes Sturm and Petrus Ramus) and Counter-Reformation (Ignatius of Loyola and the soon-to-be Jesuits). But the University's dominance would be assailed by the most treasured school of the French Jesuits, the Collège de Clermont in Paris (which, under a variety of names, will mark the literary temperament of France from Voltaire to Barthes, as we will see in Chapter Two). So many intellectual "events" of a patently rhetorical character—such as the 1960s effervescence—owe enormously to the relatively obscure "structures" and institutions specific to this city (which do not exist, for instance, in Vienna, despite its enormous intellectual stature). Paulhan did not fully grasp the Parisian extremes of Rhetoric and Terror until he came back from Madagascar, which did not seem to suffer the same literary dysfunctions. If there is any city in the world where rhetoric could enjoy an "afterlife" based on pure institutional and cultural inertia, it would be Paris.

0.3 Between the Jesuits and Lanson

Every attempt to reform the institution of rhetoric out of existence seemed to leave an unruly remainder. French secondary education had been cast in the Jesuit mold, and reformers inspired by Port-Royal and the philological might of the German university did not destroy all of the Company's legacies—despite the Jesuits' mythological status as 'clerical sophists' and despite the laws of 1880 that barred them from teaching (and required other orders to receive

[27] The letters of Gasparino Barzizi of Bergamo. Anatole Claudin, *The First Paris Press: An account of the books printed for G. Fichet and J. Heynlin in the Sorbonne 1470-1472* (London: The Chiswick Press 1898).

[28] My trans. César Chesneau Dumarsais, *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, ed. Françoise Douay (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 62-63.

[29] Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Healy (Indianapolis Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 182.

special teaching permissions). Even among the generations of Sartre, Bourdieu, and Derrida we will find ideological and pedagogical traces of Jesuit humanism: the value of eloquence and the so-called *gymnastique d'esprit.*[30] And scattered among these generations, we find, in essence, a double critique of the educational regime they traversed.

On the one hand, this critique tackles the excesses of the Jesuit pedagogic paradigm—and on the other, the excesses of reformers who attempted to eradicate the teaching of rhetoric and replace it with a never-ending series of textual *explications* and lengthier *dissertations*. Rhetoric's curricular "replacement"—the literary history championed by Gustave Lanson—would be putatively democratic, for rhetoric seemed to be an aristocratic relic of the *ancien régime*.[31] Lanson rightly spoke of the "sovereignty of rhetoric."[32] It seems, however, that one tyranny was supplemented, rather than entirely replaced, by another. In the early to mid-twentieth century, young humanistic intellectuals would be squeezed between these poles. In the mature texts they produced, we perhaps find ideological traces of both the Jesuit and Lansonian forces. In their better texts, a "Jesuit" eloquence amplifies a "Lansonian" scrupulousness in reading; in their lesser texts, degraded declamations that one might call Jesuitical meet a Lansonian obstinacy and tendency for overreading. Scholars correctly point out a clash of *philosophical* traditions underlying the polarized receptions of these texts, but this is only part of a larger pedagogical picture.

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[30] All three attended Louis-le-Grand—formerly the Collège de Clermont—the most treasured early accomplishment of the French Jesuits.

[31] This general point has often been made, in many variations: "When sympathy with the French classics, the texts of the Great Century, was no longer passed on in families and when new social classes arrived at the lycées, *explications de textes* had to be invented as a means of teaching a literature that had become every bit as foreign to the mass of students as Greek or Latin literature. … In contradistinction to rhetoric, literary history gave work to all, just as the analytic exercise *of explications de textes* addressed itself to all. It was a collective labor requiring teamwork. Antoine Compagnon, "Literature in the Classroom," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 821.

[32] My trans. Gustave Lanson, *L'Université et la société moderne* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1902), 98.

0.4 What is rhetoric?

Though it would seem proper to begin with a definition of rhetoric, I hesitate to pin it down too forcefully. The intractability of fixing its definition indeed motivates my historical approach. Fumaroli's disclaimer is apt:

> One may seek the true definition of rhetoric. It escapes definition. It is a reflexive ensemble as fuzzy, mobile, and fruitful as its object: persuasion. But it attaches itself all the more to precision and to definitions since it rightly concerns Proteus himself, the insatiable speech of metamorphoses. This alliance between the principle of uncertainty attached to *oratio* itself, and the principle of rigorous intelligibility that guides the *orationis ratio* of rhetoric, has baffled the modern spirit of geometry. This chimera which joins *theoria* and *ergon* in a single living organism, the thinking of speech and speech in action, scares off the modern division of labour between specialists.[33]

Instead of searching for the essence or ultimate definition of rhetoric, I am interested in two things to be reconciled with each other. Firstly, the explicit French discourse *on* rhetoric: the fortunes of the signifier *rhétorique.* Secondly, the more implicit social structures with bearing upon this signifier, part of a greater "rhetorical superstructure" I will later describe. This "monumental" conception is not without risks. Introducing the *Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, Michael MacDonald cautions against a transhistorical image of a rhetorical monolith—in the eyes of Barthes, a rhetoric "immutable, impassive, and virtually immortal."[34] Despite the recent flux of rhetoric around the globe, however, in France we need a somewhat institutional sense to grasp how rhetoric faked its own death. Put less anthropomorphically, this is the question of why rhetoric's numerous nineteenth-century enemies did not—or could not—fully and finally kill it off. As I will argue in the second chapter, rhetoric's ability to resist being constrained to pure theory, pure practice, pure art, or pure science instilled it with an institutional durability.

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[33] My trans. Marc Fumaroli, "Préface," in *L'histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne 1450-1950*, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 2.

[34] Michael J. MacDonald, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Michael MacDonald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

0.5 Motivations across the Atlantic

The present historical inquiry was born from the failures of previous non-historical inquiries, including my own dead ends. Facing the palpable rhetorical flamboyance of French thought, many scholars sought to explain, analyze, justify, or condemn it. But in practice, this amounted to—at best—a largely unreconciled clash of norms, and at worst, a moralistic crusade to uphold the values scholars internalized from their own educations. Prodigal polemics doled out normative judgements; Derrida received a particularly vast amount of praise and blame. Yet the Parisian pedagogic juggernaut he faced as a young man from Algeria, with all of its dogmas, mythologies, strictures, and liberties, remained basically unknown to these commentators. As Derrida reflected on his academic beginnings, "Before taking a certain number of liberties with writing, it was necessary that I first be accorded a certain amount of credit. Before this, I betrayed the norms only in a prudent, cunning, and quasi-clandestine manner."[35] Examining a norm-torching book such as *Glas* yields rhetorical analysis but not rhetorical ideology, and it is this necessarily collective system of unstated values, largely disseminated by French institutions, that must be dusted off—if we want to see the "return" of rhetoric as anything more than a subservient part of a great twentieth-century linguistic turn. Equipped with little more than a continental/analytic rubric, the exegete's defense of "difficulty" struggles just as much as the Sokal-style polemic. Read pedagogically, the Sokal faction would seem to be the modern Messieurs de Port-Royal, the wardens of clarity and logical expression, or a Ramist enclave, the cult of "method."

My perspective on French intellectualism is "French" insofar as I am interested in structural and historical features that translate poorly into Anglophone contexts; I am not "importing" and "instrumentalizing" in the way that Cusset describes in *French Theory*. Indeed, the most stimulating secondary texts I encountered—for instance, Jean-François Sirinelli's work on the *khâgne*—have never been translated (perhaps rightly so since their potential audience is vanishingly small). Yet my perspective is still deeply Anglophone in one crucial respect: my initial interest was piqued by the staggering contrast in the rhetorical tenors across the Atlantic, a

35 Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, "From the word of life," in *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text, and Politics*, ed. Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 169.

contrast immediately and intuitively perceived by "English" students initially encountering "French" theory (scholars in writing in French use the term *French Theory* rather than *théorie française* to emphasize its hybridity). Few Parisian scholars would have started here.

Today the tremendous "colonizing" power that French Theory exerted in American academia for several decades is well known, its rhetorical dimension less so. Perhaps America lacks, in the words of Jean Baudrillard's transatlantic adventure, "the whole aesthetic and rhetorical system of seduction, of taste, of charm, of theatre" indeed constituting "the European's—especially the Latin European's—mental and social *habitus*, that continual *commedia dell'arte, …* the dramatization of speech, the subtle play of language, the aura of make-up and artificial gesture."[36] And Marc Fumaroli, despite being the incarnate antithesis of Baudrillard's thought, concluded his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France on a similar note.[37] In cultural comparison, America has long been suspicious of theatrical or conspicuous eloquence—before, during, and after the structuralist colonization of its humanities and social sciences. America's *public* intellectuals, to the extent that they barely exist or once existed, typically fall into the oratorical mode of the "Attic" Chomsky, who debated the "Asiatic" Foucault in a famous and futile exchange on Dutch television. The American affinity for casual interviews, relieved of heavy rhetorical armour, compared to the French *en garde* oral tendency, relishing its strenuous syntax, equally reveals this intercultural chasm.

But it is not necessary to push and overly essentialize this comparison; cultures around the world possess distinctive rhetorical modes. We should note the sophisticated, localized rhetorical practices and histories of Latin Europe while acknowledging the danger of a view from nowhere and a mythic rhetoric zero degree. No comparative ethnography exists, as of yet, that can quite do justice to the European or French *habitus* of rhetoric. My attempts make certain compromises: the vague term A*nglophone* often becomes the complement of *French* since it is not always practical to differentiate between America, Canada, Britain, and other English-speaking countries. And real historical comparisons to Prussia, whose educational system inspired a great

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[36] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 2010), 134.

[37] Marc Fumaroli, *Leçon Inaugurale faite le Mercredi 29 avril 1987* (Paris: Collège de France, 1987), 34.

deal of French envy, must remain for future work.[38] Thus the overwhelming focus is France almost by itself; contrasts can only be implicit. Studying the development of elite French educational institutions yields a preliminary sketch of their tenacious, competitive, and elite rhetorical cultures, but a full comparison to “our” cultures (wherever their location) requires future work.

Knowing little *explicit* rhetoric, theoretical discourses in France and then in the Anglophone world have often been reticent to reveal their métier, concealing the artifice of their invention and imagination (*artifice* is not necessarily a dirty word for rhetoricians). Barthes, who sometimes lamented the waning of rhetoric without explicitly naming it, presciently asked: “Why today is there no—it seems to me, at least—why is there no longer an intellectual art of persuasion—or of intellectual imagination?”[39] Paulhan was equally prescient: “Having done away with the old rhetoric, we are obliged to perform all the work of rhetoricians [*tout métier de rhétoriqueurs*]. Yet the danger here is all the greater in that everyone keeps their discoveries to themselves, neither comparing them nor allowing them to be criticized.”[40] A great *Glasnost* or unveiling never occurred, and it was certainly needed. The point of “doing theory,” it seems to me, is not to create poor imitations in English of strenuously translated French texts, further extending a garbled chain of simulacra tracing back to the hypotactic, Latinate diction of the ENS. Rather, one should understand the invention, and especially the *conditions* of invention, for the thought that became “theory.” If so inclined, one can thereby emulate the conditions of its fertility, producing discourse felicitous to the new author, subject matter, and audience. This felicity—*to prepon*, *decorum*, and *convenance* in Greek, Roman, and French rhetorical

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[38] For instance, Renan blamed the French University for its excessive rhetorical performances and emulation of the Jesuits. On the other hand, the greatness of the Prussian universities allegedly facilitated military victory: “It is Germanic science, it is Germanic virtue” that triumphed at Sadowa in 1866, according to Renan. “It is Protestantism, it is philosophy. It is Luther, it is Kant, it is Fichte, it is Hegel.” My trans. Ernest Renan, *Questions Contemporaines* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères Éditeurs, 1868), v, vii.

[39] My trans. Roland Barthes, "D'eux à nous," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 454.

[40] Paulhan often uses *rhétoriqueur* instead of *rhétoricien.* The *(grand) rhétoriqueurs* were a group of poets between the mid fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Perhaps Paulhan uses *rhétoriqueur* to emphasize the production of discourse in addition to the analysis associated with *rhetorician*.

My trans. Jean Paulhan, "Jacob Cow le pirate ou Si les mots sont des signes," in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Cercle du Livre Precieux, 1967), 135.

traditions—remains the closest thing to a universal of rhetoric that one can imagine. Ultimately, we must learn how to translate it, and likewise, what we might *not* want to translate: the tortuous pedagogic and institutional conditions, sometimes needless, sometimes necessary, latent in the genesis of postwar French thought—the capricious swings of *La Sérénissime Princesse Rhétorique* from brutality to benevolence.[41]

[41] See the footnote on page 1 which introduces Furetière's princess. For an excellent introduction to his text, see Jeffrey N. Peters, *Mapping Discord: Allegorical Cartography in Early Modern French Writing* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 147-76.

1 The Decline and Death of Rhetoric in France

> Muse, ouvre-moi la source en images fertile,
> Où l'esprit peut puiser les ornements du style!
> Je veux chanter cet art qui varie à propos
> Par le sens figuré le sens propre des mots.
> Ce sujet, renfermé dans des bornes iniques,
> Muse, peut t'effrayer par ses détails techniques.
> Les Tropes, aujourd'hui, gardent encor les noms
> Imposés par les Grecs, de qui nous les tenons.
> — François de Neufchâteau, *Les Tropes, ou, les figures de mots*[1]

If and when we speak of the institution of rhetoric as *dead*, we already make a major presupposition. We seem to presume that this institution belongs to a category of things that *could be* dead or alive—two exclusive states, at least strictly speaking. A logician might declare this to be a category mistake; a rhetorician might detect an unwieldy personification; a poet or critic might remind us of vampires and other undead creatures that inhabit both categories at once (or neither). Perhaps rhetoric, however poetically construed, cannot be "acquitted, liberated, and put to death," as Tzvetan Todorov once put it organically.[2] Or if a *dead* rhetoric does not presume an organic substrate, then another sense of life and death is at play: relevancy, presence, and importance ("alive") versus their opposites ("dead"). But relevant, present, and important for whom, and to what end? What if one part of the institution flourished while another decayed? Though this form of obstinate overreading could be drawn out indefinitely, let us constrain it, at least, by the specific questions of what happened in France.

Two rough camps of opinion emerge in response to the question "was rhetoric dead in France by the early twentieth century?" The first camp, the larger one, says "yes: despite certain complications and qualifications, rhetoric was indeed dead." The second camp says "no: rhetoric was diminished but alive"—or gives a longwinded refusal of this entire question and its potentially false dichotomy. Though I profess to be in the camp of "no," the arguments for rhetoric's death remain excellent, numerous, and instructive; the related questions of *why and*

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[1] "Reveal the source, oh Muse, in images fertile, / Where the mind may seize the ornaments of style! / I want to sing of this art that exchanges, / The literal sense for the figurative ranges. / This subject, ever-trapped in an unjust jail, / Might frighten you, Muse, in its arcane detail. / Even nowadays, the tropes still carry the names / The Greeks gave them, an art we've retained." My trans. François de Neufchâteau, *Les Tropes ou les figures de mots* (Paris: Delaunay, 1817), 1.

[2] Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 79.

how rhetoric died represent (for an admittedly small number of people) the consummate whodunit of intellectual history, attracting the structuralists and many thinkers since. Given that I believe in a weak survival of sorts, I spend a surprising amount of effort in this chapter elaborating and strengthening the case for its death. In doing so, however, I introduce many historical currents, rarely addressed in English, necessary to understand rhetoric's ultimate tenacity.

Responding to the mysteries of why and how rhetoric met its end, the structuralists developed an eschatology of rhetoric, imagery of dark and unfortunate endings: a shipwreck, a state of misery or moribundity, and, most evocative of all, soft intimations of the decline and fall of the rhetorical empire.[3] But with good reason, they sometimes hesitated: rhetoric, for Barthes, "has taken three centuries to die, and is not dead for sure even now."[4] Why might it be wise to hesitate?

For recent historians and spectators outside France, it seems clear that the postwar explosion of extravagantly composed texts has something to do with the French educational system, in which rhetoric was somehow *not* dead (in whole or part). The Sartres, Derridas, and other mellifluous or maniacal writers constitute the knowing or unknowing beneficiaries and practitioners of a recondite rhetorical matrix that must be investigated in French education. A remarkable number of humanistic intellectuals followed a narrow pathway which lends itself to study: from a *lycée* (secondary education quasi-"high school") to a *khâgne* (humanistic preparatory years for the *grandes écoles*) to the École Normale Supérieure on rue d'Ulm (henceforth ENS or Rue d'Ulm).[5] In Perry Anderson's motivating account of postwar intellectualism:

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[3] Imagery well surveyed in Don Paul Abbot, "Splendor and Misery: Semiotics and the End of Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 24 (2006).

[4] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

[5] The *lycées* of the early twentieth century are *not* strict equivalents of American or Canadian high schools. For instance, a grade 12 class might send a mixture of students to university, industry, and trades, whereas a *lycée* student is already on a 'liberal' path and might exceed in age a student who has already left for "college." Other elite pathways such as the *taupe* (science and math counterpart to the *khâgne*) will be excluded. Though the total scene of twentieth-century elite and non-elite education (including business, administration, and the natural sciences) remains crucial to sociological studies, this would overburden our inquiry into the cohorts that largely end up on Rue d'Ulm.

> Viewed comparatively, the striking feature of the human sciences and philosophy that counted in this period was the extent to which they came to be written increasingly as virtuoso exercises of style … Foucault's oracular gestures, mingling echoes of Artaud and Bossuet, Lévi-Strauss's Wagnerian constructions, Barthes's eclectic coquetries, belong to the same register. To understand this development, one has to remember the formative role of rhetoric, seeping through the dissertation, in the upper levels of the French educational system in which all these thinkers—*khâgneux* and *normaliens* virtually to a man—were trained, as a potential hyphen between literature and philosophy. Even Bourdieu, whose work took as one of its leading targets just this rhetorical tradition, could not escape his own version of its cadences. … The potential costs of a literary conception of intellectual disciplines are obvious enough: arguments freed from logic, propositions from evidence. Historians were least prone to such an import substitution of literature, but even Braudel was not immune to the loosening of controls in a too flamboyant eloquence. It is this trait of the French culture of the time that has so often polarized foreign reactions to it, in a see-saw between adulation and suspicion. Rhetoric is designed to cast a spell, and a cult easily arises among those who fall under it. But it can also repel, drawing charges of legerdemain and imposture. Balanced judgement here will never be easy. What is clear is that the hyperbolic fusion of imaginative and discursive forms of writing, with all its attendant vices, in so much of this body of work was also inseparable from everything that made it most original and radical.[6]

Evidently, these thinkers wielded incredible skills that cannot be attributed to mere individual genius or eccentricity. They inspired an epideictic industry outside of France that relentlessly praised and blamed the "hyphen" of rhetoric in French thought, not to mention the serious scholarly enterprise of explicating the literary *writing* of philosophy. Anderson's account suggests *something* rhetorical—transcending the individual—indeed survived, even if it cannot be yet be demarcated and put into a tidy box of culture, *esprit*, or *zeitgeist*.

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[6] Though Barthes attended an elite *lycée*, he never attended a *khâgne* due to his health, making him (as we will later see) an interesting exception to a long list of *khâgneux* in the literary and philosophical fields. Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (London: Verso, 2011), 143.

1.1 Introducing the "great paradox": dead and alive at once?

Yet surely these aforementioned remnants dwindle into insignificance when set against the mountains of textual evidence revealing an effective erasure of rhetoric? What about "eyewitness" accounts testifying to rhetoric's demise over the span of a lifetime? For instance, Paul Valéry remarks: "I was in rhetoric in 1887. (Rhetoric, since then, became *première [supérieure]:* a great change which one can infinitely reflect upon)."[7] Under educational reforms we will soon survey, the word *rhétorique* practically vanishes, and when it appears, it typically signifies bad teenage memories among the positivist modernizers of the late nineteenth century. We thus approach a great paradox: precisely when rhetoric was thought to be "dead," the country's elite educational institutions somehow shaped and certified two generations of the most rhetorically sophisticated intellectuals—flamboyant, prodigious, irritating, eloquent, or otherwise provocative—known to twentieth-century France and then the Anglophone world. These two generations stretch, roughly speaking, from Lacan (born 1901) through Derrida, Genette, and Bourdieu (born 1930) to Rancière (born 1940), encompassing the most talented and eccentric writers and orators who so strangely flourished in "post-rhetorical," post-war France. Evidently, rhetorical autodidacticism had not *entirely* replaced the old system; even the structuralists with a vested interest in the "new rhetoric" occasionally hesitated to eulogize the "old rhetoric" in full finality. Perhaps the institution of rhetoric had in fact undergone a mutation or *relève* rather than an outright death.[8]

Considered in the broad sense that Barthes preferred, the "former rhetoric" spans so many dimensions, each fluctuating in its own way, that speaking of its overall state engenders confusions and paradoxes. But the *discourse* on rhetoric largely spoke of it as if it were a unified thing, meaning that we often must engage its totality. Although the state of rhetoric in early twentieth-century France might not be a true paradox, it makes sense, for expository and motivational purposes, to patiently present the arguments for decline and continuity separately, and to suspend our judgement as to the total fate of French rhetoric for as long as possible.

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[7] I.e. he used to be in the class of rhetoric, *rhétorique supérieure.* My trans. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 1134.

[8] These terms suggested by Genette's more interesting work: Gérard Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 21, no. 2 (1966): 293.

We can only sketch the contours of this dead-and-alive rhetoric paradox over the next two chapters, for its content is commensurate with a total history of rhetoric whose intractability even Marc Fumaroli's thousand-page historical tomes do not claim to overcome. But these contours will suffice to refute the tidy accounts of rhetoric ceding to literary criticism written from the comfort of modern literature departments and to expand the semantic and historical scope of the term to better appreciate Barthes' ultimate dilemma regarding the fate of the institution. I will proceed as follows in this chapter:

1. Refuting Gérard Genette's decline narrative ("rhetoric restrained") centered on Dumarsais' *Des Tropes* (1730)
2. Reinserting Dumarsais into the context of the *Enyclopédie* and examining its rhetorical milieu
3. Developing the idea of a rhetorical superstructure and infrastructure, and using this to assert the necessity of a pedagogical and institutional understanding of rhetoric
4. Elaborating rhetoric's decline over the long nineteenth century
5. Examining the current "state of the art" accounts of rhetoric's decline and replacement in the Third Republic, centered on Gustave Lanson

In the next chapter, the idea of the rhetorical superstructure will be elaborated into eight elements, whereby a synthesis and resolution of the great paradox will be proposed. Over these first two chapters, my bias towards a certain kind of historiography for rhetoric should become apparent, an approach that takes, as its main "characters," not geniuses or great ideas, but the social groups and institutions, in France, that have done the most to shape or shatter the national architectures and cultures of rhetoric: Jesuits, Jansenists, eighteenth-century *philosophes*, nineteenth-century republicans, the university, the *collège*, the *khâgne*, and so on. If one had to pick a main character in the pedagogical arc that emerges, it would have to be the Jesuits, who represent both protagonists and antagonists for the various centuries and worldviews under consideration (heros of humanism, villains of positivism, ambiguous architects of classical French education).

By asserting these factions and their social struggles, I will begin to pull apart the triumphalist, overly theoretical narratives that shape the old rhetoric—a total social institution, a "meta ideological state apparatus"—into a stately museum of Greek and Roman artifacts, curated by literary criticism or linguistics. Rhetoric has been called "une façon d'habiter le monde"[9] in a much-cited and inspiring phrase, but I do not think we are close to delivering the sort of interdisciplinary, expansive history commensurate with this idea. Simply tracking the philosophical discourse *on* rhetoric and the theoretical development *of* rhetoric yields, as we will see again and again, a rather premature "death."

1.2 The necessity of a pedagogical perspective

Since we still do not entirely understand rhetoric's European history, our understanding of the greater "pedagogic unconscious," which irrupts into the histories of thought and the received ideas, methods, and values of its thinkers, seems rather poor indeed, although certain waypoints exist. Though a proper historian of neither literature, pedagogy, nor rhetoric, Bourdieu acquainted himself with the nineteenth century, particularly in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.[10] Following Bourdieu and his circle, massive critiques emerged that highlight the quasi-*habitus* of academic rhetoric among reproducing and heritable structures of power, prestige, and capital; institutional elitism molded rhetorical norms.[11] We will see in the next chapter that French thinkers both revealed and suppressed this elitism and the trauma of its rigour; the majority of them suffered through rhetorical hazings whose traces disperse

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[9] Bernard Beugnot, *Les Muses classiques. Essai de bibliographie rhétorique et poétique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996), 11.

[10] "Throughout the nineteenth century, ancient languages and literatures continued to dominate curricula and, despite the effort of a minority current which wanted, in the Encyclopedic spirit, to train observation and experimentation, pedagogy remained oriented towards the acquisition of rhetoric (through Latin or French discourse) and moral education or, more precisely, the 'elevation of thought'. The combination of a universalistic humanism and a formalist reading of texts reaches its apogee under the Third Republic, in the secularized spiritualism of the university cult of the text treated as pure form (with the scholastic genre of 'explication de textes') and suitable for admission into the pantheon of canonic authors, there to serve as the basis for a sort of republican and national consensus." Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1995), 305.

[11] Especially in Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Monique de Saint Martin, *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power*, trans. Richard Teese (Standford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

themselves throughout their works. Even after Bourdieu, however, scholars rarely venture into the historical and comparative terrain required to grasp why, for instance, an Anglophone Derrida would seem impossible, or why French intellectualism permitted, empowered, and rewarded rhetorical strategies seemingly untenable elsewhere.[12]

In searching for this French distinctiveness, educational features become cardinal. As Alan Shrift contends, failing to address the canon-forming *agrégation de philosophie* "leads to a failure to understand what, at a profound level, distinguishes all French philosophers…from their German, British, and American counterparts, namely, the thorough grounding in the [pre-1800] history of philosophy."[13] Created in 1766 as a teaching qualification, the *agrégation* partly responded to the educational vacuum caused by the Jesuit suppression in 1764. After Shrift's work on the exceptional *agrégation,* we should add further institutions and traditions that distinguish France, and reveal, in a preliminary way, a pedagogic, "structural" reworking of overly purified histories of intellectual "content." Indeed, instead of attributing rich and creative periods of twentieth-century French thought to educational "progress," they are better associated with a peculiar conservative-radical collision: a largely *conserved* rhetorical culture, value system, and educational nexus—ignited by radical aesthetic, political, and philosophical impulses.

Of particular interest in the next chapter will a be certain educational trinity: the exercises of the *explication de texte* and *dissertation* as situated in the *khâgne* milieu, a framework allowing the two foremost pedagogical implements to be examined in an elite, competitive environment. This choice should not diminish the importance of the *agrégation,* which, in the case of Derrida, proved vital to the development of his thought, as Edward Baring argues. It

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[12] For instance, Michele Lamont examines Derrida's career trajectory across the systems of legitimation in France and America, but does not address the rhetorical dimension in detail. Michele Lamont, "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida," *The American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 3 (1987).

[13] Alan D. Schrift, "The Effects of the Agrégation de Philosophie on Twentieth-Century French Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2008): 449-50.

indeed represents the "gatekeeper of French academic philosophy."[14] Instead of this ultimate challenge posed to aspiring philosophers, however, in the following chapter we will encounter the earlier and less vocational years of the *khâgne*, which I perceive as the most essential host for rhetoric's "afterlife" in French intellectualism.

This afterlife is where I diverge most sharply from the scholarly *endoxa*. Though my sense of rhetoric's decline differs from recent French scholars of rhetoric in degrees of emphasis, it essentially expands upon their work. When it comes to the twentieth century, however, I envision a much stronger continuity of rhetoric than they do, perhaps because they are more likely to take French pedagogy as a given whereas, as an outsider, I am inclined towards exploring its contingent events and structures. By Anglophone standards, a weakened French rhetoric might appear comparatively healthy, and the most similar argument to my own unsurprisingly emerges from another Anglophone scholar, Martin Guiney. Though essentially focused on literature rather than rhetoric, his work maps out how the "cult" of literature in France, after purportedly democratic reforms during the Third Republic, still retained its spiritualism and dogmatism in an age of *laïcité*.[15] His continuity argument for literary pedagogy, like my ultimate argument for the continuity of rhetoric, grounds itself in the latent religiosity and Catholic history of French education. It took surprisingly long—until the Third Republic—for a true French pedagogic consciousness to arise under Gabriel Compayré, Ferdinand Buisson,

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[14] Derrida took (and hated) the *agrégation* as a student. Still critical, he went on to prepare others as an *agrégé-répétieur*: someone who "make[s] himself the representative of a system of reproduction" for his students, reproducing everything from "content" to "forms," "norms," and the "logico-rhetorical organization of their exercises (*explications de texte*, essays, or *leçons*)." Jacques Derrida, "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends," in *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 75.

Edward Baring argues that "the practice of deconstruction was a response to the conflicting demands of the exam, and that Derrida's later criticism and resistance to the *agrégation concours* grew out of an early and intimate involvement with it"; One imagines Derrida focused on his prodigious output of books, and yet, "the majority of the pages that Derrida wrote during the 1960s and 70s were lecture courses preparing students for the concours." Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968*, 222-23.

[15] "The inability of literary pedagogy to decide between rhetoric and history, and between interpretation and erudition, is a symptom of the larger dilemma between a top-down, dogmatic transmission of values, and a more modern (democratic) system in which individuals bear the responsibility for their own salvation. I have argued that the French school, by and large, has adhered to the first (dogmatic) model, while claiming to adhere to the second." Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*, 207. Or in other words: "the closely guarded secret of republican pedagogy … is that the attack on Jesuit pedagogy was a disguised attempt to appropriate the same techniques to its own ends: to teach the *idea* of literature, and the cult of high classical style, instead of literature itself." Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*, 195.

and Émile Durkheim. Their relatively unknown discipline, as I begin to show, can enrich and disturb certain received ideas about intellectual history.

At this point, before embarking on a study of various decline-of-rhetoric narratives, we should fix in our memories that these incomplete accounts will be complicated and partly overturned by the next chapter. Using the strategy of a pedagogic reading, the great paradox will eventually approach resolution. Until then, patience and a suspension of judgement is in order.

1.3 Structuralism's story of rhetoric's decline and demise

Literary structuralism eventually envisioned itself as a partial or total heir to rhetoric. With this in mind, the strange structuralist passion for speculating on rhetoric's decline makes considerably more sense: one must tell some sort of story to legitimate the succession and its nascent order. Yet a troublesome interregnum stands between rhetoric's ancient triumphs—unambiguous greatness in the ancient world—and its quasi-return through structuralism. In one of the gloomiest accounts of rhetoric's history ever conceived, and certainly a presentist one that conveniently leads to literary theory, Todorov seizes "one essential feature" of the immense period between Quintilian (c. 35-100 CE) and Pierre Fontanier (1765-1844):

> The function of discourse is forgotten. … Fortune does not smile upon a single rhetorician, and this longest period in the history of rhetoric—lasting nearly 1800 years—turns out to be, at least in its broad outlines, a period of slow decadence and degradation, suffocation and bad conscience. Rhetoric embraces its new object, poetry—language as such—but it does so reluctantly.[16]

For Todorov, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rhetoric represents an "elderly gentleman…never dar[ing] to stray far from the ideal of his youth," numb to his contemporary, changing world.[17] What was the nature of this decline (if there was a decline) and what of its interruptions and reversals? Might there be youth within senescence, gusto within old Lady Rhetorica? The overall relation between rhetoric and modernity poses the most challenging

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[16] Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 69-70.

[17] Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 86.

historical questions one could possibly ask, for although it is a broadly "negative" relation, its proliferating modalities and contexts still stifle recent scholars.

Taking the decline of rhetoric as a given, structuralists sought answers as to *why* and *how* rhetoric met its end, answers that were ultimately quite clever, hasty, and in short, mistaken. From Genette, Todorov, Barthes, and Foucault, and a bit later, from Paul Ricoeur, we find a great deal of speculation upon the literary and linguistic causes (or consequences) of rhetoric's death or decline (and a corresponding dearth of political, social, or economic perspectives).[18] Particularly from Genette, the greatest devotee of this domain, emerged an entire explanatory decline narrative, *rhetoric restrained*, in an article of the same name in *Communications* (1970). The narrative of rhetoric restrained is basically a suicide-by-shrinkage. Supposedly, the five canons of rhetoric, which had flourished in antiquity, eventually withered to one, *elocutio*, and then collapsed further, all the way down to the mere study of trope (especially metaphor and metonymy). This "rhetoric restrained" thesis,[19] which all too conveniently led to the structuralist passion for trope and figure, turns out, as we will see, to be deeply mistaken.[20] Though Genette's very article urged prudence, his hypothesis was soon taken as a given. The slow reduction or restraint of rhetoric from its broad classical concerns to a narrow focus on trope constituted the primary cause of rhetoric's death according to Genette, a notion taken up again and again by

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[18] These accounts tend to overlap, but Foucault's (very brief) account is rather different than the others. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[19] In English Cf. Gérard Genette, "Rhetoric Restrained," in *Figures of Literary Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

[20] Douay, Sermain, and a few other scholars have made an impressive effort to refute "rhetoric restrained," an effort still largely unappreciated (especially Douay's, whose work deeply influenced this chapter). See as an introduction Françoise Douay, "Dumarsais, Beauzée, Fontanier : de la Grammaire Générale aux questions de baccalauréat," in *Pierre « Émile » Fontanier : La rhétorique ou les figures de la Révolution à la Restauration*, ed. Douay and Sermain (Lévis, QC Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 2007). For why Genette is wrong, see Françoise Douay, "Non, la rhétorique française, au XVIIIe siècle, n'est pas « restreinte » aux tropes," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 12, no. 1 (1990). As an English introduction to Genette, Todorov, Barthes, and Ricoeur's histories of rhetoric, see the useful but less skeptical article by Abbot, "Splendor and Misery: Semiotics and the End of Rhetoric."

Fortunately, Genette contributed a more obscure yet much better piece to the *Annales* regarding the relationship between rhetoric and teaching in the twentieth century, which moves us towards a "thicker" history, a total pedagogical-ideological-social history of rhetoric. Fittingly for the *Annales*, he noted that "the contents of education participate—eminently—in what Lucien Febvre called the mental equipment of an era." My trans. Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 293.

Todorov, Ricoeur, and others.[21] In hindsight, this appears to us as a projection of structuralist desires upon the history of rhetoric, setting the priority of metaphor and metonymy in the manner of Roman Jakobson.

1.4 A potential perpetrator: César Dumarsais?

At the scene of rhetoric's demise, each forensic inquiry discovers a remarkable work by the enlightenment grammarian and encyclopedist César Chesneau Dumarsais (1676-1756): *Des Tropes, ou des différents sens dans lesquels on peut prendre un même mot dans une même langue* (1730), freshly reprinted in 1967 with preface by Genette, who dubbed this treatise "without a doubt the most important monument of all French rhetoric."[22] Allegedly residing in the "heart" of *la rhétorique classique,*[23] Dumarsais, in my estimation, belongs instead to its spleen (a melancholic organ that one can live without). Sometimes spelled *Du Marsais,* he is a perfectly pliable figure. Despite ranking as perhaps the greatest French linguist of the eighteenth century,[24] Dumarsais has suffered, especially in the Anglophone world, from being an often-mentioned but always peripheral name.

Genette valued Dumarsais' "rhetoric" for it proto-structuralist, grammatical, and synchronic passions for taxonomization. The specialized and elegant *Des Tropes* proved to be anything but a full-bodied, comprehensive rhetoric extending to persuasion, composition, and his era's *code du bon goût.*[25] For Dumarsais himself this was a work of grammar; for his contemporaries, one of poetics; in French accounts of the 1960s and 1970s, one of rhetoric.[26] The "swan song" of rhetoric, Todorov claims, "begins in 1730, when Du Marsais published a

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[21] Abbot, "Splendor and Misery: Semiotics and the End of Rhetoric," 311.

[22] My trans. Gérard Genette, "Préface," in *Les Tropes*, ed. César Chesneau Dumarsais (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1967).

[23] Claude Mouchard, "Postface," in *Traité des Tropes* (Paris: Le Nouveau Commerce, 1977), 255.

[24] Tzvetan Todorov, *Littérature et signification* (Paris: Larousse, 1967), 93.

[25] This is Sermain's label for the history of rhetoric from 1725-50, which he draws from d'Alembert's description of Horace. Jean-Paul Sermain, "Le code de bon goût (1725-1750)," in *L'histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne 1450-1950*, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

[26] Douay, "Non, la rhétorique française, au XVIIIe siècle, n'est pas « restreinte » aux tropes," 126-27.

rhetorical treatise destined to stir up more interest in its own country than any of its predecessors."[27] Though it stirred the structuralists, we will see that *Des Tropes* lacks any hegemonic power over the history of rhetoric; even great texts tend to be swallowed by greater pedagogical forces.

In defense of the passion for *Des Tropes,* the work remains useful, innovative, and worthy of translation. Dumarsais defines metaphor, metonymy, and so on in a particularly lucid and quotable manner, although he struggled with catachresis, which blurs into metaphor (distinguishing them rests on the tricky matter of what constitutes an abusive metaphor). Overall, however, the taxonomic ambition of the treatise successfully seizes the various tropes, as if Dumarsais captures them all in the wild—in literature—and puts them into a well-ordered modern zoo rather than a confusing medieval bestiary. Entries are cleanly subordinated; synecdoche is a *species* of metonymy. And what is a trope in general? Simply a special kind of a figure, in which a word obtains "a sense [*signification*] that is not precisely [its] proper sense."[28] As Dumarsais points out, the Greek etymology suggests a "turn" away from the proper sense.

Though most of the work consists of analyzing, comparing, and contrasting various tropes, an offhand insight at the start of the first chapter attracted much recent interest. As Dumarsais provocatively puts it: "Far from the figures being manners of speaking distanced from the natural and ordinary, there is nothing so natural, so ordinary, and so common as the figures in human language."[29] This led Genette to speculate on the nature of this distance: if a figure is some kind of "deviation" from a norm, but the deviation is in fact "normal" or "normalized" (as in a dead metaphors—*the leg of the table*), then what does this say about the nature of the figure? What do we make of the distance or gap (*écart*) between literal and figurative, between norm and deviation, when these poles vacillate? Such questions transfixed Genette and were taken up on a

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[27] Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 84.

[28] My trans. Dumarsais, *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, 69.

[29] My trans. Dumarsais, *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, 62.

more philosophical level by Derrida in "White Mythology."[30] Philosophy, Derrida claims, cannot entirely understand its own metaphoricity from inside itself; even if it can account for its "'founding' tropes," it will be thwarted by the metaphor of metaphor (as Dumarsais puts it, the metaphor "dwells in a borrowed home"—*il est … dans une demeure empruntée*—itself a metaphor or non-literal statement).[31] In figurative language, the distance between norm and deviation, between true home and borrowed home, remains mysterious.

All of this intrigue of the *écart*, however, barely intrigued Dumarsais' peers: in the decades surrounding *Des Tropes*, no notable rhetorical revolutions or ruptures transpire.[32] Nor was *Des Tropes* a cause of restraint. For French rhetoric was effectively unrestrained from the Edict of Nantes in 1598 to its removal from national curricula circa 1885 in France (as suggested by Douay's quantitative analysis of published texts).[33] Though it would certainly be convenient to categorize vast swaths of rhetoric's history as favouring *inventio*, *elocutio*, or *dispositio*, these generalizations, if there is any hope for them, must be narrowed to traditions, whether Ramist, Jesuit, and so on. By reattaching conceptions and practices of rhetoric to social groups—instead of abstracting it away from its students, teachers, religious orders, and political factions—we facilitate stronger generalizations.

1.5 Negative consequences of "rhetoric restrained"

Had this account of restraint, the so-called "semiotician's history of rhetoric,"[34] been confined to Genette and his peers, it would be of little importance to revisit. And yet, rhetoric

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[30] Which cites Dumarsais, Fontanier, and Aristotle, but not Genette. Given their relationship, however, Derrida was likely quite familiar with Genette's work.

[31] "If we wanted to conceive and classify all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, there would always be at least one metaphor which would be excluded and remain outside the system: that one, at least, which was needed to construct the concept of metaphor." Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 18, 55.

[32] Sermain, "Le code de bon goût (1725-1750)," 879.

[33] Douay, "Non, la rhétorique française, au XVIIIe siècle, n'est pas « restreinte » aux tropes," 126.

[34] Don Paul Abbot helpfully mapped this terrain in "Splendor and Misery: Semiotics and the End of Rhetoric". The relationship between postwar French intellectuals and the history of rhetoric turns out to be far more extensive and messy than he claims.

restrained effectively grounds a literary-critical industry practically devoted to ignoring the classical breadth of rhetoric despite Genette's request to "fill out and correct this more than cavalier account" with an "immense historical investigation."[35] As one book describes itself: "While not pretending to be deconstructive, *Rhetorical Poetics* shares the view, expressed by de Man, equating 'the rhetorical, figural potentiality of language with literature itself.' The starting point of this book is that limited rhetoric of which Genette speaks, the rhetoric of tropes and figures."[36] Its first page cites the *rhetoric restrained* hypothesis to justify its subject matter, reproducing rhetoric's limitation. Decades after Genette's influential thesis, he offered an obscure quasi-apology for what he calls this "semi-misunderstanding": "I had to subsequently realize that rhetoric is not limited to this one aspect [of figure], and that such a restriction was evidence of a rather restricted view, and most likely prevaricated by an overly partial comparison."[37] Unfortunately, this retraction scarcely registered, and the total institutional-pedagogical-social universe of rhetoric has been barely acknowledged outside of specialists.

Rhetoric restrained impeded structuralism and adjacent movements in French thought from understanding themselves in rigorous terms drawn from classical rhetoric—*topoi, status causae*, *dissoi logoi,* enthymemes, the realm of the probable—since they desired trope and figure to the detriment of rhetoric's other riches, as did a broad subset of Anglophone intellectuals in the heyday of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*. Barthes, as we will see in the final chapters, often tried to fight this tendency, but could not singlehandedly expand the rhetorical domain.

I agree with Françoise Douay, the harshest critic of rhetoric restrained: "the old vases of Metaphor and Metonymy," as she amusingly writes in an eloquently figured phrase, are but "*chiens de faïence* who stupidly guard the entrance of the expansive rhetorical domain, and who

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[35] Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 104.

[36] Donald Rice and Peter Schofer, *Rhetorical Poetics: Theory and Practice of Figural and Symbolic Reading in French Literature* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), xvi.

[37] Gérard Genette, "Sketching an Intellectual Itinerary," in *French Theory in America*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer Editors: Sande Cohen (New York 2001, 2001), 74.

forbid you from perceiving its vitality."[38] Metaphor and metonymy are neither rhetoric's theoretical panacea nor the historical singularity they were made out to be. Though it was Jakobson who definitively shrunk the purview of rhetoric to these two tropes, he never pretended to seriously engage the history of rhetoric. The last great rhetoricians for certain Parisian intellectuals were not true rhetoricians at all: they were French grammarians such as Dumarsais and the successor to his project Pierre Fontanier (1765-1844) (who Genette terms the "Le denier grand rhétoricien français").[39] Too often *Des Tropes* and Fontanier's *Les Figures* function as representatives—perhaps synecdoches—for a one to two century period of French rhetoric before the twentieth century. The contemporary humanities adjacent to rhetoric still bear a vague sense that the final destination of rhetoric was, or should be, the study of trope.

1.6 Dumarsais and the *Encyclopédie* in the Enlightenment

The "cavalier" histories running through Dumarsais correctly assessed his brilliant tropology but missed his passionate advocacy for the ideals of the Enlightenment *philosophe*, as well as his contributions to grammar and the teaching of Latin. Dumarsais indeed belonged to perhaps the most anti-rhetoric coterie in his contemporary society: the *philosophes.* Sketching him out here will provide a stark contrast to avowed rhetoriphiles we will encounter later. Though his life has been obscured by a censorious environment, he appears sporadically in histories of linguistics, clandestine philosophical literature, the Enlightenment, and the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. His name was well known to *Groupe μ,* Chomsky, Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva, Ricoeur, Todorov, Genette, Lyotard, Paulhan, Perelman, and Foucault (who assessed him fairly: "one of the subtlest grammarians of the period").[40]

Outside of the French rhetorical tradition into which he was inserted, Dumarsais' greatest fame is perhaps philosophical. Widely believed to have penned a clandestine tract that became

[38]The expression *se regarder en chiens de faïence* means a hostile gaze. The literal dog figurines (trinkets for a mantelpiece) do not appear particularly bright or friendly. Douay, "Non, la rhétorique française, au XVIIIe siècle, n'est pas « restreinte » aux tropes," 130.

[39] Gérard Genette, *Figures I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 211.

[40] Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas (London: Continuum, 2004), 17.

the most famous philosophy article of the entire *Encyclopédie*—"le philosophe"—he finds himself anthologized today in Enlightenment collections and French secondary education. "Le philosophe" offered a bold Enlightenment manifesto, proclaiming that "reason is to the philosopher what grace is to the Christian."[41] Dumarsais' ideal "philosophic spirit … of observation and exactness, which relates everything to true principles," dovetails with d'Alembert's often-studied "Preliminary Discourse" to the *Encyclopédie.*

Though we will eventually see that the Enlightenment proves to be both too early and too late a point from which to narrate rhetoric's decline, we should note how it fared in the *Encyclopédie*: quite poorly indeed. Whereas systematized philosophy flourished in the *Encyclopédie*, rhetoric floundered, scorned in its scattered mentions across the twenty-eight volumes. Its main rhetoric articles were crafted—capriciously and without unity[42]—by d'Alembert, Diderot, Jaucourt, and Voltaire, not Dumarsais, who worked on grammar articles until he died and Beauzée succeeded him. From the vantage of the *Encyclopédie,* Dumarsais was thus primarily a grammarian—but a multifaceted one, who would fall under the banner of *philosophe* that Dumarsais himself defined in his clandestine, originally anonymous tract. Representing this grammatical zeitgeist, Dumarsais was the most cited author in the *Encyclopédie*'s articles on grammar and linguistics, mentioned profusely in the articles after his death at the letter G (cited in 54 articles, he even exceeds the Port-Royal *Nouvelle méthode latine* (44) and Quintilian (42)).[43] Julia Kristeva's account of Dumarsais, unlike that of her peers, emphasizes that his work "allowed the grammarian to discern, from the grammatical categories inherited from Latin, *relations* between linguistic *terms.*"[44] Though Dumarsais' innovations in teaching Latin and his educational contributions to the *Encyclopédie*—perhaps "more clever than

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[41] César Chesneau Dumarsais, "Definition of a Philosophe," in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 21.

[42] Sermain, "Le code de bon goût (1725-1750)," 893.

[43] Sylvain Auroux and Bernard Colombat, "L'horizon de rétrospection des grammairiens de l'Encyclopédie," *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* 27 (1999): 57.

[44] Julia Kristeva, *Language the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics*, trans. Anne M. Menke (New York Columbia University Press, 1989), 184.

profound"—failed to impress early historians of pedagogy such as Gabriel Compayré,[45] he remains leader of the project's grammatical passion, even more so after his death, which allowed him to be memorialized as the consummate grammarian, more of a scientific humanist than a rhetorical one.

Dumarsais enjoyed a strangely cratylic death during the *Encyclopédie*'s drawn-out alphabetical production, rounding out our grammatical sketch. In its first volume his articles include "Accent," "Adjectif," "Anaphore," "Adverbe," and so on; by the seventh volume, the encyclopedists had made it to the letter 'G.' Here he expired in 1756, penning the article "Grammarien" but leaving the key article "Grammaire" to his successor Beauzée.[46] Though he lived for a whole eight decades, he died a long way indeed from "Rhétorique" in Volume XIV. Given its prominence in European history, "Rhétorique" ultimately fared rather poorly next to the nearby "Rhinoceros." On the other hand, Beauzée wrote generously of "Grammaire" and Dumarsais' "Grammarien" lauds the vocation.

To be a grammarian, in the way Dumarsais imagined it, is not just to understand the rudiments of grammar or to rank as linguistic martinet. These people he calls mere *grammatistes* (like Flaubert's definition of "Grammariens" in his *Dictionaire*: "Tous pédants"). Citing Quintilian's capacious sense of the grammarian, and evoking his old definition of the *philosophe*, Dumarsais leaves us the image of the grammarian as someone with a total command of history, thought, and letters—and perhaps above all, a dedication to society, channeling Roman *civilitas*.[47] Douay identifies Dumarsais with a "rationalist aesthetic of good sense and of nature that is less of a rhetoric and more of an antirhetoric."[48] He seems more akin to a French Locke than the French writers of rhetorical treatises; contemporary rhetoricians gradually developed

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[45] "Dumarsais' innovation consists of substituting in place of the true Latin language (with its inversions, ellipses, and own form of construction) a Latin language of convention, tidy and artificial, whose sentences lend themselves to a steady and strict word-for-word." My trans. Gabriel Compayré, *Histoire critique des doctrines de l'éducation en France*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Genève Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 158-59. See also Gabriel Compayré, *The History of Pedagogy*, trans. W. H. Payne (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1889), 330.

[46] Douay in Dumarsais, *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, n381.

[47] "Grammarien" is included in Douay's edition of *Des Tropes* (359-360).

[48] Douay in Dumarsais, *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, 15-16.

and sustained the discipline without enticing ruptures of the kind Genette sought.[49] In the ideals of texts such as “le philosophe” and “grammairien”—ideals that emphasize erudition and service to civic society—we note the conspicuous absence of eloquence as a value, especially one pursued for its own end. As we will soon see, some of his Jesuit-educated *philosophe* peers such as Voltaire were still comfortable valuing eloquence despite their contempt for the term *rhetoric*.

D’Alembert’s *éloge*, memorializing Dumarsais as a “Grammairien profond & philosophe,” noted that the *philosophe* seeks to organize and regiment (*régler*) languages whereas the *bon écrivain* seeks to arrange and establish them (*fixer*).[50] In this sense, Dumarsais was no *écrivain,* and we will soon be able to contrast him with a vastly different world of rhetoric—one that actually cared about the pursuit of eloquence and the task *de fixer les langues*. This portrait I have given of Dumarsais is not unlike the one that today hangs in the Louvre, painted by Louis Tocqué: his face projects a subtle confidence; his left hand clutches a book; his index finger props it open; its spine reads “Gramm. Françoise.” Dumarsais’ repose, his closed lips, and his lack of writing instrument represent features, quite fittingly, opposite to the impassioned, gesticulating orators found in Jan Steen’s *Rhetoricians at a Window* and other famous depictions of the “act” of rhetoric.

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[49] For instance, Gabriel-Henri Gaillard’s extremely popular *Rhétorique françoise à l'usage des jeunes demoiselles* (1745), which witnessed more than forty editions, represents a far better contemporary exemplar of where French rhetoric was headed: developing the tastes of new audiences. Unlike *Des Tropes*, this manual offered a full-bodied course, treating four of the five classical canons of rhetoric versus the sole canon (and subset) of *elocutio* found in Dumarsais’ treatise. Its first paragraph immediately engages taste, a crucial theme for the era, and yields the premise of the *jeunes demoiselles* demographic: “Rhetoric has two objects: it teaches one to compose excellent Works, and to appreciate them [*goûter*]. Taste, this fortunate faculty of the soul often only found among men as the fruit of study and effort, Nature liberally granted to women.” My trans. Gabriel-Henri Gaillard, *Rhétorique françoise à l'usage des jeunes demoiselles*, 7e ed. (Lyon: L’imprimerie de Leroy, 1792).

Cf. Marc André Bernier, "Ad majorem feminarum gloriam. L’Essai de rhétorique à l’usage des jeunes demoiselles (1745) de Gabriel-Henri Gaillard et la tradition jésuite," in *Femmes, rhétorique et éloquence sous l'Ancien Régime*, ed. Claude La Charité and Roxanne Roy (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 2012). Françoise Douay, "Les recueils de discours français pour la classe de rhétorique (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)," *Histoire de l'éducation*, no. 74 (1997).

[50] “Subjecting languages to rules is one of the highest human efforts, though an incremental one. Formed at first without principles, languages were more the work of necessity than of reason; philosophers set about straightening this formless chaos, diminishing irregularities as much as possible, and repairing that which the People had haphazardly constructed as best they could.” My trans. Jean le Rond d'Alembert, "Éloge de M. Du Marsais," in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert ((Autumn 2017 Edition), Chicago: University of Chicago - ARTFL Encyclopédie Project 2017), 7:viij. http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

1.7 The rhetorical superstructure

The missteps of the "rhetoric restrained" narrative suggest that rhetoric's often-intractable decline cannot be measured by a thin "history of concepts." One must consider not just great texts representing rhetorical theory, but a total matrix that encompasses literary, religious, and pedagogical practices, which reside in social and institutional bodies, along with their latent ideologies and explicit doctrines, a matrix shaping discourse. Let us call this totality the rhetorical superstructure, a term chosen for multiple reasons. Firstly, as an alternative term to "rhetoric," it allows us to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, and between abstract institutions and their concrete instantiations, differences which often infect "rhetoric" with polysemic instability (these ambiguities are almost a scholarly genre in themselves). Since thinking of rhetoric as pure theory or pure practice leads to historical blunders, we will refer to everything as one continuous entity. Secondly, this choice implies a relation between a more cultural-discursive superstructure, and another more material entity, which we later call the "rhetorical infrastructure."[51]

The two terms of this reciprocal relation are not meant to invoke Marxist teleology but have been chosen to suggest that the superstructure can never be fully independent of the infrastructure. The purpose of these terms will not be grand system-building, but simply a nonce vaccination against a certain way of thinking. This thinking, though appropriate for the history of linguistics, hides from arguably the most frustrating and fascinating feature of rhetoric: its virtually total—and confounding—integration between social, political, pedagogic, religious, and literary realms, stretched between continuous oscillations of theory and practice, science and art, with respect to these domains.

What initial form might this rhetorical superstructure take on in France? We could imagine it thusly. Despite manifold nooks, crannies, tattered edges, and other features taxing the imagination, there must be large clusters, separated by fissures, where multiple pedagogic-

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[51] Braudel deploys a similar distinction to great effect in *The Identity of France*, but his death prevented the planned "State, Culture and Society" volume and thus his work covers little directly relevant to this dissertation. Though he develops the superstructure/infrastructure relation over geographic and economic terrain in the second volume, it is not clear how he would have extended it into literary territory. Cf. Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France: Volume II: People and Production*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 411.

religious layers, under the *ordres enseignants,* stack tightly upon each other. From the medieval Benedictines and Dominicans to the more recent Jesuits, Oratorians, and Ursulines, and finally to the Sulpicians educating Ernest Renan and the Assumptionists inveighing against Dreyfus, these factions represent pedagogical juggernauts and hence key determinants of the superstructure's fortunes, for they maintained virtual educational monopolies until they were out-competed by secular alternatives (and finally wrestled into educational submission circa 1880 under Jules Ferry). They would be blown about by various theological movements, especially Jansenism. Foremost among these congregations were the Jesuits, who at their peak can be called the "schoolmasters of Europe."[52] Since the teaching orders enclosed literature, theology, and pedagogy into reasonably holistic and distinct units (and even geographic sites) they yield a preliminary map of the totality under consideration. Like all maps, it has an ineradicable arbitrariness to it, but at least it is not too big to comprehend: in a good day's journey, one could travel from the Latin Quarter to Port-Royal-des-Champs, southwest of Versailles.

Neglecting the teaching orders and the alignment of rhetorical-religious power, as Genette did, omits a vast part of this superstructure. Though quasi-secular sections will eventually split off, partly thanks to the encyclopedists and *philosophes*, they never achieved the pedagogic hegemony of the clerical teachers (Renan rightly suggests that the teacher is the closest profession to the cleric).[53] Indeed, we will see in the next chapter that "secular" education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century inherited more than it might want to admit from early clerical configurations. Though representing the rhetorical superstructure via these orders remains reductive, it gives us a viable alternative to narrativizing, for instance, the eleven massive volumes of Henri Bremond's *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours* (in combination with all of the post-Fumaroli scholarship).[54] The work of abbé Bremond charts, with particular vigour and originality, the unfathomably complex denominational disputes shaping and splintering what we are calling the

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[52] John W. Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy: The Jesuit Schools in France from Revival to Suppression, 1815-1880* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), viii.

[53] Ernest Renan, *Recollections of My Youth* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897), 294.

[54] This name is pronounced *Brémond* but is spelled inconsistently, with and without the accented 'e.'

rhetorical superstructure of France. The value and methodologies of eloquence differed greatly among the *ordres enseignants,* as well as the theological quarrels, which so readily became literary (and brutally political). Let us consider a few, however superficially.

1.8 Rhetorical-religious ruptures

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 crushed Huguenot (French Calvinist) education, meaning that interdenominational struggles among Catholics will be our ultimate focus. The Reformation, however, inadvertently caused a true "restraint" of rhetoric in certain Protestant regions, cracking massive pedagogical fissures into Europe which ran through sixteenth-century Paris. For instance, before Petrus Ramus was stabbed to death in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, he worked towards shrinking the scope of rhetoric while expanding dialectic. After completing his M.A. at the University of Paris, then dominated by scholasticism, he soon published scathing criticisms of Aristotle which inflamed the university.[55] He argued, roughly speaking, that *inventio* and *dispositio* belonged to dialectic, not rhetoric. According to Chaïm Perelman, Ramus thus committed "an error that was fatal to rhetoric" (fatal, at least, for Ramism).[56]

Though Ramus' *conception* of rhetoric has little to nothing to do with organized religion, his *reception* hinges upon his professed faith: Ramus gave up Catholicism for Protestantism about a decade before his decapitated body hit the Seine. Thus the dispersed yet powerful international Ramism that Walter Ong captures—taking hold in Protestant regions which might regard Ramus as a martyr of St. Bartholomew's day—depends upon his mysterious conversion, which inadvertently led to the mutilation of rhetoric's purview in a significant part of Europe. Scholars of rhetoric, resenting Ramism's brutalization of the trivium, might be inclined to call it a "superficial pedagogic method," as Frances Yates did.[57] On the other hand, the pedagogy and

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[55] Ramus' interest in dialectic partly owes to Agricola's *Dialectical Invention,* brought to Paris by Sturm. Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 21-23.

[56] Chaïm Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, trans. Willian Kluback (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 3.

[57] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 234. Or there is the oft-quoted jab of Justus Lipsius: "never will he be great for whom Ramus is great" (*nunquam ille magnus erit, cui Ramus est magnus*).

humanism of the Protestant innovator Johannes Sturm (1507-1589), associated with the Gymnasium system, was much broader in terms of rhetoric, and not so far from Jesuit pedagogy (Sturm thought the Jesuits plagiarized him, but it was mostly a case of shared humanist heritage). Though Ramus had actually learned much from Sturm in Paris, they left the Protestant world with two very different rhetorical purviews. For Ramus, the "entirety of true rhetoric" could be found in *elocutio* (style) and *actio* (delivery), and the latter could be almost neglected in practice, arguably making Ramus the greatest 'restrainer' the art has ever known.[58]

In the Catholic world, a broader—and if I may say, richer—conception of rhetoric exists on the whole, partly unified by the Church's promotion of Latin and the hegemonic "plan of studies" of the Company of Jesus: the great *Ratio Studiorum* (definitive edition: 1599).[59] The story of the classical canon in France could be said to begin with the "normativity, universality, [and] duration" of the *Ratio Studiorum*, implemented and established through the company's growing school system. Thanks to the cornucopian breadth of Jesuit pedagogy, the Company's countless students, from Descartes to Diderot, would not have experienced a restrained rhetoric unless instructed by a rogue teacher. Free of Ramist restraint, the educators following the *Ratio* and its derivatives could not readily pretend that they were teaching an art of a mere one or two canons as they guided prelections of Aristotle's synoptic *Rhetoric* and the expansive works of Cicero.

The consequences of the Company's deep, broad, rigorous, integrated, and highly Latinate program were particularly immense in France. Barthes would claim that the "monopoly" of Jesuit pedagogy "left bourgeois France with the concept of 'fine writing'"[60] and that signifiers of French culture adhered to the "constraints of Aristotelo-Jesuit rhetoric" until quite recently.[61] This would only seem a slight exaggeration; in Jesuit humanism, "Rhetoric itself is the noble substance, it dominates everything. … Until around 1750, outside the sciences,

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[58] Peter Ramus, "From *Logic*," in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* ed. Wayne Rebhorn (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2000), 159.

[59] As well as Cypriano de Soarez's *De Arte Rhetorica* (1568) and similar comprehensive works.

[60] Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 39.

[61] Roland Barthes, "Pleasure in Language," in *'Masculine, Feminine, Neuter' and Other Writings on Literature* (London: Seagull, 2016), 77.

eloquence constitutes the only prestige."[62] Traces of this domination, as we will see in the next chapter, can be readily detected in Barthes' day.

No single example can suffice to express the Jesuit view of rhetoric, nor the diversity of its styles and scholarly traditions. Yet in regard to the sheer *value* placed on eloquence—in its dignity, beauty, utility, and especially its power—we might cite a passage from Nicholas Caussin S.J. (1584-1651) that appears near the beginning of his massive *eloquentia sacra et humana* (1619), a tome of more than a thousand pages (in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, physicians sing the praises of Caussin's loquacity: the most soporific substance known to medicine, a cure for any insomnia).[63]

Though Caussin declares sacred eloquence superior to pagan, he would seem intoxicated by a rather pagan rhetorical revelry, in striking contrast to the sober exactitude we perceived in Dumarsais, this "janséniste puis libre-penseur."[64] Caussin bursts forth:

> Eloquence is a procuress and can effectively seize and bind people's spirits, especially when it is joined as a companion to wisdom and moral integrity. Carried on its wings, as it were, the orator's soul flows into the very hearts of his auditors, and he purchases them for himself in a form of slavery that is most pleasing to all. Once he has entered them, what does he bring to pass? Are spirits to be inflamed? He lights the fire. To be strung into action? He sharpens the goad. Enlightened? He spreads the light all around. Consoled? He sprinkled on Nepenthe. Restrained? He puts on the brakes. Healed? He supplies Panacea. Allured? He turns into a little Siren. In short, one cannot say how many gentle juggling tricks this pandering eloquence possesses, how many and how admirable

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[62] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 44.

[63] Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, 251.

[64] Douay, "Non, la rhétorique française, au XVIIIe siècle, n'est pas « restreinte » aux tropes," 126. Consider Dumarsais' probable education: "Very different from the program dispensed in Latin by the Jesuit colleges (Aristotle, the *progymnasmata* of Aphtonius, the Spanish and Roman baroque), this Oratorian program—French, modern, with less technique—is the crucible of a new rhetoric, where the alliance between reason and the heart triumphs." My trans. Françoise Douay, "Biographie," in *Des tropes ou des différents sens*, ed. Françoise Douay (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 30.

> its effects. A person would hardly err who said, in the words of Philo Judaeus, that eloquence is the "siege-engine of the soul."[65]

This imagery of effusive, protean eloquence, shifting into a form *proper to every occasion* from the elixirs of nepenthe and panacea to the erotic pull of the procuress and siren, would seem a fitting testament to the reverence felt by the Company of Jesus towards the sublime substance of rhetoric. Caussin freely glorifies eloquence. The ebullient style here draws heavily on the Second Sophistic (the Greek rhetors between the first and third century CE, who represent a more literary version of the sophists of the fifth century BCE, roughly speaking). Caussin exemplifies what Fumaroli calls the "sacred sophistic," associated with the Jesuits, although this elevated style cannot be found across Jesuit rhetoric. The profound concern with propriety, circumstance, and audience in this passage, however, faithfully indicates the Jesuit insistence on adaptation, whether as missionaries or as teachers, an adaptability ideologically connected to their optimistic view of providence. Michel de Certeau rightly calls the Jesuits the "partisans of adaptation."

But this is not exactly a freewheeling adaptation to anything. Rather, its aims reach *outside* the self. Loyola epitomizes this adaptive genius in his letter "How to Deal and Converse with People in the Lord" (1541). To "win the love of highly placed persons and superiors for the greater glory of God our Lord," one must "study their temperament and adapt": when speaking to "choleric" persons, for instance, "avoid seeming grave, phlegmatic, or melancholic." Rather, be "quick and merry in speech."[66] Loyola then references a Pauline epistle: "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."[67] The Jesuits would later approvingly quote Cicero's ideal: "We are not born for ourselves alone" (*Non nobis solum nati sumus*).[68] These adaptive and civic or outward-facing

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[65] From an edition of 1630. Nicholas Caussin, "From *On Sacred and Profane Eloquence*," in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* ed. and trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2000), 279.

[66] Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 66.

[67] 1 Cor. 9:22 KJV

[68] John W. O'Malley, "From the 1599 *Ratio Studiorum* to the Present: A Humanistic Tradition?," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 129.

imperatives are perhaps the closest thing can find to the ideological essence of the rhetorical-religious alliance among the Jesuits. To say that they helped institutionalize eloquence is only to begin describing their rhetorical import,[69] which will continue to unfold in the next chapter.

1.9 Jesuit rivals: the Oratorians and Jansenists

The Jesuit educational monopoly did not last. The Oratory of Jesus, established in France in 1611 by Pierre de Bérulle, originally sought to avoid incursions into educational and geographic strongholds of the Jesuits. Yet a rivalry grew, and the Oratorians became effectively Gallican (i.e. under shared authority of monarch and pope), not ultramontane (allied to the pope only) like the Jesuits, even though Bérulle had originally favoured the papacy.[70] The founding of the Oratory represents the "culminating point of the French Counter-Reformation," for Bremond, a former Jesuit, who amusingly describes their difference as follows: "the Oratorians are more spontaneous and nearer the Attic standard, the Jesuits more artistic and more Latin. The first cared less for fine writing, and that perhaps explains why they wrote so well."[71] The Oratorians yielded their own great philosopher in Nicolas Malebranche, and rhetorician-mathematician in Bernard Lamy.

Compared to the Jesuits, the Oratorians took a more modern approach, at least from our vantage today. Though still deeply preoccupied with Latin mastery, they did not always insist on it as a language of instruction, and eventually provided textual explanations of Latin grammar in

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[69] "The Jesuits were intensely conscious of this rhetorical field. … They took their stand in the major European controversies relative to rhetorical doctrine, and they saw perfectly the far-ranging stakes of these disputes, for them and for the common Christian good as well. They resisted Ramism, as Walter Ong has brilliantly shown, and they fought Port-Royal logic. Ramism and Port-Royal logic had in common the detachment of Humanist rhetoric from the central epistemic and ethical function the Jesuits stood for. … They were ahead of their time in their lucid awareness of the part played by the Sophists and the Second Sophists in the unfolding of Western Christian culture." Marc Fumaroli, "The Fertility and the Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: The Jesuit Case," in *The Jesuits: cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 92.

[70] "The [Jesuit-Oratorian] rivalry progressively took on ideological dimensions. Bérulle was strongly attached to the papacy, and the early Oratorians faced opposition from the Sorbonne and the Parlement of Paris, but, later, Gallicanism became widespread among the French Oratorians. More important, so did Jansenism." John Donelley, "The Congregation of the Oratory," in *Religious Orders in the Catholic Reformation*, ed. Richard DeMolen (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 206.

[71] Henri Brémond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, vol. 3 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), 133, 70.

French (learning Latin grammar in Latin strikes us as absurd, but this had been standard). They ultimately took over eight Jesuit colleges after their suppression and gained a reputation for being relatively welcoming to the Revolution, a revolution that in fact led to their demise.[72]

The Oratorian-Jesuit tensions, however, were minor compared to the bitter, war-like rivalry between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, which would have grave effects on the rhetorical superstructure. Some Oratorians became Jansenist sympathisers; the Jansenist-Jesuit quarrel proved closer to a political and theological zero-sum game than any of the Company's past altercations.[73] Whereas the Jesuits had been, in the words of de Certeau, "partisans of adaptation," emphasizing "civil practices," the Jansensists "opt for practices of worship" and retreat.[74] From the Jansenist perspective, the Jesuits served both God and a humanist mammon. The civic and evangelical felicities of eloquence, radiating outward into the masses, would be of little use to Jansenism, for as conceived (tendentiously) by Bremond, this doctrine "clumsily and invariably directs us to the saddest region of ourselves, … hypnotising us before the spectacle of a natural misery of which we are not guilty and which we cannot cure."[75] Jansenists still dutifully taught rhetoric—and wrote quite well—but treated it as just one of the various subjects that would give way to theology, demoting rhetoric's civic dimension. It would be misleading to

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[72] For instance, Joseph Lebon, whom Jean Paulhan mentions, was both Oratorian and part of the Terror. See Ruth Graham, "The Enlightened and Revolutionary Oratorians in France," *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* (1981).

[73] Being "one of the major cleavages in the history of France," subject to "endless interpretive controversies," Jansenism cannot be fairly condensed into a few sentences. This will have to suffice as an introduction: "'Jansenism' means resistance to absolutism, … [its] profoundly revealing double, its religious mirror, its ghost. … Jansenism opposed the political religion of the *raison d'État* with its own religious politics, that of God as absolute. Theologically, the movement began in Louvain in the context of discussions, following the Council of Trent, concerning free will and grace in reaction to the Protestant schism. The Jesuits gave it a name, based on that of Bishop Jansenius, whose *Augustinius* (1640) was the most elaborate expression of the doctrine that would eventually trigger the controversy. In opposition to Molina, the theologian of the Jesuits, Jansenius pointed to man's fundamental corruption and God's omnipotence." Catherine Marie, "Port-Royal: The Jansenist Schism," in *Realms of Memory*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University, 1996), 303-04.

[74] Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 162-63.

[75] Henri Brémond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), 404-05.

say they were simply “against” rhetoric, but under Jansenism a passion for language could merit shame.[76]

This pedagogic-spiritual-political rivalry will play over innumerable cultural domains. Historically, it helps form great antitheses of French literature: “Corneille Jesuit, Racine Jansenist; Corneille optimistic, Racine pessimistic; Corneille political, Racine psychological.”[77] The rhetorical superstructure seems cleaved here by theological difference, between, in a word, a “worldly” doctrine of engagement—communication *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*—versus a spiritual retreat into silence and the self.[78] Such oppositions, whose political, pedagogic, and literary dimensions I have barely broached, structure themselves deep into the social reproduction of rhetoric in *ancien régime* France, outweighing the machinery of theoretical innovation that would typically be associated with a history of linguistics or another science. A tidy history of trope and figure might include Aristotle, Quintilian, and Dumarsais, but however expanded, cannot apprehend rhetoric as total social fact. The effects of this theoretical trope-figure discourse on the overall rhetorical superstructure remain *de minimis*.

1.10 The rhetorical infrastructure

If we define a rhetorical superstructure, let us also define an infrastructure: the non-discursive historical factors generally considered outside the “proper” rhetorical domain. Events—wars, revolutions, schisms—all perturb the rhetorical superstructure, as do broad sociological shifts, such as changing class relations, education for girls, mandatory education, and the appetites of capitalism (perhaps one could argue that the “age of capital,” spanning from 1848 to 1875 in Eric Hobsbawm’s formulation, yields rhetoric’s true swan song). For instance, between the Middle Ages and the advent of compulsory education in the late nineteenth century, French society did not exactly become literate but rather transitioned from so-called “restricted literacy” to “mass literacy”: the expansion of literacy from elites, clerics, and specialists to the

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[76] Peter France, *Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 118.

[77] Terence Cave, "Corneille, Oedipus, Racine," in *Convergences: Rhetoric and Poetic in Seventeenth Century France*, ed. David Lee Rubin and Mary B. McKinley (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 82.

[78] *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (AMDG), for the greater glory of God, is the official Jesuit motto.

masses (one would typically learn to read in Latin rather than French until the Revolution).[79] The pan-European growth of primary education between the mid and late nineteenth century proves particularly staggering.[80] Many of these sociological forces represent headwinds blowing against rhetoric, at least when it is conceived as a pure ruling class instrument (which it is not purely). The eloquence of the senate risks impropriety in the salon; the eloquence of the salon offers less and less to the human sprockets of an increasingly industrialized France.

We should be open to the possibility that rhetoric's decline was not an endogenous one—such as rhetoricians' failure to innovate—but an exogenous one arising at least in part from structures outside its control. The eloquence of a Demosthenes, Cicero, or Bossuet seemingly requires a healthy state of orality in society and would be challenged by the "Gutenberg galaxy" and post-print media. A materialist argument could be made that rhetoric—even if it had better adapted to rationalism, romanticism, and positivism—would still have been neutralized by socioeconomic forces, or distorted and instrumentalized by capitalism. Ultimately, an intractable mess of reciprocal relations between the rhetorical superstructure and infrastructure obscures any omniscient view. However, one part of the superstructure can be readily tracked, affording us some stability: a nearly continuous discourse on eloquence-as-value, its means and ends, and its relative importance compared to other pedagogic aims.

1.11 The Enlightenment: an incomplete revenge of student against teacher?

Though the work of Dumarsais was no true rupture, the rhetorical superstructure did undergo a strange twist along social axes in Enlightenment France, an era that defies easy characterization for rhetoric's fate. It is safe to say, however, that things had generally worsened since the Renaissance. During the eighteenth century, as Fumaroli captures it,

> The main battle in Europe … was no longer between Reformation and Counter Reformation, but between, on the one hand, 'philosophical' and secular Humanism,

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[79] François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 305-10.

[80] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1997), 118.

> which in Catholic countries stemmed largely from former pupils of the Jesuits like Fontenelle, Voltaire, and Diderot, and on the other hand, the anxious and angry clerical anti-Humanism of the Jansenists, which the *philosophes* were happy to identify with the Roman church in general. The Jesuits' teaching and learning could seem in Jansenist eyes to fuel the new humanitarian and deist philosophy, whereas all the while they stood too firmly on the side of Roman church orthodoxy for the taste of the lay philosophers. There is no doubt that the Jesuits amply nourished the new lay philosophical enlightenment. Most of their pupils, notably in France, were superbly trained in ethico-rhetorical as well as scientific or technical skills.[81]

In this predicament, the various humanisms prized "eloquence," and yet the rhetorical systems that yielded this eloquence had trappings of religious authoritarianism or appeared opposed to emerging Enlightenment principles. What emerged from certain key *philosophes*, however, fell far short of a total condemnation of the rhetorical superstructure, for they still clung to some of its values.

Voltaire, Diderot, and d'Alembert[82] broke from so-called "rhetoric" yet pledged allegiance to "eloquence": that is to say, they disdained the theory and formalization of eloquence, but supported and valued its practice, which should be as "natural" as possible.[83]

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[81] Translation altered for readability. Fumaroli, "The Fertility and the Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: The Jesuit Case," 99.

[82] For instance, in place of art, learned craft, and *techne*, d'Alembert makes a grand appeal to the gifts of nature in his article "Elocution": "I have termed eloquence a *talent,* and not an *art* as so many rhetors have done since art is acquired by study and exercise whereas eloquence is a gift of nature. Rules will never make a work or speech eloquent." My trans. Jean le Rond d'Alembert, "Elocution," in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert ((Autumn 2017 Edition), Chicago: University of Chicago - ARTFL Encyclopédie Project 2017), 5:521. http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

[83] Stéphan Pujol notes the frequency of this distinction during the Enlightenment and the confusion between its two terms (429-430), along with the Enlightenment ideal of natural eloquence. Stéphan Pujol, "Eloquence," in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Michel Delon (London: Routledge, 2001), 431.

Voltaire admitted his deep debts to his Jesuit teachers at Louis-Le-Grand,[84] but his Encyclopédie article "Eloquence" surely would have disappointed them, for it begins and ends with the premise that true eloquence cannot be taught. "Nature renders men eloquent," he contends from the outset, "under the influence of great interests or passions."[85] He concludes by claiming that "in an enlightened century, genius aided by examples knows more of *eloquence* than the sayings of all the masters"; books on eloquence have "said too much."[86] Perhaps these books said too little to Voltaire, since he distorts them greatly in his haste to valorize genius. In this proto-Romantic vein, Voltaire betrayed Louis-Le-Grand's well-established precedent that eloquence could in fact be taught, which it would prove, again and again, up to the era of Barthes.

Recent scholarship suggests that the textbook Enlightenment narrative—pitting the forces of "reason" against "religious superstition"—must be questioned, especially in the realm of rhetoric, due to the ambiguities of the so-called "Jesuit Enlightenment." On the one hand, considerable Jesuit contributions to science, their optimistic view of human nature, and intellectual culture of curiosity fired the passions of future *philosophes*, who often received eloquence as unquestioned value. On the other hand, the Jesuits teamed up with the Jansenists, roughly speaking, to stifle the *Encyclopédie*, and the Company never became sufficiently enlightened for radical tastes. Rising anti-Jesuit sentiments in France could be regarded as a delayed "vengeance" exerted from students to teachers (who were wise but insufficiently radical

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[84] "In his most earnest moments, Voltaire was perfectly aware of the covert debt owed by his philosophical party to his beloved and admired teachers at the Collège-Louis-le-Grand. A large part of his French public was trained by the Jesuit educators, enlightened by the Jesuit international review, the *Journal de Trévoux*, and dazzled by the philosophical and scientific quarrels in which the Jesuits had a distinguished role. Voltaire fought as harshly as his former masters against their common anti-Humanist foes, the Jansenists." Fumaroli, "The Fertility and the Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: The Jesuit Case," 110.

"The Jesuits knew how to impart the passion for knowledge to Voltaire and for its living expression. Far from being experienced as a laborious duty, literary endeavours became the happy and fertile exercise of natural gifts which the Jesuits helped bloom." My trans. Marc Fumaroli, "Voltaire Jésuite," *Commentaire SA*, no. 69 (1995): 110.

[85] My trans. Voltaire, "Eloquence," in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert ((Autumn 2017 Edition), Chicago: University of Chicago - ARTFL Encyclopédie Project 2017), 5:529. http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

[86] My trans. Voltaire, "Eloquence," 531.

for the *philosophes*).[87] This vengeance certainly found *rhetoric* to be an easy victim (but only as term, and not as the total, resilient institution we shall keep exploring). The writers who so benefited from Jesuit pedagogical culture—while claiming that nature alone yields true eloquence—today risk a great deal of hypocrisy. Ultimately, this revenge of student against teacher strikes us as a somewhat botched endeavour: after besmirching *rhetoric* as signifier they failed to take their plot to its full ideological and institutional conclusions and uproot its signified.

We should note (and will note again) the potentially extreme disparity between, on one hand, rhetoric's (potentially terrible) *reputation* among thinkers within domains such as Rationalism, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Positivism, and on the other, the mighty reproductive forces of the rhetorical superstructure: the pulpits and printing presses, curricula and classrooms, that functioned long, long after rhetoric's iniquities were "settled" by Descartes, Voltaire, Hugo, or even Renan. Viewed from the vantage of high thought, Rationalism should have virtually ended rhetoric. And if the *Encyclopédie* represented a philosophic snapshot of knowledge, then the generous number of words afforded to *Rhinocerous* compared to *Rhetoric* suggest its afflications would be terminal. Yet, as we continually see, it endured.

1.12 French rhetoric "dies" during the Third Republic

Though mapping a French rhetorical decline has barely begun here, we should begin to suspect that this decline will stretch across the entire contours of the rhetorical superstructure—theory *and* practice, philosophy *and* religion, politics *and* pedagogy. No smoking gun might ever turn up, as it did with "rhetoric restrained"; the culprit's alias will not be a proper noun. Just as the decline and fall of the Roman empire, contra Edward Gibbon, cannot be attributed to a singular Christianity, *l'empire rhétorique* will not crumble in the tidy way that pioneering historians prefer. So we continue expanding on these various domains, and lay the groundwork for probing Barthes' great rhetorical dilemma, a turmoil of equivocations, vacillations, even hypocrisies. He constantly struggled to separate the goods of rhetoric, and the Good in rhetoric,

[87] Jeffrey D. Burson, "Distinctive Contours of Jesuit Enlightenment in France," in *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness*, ed. Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 234.

from its plethora of unseemly institutional roles, roles that became increasingly obvious to an increasingly literate public in the anticlerical and positivist nineteenth century.

The death of rhetoric, according to contemporary scholars, is a surprisingly recent affair. It runs something like this. Under a series of pedagogical reforms, literature departments emerged and the teaching of rhetoric vanished during the long and eventful Third Republic (1870-1940) due to anticlericalism, republicanism, positivism, and a spectrum of other religious, sociological, and political factors. Perhaps a death certificate could even be issued at the auspicious juncture of the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1), when Prussian victory arguably signalled the defeat of French education (Prussia had come to analogous conclusions after being trounced by Napoleon in 1806). In the wake of the siege of Paris, Michel Bréal, a philologist who had studied in both nations, partly attributed the French failures to a conservative educational system, as did Ernest Renan, who excoriated a decadent French literary education that was "less that of modern science than that of the rhetors of the 4th or 5th century BCE."[88] Both philologists complained of the Jesuit influence in France that had so shaped its intellectual institutions, an influence continuously praised and blamed for France's classically oriented pedagogy.[89] Though this pedagogy would be widely criticized for its untold hours devoted to Latin and Greek—enhancing the effect of a Rome or 'Athens in Paris'[90]—rhetoric represented the supreme target.

The French educational emphasis on rhetorical and literary excellence seemed utterly out of joint with industrial, scientific, and military exigence, and yet the defeat by Prussia still did not prompt a total purge of classical pedagogy. We might highlight the less noted year of 1880,

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88 Michel Bréal, *Quelques mots sur l'instruction publique en France* (Paris: Hachette, 1872), 150-52.

My trans. Renan, *Questions Contemporaines*, 100.

89 Gabriel Compayré and then Émile Durkheim would go on to critically detail this influence as pedagogical thought became more skeptical and self-aware in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The history of Jesuit humanism and pedagogy would eventually be enriched immensely by François de Dainville, S.J. See Marie-Madeleine Compère, "La postérité du père de Dainville en histoire de l'éducation [online]," in *François de Dainville: Pionnier de l'histoire de la cartographie et de l'éducation* (Paris: Publications de l'École nationale des chartes, 2004).

90 Though I do not undertake the detailed classics-focused history that Miriam Leonard requests in *Athens in Paris*, we will certainly be exploring its pedagogic peripheries. Cf. Miriam Leonard, *Athens in Paris: Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17.

when reforms gutted composition in Latin, an ancient stronghold of rhetoric, from the baccalaureate, and the Latin *discours* would no longer challenge students taking the (national) *concours général*.[91] A greater rhetorical defeat of 1880, at least symbolically, coincided with prohibiting religious congregations—often the subjects of conspiratorial rumours and intrigue—from teaching activities: the Jesuits were banished entirely, and other orders would now require special state permissions.[92]

A few decades prior, French novelists and politicians, and even some all-too-literary historians such as Jules Michelet,[93] had mythologized the Jesuits into the nineteenth century's 'clerical sophists': they personified the dark side of rhetoric, as well as the furtive forces of ultramontane authoritarianism. *Jesuitisme* approached charlatanism in meaning and became just as baroque as antisemitic conspiracy theories, although not nearly as disastrous.[94] The Jesuit quasi-monopoly on teaching had been defeated long, long before 1880.[95] Mythologically, however, the Jesuits remained a mighty nineteenth-century force and were the perfect scapegoat for a diverse array of political complaints. Thus, as police forcibly removed priests from classrooms in 1880, the ancient religion-rhetoric alliance in pedagogy suffered a grave and final

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[91] Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France 1800-1967* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), 247.

[92] Debray begins his "University Cycle" chronology for charting the rise of modern French intellectuals in 1880. More generally, the "institutional foundations … of a *university milieu*" were erected between 1871 and 1885. Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 1981), 42. (42).

[93] Lucien Febvre links Michelet's remarkable invention of the concept of the Renaissance to his vehement rejection of the Jesuits, clerical authority, and the church in general. Lucien Febvre, "How Jules Michelet Invented the Renaissance," in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre* ed. Peter Burke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 265.

[94] Nineteenth-century literature often associated the stock character Jesuit with the masculine subterfuge of the confessor, a dangerous figure alone with the female confessant. Sometimes, however, the masculine role was imported into feminine wiles: "The most Jesuit of Jesuits is still a thousand times less Jesuit than the least Jesuit woman; behold what Jesuits women are!" My trans. Honoré de Balzac, "Petites misères de la vie conjugale," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1879), 573.

[95] I say "quasi-monopoly" because of state-run engineering and military schools. The Jesuit lost their schools when driven from France in 1764. After their order had been dissolved by Clement XIV and re-established by Pius VII in 1814, their nineteenth-century educational influence remained minor compared to their massive accomplishments in the seventeenth century.

symbolic defeat. Soon after, the eponymous Jules Ferry laws of 1881 and 1882 finally realized the old "Jacobin dream" of mandatory and free primary education system under strict *laïcité.*[96]

Yet perhaps it would be premature to conceive of the "end" of rhetoric, which would leave an enormous vacuum, until something appears that could take its place. In 1890 another round of reforms declared the effective curricular replacement for rhetoric: "the center of gravity of secondary education is [now] in explication," and no longer in the compositional and imitative realm.[97] The new, self-identified *intellectuel* (a recent, post-Dreyfus neologism) would be stamped by an endless series of *explications de textes.* These would be purportedly "democratic" exercises replacing the indulgent individualism and elitism of a rhetorical composition associated with aristocratic rule. Boosted by associations with science, philology, and history, and championed by Gustave Lanson, *explication* became the hegemonic pedagogical paradigm into which the structuralists emerged; it was especially tenacious at the Sorbonne that Barthes would attend. Perhaps only when *explication* was fully institutionalized could rhetoric be declared defeated. Let us say with warranted imprecision, then, that rhetoric "dies" some time during the Third Republic. These three waypoints—1870, 1880, and 1890—give the briefest tour of much more comprehensive historical efforts.[98]

1.13 "The only error of the Greeks" over the long nineteenth century

Despite these glimpses into an era of rapid decline in the Third Republic, we have barely broached the complex *ideological* hostility towards rhetoric mounting over the long nineteenth century. Scholars of rhetoric tend to savour Renan's famous quip of 1885 that rhetoric (along with poetics) was the "only error of the Greeks," and deploy it, with good reason, as a marker of its reputational nadir. Yet in itself, it explains nothing of the accelerating decline, for his argument against rhetoric simply recycled old commonplaces: no rules can make masterpieces;

[96] Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry*, 303.

[97] My trans. Quoted in Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France 1800-1967*, 248.

[98] More dates, eg. 1885 and 1902, have been highlighted by Compagnon, Douay, Guiney, Prost, and others. For a detailed account, see especially Compagnon, "La rhétorique à la fin du XIXe siècle (1875-1900)."

only thinking well can lead to speaking well; “absolute sincerity” is the key.[99] There is nothing new here. Why should such stale accusations finally find purchase during the Third Republic, in the decades surrounding Renan’s speech, after failing for centuries to vanquish *l'art de bien parler?* We should turn to the Republican political climate which makes the question of rhetoric rather different than it had been under the *ancien régime*, yielding new political-pedagogic angles of attack that reinforced the usual philosophical and literary critiques (rhetoric as enemy of truth, sincerity, or beauty).

An increasing contempt for elitism certainly does not bode well for the institution, and the First Republic (1792-1804) will offer the Third Republic (1870-1940) the prototypes of an anti-elitist argument against rhetoric.[100] As Martin Guiney summarizes, a “myth” birthed in the French revolution held that “language in its regenerated state could serve as a perfect vehicle for communication”; “The rejection of literature took the form of a rejection of rhetoric as a basis for separating literature from the rest of human discourse, and as a basis for elitist Jesuit pedagogy that monopolized the institution of literary studies at the time.”[101] As we will later see with Paulhan, a post-revolutionary “terrorist” attitude towards language posits that rhetorical excesses, or even rhetoric itself, could be dispensed with.

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[99] This famous remark emerged as Renan celebrated the speech of diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, who supposedly possessed a natural eloquence, free of artifice, an eloquence Renan deemed so rare in his time: “You do not like rhetoric for good reason. It is, along with poetics, the only error of the Greeks. After having made their masterpieces, they believed they could derive the rules for making them. An error indeed! There is no more an art of speaking than there is an art of writing. To speak well is to think well out loud. Oratorical and literary success has but one cause: absolute sincerity. When you are enthusiastic about an encounter and you succeed in beguiling the dullest of things by metaphors, the stubbornest of things by the artifices of the supposed art of speaking well, it is not your speech that pleases but your person. Or rather, you speak *fully*, you charm, you have this supreme gift that works miracles, like faith, and which is truly of the same order.” My trans. Ernest Renan, "Réponse de M. Ernest Renan au discours de M. Ferdinand de Lesseps," in *Recueil des discours, rapports et pièces diverses lus dans les séances publiques et particulières de l'Académie française 1880 — 1889* (Paris: l'Institut de France 1890), 12.

[100] Of course, leaping from the First to Third Republic skips over an extremely challenging period in between. The Bourbon Restoration benefited rhetoric, and, roughly speaking, so did other periods of reaction. From a purely political perspective, one might say loosely that reactionary factions paused, soothed, or slowed rhetoric’s decline in the nineteenth century.

[101] Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*, 20.

1.14 Mythologies of rhetoric

Though we will soon see the Jesuits enmeshed in a dark conspiracy theory that proved unfavourable to rhetoric, a positive myth valorizing their "other" also proves important. In the nineteenth century, that old nexus of anti-Jesuit sentiment and stylistic sobriety—Port-Royal—witnessed "its most illustrious period as a cultural icon" despite Jansenism's retreat: "instead of fading into oblivion, Port-Royal entered the cultural sphere, where it was exalted as the quintessence of the Grand Siècle."[102] Saint-Beuve played a crucial role as he mythologized Port-Royal into a spiritual refuge.[103]

Initially founded as a Benedictine abbey in 1204 (on a rather swampy site) and piously reformed by Marie Angélique Arnauld in 1608, Port Royal finally relocated to Paris in 1626 (and away from what seemed to be a nun-killing swamp).The famous *petites écoles de Port-Royal,* formed under Saint-Cyran, only lasted from 1637 to 1660, instructing relatively tiny numbers of students. And yet, their memory and example would be deployed by Protestant or secular Republican reformers more than two centuries later, who preferred Port-Royal pedagogy and the *Port-Royal Logic*. Though Giambattista Vico had excoriated this text for raising a useless, passive, yet judgmental youth whose ungainly means of expression were *arida e secca*,[104] early efforts to theorize and historicize French pedagogy began with Port-Royal in a highly favourable position.

Meanwhile, nineteenth-century France witnessed a breakthrough in its anti-rhetoric argumentation: a grandiose conspiracy theory which scholars have perhaps underestimated. Vilifying an allegedly nefarious group of real people often proves easier than criticizing an

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[102] Marie, "Port-Royal: The Jansenist Schism," 337.

[103] "Even in the most fiery moments of the Sorbonnic and Jesuitical dispute, during the obstinate debates of the Formulary controversy, and when outside there raged hardest—from Rome to Louvain and from the Collège de Clermont to the benches of the University, intrigues, clamours, and a sort of dusty invective or resilient good humour—even then, despite it all, Port-Royal held on, almost without interruption, to the cloister, the sanctuary, the cell, and alms depository, to the Christian practice of morals and the inviolable interior of certain souls, to the study cabinet, poor and silent." My trans. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, 4e ed., 5 vols., vol. 1 (Hachette, 1878), 35.

[104] Giambattista Vico, *L'autobiografia, il carteggio e le poesie varie*, ed. B. Croce e F. Nicolini (Bari: G. Laterza et Figli, 1929), 14.

abstract idea without a face, and this is entirely true of rhetoric and its wily agents. Though the sophists had brilliantly fulfilled this role in antiquity—users and abusers of rhetoric, teachers and salesmen of a false art—the French Jesuits of the nineteenth century were far better villains. For they represented not only cunning teachers of rhetoric and casuistry, but agents of clerical authority, an authority that was sworn enemy of countless republican intellectuals. And although the French Jesuits were far too weak and scarce to dominate nineteenth-century education after being reinstated in 1814, they were readily personified into the institution of rhetoric, facilitating new angles of attack.

The fervor, complexity, and extent of the so-called "Jesuit myth" has been largely forgotten. From the explosive lectures of Michelet and Quinet at the Collège de France excoriating the furtive Jesuit influences on society to the massively popular anti-Jesuit novel *Le Juif errant*, diverse critics assailed the Company of Jesus in nineteenth-century France: Republican thinkers of various stripes, dispersed Port Royalists, bureaucrats, novelists, and pedagogues (over a range of political orientations, but generally the non-socialist left). At its base, the mythology of *Jesuitisme* references their para-national network of political-religious-pedagogic influence that had so shaped French education and society. Allegedly, their students could be neither good citizens nor good thinkers, and the Voltaires and Diderots they trained were explained away.[105]

Even for their milder critics, such as Renan, the Company's post-suppression legacy was tremendous: "The French education system created after the Revolution under the name 'University' in reality carries forward much more from the Jesuits than from the former universities."[106] This genuine influence, however, anchored the most passionate and extreme hyperbole. Renan's criticisms of a mechanistic Jesuit moral education pale in comparison to

[105] "Anti-jesuit criticisms of the Jesuit education embraced not only its doctrinal content, … but its whole pedagogical spirit and method. … The Jesuits' long-standing reputation as educations was disparaged as the product of propaganda, charlatanism, or intrigue, sustained only by slandering superior rivals (Port-Royal, the Oratorians, the Université). … Men like Voltaire were [allegedly] great despite rather than because of their Jesuit education. … In Jesuit pedagogy, as in everything they undertook, it was implied, the arts of trickery, of illusion, of manipulation were paramount; no great men, and no sound citizens, could develop where the cultivation of reason and of conscience were so cynically neglected." Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 242-43.

[106] My trans. Renan, *Questions Contemporaines*, 81.

Michelet's fiery harangues,[107] and the philologist's gripes against the French University—a quasi-Jesuit school of style, of pompous declamations, of squandered talent—were indeed restrained and nuanced compared to what had gone before him.

Michelet launched his invectives at the Collège de France by defining *jésuitisme* as "the spirit of the police and their informants, the mean baseness of the *tattletale* pupil, once transferred from school, college, and convent into the community at large," as "the spirit of the police introduced into the matters of God."[108] The Jesuits allegedly transposed the secretive inculpations and disciplinary regimes of the classroom into society itself; the historian fretted over his beloved French people "whom the Jesuits are daily plunging a step lower into this hell of everlasting corruption."[109] "The" Jesuit, for Michelet, represents an automaton of power—as if derived from Foucault's nightmares—a "machine, a mere instrument to be put in motion, without any individual will."[110] Barthes knew of his dear historian's "loud cries" about the Jesuits and their "sterile invention" and "negative proliferation," their function as scapegoat.[111] Unsurprisingly, Michelet also felt anxious about rhetoric. Barthes said of the historian that he "feared art"—or "traditional rhetoric, with its rules and formulas"—"precisely to the degree that he had a gift for it."[112] The mythic Jesuit became, among his other guises, a mechanical Turk of rhetoric.

Lecturing with Michelet, Edgar Quinet proclaimed that the Jesuits' "great plan of education" consisted in "allow[ing] the spirit an apparent movement, which should render all

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[107] "Our system of education is still, without our being aware of it, feature for feature, that of the Jesuits, based upon the idea that man can be 'licked' into moral shape by bringing outward influences to bear upon him, totally forgetful of the soul that imparts life, treating him, in short as a piece of intellectual mechanism." Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 462n8.

[108] Translation altered. M. J. Michelet, "M. Michelet's Lectures," in *Jesuits and Jesuitism* (London: Whittaker and Co, 1846), 1.

[109] Michelet, "M. Michelet's Lectures," 1.

[110] Michelet, "M. Michelet's Lectures," 8.

[111] Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower, and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berlekey: University of California Press, 1997), 128.

[112] Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 24.

movement impossible; to waste it in incessant gymnastics[:] … never was so much reason brought to bear in conspiracy against reason."[113] Quinet's charges made the Jesuits out to be sophistic charlatan-pedagogues:

> The pompous display of discussions, theses, of intellectual struggles, of word-combats … characterize[s] the education given by the order of the Jesuits. The more they stripped reflection of its gravest topics, they more they allured to those intellectual exercises and tricks of fence which marked the nothingness of the discussion; so that they abounded in spectacles, solemnities, academic tourneys, spiritual duels. ... Here was the miracle of the Society of Jesus... to render him [*l'homme*] immoveable at the very moment in which he was beguiled by all the appearances of literary and philosophical progress. If the Satanic genius of inertia had been bodily manifest on earth, this is the course it would have pursued.[114]

Though typical in their vehemence, these characterizations are but a tiny sampling of the range of accusations that inflamed complex anti-Jesuit sentiments in nineteenth-century France. In addition to their wily reputation, most important here are their ultramontane, counterrevolutionary associations: they were subject to a "special hatred and mistrust reserved for their order in the demonologies of the secular Left."[115] These politically charged mythologies of the nineteenth century should be remembered as we struggle to reconcile contemporary rhetoric, as Barthes did, with its social history.

1.15 Quitting words for things

Outside the Jesuits, rhetoric remained negatively associated with the worst parts of religious education and fared poorly under increasingly positivist attitudes. Renan's youthful experiences are particularly instructive in understanding his contempt for rhetoric, so characteristic of his time (we will continually see that attitudes towards rhetoric tend to be

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[113] M. E. Quinet, "M. Quinet's Lectures," in *Jesuits and Jesuitism* (London: Whittaker and Co, 1846), 50.

[114] Quinet, "M. Quinet's Lectures," 51.

[115] Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France*, 54.

formed early in life). Renan had studied the art via the "somewhat insipid classical teaching of M. Dupanloup" at the seminary of Saint-Nicholas du Chardonnet. A moderate, compromising ecclesiastic and reformer, the voluble Félix Dupanloup was far from a clerical authoritarian. But for Renan, Dupanloup was still the very personification of literary-rhetorical extravagance, since the "principal dogma" of Dupanloup was allegedly "No salvation without a good literary education."[116] Finishing his rhetorical training, Renan then entered Issy, a branch of the St. Sulpice seminary, where the labour of style would no longer torment him:

> St. Sulpice is now the only place where, as formerly at Port-Royal, the style of writing possesses that absolute forgetfulness of form which is the proof of sincerity. It never occurred to the masters that among their pupils must be a writer or an orator. ... In this way St. Sulpice with its contempt for literature is perforce a capital school for style, the fundamental rule of which is to have solely in view the thought which it is wished to inculcate.[117]

From St. Sulpice, Renan celebrates Port-Royal as the nepenthe of formalism; all his previous rhetorical training was mere *enfantillage*. Under the Sulpicians, Renan enjoyed what he saw as a more open-ended yet more rigorous education than at Saint-Nicholas.

Renan ultimately began to doubt ecclesiastic authority and the truths of the Christian faith. His immensely popular *Life of Jesus* (1863) fortified positivism, through biography, with an authoritative power drained from the Church.[118] His life, in some ways, captures the relation between declining religious, rhetorical, and literary convictions (literary in the sense of valuing

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[116] Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*, 196, 220. One of the most prolific pedagogues of his day, Dupanloup defined the task of the rhetoric professor quite unobjectionably in his massive *De la haute éducation intellectuelle*, and valued history, science, and philosophy. Yet this is not what Renan took away from his education at Saint-Nicholas: "its superficial rhetoric I came to look upon as a mere digression of very doubtful utility. I came to realities from words, and I set seriously to study and analyse in its smallest details the Christian Faith which I more than ever regarded as the centre of all truth." Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*, 196. Dupanloup "was not sufficiently rational or scientific[:] … his two hundred pupils were all destined to be poets, writers, and orators." Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*, 160.

[117] Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*, 193-95. Renan admired their humility: "The rule of the St. Sulpice Company is to publish everything anonymously, and to write in the most unpretending and retiring style possible. ... Michelet has described the alliance between the Jesuits and the Sulpicians as 'a marriage between death and vacuum.' This is no doubt true, but Michelet failed to see that in this case the vacuum is loved for its own sake." Ernest Renan, Recollections of My Youth (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897), 193.

[118] Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*, 96.

form) as juxtaposed against an ascendant positivism.[119] Ultimately, to Renan's famous slur for rhetoric—*la seule erreur des Grecs*—we should add his personal decree: *je quittais les mots pour les choses,*[120] a mythic pronouncement extending, in many ways, to the anti-rhetoricism of the long nineteenth century. Though we have barely begun to explore this distrust or hatred of words (*misology*), we will later revisit its literary scene via Paulhan's "terrorists," who will not only quit words for things, but burn them for good measure.

1.16 The replacement of rhetoric?

Though far from elaborating a complete nineteenth-century narrative of decline, we now sense that rhetoric does not seem to die by its own hand, for it got caught between republican politics, anti-clerical sentiments (especially anti-Jesuit ones), and a positivist belief that rhetoric runs contrary to the "facts." With these prerequisites, we can now introduce the best scholarly accounts concerning themselves with the mystery of rhetoric's end (which will be complicated by the next chapter). Compagnon's account, in essence, narrates rhetoric's rapid *replacement* on curricula by the nascent discipline of literary history. In his telling, Gustave Lanson effectively becomes the hero—for literature departments—or the villain—for rhetoricians, finally delivering the *coup de grâce.*

Though Compagnon's account focuses on the rather recent birth of literature departments (and hence downplays a more purist rhetoric or philosophy perspective), he frames it with one of the key quarrels we have examined: the Jesuits—associated with rhetoric and theory—and Port Royal—associated with philology and history (one could also call the Port Royal faction the Jansenists or the Benedictines, and he chooses Benedictine). It took until the Third Republic for the Benedictine tradition to win out:

> The two traditions began to be perceived as rivals when the Benedictine espoused particularism and the Jesuits generalism. After the Revolution, when the Benedictine

[119] In the "Renan affair," he attacked the divinity of Christ in a public Collège de France lecture, resulting in a suspension and scandal. Sandra Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy & French Education: Liberal Reform in the Second Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 180-81.

[120] Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, ed. Jean Pommier (Paris Armand Colin, 1959), 129.

> abbeys and the Jesuit colleges were dispersed, particularism took refuge in the Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, while rhetoric flourished in the Napoleonic universities established in 1803. The situation changed after the defeat of 1870, which many observers [such as Renan] saw as the defeat of France's educational system ... The reformers of the French educational system were essentially a few historians ... [who] propagated the discipline of the positivist method for establishing facts. ... History, based on this cult of facts, became the science that would prepare the nation for revenge on Germany. And their bête noire was literature, which was irretrievably associated with rhetoric. ... The literary faculty, who were rhetoricians, did not know how to teach [literary history]. ... But a savior appeared, to whom, it is no exaggeration to say, literary studies in France owe their survival. ... The notorious "Lanson," as his textbook was soon called, made it possible for professors of rhetoric to retrain themselves into the historical method, a generation after the historians had done so. …He insisted the techniques of philology would give scientific legitimacy to literary studies ... [and eliminated] their "impressionistic imagination" and "systematic dogmatism."[121]

In this account, Lanson resolves much of the turmoil we have seen brewing by promoting two pedagogical exercises with which he is so famously associated: the *explication de texte* and the *dissertation*, which we will examine in the next chapter.

Lanson seemingly triumphed where countless anti-rhetoric thinkers had failed. Due to the massive anti-rhetoric campaigns that had proceeded him, this was partly mere good timing. Yet he also bypassed the massive tradition of ethico-philosophical attacks from Plato onward and instead assaulted rhetoric's *reproduction* more than its reputation, striking its curricular organs. What finally supressed rhetoric in France, in this reading, was not a more persuasive or better-reasoned argument against it, but a far more bureaucratic endeavour of reform and replacement, heavily buttressed by republican politics.

Likewise, the philosophical defenses of rhetoric did not hold, notably that of Ferdinand Brunetière, whom Compagnon has highlighted as a kind of anti-Lanson (and anti-Dreyfusard).

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[121] Compagnon, "Literature in the Classroom," 819-21.

Brunetière could be called "last eloquent rhetorician" of his day. He had actually mentored Lanson, the supreme anti-rhetorician.[122] Brunetière's "An Apology for Rhetoric" likely represents the discipline's best philosophical defense in the late nineteenth century: "Rhetoric is the body of rules and laws which govern the art of writing, considered in itself as inseparable from the art of thinking: and whether it is known or not, and I rather fear it is not known very well, what one denies in attacking rhetoric is an art of thinking and writing."[123] Whereas the critics of rhetoric constantly separated "things" from "words" in order to denigrate the latter, Brunetière claims thinking and writing are "inseparable." Hearkening back to Aristotle's sense of rhetoric as an art for probable and uncertain matters, and foreshadowing twentieth-century convergences of psychology and rhetoric, Brunetière mapped its "empire," an "entire province of the human mind":

> What is really attacked under the name of rhetoric is all the means for urging [*persuader*] on men things which are not to be proved [*démontrent*]. Liberty, and immortality, and even morality cannot be proved: they are to be urged. We cannot establish the necessity of obedience, or of self-control, or of self-sacrifice; but we can incline our hearts to them. … Yes, where the power of logic and dialectic ends, there begins the power of rhetoric. Where reasoning wanders, and reason even blenches, there does it come and found its empire. It lays hold of an entire province of the human mind, not the least vast and inaccessible, and impenetrable to the demonstrations of erudition and the inductions of metaphysics; it establishes itself there, and reigns in sovereign sway.[124]

Rhetoric's relationship to reason, the difference between persuasion and proof, has always been vital for establishing its possible sovereignty. Brunetière's conception here of rhetoric's mental "empire," "an entire province of the human mind," is impressively modern, at least compared to the impoverished senses developed by his contemporaries. He also took Renan's scientific optimism to task in his somewhat mystical, anti-positivist polemic *Religion and Science*.

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[122] Compagnon, "Literature in the Classroom," 820.

[123] Ferdinand Brunetière, "An Apology for Rhetoric," in *Brunetière's Essays in French Literature* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 239.

[124] Brunetière, "An Apology for Rhetoric," 242-44.

Wondering whether "the historical sciences … deserve this name at all," and lamenting the broken promises of philology, Brunetière believed contemporary thought could not deliver on expectations.[125] Yet Brunetière's name is scarcely remembered, let alone remembered as a rhetorical nostalgist, partly because his former student Lanson would introduce a new historical paradigm that heavily contravened the old art.

In a wry twist for a critic of rhetorical pedagogy, Lanson became chair of *éloquence française* at the Sorbonne in 1904, an astrologer in a chair of astronomy (though he would see it the opposite way). Shunning Brunetière's embrace of the airy expanse "where reason wanders," Lanson understood rhetoric in the most brittle, pejorative sense. This vision, implemented into pedagogy, greeted the generation of Sartre, and later, of Foucault:

> In this system, Latin and even Greek will keep their place. Nothing will be endangered but rhetoric, this woeful habit of not examining the truth of things, under the guise of analyzing or admiring beauty, which one calls the culture of literary taste, and which is nothing but perversion and abuse. The humanities will be renewed, freed of rhetoric, and directed by the concern for the scientific formation of the mind.[126]

The true problem for Lanson remained rhetoric's formalism and alleged vacuousness, and he specifically spared Latin and Greek in his condemnation of classical education.[127] This Lansonian vision still flourished as Barthes entered the Sorbonne in the early 1940s, working on Greek tragedy, and slowly realizing that something was missing from an otherwise classical education.

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[125] Ferdinand Brunetière, *Science and Religion* (Odd Volumes, 2016), 26.

[126] My trans. Lanson, *L'Université et la société moderne*, 102.

[127] "Our classical teaching ... is more bad than good. It is bad, not because it teaches Greek and Latin, but because 'literary' studies, which only see the daring of the play of ideas or the beauty of their forms, excessively dominate this teaching. ... The humanities that made a Rabelais, a Montaigne, shrink away from rhetoric. It is no longer an art of thinking that one acquires, but an art of speaking well without thinking." My trans. Lanson, *L'Université et la société moderne*, 90-92.

1.17 Tentative conclusion: rhetoric cedes to Lansonism

If structuralism eventually went too far in "emptying" history, then it must be remembered that the pendulum between theory and history (or rhetoric and philology) was returning from a particularly pedantic point in its long arc. As Jean Guéhenno wrote in his wartime journal, complaining of a decadent state of Lansonism in higher education:

> I have ample proof, unfortunately, that the teaching of literature in the Sorbonne and the Universities has become pathetic. The abuse of history, of the footnotes of history, has destroyed all critical sense and taste. I know of a professor who spent a whole year giving a commentary on Lamartine's "*Le Lac*." He traced the history of a little pink or blue notebook in which Lamartine had scrawled a few stanzas of his poem. … When the last [lecture] came around, neither he nor his students had read the poem yet. To these so-called historians, it seems that all the artists of the past suffered, wrote, and lived only to provide matter for a few bibliographical index cards.[128]

Brunetière could be credited for foreseeing such a stultified, scholastic endeavour bereft of "critical sense and taste." Though this ridiculous example—spending a year on the genesis of poem without reading the text itself—seems rather extreme, it offers a taste of Barthes' motivations for his rehabilitation of rhetoric that will unfold in the final chapters: he and many of his peers experienced Lansonism as a tyrannical force that must be subverted. Given that the reformers of the Third Republic envisioned themselves democratizing literature, the return of rhetoric in the 1960s will thus inhabit a curious mythological space of both reaction and revolution.

In the beginning of this chapter, we set out to address the "great paradox," and we have now confirmed its first half: that rhetoric suffered genuine and severe setbacks on multiple fronts from politics to pedagogy. From Fumaroli's *Histoire* and the other work that its experts produced—Douay, Sermain, Compagnon—one could potentially build a chronological and fairly comprehensive decline-of-rhetoric narrative of five hundred to a thousand pages. But this was

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[128] Jean Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940-1944: Collaboration, Resistance, and Daily Life in Occupied Paris*, trans. David Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 142.

not our goal, and as we have seen, doing it properly requires addressing multiple intersecting domains. Responding to this complexity and the structuralist folly of taking a tiny textual sample as a bellwether for the whole of rhetoric, I have sketched out the concept of a rhetorical superstructure as an imperfect shortcut or heuristic. This concept will prove useful in the next chapter as we examine the other half of the paradox: the curious continuities of rhetoric into the formative years of the humanistic thinkers who will eventually ascend in the postwar period.

In this chapter, we stumbled upon at least two remarkable tendencies in the history of French rhetoric which bear repeating and remembering. First, a great disparity of decades and centuries separates the philosophic, critical thought *on* rhetoric from the institutional fortunes *of* rhetoric. Reading the rationalists or encyclopedists in isolation, or even a figure as late as Renan, yields a sense of decline that is premature compared to rhetoric's ideological conditioning of pedagogy, materialized into various social groups. Secondly, the mythos of rhetoric became increasingly associated with factions readily demonized, rightly or wrongly, from a secular center-to-left perspective. This mythos illuminates the sometimes-baffling trepidations of twentieth-century French thinkers in reviving rhetoric, and the sometimes-baffling hypocrisies of radical postwar intellectuals who were too often—at least from a nineteenth-century vantage—drunk on the dregs of a bourgeois, aristocratic, or "Jesuitical" art.

Ultimately, we should be skeptical of the seductive powers of narrative that schematize and simplify the decline and fall of an empire such as rhetoric. An apt narrative anecdote comes to mind. In Balzac's *La peau de chagrin*, Valentin finds a magical leather skin that grants wishes yet shrinks each time it is called upon and drains his lifeforce. After referencing Genette's "rhetoric restrained," Ricoeur claims, "L'histoire de la rhétorique, c'est l'histoire de la peau de chagrin."[129] Today, this story misleads us in two ways. Firstly, rhetoric, although in terrible

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[129] Paul Ricoeur, *La Métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 13-14. The English translation is less literal: "The latest treatises on rhetoric offer us, … in G. Genette's fitting words, a 'restricted rhetoric,' restricted first to the theory of style and then to the theory of tropes. The history of rhetoric is an ironic tale of diminishing returns [*peau de chagrin*]. This is one of the causes of the death of rhetoric: in reducing itself thus to one of its parts, rhetoric simultaneously lost the nexus that bound it through dialectic to philosophy; and once this link was lost, rhetoric became an erratic and futile discipline. Rhetoric died when the penchant for classifying figures of speech completely supplanted the philosophical sensibility that animated the vast empire of rhetoric, held its parts together, and tied the whole to the *organon* and to first philosophy." Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-discplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 9-10.

shape by the late nineteenth century compared to its seventeenth-century grandeur, simply did not shrink down to trope, to the size, in Balzac's novel, of a "periwinkle petal." And secondly, Ricoeur's analogy omits that Valentin was indeed granted wishes—powerful wishes (though he dies in the end, he dies grasping his true love). In the next chapter, we shall shift to the scene of this twentieth-century amorous encounter, trying to fortify ourselves with an analysis of transhistorical structures that will variously fail and succeed to resist the novelistic temptations of a Balzac or a Michelet.

2 The Continuities of Rhetoric in France: The Resolution of the Great Paradox

"The desire to write took hold of me only when I was around thirty. Of course, I had been involved in what are called literary studies. But those literary studies—the habit of explicating a text, of writing papers, taking tests—you can well imagine that they in no way made me want to write. Quite the contrary."—Michel Foucault[1]

2.1 Introduction

Routed in French pedagogy and retreating from public awareness, replaced by Lansonism and remote from literary history, rhetoric supposedly dies down, or dies off, during the Third Republic. A rare account from 1888 worried that the replacement of rhetoric with a synoptic, historical approach to French, Latin, and Greek literature would endanger "the general culture of the youth," "classical taste," and "l'esprit français" through a great transformation that "substitutes an exposition of facts, without principles and laws that explain them, for a theoretical form of teaching."[2] Were such fears justified? Certainly, the explicit theory of rhetoric suffered. But the rest of these concerns seem overblown. In Genette's more stimulating work on teaching we find an intriguing ambiguity: despite rhetoric's *official* disappearance, "a code of expression (and an intellectual instrument) of such proportions does not vanish without leaving traces or finding a successor: in reality, its death can only be a taking-up (*relève*), or a mutation, or both at once."[3] Genette correctly perceives the rise of the *dissertation*—an extra-rigid quasi-essay—as indicative of a rhetorical mutation towards *dispositio* and notes a pedagogic and epistemological shift: "the scholarly exercise is no longer imitative, but descriptive and critical; literature has ceased being a model in becoming an object."[4] This model-

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 31.

[2] My trans. Antelme Édouard Chaignet, *La Rhétorique et son histoire* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1888), vii.

[3] My trans. Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 293.

[4] My trans. Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 297.

to-object transformation of literature seemingly relieves rhetoric of many of its old duties, and as a narrative of rhetoric's demise, satisfies many scholars of literature.

But what about the *relève* of rhetoric as such? And might the "code of expression" and "instrument" of rhetoric still haunt literature itself? Whereas the next chapter will focus on the latter question via Jean Paulhan's concerns over literary "Terror," the present chapter will focus on rhetoric as part of a total pedagogic experience of reading, writing, and speaking unconfined to literature or genre (*lege*, *scribe*, *loquere*, as one pedagogic motto has it). We will briefly consider some of the potential implications of rhetoric's *relève* for the structuralist generations as motivation, and then shift to mapping sites of continuity and transformation. Whereas the last chapter took a more diachronic approach for evoking decline, a more synchronic approach will unfold here, made possible, in part, by the traditionalism and relatively static nature of various French institutions. Those truly new institutions, the *khâgne* and ENS in particular, often derived their pedagogic culture from older models, allowing us to observe certain truly long-term continuities.

In keeping with the last chapter, we will take up the rhetorical superstructure, whose elements seem to resist the four most standard perspectives: rhetoric-as-(proto)science, rhetoric-as-art, rhetoric-as-theory, and rhetoric-as-practice. Eight elements, although preliminary and certainly not exhaustive, will be useful in dissolving the great paradox:

1. A constitutive conflict: the *collège*, roughly speaking, liberates the arts from the university, prompting an enduring "universitization" of secondary education in France.

2. A relation to antiquity: humanism, but restrained humanism.

3. A pedagogical architecture: the *Ratio Studiorum* and its legacy.

4. A social mechanism: agonistic hierarchies rewarding eloquence.

5. A linguistic program: Latin-for-Latin's sake shifts to Latin for the sake of French; Greek continues as mark of erudition.

6. A way of reading: *explication.*

7. A way of writing: *dissertation*.

8. A way of speaking: "talk like a book."

These eight sites typically support one another and are sometimes inextricable. For instance, humanist erudition requires skill in Latin and Greek, which in turn fosters French eloquence through relentless translations. In this list, one should note the conspicuous absence of the "great works" on rhetoric, poetics, and language in general (e.g. Lamy, Fénelon, or Dumarsais). Some of the forces most responsible for rhetoric's permanence, it would seem, are the hardest to textualize.

These eight elements will help illuminate the pedagogical and ideological conditions of *éloquence française* or, in the more modern terminology of Bourdieu and Passeron, "the pre-eminent value the French System sets on literary aptitude."[5] They argue forcefully for the "social function" of this literary aptitude, noting the "humanist tradition inherited from the Jesuit colleges—an academic, Christian reinterpretation of the social demands of an aristocracy."[6] Yet they offer few early historical details beyond this claim. While *Reproduction* and *Academic Discourse* prove that a professorial "magisterial discourse" and other rhetorical practices remained alive and well in French higher education (after rhetoric's supposed "death"), this is not, in itself, a satisfying resolution to our paradox. That said, their work helps correct the great de-socialization of language endemic to structuralism and encourages us to think of rhetoric as much more than a particular form of disciplinary knowledge.

A more sociological perspective also reveals the importance of the rhetorical infrastructure, which witnessed explosive growth—relative to the reasonably static population of France—during the Third Republic and beyond. For instance around 1880, a mere 2% of the male population finished secondary education, with only about a thousand total arts students in the university system; by the late 1970s, this number had increased two-hundred-fold, despite the

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[5] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 115.

[6] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 114-15.

total population of France only increasing by about a quarter.[7] In 1880, the state finally takes women's secondary education seriously, although women are still offered an overly practical education, inferior to the male *lycée*, until the end of WWI.[8] The option for de Beauvoir to study philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1925 had only emerged the year prior.[9] Soon university women are abundant. Though the number of highly literate women and men grows enormously during the Third Republic, the *khâgne*-ENS pathway does not expand in proportion to these new demographics.

Whereas the average French youth in the twentieth century increasingly encounters new educational pathways—scientific, technical, or otherwise modern—those destined for the ENS letters division continue with a remarkably classical program. This allows for a disjuncture between the *khâgneux-normalien* relation to rhetoric and the broader one of French society. Thus instead of imagining rhetoric's "death," we might eventually envision a somewhat continuous elite core of rhetoric, around which a more accessible educational regime, more hostile to rhetoric, expanded—slowly at first, but rapidly during the Third Republic. Given my aims, I have reduced the rhetorical infrastructure to almost a footnote of the superstructure, but it is worth remembering that most accounts do the reverse—an often-productive move for the general history and sociology of education.

2.2 Implications of permanence

Rhetoric, said Barthes, "has taken three centuries to die, and is not dead for sure even now."[10] He was right to hesitate. The tenacity of the French rhetorical superstructure that unfolds here suggests structuralism's "rhetorical" turn, justified by constant references to linguistics, was

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[7] Régis Debray, Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 1981), 30; Violaine Houdart-Mérot and Ralph Albanese, "Literary Education in the Lycée: Crises, Continuity, and Upheaval since 1880," Yale French Studies, no. 113 (2008).

[8] John E. Talbot, *The Politics of Educational Reform in France, 1918-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 10.

[9] Margaret A. Simons, "Beauvoir's Early Philosophy: 1926-27," in *Diary of a Philosophy Student, Volume 1, 1926-27*, ed. Barbara Klaw, Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir, and Margaret A. Simons (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 30-31.

[10] Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard, 1st ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 15.

arguably more institutional and unconscious than explicitly dictated by the consequences of its propositions: French intellectualism 'regressed' to a rhetorical mean, approaching its ancient pedagogic preference for linguistic excellence over historical erudition.

To the extent that this return is real—and it not a simple, reactionary return to an ideal past—we should shift interpretive tactics. Time and time again, scholars have engaged postwar intellectuals in relation to writing, style, and rhetoric, as if their individual "projects" or "intellectual milieu" of a few decades compelled them towards their profoundly idiosyncratic modes of discourse. Their thought supposedly *necessitates* certain unconventional forms of writing or, in a weaker formulation, the content and conveyance of their thought *resonate* with one another: useful and even necessary schemes for explicating their work. Though certainly amenable to engaging individual thinkers, such approaches cannot account for some of the spectacular collective tendencies unfolding in this chapter.

These individualist, *le style c'est l'homme même* formulations elide the reality that the most rhetorically sophisticated French intellectuals of the twentieth century clustered together in a handful of elite institutions that had continuously inculcated rhetorical virtuosity since their very establishment, inducting students into a matrix of normative expectations, implicit and explicit values, agonistic hierarchies, incentives, disincentives, and examinations constraining (but not eliminating) their philosophical and literary agency. French education funneled its (potentially) elite humanistic intellectuals into a narrow range of educational paths. Of these one stands out as unambiguously the greatest. Neither Harvard nor Yale, Oxford nor Cambridge, yields a true analogue to the special journey from a *khâgne*—hopefully that of Louis-le-Grand or Henri IV—through the *conours d'entrée* to rue d'Ulm.[11] The extremely competitive concentration and centralization so characteristic of French education represents one of the most obvious potential factors contributing to the creative explosions of postwar intellectualism.

From Sartre to Derrida, thinkers often testified to tumultuous relationships with their schools, laced with both gratitude and resentment, oscillating between appreciating the benefits

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[11] This journey features prominently in Nizan's *The Conspiracy*, a rather baffling novel unless acquainted with elite Parisian education and its accompanying anxieties and humiliations. I almost always refer to pre-1960s education along humanistic pathways in the Third (or sometimes Fourth) Republic. Today, Rue d'Ulm remains prestigious but viable alternative paths increasingly opened up.

of their institutional formations and recounting various traumas, especially examinations. Sartre will admit the “undeniable influence” of ENS classicism on his writing and in the same breath disparage the “lousy culture” of the institution—and then, shortly after, reminisce over his happy days there.[12] Insecurities about institutional elitism also emerge, particularly from the left, confronting the ENS mythology of nobility: “One is born a *normalien*,” As Georges Pompidou put it, “as one is born a chevalier (knight). The *concours* is only dubbing.”[13] Though we should always balance the gifts of nature with the formations of culture, we must reject the notion that one is simply, so to speak, “born a Derrida.” Far from being a ceremony of “dubbing,” the *concours d’entrée*, in fact, structures a great deal of the education preceding it; the *khâgne* was born to serve this examination; limitless natural genius does not in itself allow one to pass. We should thus understand the writer’s justifications for certain forms of discourse in a dialectic with the rhetorical superstructure. In this undertaking, educational institutions do not provide total answers, but they are an apt place to begin.

Despite the emergent diversity of literate and oral modes among the *lycéens*, *khâgneux*, and *normaliens*, the general rules of the “game” were relatively fixed—and very old. Scholastic distinction partly coincided with stylistic distinctiveness in a system hailing precocious talents as collective rhetorical subjects while simultaneously energizing them into atoms of stylistic individualism. Writers as different as Derrida and Bourdieu, for instance, received a rather similar push into this matrix, attending one of most storied schools in all of Europe as *khâgneux*. Continuously radiating and reproducing a complex humanistic and literary culture since its founding by the Jesuits in the mid-sixteenth century, the Collège de Clermont, ultimately renamed Lycée Louis-le-Grand, exerted a heavier hand on intellectual history than many prestigious universities; it has been rightly called the “model and father” of secondary institutions in Napoleonic France.[14] Lest this fanfare appear hyperbolic, and it certainly must

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[12] *Sartre By Himself*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), 18.

[13] Quoted in Diane Rubenstein, *What's Left? The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 47.

[14]This phrase is Breal’s. Bréal, *Quelques mots sur l'instruction publique en France*, 153. Indeed, Louis-le-Grand (under the name *Prytanée français*) was the “model for the lycée” in general: “In organization, in teaching methods, and in spirit, the Imperial reforms marked a return to principles of education laid down by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century. French secondary education again took on a cloistered and authoritarian aspect that subsequent regimes were unable to efface.” Talbot, *The Politics of Educational Reform in France, 1918-1940*, 8.

seem so, we should examine some of its achievements. In itself, Louis-Le-Grand will not resolve our paradox, but it gives a promising site of rhetorical ethnography for introducing our broader questions.

2.3 Introducing Louis-le-Grand

From its prestigious centralization in Paris to its ultra-demanding classical, humanistic pedagogy, the school lives halfway between archetype and prototype of elite French secondary education. It inspired much imitation since its early formative conflicts with the University of Paris, conflicts imprinting both secondary and higher education up to the present. Before the Jesuit suppression in 1764, their prized *collège* taught Molière, Sade, Diderot, and Voltaire. Amidst revolutionary upheaval, every Parisian college shut its doors, except, of course, Louis-le-Grand, the so-called "school of the French Revolution."[15] Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire would experience it in the first half of the nineteenth century, Jean Jaurès, Ferdinand Brunetière, and Romain Rolland in the second. The path between Louis-le-Grand and the ENS is particularly well trodden; the ENS *reçus* in Rolland's year, for instance, had come from Louis-le-Grand by an overwhelming margin (fifteen out of twenty-four—other schools sent a maximum of two).[16] Louis-le-Grand boasted too many twentieth-century intellectuals to name comfortably; a short list might include Alain Badiou, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Marc Bloch, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Dumézil, Émile Durkheim, Lucien Febvre, Jacques Le Goff, Jean-François Lyotard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Nizan, Pierre Nora, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jean-Pierre Vernant (*lycéen* or *khâgneux*).[17] Certain great students, such as Deleuze, would even return as teachers.[18] In its mythos, this "great barracks of pale brick" and "gilded inscriptions" represents a retreat into arcane and elite culture, where, as Nizan's novel puts it, "boys of

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[15] *The School of the French Revolution*, trans. R.R. Palmer, ed. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 9.

[16] Romain Rolland, *Le Cloître de la rue d'Ulm. Journal de Romain Rolland à l'École normale (1886-1889)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1952), 3.

[17] Not all exclusive to Louis-le-Grand.

[18] Cf. François Dosse, *Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: intersecting lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 95, 116.

nineteen could not learn much about the world on account of having to live among the Greeks" and other recondite figures.[19] Though Louis-le-Grand yielded disproportionate numbers of French presidents and Fields medalists, I will say nothing further of its excellence outside the arts and social sciences.

So eminent that it was renamed for Louis XIV, and briefly for Napoleon (*Lycée Impérial*), Louis-le-Grand continuously garnered an immense and perhaps nauseating prestige, being entirely unashamed of classicism. Its most famous Jesuit teacher, Joseph de Jouvancy (1643-1719), launches the first chapter of his pedagogic method on the premise that there is no erudition without perfect Greek.[20] In the 1920s, Sartre and Nizan, attending its *khâgne,* would complain in a ribald poem that "we caress the Bailly"—the famous Greek-French dictionary—instead of women's breasts.[21] A commemorative work for Louis-le-Grand's *khâgneux* between 1934-1939 begins with an "hommage aux philhellènes"[22] and proceeds to regale us with the victories of its alumni across society, though we are left to fill in the many implicit steps between learning Greek and succeeding in business and bureaucracy.

On the other hand, Latin's role at Louis-le-Grand, with more immediate literary, political, scientific, and ceremonial utility than Greek, is much easier to justify. The carriage of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, for instance, stopped in front of Louis-le-Grand after the coronation to receive a Latin epideictic oration from one of its most precocious students. This student, as it turns out, was a seventeen-year-old Robespierre—ominously wishing them a happy reign (in Latin) long before he helped dispatch them to the scaffold (in French). The early epithet of this star Latinist and rhetorical prizewinner was indeed "the Roman."[23]

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[19] Paul Nizan, *The Conspiracy*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 2011), 29.

[20] Joseph Jouvency, *De la manière d'apprendre et d'enseigner*, trans. H. Ferté (Paris: Hachette, 1892), 2.

[21]My trans. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Écrits de jeunesse*, ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 338.

[22] Marcel Garrigou, "Prologue," in *Khâgne ... et après : Lycée Louis-le-Grand, 1934-1939*, ed. Marcel Garrigou (Toulouse: Éditions Arts et Formes, 1994), 5.

[23] David P. Jordan, "The Robespierre Problem," in *Robespierre*, ed. Colin Haydon and William Doyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19. He was still competent in Greek, earning "2e prix de vers latins, 2e prix de version latine, 5e accessit de version grecque" in the 1774-75 class of rhetoric. Hervé Leuwers, "Maximilien de

But the school yielded much more than Jacobins and future leftists; it would eventually host some of the most famous fascist writers, such as Robert Brasillach and Maurice Bardèche.[24] Noting considerable numbers of fascists at Louis-le-Grand, Barthes helped form a group called *Défense Républicaine et Antifasciste*.[25] Later, during the Nazi occupation, Jean Guéhenno worried about the "terrifying indifference" of most of the *khâgneux* toward the outside world.[26] Students received, regardless of the political orientations of their peers and teachers, constant reminders that their experiences were exceptional. In addition to all the political and economic idiosyncrasies of interest to sociologists, often anti-meritocratic ones, we might single out the immense vibrance of Louis-le-Grand's literary and rhetorical culture.

The ideal of eloquence, and its pursuit through classical languages and ultimately French, did not simply flow from the fountain in Louis-le-Grand's courtyard for its students to imbibe. Rather, eloquence was *exercised* through a pedagogical paradigm that is sometimes called the "gymnastique d'esprit," under intense supervision that abated little between the Jesuit pedagogues and the secular *agrégés* teaching Derrida and his *khâgne* classmate Nora. These great pedagogues—bad teachers were rather scarce at Louis-le-Grand—inducted promising students into an elite cadre of rhetors replete with shibboleths and ceremonies; Nora claims that it was the severe, strenuous French class, not history or philosophy, that represents "the tattoo that would inscribe you for life in the tribe of fine and cultivated minds."[27] And from Gabriel Compayré to Pierre Bourdieu, Louis-le-Grand yielded its share of students who would go on to criticize the "Jesuitical" excesses of rhetoric and elitisms of French education. This central fixture of French letters over the centuries should be singled out for its reciprocal *selection* and

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Robespierre, élève à Louis-le-Grand (1769-1781). Les apports de la comptabilité du « collège d'Arras »," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 371 (2013): 177.

[24] Rubenstein, *What's Left? The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Right*, 35.

[25] Tiphaine Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 65.

[26] Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940-1944: Collaboration, Resistance, and Daily Life in Occupied Paris*, 188.

[27] My trans. Pierre Nora, "Khâgne 1950," *Le Débat*, no. 3 (1980).

shaping of future intellectuals.[28] Adding in Lycée Henri-IV, perhaps Lycée Condorcet or Janson-de-Sailly, and certainly the École Normale Supérieure, we span the modern French intellectual alphabet from Raymond Aron to Simone Weil.

2.4 The *khâgne*, humanist school of rhetoric and philosophy

Though Louis-le-Grand as *collège*, *lycée,* or *khâgne* offers a fixed address for charting rhetoric's fortunes, the *khâgne* in general, implemented throughout the country, represents a true *lieu de mémoire* of French culture (it is indeed featured as such in Nora's *lieux de mémoire* project). Since it both filters and grooms students for the ENS, the *khâgne* promises the harshest, and arguably the most decisive, years for a young intellectual. The term *esprit normalien* partly deceives us, for this quality of mind originates, according to the students who possessed it, not in the destination on rue d'Ulm, but in the journey through the *khâgne*.[29] Out of all French institutions, it is arguably the most important in explaining the rhetorical vibrance of twentieth-century French intellectualism—and certainly the most foreign to the North American education system. Jean-François Sirinelli has fortunately done much to historicize the *khâgne,* especially in relation to the ENS: in his metaphor, the central island of the *khâgne* archipelago.

For the best chances of entering Rue d'Ulm, not any *khâgne* will do. Louis-Le-Grand and Henri-IV greatly surpassed all others in sending students to the ENS; the former sent about double that of the later; few *khâgnes* outside of Paris, aside from Marseille, sent appreciable numbers.[30] Being at the wrong school, or in the wrong city, potentially thwarted the best of students. Didier Eribon's biography of Foucault, for instance, emphasizes his futile years in the *khâgne* of the Académie de Poitiers—and how, upon moving to Paris, Foucault's fortunes improved in the *khâgne* of Henri-IV, where he would be spellbound by Jean Hyppolite's

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[28]"If, among all the lycées of Paris and of France, one fancied electing an administrative centre, Louis-le-Grand would muster, without a doubt, a flattering number of votes." My trans. Gustave Dupont-Ferrier, *Du Collège de Clermont au Lycée Louis-le-Grand, 1563-1920*, vol. 2 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1922), 197.

Cf. François de Dainville, *L'éducation des Jésuites (XVle-XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Marie-Madeleine Compère (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1978), 204.

[29] Robert Smith, *The Ecole Normale Superieure and the Third Republic* (New York: SUNY Press, 1982), 22.

[30] Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle. Khâgneux et normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 90.

legendary course on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.*[31] On the other hand, Deleuze resigned himself to the Sorbonne after attending Louis-le-Grand's *khâgne* yet still failing a required portion of the *concours d'entrée*. Since the ENS entrance examination measures—among other things—written and oral test-taking aptitudes in potentially disagreeable subjects, the brightest minds in the best *khâgnes* were not guaranteed entry to the ENS.

The formidable caliber of *khâgne* teachers goes against the conventional wisdom of reserving the "best" teachers (in whatever sense) for older, more advanced students. On the first day of class, for instance, a lucky *hypokhâgne* student in Orléans might be greeted by a coy Deleuze performing an amusing stunt. He would claim he had been victim to a briefcase mix-up at the train station, worrying that a traveling salesman, some stout Belgian oaf, would be now be stuck showing his clients the *Critique of Pure Reason* instead of his normal merchandize of toiletries. Having "lost" his lecture notes in this mix-up, Deleuze would then give a "extemporaneous" philosophy lesson that he had in fact carefully prepared, leading students to insight with his feigned ignorance—a scatterbrained Socrates.[32]

Whereas Deleuze would become best known as a philosopher, the most famous *teacher* of the modern *khâgne* is certainly Alain (Émile Chartier), who taught *première supérieure* at Lycée Henri-IV (his portrait hanging, during the occupation, where Pétain's should have been).[33] His remarkable and charismatic influence, upon Simone Weil for instance, almost makes him a one-man school; his popularity attracted listeners, such as Sartre, who were not enrolled in his class. His impact extends beyond the inspiration, preparatory knowledge, and famous pacifist attitude he delivered under his so-called Chartieriste pedagogy. As we will later see regarding Alain's *topos,* he imparted a range of literary values and a rhetorical *habitus*. On the other hand, Jean Guéhenno, at Louis-le-Grand, reflected on a sophistic, "dangerous dialectical skill" that seemed

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[31] Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Faber and Faber 1993), 17.

[32] Dosse, *Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: intersecting lives*, 102-03.

[33] Jacques Guicharnaud, "Higher Education," *Yale French Studies*, no. 22 (1958): 89-90.

innate in his students. Such preeminent *khâgne* pedagogues, it is said, could exceed the impact of great Sorbonne professors upon upcoming generations.[34]

This short list of the great aforementioned *khâgnes* approximates the elite educational scene reasonably well.[35] Not everyone, however, would follow the same arc as Foucault and Derrida (from the *khâgnes* Henri-IV and Louis-le-Grand to the ENS respectively). Prior to Simone Weil's generation, the *khâgneuse* did not exist. Jacques Lacan attended the Collège Stanislas de Paris, private and Catholic, unlike the aforementioned schools; Michel de Certeau went through seminaries en route to becoming a Jesuit; Barthes had to "settle" for the Sorbonne because of his medical issues. Overall, however, studying the *khâgne* in general, and as specifically implemented in Louis-le-Grand and Henri-IV, goes a long way in revealing an enduring rhetorical culture and a pivotal educational environment in general.

2.5 Rhetorical functions of the *khâgne*

The putative function of the *khâgne* is essentially *preparatory*. It does not exclude research, but the acquisition of an immense amount of material is key: "The *khâgne* student learns to know and the university student learns to doubt."[36] Its birth is basically accidental: the *khâgne* organically responds to the need for extra training before the arduous ENS entrance exams.[37] From this strangely humble exigence, and without any grand manifesto or educational ideology handed down from above, emerged an ultra-prestigious institution, flavouring French intellectualism perhaps just as potently as the better-appreciated ENS (though exclusive, its students will sometimes take Sorbonne courses, making it less *pedagogically* unique than the

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[34] Guicharnaud, "Higher Education," 89-90.

[35] This select group should be compared to the more than 200 *lycées* and 600 *collèges* in France by the 1950s. See "The Structure of French Public Education," *Yale French Studies* 22 (1958): 9.

[36] My trans. Jacqueline de Romilly, *L'enseignement en détresse* (Paris: Julliard, 1984), 201.

[37] "The *khâgnes* ... appear as the result of a process, not a very prestigious one, of decantation. The provisions of 1826 and 1830, which provided specifications for the [entrance] exam of the École normale, only dictated that the candidates must be *bacheliers*. But, given the nature of the written tests which, apart from philosophy, were close to the syllabus and training of the rhetoric class, and given the high level of these tests and the competition encountered by the candidates, the tradition quickly became to return, after the philosophy *baccalauréat*, to spend one or two years in rhetoric. My trans. Jean-François Sirinelli, "La khâgne," in *Les lieux de mémoire, tome 2 : La Nation*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 593.

khâgne).[38] In Nora's reflections, the *khâgne* will be defined by its complex, conflicted humanisms.[39]

The rhetorical origins of the *khâgne* were eventually concealed. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the *khâgne* class of *rhétorique supérieure* becomes *première supérieure.*[40] Yet this hardly meant the end of inculcating a range of skills in the domains of argument, textual planning and arrangement, and the inventive, "pre-writing" stage. As Genette argues, in the *khâgne* system contemporary to him we find an incredible emphasis on the structural *planning* of the student's text (*plan* in French—the design, blueprint, progression, or scheme). The student is taught to prize the plan; a poor plan will supposedly entail a poor *dissertation* (an exercise which, as we will see, is utterly unavoidable). The *khâgneux* deliberately acquire the *reflexe du plan:* "to find as rapidly as possible, facing a subject, the most suitable and effective construction."[41] For instance, if assigned to a particular writer, the student would efficiently devise a three-way scheme such as 1) physical portrait 2) intellectual portrait 3) moral portrait; if possible, these should correspond a Hegelian dialectical movement (thesis: physical/body, antithesis: intellectual/mind, synthesis: moral/heart).[42] For Genette, this tremendous emphasis on textual structure—the "*mystique du plan*"—represents the most characteristic element of a "new rhetoric": the reorientation around *dispositio,* or the arrangement of texts.[43] On this account, the *khâgneux* no longer learn how to *style* their texts, but to *structure* them.[44]

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[38] For the Sorbonne-ENS overlap see Smith, *The Ecole Normale Superieure and the Third Republic*, 74-75.

[39] "The watchword of *l'idéologie khâgnale*," according to Nora, is "'human,' the study of *human* time. This substantive adjective was the keystone of the entire edifice. But the human, in this era, had two faces, according to the class schedule, in French or in philosophy. On one side, the smile of Mona Lisa, the charm of embowed affirmations of which one can never say if they are true, or if they are false. ... On the other, the mouth of shadows. A tragic humanism making a misery of our days. For the human was always beyond, on the other side, calling us, like a siren, to throw ourselves overboard the ship of appearances." My trans. Nora, "Khâgne 1950," 8.

[40] Sirinelli, "La khâgne," 592.

[41] Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 299.

[42] Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 300.

[43] Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 298.

[44] For an example of a robust emphasis on structure during rhetoric's darkest years, see Tridon-Péronneau, *Compositions de Rhétorique* (A. Fourneau Paris, 1887).

By no means, however, were the *khâgneux* always prohibited from a freer form of writing. Consider Alain's famous method of the *topo,* a liberal, topical essay.[45] Like the *topoi* one finds in Aristotle or Cicero, its purview is invention. But in Alain's classroom, the method appears closer to "themes" or perhaps *ekphrasis*:

> In the argot of the khâgne one speaks of *topos*. Elsewhere the *topo* is a sketch to spare verbiage; the *topos* of the khâgne, on the contrary, were exercises of putting-into-words. … For the *dissertations*, the subject, the date was fixed, regulated, obligatory. There were no rules for the *topos.* … Some dealt with the will, egotism, superstitions, space, time, music, theatre, etc.: all close to the syllabus but taking after some personal experiences or readings.[46]

Weil's *topos* ranged from "The Fairy Tale of the Six Swans in Grimm" to "The Beautiful and the Good"; another student covered everything from a reading of the Sirens episode in the *Odyssey* to personal observations of a particular staircase.[47] Set against the fixity of a *dissertation* or *explication*, the *topo* constitutes a remarkably uninhibited form. As we will later see, however, students tended to use the *dissertation-explication* pair to represent their experiences.

In Alain's classroom, literature and philosophy mingled freely, which is arguably true of the *khâgne* in general. Reticent towards history and the contemporary plight of the 1930s,[48] Alain would start the year by pairing a philosopher together with a literary icon, taking them both up throughout the term. In Simone Weil's three years studying under Alain, for instance, she faced formidable, curious pairings: Plato's dialogues juxtaposed with Balzac's novels, the *Critiques* of Kant unfolding alongside the *Illiad*.[49] This philosophy and literature mixture also emerges in Alain's evaluations of Weil's work, and the values it seems to imply. Roughly

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[45] Somewhat like the *topos* assigned to his students, he his own format of *propos* was informal and remarked on diverse social and philosophical topics. He submitted many to the *NRF*.

[46] My trans. Samuel Sylvestre de Sacy, "Topo, disciple, philosophie," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, September 1952.

[47] Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 36-37.

[48] Jean-François Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron, deux intellectuels dans le siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), 111.

[49] Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, 35.

speaking, these values could be divided into 1. general character ("excellent student") 2. philosophical and intellectual aptitude ("profound and abstract subtleties of thought") 3. literary and rhetorical aptitude ("her style lags a trifle behind her ideas," "almost impenetrable language").[50] He evinces the values one might expect from a philosophy teacher, but also a deeply literary sensibility—supplementing it or perhaps competing with it. Badiou echos this characterization of (the other) Alain: "to all intents and purposes a classical philosopher" and yet "closely involved in literature; the process of writing was very important to him."[51] Alain did not need to be particularly philosophically transgressive himself to loosen his students' inhibitions.

One also finds this philosophy-literature concoction in the classroom of Deleuze, who would teach the expected (Spinoza) as well as the unexpected (Proust, Claudel), and even the baffling: "Deleuze urged his students to read certain mystery novels published in Gallimard's Black Series."[52] This mixture faithfully follows the *khâgne*'s humanist heritage, an ideological balance of *ratio* and *oratio* that positivism and other rivals to rhetoric had never quite purged. Though outside observers of French intellectualism never fail to notice a widespread literary-philosophical promiscuity, so evident in Deleuze, Derrida, and especially Sartre, perhaps this tendency merits study as a delayed manifestation of the *khâgne* milieu (which itself reflects an even older humanism). The pedagogical paradigm, at least under an Alain, ultimately centered upon "a method for learning to think by means of a severe act of attention brought to bear on the art of writing."[53] To this end, the charismatic teachers of the *khâgne* performed rather elegant shifts between the multiple humanistic inquiries and aptitudes under their command: a pedagogical *glissando* rather than *staccato*, fresh and enticing to foreign ears but rather traditional in this idiom.

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[50] Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, 41-42.

[51] Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," 72.

[52] Dosse, *Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: intersecting lives*, 105.

[53] Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, 31.

2.6 The *khâgne* between myth and practice

The mythological import of *khâgne* rivals that of its daily practices. As if hurrying to fill in the vacancies around its unimpressive origins, myths sprung up around the institution. Jean Giradoux, for instance, hailed it as a veritable Plato's academy.[54] In the years of Sartre and Nizan, *khâgneux* might wear the brass badge of an owl: a reference to Athena's *glaux*, a symbol they deploy in their poem "Complainte de deux khâgneux qui travaillaient fort" (perhaps intended to be sung together in comradery).[55] Adding to its classical connotations, the *khâgne* is often described as a "gymnastic" institution (and like an ancient gymnasium, it stands as an effectively all-male space up until the rather late entrance of Simone Weil and other young women).

The term *khâgne,* however, comes from neither Plato nor Greece: it is fake transliteration meant to *appear* classical and perhaps thus more distinguished (at base, it is something like the epithet "nerd": literally "knock-kneed" or *câgneux*). As a history teacher laughingly put it: "It's a very highly selected milieu, already an elite; there are no discipline problems. It's really the last bastion of Greek education!"[56] At Louis-le-Grand, Derrida and Nora discovered that students, though all brilliant and "elite," did not consider everyone an equal. The *externes* were from Paris and could stay in their family homes; the *internes* were boarders from elsewhere (i.e. internal to the school) and thus scorned. *Internes* and *externes*, however, united themselves around one cause: feeling superior to the students at the Sorbonne.[57] Mythologically, the *khâgne* secludes itself from society, reincarnating a young male Athenian elite. They did not look the part, however. As Sartre's biographer puts it, the "slovenliness" of *khâgneux* at Louis-le-Grand—with

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[54] Sirinelli, "La khâgne," 598.

[55] Sartre, *Écrits de jeunesse*, 338,542.

[56] Quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 93.

[57] François Dosse, *Pierre Nora: Homo historicus* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), 57.

"hands sunk in the pockets of their long sloppy gray smocks"—emanates from a "cultivated snobbery, in which, as would be expected, Sartre finds himself perfectly at home."[58]

The daily workings of the *khâgne* evoke a gymnasium of the *logos*. The institution spanned political and intellectual rivalries through what Sirinelli calls an "absolute reverence for language": "consecutively reading Taine, Bergson, Sartre, Aron, Althusser, Foucault, one cannot escape the feeling that, if they do not form a spiritual family, then they interrelated by their form of reasoning or expression as a consequence of the assiduous gymnastics of their years in the *khâgne*."[59] Sirinelli emphasizes the "repetitive gymnastics" of composition, analysis, expression, and other exercises, and, citing Genette, the "mystique du plan"; this gymnastic metaphor is closer to the essence of the *khâgne* than "force-feeding [*gavage*]," although it is true that an immense amount of material must be consumed.[60] The "pedagogic action" of the *khâgne* teachers, according to Bourdieu, "resembles that of a *coach* who passes on the structure of an exercise and the framework of learning over knowledge itself"; "they tend, like Jesuit prefects and monitors, to develop a total patrimonial-style relationship to their students."[61] The *khâgne*'s ultra-demanding "gymnastic" training and "absolute reverence for language" indeed inherited elements of classical pedagogy. The "gymnastique d'esprit," the cardinal element, focuses on the perfection of the individual student aptitudes through increasing efforts on given tasks under a coach-like teacher, standing in contrast to more passive methods relying upon the students' agency to "exercise" themselves.

This intense régime, in combination with the teacher's erudition, yielded an education both deep and broad. As Georges Dumézil put it, the years of the *khâgne* "arm the mind against the double pitfalls of subsequent studies in sciences or letters: general but superficial curiosity and excessive or hasty specialization."[62] Yet of course, while it appears educationally rich from

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[58] Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, trans. Anna Cancogni, ed. Norman MacAfee (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 52.

[59]My trans. Sirinelli, "La khâgne," 620.

[60]My trans. Sirinelli, "La khâgne," 93.

[61] Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, 93.

[62]My trans. Quoted in Didier Eribon, *Faut-il brûler Dumézil?* (Flammarion, 1992), 81.

the perspective of the humanism inherited by bourgeois society, a less sympathetic take on the *khâgne* (or ENS) might depict it as a modern *phrontisterion* where the *logoi* duel in clouds through the most abstruse arguments, far above the humble people on the ground.[63]

The rhetorical culture of the *khâgne* indeed looks different depending on whether we regard it from above or below, from the vantage of teacher or student. Jean Guéhenno captured the experience of teaching in occupied France in his classic *Journal des années noires*. He writes in November 1941:

> It is my profession to produce *Normaliens*. This is a species I know pretty well. I don't think there is, anywhere in France, a gathering of young people more devoted to beauty, to truth, to all the ideal values, than in the École Normale or in a class preparing for the École Normale, a *khâgne.* But then, too, no doubt, nowhere can one see what an evil power culture can have, what a vile instrument the *Logos* can be. … There is in every good *khâgneux,* at the same time as a mind able to devote itself to noble, disinterested research, a dangerous dialectical skill from which he is always tempted to profit. The practice of *Logos* makes him capable of doing anything at all, to serve a lie as well as the truth. Among these marvelous young men I deal with every year, I have hardly any difficulty in discerning, unfortunately, those who … will turn into the new sophists, serving institutionalized power—vile servants of the strongest, whoever the strongest may be. They are "maids of all work." Thus each class of *Normaliens* has its lot of *Graeculi esurientes* [hungry little Greeks].

The *khâgne* and ENS, for Guéhenno, ultimately yield a "rather large number … of brilliant careers in French society." But the bad apples are as rotten as can be: Marcel Déat and Robert Brasillach, these notorious collaborators, represent evil "masterpieces of the École and *Logos*"—

[63] Sartre beautifully evokes this in his essay on Brice Parain: "What he encountered there first [in the city] wasn't the technical language of the factories and building sites, but rhetoric. At the École Normale Supérieure, I knew many of these peasants' sons, who had been wrested from the soil by their exceptional intelligence. For long periods, they were as silent as the soil, but would suddenly break that silence to expatiate on the most abstract subjects. Like the Socrates of *The Clouds*, they would argue both sides of the case with equal virtuosity and a pedantry that was its own source of amusement. And then they would sink back into silence. Visibly, this intellectual gymnastics remained something alien; it was merely a game to them, a murmur of noise on the surface of their silence." Jean-Paul Sartre, "There and Back," in *Critical Essays* (London: Seagull, 2010), 304-05.

just as much as its more illustrious and noble alumni. Both are sentenced to death: Déat escapes to Italy, Brasillach mounts a skillful defense no doubt enhanced by his *normalien* oratory, but still faces the firing squad.[64] Guéhenno's concerns over the "practice of *Logos*" are not unlike the panics over sophistry in classical Athens; his student sophists hint at Thrasymachus in particular. Good character, for Guéhenno, holds back the "dangerous dialectical skill[s]" and the mighty *Logos* from enabling evil deeds.

Yet whereas Guéhenno, as teacher, perceived these tendencies issuing from individual student morality, the young Derrida experienced the rhetorical norms imposed by the system itself. His case perhaps best illuminates the idiosyncratic brutality of the *khâgne,* so hard to separate from the benefits of its gymnastic training. Late in life, he explained his deep debt to his "classical training" in rhetoric, particularly in the *khâgne:* "probably people who read me and think I'm playing with or transgressing norms—which I do, of course—usually don't know what I know: that all of this has not only been made possible by but is constantly in contact with very classical, rigorous, demanding discipline in writing, in 'demonstrating,' in rhetoric."[65] Yet perhaps an examination system of what Derrida calls "monstrous torture," subjecting students to a "horrible machine, … awaiting its sentence of life or death," is not worth the price of eloquence.[66] One cannot strike a properly Faustian bargain with a faceless system, for Mephistopheles never takes stage to pitch the deal.

The young Derrida, in poor mental health, failed the *concours* twice before passing. Given his macabre lexicon one could accuse him of hyperbole, yet nightmarish imagery—a vision of the Inquisition or Hades—seems standard. As Romain Rolland explained the trauma of the *concours* of the previous century: "I will never be able to make those who have not

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[64] His last sardonic last words: "Vive la France quand même!" That Brasillach died for "purely intellectual" crimes prompted enormously controversy and troubled resistance figures such as Jean Paulhan, who wanted to defend "the writer's right to error" amidst concerns that the *épuration* would go too far. For an account of his all-too-literary trial, see Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

[65] Jacques Derrida and Gary A. Olson, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 10, no. 1 (1990): 4.

[66] Jacques Derrida, "A Certain 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking: Jacques Derrida's Interview with François Ewald," in *Derrida and Education*, ed. Gert J.J. Biesta and Denise Egéa-Kuehne (London: Routledge, 2005), 58.

experienced it sense the nightmare of the examinations which my comrades and I had undergone. … All of our youth was made somber under the black wing of this burden."[67] Pierre Nora sustains such dark descriptions in his piece "Khâgne 1950" (written anonymously, giving it a more literary, confessional quality). For Nora, of all the classes in the *khâgne*, it is French class that painfully "brand[s]" and "tattoo[s]" the students as a special "tribe":

> French was invested with the highest mission: to give us the form that, whether in other disciplines or in life in general, and whatever you later do, will allow you to do it. …Philosophy, whose teaching is open to criticism; history, belonging to neither time nor country.[68] But French was the brand of the red-hot iron, the blue circle of the convict who on every occasion would explode the critical and paradoxical spirit of the "young and brilliant" *normalien*, the tattoo that would inscribe you for life in the tribe of fine and cultivated minds. The mission of the teachers was thus to prepare us for these two basic exercises: the six-hour *dissertation*, and the thirty-minute *explication de textes.*[69]

Whereas Derrida refers to an explicit rhetoric, Nora refers to the teaching and mastery of French: for the inculcation of stylistic and argumentative virtuosity, much the same thing. French class is the tribal marker, with the *dissertation* and *explication de texte* as the corresponding rituals.

These sketches of Louis-le-Grand and the *khâgne*, though tendentious, suggest something important about the great paradox: examined from the holistic perspective of an elite institutional culture and ideology, the rhetorical superstructure does not seem to decay as much as it should. A disjuncture exists, it would seem, between an elite tradition running through Louis-le-Grand and the greatest *lycées*, a *de facto* rhetorical permanence, and the *de jure* death of rhetoric as theory or practice, held in contempt by the public. As this chapter maps out various features of the rhetorical superstructure, we see that most of it exists, so to speak, below the surface

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[67] Rolland quoted in Rubenstein, *What's Left? The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Right*, 37.

[68] The phrasing echos Fénelon's oft-quoted remark: "The good historian belongs to neither time nor country." [*le bon historien n'est d'aucun temps ni d'aucun pays*]

[69] My trans. Nora, "Khâgne 1950," 5-6.

immediately visible to society, a society that increasingly used the word "rhetoric" as a pejorative—or did not use it all—but could not upend the entire educational system at once.

2.7 The arts, stolen (or liberated?) from the University

Up until this point in our investigation, the university has been suspiciously relegated to the background. We should sketch its early pedagogical universe so that it may be linked to the revolutionary, republican, and imperial institutions (*lycée*, *khâgne*, ENS) attended by modern intellectuals. In particular, we should turn to the challenges the University of Paris faced from the Jesuits. Such challenges lasted all the way to their suppression in 1764—and arguably, in legacy form, to the present.[70]

The University of Paris constitutes the literal and figurative *alma mater* of the Jesuits and their pedagogy, despite their associations with Spain (the homeland) and Rome (the destination). Arriving in Paris in 1528, Ignatius reached out to fellow M.A. students—including his roommates—to recruit his first companions. Of these, Jerome Nadal did the most to establish their teaching methods and humanist affinities, wielding a superior rhetorical practice to Ignatius himself.[71] The University of Paris gave the Jesuits the pedagogic "manner of Paris" (*modus parisiensis*)[72] whose innovations were also appropriated by a variety of Protestant educators and miscellaneous humanists. The Jesuits, however, displayed a particular genius in organizing, systematizing, and instrumentalizing the *modus parisiensis*. From the outset they proved to be masters of syncretism.

The nascent Jesuit pedagogical empire and its doctrines, developed through key colleges such as Messina (1548) and Clermont (1563), offered training that could compete with humanistic university courses in a nimbler and more dispersed format. Printing presses and

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[70] Cf. Bréal, *Quelques mots sur l'instruction publique en France*, 403.

[71] John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 13-14.

[72] Early Jesuits first encountered the *modus parisiensis* at the University of Alcalá, Many of them would transfer to Paris. Gabriel Codina, "The 'Modus Parisiensis'," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 38-39.

Counter-Reformation book culture followed in the wake of their colleges.[73] The papal bull of 1540 that constituted their order bestowed wide powers over education (even though they were not founded as a specifically educational enterprise, which is easy to forget). Ultimately, the University of Paris suffered so much that some of its emptying classrooms were appropriated as stables; secondary education, not primary or higher education, proved to be most opportune and became the great Jesuit triumph.

The Jesuits, in short, could be said to "universitize" secondary education. Not in full, of course, but enough to worry universities. This will radically reconfigure the rhetorical superstructure by offering humanistic education at a younger age to (comparatively) massive numbers of students. Secondary education in France retains a special prestige as a primary site of literary and cultural formation rather than the higher education more typical of the Anglophone and Germanophone worlds.[74] Recent historians thus display an "immense interest" in the School: "In France, the School is at the heart of ideological debates from before, and especially after the Revolution; it becomes Temple of the Nation and of the Republic after 1880; and it is around the School that the new intellectual and political elite of the country constitutes itself."[75] If forced to select the foremost structural factor that makes French education French, it would likely be this early and largely enduring triumph of the School. Durkheim had already sensed this near the turn of the century: the French "national genius" as well as the "serious flaws" of the "national temperament" partly formed within the Jesuit schools.[76] One need not make a value judgement, however, to apprehend this structure.

The rupture between the nascent Jesuit system and the older medieval university is perhaps the greatest event of French education. For Durkheim, the competition-oriented Jesuit colleges represented a "revolution," "instantaneously develop[ing] to the point of super-

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[73] Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: NLB, 1976), 194.

[74] Cf. Bréal, *Quelques mots sur l'instruction publique en France*, 156.

[75] My trans. Daniel Milo, "Les classiques scolaires," in *Les lieux de mémoire, tome 2 : La Nation*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 547.

[76] Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 239.

abundance," challenging the lax and often trivial University examinations of the late middle ages.[77] Or as Marc Fumaroli captures it in *L'age de l'éloquence:*

> The principal novelty of the *Ratio Studiorum*, the more liberal attitude towards "humane letters," and the rehabilitation of the regents of Grammar and Rhetoric to equal status with the regents of Philosophy and Theology, was something in principle acquired as of 1535 in Paris. Between the ancient University of Paris, formerly pontifical, and the colleges of the Company of Jesus, which now had the favour of the Papacy, emerges a rivalry at the end of the sixteenth century that will last up to Jules Ferry [1832-1893] and beyond.[78]

And this is not the only great tension one might date to this period. Centrally at stake the development, distortion, and appropriation of humanism. Durkheim claims that the Company of Jesus had effectively "realized the educational ideal of the Renaissance" yet warns "they did not achieve this until they had mutilated and impoverished it"[79]; Jesuit scholars, of course, typically minimize such alleged disfigurations. Faced with a genuine and entrenched scholasticism, perhaps one ought to be grateful for any humanism at all.

2.8 Humanism, but restrained humanism

A vigorous emphasis on *litterae humaniores,* humane letters, emerged among the first Jesuits. Diego Laínez worried about an overemphasis. If "a mind nourish[es] itself excessively on the humanities," perhaps it becomes "so dainty and spoiled that it loses ability and inclination for profounder matters," specifically theological and philosophical ones.[80] To this concern, Juan

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[77]Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 261.

[78] My trans. Marc Fumaroli, *L'Age de l'éloquence : Rhétorique et «res literaria» de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Genève Droz, 1980), 244-45.

[79]Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 252.

[80]Letter from Juan to Polanco to Diego Laínez, 1547. In Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 177.

de Polanco replied with a fascinating defense: ten points in favour of the humanities.[81] Polanco's appeals range from learning Latin to communicate God's gifts (Ignatius insisted upon robust Latinity) to the notion that the humanities were analogous to lighter physical exercises that must strengthen the student before the heavily lifting of "philosophy and scholastic theology," these "toilsome subjects."[82] A few reasons stayed relevant: humanities students "exercise their wits and powers when they engage in rhetorical disputations … or in original compositions."[83] Jesuit humanism, however justified, became built in to their educational system from the outset. Without the formative experiences of the first Jesuits at the University of Paris, especially Jerome Nadal's, the great transposition of Jesuit humanism into French secondary education would be virtually unimaginable.

The students of the Jesuits, however, would encounter curricula expurgated according to Christian demands. In Durkheim's overly harsh judgement, the Jesuits "only expounded Humanism in order to contain it"; "they had to expunge virtually all positive content from the classical authors."[84] It is not clear, however, how an unrestrained, unexpurgated humanism could have been tolerated in France at this time. Viewed more positively, Jesuit humanism was a pragmatic negotiation; Max Weber refers to their "liberal utilitarian compromise with the world."[85] The compromise regarding classical Pagan content coincided with another compromise: initially prohibiting the teaching of French grammar and literature, or in other words, promoting the Latin *language*, and to a lesser extent, Greek.

This promotion would have profound consequences for the rhetorical superstructure: a sort of formalism of the *longue durée,* born through an artfully restrained form of Christian humanism, emerged as a precautious practice of reading, writing, and oratory; a victory of words

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[81] He lists eight, but there seems to be ten, depending on how one counts them.

[82]Letter from Juan to Polanco to Diego Laínez, 1547. Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 178.

[83] Letter from Juan to Polanco to Diego Laínez, 1547. Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 179.

[84] Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 252.

[85] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, ed. Richard Swedberg (New York Norton, 2009), 41.

over things. Detractors accused the Jesuits of propagating a "culture of pure form."[86] This wager upon form became particularly apparent during the late nineteenth century as rival historical models emerged and pedagogical thought took a critical turn. Compayré claimed that Jesuits "pay more attention to words than to things, … to the elegancies of language, to the elocutionary effect; in a word, to the form, which, at least, has no religious character, and can in nowise give umbrage to Catholic orthodoxy."[87] All the way back to Augustine—who confessed not only to sins of the flesh but of the tongue—Christians struggled with the moral and theological import of instrumentalizing or idolizing Pagan eloquence.[88] Although Augustine termed his chair in rhetoric the *cathedra mendacii*, the perils of rhetorical mendacity were much outweighed, for the first Jesuits, by the benefits of a supple eloquence suited to the souls the Company intended to save. By prizing and rationalizing pure Latin excellence the riskier parts of Paganism could at least in theory be left behind.

The amount of extra-linguistic education offered by the Jesuits has been debated considerably. The *Ratio* itself certainly features this historically "erudite" knowledge (*eruditio*) but subordinates it to linguistic education. Erudition has a precise Jesuit meaning: "the study of historical events, ethnology, the authoritative views of scholars, and wide sources of knowledge," but this is to be promoted "rather sparingly according to the capacity of the pupils."[89] The "more recondite subjects," from political and military organization to Roman and Athenian dress, could only be addressed "in moderation" on the weekly holidays.[90] As Marc Fumaroli keenly details, however, there were both "erudite" and "rhetorical" Jesuits; the great historian of humanism François de Dainville (S.J.) argues that the neglect of *eruditio* in the *Ratio*

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[86] Quoted in Compayré, *The History of Pedagogy*, 145. Cf. Louis Liard, *L'Université de Paris* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1909), 22.

[87] Compayré, *The History of Pedagogy*, 144.

[88] "At a vulnerable age I was to study the textbooks on eloquence. I wanted to distinguish myself as an orator for a damnable and conceited purpose, namely delight in human vanity." Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

[89] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, trans. Allan P. Farrell (Washington, DC: Conference of Major Superiors of Jesuits, 1970), 73.

[90] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 78.

Studiorum does not mean that Jesuit education actually neglected it in practice, and provides certain counterexamples.[91] By modern standards, though, it seems fair to say that the average student would experience erudite knowledge firmly subordinated to the task of linguistic excellence.

2.9 From the *modus parisiensis* to the *Ratio Studiorum*

Parisian pedagogy diverges from Oxford, Bologna, and other late medieval universities with the so-called *modus parisiensis.* The *modus parisiensis* grew out of scholastic *disputatio*, yet was "humanized" and set apart from the lax Italian systems, which gave the students more autonomy. In sixteenth-century Paris, one would take classes, administered in a top-down manner, in the colleges or residences of the university; in Italy, the students would take classes and exercise more freedom in the university structure itself.[92] This Parisian dressage for the young mind, eventually spreading throughout Europe and its colonies, emphasized a teacher-centric pedagogy with many examinations and rigorous drills, which nonetheless progressed the student based on individual aptitude rather than age. The original manner of Paris was fundamentally about *exercise*: "Exercises and constant practice, as a 'spiritual gymnastics,' put into play all the faculties of the human person."[93] The *modus parisiensis* represents a higher-effort form of teaching and learning than mere "study," but potentially a more effective (and more strenuous) one than a student might have encountered at Bologna. The underlying model of the original Jesuit teacher-student relation is that of the person directing the Spiritual Exercises and the person performing them.[94] Despite centuries of incremental change punctuated by revolutionary reforms, twentieth-century elite Parisian education has remained closer to the *modus parisiensis* than the laxer methods originating in Italy.

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[91] François de Dainville, *La Naissance de l'humanisme moderne*, vol. 1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1940), 103-04.

[92] John W. Padberg, "Development of the *Ratio Studiorum*," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 82.

[93] Codina, "The 'Modus Parisiensis'," 37.

[94] "The Characteristics of Jesuit Education, 1986," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 218.

Protestant educators too were inspired by the pedagogy of sixteenth-century Paris, but they lacked the organizational genius of the *Ratio Studiorum*, which traces back through intermediaries to the *modus parisiensis*.[95] The *Ratio* of 1599 codified into a stable and persistent form an entire educational architecture: demanding, top-down, and focused on exercising the student to his limits within a competitive system pitting him against his peers. Like the *Spiritual Exercises* (which Barthes will grasp via *inventio*) the watchword here is *exercise*. Though many of the *Ratio*'s methods had been appropriated and synthesized from previous humanist pedagogies, it will triumph via the unmatched organization and rapid growth of the Company's schools. The dreary scholastic methods latent within the *modus parisiensis* became more exciting when applied to humanist content.

As Barthes put it, the *Ratio Studiordum* reveals, "in the ideology it legalizes, an identity of an academic discipline, of a discipline of thought, and of a discipline of language": the *Ratio* "sanctions the preponderance of the 'humanities' and of Latin rhetoric; it invades all of Europe, but its greatest success is in France."[96] At face value—a list of arcane rules covering the minutiae of attendance policies and minor classroom infractions such as passing notes between students—the *Ratio* would seem drier than the most derivative of rhetorical manuals.[97] In reality, however, it arguably tells us more about the endurance of French rhetorical culture than any other single document, since it lucidly reveals the social structures behind the pursuit of eloquence, which is so often framed from the language-user's perspective.

2.10 Agonistic hierarchies: prizes, prize-givings, and distinction

One of the most stunning features of the French educational system, at least from an outsider perspective, remains its relentless hierarchies, inextricable from its tradition of what

[95] Codina, "The 'Modus Parisiensis'," 49.

[96] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 44.

[97] Its most interesting potential contents, explicit statements of a grand pedagogical doctrine tracing back to Ignatius, were in fact removed from the 1599 edition because they were so widely known among the Jesuits. "The Characteristics of Jesuit Education, 1986," 228.

Bourdieu and Passeron call "competition for competition's sake."[98] The exams and their rankings decide so much in academic life—and even in life itself. For instance, upon hearing of Sartre's initial *agrégation* failure, the parents of Simone Jollivet promptly decided that their daughter must not this marry this impish underachiever.[99] Or as Barthes mused in his journal: "French professors discussing a doctoral candidate: what teaching skills has he shown? Confusion, embarrassment. Suddenly, to the great relief of all, someone exclaims: his *agrégation* lecture!"[100] Of course, academic hierarchies, distinctions, and competitions can be found almost universally, but the French system stands out in its tenacity and (arguably) in its brutality; Derrida found it generally "terrible" despite its possible utility.[101] Though much could be said about the creative and repressive effects of cultural agonism in general, as well as the contests open to the public such as the great *concours académique,*[102] we will confine ourselves to a discussion of private contests within schools and their remarkable tenacity.

Rife in the Jesuit and Oratorian schools under Louis XIV, "competitive examinations, prize contests, and award ceremonies protruded from every corner of the cultural map"; Oral contests, *disputatio scolaire*, gave their largely-elite students experience in a "ruthless" quest to "cut an opponent down to size by exposing his contradictions and fallacious arguments."[103]

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[98] "It can be seen how the French system has been able to find in the external demand for mass-produced, guaranteed, interchangeable 'products' the opportunity to perpetuate while making it serve another social function related to the interests and ideals of other social classes—the tradition of competition for competition's sake, inherited from the eighteenth-century Jesuit colleges which made emulation the favoured tool of an education designed for an aristocratic youth." Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 148.

[99] Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 73.

[100] Roland Barthes, *Incidents*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 30.

[101] "My classical training in France has been a great influence—all those competitions that I suffered from. The French system was and still is terrible from that point of view; you have to go through a number of selective competitions which make you suffer to make you better. I'm politically against this system and I fight it; nevertheless, I had to go through it. Yet, however negative it may be from some point of view, it's good discipline and I learned a lot from it. The way I write is probably marked by this experience." Derrida and Olson, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," 4-5.

[102] Rousseau won this in 1750 in a great boon to his career and the Enlightenment in general. Jeremy L. Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice: Academic Prize Contests and Intellectual Culture in France, 1670-1794* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 1-3.

[103] Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice: Academic Prize Contests and Intellectual Culture in France, 1670-1794*, 14.

These were joined by less ruthless contests in Latin and Greek prose and verse. Such *joutes savantes* channelled values of chivalry and nobility, anticipated by the original agonism of the Dionysia festivals of the 6th century BCE.[104]

Under the rule of the *Ratio Studiorum*, the classroom itself became something of a miniature Republic of Rome. “Honorable rivalry” (*honesta aemulatio*) constitutes the primary student “incentive” (*incitamentum*).[105] If the teacher was overburdened, one’s work might be corrected by a “rival” (*aemuli*), and this corrector would himself be “corrected” if he failed to catch a mistake.[106] Which student deserves the greatest glory? The most eloquent, of course. Rule 35 reveals the classical equation of social distinction and eloquence:

> Those [students] who write the best theme will be chosen chief magistrates. Those who are next highest will likewise receive positions of honor in the order of merit. To give the election an air of erudition, the titles of the officials may be taken from political or military offices in Greece or Rome. The class should be divided into two fairly equal camps to stimulate rivalry. Each camp shall have its officers opposed by those of the rival camp and each pupil shall have his rival. The chief officers of each camp should have the seats of honor.[107]

These camps were typically termed the Romans and the Carthaginians. Students might be physically rearranged in the classroom in honorable chairs or lowly benches according to the results of competition.[108] As Durkheim put it, they “lived, so to speak, on the brink of war, each striving to outstrip the other”: this gainfully-harnessed agonism was a “revolution” against the universities and colleges of the middle ages, which, although they had *disputatio*, knew of no

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[104] Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice: Academic Prize Contests and Intellectual Culture in France, 1670-1794*, 15.

[105] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 68.

[106] Paul F. Grendler, "The Culture of the Jesuit Teacher 1548–1773," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3 (2016): 28.

[107] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 69.

[108] Grendler, "The Culture of the Jesuit Teacher 1548–1773," 29.

such totalizing competitive system.[109] The *Ratio Studiorum* implemented a severe agonistic hierarchy, by present standards, with little to no trace of a cooperative element. As Bourdieu and Passeron put it, "the Jesuits fashioned a *homo hierarchicus*, transposing the aristocratic cult of 'glory' into the order of social success, literary prowess and scholastic triumph."[110] Though the early Jesuits often pandered to the aristocracy and their sons, it should be noted that they did in fact instruct some poor students; the Jesuits themselves drew largely from the professional and merchant "middle class" (an anachronism).[111] Whereas the competitors in the school contests were merely *likely* to be social elites, the structural logic of the contest ensured that the students could not escape being hierarchized in the classroom.

Just as eloquence structured itself into classroom contests, the general *collège* environment sought to enforce discipline through means that were more persuasive than punitive. Rules were manifold. The Royal College of Savoy in Torino, for instance, has been compared to the world of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*; this school stipulated everything down to the precise times, locations, implements, and methods by which students' hair must be combed—and the consequences of transgression.[112] But the preferred Jesuit method for shaping students was charismatic: they were to be won over.[113] Rather than a teacher simply "transmitting" information in a detached, contractual, and almost unidirectional manner, the teacher cultivated a relationship to bring the student to his side, engaging the Jesuit ideal of *cura personalis* (care for the person) and perhaps Cicero's oratorical trinity of teach, move, and delight. Compliance with rules was primarily *incentivized*; as the *Ratio* puts it, "Faithful observance will be better secured by the hope of honor and reward and the fear of disgrace than

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[109] Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 260,61.

[110] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 149.

[111] A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 203-06.

[112] "Negligence in proper combing has always been sufficient cause for dismissing a Valet, since soon enough the parents discover the vermin in their sons' hair." Aldo Scaglione, *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986), 5,165-66.

[113] Scaglione, *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System*, 120.

by corporal punishment."[114] This Jesuit reticence to punish was relatively "progressive"; elsewhere, as Durkheim grimly notes, students might venture "solemnly into the woods to gather the rods that would be used to beat them."[115] A quasi-aristocratic honor system, in sum, disciplined the students of the Jesuits towards both eloquence and compliance. The Company partly inherited, from the Roman Republic in particular, the alignment of social distinction with an oratorical command of language and its virile power.

The incentivized agonism of French education became naturalized and almost invisible. As Durkheim noted in early 1900s, the Jesuit "goad" for motivating students "consisted exclusively in competition," and although diminished, "still has considerable importance" in France; "the competitive system created by the Jesuits with its endless compositions, its public recitations, [and] its prize-givings," after its successes in secondary education, "was imported virtually in its entirety into the University."[116] This incentivized agonism continued, without the Jesuits, into the *lycée*, *khâgne,* and ENS (the top ranking student in the *concours* would now be called the *cacique*—a sample of the sizable *khâgneux-normalien* argot). As Dianne Rubenstein argues in her political ENS study, "However much the ENS celebrates illustrious *normaliens* of the left, it does so in a language (as seen in the *necrologies* and distribution of literary prizes) that reinforces notions of superiority, exclusivity, hierarchy that bear a startling similarity to analogous notions on the right."[117] These hierarchies, partaking in what Bourdieu and Passeron call the "typically French religion of classification," seem to have self-perpetuation as their main

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[114] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 70.

[115] Émile Durkheim, *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory & Application of the Sociology of Education*, trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer, ed. Everett K. Wilson (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 187.

[116] Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France*, 260,66-67. As one might expect, Comparyé did not think highly of the "solemn distributions of prizes, crosses, ribbons, decorations, titles borrowed from the Roman Republic, such as decurions and praetors; all means, even the most puerile, were invented to nourish in pupils an ardor for work, and to incite them to surpass one another." Compayré, *The History of Pedagogy*, 146-47.

[117] Rubenstein, *What's Left? The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Right*, 9.

objective.[118] Though other kinds of academic distinction outside the humanities would supplement the original eloquence-based hierarchies endemic to Jesuit education, rhetorical skill remained a key structural requirement in the French system.

National differences are also instructive. An American rhetoric teacher, embedding himself in French education system of 1912, noted that the "ideal of writing" for the young French student greatly exceeded that of the American: "when pupils distinguish themselves in examinations—which in France are always largely a matter of composition—they receive prizes and public mention very much as if they were the winners of athletic trophies."[119] He published this assessment in *How The French Boy Learns to Write,* a book amusingly endorsed by Lanson himself.[120] Though a France with American "football values" might be hard to imagine, other pedagogical models—more collaborative than competitive, or more empirical and scientific than intuitive and rhetorical—were in fact possible. This preliminary analysis suggests that regardless of the declining state of explicitly rhetorical theory, the old ideological regimes in fact persisted, via hierarchies, contests, and titles that the Third Republic reformers did not fundamentally alter. The great critic of rhetoric's educational empire, Gustave Lanson, ironically occupied the Sorbonne's *chaire d'éloquence française*—a chair which he did not or could not destroy—evoking the futility of a total educational reform.[121]

With agonistic and hierarchical education comes prizes, and with prizes ultimately comes the spectacular public ritual of prize-giving and its requisite oratory. In the twentieth century this ritual's contingencies became more obvious; perhaps the young Sartre's irreverence towards "Prize Day" foreshadows his mature refusal of the Nobel prize in literature in 1964. As characterized by his biographer Annie Cohen-Solal, the yearly Prize Day constitutes an "unjust,

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[118] "Endowed by the Jesuits with particularly effective means of imposing the academic cult of hierarchy and inculcating an autarkic culture cut off from life, the French educational system was able to develop its generic tendency towards autonomization to the point of subordinating its whole functioning to the demands of self perpetuation." Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 148-49.

[119] Rollo Walter Brown, *How The French Boy Learns to Write* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915), 47.

[120] Gustave Lanson, *Méthodes De L'histoire Littéraire. Homme Et Livres* (Genève: Slatkin Reprints, 1979), 57.

[121] For instance, the resistance during the Second Empire examined in Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy & French Education: Liberal Reform in the Second Empire*, 179.

cruel ceremony, which pushes to the extreme an educational system whose key words are selection and competition: the 'best' are picked, all others forgotten." Deployed to a boys' *lycée* in Le Havre, Sartre would soon desecrate this award ritual of "laurel crowns and gilt-edged books," over which he was assigned to preside as the youngest teacher.[122]

Violating every oratorical norm in a ceremonial gown too large for his short stature, Sartre torched the decorum expected by the city's bourgeois parents who had hoped for the sober valediction and edification of their sons—who had hoped Sartre would link academic distinction with a distinguished future. Instead, Sartre rushed through a frenzied speech and arrived at a baffling climax—entirely directed towards the students instead of their parents. The take-home message was not exactly 'work hard and follow your dreams.' Rather, Sartre concluded that the cinema (of all things) constitutes a true artform (and "not a bad school" of contemporary society). He leaves the youth with a final imperative: "Go to the movies often. But do it preferably during bad weather; first, enjoy your vacation."[123] Though one could read this as an erratic Sartrean outburst, it certainly highlights the mounting fatigue with the competitive vicissitudes of classical French education, perceived experientially before being quantified empirically. Or as Bourdieu and Passeron put it, less anecdotally, in a higher education context:

> The French University always tends to go beyond the technical function of the competitive examination and to solemnly draw up, within the quota of candidates it is asked to elect, hierarchies based on the imponderables of derisory quarter points. Derisory no doubt, but decisive: consider the weight the academic world attaches in its assessments—often fraught with professional consequences—to the rank attained in the entrance examinations taken in late adolescence.[124]

But the problem, for aspiring humanistic intellectuals at least, is not merely that the examinations prematurely weigh out their fates in "quarter points." As we will see in studying the *explication de texte* and *dissertation*, these exercises became highly overrepresented compared to potential

[122] Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 78.

[123] Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 79.

[124] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 148.

alternatives, measuring interpretive and rhetorical aptitudes over a rather narrow terrain that falls short of the full purview of scholastic skills, and certainly, of a holistic *Bildung*.

2.11 Latin for the sake of Latin; Latin for the sake of French

Descartes wrote *Discourse on Method* (1637) in French rather than in Latin, an event laden with meaning for Derrida.[125] As a young man from Algeria, however, Derrida found himself forced to learn Latin more than three centuries after Descartes' bold switch to French. One might think that Latin should have been devastated by some of the same Third Republic blows that rhetoric received: the curricular fortunes of the two subjects have often been compared during the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century.[126] The formal pursuits of rhetoric and classical languages could be sacrificed, according to modernist reformers, for content useful in a vocational sense, or at least the pursuit of "things" (such as history) rather than "words." Yet even after these attacks, we encounter some remarkable figures: a *lycée* student in 1890 might have taken about three hours of French per week—and ten for Latin and Greek.[127] Facing the *concours d'entrée* of the ENS, even a science student would need to know Latin until the first years of the twentieth century. The young structuralists in the Letters division could theoretically avoid Greek, but the alternatives to the Latin-Greek option (Latin-Foreign Languages, and Latin-Sciences) were not popular.[128] The *khâgne*, and *lycée* before it, would thus need to keep the classical languages. The retention of Latin helped slow the transformation of the rhetorical superstructure and maintained an elite compositional practice in France. Given that Latin's death knell arguably began in the Reformation, and given that it was doomed by the ability of the printing press to reinforce vernacular languages and literatures, Latin's endurance in French intellectualism appears rather impressive. Let us briefly examine this great inertia.

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[125] Jacques Derrida, "If There Is Cause to Translate I: Philosophy in its National Language," in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[126] Cf. Violaine Houdart-Mérot and Ralph Albanese, "Literary Education in the *Lycée*: Crises, Continuity, and Upheaval since 1880," *Yale French Studies*, no. 113 (2008). Compagnon, "La rhétorique à la fin du XIXe siècle (1875-1900)."

[127] Houdart-Mérot and Albanese, "Literary Education in the *Lycée*: Crises, Continuity, and Upheaval since 1880," 31.

[128] Smith, *The Ecole Normale Superieure and the Third Republic*, 23-24.

In Counter-Reformation Europe, the Church sanctioned Latin, a language taught across the teaching orders. The Latin methods of those orders differed, however, as did the social stakes of the language. As the Oratorians and other orders later proved, Latin could be effectively studied as a dead language by focusing on its translation into French (with helpful Latin grammars written, for the first time, in French). Yet among the early Jesuits, perfect, living Latin eloquence—and the linguistic proficiency supporting it—cannot be overstated as a formative ideal, around which their educational enterprise turned.

More than a mere "subject," it was a way of life, integrated between multiple cultural levels of honour, discipline, and competency. We could call Latin a "male puberty rite," as Walter Ong does, undertaken "outside the home in a tribal setting."[129] Latin proficiency is indeed classically wed to virility: "nobody ever admired an orator for merely speaking good Latin," claims Cicero's Crassus. If people hear him speaking poor Latin, then "not only do they not think him an orator, but not even a man."[130] Under the early Jesuit regime, a student should not speak French on the city streets lest they require "fraternal correction" (snitching); poor Latin represented one of the gravest pedagogic sins. An early Jesuit rector at Tournon complained that one of his teaching staff "cannot say three words of Latin without committing either a horrendous blunder or a barbarism, or both at the same time, so that whenever I see a visitor go into his class I am completely mortified."[131] Errors that could be tolerated for a "dead" language would not go uncorrected in the Jesuit classroom. Long after their expulsion, Latin might still serve as a disciplinary or punitive instrument; one unfortunate day, the rebellious Maxime Du Camp was forced into solitary confinement at Louis-Le-Grand, writing out 1500-1800 lines of Latin as penalty.[132]

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[129] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 111.

[130] *De Oratore* III.XIV. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero on Oratory and Orators*, ed. and trans. J.S. Watson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 206.

[131] Quoted in Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France*, 54.

[132] Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign: from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2001), 143.

This disciplined Latin excellence, at base grammatical and ultimately rhetorical, embedded itself into the structure, content, and teaching environment of the Jesuit *collèges*:

> The course structure for these students, who already knew how to read and write, consisted of five classes, beginning with lower grammar, progressing through two more grammar classes to humanities, finishing with rhetoric. Placement in the classes was according to ability, not age, and a student could move to the next class when he mastered the contents of the lower one. Through the five courses, instruction was in Latin, and students had to speak Latin to each other. The courses in the humanities introduced Greek. If all went well, in the final course of rhetoric students could compose in both Latin and Greek, in both prose and poetry, and could pronounce both languages so well that, in the words of [rector] Claude Matthieu, "you would not say they were French."[133]

This *collège* system, of course, would face numerous revisions, subtractions, and expansions en route to becoming the modern *lycée*; the ideal of Latin for the sake of Latin, after the Jesuit expulsion, would shift to Latin for the sake of French; Latin ceased to be the essence of what it means to be literate. Despite these changing ideals, the notion that Latin or French composition was the *culmination of secondary education* is an absolutely remarkable legacy; the final class of rhetoric marked student maturation, as well as an elevated teacher status. This had not strayed far from the old Roman hierarchy, in which the *primus magister* (primary teacher) ranks below the *grammaticus* who ranks below the *rhetor*—with a pay grade to match.[134]

Likewise, the notion that Latin would edify students in their vernacular language, two millennia after reaching its Ciceronian "peak," speaks to the profound pedagogic conservativism we have been exploring. Even someone as late as Derrida would cite this concept: "We speak French, therefore Latin."[135] One could not say the same of English, and especially not German. What Bourdieu and Passeron term the *bourgeois parlance*, lexically and syntactically Latinate

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[133] Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France*, 61.

[134] Henri Irénée Marrou, *A history of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (Toronto: Mentor, 1964), 381.

[135] Derrida and Cixous, "From the word of life," 178.

French, ultimately emerges from education, not domestic life: “University French has never been anyone’s mother tongue,” even for those raised among the upper classes.[136]

This endurance of Latin—both as a linguistic ideal and subject demanding hundreds of hours of instruction—concealed a certain rhetorical habitus well into the twentieth century. The procedure of *version* (translating Latin to French) represents “partly a stylistic exercise designed to have students once again undertake a form of literary writing.”[137] Even though “style” was supposedly contained by the scientific and neutralized practice of *explication,* a command of French style and a general stylistic sensibility are in fact demanded by an elegant translation. An idiomatic knowledge of the target language, ways of translating tropes and figures, a sensitivity to linguistic register: all of these aptitudes are closer to a rhetorical purview than a grammatical one. Whether one uses a rhetorical manual with explicit norms, or whether one intuits norms from experience, a collective code of some sort underlies one’s translation decisions. In the case of Latin-to-French or French-to-Latin, such codes feature a beneficial degree of congruency.

A true purge of rhetoric *should* have taken translation exercises with it. The notion of improving style via translation is already quite explicit in Quintilian: “Our earlier orators thought the best exercise was translating Greek into Latin. … The Greek authors are full of varied matter, and they introduce a great deal of art into the practice of eloquence; when we translate them, we are free to use the best possible words, for the words we use will all be our own.”[138] This somewhat covert realm of stylistic exercise largely escaped criticism from Lanson, Renan, and other critics of explicitly rhetorical education. Given Derrida’s extensive experiences and engagement with translation and some of his tantalizing remarks (“the question of deconstruction is … through and through *the* question of translation”)[139] future research should pursue the

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[136] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 115.

[137] Houdart-Mérot and Albanese, "Literary Education in the *Lycée*: Crises, Continuity, and Upheaval since 1880," 35.

[138] Quintillian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. IV (Books 9-10) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), 357 Bk. 10.5.2-3

[139] Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," in *Derrida and Differance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Warwick: Parousia Press, 1985), 1.

pedagogic conditioning of French thought via the effectively unavoidable "task of the translator."

2.12 Methods of reading: *explication de texte*

The *explication de texte* exerts an idiosyncratic and hegemonic force by the late Third Republic, even a tyrannical presence according to the memories of its conscripted apprentices. The first thing to note about this exercise, though obvious, is its textuality: generally speaking, one produces an explanatory French *text* about a French *text*.[140] Before the reign of *explication*, nineteenth-century secondary education had maintained a considerable amount of orality, supported in ideology and method by the oral orientation of classical rhetoric. As the historian Ernest Lavisse[141] (1842-1922) describes his experiences:

> At this time, the true end of study was the class of rhetoric where the best students spent two years. In rhetoric, everything yielded to speech [*discours*]. We gave two speeches per week, one in Latin and the other in French. … Our teachers ranked them by merit, reading the entirety of the best ones and the good passages from the lesser ones.[142]

For Lavisse, his classes were fundamentally geared towards being able to *speak*, and speak about anything: "This rhetoric, in which we talked too much about people we hardly knew, about things we did not know any more about, was the natural culmination of an imprecise education."[143] Plenty of written exercises such as translations From French into Latin and Greek (*thèmes*) and the inverse operation (*versions*) kept him busy, but these were a subservient part of the greater goal of *viva voce* eloquence.

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[140] But for the *agrégation de philosophie*, for instance, one might be *orally* examined on French and Latin texts.

[141] Lavisse precedes Lanson as ENS director.

[142] My trans. Ernest Lavisse, "Souvenirs d'une Éducation Manquée," in *L'éducation de la démocratie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1903), 13.

[143] My trans. Lavisse, "Souvenirs d'une Éducation Manquée," 15-16. See also Ernest Lavisse, *Souvenirs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1912), 214.

In the twentieth century, however, the structuralists were born into a veritable culture of *explication,* and of texts in general. As Lucien Febvre put it as he probed the textualization of the historical discipline:

> Young men intellectually fashioned by a culture based solely upon texts, on *explications de textes*, passed, without any interruption in their habits, from the *lycées* where their skills as textuaries had placed them alone, to the École normale, to the Sorbonne, to the Faculties where the same work of textual studies, of *explications de textes,* was presented to them, the sedentary deskwork and paperwork of closed windows and drawn curtains.[144]

This culture and its cardinal exercise enveloped the young Barthes, who would understand the *explication de texte* as a "very culture-specific" or nation-specific practice that tended to baffle foreign students.[145] As Compagnon puts it, Barthes was a "model student of the Third Republic of Letters: schoolboy in the 1920s, lycéen in the 1930s, Sorbonne student in the early 1940s. *Lansonisme* was all he knew."[146] Whereas Barthes met it in the *lycée* and then at the Sorbonne, his equally famous peers encountered it on the *lycée-khâgne*-ENS trajectory.

What is the *explication de texte*? In essence it brings together a grammatically oriented explication of "literal meaning" with a historically oriented explication of "literary meaning."[147] The imperative of the second step, to "situate" the text within a context, often overshadows the first step. Yet the first step is here vital, since it is the proto-structuralist dimension; Barthes spoke of the "tendency to want to identify the 'construction' of the text (the influence of the '*explication de texte*'), the plan; to reconstruct the 'units' (how the codes appear) and the manner in which they're combined."[148] Thus the *explication de texte* yielded a crucial set of skills that

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[144] My trans. Lucien Febvre, *Combats pour l'Histoire* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1992), 4-5.

[145] Roland Barthes, *A Very Fine Gift*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 36. No strict equivalent in North America exists; "close reading" has more leeway, and less formal standardization.

[146] My trans. Antoine Compagnon, "Comment parler de la littérature?," *Le Débat*, no. 32 (1984/5).

[147] My trans. Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième République des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 81.

[148] Roland Barthes, *How To Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 156.

were adopted by structuralism—and yet were purged of what the young Barthes called the "Lansonian tyranny of *influence, milieu, rapprochement.*"[149] Structuralist theory gave justifications for jettisoning the second step and emphasizing the first, but students were already acquainted with the requisite skills.

Though Lanson haunts the Barthes-Picard quarrel of the 1960s three decades after his death, in life he was an important presence. Sartre, unlike Barthes, knew Lanson himself—all too well—since he directed the ENS during Sartre's education there. His compatriot Nizan described the school as a "ridiculous and more often odious thing, presided over by a patriotic, hypocritical, powerful little old man who respected the military."[150] Donning a fake beard and a *Légion d'honneur* medal for the ENS *Revue* of 1925**,** a plucky Sartre assumed the role of a tyrannical-yet-gullible Lanson in a lampooning musical, *Le Désastre de Langson,* penned by the young rebel ("I danced naked with a half-naked Nizan in that Revue.")[151] A series of such humiliations led to Lanson's resignation.[152] But the meaning of Sartre's anti-Lanson vendettas exceeds mere churlish, juvenile rebellion. As Sartre's biographer points out, Lanson "had abolished the teaching of rhetoric"—and perhaps more importantly for Sartre specifically—"had dealt the death blow to the tradition of subjective analysis" through the *explication* regime: Sartre took his revenge against "the very 'patron of the French language,'" the patriarch of the stifling pedagogy that molded Sartre's teachers.[153]

Setting aside the grudges of the Sartre set, what was so objectionable about Lansonism? In René Benjamin's *La Farce de la Sorbonne* (1921), we find the figure of the Lansonian scholar

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[149] Roland Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, trans. Jody Glading, ed. Éric Marty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 106.

[150] Quoted in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Portraits (Situations IV)*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull Books, 2009), 207.

[151] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Witness to My Life*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, ed. Simone de Beauvoir (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 8.

[152] For instance, as Paris fluttered with the news of Charles Lindbergh's transatlantic landing, Sartre's prankster cabal seized an opportunity. A certain "Lindbergh," an enlisted lookalike, arrived at the ENS to enormous fanfare: "we lofted him on our shoulders and carried him around in triumph." To Lanson's chagrin, the press fixated on the prank. Sartre, *Witness to My Life*, 25-26.

[153] Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 62.

ridiculed as the sort of pedant who tallies up, all the way back to the twelfth century, every drunkard appearing in French literature (a counting impulse recently rebirthed through today's digital humanities).[154] In other words:

> A file clerk who scrutinizes, tabulates, and enumerates, who makes lists of names, comparisons of dates, notes on sources, tables out of notes and groupings with dates, occupying, to the great surprise of those who have never heard of him, a chair of *French Literature* at the grand University of Paris, this light of the world.[155]

Benjamin's farce ridicules the *édition savante et critique*, the proliferation of voluminous footnotes and commentaries, squeezing the main text to a mere two lines per page.[156] In this light, the explicator becomes a sort of scholastic scrivener, a Benedictine commentator without taste or rhetorical verve.

In many locales a student might struggle to speak of the text *without* explication, and it was perhaps Barthes whom was most keenly aware of its pedagogic hegemony. As Barthes put it, "The text, in our schools, is always treated as an object of explication, but an explication of the text is itself always attached to a history of literature; the text must be treated not as a sacred object (object of philology), but essentially as a space of language."[157] He observed that the *explication de texte*, though suited to classical literature, can fall apart in the modern context. Breaking free of "author, school, and movement" and Taine's famous *race, milieu et moment*, Barthes' *S/Z* frontally assaulted the *explication de texte*. His strategy in *S/Z* (which we will meet again in Chapter Five) essentially entailed pushing the structural dimension to fill the space of the historical dimension until this exercise in all-too-close reading became virtually unrecognizable. Praise for *explication* from intellectuals in the orbit of structuralism, or at least praise unaccompanied by blame, remained scarce.

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[154] René Benjamin, *La Farce de la Sorbonne* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1921), 112-13.

[155] My trans. Benjamin, *La Farce de la Sorbonne*, 116.

[156] Benjamin, *La Farce de la Sorbonne*, 131.

[157] Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 28.

Derrida's struggles with the *concours d'entrée* reveal how a certain form of rhetorical virtuosity might still emerge as a response to the challenge of *explication*. He recalls his approach for the exam's *explication de texte* on a simple and drab Diderot excerpt from the *Encyclopédie*: "I decided that this text was a trap… everything about it, in its form, was ambiguous, implied, indirect, convoluted, suggested, murmured. … I invented a Diderot who was a virtuoso of litotes."[158] He passed this portion—but not without the jury admonishing him: "this text is quite simple; you've simply made it more complicated and laden with meaning by adding ideas of your own." Similar comments haunted him previously in the *khâgne;* a failed Malebranche exam represented "an exercise in virtuosity, with undeniable intelligence, but with no particular relation to the history of philosophy."[159] Faced with a very high chance of failure, Derrida's "virtuosity" responded to a series of perceived traps at every point. Given a game that is effectively unwinnable—even a mark of 17/20 is unthinkably high—rule-bending rhetorical tactics of invention-interpretation represent natural, "structural" responses just as much as eccentric, "personal" ones.

2.13 From *praelectio* to *explication*

Where did the *explication de texte* come from? Though imposed by Lanson, it was not his invention. He deferred to the philologists: the exercise, an "effective and necessary gymnastics," was not "torture" but in reality "essentially identical to the exegesis practiced in religious sciences and in Greek and Latin philology."[160] Though it displaced the rhetorical composition associated with the Jesuits, the seemingly disruptive *explication de texte* surprisingly parallels *another* aspect of Jesuit pedagogy: *praelectio*. For some scholars *praelectio* indeed births *explication*; Barthes regarded as "rooted in a very particular style of teaching inherited, by and large, from the Jesuits."[161]

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[158] Quoted in Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 54.

[159] Quoted in Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, 48.

[160] My trans. Lanson, *Méthodes De L'histoire Littéraire. Homme Et Livres* 52.

[161] Michèle Rossellini, "Les mots sans guère de choses : la praelectio," *Langue française*, no. 121 (1999): 28. Roland Barthes, "Works of Mass Culture and *Explication de Texte*," in *A Very Fine Gift* (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 36.

Extensively developed by Quintilian, and then rediscovered by Erasmus and other humanists, *praelectio* eventually formed the basis of an extremely sophisticated practice of reading in the Jesuit classroom featuring five or six steps (Lanson will have merely two). The steps, which would vary depending on class (humanities, grammar, rhetoric), run approximately as follows:[162]

1. Subject. Read the text and give an overall exposition of its subject/argument.
2. Interpretation and development. Explain the literal meaning of the text at a low level, substituting simpler expressions if need be.
3. Rhetoric and/or Grammar. Explain how the text uses various rhetorical/grammatical precepts.
4. Erudition. Connect the text to "outside" historical details, particularities, and erudite knowledge.
5. Latinity. Appreciate the style of the author, improve one's Latin.

The *praelectio* might also conclude with a moral lesson, but this does not seem to be its main ambition. What is important here is not the precise directives of each step, but their culmination towards the final step of stylistic appreciation, and the overall emphasis on form—leaving only a single step, erudition, for situating the text. In comparison, then, the *explication de texte* represents a great rebalancing of the *praelectio*'s priorities: a serious effort to situate the text, buttressed by philology and *eruditio,* becomes the equal of the formal, rhetorical, and grammatical. Instead of amassing the stylistic gems of another Ciceronian speech to "selfishly" improve one's Latin, the new overarching goal, more or less, involves the formation of a national canon, the collective creation of entry after entry in Lanson's hefty *Histoire de la littérature française* (1894). Although the *explication de texte* is often thought to be a pedagogical rupture of sorts, the main discontinuity lies in purpose and ideological background rather than the degree of textual skills a student might acquire; a scrupulous attention to formal, rhetorical, and grammatical details persisted.

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[162] This is a rough composite of what Rosselini, Chevalier, and Jouvency describe. See also Jean-Claude Chevalier, "La pédagogie des collèges jésuites," *Littérature*, no. 7 (1972). Jouvency, *De la manière d'apprendre et d'enseigner*, 95.

2.14 Practices of writing: *dissertation*

Whereas the *explication de texte* follows and manifests the structure of its object, the *dissertation* lacks a textual "object" in the same sense. In the nineteenth century, the written *dissertation* began replacing the *discours,* which was modeled on Latin oratory*,* shifting from a kind of impassioned discourse to a sober critical reflection modeled on classical rhetoric's *amplification* (roughly, to expand on material).[163] "The rhetorical monopoly of the dissertation," as Genette said, "is almost total": "we can define our scholastic rhetoric as a rhetoric of *dissertation* without leaving out much."[164] Compared to other academic genres, the *dissertation* enjoys a high degree of autonomy, being unbound to a predefined object.

Still, the *dissertation* is hardly free of impositions and artifice. Compared to the British traditions of academic and literary essays, with a degree of personal latitude and perhaps a touch of whimsy, the *dissertation française* "must start with an introduction setting out the problem 'with brio and brilliance,' but in a style free from all familiarity or personal comment."[165]As Derrida explains it:

> You had to write what we called a *dissertation* according to a certain pattern: in the introduction you should ask a question after having played naive; that is, you should act as if you do not know what the question is, then you invent the question, you justify the question, and at the end of the introduction you ask the question.[166]

This fake naturalness heightens the conceit of the *dissertation,* which ultimately became the form that traumatized Derrida the most: "the rigidity of those forms...was terrible. It had some good aspects too, but it was terrible. ... It was terribly rigid."[167] Long after his student days, Derrida

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[163] Françoise Douay, "Du discours à la dissertation : aspect du passage de rhétorique à la littérature en France au XIXe siècle," (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'université de Provence, 2005).

[164]My trans. Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 297.

[165] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 143.

[166] Derrida and Olson, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," 9.

[167] Derrida and Olson, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," 9.

called for the "deconstruction" of the *dissertation* and the critique of its ideology and authority while acknowledging the formative influence of such institutions on him. His Herculean efforts to disrupt his introductions during the height of his career—elliptical orbits around questions that no one else would dream of asking, dances around the fiery imperative to *begin in the beginning,* and a simultaneous recognition and refusal of the generic requirements of *exordium*—all seem to point to the early trauma of the *dissertation*.

It is debatable whether the shift from *discours* to *dissertation* exceeds that of *praelectio* to *explication.* Both transitions coincide, roughly speaking, with an orality being overtaken by writing, and with a certain freedom and variation in reading and composition being increasingly restricted to a smaller "scientific" and "critical" realm. At this remove, it would be inappropriate and likely impossible to assess precisely how tyrannical these two exercises were, or which of their features could be defended. What might strike us as more obviously oppressive is the fact that these *two* exercises came to dominate a generous breadth of exercises previously offered to students. Under the former Jesuit system, diverse descriptive *and* imitative drills were encouraged; imitation had not yet been saddled with Romantic complaints; genres of rhetorical composition were numerous.[168] The Lansonian paradigm was perhaps more of a hyper-purification than an outright rejection of the pedagogic past.

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[168] "While the teacher [of rhetoric] is correcting written work, the tasks of the pupils will be, for example, to imitate some passage of a poet or orator, to write a description, say, of a garden, a church, a storm, to change an expression about in various ways, to turn a Greek speech into Latin or a Latin speech into Greek, to turn Latin or Greek verse into prose, to change one kind of poem into another, to compose epigrams, inscriptions, epitaphs, to cull phrases from good orators or poets, both Latin and Greek, to apply figures of rhetoric to some subject or other, to draw arguments for any subject from the commonplaces of rhetoric, and other exercises of a similar nature.... Shorter prose compositions ... [might include] inscriptions from shields, churches, tombs, parks, statues, or descriptions of a town, a port, an army, or narratives of some deed of a saint or, finally, paradoxes." *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 75-78.

2.15 Practices of speaking: “talk like a book”

The Revolution, it is often said, marks a broad symbolic shift in French society from oral to written culture; Republican ideology would be primarily secured via texts.[169] Yet this did not eradicate a remarkable holdout of orality: the professor’s oratorical performance in front of the class. Coming “at the expense of other techniques of inculcation or assimilation,” modern French education, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, gives a “well-nigh absolute” value to the “oral transmission and the manipulation of words”; “transmission by literate word of mouth” remains the sole “unconditional imperative” of the professor, clearly ranking above marking and other duties of assessment.[170] This special relation between oral and literary excellence in elite French education, in sum, is the ability to “talk like a book,” as they put it. This relation, by contemporary Anglophone standards, places great emphasis on oral, monological eloquence in a high linguistic register, yielding discourses such as a *leçon* that are well suited to transcription, seeming perhaps too artful to be extemporaneous. Though oral gaffes tend to be filtered out by selective transcription, editing, and publishing before becoming printed gaffes, videos of French intellectuals during lectures and interviews, less likely to be manipulated, tend to confirm their living felicity with language.

Such abilities, doubtlessly the product of both nature and culture, arguably reach their educational apex at the ENS for the structuralist generations. As Dianne Rubenstein remarks in her political-literary study of the ENS:

> The parallels between Jesuit book culture and the “*culture liveresque*” of the ENS are striking. Between the Book and the book, between the interpretation of the written, sacred texts and Lanson’s *explication*, between the meditation on the written word and its oral instruction lies the ENS dual insistence on the written word (“something of permanence and death”) and its spoken substitute: *Scripta manent verba volant* [inscriptions stay,

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[169] Furet and Ozouf have highlighted the importance of Jacobin “written culture”: “the dichotomy between oral and written was coterminous with the temporal opposition between old and new, barbarity and enlightenment, good and bad behaviour, which gave meaning to the revolutionary upheaval and to the order it was now creating; whether transmitted through the school or through the family, writing was both a vehicle for and a symbol of the advent of civic and private virtue, and at the same time an instrument of republican surveillance. The elements of this ancient belief date back to Protestantism, before the Catholic Reformation took them over, until finally, in a secularized, radicalized form, they emerged as the favoured breeding ground of republican mythology.” Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry*, 317.

[170] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 120.

spoken words fly away]. These two requisites are reconciled in the *normalien* pedagogy which "strives to speak like a book."[171]

As Rubenstein correctly observes, there is a parallel here to Jesuit culture, and likely more than a parallel. The daily Jesuit *praelectio* in the rhetoric class entailed oral readings of written texts which were, in the case of Cicero, originally speeches (and likely "touched up" as they became texts).

The "well-nigh absolute" value given to the "oral transmission and the manipulation of words," identified by Bourdieu and Passerson in twentieth-century French education, keeps with the priorities of the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599. Over its long reign, it conserves the priority of the spoken word in a society increasingly bewitched by "the coming of the book."[172] It describes the class of rhetoric with an evident bias towards orality and reading aloud:

> The scope of this class is not easily defined. Its purpose is the development of the power of self-expression. Its content spans two major fields, oratory and poetry, with oratory taking the place of honor. The purpose of the formation is both practical and cultural. It may be said in general that this class is concerned mainly with the art of rhetoric, the refinement of style, and erudition. Although the precepts may be studied in many authors, the daily prelection shall be confined to the oratorical works of Cicero, to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and, if desired, his *Poetics*. Cicero is to be the one model of style, though the best historians and poets are to be sampled. All of Cicero's works are appropriate models of style, but only his orations are to be matter for the prelection, so that the principles of his art may be observed as exemplified in his speeches.[173]

The great orator and "one model of style" was also author, it is sometimes forgotten, to some rather ugly and immature texts, such as *De Inventione,* which are not pleasant to read, let alone to read aloud. Fortunately, these would be avoided for prelections of, for instance, Cicero's oration on behalf of Archias, a textbook application of a classical five-part speech structure. Speeches are *spoken* in the classroom; Jesuit pedagogy manifests an acute propriety of medium. Compared to the other teaching orders—who would just as readily study Latin and Greek texts as objects—

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[171] Rubenstein, *What's Left? The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Right*, 72.

[172] The title of Lucien Febvre's study of the history of printing between 1450-1800 (*L'apparition du livre*).

[173] *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, 72-73.

the Jesuits emphasized a spoken, living Latin whose point, more or less, was the linguistic reincarnation of Cicero. Ultimately, an abated Latin orality continued in elite French education deep into the nineteenth century, where it reached the reformers who despised such "declamations," and a newer emphasis on French oral excellence in the classroom and lecture hall persisted until Bourdieu's and Passerson's critiques.

2.16 Conclusions

We have visited eight preliminary sites that span the elite pedagogical horizons of the early-to-mid twentieth experience of rhetoric and its antecedents, especially in relation to the *khâgne* and its transition to the ENS. What remains unvisited is regrettably immense: most of the modern Sorbonne and provincial *lycée*, the largely segregated and inferior rhetorical education of women before Weil and de Beauvoir, and indeed the experience of rhetoric for most of the French population (perhaps more accurately, a non-experience of rhetoric). However, an awareness of these gaps helps us realize something of vital importance in resolving the great paradox: *rhetoric did not decline uniformly across French society*: it was nonsynchronous. As Régis Debray puts it, "a pocket of memory" or "tribal reservation" links the nineteenth-century *khâgne* teacher, through a line of disciples bound by institutional inertia, to a student of the 1960s.[174] Elite pedagogy was a sheltered island.

The dearth of rhetoric textbooks in the early twentieth century suggests to many scholars that rhetoric was of little use, value, or interest to the general public. This is true; meagre scraps of rhetorical theory often could only be published under the aegis of a book on stylistics or grammar.[175] Yet some still required an integrated theory-practice of rhetoric: the students who endeavored to pass grueling examinations in which rhetorical skill was a decisive factor, and the teachers preparing them, whom had once been students in a milieu that was less hostile to rhetoric.

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[174] Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France*, 49.

[175] Eg. The popular *Précis de Stylistique Française* by Jules Marouzeau.

Since this preparation had been the mission of the *khâgne* from the outset, this institution has been the most interesting and important inheritor of the old rhetoric in this discussion. Though the class of *rhétorique supérieure* became *première supérieure* and infused itself with Lansonian exercises and Republican ideology, this change has led to an exaggerated sense of rhetoric's death. The paradigm of *explication* felt "tyrannical" to so many students, overwhelmed by the task of situating the text historically. Although the historical half of *explication* entailed tediously situating text after text, its other half still contained a great deal of formalism. *Explication* rebalanced the priorities of Jesuit *praelectio,* but it did not create its imperatives from scratch.

Nor was the broader pedagogical program that the structuralists would experience born *ex nihilo.* As Guiney has argued with a particular emphasis on the secular versus spiritual status of literature—much more thoroughly historicized than my own rhetoric-focused account—we should not take the arguments of the Third Republic reformers at face value. The "content of the canon changed only superficially in the transition from the Catholic to the Republican school," and yet, "the discipline of literature provided the Republic with an ideal opportunity to claim independence from the authoritarian, Church-based power structure whose legitimacy it sought to replace."[176] The pedagogic shifts of the Third Republic—"from an exclusively Latin-dominated, rhetorical transmission of 'literary' values, to a Latin- and French-dominated, attenuated rhetorical approach"—cannot be deemed revolutionary. As it turns out, the "death" of rhetoric turns out to be a "rhetorical" stunt (in the dismissive sense of "rhetorical" that one should almost never employ).

What *could* have been revolutionary—and I do not mean to make a positive or negative judgement here—was a pedagogic rupture at certain earlier opportune junctures. A variety of potential kairotic moments presented themselves in the previous chapter. For instance, between the Jesuit suppression in France (1764) and the Bourbon restoration (1815), the First Republic and First Empire could have conceivably rebuilt secondary education from scratch around more Oratorian or Jansenist models, or even imports from Protestant countries. Perhaps the dominant pedagogical ideology would have been a "humanism of judgement," which Compayré attributes

[176] Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*, 209.

to the Jansenists, rather than a "humanism of form," associated with the Jesuits. An innumerable number of such contingent paths exist, all the way back to the sixteenth century's pivotal humanist encounters at the University of Paris, and the monumental pedagogic-religious-national cleavages associated with Loyola, Ramus, and Sturm. Though these hypotheticals readily devolve into intractable fantasies, they do suggest some general insights.

First, any origin story for the "hyphen of rhetoric" pervading French intellectualism cannot possibly be a purely secular affair—or a scientific one, leaving out the rhetors themselves in favour of their rhetorical knowledge. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber incidentally notes that "Catholics prefer the sort of training which the humanistic Gymnasium affords" over a more Protestant emphasis on technical-commercial learning, and, although it would require a great deal more evidence, one could perhaps attempt something of a *Catholic Education and the Spirit of Rhetoric.*[177] Bourdieu and Passeron claim "The teaching of the Jesuits should doubtless be seen as the source of most of the systematic differences which distinguish the intellectual 'temperament' of the Catholic countries marked by its influence from that of the Protestant countries."[178] We should prudently hedge the word "most" and say "many" until we carefully weigh the legacy of Port-Royal, which formed a strange yet influential enclave of intellectual separatism that confounds generalizations about a singular "French" temperament. Had nineteenth-century education modeled itself more after Port-Royal than Louis-le-Grand, the pedagogic preconditions leading to "French Theory" would seem impossible. Though this is a mere fantasy of alternative history, we can be certain that the bond between (anti)rhetorical, pedagogical, and religious attitudes radiates across the intellectual horizons of France.

This bond manifests in various national contrasts that have mostly been implicit in this discussion, contrasts that perhaps should be exemplified. For instance, in the eighteenth century, Hugh Blair already noted that the "principal field" of French eloquence was not the parliament but the pulpit, being generally impressed with their *éloquence de la chaire*. In comparison to Great Britain, thought Blair, "the style of their Orators is ornamented with bolder figures; and

[177] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 17.

[178] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture*, 160 n16.

their discourse carried on with more amplification, more warmth and elevation."[179] Despite its beauty, however, French discourse risked becoming "too diffuse, and deficient in that strength and cogency which renders Eloquence powerful." Blair claimed, "The French Preachers address themselves chiefly to the imagination and the passions; the English, almost solely to the understanding"; French homiletics leans towards the "florid" and "enthusiastic."[180] Though we should avoid too much generalizing on a national basis, this polarity seemingly persists into the Anglophone-Francophone encounters of the postwar era.

Second, we see that French rhetorical "temperament" should not be merely grasped as a disposition or spirit. The competitive rhetoricism of French intellectual life, if it were purely an *élan* or *esprit*, would not have survived without deep social and educational structures that reproduced it. This rhetoricism flourishes within an environment of strenuous "gymnastic" procedures to discipline the mind, an array of social hierarchies, distinctions, and incentives to separate literary patrician from plebian, and a handful of elite schools that filtered students based upon implicit argumentative and stylistic aptitudes in addition to more explicit academic criteria (as well as social class, of course). Facing distinct events such as the Jesuit expulsion and broad forces such as Republican ideology, various elements of this milieu found themselves repurposed or renamed, mildly impeded or utterly thwarted. Yet on the other hand, an educational historian would note that the legacies of the *Ratio Studiorum*, Louis-le-Grand, and other institutions nourished this environment, and a sociologist might argue that the managerial class demanded by industrial and postindustrial capitalism benefited from an eloquence that had once been firmly aristocratic.

Tallying up all the tailwinds and headwinds for rhetoric remains messy, but we can be sure that its remarkable tenacity in France owes less to a French comportment or set of autonomous cultural attitudes and more to the structural, institutional remnants of a great pedagogic empire. The inquiry into the precise causes for rhetoric's decline and fall in Europe, a question as difficult as the genesis of modernism, continues to occupy scholars. In France specifically, however, we should perhaps go back a step and assess whether the battered and

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[179] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841), 339.

[180] Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 389.

somewhat “nonsynchronous” institution of rhetoric, as it were, faked its own death in public so that it could live on in private. An elite rhetorical culture partly decoupled itself from the vagaries of its host society: whether the wayward eyes of the classroom fixed upon a portrait of Napoleon or Pétain, they would invariably return to the requisite gymnastic exercises for “learn[ing] to dominate language instead of being dominated by language,” as one *khâgneux* described his experience.[181]

Third, although structuralism is an “idea,” the emergence of *French* structuralism, the “return” of rhetoric in France, and indeed of the birth of “French theory,” cannot be reduced to an intertextual grid or genetic chain of primary texts. Too many formative forces are hidden, concealed in the arcane protocols of French education and adjacent literary and social traditions. French structuralism needed Saussure—but it also needed thinkers ready, in their aptitudes and values, for a cult of language (and sick of Terror, as we will see in the next chapter). Or consider, as a speculative example, the great “hermeneutics of suspicion,” which Eve Sedgwick will later understand as “paranoid reading.” The conventional view holds that Ricoeur’s trinity of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud essentially taught suspicion via their texts. While many suspicious imperatives can certainly be found therein, we must not forget about the existence of an entire elite education system that fostered suspicious *readings* as a survival strategy of differentiation within a brutally competitive field of examinations. Particularly after Lanson, students needed to hone their skills of (all too) close reading: facing the usual “good” mark of 11/20 or 12/20, they benefited from textual paranoias producing original interpretations for their *explications de textes* (perhaps achieving a 15/20). Pursuing these pedagogic forces demands new methods of a different kind than co-reading Nietzsche and Foucault to establish each citation, rapprochement, or return to probe the origins of suspicion. But perhaps pedagogic inquiry might eventually tell us something new about the postwar saga in which the great imperial power of America found its humanistic intellectual sphere recolonized under the rhetorical legacy of the old “schoolmasters of Europe.”

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[181] My trans. Pierre Bize, "Postface," in *Khâgne ... et après : Lycée Louis-le-Grand, 1934-1939* ed. Marcel Garrigou (Toulouse: Éditions Arts et Formes, 1994), 321.

Fourth, pedagogic analysis suggests that the hundreds of Anglophone reactions to French rhetorical "grandeur," "stylistic excess," and "obscurity" in the 1970s and beyond all too often imagined a deliberate intention to write extravagantly, to scheme and then execute textual convolutions. In reality, one does not often think to oneself "this is right place for *polyptoton*!" and then execute this figure (characteristic of Bourdieu: his prose strangles itself with figures of repetition). As Bourdieu rightly puts it, "the limits of Saussurean objectivism are never more clearly visible than in its inability to conceive of speech and more generally of practice other than as execution, within a logic which, though it does not use the word, is that of the rule to be applied."[182] Likewise, rhetoric as an art of rule-following and discrete choices readily becomes an unhelpful conception. In an improvisational "feel for the game"—Bourdieu's famous metaphor for *habitus*— French intellectuals enacted a performative ritual flaunting a certain rhetorical capital, whose value had been originally structured into the daily, monthly, and yearly schedules of the Jesuit classroom. Instead of producing more moralistic tracts on the rhetorical sins, mortal and venial, of French intellectuals, or celebrating writers as stylists and artists, under the lens of an indulgent individualism, one might hope to study further the collective rhetorical ideologies interspersed between hidden or poorly documented classroom practices and the well-known texts the *khâgneux* and *normaliens* eventually produced. Perhaps Barthes wrote more freely and eloquently than his peers partly because he was fortuitously barred from the *khâgne*-ENS machine and thus avoided its psychic and stylistic trauma, imbuing his art of writing with more lyricism and empathy than most *agrégés* one can name.

Fifth and finally, we return to the great paradox of the outset. Rhetoric, according to standard scholarly opinion, effectively dies—at debatable dates, for debatable reasons—near the cusp of the twentieth century. On the other hand, those intellectuals rising through the French school system after its purported death acquired and practiced a great deal of something that is safe to call "rhetoric," learning a reduced amount of theory while still developing French stylistic aptitudes through *version* and other exercises. To hastily resolve this paradox, we could simply say that the "practice" of rhetoric did not, as it turns out, need a substantial "theory" to sustain it. But this is unsatisfying for many reasons. Modern students were in fact taught something that

[182] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Pratice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24.

could be called “rhetorical theory” to prepare them for their relentless *explications* and *dissertations*, even if this theory no longer bore its classical organization, and had a new Republican impulse towards forming a national literature.

More importantly, however, the entire theory/practice distinction appears somewhat untenable in light of the many continuities and mutations we have noted within the rhetorical superstructure. Its institutions transmit customs and values that cannot be faithfully described as either theories or practices: a cultish reverence for language, the relation between oral and written excellence, the ideals of French Latinity, the hierarchies of social-rhetorical distinction, and a rhetorical agonism that rewarded precocity. These must be reconciled with the widespread suspicions that the institutions of rhetoric had, roughly speaking, been in decline after the French classical age. Barthes aptly achieved balance in his suspicions that the old rhetoric “has taken three centuries to die, and is not dead for sure even now.”[183] Again and again, its critics ripped out the surface manifestations of rhetoric, but like amateurs weeding a garden, did not tackle the entire root system all at once.

Absolutely vital in resolving the paradox, I think, is realizing that a “total social fact” cannot be eradicated by either simply purging its *descriptions* (rhetorical theory, its structure, canons, etc.) or *prescriptions* (write in *this* way) when hierarchical social structures—designed around perpetuating this social fact—persisted on the order of centuries. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the institution of rhetoric is necessarily immortal: the American education system, for instance, generally managed to construct itself at some remove from the pedagogical juggernaut this chapter describes—a distance evident in methodology, ideology, organization, geography, religious influence, and a language far less intimately connected to Rome.

Historical contingencies should inform us. Today one can go visit ruins of Port-Royal-des-Champs and ponder an alternative history of an intellectually Jansenist France or wonder what might have happened to twentieth-century thought had the educational system more fundamentally transformed itself after the Prussian invaders of 1870–1. But this kind of pedagogic thinking is not popular; intellectual and literary history has been relentlessly analyzed

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[183] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

with respect to national and conceptual categories such as "German Idealism" or "French Theory." Yet under the weighty influence of German philosophy and largely Parisian educational institutions—as filtered through Anglophone tastes abroad—"French Theory" has exceedingly little to do with the 98% of French territory outside the Île-de-France. We might as well call French Theory something like Americanized *Normalien* Theory, the Latin Quarter's American Half, Rue d'Ulm Meets Yale's Beinecke Plaza, or variations thereof.

These half-serious suggestions, however, have a more serious implication: modern academics, in some sense, are all subjects of pedagogic empires that we scarcely understand, and whose ideologies have yet to be captured by the most familiar categories. Despite the immense critical power of French theory—in both its truly Parisian and Americanized senses—it largely refused to see, or could not see, how it was in fact situated within and captured by a pedagogical legacy inconsistent with its more egalitarian values (though exceptions to this naiveté have been noted). Much more work is needed to historicize this colonization of thought and discover how this ad hoc methodology for analyzing France might be revised for other nations under the rhetorical influence of Athens and Rome. Though far from easy, this seems more intellectually auspicious than perpetuating the dead-end discourse on rhetorical excess and necessity in the realm of "theory," an unpleasant passion of the 1990s from which I have spared the reader.

Though my purpose has not been overtly political, or to simply retrace Bourdieu's critiques, it is hard to ignore the deleterious effects of the resulting social-rhetorical stratifications of the French system, which insinuates itself into even its very critics. As Perry Anderson points out, "Even Bourdieu, whose work took as one of its leading targets just this [*khâgne* and ENS] rhetorical tradition, could not escape his own version of its cadences." The pathways of escape remain difficult and scarce, as I have myself discovered. The remedy, according to the philologist who shunned the great Greek "error," consists in the pursuing the "proof of sincerity": the "absolute forgetfulness of form."[184] Today Renan's imperative still seems equally impossible and undesirable, just as it must have for the generations of Barthes and Bourdieu, bound by their rhetorical fealties. There is still a certain freedom: one can cut a deal between the personable realm of the individual—rationalized by an ethic or an aesthetic—and, to

[184] Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*, 193-94.

put it euphemistically, the faceless “rules of the game.” But it seems to me that the truer freedom—the freedom to not make this compromised deal—remains as elusive today as it always was.

3 Paulhan, Sartre, and the Terror in Letters

"Évariste Gamelin was to begin duty on September 14th [1793]. ... Prisons were overflowing; the public prosecutor was working eighteen hours a day. Faced with routed armies and revolt in the provinces, faced with conspiracies, plots, and treasons, the Convention gave its reply: terror. The Gods were thirsty."—Anatole France, *Les dieux ont soif*[1]

3.1 Introduction

The weak survival of French rhetoric as a total institution features a specifically aesthetic and literary dimension vibrant and perplexing enough to merit a dedicated investigation. Two figures at the heart of twentieth-century French letters, Jean Paulhan and Jean-Paul Sartre, struggled with the rising *terreur dans les lettres:* a revolutionary and quasi-romantic force, a neurotic urge to get "beyond words," and an aesthetic contempt of cliché, reaching its climax between the wars.[2] This "terrorist" force, for Paulhan, represents rhetoric's true enemy, and he essentialized Rhetoric and Terror into a sophisticated binary which governs his thought (and it will take much more effort to properly introduce). The Rhetorician, roughly speaking, believes in the power and dignity of words; the Terrorist, on the other hand, despises words (a "misologist" as Paulhan says, against the *logos*). Paulhan claims, however, that Terror will never be able to fully triumph over Rhetoric, nor Rhetoric over Terror, because they are liable to turn into each other at their extremes in a dramatic paradox: thus Paulhan becomes a thinker of rhetoric's weak survival (or in his specific terms, how one is stuck between running away from or going after language).[3] Launched into print by Paulhan's patronage at the *NRF*, Sartre sometimes agreed

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[1] My trans. Anatole France, *Les dieux ont soif* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1912), 122.

[2] Paulhan speaks of letters rather than literature for good reason: the term *lettres* amalgamates literary criticism, literature, and generally philosophical or literary discourses together, a broader terrain over which Terror and Rhetoric operate.

[3] "*Run away from language and it will come after you. Go after language and it will run away from you*." Jean Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes, or, Terror in Literature*, ed. and trans. Michael Syrotinski (Urbana, IL University of Illinois Press, 2006), 82.

with the old critic about Rhetoric and Terror, but later broke away in a series of curious disagreements which we will soon encounter.

In addition to the primary task of illuminating rhetoric's weak survival, I hope to rebalance these two figures: not by belittling Sartre, but by bringing Paulhan into the spotlight he so often avoided. Massively interconnected within the French intellectual scene and yet a minuscule figure in terms of his Anglophone reception, this enigmatic critic finds himself so often termed the "grey eminence" of French letters.[4] This is common ritual. Yet one could proffer a much rarer argument that Paulhan represents the older, untimely, and rhetorical shadow of the younger, timely, and historical Sartre, the radiant eminence of French letters in the years before structuralism occluded him.

Whereas Paulhan ultimately failed to persuade contemporary critics—especially Sartre—to join a rhetorical-linguistic paradigm, Barthes succeeded two decades later, inviting us to ask why.[5] Paulhan and Barthes shared a vocational position outside of literary history and university-based scholarship.[6] Yet whereas Barthes will seek to demystify literature circa *Criticism and Truth*, Paulhan had in fact *mystified* literature decades prior (but in a rather different manner than what Barthes ultimately targeted). This mystification presents itself in Paulhan's masterpiece *The Flowers of Tarbes, or Terror in Literature [Lettres]* (published in 1941 but conceived much

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[4] Paulhan's zeal for correspondence and his massive epistolary network became renowned and indispensable for the *NRF.* He spanned from Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot to dozens of major and minor figures of French letters. But he was never an American media sensation, nor would he be translated as vigorously as Sartre. Paulhan was not part of French Theory's "American pre-history": the mass of exiled European intellectuals in America during WWII, nor was he part of one of the early key French imports, Sartrean existentialism. Cf. the first chapter of François Cusset, *French Theory*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[5] I do not mean that Paulhan failed to gain followers, but his linguistic criticism was certainly a popular failure compared to the structuralist sensation. By the mid-1950s, Barthes had not read Paulhan. Roland Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," in *The Tel Quel Reader* ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), 252-53.

[6] Michael Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity: Jean Paulhan's Interventions in Twentieth-Century French Intellectual History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 11.

earlier).[7] No tidy Saussurean signs can be found here, no scientific union of signifier and signified. Instead, we encounter what Paulhan calls "a strange kind of telescoping or joining together of two foreign and irreconcilable bodies," the anatomy of "sirens or the minotaur."[8] The Paulhanian proto-sign joins together "word" and "thought" in a volatile relation which constantly threatens to reverse the priority of one "body" over the other. This idiosyncrasy, one of many, isolated Paulhan from appropriation even though he sits in the middle of French letters—and in the middle of Max Ernst's Surrealist painting "Au rendez-vous des amis" (1922), where he is one of the first figures to hold our gaze.

Though it will take until the final chapters to fully assess the differences between Barthes' and Paulhan's marketing of rhetoric, many hints emerge here. The Rhetoric-Terror dynamic constructs itself around Paulhan's personal insistence upon an aesthetic tolerance for paradox, rather confusing dialectical reversals, and a faith in "word magic." Reading *The Flowers of Tarbes* is akin to deciphering the inscriptions of the right hand moments before the left hand erases them. Moreover, Paulhan refuses to make scientific appeals to linguists—for he largely distrusted them—and he lacked the support of jubilant structuralist contemporaries, a comradery which Barthes will enjoy (as writer *and* teacher). Indeed, Barthes will more often ride with intellectual currents, whereas Paulhan will resist them. But this is not the resistance of a pure contrarian. Rather, Paulhan tried to hold onto multiple contrary ideas at once, an "editorial" reconciliation and suspension of final judgement, a skill that he indeed practiced regularly at the *NRF*.

3.2 The struggle between Terror and Rhetoric

The struggle between Terror and its dialectical partner Rhetoric characterizes interwar literature for both Paulhan and Sartre: a battle, in essence, between "Terrorists" and "Rhetoricians." Yet these cannot be regarded as exclusive, reified tribes: sometimes it makes more sense to think of a Terrorist or Rhetorician *state of mind* that oscillates instead of a long-

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[7] The title and some of the key ideas for *The Flowers of Tarbes* date to the mid-1920s; a shorter version was published in the *NRF* in 1936. I quote from the 1941 version as translated by Michael Syrotinski (the English publication does not include all the appended material of the original).

[8] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 52.

term vocation; writers certainly changed commitments. Still, Paulhan devised arguably the best way of sorting out literary attitudes towards language between the wars, including those of Georges Bataille, André Breton, Maurice Blanchot, Albert Camus, Paul Éluard, Jean Genet, André Gide, Michel Leiris, Brice Parain, Francis Ponge, Raymond Roussel, and Paul Valéry. Rather than balancing these names, however, I will highlight Sartre's response to Paulhan, who fundamentally allied himself with Rhetoric, but not as an extreme partisan. Rather, Paulhan takes the arguments of Terror quite seriously—and demonstrates he can perform them—but settles upon a kind of self-conscious and moderate rhetorical entity he calls "Maintenance." Sartre, on the other hand, claimed to move beyond the Rhetoric-Terror continuum entirely.

The usual story of the arrival of structuralism, a kind of rapid Saussurean revolution that dethroned phenomenology and toppled Sartre, gives the acrimonious Rhetoric-Terror dialectic little to no consideration. But as this chapter will argue, the violent oscillations between Rhetoric and Terror in the interwar period tell us something crucial about intellectual *attitudes* towards language: a reasonably large faction felt exhausted by the exhortation to go "beyond words," to get away from "mere words": not much remained that could be further terrorized. This exhaustion facilitated a new receptivity to a variety of more logophilic literary and theoretical paradigms, some more explicitly neo-classical, and others, like rhe-structuralism, that were avowedly more radical.

Even in accounts of structuralism as thorough as François Dosse's, Paulhan and the felt menace of Terror—recognized by almost every interwar writer of note—remains missing. In the 1960s there will be a kind of détente between Rhetoric and Terror as structuralism vindicates Rhetoric as intellectual paradigm while maintaining rather Terrorist literary tastes. As we will see, Paulhan obsessed over "signs" just as much as any structuralist: not signs in Saussure's signifier-signified sense, but a pairing of what Paulhan calls "word" and "thought" in an arbitrary relationship. Unlike the true adherents of Saussure, however, Paulhan will dizzyingly switch back and forth between two orientations towards language: the word-based Rhetoric and thought-based Terror.

3.3 Relations between Sartre and Paulhan

In 1938, Paulhan gave Sartre a salary, a monthly *NRF* column with literary autonomy, and significant promotion; Paulhan writes to Gide: "Have you read Sartre's *The Wall?* He is going to become somebody."[9] Paulhan was of course right. Their relationship began in the late 1930s with a "deferential, courteous, and grateful" Sartre who would become increasingly intransigent, and soon shatter the vocational classifications known to Paulhan's older generation: this suspicious "objet Sartre" appeared *sui generis*.[10] During the early years of the Sartre-Paulhan relationship their thinking about language had not yet radically fissured, and Sartre appreciated Paulhan's introspective approach to the "power of words," an approach that perhaps reveals a "magical" rather than "conceptual" sense of words.[11]

In 1945 Sartre founded *Les Temps Modernes,* financed by Gallimard, with Paulhan on the editorial board. The premiere issue's feature piece—Sartre's "The Nationalization of Literature"—references an interwar swing from terrorism to rhetoric. Overall, however, *Les Temps Modernes* will be anything but Paulhanian, and he does not last long on the board. Sartre will attempt to make the Terror-Rhetoric dynamic merely a feature of a certain historical period rather than an integral basis of literature itself as Paulhan wanted. And while Sartre gained international renown as philosopher, novelist, and activist, eclipsing his old impresario, Paulhan remained at the *NRF* while producing criticism, playful yet discrete as always, until his death in 1968.

Given Sartre's and Paulhan's publishing powers, their professional relationship, and their often-opposing orientations towards language, literature, and especially rhetoric, they form a pair

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[9] Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 122.

[10] Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 123, 214, 22.

[11] "My dear sir and friend, I have just finished reading your letter on the power of Words, and I agree with you entirely. … Your own words seemed to imply a challenge: show me somebody who, at the very moment he is speaking, can say 'I am sensitive to the power of words.' At this point you are no longer dealing with the question sociologically … but rather psychologically: you are appealing to introspection. And if this is the case, I can certainly answer that I am that rara avis (not so are after all). I am sensitive to something in words that is not their conceptual sense but rather what I could call their magical sense." Letter from Sartre to Paulhan, 1938. Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 123.

as natural as Sartre-de Beauvoir or Sartre-Aron, though far less intimate.[12] As Sartre wrote to de Beauvoir, Paulhan is a “guy who thinks about language. … That’s [his] business. You know the old stuff: dialectics is merely logodisputation, because you can never exhaust the meaning of words.”[13] On the other hand, Paulhan eventually wrote a piece called “Jean-Paul Sartre is not on good terms with words,” and argued precisely that. Despite such tensions, Sartre’s critical essays borrowed heavily from Paulhan when it came to understanding literary Terrorism, for Paulhan had marked the interwar scene as both a tastemaker and theorist of its literary dysfunctions.

3.4 Editors and self-fulfilling prophesies

Paulhan’s role at the *NRF* and Sartre’s role at *Les Temps Modernes* present two faces of the same perplexing problem. Rather than practicing a literary-linguistic augury that would simply *describe* and *predict* attitudes—aligned with Rhetoric, Terror, History, or otherwise—they themselves *influenced* the range, intensity, and balance of opinion: it was easy to put one’s editorial thumb on the scale. Paulhan’s case reveals much. Though Terrorist tendencies greatly predate this “prophet” of the Rhetoric-Terror struggle, his role cannot be bracketed out after he took charge of the *NRF* in April 1925, following Jacques Rivière’s death. This newly minted editor did not want to alarm the readership by suddenly shifting directions, but his decisions could not avoid being somewhat personal.[14] He maintained a novelistic focus but nonetheless published Surrealist poetry and, in general, a balance of classical and radical tastes in the *NRF*, which would seek its own form of literary autonomy.

The *NRF* relations with the Surrealists had never been placid, and in 1927, a certain “Jean Guérin” caused a kerfuffle. Guérin, an alias for the whole *comité de direction* (but

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[12] Their relationship sometimes seems calculating on both sides. Sartre speaks of Paulhan’s “Machiavellian political purposes” (338); “As soon as I settle into position for a reply to Paulhan, I lose all simplicity, influenced undoubtedly by the reputation for malice that he credits me with—and that I do not deserve I try to be brief and incisive, but polite. Then I play the very NRF game of 'false confidence in the reader'.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1999), 23.

[13] He refers to both Paulhan and Brice Parain here. Sartre, *Witness to My Life*, 95.

[14] Sophie Levie, "Jean Paulhan, rédacteur en chef de *La nouvelle revue française* de 1925 à 1930," *Études littéraires* 40, no. 1 (2009): 60.

primarily Paulhan), accused the Surrealists of hypocritically expressing their contempt of literature through literature: if words are so bad, why not shut up? Tempers flared, Breton dispatched a Rabelaisian retort to Paulhan, who then summoned Breton to a duel (but Breton failed to show up: perhaps a duel did not meet his famous Surrealist criteria of shooting randomly in the street).[15] Paulhan's own situated experiences do not, unsurprisingly, show up in *Flowers*. He gave one of his articles for Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* the apt title of "Rhetoric Was A Secret Society," a secrecy that still lingers over his eminently rhetorical body of work. Though Sartre will ultimately be more transparent than the old *éminence grise*, both raise the question of where the editorial role ends and theoretical prognostication begins.

3.5 Paulhan's meagre reception

Even if Paulhan preferred to operate behind the scenes, how could the 1960s linguistic thinkers have been so oblivious to him? Paulhan's name adorned the mighty *NRF* for more than a third of the twentieth century. He had performed quasi-Saussurean analyses of etymology and other linguistic ruses, penned arguably the greatest interwar work of literary criticism, and modeled a way of liberating literature from Lansonism. Paulhan wrote an influential preface to Sade's *Justine*, and would challenge and inspire Anne Desclos, his lover, to write a novel more "sadistic" than Sade: *The Story of O* (under the nom de plume of Pauline Réage). Paulhan fought to get it published and knew many literary "extremists" personally or professionally, often getting them into print. Yet still, after all of this, the structuralists preferred the younger Blanchot—who was in fact a devoted reader of Paulhan and praised his central Rhetoric-Terror

[15]Breton sent Paulhan this likely drunken (and certainly less than delicate) note: "Putrefaction, swine, French cocksucker, copper's nark, asshole, especially asshole, died out piece of shit wearing a bidet and besnotted with a fat dickwad." Although they would not speak for about a decade, Paulhan ultimately became Breton's editor at Gallimard. Quoted in Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 286-87.

paradox as a literary Copernican revolution,[16] a paradox formative for Sartre too (though we will see him resist it).

Given that various declines and remnants *of* rhetoric, and vacancies and fissures left *by* rhetoric, ground the oeuvres of both Paulhan and Barthes, their minimal relationship is surprising (or perhaps expected: some thinkers refuse to comment on things "too close to home"). Supposedly, Barthes had not yet read Paulhan by the mid-1950s,[17] and he sought to address more obviously Sartrean questions in the *Writing Degree Zero* (though we will see it has one Paulhanian chapter). In 1955, Barthes had a minor political scuffle with Paulhan (*qua* Jean Guérin).[18] They exchanged some letters—Paulhan wanted to win over Barthes to NRF-Gallimard—but not much more. What they will do with "rhetoric" differs dramatically: roughly speaking, Paulhan deploys the capitalized term as a somewhat esoteric polarity and institution of literature and discourse, centered around literary invention, originality, and banality, whereas Barthes uses it to name a total, intricately *structured* institution that can be productively studied vis-à-vis structuralism. In both, however, we will perceive a fundamental ambiguity about the historical status of rhetoric upon which many of their notions perch. Both were conversant with the Terrorist idiom, but fundamentally preferred Rhetoric in Paulhan's sense. This takes the form

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[16] Blanchot writes extensively of Paulhan in "How is Literature Possible?" (1941) and in "Mystery in Literature" (1946). Assessing *Flowers*, he claims: "We are now in a position to give an answer to the question: how is literature possible? It is in fact by virtue of a double illusion—the illusion of some writers who fight against commonplace expressions and language by the very same means which engender language and commonplace expressions; and the illusion of other writers who, in renouncing literary conventions or, as they say, literature itself, cause it to be reborn in a form—as metaphysics, religion, etc.—which is not its own. Now it is out of this illusion and the awareness of this illusion that Jean Paulhan, through a revolution we might call Copernican, like Kant's revolution, proposes to establish a more precise and more rigorous reign for literature." Maurice Blanchot, "How Is Literature Possible?," in *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael Holland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 58. Later, Blanchot's "Mystery in Literature" responds to the opening gambit of *The Flowers of Tarbes* ("to talk about the ineffable is to say precisely nothing at all"). Finally, Blanchot's eulogistic reflections in the *NRF* (1969) capture how Paulhan threw himself into untimely linguistic mysteries, and the nature of their relationship. Maurice Blanchot, "The Ease of Dying," in *Friendship* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[17] Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," 252-53.

[18] Cf. Roland Barthes, "Am I A Marxist?," in *'The "Scandal" of Marxism' and Other Writings on Politics* (London: Seagull Books, 2015).

of an attitudinal affinity towards successful, amorous communication in Barthes, and a conscious comfort with cliché in Paulhan.

Despite these affinities, the impact of Paulhan's esoteric thought proved minor compared to Saussure and other linguists. Genette and Todorov could develop Valéry's poetics into structural poetics[19] far more readily than they could adopt Paulhan's cryptic and less patently useful notions regarding literary invention, commonplaces, and inevitable misunderstandings between reader and writer. Todorov once approvingly quoted Paulhan's decree that "every literary work is essentially a machine—a monument, if one prefers—of language," but such references are extremely rare.[20] Paulhan's quasi-mystical dialectics make him more of a Walter Benjamin than a Barthes or a Foucault.[21] A critic who ends his masterpiece with the phrase "let's just say I have said nothing," as Paulhan does in *The Flowers of Tarbes,* is not the type to incite a critical revolution.

Aside from his humility, eccentricity, and critical mysticism that resists easy application, Paulhan's obscurity emanates in large part from bad timing: he developed his central dialectic of Rhetoric and Terror, so invested in the status of language, before Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and their contemporaries turned linguistics into a practically obligatory point of reference. He gained a head start as the son of the philosopher, psychologist, and linguist Frédéric Paulhan, who was interested in the suggestive, non-representational aspects of language.[22] Teaching in Madagascar, the younger Paulhan devoted himself to the Malagasy language and its poetry, fostering his

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[19] For its initial Anglophone reception, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, Routledge Classics Edition ed. (London: Routledge 2002).

[20] Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 281.

[21] Benjamin knew Paulhan and had a unique take on Surrealists: "less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things. They seek the totemic tree of objects within the thicket of primal history. The very last, the topmost face on the totem pole, is that of kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things." Walter Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch [Gloss on Surrealism]," in *The Work of Art in Its Age of Mechanical Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. et al. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 238-39.

[22] Frédéric Paulhan thought language to have a double function: *langage-signe* and *langage-suggestion*. In the relation of language to thought, he gave, one could loosely say, a Rhetoric-style priority to language. Frédéric Paulhan, "La double fonction du langage," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 104 (1927).

whimsy and suspicion that French letters suffered from a unique dysfunction: an agonizing rift between revolutionary Terrorists and counter-revolutionary Rhetoricians. Absent from Malagasy poetics, this rift, as Paulhan discovered, is not universal among all cultures.[23] And although *terreur* seemingly translates to terror, the term cannot be semantically and symbolically extricated from the French revolution and its reception, nor can *terroriste* be purged of its specifically French pejorative and historical connotations.

3.6 Extending Paulhan's dialectic: 1960s implications

As scholars inevitably mention, Paulhan runs theoretically and ideologically askew to any given school or genre (despite, paradoxically, participating in various circles through the *NRF*). Though indebted to the readings of Michael Syrontinksi, Anna-Louise Milne, and Michel Beaujour, I differ from the standard treatment of Paulhan as "theorist" in emphasizing his quasi-Hegelian dialectic that plays out over *history* rather than a single literary moment (since the primary goal is illuminating rhetoric's weak survival). For my purposes, he is not a proto-deconstructive puzzle to be perfectly reconciled with 1960s theory, but a thinker of rhetorical attitudes and anxieties.

The Rhetoric-Terror dynamic narrates, and in some sense predicts, how discourse swings back and forth between an infatuation with the power of words at one extreme, and a contempt for "mere words" at the other. Paulhan's decree from *Flowers*, later taken up by Blanchot, evokes these oscillations: "Run away from language and it will come after you. Go after language and it will run away from you."[24] Applying this to history, we might begin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the conquest of rhetoric had yet to meet any Terror which might oppose it, as Marc Fumaroli noted in his inaugural College de France lecture (itself a lurch towards Rhetoric).[25] The long nineteenth century, on the other hand, clearly succumbed to Terror, finally reaching what Fumaroli calls "the cutting edge [*fine pointe*] of anti-rhetorical

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[23] Cf. Michel Beaujour, *Terreur et Rhétorique* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1999), 16-17.

[24] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 82.

[25] Fumaroli, *Leçon Inaugurale faite le Mercredi 29 avril 1987*, 25.

modernity": surrealism.[26] Terror had gone through "a thousand irrational marriages" in the nineteenth century according to Sartre, and "finally bursts forth shortly before the First World War."[27] If the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic is taken seriously, defining the modernity of literature as a post-rhetorical state no longer makes sense, because—if we believe Paulhan—Rhetoric can never be entirely purged and is liable to swing back into prominence.

This dialectic, we might say, represents the twin of Ricoeur's: "the great debate that, over the course of centuries, never stopped alternating between giving the sign priority over meaning, and meaning priority over the sign."[28] Rhe-structuralism would mark, for a time, the apogee of sign and figure. Though the linguistic paradigm would succumb to various forces—the famous 1968 slogan, *les structures ne défilent pas dans la rue,* would seem to be strikingly Terrorist—it cannot ever be *entirely* eradicated if Paulhan is taken seriously. Rather than advocating for "Paulhanian" criticism, I am highlighting a certain Paulhanian inevitability, an attitudinal flux regarding the "power of words," which has in fact continued since structuralism became passé.

3.7 The reception of the Terror

The Terror of 1793-4, one of the most controversial events in the entire history of Europe, represents the very prototype of a sublime break or rupture,[29] and thus will always be associated with radicalism and the question of excess, relentlessly revisited, debated, and connected to later events. Though the reception of the Terror in history, philosophy, and literature deserves its own

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[26] My trans. Fumaroli, *Leçon Inaugurale faite le Mercredi 29 avril 1987*, 12.

[27] Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Literature?," in *"What is Literature?" And Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 135.

[28] My trans. Paul Ricoeur, "Signe et sens," in *Encyclopedia Universalis 12* (Paris: Encyclopedia Universalis France, 1972).

[29] "It is not … to the revolutionary orators that the [German] romantics will turn for lessons in style, but to the Revolution in person, to this language become History that signifies itself through declarative events. The Terror, as we well know, was terrible not only because of its executions, but because it proclaimed itself in this capital form, it making terror the measure of history and the logos of the modern era. The scaffold, the enemies of the people who were presented to the people, the heads that fell uniquely so they could be shown, the evidency (the grandiloquence) of a death that is null—these constitute not historical facts but a new language: all of this speaks and has remained speaking." Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, ed. and trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 355.

encyclopedia, we might visit a few highlights. Moving against the grain of condemning the Terror outright, historian Sophie Wahnich's recent *In Defense of the Terror* responds to François Furet's infamous argument that the Terror in some sense yielded the gulag,[30] as well as the countless and less hyperbolic condemnations of its seemingly wanton killings. Out of all Terror's interpreters, however, Hegel is the one we must not leave out, for his understanding of the Terror proved equally influential and incendiary. And for good reason: as Charles Taylor's exegesis bluntly puts it, "the aspiration to absolute freedom engenders the Terror."[31]

Hegel implicitly compared the sheer meaninglessness of guillotine's action to the cleaving of a cabbage (*Durchhauen eines Kohlhaupts*), an act since inscribed with a great deal of meaning.[32] Hegel's sense of the Terror, in which all individual particularity is vanquished, certainly underlies Blanchot's curious claim that "when the blade falls on Saint-Just and Robespierre, in a sense it executes no one."[33] Indeed, as Taylor explains, "the drive to absolute freedom ends in the contradictions of the terror, a kind of destructive fury which destroys the individual it came to liberate."[34]

Hegel's French reception further stretched Terror's philosophical and ethical proportions in the 1940s under Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite, which is to say nothing of the emerging comparisons between terrors in France and the Soviet Union. Even more perils and peculiarities, hermeneutic and historiographic, would accumulate after Paulhan died in 1968,

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[30] As Jean Baudrillard puts it: "Finalistic, moral vision which leads François Furet to distinguish between the good and bad events of the French Revolution, and to stigmatize the Terror, attesting to an inability to grasp what, in the event, exceeds objective (initial or final) conditions at the cost of a violence against itself on the part of the event. Thermidorians know nothing of [the preceding month] Messidor." Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV 1995-2000*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso 2003), 85.

[31] Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 186.

[32] "The sole work and deed of absolute freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water." G.W.F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 360.

[33] Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Work of Fire* (Standford, CA: Standford University Press, 1995), 319.

[34] Taylor, *Hegel*, 187.

estranging him from Anglophone audiences reticent to engage the concept's enormous reception history; few things are so formidably French as *Terreur* (one must forget all Americanizations of the term). As Wahnich reflects (after 9/11): "'The abyss of the Terror' is never completely closed," for this "unlikely encounter between the political and sacred" will never fail to provoke and perturb us.[35] This abyss seems to have swallowed Paulhan's thought.

3.8 Terror in the entirety of *les lettres*

The affective weight of Terror evidently suggests caution. When transposed into the realm of letters, however, no other term so explicitly captures the anti-rhetoric climate between the wars, overrun by "Terrorist" destruction and gripped by a great logomachy that had mounted over the long nineteenth century. Paulhan charted a proto-structuralist struggle between the signifiers of Rhetoric and the signifieds of Terror, subject to the synchronic rules of literary production. And as we will see, Paulhan represents a vital and effectively missing piece of structuralist pre-history; *The Flowers of Tarbes*, though studied less than Sartre's *What Is Literature?,* better anticipated the structuralist milieu.

By examining Paulhan's dialectic of Rhetoric and Terror as a *historical* instrument, one finds the inevitability of the coming mania for language, a "*mirage linguistique*" for Thomas Pavel, a "prison-house" for Fredric Jameson, a "denial of history" for Sartre: Terrorists between the wars had exhausted themselves in conquering the Rhetoricians and had more or less run out of victims, opening the possibility of a linguistic revanchism and new mania for "words" over "things." And one also finds in Paulhan's dialectic the inevitability of this mania's collapse: the very extremes of Rhetoric, Paulhan suggests, contain within them the seeds of a new Terror.

The standard story of phenomenology yielding to structuralism, though not wrong, has a disciplinary bias towards purely philosophical thought. Terror, on the other hand, concerns an attitude towards language that can be found across the intellectual landscape—including literature, criticism, pedagogy, politics, psychology, visual art, and even everyday discourse—making it a more interesting and powerful category than a tidy and principled "school of thought." Part doctrine and part disposition, Terror transcended disciplinary boundaries. For

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[35] Sophie Wahnich, *In Defense of the Terror*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 98.

instance, Foucault identified an effectively Terrorist "network," centered around Breton, "the spreader and the gatherer of all this agitation in modern experience," linking "Bataille, Leiris, and Blanchot, and extending through the domains of ethnology, art history, the history of religions, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, … effacing the rubrics in which our culture classified itself."[36] Although postwar rhe-structuralism would become far more scientific than the interwar Terror, both tended to spill over their confines into a variety of language-heavy domains.

How does one define the Terrorist, and who were they in actual practice? The easiest (but somewhat incomplete) way of defining the Terrorist, for Paulhan, is as a "misologist,"[37] someone seeking to eradicate all clichés and liberate the writer from language and tradition in hopes of accessing the raw materials to which language refers. On the other hand, the Rhetorician deploys templates and toolkits, stock phrases and well-worn patterns, happily dwelling within the world of words. Between the wars, the Rhetoricians (or the Maintainers, as Paulhan terms the wiser ones) were outnumbered by the Terrorists. Though not an exhaustive feature, misology arguably ran rampant among them. For instance, Bataille shares a "hatred" of language, according to Sartre, "with a great many contemporary writers."[38] The most interesting figure who flirted with Terror, however, was undoubtedly Sartre himself, condemning it as he sometimes fell into it, at least in Paulhan's view.

The epitome of Terror, for Paulhan, was Surrealism, a movement that he and Sartre both promoted and criticized at various times.[39] What makes the Surrealist a Terrorist? The literary-linguistic dimension of Surrealism aspires towards a violent triumph over mediation. Rather than being a "poetic form," the declaration of 1925 claims that Surrealism constitutes "a cry of the mind turning back on itself, and it is determined to break apart its fetters, even if it must be by

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[36] Michel Foucault, "A Swimmer Between Two Words," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998).

[37] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 34.

[38] Sartre, "A New Mystic," 224.

[39] See especially Paulhan's rupture with the Surrealists in the *NRF* in of October 1927.

material hammers!"[40] The poet of Surrealism will take on "the responsibility for the reception and transmission of signals which press upon him from the depths of souls," at last overcoming "the depressing notion of the irreparable divorce of action and dream."[41] How was this vision to be put into practice? As Breton declares in his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), the movement must set loose "hordes of words"— often produced by automatic writing—into "the silly little towns and cities of literature" to revitalize them since "the logical mechanism of the sentence alone reveals itself to be increasingly powerless to provoke the emotive shock in man which really makes his life meaningful."[42] Rarely referring to terror explicitly, Breton clearly seeks out shock tactics for literature—the more extreme, the better. Perhaps the greatest Terrorist document remains Éluard and Breton's "Notes sur la poésie," which takes Valéry's poetic aphorisms and negates them in the most violent, bizarre, or playful way possible. Valéry writes: "Thoughts and emotions, totally naked, are as weak as naked men. Thus one must clothe them." Éluard and Breton retort: "Thoughts and emotions, totally naked, are as strong as naked women. Thus one must unclothe them."[43] Éluard and Breton's Terror retaliates against Valéry's Rhetoric.

Just as the historic Terror ultimately ended, various literary Terrorists eventually burned out or recanted. The most extreme Terrorists risk acquiring the very psycho-linguistic disease or logomania they attempt to cure, plagued by the order of words that they so want to escape: "the terroristic exclusion of the flowers of rhetoric … may become an obsession that can turn into neurosis."[44] Robespierrean purity may well devolve into paranoia. The lexicon of Terror is often that of anguish, torture, and excess; its practitioners had successfully neutralized the word *rhetoric* to the point where it no longer aroused fear. For this, Paulhan claims, "The blame does

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[40] "Declaration of January 27, 1925," in *The History of Surrealism*, ed. Maurice Nadeau (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 240-41.

[41] André Breton, "The Poet's Function," in *The History of Surrealism*, ed. Maurice Nadeau (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 304.

[42] André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestos of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michicgan Press, 1969), 152.

[43] My trans. Paul Éluard and André Breton, "Notes sur la poésie," in *Oeuvres Complètes* (1968), 474, 1468.

[44] Renato Barilli, *Rhetoric*, trans. Giuliana Menozzi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 115.

not lie with us, but with Terror alone, and with how disreputable it has made the thing (so that rhetoric is no longer taught in the classroom), and the word (so that it has become synonymous with *verbose* and *bombastic*)."[45] As we will see, however, both Terror and Rhetoric will inevitably fail to conquer or neutralize one another in their entirety.

3.9 Terror as transcendent

Since Terror concerns an attitude towards language, it has little need to differentiate between literature, criticism, and philosophy. Though "the great event of literature" emerges in dynamics of Rhetoric and Terror, "the history of literature is not the only interested party."[46] Paulhan treats philosophy more rarely than literature, but he is very explicit about Henri Bergson, in whose work "Terror finds its own philosopher"; "The facts, Bergson and the Terrorists say, are there for all to see."[47] Paulhan was skeptical of the (language-based) praise Bergson often received for having "gone beyond language."[48] Nothing could be "more alien and more hostile to literature, or more liable to reduce it to a pile of quivering and neglected words."[49] Whereas Paulhan identifies Sainte-Beuve as Terror's "artistic director" and points at other literary and critical "disciples" and "grand inquisitors" of Terror, Bergson represents "the metaphysician who would provide its demonstration, but at the same time aggravate and accelerate it."[50] Bergson gets caught up in the "illusion of verbalism, or of great words," thinking that we are more inclined to eat the great French delicacy, the ortolan, thanks to the "flattering tint" of its name.[51] Yet this sort of neo-Cratylism was not Paulhan's only grievance:

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[45] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 82.

[46] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 82.

[47] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 30,38.

[48] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 63.

[49] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 30.

[50] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 32.

[51] My trans. Jean Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Cercle du Livre Precieux, 1967), 291.

the philosopher had upheld thought as “fixed, shared, [and] abstract,” relegating language to the “fugitive, personal, [and] unique.”[52] Though Paulhan did not want to simply reverse this opposition and trivialize thought, the thought/language barrier would find itself relentlessly assailed. Paulhan happily bombarded this barrier from both sides, embedding himself with both belligerents to acquire their best armaments.

The borders of Rhetoric and Terror, sometimes traversed by a writer surrendering to the other side, seemingly structured the debates of French letters between the wars. Paulhan probed these divisions relentlessly, prompting Sartre to deploy a surprising number of explicit Rhetoric-Terror arguments. Though Sartre, as we will see, tried to distance himself from the Terrorists, his relentless minimization of language meant he at least remained in their orbit, and he arguably covered up his Terrorist tendencies better than anyone (though he speaks extensively of revolutionary Terror in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*).

On the other hand, Paulhan considered Paul Valéry, Julien Benda, and Alain to be in the camp of Rhetoric. One should add Gide and Paulhan himself to this list (Valéry and Gide will become early Barthes fixations).[53] Paulhan explains in a letter that the rhetorical (and neo-classical) camp attracted three essential criticisms over the past 150 years, and he associates each with a contemporary apologist:

1. *Faux.* Valéry: “The *écrivain* is always a forger”[54]
2. *Abstrait*. Benda, eg. *Essai d'un discours cohérent sur les rapports de Dieu et du monde*
3. *Banal.* Alain: “the most banal being, if one sublates its [etymological] origins, becomes the most astonishing”[55]

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[52] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 37.

[53] Cf. Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 293.

[54] Paulhan titled his work on the poet *Un rhétoriqueur à l'état sauvage: Paul Valéry ou La littérature considérée comme un faux* (1946, a reworking of an essay from 1929).

[55] My trans. Jean Paulhan, Jean Paulhan à André Rolland de Renéville, 1951, HyperPaulhan, Paris.

As we will later see, Paulhan does not urge the Rhetoricians to refute these three accusations. Rather, he encourages them to absorb, tolerate, or even embrace them, soothing the neurotic element of the internecine conflict.

In French letters, Terror never vanquished Rhetoric—for Paulhan, neither side can ever fully triumph—but it did leave a legacy. In the 1960s and beyond, we will see *Tel Quel's* literary tastes tilt towards the earlier Terrorists, whereas Barthes, especially in his early work, preferred the quasi-classicism of Gide and Valéry. Though the logical workings of *The Flowers of Tarbes* will be elaborated later, these personages exemplify, for now, the central concept of his sometimes-baffling book, a concept that might seem pointless until we appreciate the extreme threats (along with certain truths and insights) that Paulhan perceived in the accelerating Terror. When "*mastery* and *perfection*" have been reduced to "artificiality and empty convention," Paulhan believes there are "no dangers that are more insidious, nor any curses crueler": in Terror, "even *literature* signif[ies] above all *what one must not do.*"[56] These questions of whether one *should* "do literature"—or for Blanchot, "how is literature *possible*?"—or for Sartre, "what *is* literature?"—encircled each other in an epochal debate for French letters.

Even if a total triumph of Terror remains a logical contradiction, its provocations succeeded brilliantly. Terrorist publications nettled and incited debates over the constitution of literature among Paulhan, Blanchot, Sartre, and their contemporaries. For Sartre specifically, Terror allies itself with an obsession with silence, which he perceives in Camus' *The Outsider*.[57] In "Introducing *Les Temps modernes,*" an annoyed Sartre wryly noted that "Hachette used to

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[56] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 9.

[57] "In assembling thoughts, [Camus] is forced to use words to describe a world that precedes words. The first part of *The Outsider* could have been given the same title as a recent book, *Translated from Silence*. Here we touch upon a disease common to many contemporary writers and whose first traces I find in Jules Renard. I shall call it 'the obsession with silence.' Jean Paulhan would certainly regard it as an effect of literary terrorism. It has assumed a thousand forms, ranging from the surrealists' automatic writing to Jean-Jacques Bernard's "theatre of silence." The reason is that silence, as Heidegger says, is the authentic mode of speech. Only the man who knows how to talk can be silent. Camus talks a great deal; in The *Myth of Sisyphus* he is even garrulous. And yet, he reveals his love of silence. He quotes Kierkegaard: 'The surest way of being mute is not to hold your tongue, but to talk.' And he himself adds that 'a man is more of a man because of what he does not say than what he does say.' Thus, in *The Outsider,* he has attempted *to be silent*." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Camus' *The Outsider*," in *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

distribute capsules of silence, in the form of voluminous novels, to many a railroad station bookstore." His new journal, of course, would not seek to publish "capsules of silence." This quasi-paradox—Sartre terms it "voluble silence"—was most vexing, this belief that "the secret aim of all literature [is] the destruction of all language." Stoked by a "mighty metaphysical pride" in the years after WWI, the Surrealists had propelled the problem to its climax.[58] But the insular struggles in literature would be ripped open by history: "what did surrealist destruction, which leaves everything in place, matter to us, when a destruction by sword and fire threatened everything, surrealism included?"[59] Sartre never converted Paulhan to this new way of thinking.

3.10 The problem with linguists

To worry about language was often to whinge about linguists—at least before structuralism lionized them—and both Sartre and Paulhan complained in their own ways. "The linguist," griped Sartre, "studies language when no one is speaking it," as if "the words are thrown on the table like dead fish, already killed and cooked."[60] How then, in a few short years, could linguists arrive as a prophets, architects, or heroes of structuralism after being disparaged by the star of French intellectualism? Rather than emanating almost purely from linguistic-scientific discoveries, as many histories suggest, French intellectualism thoroughly *overdetermined* its wager on language, and Paulhan put quite a few chips on the table as both critic and editorial tastemaker, betting against Sartre and the Terrorists more radical than him. Though Paulhan would complain about "the linguists at fault" and the contradictions between Saussure and Bally around the "still shaky" realm of stylistics, he nonetheless created an *ad hoc* linguistic-rhetorical criticism often unknown to Anglophone scholars, founded in the arbitrary (yet deeply mysterious) relations between "word" and "thought."[61]

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[58] Sartre, "Introducing *Les Temps modernes*," 251. Sartre, "A New Mystic," 237.

[59] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 176.

[60] Sartre, "There and Back," 300.

[61] Jean Paulhan, "Key to Poetry," in On Poetry and Politics, ed. Jennifer Bajorek and Eric Trudel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 87. Paulhan, "Clef de la poésie," 258.

Paulhan sought something linguistic that linguists did not as of yet seem to offer him. He initiated, but never finished, a doctoral project under Antoine Meillet, arguably the greatest French linguist at the time.[62] In particular, Paulhan did not like the "idea of meaning" that was in vogue:

> These linguists [Meillet and Bréal] have an idea of meaning that is too simple and, in some way, too unilateral. This meaning seems to them to be a natural property of the word, whereas it is an invention—and sometimes one that has to be slowly and painfully executed—made on each side with their own resources by the speaker and the spoken-to.[63]

Paulhan's refusals of various linguistic theories preclude him from being a proper or dogmatic structuralist; as Milne points out, "Paulhan worked from within quite different epistemological parameters from those generally perceived to have been inaugurated in French critical thinking by Saussure."[64] Yet as we will see, Paulhan prizes the strictly linguistic quality of literature as much as any structuralist, and certainly makes various quasi-structuralist moves.

3.11 Paulhan's literary "science" and the critique of etymology

"My whole point," Paulhan explains, is "sketching out, as the basis of literature, a system of knowledge that would be precise and rigorous, in short scientific."[65] Though he did develop quasi-mathematical literary formulas, he failed to write a true "scientific treatise" of literature. His linguistic thought, however, could be rightly called *more* scientific than some of its rivals, particularly the literary etymology that was often in vogue in French letters.

Long ago, Saussure had banished etymology to the margins of the *Course in General Linguistics* as a mere ad hoc "trac[ing] back" of words, harnessing "phonetics, morphology,

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[62] Anna-Louise Milne, *The Extreme In-Between: Jean Paulhan's Place in the Twentieth Century* (London: Legenda, 2006), 50n100.

[63] Quoted in Milne, *The Extreme In-Between: Jean Paulhan's Place in the Twentieth Century*, 92.

[64] Milne, *The Extreme In-Between: Jean Paulhan's Place in the Twentieth Century*, 36.

[65] Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 289.

semantics etc. as the need arises" without interrogating "the nature of the processes it is obliged to engage in."[66] Saussurean thought had not yet shaken up literary studies when Paulhan's *Alain, or Proof by Etymology* (1951) criticized the "scientific" failures and "rhetorical" successes of etymology. Paulhan concerns himself with (his of version of) the arbitrariness of the "sign," yielding one of his most compelling, original, and quasi-structuralist texts.

Paulhan analyzes etymological "proof," taking Alain and other writers to task for engaging in the "vanity of etymology" and "myth of the original word."[67] In *Flowers*, Paulhan had already noted that "When we actually use it, our language is, with a few exceptions, quite arbitrary."[68] In *Alain,* Paulhan explores how etymology simultaneously represents a failure from the vantage of linguistics and yet achieves a rhetorical success (the etymology of *etymology*, as he points out, legitimates itself as the *etumos* or authentic *logos*). For instance, learning that *shallot* comes from *Ashkelon* tells us nothing about the vegetable.[69] Worse still, "a false etymology will inform, in many cases, better than a true etymology."[70] Proof by etymology might appear as absurd to the linguist as "squaring the circle, or perpetual motion"; on the other hand, "etymology does not differ at all from the pun [*calembour*]; and in general the etymologist discovers in his so-called primitive words what he originally put into them."[71] Thus etymology, for Paulhan, offers no discovery of meaning; one should instead examine the coded systems of literature.

In this way, Paulhan anticipated the rhe-structuralists of EPHE. Yet unlike their later bias towards codes of trope and figure (*elocutio*) and narrative (*dispositio*), Paulhan seized a discourse of originality and banality, mainly under the purview of *inventio*. Though Paulhan did

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[66] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Chicago: Open Court, 1986), 187-88.

[67] My trans. Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 278.

[68] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 72.

[69] Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 276.

[70] My trans. Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 277.

[71] My trans. Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 293.

pen a spoof of Du Marsais' *Des Tropes*, the figurality of literary language produces little anxiety compared to its inherent banality. He fundamentally concerned himself with the relations between word and thought: does the cliché liberate, or constrain, one's ideas—does it facilitate easy expression or stifle thought itself? How trustworthy is language as an *expression* of thought, or might it serve other purposes? Paulhan groups his responses to such questions into the poles of Rhetoric and Terror so that he may alternate between them in the tumultuous, dialogical reversals so characteristic of his method (via prosopopoeia, Terror actually gains a voice). Paulhan, we could say, updates the dialogue of Hermogenes and Cratylus, expanding beyond convention versus nature to Rhetoric (words) and Terror (thought).

Another one of Paulhan's quasi-structuralist endeavors emerges in the rather mathematical *Key to Poetry*, which dates, in its early versions, to 1944. Though clearly aware of Saussure, he does not speak of signifiers and signifieds. Rather, he builds a "formula" out of "words" and "ideas" that differentiates between the true and false "laws of poetry currently in use."[72] For the Rhetorician, each "poetic event"—eg. an "image, commonplace, [or] antithesis"—corresponds to a formula of the form:

F(a b c) implies F'(α β γ)

where F is a function of the *words* a, b, and c

and F' is a function of the *ideas* α, β, and γ

That is to say, for the Rhetorician, the poetic event's transformation of *words* implies a transformation of *ideas.* However, for the Terrorist, the words now correspond to α, β, and γ, and the ideas to a, b, and c.[73] Thus the Terrorist witnesses this same poetic event's transformation of *ideas* implying a certain transformation of *words*. But just when one might expect Paulhan to rest at ease after this tidy scientific distinction, he fixates on the fundamentally mysterious relation between words and thoughts (and hence between Rhetoric and Terror): a properly *linguistic*

[72] Jean Paulhan, "Key to Poetry," in *On Poetry and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Bajorek and Eric Trudel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 81.

[73] Paulhan, "Key to Poetry," 80-81.

method for separating them appears remote after noting Saussure and Bally's "elusive, uncertain, and contradictory … conception of language."[74] In effect, Paulhan embraces a certain mysticism regarding the word-thought relation, allowing himself to be contented rather than tormented—the fate of so many peers. But of course, this mysticism, so inward and esoteric, is precisely the opposite of the stable building blocks that structuralism would soon demand.

His eccentricities continue. If Paulhan so acutely perceived the struggles of Rhetoric and Terror playing out over French letters, it was only, perhaps, because he was able to leave its battlegrounds behind and see things afresh through his teaching in Madagascar and his study of the Malagasy language and its proverbs. During his three years as a *lycée* teacher, Paulhan researched and transcribed the *hain-teny*, a form of oratorical contest where proverbs would be exchanged until one proverb trumps all (he will come back to Paris and teach at *l'École des Langues orientales vivantes*).[75] This Malagasy tradition, a healthy game of invention for Paulhan, lacked the Terror-Rhetoric dysfunction. A kind of rhetorical ethnography empowered his thinking, setting him apart from Barthes, Foucault, and many others who often discussed literature, rhetoric, and discourse as such, without the all-important *French* qualification. In Paulhan's (anti-colonial) experiences in Madagascar and later eclectic writings, we find literary models that could potentially escape from the vicissitudes of Terror and the triteness of Rhetoric.

3.12 The logic of Terror

Before engaging the historical dialectics of Terror, let us examine its synchronic logic. In Terror, says Paulhan, "ideas are *worth more* than words, and the spiritual is worth more than the material"; "language is essentially dangerous for thought."[76] The "faith" or "prejudice" of the Terrorist entails ranking the word below the idea in both "dignity" and "nature."[77] In seeking the *motivation* for Terror, Paulhan claims that a work of literature might convey "joy or despair," but

[74] Paulhan, "Key to Poetry," 87.

[75] Jacques Faublée, "Jean Paulhan malgachisant," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 40, no. 2 (1970).

[76] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 34.

[77] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 34.

it “more secretly reveals an *idea about language*: the understanding we have of it, … how we place ourselves in relation to it, and in *opposition* to it.”[78] An undisclosed linguistic ideology, though he does not use the term, lies below the surface of the work: its “system of expression” is concealed for Rhetoric (“like the skeleton of a mammal”) but visible for Terror (“like the shell of a crustacean”).[79] The task of Terror, as it were, is to crack the shell, prompted by a deep cynicism towards the fidelity and expressivity of language. Indeed, for Terror “certain words reveal a hypertrophy of matter and of language, at the expense of ideas”—completely contrary to all of the grammarians, philologists, and linguists whom the critic considers. [80] Yet the “power of language” still remains “too subtle or secret” to undergo their scholarly analyses, according to the often-mystical Paulhan.[81] Thus, instead of linguists, he mainly considers the *arguments* of Terror’s partisans: Taine accusing Rousseau of “verbalism” or Renan lambasting most of classical literature as an “abuse of rhetoric”; in this Terror, “no one is safe.”[82] The inquisition into hollow or duplicitous political terms such as “freedom” and “equality” seemingly spills into literature, infusing it with a “polemical element.”[83] For Paulhan, Terror’s literary and political arguments feature remarkable similarities, hinting at why he fixated upon such an allusive and divisive term.

If Terror merely means a certain kind of prejudice towards language, defined *ex nihilo,* it would not be such a curious entity. Yet it is a prejudice that both derives from and reflects upon the histories of revolution and literature in France, especially the Terror’s leveling of status and ability, the equality before the guillotine. So we should consider its diachronic element in addition the synchronic arguments of Terror. Since, according to Hegel, “fanaticism wills only

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[78] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 35.

[79] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 89.

[80] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 36-37.

[81] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 37.

[82] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 28.

[83] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 28-29.

what is abstract, not what is articulated," the Terror was a "time of trembling and quaking and of intolerance towards everything particular," when "all differences of talents and authority were supposed to be cancelled out."[84] This issue of talent bridges the historic and literary Terrors. Paulhan notes that Joseph Lebon, who sanctioned many executions in Arras, declared that the revolutionary tribunal would *first* judge the prisoners who "stood out because of their talents."[85] Figuratively speaking, the skilled Rhetoricians would be executed first: "When Hugo, Stendhal, or Gourmont talk about massacres and slaughters, they are also thinking about a kind of talent: the kind that is betrayed by flowers of rhetoric."[86] As Paulhan defines Terror historically: "We call periods of *Terror* those moments in the history of nations ... when it suddenly seems that the State requires not ingeniousness and systematic methods"—associated with Rhetoric—"but rather an extreme purity of the soul"—associated with Terror.[87] Robespierre's "Republic of Virtue" comes to mind; restrictive rules would be seemingly marched to the scaffold by the radicals whom Paulhan dubs the "adversaries of Rhetoric: Romantics, Terrorists."[88] Indeed, those aspects of rhetoric associated with *techne*—"skill, knowledge, and technique"—"become suspect," during periods of Terror, "as if they were covering up some lack of conviction."[89] Thus emerges a parallel between revolutionary and literary history.

Terror necessarily invokes history: every Terror seems to refer back to *the* Terror. "During periods of Terror," as Paulhan puts it, "literature happily welcomes, and even seeks out … mad poets or absurd thinkers, those small or great Satans of the quill."[90] Paulhan speaks of

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[84] G.W.F Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. Allan W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 39.

[85] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 24.

[86] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 24.

[87] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 24.

[88] My trans. Paulhan, "Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie," 291.

[89] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 24.

[90] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 87.

periods, emphasizing a historical phenomenon that threatens to sweep up individuals, something more complex than an inner belief or emotion. Constructing a simpler and less historically grounded rivalry between misologists and philologists (or logophiles) would censor Terror's explosive and perhaps undecidable connotations, its political provocation to condemn or condone the events of 1793-94. What increases the value of the term in France may well hamper it in those locales and eras without a relevant rupture or revolution.

3.13 Terror's history and merits

Paulhan's "Satans of the quill" primarily belong to Romanticism and the contemporary Surrealism that surrounded him in the 1920s and 1930s while *The Flowers of Tarbes* was taking shape. An old critical commonplace holds that rhetoric and Romanticism were natural enemies, but this has certain exceptions in the British case and perhaps more in the French.[91] Surrealism, however, represented a consistent and extreme manifestation of Terror for interwar intellectuals. As Sartre puts it, if the Surrealists have reduced words to "ashes" and nothing remains, is this "a nothing I create or one that I disclose? The Surrealist makes no choice between these two contradictory hypotheses."[92] Thus, for the Surrealists, "the bonfire of words is an absolute event."[93] The word would now receive a mere show-trial: the culmination of a long process of juridical decline in the literary courts.

In literature, Terror took the form of a crescendo. Since the original revolutionary Terror, literary terror—so preoccupied with "purity" and "rupture" had, according to Maurice Blanchot in 1942, "dominated the world of letters for the past 150 years."[94] Blanchot pictured Terror reaching new heights: "With Victor Hugo it rejects 'rhetoric', with Verlaine 'eloquence', with Rimbaud 'poetic old hat'; but with more recent writers, driven by a distaste for clichés and

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[91] Cf. Don Bialostosky and Lawrence D. Needham, "Introduction," in *Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature*, ed. Don Bialostosky and Lawrence D. Needham (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[92] Sartre, "There and Back," 326.

[93] Sartre, "There and Back," 326.

[94] Blanchot, "How Is Literature Possible?," 50.

tormented by an obsession with revolt, it claims to break with all forms of discourse and even with all language."[95] Blanchot summed them up thusly:

> The Terrorist, completely enchanted with a dream of innocence in which things and emotions can appear to us in their original purity, … is obsessed by the linguistic aspect of language. One must wring the neck of eloquence, push away technique, be mistrustful of words, for words are only words. No ideal aspect for language the way Terror sees it: the star here eternally shows the frozen landscape of its extinguished volcanoes and its lifeless mountains.[96]

Terror, in this imagery, would seem to voraciously consume and extinguish its enemies. And yet for Paulhan, the historical and conceptual process of Terror can never quite complete itself. When pushed to its extremes, Terror relentlessly encounters an obstacle: the act of pushing past words engenders an obsession with them. As Paulhan puts it, "No writer is more preoccupied with words than the one who at every point sets out to get rid of them, to get away from them, to reinvent them."[97] In this way, the extreme Terrorists now become Rhetoricians, for cataloguing abusive clichés—stereotypes that must be avoided to liberate thought—creates a pathological devotion: "Terror is verbal, and more preoccupied with language than rhetoric has ever been." [98] Thus, we can imagine the Terror-Rhetoric continuum not as a straight line or spectrum, but as a horseshoe, in which the endpoints draw close together. Though often irritating and wrong to those at either extreme, and disdained by political scientists, the horseshoe structure would seem to capture Paulhan's thinking.

Though Paulhan "sides" with Rhetoric, we must note that Paulhan's thought was shaped by a truly intimate encounter with (and appreciation of) chronic and acute Terrorist tastes in French literature, and he was far from an old literary conservative or moralistic elder attacking

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[95] Blanchot, "How Is Literature Possible?," 50.

[96] Blanchot, "Mystery in Literature," 46.

[97] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 76.

[98] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 76.

the avant-garde. Milne's book on Paulhan is wonderfully titled *The Extreme In-Between*, capturing his vexing orientations across aesthetic and political spectra. Jumping into almost any point of *The Flowers of Tarbes,* the reader lands "extremely in-between" Rhetoric and Terror: even in the final pages, the resolution in favour of Rhetoric is deliberately moderated and even undermined. The book's final gesture is not a raised hand or a closed fist but a shrug.

Much of what makes *The Flowers of Tarbes* so difficult, original, and subtle is that Rhetoric, though preferred by Paulhan, does not simply triumph over Terror. Rather, Terror propounds viable critiques that arrive at the disturbing ambiguities of language, which for Paulhan often revolve around the cliché. The cliché is indeed:

> The perfect place in language for the reader to completely lose sight of the writer—since he cannot tell if this writer has thought carefully about the cliché, or whether he has simply repeated it; this reader then imagines the author who surrenders entirely to thought as someone caught up in arranging words. The cliché is a place of non-understanding. … We see language betraying us before our very eyes, by introducing into speech … the very obscurity and misunderstanding it was designed to dispel. … If justice is to be done, commonplaces should be the first terms to be banished from a well-constructed language.[99]

To exemplify how the "cliché is a place of non-understanding," we can turn to Sartre, of all people, and his *Saint Genet* (1952). He thoroughly analyzes a sentence from Genet's *Funeral Rites* (1948), which Genet himself had set off with quotation marks: "'The gardener is the loveliest rose in his garden'" (the floral imagery, of course, is Paulhan's old friend). Sartre explains its ruse:

> "'The gardener is the loveliest rose in his garden'": this sentence, which is casually slipped in among twenty others, like a counterfeit coin among genuine ones, is protected only by its air of innocence and its comfortable banality. A hasty reader sees that a young man is a rose: he does not quite approve, perhaps, of one's comparing a male to a flower,

[99] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 68.

> but does Genet mean a flower? The image is trite one, it has lost its bloom. He continues reading; he installs within him this seeming commonplace without having noticed that Genet was unable to keep from setting it off by quotation marks. Of course, no sooner has the gilding entered than it melts. We have been tricked. Why is it that we no longer understand this hackneyed locution? The cleverest reader will realize—too late—that the gardener, his roses and the banal comparison were chosen only in order to mask the aberrant form of the proposition. … [Ultimately] the sentence is absurd only in appearance: it *alludes* to Genet's entire history, to all his hopes. … Yet it is impossible to *realize* this signification; every precaution is taken to prevent us from doing so: a good, round prose sentence, a "cliché," suddenly challenges itself, is swallowed up, and the wreckage seems to point vaguely to an inaccessible constellation.[100]

Sartre's lengthy, incisive, and rather Paulhanian analysis of this sentence evokes the potential pathologies—neuroticism, paranoia, or conspiratorial thinking—of Terrorist practices of reading and overreading. Paulhan even speculates about whether the situation could be worse than what we have just seen.

What could be worse than a misunderstanding between reader and writer? Perhaps, Paulhan wonders, "there might exist a kind of Terror *between ourselves and ourselves.*"[101] Rather than "vagueness and inexactness" between author and reader, one gets caught up in fully internalized Terror: "hermeticism, exclusivity, or absence—only leaving behind, between ourselves and ourselves, the briefest of flashes."[102] Here one sees why Paul de Man became so

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[100] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 508-10.

[101] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 74.

[102] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 74.

interested in Paulhan: *if* this study of misunderstanding was pushed further, one might arrive at something proto-deconstructive.[103]

Yet Paulhan stops before the edge of this cliff. He always hedges, reverses, or synthesizes such positions: he is too dialectical to remain in the extremes of aporia. The liberalism of the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic aligns with Paulhan's editorial role at the *NRF*, in which he sought to hear out the competing classical and radical voices—and resonates with his own politics. Neither Marxist nor right-wing, Paulhan developed a distinctive radical centrism, or at least a considered oscillation around the centre. Perhaps Paulhan could be the considered the first (or last) Girondin of "theory," a legacy often forgotten in the wake of the deconstructive Jacobins who followed. Paulhan's relentless focus on the cliché as a "place of non-understanding" (his term) or as pointing to an "inaccessible constellation" (Sartre's term) further distinguishes him from those prizing tropes, binaries, and other rhetorical-philosophical materials.

3.14 From Terror to Rhetoric

With Terror surveyed, we turn to Rhetoric. Modern literature, for Paulhan, effectively coincides with the eclipse of rhetorical institutions, with the defeat of what we could call rhetoric's "ancien régime." As Paulhan recalls, "Rhetoricians—at a time when there were books on rhetoric—used to explain obligingly …which rhetorical flowers one should use": they recommended specific means of expression.[104] And yet, "the literary arts these days are marked by refusal": they tell us which devices "are apt to frighten poetry away for good."[105] Early in *Flowers,* Paulhan notes a sign, at the entrance of the public park of Tarbes, warning "It is forbidden to enter the park carrying flowers." To this sign, Paulhan replies: "The same sign can

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[103] As Syrontinki notes, the final session of de Man's Yale graduate course, "Theories of Rhetoric from the 18th to the 20th century," concerned itself with Paulhan, whom de Man seems to have primarily treated and expressed admiration for in various unpublished materials (but he was mentioned as far back as de Man's "The dead-end of formalist criticism"—written originally, in French, during the 1950s). Syrotinksi argues for a strong influence on several fronts: particularly significant, I think, is that de Man "recognized Pauhlan's awareness of the epistemological consequences of 'pushing Rhetoric as far as it will go.'" Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity: Jean Paulhan's Interventions in Twentieth-Century French Intellectual History*, 12-15, 158 n6-7.

[104] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 9-10.

[105] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 10.

be found these days at the entrance to literature."[106] Though prohibited, the flowers of rhetoric had been kept alive as a scapegoat: "when all is said and done, rhetoric has never stopped existing, since Terror has also never stopped condemning it."[107] In recent memory, Rhetoric was left to "rot in its own chains," on account of its reputation, by even the "honest writer."[108] But the problem is an ancient one. For Paulhan, the rhetor who believes "true rhetoric begins with a feeling of disgust for rhetoric," like the philosopher who might say "philosophy begins with the hatred of philosophy," has already anticipated the coming of Terror. Indeed, "If Montaigne knows Cicero, Cicero is expecting Montaigne."[109] This anticipatory movement is characteristic of Paulhan. Like an orator engaged in *refutatio,* he looks ahead to the coming arguments and imagines how to refute them in advance.

The Flowers of Tarbes swings back and forth, considering Terror from the vantage of Rhetoric and vice versa. At first it would seem that the paradox of Rhetoric and Terror will result in devastating aporia—as if Paulhan had created a monumental version of the infamous sophistic text *dissoi logoi* and its unresolved quarrel between two dueling arguments. And yet, Paulhan slips in a modest solution towards the end, and argues for something he calls Maintenance: the pendulum should stop on the side of rhetoric, but it must be a rhetoric that is deeply aware and accepting of its own status.

Take courage and embrace the cliché, argues Paulhan. If the conventionalness of literature makes us uneasy, then "there is a way we can turn this unease to our advantage, which is to make theatre *a bit more* theatrical, the novel violently novelistic, and literature in general more literary."[110] Put concisely, "we simply need to *make* commonplace expressions *common.*"[111]

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[106] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 9.

[107] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 83.

[108] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 94.

[109] Paulhan, "Rhetoric Rises From Its Ashes," 52.

[110] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 91-92.

[111] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 92.

This extends to the micro and macroscopic levels: “literary rules and norms, rhetorical figures, dramatic unities, which are all subject to the same fortunes and obey the same laws.”[112] Once Rhetoricians take a stance on language, they are “thereafter free to talk about love or fear, slavery or freedom.”[113] In Paulhan’s final embrace of rhetoric, he likens the art to marriage: what appears to be an “intolerable and cold restraint” yields “the original joy of that first commitment,” latent within every subsequent moment.[114] Paulhan urges a degree of faith in language—but a measured faith sobered after studying Terror’s best arguments. Mirroring the sign at the book’s beginning that forbids entering the park *with* flowers, the conclusion erects a new sign, forbidding us to enter *without* flowers. Yet whereas the beginning merely referred to *le jardin*, the ending refers to *le jardin public*: the commonplaces can now be held in common.[115]

One might think that Paulhan’s “flowers” are superficial or supplemental to language; however, precisely the opposite is true. Aligned with many modern rhetoricians, and perhaps with Nietzsche, he envisions the primacy of “rhetorical thought”:

> It is not at all because rhetorical thought was abnormal and artificial that we remained powerless to represent it to ourselves, but rather because it was a little too normal and natural—I mean too close to nature and to those original thoughts of which our ideas and our feelings, as soon as we distinguish them, are no more than a distorted echo.[116]

In this vision, the rhetorical treatises that so interested Paulhan[117] stand as mere ladders reaching towards this higher vantage. Though “rules and commonplace expressions” tend towards a “dissociation of word and idea”—a point upon which Rhetoric and Terror agree—these only

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[112] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 92.

[113] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 89.

[114] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 93.

[115] Jean Paulhan, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou La Terreur dans les Lettres* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1941), 26,165.

[116] Paulhan, "Young Lady With Mirrors," 68-69.

[117] Such as Brunetto Latini’s treatise, which Paulhan translated. See Paulhan, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou La Terreur dans les Lettres*, 205-15.

gesture towards rhetorical cognition and cognitive rhetoric, realms between which Paulhan so playfully glides.[118] More than just literary language, Paulhan claims to dutifully seek "the everyday milieu where Terror and Rhetoric operate."[119] Here, each word uttered potentially overcommits the speaker: "*Master of the word you are about to say, slave of the word you have said.*"[120] This power struggle, for Paulhan, reaches out into manifold domains, making language exceedingly political, polemical, and impossible to ignore, but in a rather different way from Marxist thinking on the matter. Paulhan's idiosyncratic work, we should remember, was remarkably well isolated from contemporary philosophical and political dogmas. By this point, we now have a reasonable introduction to Paulhan's work and can turn to understanding its implications for structuralism and the uncertain remains of rhetoric.

3.15 On the eclipse of Sartre

The standard story of French intellectualism tells us, roughly speaking, that structuralism dethroned existentialism and phenomenology following the liberation of Paris. François Dosse, for instance, capably charts "the eclipse of a star": Jean-Paul Sartre was *the* "postwar intellectual tutelary figure"; and yet, "the law of tragedy requires a death before a new hero can come onstage."[121] This hero, for Dosse, was Lévi-Strauss, who will accuse Sartre of turning history into a mythic signifier; the nascent structuralism doomed Sartre because he had spent his career downplaying the order of words.

Though claiming to be "not entirely hostile to structuralism," Sartre detested the notion that "thought is only language, as if language itself were not *spoken.*"[122] This is simply the "opposite error" of an older era when "thought was defined as independent of language, as

[118] Paulhan, "Rhetoric Rises From Its Ashes," 48.

[119] Paulhan, "Rhetoric Rises From Its Ashes," 47.

[120] Paulhan, "Rhetoric Rises From Its Ashes," 47-48.

[121] François Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, trans. Deborah Glassman, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

[122] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism: An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," *Telos*, no. 9 (1971): 111.

something unknown and ineffable, existing before expression."[123] Dosse summarizes Sartre's ill fit: "As a philosopher of consciousness, of the subject, he considered linguistics to be a minor science and avoided it practically systematically."[124] However, Dosse never mentions Paulhan, who had warned that "Sartre is not on good terms with words" in 1950 in *La Table Ronde*, and who had indeed conceptualized and predicted the ruin of those who entirely retreated from the order of words.

Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966), according to Sartre, "replaces cinema with a magic lantern, movement by a succession of immobilities": Foucault allegedly banishes "historical reflection" through his appeals to structuralist and Tel Quelian thought.[125] Structures, for Sartre, must bow to history: "Man is the product of structure, but yet he goes beyond it"; structures are *given* to him, but only insofar as "he is engaged in history, engaged in such a way that he cannot fail to destroy them."[126] Whence came this belief? Sartre's enduring historicism had been forged in the factious interwar period, not merely as a response to the "events" of the depression and fascism, but also as an antidote to the great Terror in Letters that polarized so many writers.

Sartre, like Paulhan, acutely perceived the menace of Terror before the war, and responded to its crisis in "The Nationalization of Literature" (1945), "Introducing *Les Temps Modernes*" (1945), and *What is Literature?* (1947). By 1945, Sartre could claim "pride is no longer taken from separating thought from words," and thus "literature and rhetoric have been restored in their dignity and their powers": "one cannot even conceive how words might betray thought."[127] Yet Sartre, born in 1905, had been tossed around by the confluent currents of

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[123] Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism," 111.

[124] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 7-8.

[125] Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism," 110.

[126] Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism," 112.

[127] Sartre, "The Nationalization of Literature," 271-2.

Rhetoric and Terror during his most formative years, and he would look back upon them using Paulhan's dialectic.

Recalling his youth in *The Words* (1963), Sartre recognizes the duplicity and double temptations of Terror and Rhetoric. Meeting "idle heaps of whiteness" in Aurillac, the young Sartre split in two: "As a terrorist, I was concerned only with their being: I would establish it by means of language. As a rhetorician, I cared only for words: I would set up cathedrals of words beneath the blue eyes of the word sky."[128] Sartre-as-Rhetorician equated language with the world: "To exist was to have an official title somewhere on the infinite Tables of the Word," yet his misologist other had "launched a reign of terror."[129] In the unpublished manuscript, we find:

> One could say that my metamorphosis started with the transformation of my relationship with language. I have passed from terrorism to rhetoric: in my most mystical years, words were sacrificed to things; as an unbeliever, I returned to words, needing to know what speech meant. But it is hard: I apply myself, but before me, I sense the death of a dream, a joyous brutality, the perpetual temptation of terror. ~~For forty years, I have been thinking against myself.~~ [130]

The oscillations of this "perpetual temptation" had been formative not only for Sartre, but for a good part of his literary generation: "When we were still schoolboys," he recalls, "on the lycée benches or in the Sorbonne amphitheaters, ... we swung between terror and rhetoric, between literature-as-martyrdom and literature-as-profession."[131] To use Beaujour's phrase, this was the *tourniquet* of Terror and Rhetoric, the merry-go-round upon which so many writers had chaotically careened between the wars.[132]

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128 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 183.

129 Sartre, *The Words*, 182,84.

130 Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, 357.

131 Sartre, "What is Literature?," 173.

132 Beaujour's memorable term. Michel Beaujour, "Jean Paulhan et la terreur," in *Jean Paulhan : le souterrain*, ed. Jacques Bersani (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976), 126.

And yet Sartre claimed, so to speak, that the *tourniquet* had stopped, or could be stopped. After the liberation, the "scars, the traces of these varying temptations" of Rhetoric and Terror, are "all very far away from us now"; interwar literature, especially Bataille, "has a hard time of it these days."[133] In *What is Literature?*, Sartre proposed that *engagement*, in a sense, would be the pious refuge from these temptations, and thus broke from Paulhan. They agreed about the Rhetoric-Terror vicissitudes and vacillations but disagreed about the solutions, as well as the current state of affairs.

Sartre's view that language could be virtually forgotten was certainly not ubiquitous. As Camus wrote in 1944, "The most significant works of the 1940's are perhaps not the ones people think, but those that call language and expression once more into question. The criticism of Jean Paulhan, the new world created by Francis Ponge, and Parain's historical philosophy seem to me to answer this need."[134] In *Situations I* (1947), Sartre responds to the challenges of language in his essays on Georges Bataille, Francis Ponge, and Brice Parain:

> Bataille will define poetry as 'a holocaust of words' in the same way that Parain defined Bolshevism as 'a destruction of the word.' … [Blanchot] reveals the secret of this endeavour, when he explains that the writer must speak *in order to* say *nothing*. If words annihilate each other, if they crumble into dust, won't a silent reality at last emerge behind them? The hesitation evident here is significant; it is Parain's own hesitation: is this suddenly emergent reality waiting for us, unnamed, behind the words or is it, in fact, *our* creation?[135]

Parain, a *NRF* figure virtually unknown outside of France, proved central to the Sartre-Paulhan quarrel; Parain had been agonized by linguistic questions since his *Essai sur la misère humaine* (1934). This, according to Sartre, was Parain's plight: "He is suffering from word-sickness and

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[133] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 173.

[134] Albert Camus, "*On a Philosophy of Expression* by Brice Parain," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody (New York: Knopf, 1969), 240.

[135] Sartre, "A New Mystic," 236.

wants to be cured."[136] Though such afflictions were endemic to inter-war Terrorism, Parain proposed a distinctively theological solution.

3.16 Sartre Responds to Parain

According to Sartre, Parain had displaced, in effect, an existential question into an esoteric theological realm.[137] Parain's God, who reminds Sartre of Kafka and Kierkegaard,

> suffers from a thoroughly modern impotence. The messages he sends to men are scrambled—or, rather, they reach us the wrong way round. Starting out from the bosom of silence and from the unity of a thought governing matter, we receive them as a plurality of noises and it is matter that has subjugated the meanings in them to itself. This God doesn't speak to man, he suggests His silence to him by means of sounds and words.[138]

To counter this, Sartre shifts into his own territory: "Language is being-for-others. What need do we have of God?"; "if it is true that to speak is to act under the gaze of the Other, there is every danger that the famous problems of language will merely be a regional instance of the major ontological problem of the existence of others."[139] Parain had defined a kind of *homo loquens,* most unsatisfying for Sartre. This move, and its negation, characterized a host of writers following WWI.

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[136] Sartre, "There and Back," 299.

[137] He writes: "Situated within language, I feel of it that I am responsible for the world I did not create, promoted, whether one likes it or not, to the rank of collaborator with God. *Eritis sicut Dei*. [Ye shall be as Gods, Gn. 3:5] Such is the original sin agreed upon by God, and its consequence of salvation, which I cannot refuse. I am free of my earthly life because I can destroy it. In doing so, however, I affirm my freedom, that is to say an offering, and I retain language. But I cannot destroy language. It is the negation of death. In the past, I strove to do so, to free earthly life of its rule; however, this rule, which propels me, prevents me from destroying myself, and thus keeps me inside language. On both fronts I am rejected. Nowhere do I attain silence, only the regret of thought and language, which takes me back by this means. Silence is beyond us. Language is only the reasoning which brings us towards it." My trans. Brice Parain, *Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1942), 183-84.

[138] Sartre, "There and Back," 354.

[139] Sartre, "There and Back," 367.

The extent of the literary-linguistic agony after WWI, so motivating for Sartre and Paulhan, must be continually emphasized. Sartre chronicles an entire "crisis of language" between 1918-1930:

> Ponge and Parain had, from the outset, defined man by speech. They were caught like rats in a trap, because speech was now worthless [after 1918]. We can truly say in this case they were in despair: their position denied them the slightest hope. We know that Parain, haunted by a silence that constantly eluded him, went first to the extremes of terrorism before returning to a nuanced rhetoric. Ponge's path was more tortuous. His objection to language is, first and foremost, that it is the reflection of a social organization he abhors. … As a poet, he sees poetry as a general enterprise of *cleaning up* language, just as the revolutionary may, in a way, look to clean up society.[140]

A Terrorist "revolt" against language, a "profound distrust of discourse," indeed characterizes this period:

> In these magnificent post-war years [after WWI], there were many other young people in revolt against the human condition, and, in particular, against the language that expressed it. The obsession with intuitive knowledge or, in other words, with a knowledge without indeterminates, which, as we have seen, first motivated Parain, was initially a driving force of Surrealism, as was that profound distrust of discourse Paulhan has dubbed 'terrorism'. But since one has, in the end to speak, since, whatever one does, the word intercalates itself between the intuition and the object, our terrorists were ejected, like Parain himself, from silence, and throughout the postwar period, we can see an attempt to destroy words with words going on.[141]

In the "destroy[ing] words with words" we begin to discover the futility that Paulhan and Sartre identify in the Terrorist position: a true misologist should yield silence rather than loud complaints. As Sartre put it, "the surrealist … ends up doing a lot of painting and writing but he

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[140] Sartre, "Man and Things," 388.

[141] Sartre, "There and Back," 324-25.

never actually destroys anything."[142] On this, Paulhan and Sartre agree. Their contention would arise from Sartre's emergent strategy: neither the destruction of words nor silence, but avoiding the problems they pose altogether.

What is Literature? would elaborate Sartre's solution which hinges upon historical forces. "From 1930 on," according to Sartre, "the world depression, the coming of Nazism, and the events in China opened our eyes. ... The detachment which our predecessors were so fond of practising had become impossible. ... History flowed in upon us."[143] Camus, on the other hand, noted a new "inner discipline" emerging among writers in response to the surrealist tendency of "using the uncertainty of language and the world to justify every possible kind of liberty, " moving closer to Paulhan's position.[144] Sartre, however, would reject Surrealism in his own way, seeking a "concrete and liberated literature" following the "tangle of vipers" that constitutes the "terrorist complex."[145] Here Sartre saw three serpents:

> One might distinguish, first, so deep a disgust with the sign as such that it leads in all cases to preferring the thing signified to the word, the act to the statement, the word conceived as object to the word-signification, that is, in the last analysis, poetry to prose, spontaneous disorder to composition; second, an effort to make literature one expression among others of life, … and third, a crisis of the writer's moral conscience. … Without for a moment conceiving the idea of losing its formal autonomy, literature makes itself a negation of formalism and comes to raise the question of its essential content. Today we are beyond terrorism.[146]

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[142] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 154.

[143] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 175.

[144] Camus, "*On a Philosophy of Expression* by Brice Parain," 240.

[145] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 135.

[146] Sartre, "What is Literature?," 135.

And yet, this last sentence proves troublesome. Given that Sartre wanted to replace the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic with a return to history, one must ask whether this gesture is itself a new form of Terrorism since Sartre seemingly runs away from words.

3.17 Paulhan responds to Sartre

Paulhan's response in "Jean-Paul Sartre n'est pas en bons termes avec les mots" (1950) avoids the political-historical aspects of Sartre's program in favour of a more subtle, but perhaps harsher, critique. In three hundred pages of Sartre's literary criticism (*Situations* I), Paulhan finds no consideration of the *literary*: thus Sartre represents a "strange case of Terror."[147] Sartre cut himself off: "For not wanting to isolate words, it is ultimately thought that our philosopher finds himself isolating from both words and things."[148] For Paulhan, Sartre would tendentiously separate thoughts and words only when it suited him:

> When he defines Blanchot's *Aminadab* by a certain way of treating "the fantastic as a language," or Renard's *Journal* by "the systematic condensation, in a sentence-formula, of a certain sum of ideas," Sartre does stop invoking, even for a moment, this gap [*écart*] between words and things, which he denied just now. This gap supports him, and whoever removes it sees *Situations*, deprived of its skeleton, collapse altogether.[149]

Though Paulhan had once promoted Sartre's fiction, his whole critical paradigm was deemed "upside down" by 1950, long before the famous structuralists rebelled against Sartre in the mid-1960s. Sartre, however, would still use the distinction in *Saint Genet* (1952)—"he is against terror and for rhetoric because it is beautiful to sacrifice the most beautiful prose to poetry"—and even dissected Genet's prose rhetoric: "a funeral oration, the haughty confession of a man condemned to death."[150] As we have seen with both Sartre and Paulhan, the Rhetoric-Terror distinction proved invaluable in charting the dysfunctions of the literary field, although it could

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[147] My trans. Paulhan, "Petite préface à toute critique," 303.

[148] My trans. Paulhan, "Petite préface à toute critique," 303.

[149] My trans. Paulhan, "Petite préface à toute critique," 305.

[150] Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 505,04.

be turned against its users. Sartre's rhetorical analyses—ingenious and eloquent in themselves but rare because of his linguistic reticence—did not go unnoticed by Paulhan.

3.18 Legacies of Terror at *Tel Quel*

Thus far we have not gone much past 1950: what became of this strange and divisive breach in French letters? Sartre's demotion of the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic after the liberation of Paris would seem most premature during the reign of *Tel Quel*, which has often been associated with terrorism, although rarely in the explicit sense of Sartre and Paulhan. With *Tel Quel* we will perhaps see Rhetoric attach itself to an orientation towards language, and Terror attach itself to an orientation towards literature.

After its polite beginnings in 1960, the journal entered a more aggressive phase between the mid-60s and mid-70s with a "terroristic take on the materiality of literary practice."[151] Foucault described a "paradoxical act of critical terror" in *Les Aventures d'une jeune fille*[152] by Jean-Édern Hallier, who helped Sollers found *Tel Quel*, but then was excommunicated from the group. In an interview with *Tel Quel*, Barthes wondered whether "writing cannot avoid being a terrorist act (a terror that can turn against its author)."[153] *Tel Quel*'s various intellectual and interpersonal terrors, however, were joined by reflections on Terror in Paulhan's sense, and thus of course, on Rhetoric.

Rhetoric, the "cornerstone" of the *Tel Quel* project according to Dosse,[154] was not revived as a neoclassical gesture, but to instruct avant garde literature and structuralist speculation. Writing in *Tel Quel*, Gérard Genette, following Barthes, sought to study rhetoric not for its content, but for its formal examples:

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[151] Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, "Introduction," in *The Tel Quel Reader* ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998).

[152] My trans. Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: NRF Gallimard 1994). Page #.

[153] Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," 253. In its avant-garde and often paranoid mindset, the journal, as Dosse puts it, "gave free rein to a veritable terrorized terrorism."Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 277.

[154] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 277.

> For us, today, the oeuvre of rhetoric only offers, in its contents, a historical interest (although underestimated). The idea of resurrecting its code to apply to our literature would be a sterile anachronism. This is not to say that one cannot find all the figures of the former rhetoric in modern texts: but the system is out of tune, and the signifying function of the figures has disappeared with the network of relations articulating them in this system. The self-signifying function of Literature no longer passes through the code of figures, and modern literature has its own rhetoric, which is precisely (for the moment) the refusal of rhetoric, and which Paulhan has called Terror. What we can take from the old rhetoric is thus not its content but its example, its form, its paradoxical idea of Literature as an order founded on the ambiguity of signs, on the slight but steep space that opens between two words of the same meaning, two meanings of the same word: two languages of the same language.[155]

Echoing and citing Paulhan, Genette suggests that the refusal of rhetoric, characteristic of modern literature, does not truly exceed the rhetorical domain: perhaps a sort of bad faith on the part of the Terrorists. Sartre had already made a similar point in *Saint Genet*: "we know that terror, too, is a rhetoric"; "the law of rhetoric … is that one must lie in order to speak the truth."[156] Though Genette would go on to extensively interrogate the figurative codes of literature, Foucault surprisingly engages a kind of Rhetoric/Terror binary more than Genette and anyone else writing in *Tel Quel.* For Foucault, literature begins with the death of rhetoric, at least in the controversial definition of literature he offers us. We will soon see him retrace the steps of Paulhan.

3.19 Foucault, rhetoric, and literature

During the time of his *Tel Quel* engagements and *Raymond Roussel* (1963), Foucault became remarkably interested in the institution of rhetoric and the literary-linguistic ruptures after the Revolution that can only be described as Terrorist, although he does not cite Paulhan explicitly. Rather, Foucault finds himself fascinated by a Terrorist tradition stretching from Sade,

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[155] My trans. Gérard Genette, "La Rhétorique et l'espace du langage," *Tel Quel*, no. 11 (1964): 54.

[156] Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 518n.

roughly speaking, to Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski.[157] Indeed, "the works of Sade and the tales of terror" mark a "transformation" in writing; Foucault claims that "language now listens from the bottom of its burrow," referencing Kafka's "Der Bau," for a "disquieting sound."[158] Literature, in the sense that Foucault uses the word, effectively begins at the end of the eighteenth century, an era which witnessed the appearance of a language that "appropriates and consumes all others in its lightning flash."[159] And from this era, "literature, as it has existed ever since the disappearance of rhetoric … will be obligated to employ a unique language"; this new language must be "doubled" since, in the absence of rhetoric that "tell[s] us what beautiful language should be," one level of language must tell the story and the other must "make visible what literature is."[160] He goes on to claim:

> Beginning in the nineteenth century, we stopped listening for this originary speech and in its place could be heard the infinite murmur, the accumulation of words already spoken. Under these conditions, the work no longer has to be embodied in the figures of rhetoric that would serve as signs of a silent, absolute language. The work no longer has to speak other than as a language that repeats what has been said and which, through the force of repetition, simultaneously erases everything that has been said and brings it closer to itself, to take hold of the essence of literature.[161]

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[157] That said, he treats Klossowski somewhat differently: "since Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot … language owes its transgressive power to an inverse relation, that of an impure speech to a pure silence. … Klossowski knows these forms of transgression. But he modifies them in an initiative that is his alone: he treats his own language as a simulacrum." Foucault, "The Prose of Actaeon," 133.

In 1963 Foucault explains in *Critique:* "At the time of the great transformations contemporary to Sade, if literature reflected on itself and criticized itself in the mode of Rhetoric, it was because it relied, at a distance, on a withdrawn yet demanding Word (Truth and Law), which it had to restore to figural language (whence the indissociable opposition of Rhetoric and Hermeneutics)."Michel Foucault, "Distance, Aspect, Origin," in *The Tel Quel Reader* ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), 103.

[158] Foucault, "Language to Infinity," 94-95.

[159] Foucault, "Language to Infinity," 99.

[160] Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, 55-56.

[161] Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, 63.

Foucault concludes that “Mallarmé’s book,”[162] though a failure, “is the first book of literature,” and that “literature began the day something we might call the volume of the book was substituted for the space of rhetoric.”[163]

Foucault’s “Language to Infinity” (1963) muses on the relation between language, rhetoric, and the library of Borges. While never citing Paulhan, the essay describes something “paradoxical” and profoundly Terrorist in Sade’s languages:

> These languages which are constantly drawn out of themselves by the overwhelming, the unspeakable, by thrills, stupefaction, ecstasy, dumbness, pure violence, wordless gestures, and are calculated with the greatest economy and precision to produce effects (so that they make themselves as transparent as possible at this limit of language toward which they hurry, erasing themselves in their writing for the exclusive sovereignty of what they wish to say and lies outside of words)—these languages very strangely represent themselves in a slow, meticulous, and infinitely extended ceremony.[164]

Later on, Foucault explains that in novels of terror, “Language should acquire the thinness and absolute seriousness of the story; in making itself as gray as possible, it was required to transmit an event to its docile and terrorized reader.”[165] Such statements enact a Foucauldian fugue on Paulhan’s theme, and perhaps suggest that Paulhan lurks behind the scenes of *Tel Quel*’s simultaneous attractions to both ends of the Rhetoric-Terror spectrum. Foucault’s sense of rhetoric’s decline bears little resemblance to the trope-based accounts we saw in Chapter One,

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[162] Mallarmé and rhetoric’s end are important inflection points for Foucault. Cf. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 1, 447.

[163] Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, 63. This counterintuitive and improbable notion that literature was born at such a late date was one of the issues in a petty but amusing public quarrel between Foucault and George Steiner, who thought that “the literary” is roughly as old as rhetoric and poetics. Michel Foucault, "Polemic: Monstrosities in Criticism," *Diacritics* 1, no. 1 (57-60 1971).

[164] Foucault, "Language to Infinity," 95.

[165] Foucault, "Language to Infinity," 97.

and is ultimately rather Paulhanian since it seeks to grasp the dawn of a literary, quasi-Terrorist entity.[166]

3.20 Conclusion

The Sartre-Paulhan relationship oscillated just as Rhetoric and Terror swung back and forth. After a brief period of initial harmony, Sartre tried to escape the dynamic: as he confided to Camus, Paulhan got caught up in a "false paradox concealing dryly stated banalities": he amounted to "a con, mediocrity, and feeble pisser [*pisse-peu*]."[167] For a more mature Sartre, "language is merely existence in the presence of someone else."[168] And even at the very peak of structuralism in 1966, Sartre intransigently insisted that *le refus de l'histoire* characterized and inspired the younger generation, specifically Foucault. Linguists were the supreme heroes of 1966—not historians, and not alleged historicists such as Sartre. So then, was Paulhan happy? After all, the surge towards structuralism—towards Rhetoric—seemingly confirmed the dialectical reversal ensuing after peak Terror. Yet Paulhan's late texts in fact suggest his disappointment.[169] All of the linguists propping up structuralism had missed out on the "secret of language": their terminology did not speak to mysterious and magical reversals between the priority of words over thought, and thought over words, reversals epitomizing the Paulhanian method. He would die in October 1968, shortly after the events of May that would again affirm Sartre's insistence on History and partly restore his reputation. But neither thinker could ever be permanently vindicated, for the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic seems to inevitably swing back into the wrong polarity, whatever this might be.

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[166] "From the Romantic revolt against a discourse frozen in its own ritual pomp, to the Mallarméan discovery of the word in its impotent power … literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas [in the nineteenth century], and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity; it becomes detached from all the values that were able to keep it in general circulation during the Classical age (taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth), and creates within its own space everything that will ensure a ludic denial of them (the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible)." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 300.

[167] My trans. Oliver Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 528.

[168] Sartre, "There and Back," 366.

[169] Especially *Le don des langues* (1964, 1967)

Ultimately, at least two aspects of the Rhetoric and Terror dynamic emerged in this chapter that illuminate the strange tenacity of French rhetoric as an institution. First, the dynamic represents a distinctive "literary psychopathology" within the writer's mind; second, it represents a Hegelian historical instrument transcending the writer and capturing widespread literary-linguistic attitudes.

First, the psychopathology. Perhaps Blanchot best dramatizes this psychic distress in "Literature and the Right to Death," which mentions neither Paulhan nor Sartre but responds to the forces they all knew with intimacy and pain. The writer, claims Blanchot, constitutes "several people in one," querulous and irreconcilable. Thus "Several absolute and absolutely different commands" fetter "the" writer—the *writers* within the writer—who have been bound by "implacably hostile rules." These include the Terrorist's imperative ("You will keep silent, you will not know words") and the Rhetorician's ("Know nothing but words"). Blanchot names more rules, more "voice[s]" bewitching the mind from inside. He wonders: "Which voice should be listened to? But the writer must listen to them all! What confusion! … He must therefore oppose himself, deny himself even as he affirms himself, look for the deepness of night in the facility of day."[170] This anxious internal dialogue, so aptly expressed here, runs through *The Flowers of Tarbes* and even reappears within the recollections of *The Words*, long after climaxes of interwar literature. Before Blanchot's neurotic internal dialogue, Paulhan had likened Terror to a "neurosis"; Terror "can never quite prevent joy, or grandeur. It simply gives its victims a bad conscience, and that fear of being fooled which makes fools of us."[171] Paulhan and Sartre, however, prescribe different therapies for this psychopathology: Paulhan advocates for what we might now call "mindfulness," Sartre for focusing on something *outside* this mindset, a higher "other." The Rhetoric-Terror dynamic, in this sense, constitutes a kind of communicable anxiety, paranoia, or neurosis prevalent in French letters, transmitted forward to *Tel Quel* but failing to take hold universally.

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[170] Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," 312.

[171] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 83.

Second, Rhetoric-Terror dynamic constitutes a *historical* instrument, necessarily linked to revolutionary memory.[172] For better or worse, it imports the events of 1793-4, and to a lesser extent 1789, into the scene of "linguistic politics." This entails a truly remarkable reversal: from the vantage of Terror in language, structuralism would not be a "revolutionary" force as it is often called, but a reactionary one—even though the structuralists largely belonged to the political left.[173] One of rhetoric's strangest journeys as a French institution would be a long leftward shift away from the monarchy and the religious right towards republicanism, finally reaching those like Barthes who would sometimes reproach it for its aristocratic and bourgeois legacies.

After Barthes, and especially after Fumaroli, a thorough effort to historicize rhetoric in France will take place. Decades earlier, however, Paulhan had already made a key insight about the baffling decline of rhetoric over the long nineteenth century. As historians sometimes mention, this arguably represents the most inscrutable era for rhetoric despite its recency. Though Paulhan was far from a historian, he used the single event of the Terror to generate a dialectic for discourse, a dialectic with applicability to both past and present.[174] When the Renans of the nineteenth century relentlessly belittled rhetoric and continually proclaimed they were shunning words for things, Paulhan would posit that they actually imbued the order of words with an excessive power, through which it could eventually regain sovereignty. Until we

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[172] If literature "has been called the Reign of Terror," says Blanchot as he channels Hegel, "this is because its ideal is indeed that moment in history, that moment when 'life endures death and maintains itself in it' in order to gain from death the possibility of speaking and the truth of speech." Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," 321-22.

[173] And for some, structuralism is truly reactionary. Under the particular Marxist perspective of Sebastiano Timpanaro, for instance, structuralism "emerged from the anti-materialist (and, more or less indirectly, anti-Marxist) reaction of the late nineteenth century. … This denial or underestimation of historicity … paradoxically brings together bourgeois and revolutionaries in the West." Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Structuralism and Its Successors," *Contemporary Literature* 22, no. 4 (1981): 622.

[174] We could say the same thing about Paulhan's theory of discourse as Hyppolite said of Hegel. The French Revolution is: "not the final term but itself appears as a dialectic. The immediate realization of the general will culminates only in the Terror, and the terrestrial city which claims to have absorbed the City of God appears as a new avatar of spirit. The immediate interchange between specific will and universal will oscillates between anarchy and dictatorship and fails to come to a stop at a world, at a stable organization." Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 453.

reconcile Paulhan with the whole rhetorical superstructure, we should only call Rhetoric and Terror a dialectical heuristic. Yet since it compresses an enormity of historical details into a memorable polarity, it is indeed a good heuristic (even it fails to become a true law of literature, as Paulhan basically believed).

The swings of Terror to Rhetoric and back to Terror do not seem to have stopped in contemporary domains, from literary criticism to linguistic politics. Paulhan is strangely missing from the contemporary scene even though he anticipated and theorized the discord around speech codes that prevails today, as well as the "power of words" that parties tend to minimize or maximize for various aims: we now have Rhetorics and Terrors of the left *and* right. Though these may lack the *idée fixe* of 1793-94 and the imaginary of the guillotine, which makes Paulhan's work so suited to French discursive histories, the continuum of misology to philology, or logophobia to logophilia, is not easy to escape.

As we saw in the first two chapters, the purge of rhetoric failed to reach its conclusion and the extremes of this continuum. And as we will see in the final two chapters, Barthes will struggle with envisioning the "new rhetoric" when the "former rhetoric" shows faint but palpable signs of life. The history of rhetoric, and even the history of some of its fellow travelers, has often been conceived as a history of discrete states: a history of life and death, of ascents and descents. This too was my initial inclination, for it lends itself to lucid expression. Yet between the institutional declines and continuities, between Paulhan's Rhetoric and Terror, and between Barthes' "former" and "new" rhetorics, we seem to find a dialectical tendency that thwarts the discrete state from fully manifesting itself, pulling back from the asymptote and never quite reaching its stated ambitions. In the end we can indeed say with Paulhan: "we have pushed Terror to its limit and discovered Rhetoric."[175]

[175] Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 154.

4 Barthes Between Rhetoric and Structuralism

"The *Doxa* is current opinion, meaning repeated *as if nothing had happened.* It is Medusa, who petrifies those whose look at her."—Roland Barthes[1]

Having broadened weak survival into the manifold domains of the first three chapters, we must ultimately return to one of our points of departure: the rapprochement between rhetoric and the theoretical-linguistic terrain of structuralism. Even someone as anti-theoretical as Fumaroli credits this encounter for renewing interest in rhetoric (through it featured too much bricolage for his tastes). I will be emphasizing that Barthes found rhetoric and embraced it as "theory" *before* structuralism, before identifying with Saussure. Barthes, I will argue, never really left rhetoric behind, nor was he accepted by the "high structuralists": he never practiced a fully rigorous structuralism consistent between texts. Before getting to this argument about the early Barthes, however, it would be wise to sketch out the Parisian rhe-structuralism of the 1960s and early 1970s, when structuralism excitedly perceives its commonalities with rhetoric, and hastily digs through its history. I will approach this through rhe-structuralism's theoretical foci, as well as its journals. This will motivate a return to Barthes' early, pre-structuralist work, and a revisionist reading of his career.

4.1 Rhe-structuralism in review

What perhaps underwrites "rhe-structuralism" is not the sign, but as it were, the figure of the figure. In addition to the figure as some kind of vague signifying motif, thought converged on the rhetorical and otherwise literary figures dear to Genette's work (*Figures* vol. I-V), promoted by his republications of classic manuals (eg. Fontanier's *Les Figures du discours*). Despite rhetoric's marginal position in Deleuze's "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" (1973) and his work in general, he admitted "structuralism is riddled with reflections on rhetoric, metaphor

[1] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 122.

and metonymy, for these figures themselves imply structural displacements which must account for both the literal and the figurative."[2] Lyotard's *thèse de doctorat d'état—Discourse, figure* (1971)—more strongly reacted to an ever-present psychoanalytic discourse on figure. Brushing up against the figural theories of Todorov and Jean Cohen among others, Lyotard asked "how can figural discourse—invested by the forms of desire, offering the illusion of fulfilment—perform the function of truth?"[3] A psychoanalytic fugue on old rhetorical themes emerged: Émile Benveniste had famously written that "the unconscious uses a veritable 'rhetoric' which, like style, has its 'figures'";[4] Lacan cited Quintilian's *figurae sententiarum* to ask, "Can one really see these as mere figures of speech when it is the figures themselves which are the active principle of the rhetoric of the discourse which the patient in fact utters?"[5] From psychoanalysis to new poetics, figures were invested with immense import.

The polysemy of "figure" imbued it with a lucrative suppleness for critics or philosophers ranging over massive aesthetic and linguistic terrain: they could treat the figure similarly to a Saussurean sign, specify a new meaning, or leave its connotations adrift in the discursive void. Here, Barthes was master. Whereas he dubbed Sade a "great rhetorician of erotic figures," he claimed the lover's discourse "exists only in outbursts of language, which occur at the whim of trivial, of aleatory circumstances. These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*. The word is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation."[6] In his sense here, "the figure is outlined (like a sign) and memorable (like an image or a tale)."[7] Furthermore, Barthes notes that Genette blew open the scope of figures to

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[2] Giles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, ed. David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 173.

[3] Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 277.

[4] Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 75.

[5] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 433.

[6] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin, 1990), 3.

[7] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 4.

include micro and macroscopic textual details, even narrative features.[8] At its worst, the figure thus became a pseudo-sign and weasel word, and at its best, an inkblot for invention and creative vehicle. Even if we ignore the sense of "figure" that means "personage," there were few notable thinkers who did not at some point rely on the play within this word. Vaguely semiotic and motivic yet flexible and gestural, *figure* became a cardinal term.

4.2 The resurgent interest in rhetoric in general

But there was also broader, more institutional passion for rhetoric, a passion suspiciously coinciding with the peak of structuralism. The sixth section of EPHE constitutes one of the great focal points, where Barthes taught two successive rhetoric seminars during 1964-66, attended by Gérard Genette, Tvzetan Todorov, Phillipe Sollers, George Perec, Severo Sarduy, and Michel Butor.[9] Whereas the first seminar of 1964-65 considered classical rhetoric, the second seminar of 1965-66 related rhetoric to contemporary literature (Flaubert, Mallarmé, Valéry, Proust, Kafka, Sartre, Butor, and Blanchot) and yielded Barthes' unpublished "Valéry and rhetoric" (now in *Album*). In early 1967, Barthes' teaching turned to "Recherches sur le discours de l'Histoire" after finishing with the institutional aspect of rhetoric, continuing his linguistic-rhetorical program at a discursive level superior to the sentence in hopes of understanding historical writing.[10]

In these years, representing structuralism's apogee, excited pronouncements about rhetoric abound in the works of Barthes and the *séminaristes*. Between 1964-1967, these occur frequently in his interviews and texts, including "Rhetoric of the Image," "Elements of Semiology," "Structural Classification of Rhetorical Figures," "Rhetorical Analysis," and "Structural Analysis of Narrative." Rhetoric also hid in his least popular monograph, *The Fashion System (*1967), whose rhetorical content was transformed into "Showing How Rhetoric Works" (1969). Though Barthes' literary applications of the art were primarily modern, in 1965 he discussed Dante with François Wahl for *France-Culture*, lamenting the reduction of rhetoric

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[8] Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, 172.

[9] Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 180.

[10] Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Eric Marty, 5 vols., vol. 2, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 1293-94.

to figuration and adornment: true rhetoric concerns the “total organization of the spoken thing of discourse.”[11] In appropriately epideictic style, Barthes’ lecture at the famed Johns Hopkins conference in October 1966 both starts and ends with appraising the multi-millennial rhetorical tradition;[12] Todorov, who accompanied Barthes to Baltimore, was almost equally preoccupied with rhetoric and concluded his review of *The Fashion System* by optimistically positioning semiology as a “distant echo of this classical discipline that had attempted an initial organization of speeches, Rhetoric.”[13]

EPHE’s return to rhetoric culminated in the 1970 issue of its journal *Communications*: “Recherches rhétoriques.” Front and center lay Barthes’ *aide-mémoire* on the old or “former” system of rhetoric that, for Barthes, represented the constitutive, transhistorical feature of the West. Here he expanded upon his lecture notes from 1964-65, overtly producing a structuralist understanding of rhetoric’s synchronic and diachronic domains—and more covertly, a commentary on structuralism itself. In its very title, his course “La rhétorique : esquisse historique et structurale” (1970-71) at the University of Geneva highlighted the question of rhetoric’s “events” versus its “structure.” The concomitant return of rhetoric and triumph of structuralism between about 1964-1970, so poorly documented today, indeed represents *l’avenir de la rhétorique* that Barthes first spoke of in the 1940s—but with a massive structuralist twist that the young Barthes, ignorant of Saussure, could not have imagined. Looking back at rhetoric’s fashionable rise in 1960s, Aron Kibédi Varga claimed that “we talk of it much but know of it little.”[14] In this scene, rhetoric was not a massive historical tradition intrinsically worthy of exhaustingly patient or pedantic investigation, but a kind of suggestive means of invention. The discipline of *topoi* itself became a *topos* for French thought.

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[11] My trans. Roland Barthes and François Wahl, "Dante et la rhétorique," (France: France Culture, September 26 1965). https://youtu.be/xDWD15et5Hw.

[12] Cf. Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 294.

[13] My trans. Tzvetan Todorov, "De la sémiologie à la rhétorique," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 22, no. 6 (1967): 1327.

[14] My trans. A. Kibedi Varga, *Rhétorique et littérature : études de structures classiques* (Paris: Librarie Marcel Didier, 1970), 19.

4.3 Journals

The moment of rhe-structuralism can be readily introduced through its journals. *Tel Quel* was founded in 1960, *Communications* in 1961, and *Poétique* in 1970: the three publications provide a preliminary approximation of rhe-structuralism in France, perhaps also adding in the much older *Critique* (1946). Whereas *Critique* had been interdisciplinary and socially flexible, following Bataille's vision as its founder, *Tel Quel* witnessed "papism, excommunication, tribunals"; basically, it was an intellectual clique.[15]

The less well-known journal *Communications*, vastly more academic and less polemical than *Tel Quel*, came from the new *Centre d'études de communication de masse* (C.E.C.MAS) at the sixth section of EPHE.[16] Barthes wrote a brief manifesto for C.E.C.MAS in 1961: consciously inspired by the American expression "mass media,"[17] it claimed to be the first French venue for studying mass communication in a variety of sociological, economic, and ideological dimensions, and over the 1960s proved to be a most fertile host for combining rhetoric and semiology. A few issues of *Communications* bear mention: "Recherches sémiologiques" (1964) presented Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* and "Rhetoric of the image" for the first time, plus Todorov's debut piece in Paris; "The Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1966) successfully moved away from poetic language to narratology; "Recherches sémiologiques: le vraisemblable" (1968) featured Barthes, Genette, Kristeva, and Todorov (who positioned Corax, the apocryphal progenitor of rhetoric, as the first thinker of the *vraisemblable*). Umberto Eco contributed several pieces to the journal. This is only to highlight a few key names known to North Americans; untranslated thinkers such as Claude Bremond held *Communications* together and built it into a still-enduring force.

After *Tel Quel*'s somewhat unassuming start, it launched its famously volatile and byzantine plots into French intellectual life. Flipping through its first issues of 1960—spring,

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[15] Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, 133. Deleuze quoted in Johannes Angermuller, *Why there is no poststructuralism in France: the making of an intellectual generation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 27.

[16] Editorial committee: Barthes, Claude Bremond, Violette and Edgar Morin, and Georges Friedmann (also *directeur* of C.E.C.MAS).

[17] Roland Barthes, "Le centre d'études des communications de masse : Le C.E.C.MAS," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 16, no. 5 (1961): 991.

summer, and fall—one is amazed to find translations of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and John Donne, so genteel compared to the increasingly theoretical and rhetorically violent texts that would soon follow. Genette timidly mentioned rhetoric in "Une poétique 'structurale'?" (1961), quickly followed by Foucault's aggressive "Language to Infinity" (1963), which somehow seems tame to compared to Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968). The obviously polemical, political, and pugnacious efforts of *Tel Quel*—a performed, applied rhetoric—enjoyed a symbiotic relation to its theoretical discourses on writing and poetics. As Dosse puts it: "Tel Quel was interdisciplinary from the start …The cornerstone of the project was rhetoric, a particular realm of knowledge made popular by structuralism"; *Tel Quel* would shake up the literary scene via the "new stylistics."[18] Writing in *Tel Quel* in 1964*,* Genette claimed that a "code of literary connotations" represented rhetoric's true "ambition," making no mention of its much broader classical functions; citing Paulhan, he linked the modernity of literature to the terrorist rejection of rhetoric.[19]

During the 1960s, Barthes had one foot in *Communications*—and the other in *Tel Quel.* After *Tel Quel* witnessed a streak of formalism from about 1962-1967, Barthes drew closer to Sollers, Kristeva, and the journal's board. According to Bremond, who had edited and written for *Communications* with Barthes, this "provoked a break between people like Genette, Todorov, and me, on the one hand, and *Tel Quel,* on the other."[20] Still, a rhetorical bond united them: by 1970, Bremond confidently touted rhetoric as an "essential dimension" of signification, no longer an "anachronism" or "struggle of the avant-garde" in France; the figures (and thus *elocutio*), he admitted, would be the focus of this rhetorical revival; it was uncertain whether *inventio*, *dispositio*, *memoria*, and *actio* soon return.[21] Paulhan had in fact linked the fortunes of literature directly to *inventio* three decades earlier in his discourse on cliché and originality, but this was not widely touted. Bremond correctly understood the tendentiousness of this

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[18] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 277.

[19] My trans. Genette, "La Rhétorique et l'espace du langage," 54.

[20] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 278.

[21] My trans. Michèle Lacoste, "Choix bibliographique," *Communications*, no. 16 (1970): 1-2.

appropriation; it would take years to balance out the neglected canons (and *memoria* and *actio* struggle for recognition even among the most judicious rhetoricians).

Poétique, founded by Cixous, Genette, and Todorov in 1970, represents the most essential and deliberate manifestation of rhe-structuralism, capping off almost a decade of meditations on poetics for Genette. Its first issue noted a "reawakening of theoretical consciousness and activity" after a long "slumber" following the "abolition of classical rhetoric" and the related "quasi-monopoly" of literary history.[22] Dosse characterizes *Poétique* as "a warhorse against psychologizing theory," grounded in the "structuralist and formalist orthodoxy" and diverging from Barthes at this time because of his increasing commitment to the "textual ideology" of *Tel Quel.*[23] The first ever article in *Poétique*, however, was a Barthes piece on the theme of beginnings. Dosse's characterization of *Poétique* is largely correct, but it omits a very fertile angle of thought derived from Nietzsche's rhetoric course, published there in 1971, that violently propelled metaphor into "the text of philosophy" (Derrida's phrase from "White Mythology" in the same issue).[24] Just like *Tel Quel*, *Poétique* issued from Seuil, a publishing powerhouse that became crucial to structuralism and often bested the great Gallimard, as well as Flammarion.

Pushing into social-political territory unknown to *Poétique*'s formalism, the journal *Literature* sprang up in 1971 at "the structuralist university": Vincennes (Paris VIII). As Henri Mitterand, a Zola specialist, described the journal team: "We had a common core that was vaguely Marxist and sociological, and some were rhetoricians impassioned by the study of forms and ideology. Our two masters were Benveniste and Althusser."[25] Under headings such as

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[22]My trans. "Présentation," *Poétique* no. 1 (1970).

[23] François Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, trans. Deborah Glassman, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 115.

[24] An important milestone. In early 1970, a Strasbourg seminar focusing on Nietzsche's rhetoric propelled further lines of thought thanks to the Groupe de recherches sur les théories du signe et du texte. Derrida, Lyotard, Jean-Luc Nancy, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Genette (Lacoue-Labarthe's former teacher) attended, forging and strengthening interconnections. This seminar yielded the "Rhétorique et philosophie" issue of *Poétique* in early 1971, with Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's centerpiece translation of Nietzsche's rhetoric, plus Derrida's "White Mythology," Sarah Kofman's "Nietzsche and Metaphor," and Lacoue-Labarthe's "The Detour" (i.e. Nietzsche supposedly took a detour through rhetoric). At Vincennes, Lyotard would go on to teach Nietzsche and the sophists, eventually interrogating them more thoroughly than all of his strictly philosophical peers.

[25] Quoted in Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 2, 156.

"Lexique, rhétorique et idéologie," *Literature* opened up properly rhetorical (i.e. effect-oriented) terrain, although its primary object was still literature. Here, scholars such as Pierre Kuentz began to firm up relations between rhetoric and linguistics that had been hastily thrown together in the 1960s. Moving into the 1970s and beyond, a variety of manifestations of rhe-structuralism emerged that rarely captivated Anglophone attention. Groupe μ (mu for metaphor), the collective of six Belgian scholars at University of Liège, created the hyper-semiotic *Rhétorique Générale* (1970) and later moved into studies of visual rhetoric. The Paris School of Semiotics, centred around Greimas and vastly more technical than Barthes, noted the convergences and divergences between rhetoric and semiotics (eg. Jacques Fontanille, Joseph Courtés).[26] These groups were very much centered around a linguistics-literature-communication axis. On the other hand, a certain rhetoric-philosophy-classics axis spawned a confrontation between philosophy and its "others." Foucault, for instance, drew inspiration from Marcel Detienne's *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (1967) and a powerful classics milieu.[27] A philosophical dialogue on sophists (i.e. "masters of truth") emerged, running through Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard all the way up to Badiou and Cassin.

4.4 Rhetoric before structuralism

I am far from the first to note the encounter between rhetoric and structuralism. On Dosse's account, the "structuralist moment" witnessed a revival of rhetoric's ancient "critical" and "poetic" functions, i.e. the descriptive/analytic and productive/performative ones.[28] What we

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[26] Joseph Courtés, "Rhétorique et sémiotique : De quelques divergences et convergences," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 52, no. 3-4 (1978).

[27] For his debt to classicists, see Charles H. Stocking, "Hesiod in Paris: Justice, Truth, and Power Between Past and Present," *Arethusa* 50, no. 3 (2017).

Foucault deploys the figure of the sophist in two texts on Deleuze: "Ariane s'est pendue" (1969) and "Theatrum Philosophicum" (1970). Foucault became, in his own words, "radically on the side of the sophists": they had succeeded in creating a strategic theory and practice of discourse. The problem was now to "study discourse, even the discourse of truth, as rhetorical procedure," in short, "to 'rhetorize' philosophy." My trans. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 1, 632,34.

Rhetoric would be increasingly linked to parrhesia in Foucault's late work, which would take up contested terrain between philosophy, politics, and rhetoric. See Geoffrey Bennington, "The Truth About Parrhesia: Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Politics in Late Foucault," in *Foucault/Derrida Fifty Years Later*, ed. Penelope Deutscher Olivia Custer, and Samir Haddad (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[28] My trans. François Dosse, "Oxymore, le soleil noir du structuralisme," *EspacesTemps* 47-48 (1991): 140.

will see with Barthes, however, is not a fusion of equals, but perhaps a rhetorical base with structuralist toppings. The history I have just reviewed represents an important consummation point in the desire for rhetoric, but it is far from its origins.

If Barthes is indeed the "nurturing mother figure" of French structuralism (Dosse's phrasing), then totally predicating the postwar "spell of language" upon linguistics seems unwise. Rather, this spell depends upon the broad cultural-pedagogical-institutional remnants of rhetoric (Chapter One and Two), upon the exhaustion of Terror in Paulhan's sense (Chapter Three), and finally, upon the powerful theoretical apparatus of recent linguistics and its relation to rhetoric under Barthes (Chapter Four). The concept-history approach to structuralism, as important, practical, and academically standard as it may be, gives us a truly stunted sense of rhetoric *if* isolated from pedagogic, political, religious, and aesthetic realms. Introducing structuralism, however, is absolutely vital in grasping why Paulhan "failed" and Barthes "succeeded" in their rhetorical revivals: had Paulhan valued, promoted, and cited linguists as much as Barthes, a rather different scene could have played out.

One of the arguments threading through this dissertation asserts that rhetoric offered a kind of structuralism-before-structuralism; scholars have been overly taken in by structuralism's marketing campaign which announced its newness, its rupture, and its credentials derived from linguistics. We saw this in the first and second chapter: the elite core of rhetorical superstructure never ceased to promote a skill set and value system oriented towards linguistic excellence and highly formal reading skills (despite rhetoric's increasing disrepute). And we saw this again in the third chapter: Terror distains Rhetoric, but if it pushes too hard, becomes shackled to the order of words that it seeks to escape. Thus Rhetoric is here to stay (and in Paulhan's view, a mild, thoughtful Rhetoric is preferable to Terror). From the more materialist vantage of Chapters One and Two, and the more idealist vantage of Chapter Three, we confirm that rhetoric's weak survival tends to be narrated as a death for a variety of ideological, political, and aesthetic reasons, coinciding with an exaggeration of the entities that allegedly replaced or succeeded rhetoric. The institution feigns death—like a rabbit engaging in thanatosis—and once again lopes off when the coast is clear.

I will now introduce a new reading of Barthes by considering three major moments in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s; each of these casts doubt upon whether he ever entirely "converted" to structuralism from his original rhetoric-heavy paradigm. Then I will briefly contrast Barthes' hybridized rhe-structuralism with the "structuralism for purists" associated with Dumézil, Benveniste, and Lévi-Strauss. To begin this reassessment, we must note that Barthes knew almost nothing of linguistics in the 1940s. In 1949, Barthes arrived in Alexandria and soon thereafter met Greimas, who decisively pushed Barthes to read Saussure, Hjelmslev, and linguistics in general.[29] Yet up to that point, the only apparent linguistic encounter of the 1940s was when Barthes took the term "degree zero" from Viggo Brøndal circa 1947.[30] In the mid-1940s one enters a fascinating alternate theoretical universe free of Saussure, especially in Barthes' "The Future of Rhetoric" of 1946 (unpublished until 2017). This text represents the "smoking gun" of a rhetorical Barthes, a manifesto for why rhetoric should *have* a future. Long before Barthes spars with the legacy of Lanson as upheld by Raymond Picard, "The Future of Rhetoric" argues for an atavistic form of freewheeling *nouvelle critique* distancing itself from Lanson's historical insistence upon "*influence, milieu,* [and] *rapprochement.*"[31] Though vague and promissory, even by Barthes standards, this text advances a remarkable idea: rhetoric as a basis for "theory," as a science—in the relaxed French sense—of the human sciences.

4.5 Idiosyncrasies of Barthes

The version of Barthes I present here—the "rhetorical Barthes"—does not aim to be authoritative, but rejects three common images of his work. Firstly, the Anglophone belief that he was a "cultural theorist" with a view from nowhere, a thinker who can be parachuted into any context without regard for his formative influences. Secondly, the pervasive narrative that Barthes was a *typical* or representative structuralist: as we will see, he is so atypical as to make the structuralist label deeply suspect. Thirdly, a tidy "poststructuralist" Barthes: as a partial consequence of Barthes' messy relationship to structuralism, it becomes difficult to imagine

[29] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 162-63.

[30] Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," 258.

[31] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 106.

Barthes going beyond ("post") a movement that never entirely accepted him, whose method he could never practice in an entirely convincing way. The rhetorical Barthes does not aspire to capture every work, but it does aspire to coherency (three rough critical schools attempt to capture a coherent Barthes, a divided Barthes, and a multiple Barthes).[32] Despite Barthes' coherent fascination with rhetoric, however, he was racked by an uncertainty about the *institution* of rhetoric—how to inherit or reject it— which emerges in the next chapter.

Whereas highlighting a "rhetorical" Barthes helps dispel these faulty images common among Barthes readers, a different misunderstanding often emerges among the relatively few scholars interested in his rhetoric. Whereas it is easy to assume the structuralist paradigm of the 1960s drew Barthes *back* to rhetoric—and this is the impression generated by Barthes' work between 1960-1980—I argue that a rhetorical paradigm *underlies and predates* a structuralist paradigm, resulting in a strange hybrid or palimpsest effect. In other words, Barthes often took a kind of rhetorical criticism and superimposed linguistic concepts and rationalizations on top of it, giving him great breadth at expense of rigour. On the tone hand, linguists often considered him a "bad structuralist"; on the other, flexible rhetorical models powered his thought. These models reward the critic for certain intuitive leaps, avoiding the agonizingly slow methodological setup that Barthes attempts, for instance, in *The Fashion System*. But this ungainly work is not what we remember of him. Some of his most celebrated works, in my estimation, combine a rather impressionistic linguistics with a somewhat traditional (and then-forgotten, and therefore fresh) rhetorical impetus.

We will consider three important eras in his career to observe how this imperfect yet ingenious palimpsest of "theory" amassed its sheets. First, the 1940s, when Barthes knew nothing of structuralism but was immersed in classics and rhetoric. Second, the *Mythologies* era of the 1950s: the appended essay "Myth Today" aggressively embraced Saussure and is sometimes seen as a threshold to the mature, more theoretical Barthes. Third, the mid-1960s, when Barthes worked hardest to promote structuralism in "The Structuralist Activity" (1963) and other pieces. This peak of his structuralist passion coincided with his rhetoric seminars and related explorations. Moving between these three eras (marked in the coming section titles), we

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[32] Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel, *De Barthes à Balzac* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 17.

will witness Barthes' increasing adoption of modern linguistic concepts—which *supplement*, but do not displace, his older rhetorical models. Then, Barthes' sometimes dubious status as structuralist will be assessed from the perspective of his critics and the better-legitimated structuralists and linguists in Paris. This will help free Barthes from the *doxa* that burdens him, and thus allow the next chapter to pursue his rhetoric more generously**.** This chapter pays particular attention to Paul Valéry, a poet and critic who died in 1945 before French structuralism took off, but guided Barthes towards a rehabilitation of rhetoric.

Ultimately, I agree with Dosse that Barthes represents a "subtle and supple incarnation" of structuralism, "wrought of moods rather than of rigor."[33] What must be added to Dosse's account, and countless narratives of Barthes' (pseudo) structuralism, is that his suppleness as thinker and writer owes in large part to his rhetorical and classical training—which had its *own* strictness and discipline, yet lacks rigor according to the standards of linguists, who tended to be Barthes' most ruthless critics. Amicable readers tend to trust Barthes on the methods he professes to use—such as semiotics—and this conceals often unacknowledged techniques of rhetorical provenance such as *topoi*, as we will see in the next chapter.

A few years after the curious vision of "The Future of Rhetoric" (1946), Barthes encountered Saussure and began his canonized career as we know it. Yet we must not forget that rhetoric was his first, and could have been his last, theoretical vehicle for literature and culture, and came back decisively in his teaching and thought from 1964 onwards. What emerged in practice, perhaps, was a rhetorical toolkit augmented with Saussure—and vying against Saussure—tainting his supposed purity. When other linguists were later stitched into Barthes' pied linguistic theories—Hjelmselv, and more dramatically, Benveniste—Barthes could always return to the stability of classical rhetoric when the contemporary scene became too muddled. He never attained a great distance, in my estimation, from what he famously called the "monumental history" of rhetoric, a history so vast and "virtually immortal" that it has "digested regimes, religions, [and] civilizations" and is indeed commensurate with two and half millennia of the "historical and geographical West."[34]

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[33] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 71.

[34] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

4.6 The young Barthes and "The Future of Rhetoric" (1940s)

More than any other text, "The Future of Rhetoric" (1946)—unpublished until 2017—demands we re-evaluate Barthes' career and the standard story of how structuralism invited a rhetorical revival. Here Barthes expounds the literary applications of rhetoric as a "science of written language" before he knew anything of Saussure, semiotics, or structural linguistics.[35] Barthes' apology for rhetoric directly engages the pedagogical world we explored in Chapter Two. The methods of Lanson, promoting the historical, philological study of literature, had swept into the French education system and became particularly associated with the Sorbonne. Having recently traversed this system, Barthes writes**:**

> Within the framework of Lansonism … the traditional distinction between *le fond* and *la forme*—content and form—blossomed. … Form is always the poor cousin; it prompts only a short, vague commentary, a kind of false window for symmetry. Philology, which nevertheless has the merit of rigor and of historic spirit, restricts itself to the chronology of forms and does not try to penetrate the verbal automatisms belonging to a writer.[36]

In this early manifesto, Barthes seeks to part ways with the "scientific spirit" of Gustave Lanson's historical method: its claim of scientificity represents its "most debatable feature," "authoriz[ing] … the triumph of the letter over the spirit, the secondary over the essential, collation over organized explanation."[37] Barthes wanted to retain Lanson's approach as an "available" option, but fundamentally, it was "unsatisf[ying]" and risks a "tyranny of *influence, milieu, rapprochement.*"[38] With great confidence, and perhaps a deficiency of details, Barthes decrees, "There will be no materialist history of literature so long as literature is not restored to

[35] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 107.

[36] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 106.

[37] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 103.

[38] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 103, 06.

the practice of a language."[39] Though other discontents of Lansonism are not hard to find—Sartre for instance—Barthes was almost uniquely certain rhetoric would act as remedy.

"The Future of Rhetoric" chronologically precedes the early sketches of *Writing Degree Zero,* and certain conceptual seeds for the later work can be readily found (for instance, the "rhetorical structures of the classical language" as they relate to social class and History with a capital 'H').[40] Barthes' essay of 1946, however, perhaps best foreshadows the 1960s polemical scene around *Nouvelle Critique.* Against the backdrop of a quasi-scientific and constraining Lansonism, Barthes positions rhetoric, in 1946, as a *more* scientific and yet more liberated "future": "the future of criticism, an open, nondogmatic future, can only exist where the mechanisms of language, and thus of thought, will be elucidated in accordance with a gradual synthesis of the other sciences."[41] Such statements surprise us today because they upset the usual narrative that Saussure's French legacy was chiefly responsible for this thrust towards the "mechanisms of language." Any subsequent references to the "science of semiology" Barthes makes, any claims about the various sciences and formalisms of literature derived from linguistics, can be revaluated in light of statements such as these emerging several years before his crucial encounter with Saussure:

> Written thought must be reduced to an order of verbal processes, that is to say, to rhetoric. It is, in fact, to a resurrection of rhetoric that we will sooner or later be led, not, of course, as the art of persuasion through the means of formulas and formal classifications, but very much as the science of written language, taking into account all that experimental psychology will have to teach us about the acquisition of verbal habits, the conditioning of speech, the construction, conclusion, and use of word groups, all of which, under the name of expression or even themes, we will learn to recognize and appreciate their importance.[42]

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[39] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 107.

[40] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 110-11.

[41] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 107.

[42] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 107.

Here Barthes looks to the linguistic-psychological extremes of rhetoric, rather than to its classical centre of persuasion, for renewal (central to Aristotle, at least). The movement is bidirectional: forward to "experimental psychology" and a linguistic paradigm, and yet backwards, about half a century, to before the reign of Lansonism.

The purpose, in a word, was "freedom." Barthes' final two paragraphs proclaim a strange and grandiose manifesto:

> So, why this effort, why revive rhetoric, why prolong the life of literary criticism at all? Well, simply for the sake of understanding. To understand is to create a kind of freedom, and that aim is not immaterial. The most subjective disciplines arising from the cultural practices and the art of a limited society, like aesthetics, psychology, or literary criticism, will eventually become part of the gradual synthesis of the sciences; and it is necessary for that to happen. At that time, exact knowledge of these matters will in itself create a kind of freedom, if it is true that freedom is born the day one recognizes a necessity. Thus we have the right to work toward a recognition of the necessity of poetics.
>
> It would be ridiculous to prescribe or predict what freedom would produce in this domain. It is enough to know that it is on the level of language, of social language, that the fate of Belles Lettres will be played out in order to bring light into that taboo world of verbal creation, even if this must contribute to the death of all that we would now call literature.[43]

Though we are always told that the science of signs will be the triumphant liberator, the "taboo world of verbal creation," or rhetoric, represents a wellspring of Barthesean thought that rarely failed to inspire him, despite his eventual distrust for rhetoric's conservatisms. The rhetorical "science of written language" that he seeks and admires would eventually taint his purity as a classical structuralist (a Greimas or a Martinet). Out of the many classic works of Barthes that should be revaluated in light of "The Future of Rhetoric," *Criticism and Truth* ranks highly: two decades before Barthes defended himself against the Lanson-Picard-Sorbonne axis in *Criticism and Truth*, he already plotted against it here in 1946. Given that Barthes fulfilled various aspects

[43] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 113-14.

of “The Future of Rhetoric” as he relentlessly returned to rhetoric in his later career, he cannot innocently and exclusively inhabit the semiotic-structuralist-poststructuralist universe: in both formation and destiny Barthes was *sui generis.*

4.7 Valéry and the young Barthes (1940s)

What incited Barthes to begin his rhetorical odyssey? When he wrote “The Future of Rhetoric” in the spring of 1946, he proposed rhetoric’s rehabilitation right after his own rehabilitation in the Leysin sanatorium, and had not yet read Paulhan. It is conceivable that Barthes simply discovered classical rhetoric through earlier years of reading primary texts during his education from the *lycée* onwards.[44] Yet rather than mere exposure to (perhaps hostile) Greek or Latin works, it is much more likely that Paul Valéry’s enthusiasm inspired the young Barthes to call for rhetoric’s return. Valéry was the critic-poet *par excellence* for Barthes: as far back as 1932, the teenage Barthes excitedly referred to Beethoven and Valéry as his “great gods of music and poetry.”[45] Ultimately, Barthes’ career took relatively little interest in poetry, but *poetics*, as developed by Valéry, constituted the first theoretical model that Barthes explored and remained a crucial reference thereafter.

Rather than Valéry, critics conventionally regard André Gide as Barthes’ point of origin. Barthes’ early tastes are worth reviewing. Though I contend Valéry-as-critic is vital, it is true that the very young Barthes “knew no other writer than Gide”[46]; Gide was the star *writer* who Barthes praised and emulated in some of his earliest texts (and was much more of a Rhetorician than a Terrorist). Gide resonated with ancient Greece for Barthes—he describes Gide “becom[ing] truly Greek, i.e., tragic”[47] and Barthes’ “In Greece” derives from *The Fruits of the*

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[44] A humorous pastiche of *Crito* was the first “serious” text he wrote as a schoolboy; perhaps *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, or *Sophist* were also studied in his *lycées*. But he was not exactly a star student of the classics. Though he happily performed in his ancient theatre group, his dedication sometimes faltered: “1935—36: … I enter the Sorbonne, for a license in classics (probably a mistake: it would have been better to choose philosophy or history); the lessons bore me so much that I spend the days in the almost empty library, gossiping with a group of friends.” Quoted in Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 66.

[45] Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 5.

[46] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 84.

[47] Roland Barthes, "On Gide and his Journal," in *Barthes: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Fontana, 1983), 10.

Earth (1897); Gide was his "original language" as he reflects in *Roland Barthes*.[48] In addition to Gide, Barthes' network of classical influences included Nietzsche (circa *Birth of Tragedy*) and Hellenist Paul Mazon. Barthes' first-ever publication was a Nietzsche-inspired piece entitled "Culture and Tragedy" (1942); he pursued his dissertation on tragedy under Mazon, an influential translator of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Homer, and Hesiod, and according to Barthes, "the only teacher I loved and admired" as a student.[49] Extrapolating from his early life, we might envision Barthes on the path to becoming a Hellenist or a more conventional professor of French literature. Yet after contracting tuberculosis, what Barthes could *not* become was a *normalien*: mandatory medical testing at the ENS meant that Barthes need not bother preparing himself with its entrance exams; he would not join his closest friend Phillippe Rebeyrol in the *hypokhâgne*.[50] Instead he studies classics at the Sorbonne. There would be no *agrégation de philosophie* as with Derrida and Foucault, and no easy comfort with the history and discipline of philosophy.

As important as this Greek-Gidean-Nietzschean Barthes may be, without Valéry and a few lesser points of reference, Barthes' early adoption of an avant-garde relation to rhetoric, poetics, and language remains baffling, a relation too often seen as directly and solely inherited from linguistics. Valéry the *critic* had much more to offer for thinking about poetic and rhetorical language in the abstract than the aforementioned influences. "Literature," claimed the mature Barthes, "didn't need Roman Jakobson to tell it it was language—the whole of classical Rhetoric, up to the work of Paul Valéry, attests to the fact."[51] Valéry, curiously positioned by Barthes as both part of classical rhetoric and part of something new, thus centrally motivates this investigation. The rhetorical writings and teachings of Nietzsche, arguably more radical than Valéry, were inaccessible to the young Barthes. Thus if we do not study the 1940s Barthes alongside Valéry, it is easy to forget that he could have slipped into a much more conservative and banal engagement with literature and language.

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[48] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 99.

[49] Roland Barthes, "To the Seminar," in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 338.

[50] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 72. Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes* (London Reaktion Books, 2015), 23.

[51] Barthes, "A Very Fine Gift," 148.

Valéry embedded himself in some of Barthes' earliest memories and intellectual experiences—he met him as a boy and attended his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in December 1937.[52] In Barthes' inaugural lecture of January 1977, he would hearken back four decades to Valéry, "whose lectures I attended in this very hall."[53] In "On The Teaching of Poetics at the Collège de France", Valéry declares, "Literature is, and cannot be anything but, a kind of extension and application of certain properties of language."[54] This declaration became a consequential manifesto for rhe-structuralism, and launched, for instance, Todorov's paper at the Johns Hopkins conference and his work *The Poetics of Prose* (1971). It was also well known to Genette, equally invested in poetics.[55] Valéry had published two volumes under the name *Tel Quel* in the early 1940s, and although the name of the later *Tel Quel* journal supposedly derives from Nietzsche, Valéry's poetics indeed attempted to perceive literature "as such" or "as it is." Though structuralism in the capacious sense would need Saussure in order to tackle the breadth of *les sciences humaines*, one can imagine an alternate timeline of literary criticism ignorant of Saussure and enamored with Valéry, whom Barthes often celebrated but was no longer fashionable.

Valéry lamented the disappearance of rhetoric from teaching, a complaint that Barthes seemingly internalized at a young age. The poet-critic explains how the figures of classical rhetoric reveal the "nascent state" of language:

> The formation of figures is inseparable from that of language itself, all of whose "abstract" words are obtained by some misuse or shift in signification, followed by forgetting the primitive sense. The poet who multiplies the figures thus only finds language in its *nascent state*. Furthermore, considered from sufficient elevation, can we not consider Language itself as the masterpiece of literary masterpieces, since all creation

[52] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 40-41.

[53] Roland Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977," *October* 8 (1979): 3.

[54] My trans. Paul Valéry, "De l'enseignement de la poétique au Collège de France," in *Variété V* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1944), 289.

[55] Genette, *Figures I*, 260.

> in this realm reduces itself to a combination of forces from a given vocabulary, according to forms instituted once and for all?[56]

The near equation of literature with language, and the impetus to reflect on *language as such*, are crucial milestones here. Valéry, in effect, was the closest thinker the young Barthes had to a Saussure or a Jakobson: someone who claimed to consider language itself. The young Barthes had wanted to see “literature … restored to the practice of a language,” true to Valéry’s conception: “Language … is a creation of practice.”[57] Late in his life, Barthes was still touting Valéry as an underappreciated visionary, who was ahead of his time in pursuing the “problems of language.”[58] Gide perhaps did more for Barthes’ style and self-understanding, but Valéry had set the terms of the linguistic and critical problems that Barthes took it upon himself to interrogate. According to Barthes’ “The Future of Rhetoric,” Valéry became a poet, in part, to grasp the “very mechanisms of thought”: “Everything comes back to poetry, rarely so experimental, and conveys through the means of rhetoric a nostalgia for the animality (which poets call innocence) by which man would be released from *thought*, that is to say, from adapting beyond verbal automatisms.”[59] From this statement, it might be surprising that Barthes’ later career overwhelming favoured prose over verse.

As he attended Valéry’s lectures, Barthes wrote his dissertation on Aeschylus (1941). He draws his dissertation’s epigram from Valéry’s work *Tel Quel I*: “Ancient rhetoric considered as ornaments and artifices those figures and relations which successive refinements by poetry have come to call essential; and which the future progress in analysis will one day designate as effects of deep properties of what we might call *formal sensibility*.”[60] Barthes’ rehabilitation of rhetoric and efforts to address its shortcomings in the 1960s seemingly represent the “future progress in

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[56] My trans. Valéry, "De l'enseignement de la poétique au Collège de France," 290.

[57] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 107. My trans. Valéry, "Poétique et pensée absraite," 142.

[58] My trans. Roland Barthes, "Entre le plaisir du texte et l'utopie de la pensée," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 536.

[59] Barthes, "The Future of Rhetoric," 112.

[60] Quoted in Claude Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," *Barthes Studies* 2 (2016): 90 n13.

analysis" to which Valéry alludes. Over the next decades, Barthes, like Valéry's vision of the future captured in his epigraph, kept the ancient origins of rhetoric close at hand, but did so in hopes of reaching the "deep properties" of "formal sensibility." And Barthes would do much, like Valéry, to part ways with traditional French approaches to the history of literature. Indeed, Valéry had given various historians of literature such as Hippolyte Taine the memorable title of "prolix mutes." These prolix mutes often made the history of literature a chronicle of works and authors, whereas Valéry sought "a *History of the mind as it produces or consumes 'literature'*, and this history could even be made without having pronounced the name of a writer."[61] Though Barthes downplays the mental categories important to Valéry, in *Writing Degree Zero* he hopes for "a history of literary expression, … a purely formal history"[62] or "an Introduction to what a History of Writing might be."[63] Yet since the work so directly engages Sartrean problematics with heavy-handed Marxist categories, Valéry's impact on Barthes has been underestimated; Barthes certainly did not derive his interest in formalism and language from Sartre.

4.8 Reflecting on Valéry's Legacy (1940s as seen from the 1960s)

From the later vantage of Barthes' rhetoric seminars of the mid-1960s, he looked back to Valéry and credited him for dispelling crucial superstitions. In his seminar meeting "Valéry and rhetoric" (1966) Barthes begins by reflecting on the decrepit state of the rhetorical "empire"—as he often did—and names two of its most serious French enemies: Descartes and Pascal. Barthes motivates his analysis of Valéry's rhetoric by considering his response to Pascal:

> We can see that Valéry is reproaching Pascal for not knowing—or rather for pretending not to know—what I will call the fatal theatre of language. Language is a theatre to which man is condemned. Rhetoric is the discipline that transforms that condemnation into freedom. It is a technique of responsibility. And it is not nothing.

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[61] My trans. Valéry, "De l'enseignement de la poétique au Collège de France," 288.

[62] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 2.

[63] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 6.

> Thus Valéry's conception of Rhetoric is profound, serious. It is not a simple pastiche of classical conceptions, even if it does not have their scope, because Valéry completely despised the Rhetoric of the *dispositio*. [arrangement][64]

Rhetoric in Valéry's sense liberates man from the "fatal theatre of language," a serious undertaking far removed from surface effects of rhetoric Barthes reviewed in the beginning of his seminar: "pompous, cold, conventional, ornate writing."[65] Barthes goes on to establish three principles of Valéry's conception of rhetoric:

> [1.] Literature is language; there is a universe of words. …
>
> [2.] If literature is a language, it is because the very function of the language inevitably divides in two. There is a practical language, meant to transform reality and thereby be abolished as soon as it achieves its goal. … And then there is *poetic* language (let us say more generally, *literary* language), which is essentially speculation on palpable properties of language; there is an opacity and an independence from the form. ...
>
> [3.] The form has a preeminent value because the content does not.[66]

In and of themselves, these three principles fail to surprise: what is exciting is the route that Valéry and then Barthes took to thinking about language as such without Saussure or Jakobson. As Barthes points out, Valéry and Saussure "knew nothing of each other."[67] And yet Valéry, via his mediations on rhetoric and poetics, certainly anticipated some of the more strictly scientific work on language: "If literature is a language, then it is, in some way, a matter for linguistics, and from this perspective, we are only at the very beginning of inquiries and explanations in which Valéry is already considered a predecessor. Haven't some of his texts on the sign just been

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[64] Barthes, "Valéry and Rhetoric," 181.

[65] Barthes, "Valéry and Rhetoric," 180.

[66] Barthes, "Valéry and Rhetoric," 181-85.

[67] Barthes, "Saussure, the Sign, Democracy," 155.

taken up again in the review of pure linguistics, *Cahiers de Ferdinand de Saussure*?"[68] For Barthes, Saussure is something like a "more anxiety-prone" version of Valéry: they both independently wondered and worried about the "social contract" underlying language.[69]

Though the recently publication of Barthes' "The Future of Rhetoric" (1946) and "Valéry and Rhetoric" (1966) accentuates these debts, the Valérean Barthes already reveals himself in what Anglophones deem his most iconic text, "The Death of the Author" (1967), which was strangely published in English before French (it will be covered in more detail in the next chapter). As Barthes explains, the attempt to undermine the "Author's empire" is not new:

> Valéry, entangled in a psychology of the ego, greatly edulcorated Mallarmean theory, but led by a preference for classicism to conform to the lessons of Rhetoric, he continued to cast the Author into doubt and derision, emphasized the linguistic and "accidental" nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works championed the essentially verbal condition of literature.[70]

This untimely Valérean path Barthes took—the rhetorical path, the "linguistic" and "verbal" relation to literature—upsets the story of Barthes' structuralism. Yet Valéry's poetics (which begin to displace the Author), and his preference for *elocutio* over *dispositio*, partly explains the extreme skew towards figurative language (and away from persuasion) that gripped the 1960s and beyond.

The thinkers whom Barthes called "writers not far from rhetors"[71]—such as Valéry and Paulhan—were often out of joint with contemporary movements of thought. As Genette realized while working closely with Barthes, there was something "simultaneously quite modern and quite ancient" in the Valéryean "*idea* of literature," touching upon New Criticism, Russian

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[68] Barthes, "Valéry and Rhetoric," 183.

[69] Barthes, "Saussure, the Sign, Democracy," 155.

[70] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 50.

[71] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 46.

Formalism, and contemporary structuralism.[72] Indeed, Valéry and Barthes' criticisms of the Author are less radical than often believed: both hearken back to before the dawn of literary positivism and biographical criticism—as Barthes noted, the author "still reigns in manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers"[73]—and this era, on the institutional timescale of rhetoric, is not so long ago.

4.9 Early historical ideas on rhetoric and politics (1940s)

Though Valéryean poetics represented a vital "synchronic" dimension of rhetoric, the young Barthes also began considering rhetoric's historical, political, and institutional status, associated with *l'écriture classique.* For a time during the 1940s, Barthes came close to a rather naïve and uncritical relationship to "the classics." His "Plaisir aux classiques" (1944) for instance, explains rhetoric's glory in the seventeenth century:

> This century has given rhetoric its place and its greatness. The problems of rhetoric are neither specialist, incidental, nor useless; the art of speaking well commands, in a decisive way, the essential operations of life. It is the key to every excellence. Can those who humanity considers to be great men do without being writers? …The multiform and methodical investigations of classical rhetoric towards the maxim, eloquence, the treatise and the dialogue, I read as an essential attempt of the mind to renew the myth of Orpheus and tie objects and unruly men to speech.[74]

Such is the very first reference to rhetoric in Barthes' *Œuvres complètes*: affirmative, backward-looking, and embedded in an essay with enough clichés and uncritical statements to render it rather foreign to the typical Barthes reader who might begin with *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) or later works. Whereas "Pleasure in the classics" displays little political awareness, a mere three years later he mounts a political critique of *clarté française* in "Should Grammar Be Killed Off?" (1947), culminating in *Writing Degree Zero*'s claim that "classical writing is, needless to say, a

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[72] Gérard Genette, "Paul Valéry: Literature as Such," *Style* 33, no. 3 (1999): 481.

[73] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 50.

[74] My trans. Roland Barthes, "Plasir aux classiques," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 61.

class writing."[75] Henceforth Barthes will often associate certain periods of rhetoric with bourgeois writing or state power.

4.10 Rhetoric in *Writing Degree Zero* (1950s)

Brash and peculiar, the Barthes of *Writing Degree Zero* resembles, we could say, a Sartre intrigued by rhetoric and language—a "committed" Sartre with a dash of Paulhan. The anxieties over engaged literature play out over terms such *langue*, *style*, and *écriture,* as well as over a hastily sketched out history of rhetoric as it relates to literature. Barthes elaborates, for the first time, an important hypothesis linking the death of rhetoric to the birth of modern literature: "It was at the very moment when treatises on rhetoric aroused no more interest, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, that classical writing ceased to be universal and that modern modes of writing came into being"; for "classical writers … the only thing in question was rhetoric, namely the ordering of discourse in such a way as to persuade."[76] But over the last century, Barthes claims, writers from Mallarmé to the Surrealists are not undertaking "rhetorical achievement or some bold use of vocabulary" but the "call[ing] into question" of "the existence of Literature itself."[77]

The short chapter "Writing and Silence" of *Writing Degree Zero* leaps right out of the Rhetoric-Terror milieu of the previous chapter. Without using the word "terror," Barthes describes a Terrorist sect who has "undermined literary language":

> They have ceaselessly exploded the ever-renewed husk of clichés, of habits, of the formal past of the writer; in a chaos of forms and a wilderness of words they hoped they would achieve an object wholly delivered of History, and find again the freshness of a pristine state of language. But such upheavals end up by leaving their own tracks and creating their own laws. The threat of becoming a Fine Art is a fate which hangs over any language not based exclusively on the speech of society. In a perpetual flight forward from a disorderly syntax, the disintegration of language can only lead to the silence of

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[75] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 57.

[76] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 57.

[77] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 61.

> writing. The final agraphia of Rimbaud or of some Surrealists (who *ipso facto* fell into oblivion), this poignant self-destruction of Literature, teaches us that for some writers, language, the first and last way out of the literary myth, finally restores what it had hoped to avoid, that there is no writing which can be lastingly revolutionary, and that any silence of form can escape imposture only by complete abandonment of communication.[78]

A certain literary practice of language that "restores what it had hoped to avoid" is precisely what Paulhan explores in *Flowers,* and the "object wholly delivered of History," sought out by the "Terrorists," is reminiscent of Sartre. To this quasi-terrorism, Barthes opposes the rhetoric of "craftsmanlike writing" (*écriture artisanale).*[79] Though these dimensions of rhetoric associated with "classical" or "craftsmanlike" writing were politically important for Barthes, they did not cause the dramatic alignment and near-equation of literature and language indicative of Valéry's influence on Barthes and structuralist criticism. Barthes' relation to Surrealism will be much more oblique than that of Paulhan and Sartre: though "Surrealism helped desacralize the image of the Author," Barthes does not present it, or Terror, with the visceral intimacy of the older critics.[80]

4.11 *Mythologies* (1950s)

After sketching out rhetorical features of the relatively obscure pre-*Mythologies* era, we now turn to his better-known 1950s work. Even a work as famous as *Mythologies*—published in 1957, with parts appearing as early as 1952—has not been particularly well connected to his 1940s thought, partly because of his troublesome essay "Myth Today" (which has been offered as an inflexion point between the immature and mature Barthes).[81] This famous piece, a *retroactive* theorization, cannot be deemed a trustworthy guide to the myth analyses that Barthes undertook earlier: as he puts it, "the method is not very scientific and did not pretend to be so;

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[78] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 74-75.

[79] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 74.

[80] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 51.

[81] Stafford, *Roland Barthes*, 68.

that's why the methodological introduction only came later, after reading Saussure."[82] Yet when we read *Mythologies* in light of his letters, his dissertation on Aeschylus, and especially this affinity towards rhetorical analysis, the analytic art practiced by Barthes appears much more intuitive and arguably more elegant than the heavy-handed semiotic framework developed in "Myth Today."

Why *myth* in the first place, we might ask? Why did Barthes take this as his unit or object instead of, for instance, an update on Flaubert's *idée recue*, or a more Marxist notion of ideology? At first, one would imagine that Barthes' myths have nothing to do with Greek myths. He indeed takes pains in "Myth Today" to strip the terms *myth* and *mythology* of their classical connotations; *anything* can be a myth; no magical, divine, or supernatural senses are implied. Yet Barthes began considering various mythological and magical forms of thinking at the time of his *diplôme d'études supérieures* (DES) in a profoundly classical context, making this era crucial to investigate.

In his masters-level dissertation entitled "Evocations and Incantations in Greek Tragedy" (1941), Barthes becomes fixated upon the "magic" power of the word. Indeed, these excerpts establish this as its central topic:

> The origin of this dissertation is the aim to study a number of aspects of the problem of musical catharsis in Greek tragedy. ... This meant returning to the study of those incantations and evocations in which, by word, gesture, sound and thought, the man-actor tries to have an effect upon the gods or the dead.[83]
>
> With its intense use of the asyndeton, nominal phrases, short, chopped periodology, alliterations, repetitions, the whole style of tragic incantation is designed to give the maximum efficiency to the word: lyrical efficiency for those who wish, at all cost, to

[82] Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," 256.

[83] Quoted in Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 75.

> express a rare and violent feeling, and a magical efficiency for those who wish, via an ennobled [sic], to reach the most profound essence of death and of divinity.[84]

> The intrinsic power of the word is enormous; once used it has incalculable consequences.[85]

> In all primitive peoples the word possesses a magic power. The Greeks did not escape this belief, but they dressed it up using a very subtle deployment of their imagination: a name has an influence on destiny (Ajax, Œdipus, Helen, Ulysses, etc.).[86]

> There is something profound and frightening in this unbreakable power of the word for the Greeks.[87]

Whether treated seriously or dismissed as juvenilia, the fixation on *magic* and *the word* is remarkable. A few years later, in a letter to his closest friend Rebeyrol, Barthes shifts from pursuing “the word” in the context of Greek tragedy to understanding the whole of literature using the “mythological value of the word,” moving from “magic to art, to poetry, and to rhetoric”:

> Since my graduate degree, I have been pursuing some vague but powerful ideas on the mythological value of the word. It seems to me that literature could be considered from this perspective. There’s an imperceptible and uniform movement from magic to art, to poetry, to rhetoric; that is what my thesis demonstrated. That marvelous thread could set us free from the idea, the content, to grasp literature in its creative—that is to say, organic—phase where it is most pure, as nascent oxygen is the strongest. Basically, everything holds together and I anticipate exciting connections: a history of literary art on the surface—that is, at its greatest depths—captured in samples, cuts taken from the

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[84]Quoted in Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 76.

[85]Quoted in Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 75.

[86] Quoted in Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 76.

[87] Quoted in Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 76.

> purest episodes in the continual drama of the word: the Greek lyric, sophistry, scholasticism, euphuism, classical rhetoric, Romantic illusion … I'm very ill-prepared for it [this plan] given my deficiencies: a weakness of intelligence; the very cancer of the word; … philosophical incompetence in a time when you can no longer do literature without a degree in philosophy; and the frequent feeling of having an intelligence—at its best moments—that dates back about fifty years and would be scorned by those more strictly in tune with the present times.[88]

This letter suggests Barthes wants to export magic, myth, and rhetoric out of antiquity; he wants to "set us free from the idea, the content"—and thus, like Valéry, to prioritize the study of forms.

When it comes to the myth analyses that would be published in the early to mid 1950s, we should note that myth analysis works largely *without* semiotics and can instead function via rhetorical analysis.[89] In a sense, Barthes tries to ascertain the *forms* of an argument within a myth. In some cases, this is quite literally an argument made by certain individuals. In "Blind and Dumb Criticism," Barthes maps out the common argumentation of critics: "I don't understand [Marxism or existentialism], therefore you are idiots."[90] More commonly, however, Barthes works with a dispersed, collective discourse, whose "speaker" is the *(petite) bourgeoisie*. As Barthes later put it, "What defines *Mythologies* is a systematic and tireless assault on a type of monster I called *la petite bourgeoisie* (to the point of turning it into a myth)."[91] This is not, in

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[88] Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 23.

[89] I am not the first to notice the rhetorical status of the book: a "persuasive discourse of forms of persuasion"; its rhetorical procedures "giv[e] the text a certain exemplary status." Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 20.

[90] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 35.

[91] Barthes, "Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*," 256.

essence, a "semiotic" assault. The quasi-Marxist perspective combined with clever rhetorical insights perhaps resembles Kenneth Burke more than applied semiotics.[92]

In *Mythologies'* first and perhaps most famous example, "The World of Wrestling," the wrestlers' physique "constitutes a basic sign"[93]; but there is no rigorous semiotic notion of sign here.[94] However, Barthes deploys concepts emerging from the dramatic and rhetorical material of his dissertation era: the "natural meaning" of wrestling's rhythm "is that of rhetorical amplification"; "Wrestling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic masks."[95] Though of course he radically shifted towards (petite) bourgeois society rather than Greek tragedy and French literature, he did not simply jettison his rhetorical and classical disposition from the mid 1940s. Here emerged the nexus of myth, mythology, and mythical/magical words/signifiers, suggesting that *Mythologies*, at least in its title and key terms, simply would not exist without these formative Greek years.

"Myth Today" embraces Saussure and speaks incessantly of signs, signifiers, signifieds, and signification. Perhaps the most quotable and influential insight of "Myth Today" is its discovery of "the very principle of myth," which is that myth "transforms history into nature."[96] However, in one of the least quoted passages, Barthes claims that "it is through their rhetoric that bourgeois myths outline the general prospect of this pseudo-physis [pseudo-nature] which defines the dream of the contemporary bourgeois world."[97] We should thus modify his famous decree: myth *rhetorically* transforms history into nature or "pseudo-physis**"** (perhaps another

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[92] For instance, Burke's "Journalistic Language: Reading While You Run" (1937). Unfortunately, this was a missed connection. Edward Said wistfully recalls recommending Burke to Barthes, only to have Barthes forget who Burke was some years later and wonder "Kenneth Burke? Mais qui est-il?" Edward Said, "The Franco-American Dialogue: A Late-Twentieth-Century Reassessment.," in *Traveling Theory: France and the United States*, ed. Sophie Bertho Ieme Van der Poel, and Ton Hoenselaars (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 140.

[93] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 18.

[94] See Mounin's criticisms of this text. Georges Mounin, *Introduction à la sémiologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1970), 190-91.

[95] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 23,19.

[96] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 129.

[97] Barthes, "Myth Today," 150.

Greek trace of his dissertation). Furthermore, Barthes admits that the “rhetorical forms” of bourgeois myth are always accessible even though “we cannot yet draw up the list of the dialectical forms.” He stipulates that:

> One must understand here by rhetoric a set of fixed, regulated, insistent figures, according to which the varied forms of the mythical signifier arrange themselves. These figures are transparent inasmuch as they do not affect the plasticity of the signifier; but they are already sufficiently conceptualized to adapt to an historical representation of the world (just as classical rhetoric can account for a representation of the Aristotelian type).[98]

Thus the linkage between myth or magic and rhetoric again returns, but unlike the letter of 1945 and the dissertation, Barthes speaks of the (mythical) “signifier” in place of the (magic or mythological) “word.” He then goes on to elaborate seven heterogenous “figures” of myth, although they should not be called “figures” strictly speaking: they are essentially macroscopic argumentative or logical patterns rather than microscopic syntactic-semantic twists. We could call them persuasive tactics:

1. The inoculation
2. The privation of History
3. Identification
4. Tautology
5. Neither-Norism
6. The quantification of quality
7. The statement of fact[99]

Some of these have analogues in traditional logical fallacies; for instance, neither-norism (nicer in French: *ninisme*) resembles the *argument to moderation.* Soon after presenting these, Barthes concludes that “the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a

[98] Barthes, "Myth Today," 150.

[99] Barthes, "Myth Today," 150-55.

universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions."[100] He effectively outlines a rhetoric of stagnation, the means by which bourgeois myth "stifles" man "in the manner of a huge internal parasite."[101]

Remarkably, this kind of political-rhetorical analysis has nothing to do with semiotics and instead springs from the classic questions of political rhetoric: how are opponents asserting their position? By which persuasive means? How to refute them? For although Barthes writes a section called "Myth on the Left"—in which myth is ephemeral and "inessential"—it is in "Myth on the Right" where Barthes deploys heavy rhetorical analysis to disarm bourgeois ideology. Though eager to prove the value of semiology in the first part of "Myth Today," its terminology wanes towards the end as Barthes sharpens his rhetorical and ideological critique, foregrounding the classical function of rhetoric as a way of observing the available means of persuasion. Barthes wields, at times like these, a structuralism-without-signs, an analytical approach that decomposes objects into rhetorical functions. After the liminal text "Myth Today," Barthes would increasingly use Saussurean terms and mix them with other linguists', but it is not clear that he ever entirely displaced rhetorical analysis as a habit of critique.

In the 1950s, another ingredient gets added to the stew of structuralism(s), which has nothing to do with Saussure. Lucien Goldmann's *The Hidden God* (1955) and its "genetic structuralism" (if it can be called structuralism at all) influences Barthes' conception of the sociology and history of literature, though the work does not have much in common in method with Barthes' *On Racine* (1963, with parts appearing earlier). Goldmann's genetic structuralism, roughly speaking, constitutes a Marxist sociology of literature (following György Lukács) that allows structures to evolve and be historicized. This differs immensely from the Lévi-Straussian structuralism of mathematical abstractions and direct imports from linguistics. Though Barthes much more strongly identifies with Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, he keeps the door open for sociological and Marxist explorations aligned with Goldmann, his EPHE colleague. Barthes appreciated Goldman's "history of the signified in literature," but hoped to expand—if

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[100] Barthes, "Myth Today," 155.

[101] Barthes, "Myth Today," 155.

possible—to a whole “history of significations.”[102] Rhetoric will offer Barthes an exploration of both the history and mechanisms of signification. Barthes notes that despite Racine’s reputation as “the most ‘natural’ of our poets,” figures of thought are legion in this work, and calls for a “modern work on classical rhetoric” in 1960.[103]

4.12 “The Structuralist Activity” (1960s)

Moving from the 1950s into the booming years of French structuralism in the 1960s, Barthes still has not entirely abandoned his rhetorical origins despite taking on the role of chief structuralist impresario. This becomes clear in the readily-anthologized essay “The Structuralist Activity” (1963). What Barthes calls the “activity” of the structuralist mirrors a long tradition of rhetoric that analyzed the genres, occasions, and especially the *means* of persuasion. In this essay one can indeed replace the many instances of the words “structural” and “structuralist activity” with “rhetorical” and “rhetorical analysis” and end up with a cogent text. Barthes writes:

> What is new is a mode of thought (or a “poetics”) which seeks less to assign completed meanings to the objects it discovers than to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means. Ultimately, one might say that the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings but man fabricating meanings, as if it could not be the content of meanings which exhausted the semantic goals of humanity, but only the act by which these meanings, historical and contingent variables, are produced. *Homo significans*: such would be the new man of structural inquiry.[104]

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[102] “We have occasionally undertaken a history of the signified in literature; the most remarkable endeavor on this level is doubtless that of Lucien Goldmann : Goldmann has gone very far, since he has attempted to link a form (tragedy) to a content (the vision of a political class); but to my mind, his explanation is incomplete insofar as the link itself, i.e., the signification, is not conceived : between two terms, one historical and the other literary, an analogical relation is postulated (the rejection of tragedy by Pascal and Racine reproduces the political rejection of the rightist wing of Jansenism) , so that the signification Goldmann so intuitively cites remains, as I see it, a disguised determinism.. … [Yet] what is needed (this is doubtless easier said than done) is to retrace not the history of the signified in literature but the history of significations, i.e., the history of the semantic techniques by which literature imposes a meaning.” Roland Barthes, "Literature Today," in *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 153-54.

[103] Roland Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 160.

[104] Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," 218.

If we bond together, as Kenneth Burke does, meaning and persuasion, we understand in this passage the rhetorical fabrication of meaning, which is to say, meaning as an outcome of persuasion. The goal of rhetoric, as envisioned by Aristotle and reusing Barthes' words, was to "know how [persuasion] is possible, at what cost and by what means." Or one could take the approach of changing or restricting the *semantic* to the *pragmatic* or *instrumental* in the above passage and arrive at *homo rhetoricus*. Yet this is not even necessary. Compare Barthes' sense of structuralism to I.A. Richards' call from 1936 for a "revived Rhetoric" that:

> must itself undertake its own inquiry into the modes of meaning—not only, as with the old Rhetoric, on a macroscopic scale, discussing the effects of different disposals of large parts of a discourse—but also on a microscopic scale by using theorems about the structure of the fundamental conjectural units of meaning and the conditions through which they, and their interconnections, arise.[105]

Barthes' desire to know "how meaning is possible" resembles Richards' "inquiry into the modes of meaning," which seeks "structure," "units," and "conditions." Richards notes that persuasion "poaches" on the other aims of discourse, hence his desire to cast a wider net.[106] Unless one provides strict criteria that rhetorical analysis must operate on a lesser domain of texts, the analytical-taxonomical strain of thinking that runs through Aristotle and Quintilian—at least in terms of its goals—is not fundamentally different from Barthes' survey of structuralism at this time.

4.13 The rustle of Greece (1960s)

Towards the end of "The Structuralist Activity," Barthes channels Hegel's understanding of signification among the ancient Greeks. Barthes was no expert Hegelian, but he drew extensively on Hegel's account to evoke the activities of structuralism, as well as his own. In *The Philosophy of History,* Hegel tackled the oracle at Dodona: "The rustling of the leaves of the sacred oaks was the form of prognostication there. Bowls of metal were also suspended in the

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[105] I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 23-24.

[106] Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 24.

grove. But the sounds of the bowls dashing against each other were quite indefinite, and had no objective sense; the sense—the signification—was imparted to the sounds only by the human beings who heard them."[107] This is indeed the ultimate source of the "rustle" (*bruissement*) of language that so preoccupied Barthes. "Hegel gave a better definition of the ancient Greeks," claims Barthes, "by outlining the manner in which they made nature signify than by describing the totality of their 'feelings and beliefs' on the subject."[108] In "The Structuralist Activity," Barthes drew heavily on Hegel's Greeks:

> According to Hegel, the ancient Greek was amazed by the natural in nature; he constantly listened to it, questioned the meaning of mountains, springs, forests, storms. … Subsequently, nature has changed, has become social: everything given to man is already human, down to the forest and the river which we cross when we travel. But confronted with this social nature, which is quite simply culture, structural man is no different from the ancient Greek: he too listens for the natural in culture, and constantly perceives in it not so much stable, finite, "true" meanings as the shudder of an enormous machine which is humanity tirelessly undertaking to create meaning.[109]

Hegel speaks of a "shuddering awe," "an instinctive dread" in the Greeks "when a signification is perceived in a form" that is at once attractive and repulsive.[110] In Barthes' account of *l'homme structural* from 1963, who is "no different from the ancient Greek," the function of the artist and analyst is ultimately that of the "*manteia*; like the ancient soothsayer, he speaks the locus of meaning but does not name it."[111] Barthes' understanding of literature as a particularly "mantic activity" is thus indebted to Hegel via the curious alignment of the ancient Greek and *l'homme structural.*

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[107] G.W.F Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), 246.

[108] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 31.

[109] Richard Howard, "Translator's Note," in *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 218-19.

[110] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 257-58.

[111] Howard, "Translator's Note," 219.

This text leads naturally to Barthes' investigations the following year into proto-structuralist rhetoricians such as Aristotle. Rhetorical analysis is very much a "structuralist activity": rhetoricians are always listening for this "shudder" of the "enormous machine" that produces persuasion, and, following Plato's critiques, are less interested in or indifferent towards "stable, finite, 'true' meanings." Although there are thousands of rhetorical manuals for *producing* texts, rhetorical *analysis*, like structuralist analysis, generally concerns itself with immanent features and does not have a general theory or treatise simultaneously suitable for all its possible objects. This structuralist manifesto mentions Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Dumézil, yet remains remarkably open to a portable, transhistorical structuralism. Barthes does say that structuralists reveal themselves through the lexicon of signifier and signified, *langue* and *parole*. And yet he pushes beyond Saussure to a very broad "structuralist activity" whose "goal … is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'functions') of this object."[112] For Barthes, Saussure yields the structuralist insignia, but the "activity" may as well be Greek. Barthes savoured Hegel's imagery of "rustling" Greek winds long after the mid-1960s structuralist boom. Even in 1975, Barthes pictured himself "like the ancient Greek as Hegel describes him." Whereas the Greek listened to the "rustle of branches, of springs, of winds, in short, the shudder of Nature," Barthes listens to "the rustle of language, that language which for me, modern man, is my Nature."[113] Detaching himself from rigorous linguistics, he sought new rustlings of language, associated with utopia, in the avant-garde.

4.14 The myth of Baltimore (1960s)

Up until this point, we have considered a rooted, Parisian Barthes. Though his journey to the famed Johns Hopkins conference in the fall of 1966 was not a monumental event *for Barthes,* it has been invested with such an aura, centered on Derrida and the origins of "French Theory" in America, that it should be addressed. Returning to this conference highlights Angermuller's point—that "there is no post-structuralism in France"—and enhances my contrast of the rhetorical regions of structuralism with the more purist ones associated with anthropology and linguistics.

[112] Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," 214.

[113] Barthes, "The Rustle of Language," 79.

One could write a Barthesean critique of the “myth of Baltimore”: the naturalizing effects of the tale of the Johns Hopkins conference that evacuated the histories of nuanced Franco-American intellectual commerce and the dispersed centres of structuralism. It is a seminal myth for Americans, for it perhaps installs Derrida as a Hermes figure, a trickster who outwits and ousts Lévi-Strauss, a fleet-footed emissary shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic. In reality, neither Lévi-Strauss nor structuralism was vanquished in France. Derrida admits this fated “autumnal conference” with his “elders” (Barthes, Lacan, Vernant, and so on) cannot be the dawn of poststructuralism (since this is a concept Derrida rejects) but believes it symbolized an important Franco-American “alliance” of sorts.[114] This was not exactly, however, Derrida’s conference, at least not by design. It was in fact organized between the sixth section of EPHE and Johns Hopkins[115] and must be understood by de-emphasizing the spectacular nature of Derrida’s performance.

Derrida, Barthes, and Todorov flew to the conference together, but two key invited speakers associated with EPHE and rhetoric could not attend—Genette and Jakobson.[116] Barthes’ talk, in effect, condensed his EPHE rhetoric seminars, but steeled them with a polemical edge—one designed to parry and jab rather than, as with Derrida, to slice in half. Dosse’s account of the conference first singles out Barthes as one of the “stars of the effervescence in French intellectual life,” noting that Barthes begins his talk with the “repression of rhetoric” that caused a rift between literature and linguistics.[117] Barthes offers what he terms semio-criticism, a pursuit “much more than stylistics,” as a means of repairing this conflict, a way by which “literature and linguistics are in the process of finding each other again.”[118] We should highlight “finding each other again”: this recognition pleased classicists in the room, like Pietro Pucci: “As

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[114] Jacques Derrida, "Deconstructions: The Im-possible," in *French Theory in America*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer Editors: Sande Cohen (New York 2001, 2001), 16.

[115] Sarah N. Lawall, "Review: The Structuralist Controversy," *Contemporary Literature* 12, no. 1 (1971).

[116] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 294. Cusset, *French Theory*, 29.

[117] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 328.

[118] Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 135,34.

a classical philologist, I am very happy to see that rhetoric has returned to a place of importance in modern literature and hear this return of rhetoric spoken of and justified by a sort of discourse on rhetoric in the classical world."[119] Barthes concludes his talk by again invoking rhetoric as antecedent: "literature is itself a science … of human language. Its investigation is not … addressed to the secondary forms and figures that were the object of rhetoric, but to the fundamental categories of language."[120] This closing thought was an echo of the youthful dissertation epigraph he drew from Valéry: rhetoric, inadequate in itself, would point the way to the deepest categories of language. Todorov's first and final sentences also engaged Valéry's gauntlet: to regard, in rather brutal terms, literature in near equality with language itself. If Genette and Jakobson had actually attended the conference, their contributions might have engaged this same terrain mapped out by Valéry.

Barthes, despite various attempts, did not take to America; American critics, at this conference, did not take to Barthes' rhetorical project (they would later adore him in general). The spirit of Barthes' rapprochement seemed lost on Paul de Man, the most hostile audience member, who would later stake his career on a sort of "deep rhetoric." He castigated Barthes: his methods failed to "show any progress over those of the Formalists" and present "a false conception of classicism and romanticism … simply wrong."[121] Derrida proved much more hospitable, and understood Barthes as suggesting that new literature strives to "think the adventure ... that was Western history, the history of metaphysics."[122] The next year, Barthes was again in Baltimore, and wrote to Derrida that reading *Of Grammatology* there was "like a book by Galileo in the land of the inquisition, or more simply a civilized book in Barbary!"[123] Barthes' adventure in America was thus a brief one, unlike Derrida's.

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[119] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 151.

[120] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 145.

[121] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 150.

[122] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 155.

[123] Quoted in Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, 181.

North American academics oriented towards literary criticism are eager to understand this event as if Derrida was Jimi Hendrix and structuralism was the guitar he set ablaze on the Woodstock stage, heralding a new thing called "post-structuralism" in his virtuoso performance. Yet this term, applied at this early and strange juncture, remains remarkably indeterminate: Derrida virtually had a room full of card-carrying structuralists from the sixth section of EPHE (Social and Economic Sciences) he could have accosted, yet he targeted the absent Lévi-Strauss, who hails from EPHE's fifth section (Sciences of Religion). Whatever Derrida's reasons for sparing the sixth section—we should never discount the weight of friendships—the narratives told about this event, as far as literary criticism is concerned, remain disjointed until Derrida is directly related to Barthes and his immediate peers—Genette, Todorov, Kristeva, Sollers—who were generally friendly with Derrida.

As Samoyault reflects on Baltimore, Barthes and Derrida "reacted against anything that stabilized and confined meaning, even if Barthes tended towards pluralization while Derrida emphasized the need for a perpetual slippage (not quite the same thing)."[124] Barthes, in what he calls his "midlife," developed a positive relation to Derrida, but it was not a decisive one: "I belong to a different generation from Derrida—and probably from his readers."[125] Barthes suggests that Derrida, to some extent, dispelled "the phantasm of scientificity" within the "semiological project" and "disrupted the balance of the structure."[126] Nonetheless, the practice of "scientific" literary criticism in France only *accelerated* after the fall of 1966, with the founding of the journal *Poetique* in 1970 representing an important waypoint. Whereas Derrida mounted, one could say, a covert rhetorical reading *of* structuralism in 1966, Barthes and his peers at EPHE at this time were overtly citing the rhetorical discipline as a spiritual predecessor *for* structuralism.

And yet, these two faces of rhe-structuralism both appear rather sensational in comparison to their contemporary structuralist activities. As a counterstatement to Baltimore, we should

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[124] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 295.

[125] Roland Barthes, "Letter to Jean Risatat," in *A Very Fine Gift* (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 154.

[126] Barthes, "Letter to Jean Risatat," 154.

consider the special double issue of *Yale French Studies* from October 1966. Devoted to structuralism, it begins by cautioning the reader that "the world did not have to wait for the French before discovering structuralism," citing "Geneva, Prague, Copenhagen, New York, and Cambridge, Mass," and positions linguistics—not just Saussure—as rightful origin.[127] It does not skimp on anthropology, despite its literary orientation. Geoffrey Hartman's contribution to this issue runs through a similarly dispersed geography and mantically warns that structuralism has heretofore "respect[ed] the separation of disciplines. … It is not suited for monogamy, however; and is about to form a dangerous alliance with literary criticism."[128] This issue of *Yale French Studies* very much respects the multiple legacies of linguistics behind structuralism and begins with a careful piece by linguist André Martinet. Yet Barthes, in this issue, is mentioned minimally. Thus this document and its pluralistic European and American pre-war structuralisms counter the rather singular thread of Saussure to Barthes (or Derrida) relentlessly anthologized in North American literary theory. My generation is often taught structuralism hastily en route towards later theories, sometimes simply to justify reactions against a rather brittle form of it (which, in fact, triumphed during its supposed "defeat"). Thus it can become a reversed chronology since we are unbound to time's arrow and never lived through the eras in which the thought unfolded unpredictably.

4.15 Was Barthes a structuralist?

We have considered three major Barthesean moments in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s; Barthes' continued affections toward rhetoric cast doubt upon whether he ever entirely "converted" to structuralism. Now, we will set aside rhetoric for a while, and consider Barthes' structuralist status on its own. My aim here is not to entirely remove him from the scene of structuralism, but simply to show that he fit poorly with the "high structuralists," the inner circle. This will give the next chapter more latitude in attaching Barthes to rhetoric, and exploring some of his insights that probably would have suffered under a more rigorous application of linguistics, although he might have better ingratiated himself with the martinets of language.

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[127] Jacques Erhmann, "Introduction," *Yale French Studies*, no. 36 and 37 (1966): 5.

[128] Geoffrey Hartman, "Structuralism: the Anglo-American adventure," *Yale French Studies*, no. 36 and 37 (1966): 148.

Barthes' great gusto for promotion and prediction, in my view, put him in the role of structuralism's intrepid impresario rather than a lead actor on stage. Too mercurial to put on an epic Wagnerian cycle, he nonetheless expended enormous energies on a mix of lesser operatic productions for structuralism, offering manifestos and applications, reviews and critiques: something closer to journalism than scholarly monograph. There are essentially three "structuralist Barthes": the one he professed to be (the definitional Barthes), the one he was thought to be (the doxic Barthes), and the one, through his critical practice, that he actually was. On the record, he was careful. *Structuralism* for Barthes had a "limited meaning": "systematic research that has a semantic frame of reference and is inspired by the linguistic model."[129] Yet an insidious problem lurks within such statements. Barthes believed that structuralist analysis had no surefire "canonical method" and was beset by "divergencies of approach."[130] Barthes' own structuralist practices reveal no singular or standard model of linguistics. Thus Barthes cannot be taken as a synecdoche, *pars pro toto,* for French literary structuralism and especially not of structuralism in more general sense. Barthes at his most rigorous peak in *The Fashion System* is "proof that semiotics, dutifully applied, is capable of anything, even of turning such a witty essayist as Barthes into a perfect bore."[131] In our infatuation with Barthes, we have taken the wrong texts, from the wrong author, as representations of strict structuralism. The more careful, which is to say boring, legacies of the structuralist incursion into North America are scarcely remembered, as are the structuralists held in highest esteem by other structuralists.

4.16 Relations with high structuralism

Though Barthes did not often see himself as a prototypical or archetypical structuralist, we should consider who he thought best fit this label. A seemingly innocuous comment he made a few months before his death stands out and propels this investigation: "*strictco sensu,* only Dumézil, Benveniste, and Lévi-Strauss are structuralists."[132] A remarkable list: no literary

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[129] Barthes, "Response to a Survey on Structuralism," 53.

[130] Roland Barthes, "Where to Begin?," in *New Critical Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 79.

[131] J. G. Merquior, *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986), 125.

[132] Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 130.

figures, no one in Barthes' inner circle, and no attempt to tactfully reference his own 1960s structuralist apogee. Precisely this same "triad" of "masters" was recognized, for instance, by Jean-Pierre Vernant.[133] Dumézil, Benveniste, and Lévi-Strauss, are, we might say, the structuralist's structuralists (or the Collège de France's). Though Barthes barely ever mentions Dumézil—it was Foucault who championed Dumézil to Barthes[134]—he effusively praised Benveniste (in "Why I Love Benvensite") and Lévi-Strauss (in various unreciprocated tributes). Barthes clarifies here that the literary criticism that one is inclined to call "structuralist" should properly be called "semiological," and that it has two branches: "Narratology and the analysis of Figures."[135] He seemingly refers to the poeticians and rhetoricians of the 1960s and early 1970s, noting that "there's no longer any collective, systematic force [in 1979] that would allow me to present a meaningful synthesis of the discussion of literary works."[136] Barthes himself was a venerable systematizing force of the 1960s, and having bowed out of this enterprise, thus contributed to the ambivalence he perspicuously detects.

Anglophone critics have often misunderstood Barthes' rank in the structuralist hierarchy: what appeared high from the outside was in fact low on the inside. As Samoyault claims in her biography of Barthes, Lévi-Strauss' "fully fledged science" of structuralism could only hold the "field for methodological experimentation" that Barthes explored in a certain amount of contempt.[137] Whereas Lévi-Strauss' structuralism sought to "uncover laws" as a "general theory

[133] Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 183.

[134] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 232.

[135] Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 130.

[136] Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 130.

[137] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 256. For Samoyault, Barthes' "disappointment" in his relationship with Lévi-Strauss—the anthropologist rejected Barthes' request for supervision —was "biographically decisive" (250). In 1960, Lévi-Strauss declined to supervise Barthes' work on fashion—while suggesting that Barthes shift from the semiology of clothing to analyzing the discourse of fashion in magazines (251). Yet this was merely a swerve within Barthes' stuffiest book; the real shock was Lévi-Strauss' refusal to publicly (or even privately) stamp Barthes' work with his senior structuralist's imprimatur. *Criticism and Truth,* said Lévi-Strauss, displayed an "excessive liking … for subjectivity, for feelings, a certain mysticism vis-à-vis literature" (quoted on 254); Lévi-Strauss built a joke out of *S/Z* by performing a structural kinship analysis of *Sarrasine*: this was all rather "cruel" as Samoyault captures it, though Lévi-Strauss sincerely appreciated *Empire of Signs* (256) and voted, despite certain qualms, for Barthes' entering the Collège de France. Ultimately, Barthes built Lévi-Strauss into the structuralist canon and Lévi-Strauss returned nothing on the order of true reciprocity.

of relations," "structural semiology continues to harbour a demystifying ambition as it attacks dominant opinions, the doxa, and ultimately language itself."[138] Thanks to texts such as "Myth today," the old doxic and political vectors of classical rhetoric again resurfaced, fortified and arguably obscured by semiology. These experimental avenues appeared messy and impure in the hands of Barthes for the highest-ranking structuralists and linguists, who often perceived him as a journalist or witty essayist who fell short of true science.

Benveniste, unlike Lévi-Strauss, did not register for Barthes during the rise of structuralism in the 1950s and early 1960s. Yet after Kristeva arrived in Paris in December 1965, and rapidly became a major force in Barthes' seminars in early 1966, she introduced Barthes to Benveniste.[139] Barthes quickly devoured enough Benveniste to bring his thought to Baltimore in October 1966 (further proof that this year was, as Dosse claims, structuralism's *annum mirabile*). As if implying that Benveniste is the consummate cosmonaut of language, Barthes' "Why I Love Benveniste" (1966, with a 1974 sequel) begins by comparing the incomplete discovery of outer space to that of linguistic space and then expounds his underappreciated virtues as both linguist and stylist (the latter being an increasingly important value within rhe-structuralism)**.** And yet Benveniste and the coterie of linguists at his level often chose not to publicly recognize Barthes' applications of linguistic and structural notions to literature. Appearing in 1966, during the peak of structuralist jubilance, the collection *Problèmes du langage* —featuring Benveniste, Chomsky, Jakobson, Martinet and other internationally renowned linguists—treated rather different "problems of language" than we might imagine Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault addressing under such a title, and only one text, by the Hungarian linguist Iván Fónagy, dealt with properly poetic and literary material that would possibly fit under a term like rhe-structuralism.[140] Benveniste's thought, as we will later see, trickled downwards from high structuralism to rhe-structuralism, lapped up by Barthes and Kristeva in the late 1960s. Whereas rhe-structuralism "marketed"—and expanded the market for—high structuralism, the properly intellectual content of Barthes' circle could not, as it were, cascade upwards against the force of

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[138] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 237.

[139] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 292,98.

[140] Emmon et al. Bach, *Problèmes du langage* (Gallimard, 1966).

symbolic gravity. Barthes was quite right that “there are profound ideological divergences between the various representative figures [of French structuralism] who have been crammed into the same structuralist pigeonhole, for instance between Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Lacan, or Althusser.”[141] At the same time, grouping Barthes with his fellow admirers of Valéry and poetics such as Genette and Todorov remains natural, since they would all look back upon rhetoric’s mostly forgotten history to buttress and feed contemporary criticism.

4.17 Criticisms of Barthes

Barthes’ impurities as a structuralist, according to his harshest critics, moderately to massively undermine his project. From linguists such as Georges Mounin and Roy Harris to literary critics such as Paul de Man and the eccentric Marxist philologist Sebastiano Timpanaro, Barthes was beset by fascinating and sometimes vicious accusations. His syncretic mixture of various linguists—Saussure, Hjelmslev, Greimas, and Jakobson, plus assorted Marxist and psychoanalytic jargon—supposedly tainted any allegiance he could claim to Saussure. Harris mounts particularly brutal attacks on Barthes’ scare-quoted “structuralism” from *Elements of Semiology*, expounding his failure to reconcile the contradictory concepts he appropriates from linguists like Saussure and Hjelmslev; he indeed becomes a “’theorist’ wielding intellectual scissors, who supposes that ideas can be cut up and pasted together again in any collage that he or his public find attractive.”[142] De Man’s “Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism” was fairly harsh, but more tempered than the bluntly hostile remarks he made after Barthes’ presentation at Johns Hopkins. De Man correctly suggests that Barthes is an “impure” structuralist: “the work of ‘pure’ structuralists such as the linguist Greimas and his group or of some among Barthes' most gifted associates, such as Gérard Genette or Tzvetan Todorov, is more rigorous and more exhaustive ... Barthes is primarily a critic of literary ideology and, as such, his work is more essayistic and reflective than it is technical.”[143] From within and without,

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[141] Barthes, "The Structural Analysis of Narriative," 223.

[142] Roy Harris, *Saussure and his Interpreters* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 148.

[143] Paul de Man, "Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism," *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 178-79.

it was this issue of rigour that ensured he could never sit comfortably in an ultra-technical, systematized vocation.

To Barthes' detractors, his syncretic combination of linguists revealed a confused mind, and forced Barthes into the more literary role of essayist; the muddle of various sciences he calls semiotics, semio-criticism, and trans-linguistics failed to live up to their scientific promises. As his student Compagnon suggested, Barthes did not entirely, or consciously, understand his own rhetorical métier. Eloquent as he was, Barthes could not genuinely articulate his desire to polish up *l'ancienne rhétorique*, restore its old resplendence, and send it forth into the fray under the dazzling new pennants of linguistics. Just as the Swiss flag resembles the Danish, the banner of Saussure looked much like that of Hjelmslev.

By the end of this chapter, we find Barthes in a somewhat precarious position: better at marketing structuralism than doing structuralism, celebrated by many, but not always by those who mattered most to him. But understanding his weaknesses is necessary to understand his strengths, especially when close to each other, as they often are. Structuralist impurities were often rhetorical pieties. He was never the Lévi-Strauss of literature, nor the Benveniste. And yet, inspired by Valéry, Barthes would realize that rhetoric's institutional weakening had left a great void in literary and linguistic modernity. As we will see in the next chapter, Barthes quite brilliantly mapped out what was missing, although the gaping chasm spanned too far Barthes alone to fill. Whereas Paulhan had previously confronted this space aesthetically and psychologically, Barthes will see it as nothing less than the ruins of the "civilization" of rhetoric.

5 Barthes in the Ruins of Rhetoric

"Rhetoric can constitute a crucial evidence of civilization, for it represents a certain mental selection of the world, i.e., finally, an ideology."—Roland Barthes[1]

In the preceding chapter, Barthes' eccentric structuralism was reassessed from two vantages: firstly, the early continuities within rhetoric, and secondly, the discontinuities between his work and the "high" structuralists. He often became stuck between rhetoric and structuralism, or put more optimistically, had one foot in each. But we have only seen smatterings of Barthes' thoughts *on* rhetoric. The present chapter will present and interpret Barthes' many writings, interviews, and seminars on the institutions, histories, theories, and practices of rhetoric, as well as reflect upon his own well-studied eloquence. Rather than being a "rhetorician" in the most classic sense of producing a treatise on persuasion, Barthes became a kind of rhetorical archeologist, bricoleur, custodian, and critic, a thinker of rhetoric's European institution. To an extent rarely understood or appreciated, rhetoric's institutional legacy hounded him, availing itself of Barthes' uncertainty as to its extant or extinct status, doggedly following him from the Valéry era of the 1940s to his final months of 1980, when he lamented, "*Writing* is no longer the object of a *Pedagogy* (in the very broad sense of the term): …Rhetoric has been degraded, technocratized," transformed into "techniques of expression" and mere "*writings.*"[2] Barthes sought a "new rhetoric," roughly speaking, but hesitated during the many moments when the "old rhetoric" showed signs of life.

Caught up in what has been called a "love-hate" situation between him and the art, Barthes vacillated between these extremes and ended up closer to love at the time of his death,

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[1] Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," 192 n7.

[2] He uses the English term *writings*, perhaps dismissively, to emphasize the sheer instrumentality inherent in the pseudo-rhetorics of today. He even argues that "Rhetoric *inter pares*"—advice from one writer to another, such as Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*—is effectively gone. Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 279-80.

but not definitively so: an appropriately weak commitment to a weakened institution. Though far from a reliable partisan belonging to the “party” of rhetoric, Barthes would readily repudiate the forces responsible for its marginalization, torch the reductive sketches of the institution, and expound the inadequacies of its half-baked or nonexistent replacements. Yet this is not the impression generated from his famous, brave, and harsh judgement—one he did not exactly follow—in favour of “reducing Rhetoric to the rank of a merely historical object; seeking, in the name of *text*, of *writing*, a new practice of language; and never separating ourselves from revolutionary science.”[3] Though rhetoric offered Barthes a hinge between some of his famous terms, such as readerly and writerly, and sometimes became a foil against which to define various “revolutionary” activities, a reading of his complete work undermines the notion that he saw rhetoric as *merely* a “historical object.” On the one hand, the “Old Rhetoric [is] now permanently alien to our world of language”; yet on the other, rhetoric offers relief from “a strictly modern myth[:] language is reputed to be ‘natural,’ ‘instrumental.’”[4] Pulled between conservative and radical impulses, Barthes faced a predicament that has only worsened of late. Given a brutal instrumentalization of rhetorical studies, a quasi-conservative exploration of the old rhetoric readily appears more radical and worthy than pursuing the streamlined “rhetoric lite” of today.

In general, we owe much to Barthes. With rhetoric, however, he is something of a tragic hero, making his greatest achievement an unusual one. For although he righteously drew attention towards a wrongly neglected institution—with eloquence, no less—and can be credited for many insights, he attempted to move an immovable rock through his ample but not omnipotent polemical force. Rather than a sign of weakness, this is a sign of the immensity of what he was up against. The problem of weak survival entailed, and still entails, navigating between nostalgic and Whiggish narratives, between a distant and mystified golden age and the modern dystopia of “effective communications.” Perceiving the rhetorical civilization beneath our own constitutes a formidable accomplishment. In hindsight, this might have been a good

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[3] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 93.

[4] Barthes, "The Division of Languages," 108,22.

juncture to rest on his laurels. For the next question—what exactly is to be *done* with these rhetorical remnants? —strikes me as the aporia that will swallow him.

5.1 Rhetoric between life and death

For most scholars, Barthes went too far in his criticisms of rhetoric-as-institution, carelessly throwing out some of the good along with the bad. In light of rhetoric's weak survival, however, his desire to cleave the former rhetoric from the nascent rhetoric, and his hesitancy to declare a decisive "death," make considerably more sense in his particular liminal moment. Barthes grappled with rhetoric at its most subterranean point of a five-century period in France. And he was born into a literary scene of peak Terror, which, at least as Surrealism, troubled him, and came of age among quasi-terroristic currents of thought from phenomenology to various forms of positivism.[5] If one grew up reading Lanson's textbooks in school and Sartre at home, imagining the massive rhetorical revival that we now take for granted is difficult indeed.

As we have seen in the first two chapters, we must not equate the ruination of rhetoric with its absence: many pedagogic foundation stones survived the collapse of the edifice, and these Barthes perceived better than most. Unlike his theorist contemporaries, he was keenly interested in what we could call "superstructural" status of rhetoric, its full social-historical totality which was far from obvious at the time. In this sense of rhetoric—also my preferred sense—the institution reveals itself through a never-ending series of thick descriptions and historical elucidations rather than through pithy essentialist definitions. Since Plato coined *rhêtorikê*, an exhausting and perhaps exhausted process of redefining the term has beckoned thinkers from Aristotle to Barthes. His short definitions remain interesting—and made good use of new linguistic concepts—but fall short of what I perceive to be the most original aspect of Barthes' rhetorical thought: a "civilizational" reading of the institution, an *anthropology* or *sociology* of rhetoric rather than a *philosophy*.

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[5] "I don't like the notion of *automatic writing* at all, … which implies an idealist view of man divided into a speaking subject and a profound inner subject. … It's always this idea of origins, of depth, of primitiveness, in short, of *nature*, that bothers me in the Surrealist discourse." Roland Barthes, "The Surrealists Overlooked the Body," in *The Grain of the Voice* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 244.

5.2 Neither structuralist nor poststructuralist

Before, during, and after the apparent climax of Barthes' interest in rhetoric in the mid-1960s, he engaged in a more familiar form of rhetorical literary criticism, drawing heavily upon ancient terminology. Meanwhile, he developed his own well-studied form of eloquence—*written* eloquence—set against the strong monological and oratorical dimensions inherent in traditional French pedagogical and political rhetorics, dimensions he found repulsive. The lifelong "rhetorical Barthes" is more continuous than the somewhat contradictory Barthes recently captured by Jonathan Culler: "In some ways, he is both the archetypal structuralist, with his writings on semiology and narratology, and the model poststructuralist, with his rejections of systematizing projects, his love of the fragment and his increasing evocations of the personal and affective dimensions of thought."[6] Though this apparent paradox confounds many, it resembles the more tractable difference between Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Plato's *Phaedrus*: the rhetorical system versus the amorous relation. Barthes pursued both: he would venture down what he calls the "double river" of synchronic and diachronic rhetorics, as well as the less systematic and rational aspects in the orbit of eros. From this perspective, he is not a contradictory (post)structuralist but simply someone keen to explore the full breadth of rhetoric's offerings. The late Barthes of *A Lover's Discourse,* read according to the history of rhetoric, is more of a pre-structuralist than post: he *returns* to Plato after the "ancient structuralism" of Aristotle.

As we will see time and time again, Barthes was torn between appreciating the grandeur of the "old rhetoric" and his desire to critique and reinvent it; he wondered whether it could be freed of its prescriptive and aristocratic ills. Despite this seemingly confounding conflict and its different interpretations among scholars, Barthes' rhetoric courses, I argue, directly and unambiguously invigorated his thought: the "new rhetoric" (the writerly, the Text and its *production*, the violation of norms) would now have a definite foil in the "former rhetoric" (the readerly, the work and its *composition*, the respect for norms). In this way, the central drama of Barthes encompasses a series of ironies gyrating around the new and old rhetorics: the nostalgia for the old at the time of the new, the graceful *composition* of radical texts, the rhetorician, as it were, in the closet. Barthes' nostalgia—he belonged, as he puts it, to the avant-garde's

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[6] Jonathan Culler, "Foreward," in *Barthes: A Biography*, ed. Tiphaine Samoyault (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), xii.

rearguard—often blurred the new and old rhetorics together as the former slipped so readily into the latter.

First, I will consider Barthes' reputation as a rhetorician and Hellenist—these were formative roles, not accidental ones—and compare him to Nietzsche, who is remarkably similar in these regards. Then I will move to Barthes' valuations of rhetoric and his most famous manifesto about rhetoric's history and destiny. Caught between praising rhetoric as a magnificent forgotten institution and damning it as a conservative edifice that must be rebuilt from scratch, Barthes runs the gamut from grandiosity to suspicion. We will see, however, that he much more firmly believed in studying rhetoric's *history*—and developing its historiography, which was virtually non-existent at the time. Moving beyond the rhetoric course, we will perceive its influence on major texts such as *S/Z* and grasp how rhetoric informs his pedagogy and his profound mistrust of oratory and agonistic discourse. Finally, Barthes' own eloquence will be taken up—the theorist of rhetoric who morphs, without warning, into the practitioner.

5.3 Reputation as rhetorician

Whereas Barthes' rhetoric often surprises Anglophone readers and critics, it is well known by those closest to him. Antoine Compagnon, one of Barthes' later students and advocate of a "rhetorical Barthes," claims that Barthes "missed rhetoric, just as Paulhan missed it in *Les Fleurs de Tarbes,* but he did not know what it was"; "Under the name of *writing* [écriture], Barthes reinvented what rhetoric called style."[7] Compagnon notes that the publication in 1970 of Barthes' first rhetoric seminar was one of the major positive influences on rhetoric's reputation in France.[8] Although Marc Fumaroli would take a strong anti-theory stance as he rebirthed French rhetoric through its history, he credited Barthes, whose seminars he attended and aided, for putting it back in the spotlight. Alongside the various writings of Compagnon, perhaps the most celebratory treatment of rhetoric emerges in Phillipe Rogers' *Roland Barthes, Roman*; Michel Beaujour's *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* treats the rhetorical Barthes more

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[7] Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense*, 131,30.

[8] Antoine Compagnon, "La réhabilitation de la rhétorique au XXe siècle " in L'histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne 1450-1950, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 1273.

harshly. In sum, French critics were well aware of Barthes' excavations despite certain qualms as to his methods and purposes.

On the other hand, Anglophone academia has largely ignored the rhetorical or classical Barthes. This stems, in part, from the greater symbolic capital and educational effort afforded in France to rhetoric and classics, and the drives in North America to appropriate the most radical areas of French intellectualism. On its surface, rhetoric and classics indeed fail to offer the apothegms (eg. "the author is dead") for which our market hungered. Despite this obscurity, the spotlight on Barthes blazed so brightly that a few scholars picked up on the legacies of the ancients in his work. To my knowledge, the most comprehensive treatment in English of Barthes' rhetoric owes to Peter France.[9] Almost three decades old, this article could not access the "complete" works of Barthes (which have been appended after being deemed "complete") nor does it touch on Hellenism, a natural companion to the rhetorical tradition. Patrick O'Donovan, Michael Moriarty, and Nicholas Pagan engage special aspects of the rhetorical Barthes; Robert Scholes perhaps represents the first North American to understand Barthes as a "formidable rhetorician, an ingenious, mercurial man of letters,"[10] contrasting him with Genette in *Structuralism and Literature* (1974). Yet given the countless books and articles on Barthes that consider truly minor themes in his work or apply him to areas he never knew, it is an egregious oversight that his rhetorical enterprise never received a monograph, considering its total integration of the methodological, stylistic, thematic levels of his work. Rather than the full Barthes-rhetoric relation, scholars tend to prefer focusing on Barthes *as writer,* i.e., the rhetoric *of* Barthes (for instance*, Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* by Andrew Brown).

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[9] For instance, Patrick O'Donovan notes the rhetorical references are "frequent, diverse and sometimes oblique" and "enjoy a certain continuity throughout his work." Patrick O'Donovan, "The Place of Rhetoric," *Paragraph* 11, no. 3 (1988): 227.

Citing O'Donovan, Michael Moriarty notes that for Barthes rhetoric is "conditionally returned to favour" yet takes on an ambiguous multitude of positive and negative connotations when Barthes demarcates the edges of the rhetoric and those instances when it must be "rejected in favour of Text"; Moriarty notes Barthes' "sustained involvement" in rhetoric, a discipline with a "continuing legacy" and "absolutely contemporary concerns." Michael Moriarty, "Rhetoric, Doxa, and Experience in Barthes," French Studies LI, no. 2 (1997): 176,69.

[10] Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 148.

The entirety of the Barthes and rhetoric discourse need not be elaborated, but it is worth reviewing Peter France's prescient article. He ultimately concludes that Barthes engaged in "not an unproblematic celebration and continuation of ancient rhetoric, nor a naïve modern rejection of its artifice, but a complicated love-hate relationship which is exemplary for the modern writer and indeed for the modern student of rhetoric."[11] France divides the Barthes-rhetoric relationship into three dimensions, the first being "Rhetoric as Model": rhetoric as a generally worthy proto-structuralist discipline that "privileged the impersonal system against the notions of personal expression or creativity."[12] "Rhetoric as Enemy," the second dimension, concerns three Barthesean objections: rhetoric's quasi-bourgeois power and status, rhetoric's all-too-tidy separation of form and content, and the "monological" domination inherent in oratory and pedagogy.[13] Finally, "Rhetoric as Springboard" concerns Barthes own rhetorical-writerly practice: France contends that Barthes is more Montaigne than Cicero, "making original use of an old art, indulging himself quite consciously in classical forms, but never in a simple-minded way. The old rhetoric is subverted and renovated, but it retains its power to affect the reader."[14] These three dimensions are indeed borne out by Barthes' texts that France could not access, and today we can add more.

5.4 Reputation as Hellenist

Anyone reading an introduction to Barthes might struggle to remember that he was potentially destined to become a Hellenist (if his education in classics is mentioned at all). But this is an important fact in itself—and in connection to rhetoric. His Sorbonne *license* on Greek tragedy began with an epigram on rhetoric; his knowledge of Attic Greek (and Latin) helped him considerably in exploring the "ancient" structuralists (as he once referred to Aristotle and

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[11] Peter France, "Roland Barthes, A Rhetoric of Modernity," in *Proceedings of the Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric*, ed. Albert W. Halsall (Ottawa: Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric, 1989), 82.

[12] France, "Roland Barthes, A Rhetoric of Modernity," 71.

[13] France, "Roland Barthes, A Rhetoric of Modernity," 76.

[14] France, "Roland Barthes, A Rhetoric of Modernity," 79.

Quintilian). Though Barthes provokes us with his "trademark use of Greek terms,"[15] understanding him as a Hellenist has barely begun.[16] Whereas Barthes offered many sweeping programmatic statements on rhetoric, his tireless interest in Greece never took the form of a Nietzschean polemic that thrust (non-rhetorical) Greek legacies into the spotlight. Barthes was knowledgeable enough to write a long piece for the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* on "Greek Theatre" (1965), but the measured encyclopedic style demanded by the *Histoire des spectacles* volume prevented him from freely speculating on Greek inheritance.

For almost his entire life Barthes was effectively silent on his profuse Greek lexicon, so common in his rhetoric work. Yet on January 19, 1977, Barthes delivered a session at the Collège de France that finally justified the "Greek network" in the course he was teaching (which had more than 75 Greek terms of note). He asks: "Why prioritize a Greek network? Why not be French, like everyone else? Why make things complicated, convoluted, in some pseudo-erudite garment?"[17] Though some of the six justifications answering this question are embedded in the course topics of "idiorhythmy" and "living together," three can be extracted in the context of his entire work:

a. "The Greek word pinpoints a concept that serves simultaneously as an origin, an image and defamiliarizes."[18]
b. "The Greek word generalizes and emphasises. It acts as a summary, an ellipsis—and in this respect ensures a productive unfolding (= etymological inventiveness). More generally, a dossier to be opened: on the concept-words from one language that get inserted into another idiom."[19]

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[15] Stafford, *Roland Barthes*, 13.

[16] Scholars interested in theatre explore Barthes' interest in Greek drama, and John McKeane's "The Tragedy of Roland Barthes" and Claude Coste's "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry" helpfully quote pieces of his still-unpublished master's-level dissertation on "Evocations and Incantations in Greek Tragedy" (1941). Currently being edited for publication, this dissertation is a "hugely important document for an understanding of Barthes's thought and educational training." Coste, "Roland Barthes: Terror in Poetry," 89 n8.

[17] Barthes, *How To Live Together*, 18.

[18] Barthes, *How To Live Together*, 18.

[19] Barthes, *How To Live Together*, 18.

c. "Philology (or pseudo-philology) is slow-going. To have recourse to Greek words = not to be in any particular hurry; besides, when the point is to let the signifier expand and spread like a fragrance, that slow pace is sometimes necessary. In today's world, any technique that entails slowing down: something progressive about it."[20]

To these explicit justifications for the "Greek network" one should also add the more cynical and implicit notion of what he terms the "pseudo-erudite garment": the possibility that Greek terms among French intellectuals signal erudition and hence symbolic capital. Nonetheless, Barthes concludes with the memorable image of "letting the signifier expand and spread like a fragrance," and indeed the number of the petals in Barthes' philological potpourri seems beyond measure.

5.5 The formative role

Removing this formative grid of rhetoric and Hellenism would gravely disfigure Barthes. Subtracted of all the theoretical *topoi* from the ancients, one could still have a semiotic technician or provocateur critic of French literature. But the Barthes who rhetorically analyzed mythologies, the writer and the lover (*Phaedrus*), the erudite pedagogue at the Collège de France filling his courses with ancient terms, the actor (Darius in Aeschylus' *Persians*), the theatre critic, the traveler in Greece, the theorist pushing beyond semiotics into the old "discourse on discourse" that rhetoric represented—these would wink out of existence. Perhaps most importantly, the eloquent Barthes, the writer of pleasurable insights (rather than painful obscurities), who attracted more acclaim as a stylist than all his peers—this Barthes fundamentally depends on rhetorical *dressage.* "The art of a writer like Roland," as Compagnon recalls, is one of "seizing the occasion, *kairos*, a notion we often discussed."[21] Yet *kairos* is only one of the many classical and rhetorical concepts he applied—not just to texts, but to himself. Like his friend Foucault—soon to be his eulogist at the Collège de France—Barthes hinted at his affinity with sophists. In his course *The Neutral* at the Collège, Barthes first notes that the sophists were accused of showing off a great variety of shoes without ever teaching the art of

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[20] Barthes, *How To Live Together*, 18-19.

[21] My trans. Antoine Compagnon, *L'Âge des lettres* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 2015), 117.

shoe-making—and then quips: “I don’t construct the concept of Neutral, I display Neutrals.”[22] As we will see, however, Barthes was engaged in much more than a sophistic “display” of rhetoric or a kairotic *métier*, and indeed conceptualized rhetoric in a variety of novel ways.

Barthes’ often-allusive orientation towards rhetoric hints, frustratingly, that we are seeing a mere introduction to the real work yet to come. He indeed mocks himself for his habit of “providing ‘introductions,’ ‘sketches,’ ‘elements,’ postponing the ‘real’ book till later.”[23] One of these books he imagined or flirted with was ‘A History of Rhetoric,’ and he notes that this “foible,” this habit of anticipation, “has a rhetorical name: prolepsis.”[24] Yet these books—“a History of Rhetoric, A History of Etymology, a new Stylistics, an Aesthetics of textual pleasure” and so on— are “never abandoned … they fulfil themselves, partially, indirectly, *as gestures,* through themes, fragments, articles.”[25] Proleptic as Barthes was, a thousand rhetorical gestures and invitations await the inclined reader despite his frustrating failure to deliver a dedicated monograph on rhetoric. We should take him up on his request: “One would wish ... that instead of establishing influences and schools, literary historians would reconstruct the literary ideological climate of a period, the rhetorical apprenticeship of writers.”[26] Barthes’ own “rhetorical apprenticeship” becomes much clearer when compared to the greatest rhetorician of interest to postwar French thought, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Barthes’ investment in rhetoric and Hellenism became roughly commensurate with Friedrich Nietzsche’s. Like Barthes, this philologist was a teacher-practitioner of rhetoric and a student of Greek theatre**.** Nietzsche’s hyper-anthologized “On Truth and Lies” and its quotable, all-too-quotable “mobile army” of rhetorical terms and intensifications taught students about the rhetoricity of truth—but hid the philology, the study and appreciation of rhetoric and sophists,

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[22] Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). 11

[23] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 173.

[24] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 172.

[25] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 173.

[26] Barthes, "A Great Rhetorician of Erotic Figures," 255.

that guided Nietzsche to these insights.[27] Perhaps understanding Barthes as a rhetorician is no more radical than calling Nietzsche a philologist or writer (or *Dichter*) before philosopher. Barthes and Nietzsche both synthesized and borrowed earlier works on rhetoric, “plagiarizing” them in the way that teaching often demands. Nietzsche lifted, sometimes word for word, from Gustav Gerber’s *Language as Art,* and some scholars believe this work shaped much of Nietzsche’s philosophy of language. Barthes’ notes warn of possible “involuntary quotations,” since he effectively created “personal propaedeutics.”[28] Indeed, he was much like the medieval *compilator*, a natural role for broaching such a syncretic or amalgamating discipline as rhetoric.

Rhetoric: detour or destination? Nietzsche, according to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ultimately took an “incomplete and inconclusive” “detour” through rhetoric, which opened up a “strange breach” after he fundamentally “abandon[ed]” the art.[29] Here Barthes differs from Nietzsche. After the mid-1960s Barthes made fewer titular references to rhetoric, and cooled his fervor for its disciplinary status, but rhetorical notions firmly integrated themselves right until his death. What Barthes gave up was not rhetoric, but the dream of systematizing it: he happily and freely explored its expanses late in his career (the rhetoric of love, *kairos*, sophists), but no longer felt it conceptually possible—or personally desirable—to structuralize it.

5.6 Gazing upon rhetoric

Let us consider one particular day in Barthes’ life that would seem a microcosm of his total sentiments towards rhetoric. On the 16th of August, 1964, Barthes finds himself in his familial village of Urt, where he will one day be buried. “Lost among Greek and Latin words,” Barthes writes to his dear friend Philippe Sollers as he prepares to run his rhetoric seminar at EPHE in the coming school year.[30] On the same day, he writes to Michel Butor and Georges

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[27] Barthes read this text, but apparently late in his life. C.f. Barthes, "Of What Use Is an Intellectual?," 277.

[28] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 12-13.

[29] Philippe Lacoue-Labarth, "The Detour," in *The Subject of Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

[30] “Dear friend, ... I've been in Urt for ten days or so, getting a good deal of work done, at least in terms of quantity, especially for next year's Rhetoric; I'm lost among Greek and Latin words and still not entirely sure how I'm going

Perros. “My heart is heavy,” he writes to Perros, “my overly sensitive ‘soul’ is troubled, but Quintilian sets many things right.”[31] As if channeling the archetypal ritual of humanism—like Poggio Bracciolini uncovering Quintilian’s complete *institutio oratoria* in 1416 in a forlorn monastery[32]—Barthes appears awestruck by the ancients, conveying this epiphany to Butor. Whereas Cicero and Plato irritate him, it is Quintilian and Aristotle who prove delightful as proto-structuralists:

> I’m reading the Ancients, and am so fascinated by the coherence of their system that I really don’t know anymore how I’m going to connect that to our literature—and yet that was my great idea at the beginning. I’d like to talk with you about this—if we haven’t already, because I know, I feel that you would share my interest. Some of them get on my nerves, like Cicero and even Plato; others delight me, like Aristotle and Quintilian: an expected division for a structuralist! The “heart” and “soul” are more powerless, more agitated than ever, “understanding nothing,” but fortunately there’s Quintilian and the classification of the *status causae.*[33]

This short passage suggests the same questions that haunt his overall relation to rhetoric: what is the fate of the old rhetoric in relation to contemporary (“notre”) literature, for instance, to Butor? How does rhetoric relate to structuralism, or at least to the ancient structuralists such as Aristotle and Quintilian?

An answer to this latter question came quickly to Barthes. He soon positions Rhetoric as the “glamorous ancestor” of “literary structuralism.”[34] Furthermore he will tendentiously favour the structuralists of antiquity over the organicists: “Cicero owes everything to Aristotle, but de-

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to tie it all in with our literature, the sort you write.” Quoted in Philippe Sollers, *The Friendship of Roland Barthes*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 55.

31 Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 255.

32 A discovery richly dramatized by Stephen Greenblatt in *The Swerve.*

33 I changed this translation from the original, because I believe it should be “expected” rather than “unexpected” : «d’autres m’enchantent comme Aristote et Quintilien : partage attendu de la part d’un structuraliste. » Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 151.

34 Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 6.

intellectualizes him";[35] "Isn't all rhetoric (if we except Plato) Aristotelian? No doubt it is";[36] "Aristotle is, after all, the father of the structural analysis of works."[37] In the seminar manuscript entitled "Avant-propos: L'Empire Rhétorique," Barthes suggests that his "method" will be structuralist analysis, but it will be applied to *two* research objects: rhetoric and *structuralism itself.* Or as he jots down in his notes:

- Research : never only on a subject, but also, always, into itself. <u>The gaze of the observer is part of the thing observed</u>. (Physics, Phenomenology, Semiology)
- Our method, declared: structural analysis.
- Seminar: 1 subject but 2 objects : rhetoric, structuralism.
- This structuralism, thanks to rhetoric, will itself encounter a new, sizable object: history.[38]

In looking in on itself, the structuralist *regard* necessarily finds the history of rhetoric. Barthes will thus scour the vast remains of what he calls *l'ancienne rhétorique*, realizing its literary, political, and sociological importance, for new glimmerings of textual and linguistic science—while simultaneously urging an "indispensable critical distance" from this "ideological object."[39]

L'ancienne rhétorique, however, is perhaps neither old nor distant. In a clever and controversial move, Barthes' very terminology ages rhetoric: by putting *ancienne* in front, he hints at the *former* rhetoric—not *rhétorique classique* or *antique*—even though the new rhetoric "may not yet have come into being: the world is incredibly full of Old Rhetoric."[40] The term *l'ancienne rhétorique* also vaguely suggests *l'ancien régime*; the Revolution marks or anticipates the decline of rhetorical institutions (and its Terror invites Paulhan's "anti-rhetoric"). Though

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[35] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 24.

[36] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 20.

[37] Barthes, "The Sequences of Actions," 139.

[38] My best (and perhaps erroneous) attempt at translating and deciphering the manuscript image in Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 305.

[39] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 47.

[40] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 11.

perhaps presumptuous in cleaving old and new, Barthes admits—and this is the crux of rhetoric's weak survival—that *le monde est incroyablement plein d'ancienne Rhétorique*.[41]

5.7 The great manifesto

After Barthes assembled the most promising shards of this arcane "super-civilization" of rhetoric, a final proclamation at the end of his excavation, the last paragraphs of the postscript he affixed to the ancient rhetoric seminar, epitomizes his career-long project of rhetorical archeology and appropriation. In perhaps the most important polemic he ever advanced about rhetoric, he simultaneously affirms its crucial role in shaping literature and decrees it must be exceeded. The three crucial points—"which reach me from this ancient empire in my present enterprise"—include:

> [1] The conviction that many features of our literature, of our instruction, of our institutions of language … would be illuminated or understood differently if we knew thoroughly (i.e., if we did not censor) the rhetorical code which has given its language to our culture. …
>
> [2] This notion that there is a kind of stubborn agreement between Aristotle (from whom rhetoric proceeded) and our mass culture. … A kind of Aristotelian vulgate still defines a type of trans-historical Occident, a civilization (our own). …
>
> [3] This observation, disturbing as it is in foreshortened form, that all our literature, formed by Rhetoric and sublimated by humanism, has emerged from a political-judicial practice (unless we persist in the error which limits Rhetoric to the "Figures"): in those areas where the most brutal conflicts—of money, of property, of class—are taken over, contained, domesticated, and sustained by state power, where state institutions regulate feigned speech and codifies all recourse to the signifier: there is where our literature is born. This is why reducing Rhetoric to the rank of a merely historical object; seeking, in

[41] Roland Barthes, "L'ancienne rhétorique: Aide-mémoire," *Communications* 16 (1970): 172.

> the name of the *text*, of *writing*, a new practice of language; and never separating ourselves from revolutionary science—these are one and the same task.[42]

This manifesto offers a microcosm of Barthesean thinking, laden with marxism, structuralism, and his theoretical foci ("sous le nom de *texte*, d'*écriture*"). It will be referenced often as "the manifesto" and much emerges from it.

5.8 Grandiosity, suspicion, and the "whole rhetorical culture of our civilization"

The manifesto embodies a pattern of rhetoric's grandiosity in Barthes' career. Here "all our literature" is grandly—perhaps hyperbolically—"formed by Rhetoric"; earlier in the aide-mémoire he describes the discipline in the most magnificently totalizing terms: a "veritable empire" that swallows up the West, indeed forming a "super-civilization" with a "monumental history."[43] The term "monumental history," tantalizingly dropped in by Barthes, references a Sollerean riff on Braudel.[44] Though in his course he urges an "indispensable critical distance" from rhetoric's ideology, his infatuation with this "glamorous object of intelligence and penetration" is obvious, this "grandiose system which a whole civilization, in its extreme breadth, perfected in order to classify."[45] Barthes thus dignifies rhetoric and its enormity even in his critical moments.

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[42] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 92-93.

[43] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 14-15.

[44] "The theory of textual writing's history may be termed a "monumental history" insofar as it serves as a "ground" in a literal way, in relation to a "cursive," figural (teleological) history which has served at once to constitute and dissimulate a written/exterior space. This multidimensional space (which assumes that of the "cursive" history while consuming it) implies a principle of retroactivity (Lautrémont/Dante), long-range relations, heretofore unperceived (noncultural) *periods*, a duration conceived as *language time*. It puts itself in a position to think the termination of one history and its *transition* to another level as well as the "entrance into history" of other dominant cultures." Philippe Sollers, "Program," in *Writing and the Experience of Limits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 7.

Elsewhere Barthes explains that this grand form of history "doesn't have the same wavelength, so to speak, as other histories that are internal to it." Barthes, "On Theory," 145.

[45] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 47.

Rhetoric is characteristically expansive for Barthes. He dubs the reductive tendency towards the figures an "error" in the great manifesto (as argued previously, Genette's error). Barthes tends to refer to rhetoric, in various texts, as a great "whole." In "Dominici, or the Triumph of Literature" from *Mythologies* he claims: "Antithesis, metaphors, flights of oratory, it is the *whole* of classical rhetoric which accuses [Dominici] the old shepherd."[46] Later in his career, he is still comfortable discussing "the *whole* rhetorical culture of our civilization."[47] In interviews, he articulated speech as springing from "a *whole* collection of cultural and oratorical codes."[48] This "whole," this vast corpus of rhetorical forms, was never to be understated. In addition to rhetoric's synchronic span, he expounds its age: "for a long time indeed," Barthes remembers, the "second linguistics," the "linguistics of discourse," proclaimed "a celebrated name, that of Rhetoric."[49] On the heels of his rhetoric seminars, Barthes launched his talk at Johns Hopkins with the truism that the "genuine theory of language" called rhetoric "reigned from Gorgias to the Renaissance."[50] In the ensuing discussion, philologist Pietro Pucci commended Barthes' "return of rhetoric." Barthes responded to him and the audience[51]: "I have always conceived rhetoric very broadly, including all reflections on all forms of work, on general technique of forms of work."[52] Barthes measures rhetoric and its history on an imperial scale, rivaling the great categories of literature and (super)civilization—grandiose comparisons, but not out of line with the *longue durée* milieu surrounding him.

Literature, Language, Rhetoric: these three terms are often capitalized by Barthes as if to suggest their vast dominion. Despite being such a fine writer and vehement critic of cliché,

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[46] Emphasis added. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 46.

[47] Emphasis added. Barthes, "The Return of the Poetician," 172.

[48] Emphasis added. Barthes, "From Speech to Writing," 3.

[49] Barthes, "Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narriatives," 99.

[50] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 134.

[51] An audience including Jean Hypolite, Tzvetan Todorov, and Jean-Pierre Vernant, who all touched on rhetoric or sophists in their presentations.

[52] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 151.

Barthes could not resist the trite amplifications and hyperboles that the discipline of rhetoric used on itself from antiquity onward; the rhetoric of rhetoric, as it were, proved irresistible. Barthes apparently feels that the public knowledge of rhetoric has been so decimated that he should reinforce the reader with impressive figures as to rhetoric's age and extent. This quantitative trivia tells us rhetoric ruled discourse for *over two thousand years*; rhetoric's "several hundred figures" are indeed "foundations for […] the world."[53] Again and again he returns to the size and age of the discipline: "Rhetoric and its figures: this is how the West meditated on language, for over two thousand years."[54] Barthes' lofty estimate of rhetoric, however, finds itself tempered by a host of critical statements—hyperbolic in the *other* direction—and these take us back to the manifesto passage and its microcosm of Barthesean rhetoric.

The second tendency revealed by the manifesto is Barthes' desire to go *beyond* Rhetoric, to suggest its obsolescence (as in his title *l'ancienne rhétorique*) so that he and his fellow believers in this manifesto can achieve "a new practice of language." This desire to "reduce" rhetoric does not strictly contradict the previous aggrandizing tendency. Barthes—as a kind of structuralist salesman—must make rhetoric seem obsolete (yet still fascinating) to make newer intellectual products more desirable (and bestow upon structuralism a "glamorous" pedigree).[55] Furthermore, Barthes—or any Marxist-leaning thinker—cannot simply endorse rhetoric wholesale because of its history of being weaponized by the state in "brutal conflicts—of money, of property, of class"; elsewhere he calls Rhetoric "the great literary code" of "the times of greatest social division."[56] In "Rhetorical Analysis" (1967), Barthes claims artful speaking is both "a sign of social power and an instrument of that power,"[57] wryly noting that the young bourgeois in France end their secondary education with the *classe de rhétorique* (a culminating

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[53] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 26.

[54] Roland Barthes, "Acrimboldo, or Magician and Rhétoriqeur," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (New York: Hill and Wang), 136.

[55] "Literary structuralism had a glamorous ancestor, one whose historical role is in general underestimated or discredited for ideological reasons: Rhetoric, grandiose effort of an entire culture to analyze and classify the forms of speech, to render the world of language intelligible." Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 6.

[56] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 162.

[57] Barthes, "Rhetorical Analysis," 84.

pattern imported from antiquity to the Jesuit pedagogic hegemony and beyond). According to Barthes, French literature's "very language has been formed in the rhetorical, classical, and Jesuitical mold. To be true to itself today, it must therefore escape these conditions, and its very past opens up original paths of escape."[58] Thus, Rhetoric with a capital 'R' is not revolutionary for Barthes since it is doubly troubled by an intellectually conservative pedigree and Marxist criticisms. And yet, despite its unfashionable, unradical status in Parisian intellectualism, Barthes contends that we must study rhetoric with great seriousness.

Rhetoric fittingly compels Barthes into an epideictic mood, into the extremes of praise and blame. One of the crucial questions of this chapter, then, is the extent to which Barthes' career keeps him *within* or takes him *beyond* the borders of the rhetorical empire—which by his own admission is the largest intellectual empire of all. This is a most difficult task because of the tension Barthes relentlessly identifies between rhetoric and its foes. As he later writes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, his "primary task" is to "re-establish within the science of language what is only fortuitously, disdainfully attributed to it, or even more often, rejected: semiology (stylistics, rhetoric, as Nietzsche said)."[59] Yet this comes with a second task: "to restore within science what goes against it: here, the text."[60] Though Barthes' contrarian impulses do not entirely negate his expansive estimates and praise, dubbing rhetoric a "merely historical object" detached from "revolutionary science" is quite harsh.

These two tendencies—grandiosity and celebration, bracketing and suspicion—define Barthes' rhetorical *pathos*. Neither tendency is disinterested and scientific; the *pathos* of the ancient art seeps through the Saussurean dams he constructs to harness what he dubs the "double river" of classical rhetoric (one synchronic stream, one diachronic). Barthes radiates a sense of *re*-discovery, lamenting the lack of synoptic modern rhetoric manuals in French. Thanks to this societal neglect and ignorance, and the limited scope of his readings, Barthes will be able to define and redefine rhetoric in stimulating ways without being hamstrung by the ancient and

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[58] Barthes, "On *The Fashion System* and the Structural Analysis of Narriatives," 55.

[59] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 33.

[60] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 33.

incessant debates as to rhetoric's domains, aims, and essences. Barthes was certainly a rhetorician according to his own frameworks (yet shy to consider himself as such). His most systematic definition of rhetoric is a "meta-language" that spans six activities—rhetoric as a technique, teaching, science, ethic, social practice, and ludic practice. Before considering this signature definition, let us consider some of his briefer characterizations.

5.9 Minor definitions of rhetoric (linguistic)

Manifold short definitions or characterizations of rhetoric abound in Barthes' work, scattered en route to other topics. For instance, he claims "rhetoric is the science that encodes the sending of messages" and then laments the lack of a rhetoric of reading, a corresponding science of decoding.[61] On another occasion, Barthes asks, "What is it that makes a verbal message a work of art?"[62] Whereas the formalists focused on *Literaurnost*, and Jakobson on *poetics*, Barthes responds to this question with "*rhetoric*, so as to avoid any restriction of poetics to poetry and in order to mark our concern with a general level of language common to all genres."[63] These pithy attempts often articulate rhetoric, not in the classical dimensions he knew in the 1940s, but in the most advanced linguistic terminologies he could find.

Barthes often gave rhetoric's old images new linguistic frames. In one of his most compelling attempts at simplicity, he states, "rhetoric can be defined as the connotative level of language."[64] Here he opens up a whole dimension of rhetoric based on sentiment and intuition required to understand connotation. As Barthes writes in *Elements of Semiology* (1964), "*rhetoric* is the form of the connotators"—in the Hjelmslevian sense of "form"—whereas ideology is the form of their signifieds.[65] What Barthes means by the "the rhetoric of an image," in this vein, is simply "the classification of its connotators": its "figures" will be "formal

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[61] Barthes, "Responses," 172.

[62] Barthes, "Rhetorical Analysis," 83.

[63] Barthes, "Rhetorical Analysis," 83.

[64] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 94.

[65] Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 92.

relations of elements," subject to "the physical constrains of vision."[66] Defining rhetoric as the "connotative level of language" or "the form of the connotators" perhaps resonates with Kenneth Burke's notion of the "dramatistic" level of language that he opposes to the "scientistic" in his famous essay "Terministic Screens."

Owing to connotation, rhetorical analysis cannot always remain fixed upon a textual object and requires a subjective interpreter. Asked whether the semiologist has a guaranteed objectivity during rhetorical analysis, Barthes responds with an elongated "no":

> The analysis of rhetoric requires the researcher to rely on their own feeling as a reader, something which might shock the positivist procedures associated with experimentation. As soon as we study language, we come up against this obstacle. There is no "proof" of language other than its readability, its immediate understanding. In order to prove the analysis of a language being made you always have to come back to the "linguistic sentiment" of the person who is speaking. In any case, my exteriority to the language that I am analyzing is only provisional. Indeed my own description itself could in turn be taken up by another wider and more coherent system of explanation.[67]

This appeal to sentiment and subjectivity contrasts remarkably with the formalizing impulses of Barthes' contemporaries, who were eager to develop the most objective, or at least technical, areas of rhetoric. Yet here Barthes saw a way forward; he was increasingly keen to open up structuralist science to literature, rhetoric, and other discourses of feeling and pleasure.

Rhetoric escapes positivism, at least in the mind of Barthes. Worried about "bourgeois positivism … superbly—abusively—disengaged from language," he claims that "the task facing structural discourse is to make itself entirely homogeneous to its object."[68] In a sense, "science will become literature."[69] He suggests that the new structuralist should:

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[66] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 49.

[67] Roland Barthes, "On *The Fashion System*," in *The Language of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 94.

[68] Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 10.

[69] Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 10.

> Transform himself into a "writer," not in order to profess or to practice "style," but in order to recognize the crucial problems of any speech act. ... The relations of subjectivity and objectivity—, or to put it another way, the subject's place in his work—can no longer be conceived as in the palmy days of positivist science.[70]

Here he echoes the "shock [to] positivist procedures"; the notion that "the analysis of rhetoric requires the researcher to rely on their own feeling as a reader."[71] Barthes' consummate rhetorician, rather than simply a stylist, becomes a diagnostician or pathologist of speech acts.

5.10 Minor definitions of rhetoric (amorous)

Whereas these pithy definitions would have been impossible without modern linguistics (Hjelmslev and Jakobson), Barthes will also tackle rhetoric in one of its most classical formulations from *Phaedrus*. Rhetoric's erotic-amorous dimension bridges the young Barthes as classicist to the old author of *A Lover's Discourse*.[72] Whereas many scholars envision Barthes' interest in desire as a poststructuralist or psychoanalytic move, it is arguably a Platonic one, latent in his earlier work. In an expansive definition of rhetoric from 1963, for instance, we see the discipline of rhetoric "linked … to all communication" and chiefly to love:

> This zone [of controlled literary communication], a vital one, is called rhetoric, whose double function is to keep literature from being transformed into the sign of banality (if too direct) and into the sign of originality (if too indirect). The frontiers of rhetoric may widen or narrow, from Gongorism to stenography, but it is certain that rhetoric, which is nothing but the technique of exact information, is linked not only to all literature but even to all communication, once it seeks to make others understand that we acknowledge them: rhetoric is the amorous dimension of writing.[73]

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[70] Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 7.

[71] Barthes, "On *The Fashion System*," 94.

[72] On the important relation rhetoric and love in Barthes' later work, see Michael Moriarty, "Rhetoric, Doxa, and Experience in Barthes," *French Studies* LI, no. 2 (1997).

[73] Barthes, "Preface," xvi.

The first sentence seemingly heads towards a Paulhanian tension between banality and originality. But this gives way to writing's "amorous dimension," and Barthes follows this definition with the maxim "to write is a mode of Eros"; "there is no other *significatum* in literary work."[74] Plato is not mentioned explicitly here, but shortly his rhetorical seminar will teach that "rhetoric is a dialogue of love"[75] while specifically citing *Phaedrus* (to which a section of *A Lover's Discourse* was much later dedicated). All of his subsequent work on amorous or erotic themes—a *Lover's Discourse*, *Pleasure of the Text*, his various writings on Sade, the nude, the striptease, and so on—are within the rough domain defined by Plato's ancient intermingling of love and rhetoric; as Barthes writes, studying the "pleasure of language" was to an extent anticipated by the epideictic (celebratory) genre of "old Rhetoric," although this pleasure was constrained by the "natural."[76] Of course, Barthes was not content to simply rehash old rhetorical themes in his career—except in the EPHE seminar, a piece of "personal propaedeutics" created because he could find no adequate manual, no "chronological and systematic panorama" of rhetoric in French.[77] His typical procedure was to take an old notion from Roman or especially Greek rhetoric and then attempt to radicalize or exceed it, addressing the gaps between ancient and modern sciences of discourse.

5.11 The six practices of rhetoric

We approach the EPHE seminar suspecting that Barthes will, like many rhetoricians before him, definite rhetoric expansively and eloquently. Even *defining* rhetoric—and metonyms like eloquence and the consummate orator—at this point is itself a stereotyped rhetorical gesture from which Barthes breaks through a more structuralist, *annaliste* approach. Let us consider a few of the most famous sayings to establish what Barthes is up against. Firstly, the psychagogic definition from *Phaedrus*: rhetoric as *techne psychagogia tis dia logon,* an "art which leads the

[74] Barthes, "Preface," xvi.

[75] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 19.

[76] Barthes, "From Science to Literature," 9.

[77] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 11.

soul by means of words."[78] Secondly, Aristotle's analytic definition: "Rhetoric is a counterpart [*antistrophos*] to dialectic" and "may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever."[79] Thirdly, the moralistic definition of the ideal orator from Cato the Elder and much popularized by Quintilian: the *vir bonus dicendi peritus,* a good man speaking well.[80] In addition to capturing rhetoric in one shot, there is also the strategy of defining it recursively; one can say the discipline is the sum of its five parts or canons, and then define their parts, the parts and of parts, and so on.

The genius of Barthes' definition—which is more of a thick description than the highlighting of an essence—issues from its overlapping rather than distinct parts, yielding a sociological and anthropological orientation with six "practices" constituting a "metalanguage," that is, a "discourse on discourse":

1. A *technique*: the *techne* of persuasion, a "body of rules and recipes" with designs on the auditor or reader

2. *A teaching*: a personal or institutional practice of transmission and examination

3. A *science* (or proto-science): the observation and classification of linguistic phenomena, "argumentative language and 'figured' language"

4. an *ethic*: a "body of ethical prescriptions whose role is to supervise … the 'deviations' of emotive language"

5. a *social practice*: "the privileged technique … which permits the ruling class to gain ownership of speech"

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[78] 261a. Plato, *Euthyphro ; Apology ; Chrito ; Phaedo ; Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 519.

[79] Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J.H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 3,15.

[80]Inst. Ort. 12.1.1. Quintillian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. V (Books 11-12) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), 196.

6. a *ludic practice*: a form "mockery" and transgressive play directed to the rest of rhetoric's "repressive … institutional system"[81]

These practices present themselves at the start of the "Aide-mémoire," opening up the scope of rhetoric to an unprecedented extent, recasting it with provocative terminologies. If we take these six practices as constitutive of the rhetorical discipline, then the new "discourse on discourse" that Barthes developed across his career truly transcends only one of them while developing the other five. It is the Proto-scientific aspect of rhetoric that Barthes truly surpasses, drawing on Saussure, Jakobson, Greimas, and Hjelmslev. Here Barthes becomes 5/6th rhetorician and 1/6th something else.

5.12 The aide-mémoire: critique and apology

Though Barthes' *Aide-mémoire* demystifies and "reads" the institution of rhetoric in an absolutely novel way, particularly with respect to social class, he simultaneously introduces new mystifications. In stipulating that "we shall limit ourselves to Athens, Rome, and France,"[82] he transforms the "rhetorical empire" into imperial rhetoric as written by the victors of its intellectual history (decades earlier Paulhan had already recognized Arabic rhetoric, for instance). Barthes even rules out America and Belgium, which, in hindsight, yielded some of the most vital contributions to in twentieth-century rhetorical theory: Kenneth Burke and the "Brussels School of Rhetoric."[83]

Such rejections facilitated the structuralist adoption of rhetoric, smoothing over rough patches (regrettably, some of the most interesting ones). The magnum opus of the Brussels School, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, would not jive with synchronic investigation because of its philosophical and legalistic density, relatively minimal treatment of the figures, and focus on arguments moving *though* temporal and logical space (light on

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[81] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 13-14.

[82] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 13.

[83] The Brussels School was founded in 1958 by Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (influenced by Jean Paulhan and a great variety of literary sources) and Chaïm Perelman (more strictly a philosopher of law). See Michel Meyer, "The Brussels School of Rhetoric: From The New Rhetoric to Problematology," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43, no. 4 (2010).

linguistics, it never mentions Saussure). Such structuralist biases of Barthes' circle manifest themselves in the rhetoric issue of *Communications* 16, published at EPHE. The issue's appended bibliography of rhetoric refers to *The New Rhetoric* as original but marginal in rhetoric's overall revival.[84] And yet, from our vantage today, *The New Rhetoric* is precisely the opposite of marginal. It is hard to imagine the course of later structuralism and French philosophy—which transgressed so many norms around argumentation—if it had critiqued or absorbed the argumentative teachings of the Brussels school. Barthes himself admitted his distaste for the disputative aspect of rhetorical performance, making him a poor candidate for theorizing argument (though he did a fine job of it for *Mythologies*).

Despite these distortions, Barthes ultimately gave rhetoric the ingenious structuralist treatment it deserved—and invited. Already in antiquity rhetoric had relentlessly taxonomized itself with "structural" zeal, and Barthes brought this passion to light in the very structure of his own exegesis. After a brief introduction, he divides the totality of rhetoric into its diachronic aspect, "The Journey," which forms the first half of "The Old Rhetoric," and its synchronic aspect, "The Network," which forms the second half. He strangely maintains that he is *not* writing a history of rhetoric, but only a "long diachrony" of "seven moments, seven 'days' whose value will be essentially didactic."[85] The synchronic aspect, on the other hand, represents rhetoric's "subtly articulated machine, a tree of operations, a 'program' designed to produce discourse."[86] Each paragraph is given a scrupulous subheading such as "A.3.2." for the "Journey," and "B.1.21." for the "Network." In its original French publication, it even features one diachronic appendix, a chronology of rhetoric, and a synchronic appendix, a taxonomic chart of rhetoric, plus an index that references famous terms to a point on "The Journey" or "The Network." In this way, "The Old Rhetoric" becomes a fittingly structuralist monument for a deeply structural discipline that, to this day, has not given up on its taxonomical fervor.[87]

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[84] Lacoste, "Choix bibliographique," 235.

[85] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 16.

[86] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 16.

[87] The new "computational rhetoric" seeks to complete this grand classification process.

Barthes' renowned zeal for classification thus returns to, continues, and embodies perhaps the longest and greatest taxonomic history and passion outside the biological realm.

5.13 Barthes, latent *Annales* historian

In the genesis and execution of Barthes' aide-memoire, what is absolutely remarkable and virtually never discussed is its *annaliste* quality. Barthes claims, "neither a technique, nor an esthetic, nor an ethic of Rhetoric are now possible, but a *history*? Yes, a history of Rhetoric (as research, as book, as teaching) is today necessary, broadened by a new way of thinking" that includes "historical science" (the *Annales*, more or less) as well as other disciplines near or under the umbrella of structuralism.[88] The *Annales* school, however, remained largely ignorant of rhetoric despite its potential for elucidating *mentalités* and the *genre* of history.[89] And yet, the school expanded a historiographic space—towards social history and the *longue durée*—propitious for studying the institutions and practices of rhetoric. Institutionally speaking, Barthes could not have been closer to the *Annales;* he ran his rhetoric seminars in the sixth section of the EPHE, over which Braudel presided. While playing a key administrative role in the sixth section[90] he published various non-rhetoric texts in *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations.* More importantly, in shared pursuit of new historical objects and methods, there emerged an "intellectual proximity between Roland Barthes and '*l'esprit des Annales.*'"[91] When Barthes began thinking of rhetoric on monumental timescales and its total social institution and ideology—its *mentalité* if it could be said to have one—he broke free of the positivist history that typically characterizes the discipline.[92]

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[88] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 92.

[89] Fumaroli, "Préface," 9.

[90] Braudel, Lucien Febvre, and Charles Morazé established this in 1947. EPHE was Barthes' second-most important source of legitimacy (first was the Collège de France). See also

Jacques Le Goff, "Barthes administrateur," *Communications* 36 (1982).

[91] Hessam Noghrehchi, "Roland Barthes et les Annales," *Revue Roland Barthes* 3 (2017), http://www.roland-barthes.org/article_noghrehchi.html

[92] Speaking of the Barthes-Picard quarrel, Dosse writes: "That Barthes published his article [about Racine] in the *Annales* already gave a clear idea of how he aligned himself in his approach to literary history, appealing to Lucien Febvre against the tenets of literary positivism. He adopted Febvre's combat against historicizing history, against the domination of events, in order to de fend the necessary dissociation between the history of the literary function and

The seven articles and reviews Barthes published for the *Annales* between 1957-64 are often forgotten, but the lexicon, methods, and milieu of the *Annales* were certainly at hand when Barthes and his peers intensified work on rhetoric in the mid 1960s.[93] It is true that the strictly philosophical dimension of rhetoric's history runs askew to the social history traditionally enshrined in the *Annales*. Yet as Genette proved with his *Annales* piece "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle" (1966), the social-pedagogical dimension of rhetoric fit with the notion of an era's "mental equipment."[94] One of Barthes' achievements with his work on rhetoric was indeed to deflate the "great men" approach to history and emphasize social and pedagogical continuities. Barthes did not publish any rhetoric work in *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations,* yet the last word of this title tantalizes us. Consider his famous claim that Rhetoric "watch[es] immutable, impassive, and virtually immortal" over "regimes, religions, civilizations" as they "come to life, pass, and vanish without itself being moved or changed." Indeed he claims "Rhetoric grants access to what must be called a super-civilization: that of the historical and geographic West."[95] These statements are rife with traditional *Annaliste* ideology : the pairing of history and geography, the marginalization of political history, and the valorization of (*longue*) *durée*.

Barthes speaks of his generation "suffocating" under a "monist" history which structuralism helped relieve through pluralism; historians such as Braudel revealed "the

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the history of writers of literature. To do so, Barthes raised the same problems that Febvre had sketched out when he expressed the desire to study a writer's context, his ties with his public and, more generally, the elements of a collective *mentalité*. … Barthes adopted the *Annales* idea about an active criticism that does more than assemble and collect documents and archives, asking questions and subjecting the material to new hypotheses." Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 1, 224.

[93]For instance, a few years before speaking of the rhetorical "civilization," he writes in the *Annales*: "Inevitably the word *civilization* carries with it, like it or not, a synchronic resonance: civilization is felt, after all, as a simultaneity. Thus a *history* of civilization, without being strictly paradoxical, ... can only be highly relative, implicated ... in simultaneous rhythms, but with differing amplitudes: in short, it is difficult to write a *history* of civilization without kindling in the reader a desire for a synthesis that is in some way extra-temporal." My trans. Roland Barthes, "Une histoire de la civilisation française. Une mentalité historique," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 5 (1960): 998.

[94] Genette, "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle," 293.

[95] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

coexistence of structures of differing wavelengths."[96] We should note, however, that Braudel's structuralism has relatively little to do with the Lévi-Strauss tradition and its focus on abstract structure and function.[97] In Braudel's sense, "structure was architecture and construction, but it had to be observable and located in concrete reality."[98] But instead of crediting Braudel, Barthes cites a vague, capacious "structuralism" as the essential provocation towards rhetoric.

"Structuralism," claims Barthes, "leads us to work on a new timescale"; Rhetoric represents the ultimate demonstration of this as a "very long term object (two and half thousand years)."[99] Despite rhetoric's felicity for synchronic investigation, Barthes regarded it as necessarily part of a new "diachronic structuralism"; this emergence would avoid "bring[ing] history more or less to a standstill" through standard synchronic methods.[100]This diachronic structuralism seeks codes which are "historical—they are born, prevail and die in obedience to forces that are as yet unknown and are perhaps something like a new 'secret of history.'"[101] As examples, he offers Foucault's code for clinical medicine, and of course the rhetorical code comprised of the "connotative signifiers" of literature, "stable for more than a millennium."[102]

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[96] Barthes, "On Theory," 145.

[97] "When I think of the individual, I am always inclined to see him imprisoned within a destiny in which he himself has little hand, fixed in a landscape in which the infinite perspectives of the long term stretch into the distance both behind him and before. In historical analysis as I see it, rightly or wrongly, the long run always wins in the end. Annihilating innumerable events— all those which cannot be accommodated in the main ongoing current and which are therefore ruthlessly swept to one side—it indubitably limits both the freedom of the individual and even the role of chance. I am by temperament a 'structuralist,' little tempted by the event, or even by the short-term conjecture which is after all merely a grouping of events in the same area. But the historian's 'structuralism' has nothing to do with the approach which under the same name is at present causing some confusion in the other human sciences. It does not tend towards the mathematical abstraction of relations expressed as functions, but instead towards the very sources of life in its most concrete, everyday, indestructible and anonymously human expression." Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1244.

[98] François Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*, trans. Peter V Conroy, . Jr. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 91.

[99] Barthes, "Interview on Structuralism," 68.

[100] Barthes, "Response to a Survey on Structuralism," 55.

[101] Barthes, "Response to a Survey on Structuralism," 55.

[102] Barthes, "Response to a Survey on Structuralism," 55.

Since the transformation of the rhetorical code, which Barthes dates to the late nineteenth century, entailed shaking up "the whole 'ideology' of literature," it is necessary to investigate the *history* of rhetoric and not just its flattened figures. Seeking a criticism "both structural and historic," Barthes recognized rhetoric as *the* literary code. In hindsight, the continuity that Barthes sought when he spoke of "literary signification from Antiquity to the nineteenth century (at least in France)" perhaps evaded him. Yet he perceived, to his credit, that the understanding of literature's ideology and history would be virtually coextensive with mapping the "Code" of rhetoric: that which disciplines and watches over (*surveiller*) linguistic deviations.[103]

One of the major insights from Barthes' ancient rhetoric seminar emerges in a hyperbolic but seductive thesis on rhetoric's taxonomic (and hence structural) permanence and power across societies and histories. Sociology, anthropology, and history join forces as Barthes claims that rhetoric's massive system of classification:

> Is the only feature really shared by successive and various historical groups, as if there existed, superior to ideologies of content and to direct determinations of history, an ideology of form; as if—a principle anticipated by Durkheim and Mauss, affirmed by Lévi-Strauss—there existed for each society a *taxonomic identity*, a sociologic in whose name it is possible to define another history, another sociality, without destroying those recognized at other levels.[104]

On an anthropological or sociological level, Barthes' thesis thus implies that rhetoric's structure of classifications constitutes a singular, transhistorical "feature," a signature of "what must be called a super-civilization: … the historical and geographical West."[105] Although he risks essentializing the "West," this "taxonomic identity" represents one of the most promising remnants in Barthes' commonplace book of unfinished ideas about rhetoric.

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[103] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 13.

[104] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

[105] Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 15.

5.14 From the rhetoric seminars to “The Death of the Author”

If we have just encountered “peak rhetoric” coinciding with “peak structuralism” circa 1966, then where does Barthes go from here? It is unclear how Barthes’ rhetoric seminars eventually give way to his Balzac seminars in the era of “The Death of the Author” (1967) and *S/Z* (1970). Yet precisely this era of the mid to late 1960s becomes crucial in any argument about structuralist apostasy or transformation: scholars inclined to a poststructuralist Barthes would want to locate some sort of rupture here. Instead, perhaps, we find a Barthes deeply informed by his rhetorical studies, and yet (over)confident that he can move past *l'ancienne rhétorique*—associated with the readerly and rhetorical realm of *composition*—to a new writerly, textual *production*.

In early 1967, his course was “Recherches sur le discours de l’Histoire,” which continued his linguistic-rhetorical program, but at a discursive level superior to the sentence, in hopes of understanding classic historical writing from Herodotus to Michelet.[106] The research shifts, roughly speaking, from the history of rhetoric to rhetorical analysis of the historian. From September to December 1967, Barthes was teaching at Johns Hopkins and lecturing about rhetoric at major American universities, but this remains obscure today.[107] From the American vantage, the seminal or representative moment arrives when he publishes “The Death of the Author” in an extremely unusual place: the Fall-Winter issue of *Aspen* (1967), the avant-garde, loose-leaf, multimedia “magazine in a box.”[108] Often misdated to its later European publication in 1968 (without equivalent fanfare), this text cannot be understood as a “text of ‘68”: it fits best in his EPHE research program, alongside the rhetoric and Sarasine seminars, and his discovery of Émile Benveniste.

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[106] Roland Barthes, "Recherches sur le discours de l’Histoire," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 1293-925.

[107] Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 306.

[108] Correcting the widespread practice of misdating the text to 1968, John Logie argues: “The challenge we now face is one of unteaching ‘The Death [of the Author]’ as a literary essay and of re-teaching it as a participant in a collection of artistic manifestos and provocations.” John Logie, "The Birth of "The Death of the Author"," *College English* 75, no. 5 (2013): 510.

Benveniste, who is not explicitly named in "Death of the Author," is nonetheless resoundingly present. Who or what has killed the author? As we saw earlier, Barthes began the story of authorial demise with Mallarmé and Valéry. Linguistics is the final cause of death, for it "furnishes the destruction of the Author with a precious analytic instrument[:] ...linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes, just as *I* is nothing but the one who says *I*."[109] But it is not "linguistics" as a whole: it is really Benveniste, whom Barthes began reading the previous year. Thanks to Kristeva's introduction, Barthes (like Todorov) championed Benveniste in his Johns Hopkins talk, claiming "the linguistic *I* can and must be defined in an entirely a-psychological fashion: *I* is nothing but 'the person who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I* (Benveniste)."[110] Barthes carries precisely this notion forward into "The Death of the Author." Between Valéry's attack on the Author—with "the lessons of Rhetoric" teaching Valéry about the "linguistic and 'accidental' nature of his activity"[111]—and Benveniste's recursive definition of *I*, Barthes was well equipped to claim the death of the author. In this text's complex Anglophone reception, one also wonders about the "accidental" nature of the translator's activity: in three different translations, *hasardeuse* emerges as "hazardous," "chance," and "accidental."

In characteristic rhe-structuralist fashion for Barthes during the 1960s, his thought combines cutting-edge linguistics with an older rhetorical critique, or perhaps a radicalization of rhetoric made possible by linguistics and contemporary literature. In 1968, Barthes claims that Benveniste's "ideas on enunciation (in particular on the person) turned out to be very much like certain explorations made by writers themselves" such as Valéry and Mallarmé.[112] These writers "foregrounded not the composition—as in the days of rhetoric—but, more radically, the very production of the literary text."[113] For Barthes, the history of rhetoric becomes a prelude towards

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[109] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 51.

[110] Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," 139.

[111] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 50.

[112] Barthes, "Linguistics and Literature," 75-76.

[113] Barthes, "Linguistics and Literature," 76.

a certain courtship: “the strivings of linguists towards literature and of literary critics towards language.”[114] Indeed rhetoric “necessarily prefigured a science of discourse”; the “intuitions of rhetoric have often been profound.”[115] And yet, classical rhetoric’s “normative position”—its precepts—“held it back.”[116] For Barthes, the linguistics represented by Benveniste and the deeper, non-normative rhetoric of modern French literature coincide with the Author’s demise. Benveniste’s work is like the “simmering … of water that’s about to boil, that warmth that raises raise science towards something else[:] … what I call ‘writing’”; its practitioners include contemporaries such as Kristeva, Genette, and Derrida.[117] This was one of Barthes’ quintessential programmatic moves: pointing out the convergences between as many fields as he could—between the histories of rhetoric, linguistics, and literary production—which is why he is so often referred to as an intellectual barometer for his times.

Ultimately, “The Death of the Author” should be (quite fittingly) estranged from Barthes’ authorship: it is merely the most forceful amalgamation of notions that had been circulating in Paris for some time, which eventually percolated into his seminar. For instance, in the rhetoric seminar of November 1965, Sollers noted “the author's necessary disappearance in writing” in the paper he delivered on Mallarmé.[118] To use a phrase of Sollers, “the coffin of rhetorical speech had been forced open”:[119] but the only thing inside was an indiscernible, muted mummy; the death of the author should be regarded as an authorless concept, or at least, a collectively authored concept, passing through the prismatic structure of the EPHE’s sixth section. Though the “The Death of the Author” proved to be Barthes’ consummate polemic for American audiences and a symbol of radicalism, it went theoretically “forward” while going historically

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[114] Barthes, "Linguistics and Literature," 76.

[115] Barthes, "Linguistics and Literature," 74-75.

[116] Barthes, "Linguistics and Literature," 75.

[117] Roland Barthes, "Answers," in *'Simply a Particular Contemporary'* (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 23.

[118] Sollers, "Writing and Totality," 75, 63.

[119] Sollers, "Writing and Totality," 79.

"backward" to a time before Lansonism had built the author up as an ensemble of factual atoms. This underestimated double direction strikes me as almost characteristic of this thinking.

5.15 *S/Z* and *pleine rhétorique*

The next major work Anglophones tend to value, *S/Z*, represents perhaps the worst possible text to shoehorn into a structuralist/poststructuralist rubric. Its famous distinction between readerly and writerly texts, however, can be readily aligned with Barthes' shifting rhetorical program. In *S/Z*, and more generally in his texts emerging in the late sixties, we find Barthes significantly more confident that *l'ancienne rhétorique,* which he deems the essential inventive grid for classic literature, has given up the majority of its best secrets. In *S/Z*, this corresponds to the readerly:

> A Renaissance author (Pierre Fabri) once wrote a treatise entitled *Le grand et vrai art de pleine rhétorique*. In like manner, we can say that any classic (readerly) text is implicitly an art of Replete Literature: literature that is replete: like a cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked, safeguarded (in this text nothing is ever lost: meaning recuperates everything); like a pregnant female, replete with signifieds which criticism will not fail to deliver; like the sea, replete with depths and movements which give it its appearance of infinity, its vast meditative surface; like the sun, replete with the glory it sheds over those who write it, or finally, acknowledged as an established and recognized art: institutional. This Replete Literature, readerly literature, can no longer be written: symbolic plenitude (culminating in romantic art) is the last avatar of our culture.[120]

The readerly partakes of replete, which is to say classically rhetorical, literature: the safeguarded pregnancy of meaning. The "rhetorical code" is indeed "powerful in the readerly text."[121]

So, where does Barthes' rhetoric go from here, given that he claims "we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and by secondary-school

[120] Barthes, *S/Z*, 200-01.

[121] Barthes, *S/Z*, 129.

explication: no *construction* of the text"?[122] Barthes, in effect, proposes a new orientation to rhetoric: the point will not be to "manifest a structure"—which is what the old rhetoric allows us to do—"but to produce a structuration" that is fundamentally open-ended:

> The five codes create a kind of network, a *topos* through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text). Thus, if we make no effort to structure each code, or the five codes among themselves, we do so deliberately, in order to assume the multivalence of the text, its partial reversibility.[123]

Barthes appropriates the old rhetorical notion—the *topos*—but elevates it to the constitutive level of the "entire text." Looking back, Barthes regarded *S/Z* as "both an analysis of the text and, as I see it, a theory of the text—of the classical text, the readable text."[124] Yet the growing Barthesean and Tel Quelian theory of the Text, wagered upon a kind of new, multivalent, non-normative rhetoric that, to use Barthes' words, would "de-originate the utterance" [l'énconciation].[125] To dispense with the origin of these "voices" or "codes" transgresses classical rhetoric's precepts, which focus, so often, on unifying the speaker and what is spoken (under *ethos* and other terms). Rhetoric features a whole authorial science for inscribing oneself into the discourse, for being present, powerful, and credible. But in the Text, the novelist can only be "inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet"; the author can only come back as "guest."[126] The orator desires precisely the opposite: to become host. Metaphorically speaking, the Text is a "network": "a result of a combinatory systematic"; the work, however, is "an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development' (a word which is significantly ambiguous, at once biological and rhetorical)."[127] In this way, Barthes

[122] Barthes, *S/Z*, 11-12.

[123] Barthes, *S/Z*, 20.

[124] Barthes, "On Theory," 135.

[125] Barthes, *S/Z*, 21.

[126] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 61.

[127] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 61.

tries to constitute the Text as a “post-rhetorical” object—while using a rather rhetorical notion, the *topos*. Barthes’ tendency to “slip back” into rhetoric is formidable.

5.16 The Text “after” rhetoric

S/Z represents the peak ennui Barthes felt facing the mighty *explication-dissertation* duo reigning over literary pedagogy, a duo explored in the second chapter. “The structure,” Barthes writes in *S/Z*, “is not the plot or the plan. Therefore, this is not an ‘explication de texte.’”[128] The structure of his commentary repeats the structure of the literary object, he explains, because of the “distaste” and “intolerance, which I still feel—perhaps on a purely personal and temporary level—toward the dissertation and its forms of exposition.”[129] Though he admits he might return to this traditional format, “at the moment I can only try to undo, destroy, disperse the dissertational discourse” since the “rhetorical or syllogistic model of expression” yields no more pleasure.[130] Thus, even though the “rhetorical models” were “suitable,” he dispenses with them: “I was able to ‘speak’ the text, without ever feeling the need to outline it. Thus, there is really no other structure to this work than my reading, the advance of a reading as structuration.”[131] Yet Barthes was not alone in eroding the dissertation and its outlining practices, and includes Kristeva, Sollers, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, and Derrida as fellow thinkers who, against convention, suit their texts to their objects.

Barthes’ concept of the Text was in some sense built within the hollowed-out remains of rhetoric’s schools. An essay such as “From Work to Text” (1971) could not have emerged without a historical account of rhetoric’s decline:

> The Text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading. … In the times of the greatest social division (before the setting up of democratic cultures), reading and writing were equally privileges of class.

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[128] Barthes, *S/Z*, 90.

[129] Barthes, "On *S/Z* and *Empire of Signs*," 72.

[130] Barthes, "On *S/Z* and *Empire of Signs*," 72.

[131] Barthes, "On *S/Z* and *Empire of Signs*," 72-73.

> 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.[132]

As we saw in the first two chapters, the decline of rhetorical pedagogy in France—how to write—coincided with the birth of literature departments—how to read. Barthes hopes the Text will entail a rebalancing of this history. Even as late as 1976, Barthes laments that "on the reading side, we have nothing—no science, no art—that corresponds to rhetoric. … We currently have neither a rhetoric nor a psychology … of the reader."[133] After studying classical rhetoric, "the science that encodes the sending of messages," Barthes tried, for years, to come up with its reading analogue, to debunk the notion that "the reader is the brother of the author."[134] By constantly analogizing to the rhetorical past, he imagined a certain future—a future that was always programmatic, rarely concrete, and never quite able to stand on its own.

5.17 Against agonistic discourse

Despite the enormous array of pre-existing literary and philosophical grievances against rhetoric, Barthes still managed to find largely original points for criticism. Rather than classic complaints against rhetorical trickery and iniquity, Barthes became particularly concerned with a tendency towards agonistic intellectual exchange and pugnacious orality endemic to modern French intellectualism (which we met in the first two chapters). For Barthes, spoken exchanges often represented a dangerous domain, especially since someone must get the "last word":

> In the space of speech, the one who comes last occupies a sovereign position, held, according to an established privilege, by professors, presidents, judges, confessors: every language combat (the *machia* of the Sophists, the *disputatio* of the Scholastics) seeks to gain possession of this position; by the last word, I will disorganize, "liquidate" the

[132] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 171.

[133] Barthes, "Responses," 172-73.

[134] Barthes, "Responses," 172,73.

> adversary, inflicting upon him a (narcissistically) mortal wound, cornering him in silence, castrating him of all speech.[135]

Partly owing to these dangers, Barthes wants to refuse "the *machè,* the Law of verbal combat, of jousting instituted centuries ago in the West."[136] Despite his reputation for dueling Picard—which he certainly did not enjoy—he distrusted combative verbal "games":

> One should also look at the situation in France today (I speak of conflicts of speech): visible taste of the French people for the (verbal) *agōn*: heirs of the Greeks, without their genius: rugby, football, antagonistic sports → one-to-one debates, confrontations, debates between adversaries, etc. Equivocal regime: it's coded (in fact), but one pretends to be natural, spontaneous, truthful, to oppose referents as if speech were purely transparent, instrumental → always this great naturalizing drive, this refusal to take responsibility for the codes, for the games.[137]

Barthes deeply distrusted these coded intellectual conflicts, or what we could perhaps call the mythologization of agonistic speech. Inherited from the rhetorical superstructure, these conflicts worsen under the apparent death and weak survival of rhetoric: in the former systems of discourse, at least the "games" were explicit, as they had been under Scholastic and later humanist pedagogies.

For Barthes and for us, however, the games have gone underground. For instance, any academic can relate to the experience of the question and answer period after a lecture, wherein non-questioning "questions" get posed. These questions, as Barthes puts it, are the "assertion of a plenitude" rather than a genuine "expression of a 'want.'"[138] Yet in this "game" of pseudo-questions and pseudo-answers, one is only allowed to respond to the content, and not the manner

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[135] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 207-8.

[136] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 79.

[137] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 127.

[138] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 319.

of asking: “What I receive is the connotation; what I must give back is the denotation.”[139] Barthes then compares these games, somewhat unfavorably, to the *disputatio* of medieval rhetoric and pedagogy:

> Our intellectual discussions are as encoded as the old scholastic disputes; we still have the stock roles (the ‘sociologist’, the ‘Goldmannian’, the ‘Telquelian’, etc.) but contrary to the *disputatio*, where these roles would have been ceremonial and have displayed the artifice of their function, our intellectual ‘intercourse’ always gives itself ‘natural’ airs: it claims to exchange only signifieds, not signifiers.[140]

Whereas a medieval *disputatio* would stage its two bachelors on either side of the *quaestio*—*respondens* and *opponens*—adjudicated by a master, the modern discursive codes politely hide themselves despite their sometimes brutal “airs” of the natural or neutral (Tel Quel’s excommunications come to mind). Barthes tended to appreciate that the Old Rhetoric was not shy to show its seams: discourse would reveal that it was in fact stitched together, sewn out of signifiers rather than being a natural representation of signifieds.

5.18 Against oratorical pedagogy

From Barthes’ experiences as a *lycée* and then Sorbonne student, eventually running seminars at EPHE and ultimately lecturing at the *Collège*, he built a little-known critique of what we might call oratorical or monological pedagogy, or what Bourdieu might call “magisterial discourse.”[141] And whereas Bourdieu primarily attacks institutional structures, Barthes considers the personal and interpersonal dimensions of teaching—often late in his life, from a position of increasing safety. The *non-agrégé* Barthes will confront the workings of French pedagogy in a

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[139] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 319.

[140] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 320. Cf. his remarks on the “ideology of Exchange”: Barthes, "To Learn and to Teach," 177.

[141] Until recently, the extent and importance of pedagogic materials and thought in orbit of “theory” has been underestimated. As Lucy O’Meara notes in her study Roland Barthes at the Collège de France, the “archive enseignante” of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and Benveniste “is becoming part of their oeuvre.” Lucy O’Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France*, 6.

far less systematic way than the *agrégé* Bourdieu (though a “geographic” outsider with respect to Paris, he was an “academic” insider).[142]

Barthes’ own teaching and his critique of pedagogical life reveals an extremely curious feature: this admired pedagogue with a famously beautiful voice distrusted the spoken word, its agonism, and its ability to seize the “last word.” This aversion, which has readily lent itself to psychoanalytic and biographical explanation, also aligns with his political suppleness, which avoided the most dogmatic left politics and shunned the soapbox. Barthes’ renowned discretion and aversion to appearing hysterical accentuates and perhaps generates his distaste for the spoken word: “I greatly prefer writing to speech. … I’m always afraid of theatricalizing myself when I speak … [and of] hysteria, of finding myself drawn into collusive nods and winks.”[143] The text offers Barthes a reprieve: “I love the text because for me it is that rare locus of language from which any ... logomachy is absent. The text is never a ‘dialogue’: no risk of feint, of aggression, of blackmail, no rivalry of ideolects.”[144] In Barthes’ embrace of the text and rejection of oratory, his own disposition seamlessly fuses with his theoretical rationalizations.

Barthes’ most extensive political-pedagogical critique, “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers” (1971), concerns the ancient rhetorical notion that teaching and speech are fundamentally interconnected: Rhetoric begat “the whole of our teaching.”[145] He seeks to update this tie with a variety of modern tools, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis, to respond to his contemporary teaching “crisis.” More implicitly, he critiques rhetoric’s dominant “monological” tendency. The writer is an “operator of language on the side of writing”; the teacher is “on the side of speech,” and the intellectual, in between, “prints and publishes his speech.”[146] Teaching, speech, and the

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[142] Barthes’ non-*agrégé* status shimmered beneath the surface of his works, propelling, for many years, his biographical-institutional arcs and his networks of mutual influence. Between fortuitously encountering his key fellow outsider Greimas—gateway to Saussure, Hjelmselv, Lévi-Strauss, and Merleau-Ponty—and attacking the conservative and “academic” criticism from the less-academic EPHE, one wonders if a symbolically sanctified Barthes would be even remotely recognizable. C.f. Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, 162-63.

[143] Barthes, "An Interview with Jacques Chancel," 72.

[144] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 15-16.

[145] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 309.

[146] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 309.

Law are associated together: "*all speech is on the side of the Law*."[147] This trifecta will be subjected to Barthes' scrutiny.

Barthes creates something reminiscent of Paulhan's Rhetoric and Terror distinction. Since the Law acts as an "equilibrium" between the permissible and the forbidden, what Barthes terms "repressive discourse" enacts a preference "for vacillations, for verbal oppositions, for the thrust and parry of antitheses, to be *neither* for this *nor* for that. … Repressive discourse is the discourse of good conscience, liberal discourse."[148] This is opposed with what Barthes terms "Terrorist discourse": "a native violence which is the consequence of the fact that no statement can directly express the truth yet has no other system at its disposal than the word's *coup de force*."[149] In the final section called "Peaceable Speech," Barthes claims, "violence is always present (in language), and this very presence is why we may bracket its signs and thereby dispense with a rhetoric: violence must not be absorbed by the code of violence."[150] "Repressive" as rhetoric may be, Barthes, like Paulhan, opposes it to violence.

In pedagogical practice, Barthes preferred the "utopian" space of the seminar—"small, to safeguard not its intimacy but its complexity"—over the great lecture hall.[151] Barthes' image for the ideal "meeting of speakers," where everything is "relaxed" and "disarmed," is that of "certain places, abroad, where *kif* is smoked" (he complains of his "bronchial incapacity").[152] The "teaching space" would pursue "*floating* (the very form of the signifier); such floating destroys nothing; it is content to disorientate the Law."[153] But this "utopia" was not feasible at the Collège de France, where he uttered the most notorious statement of his late period: the

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[147] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 310.

[148] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 326.

[149] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 325.

[150] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 330.

[151] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 332.

[152] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 331.

[153] Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," 331.

purported fascist tendency of language. Barthes' inaugural lecture approaches something of an anti-lecture, a lecture against *viva voce* lectures. He famously declares "language [*la langue*]—the performance of a language system [*tout langage*]—is neither reactionary nor progressive, it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech [*dire*], it compels speech."[154] Though this statement baffles or irritates many readers, perhaps it merely expresses Barthes' longstanding suspicions towards oratory in the most forceful way possible: the fear of "the authority of assertion, the gregariousness of repetition."[155] In their own ways, *writing*, *text*, and *literature* find themselves valorized against *speech*: "this grand imposture which allows us to understand *speech outside the bounds of power* ... I for one call *literature*"; literary freedom depends on the "labor of displacement" directed towards the writer's language (*langue*) and not upon strictly personal-political concerns.[156]

5.19 The eloquent Barthes: reflexivity of rhetoric

Professing to *be* a rhetorician, being identified *as* a rhetorician, constitutes a special problem. In most disciplines, the form of commentary distances itself from the content that concerns the discipline (music critics write, rather than sing, their critiques). Yet rhetoricians—or orators, or sophists— enact a strange reflexive, performative, and perhaps confessional drama. As Michel Beaujour writes of Barthes:

> To admit this rhetoricalness would get one caught in the endless play of *doxa* and paradox, and it would be confessing to sophistry, an impossible admission in a cultural context where (rebellious or established) verisimilitude tries to pass for truth at all costs or to deny truth value to any assertion. A striker out of predicates, such as Barthes, is reluctant to have his name on file as a rhetorician.[157]

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[154] Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology," 5.

[155] Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology," 5.

[156] Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology," 6.

[157] Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 258-59.

Having oneself “on file as a rhetorician” becomes simultaneously a problem of showmanship, of credibility, of authority. When it comes to writing about writing, rhetoric about rhetoric, and literature about literature, Barthes risked an *ethos* challenge, like many of his contemporaries. He wisely chose to theorize his own performance, which, as with Derrida, at least partially defended him against charges of extravagance (in such situations the most damning thing is professing to be completely arhetorical).

As an entry point in Barthes' *ethos*, we should note that rhetoric belongs to the *ecrivain* (“author”) rather than the *ecrivant* (“writer”). Whereas the *ecrivant* forgoes “rhetorical figures”—their text is “polished flat”—the *ecrivain* that Barthes identifies with “is willing to renounce the guarantees of transparent, instrumental writing.”[158] The renouncing of instrumental writing in favour of a more explicitly rhetorical practice reveals itself most prominently Barthes' articulation of *nouvelle critique.* The new criticism that Barthes articulates against Picard defines itself by grappling with what Barthes terms the “problem of language,” and in effect, the problem of rhetoric. Barthes explains, “If new criticism has any reality, it is ... in the solitude of the act of criticism, which is now declared to be a complete act of writing”; an *ecrivain* in this sense is someone “aware of the depth of language, not its instrumentality or its beauty.”[159] The critic merges with the writer to the extent that they peer together into this abyss.

However, this “transgression” finds itself “overtaken” by a profound change in “intellectual discourse as a whole.”[160] Starting with Loyola, and passing through Sade and Nietzsche, Barthes claims that the “rules of intellectual presentation” have been increasingly “consigned to the flames.” Moving on to Lacan, who “no longer separates the particular case from the idea,” and to Lévi-Strauss's “new rhetoric of *variation* … that encourages us to take a certain responsibility for form,” Barthes maintains, “one and the same truth, common to all discourse, is being sought, whether the work be fictional, poetic or discursive.”[161] Whereas

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[158] Barthes, "L'Express Talks with Roland Barthes," 106,05.

[159] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 64.

[160] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 65.

[161] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 65.

"classico-bourgeois society saw in discourse an instrument or a decoration," it is now "a sign and a truth."[162] Moving through a host of important thinkers, Barthes comes very close to saying explicitly that the forbearers and proponents of *nouvelle critique* are those who (further) rhetoricize their discourse to contend with the "problem of language." Yet this irritated the "high structuralist" Lévi-Strauss, who wrote to Barthes in 1966, after reading *Criticism and Truth*, complaining of "too much indulgence in subjectivity, affectivity, and, let us use the word, a certain mysticism with regard to literature. For me, the work is not open … and it is precisely [its] closure that allows an objective study to be done on it."[163]

In Barthes' hymn to Genette, "The Return of Poetician," similar themes emerge of collapsing the distinction between creative and critical gestures. He explains that "This return ... tends to make the poetician into a writer, to abolish the hierarchical distance between 'creator' and 'commentator.'"[164] The "sufficiently wily" Genette and his "extreme discretion" enjoy the "fantasmatic power" represented by the "demon of classifying and naming"; though Barthes praises Genette's style as "perfect," Genette's status as poetician is not about stylish writing, but rather about "accept[ing] the return of the signifier in his own discourse."[165]

Barthes often apologizes for, or hedges upon, his vocational or disciplinary status: he is neither detached scientist-analyst-linguist nor straightforward critic (or producer) of literature. In 1969 he explains that "for twenty years, my investigations have been concerned with literary language, without my being altogether comfortable in the role of a critic or a linguist."[166] And even in 1977, he finds himself stuck: "And though it is true that I long wished to inscribe my work within the field of science—literary, lexicological, and sociological—I must admit that I have produced only essays, an ambiguous genre in which analysis vies with writing." The essay made him vulnerable. Julia Kristeva defended him against "the wardens of 'rigor'": for Barthes,

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[162] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 66.

[163] Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, 166.

[164] Barthes, "The Return of the Poetician," 173.

[165] Barthes, "The Return of the Poetician," 175.

[166] Barthes, "Style and its Image," 90.

“the term ‘essays’ should not be perceived either as showing rhetorical humility or as admission of weak theoretical discourse … but as a methodological exigency of the most serious kind.”[167] Yet Barthes admits that he aligned himself with *Tel Quel* and “eccentric forces” rather than representing pure semiology.[168] Though internally conflicted, his liminality drew him towards the pluralistic and tolerant domain of rhetoric writ large. The lingering fog over Barthes’ rhetoric and lifetime intellectual output emanates, in large part, from his marked preference for journalistic and essayistic (and hence personal) modes of production as well as pedagogical (and hence quasi-communal) ones over a more classically academic output. Whereas someone like Foucault produced a series of long, serious, and intentionally book-like monographs, key Barthes books were often written in response to specific requests by others, and the publication of the book sometimes lagged his intellectual direction by several years (eg. *Mythologies*, *The Fashion System*). The books that Anglophone scholars consider to be “essential Barthes” (eg. *S/Z*, *Pleasure of the Text*, *Criticism and Truth*, etc.) make up less than a tenth of his complete works.

What of Barthes’ own style? De Man describes the tone of early Barthes as a “trumpet blast,” which is “only slightly muted” in later works, a “tone of a man liberated from a constraining past.”[169] De Man, whose own style tends towards the melancholic, posits that “A somewhat euphoric, slightly manic tone runs through Barthes’ writings, tempered by considerable irony and discretion but unmistakably braced by the feeling of being on the threshold of making discoveries.”[170] This style—and he does not always adopt it—I would call his epiphanic mode. At the height of his powers, this epiphanic writing becomes a covenant between Barthes and his readers, ensuring a feeling of mutual or collaborative discovery; when it goes astray, Barthes breaks off towards triviality or technicality. On a more concrete level of style, perhaps the best characterization of his signature syntax comes from his translator Richard Howard: “Barthes, a writer of great persuasion and power, characteristically ‘runs’ to a very long

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[167] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jarcine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 95.

[168] Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology," 3.

[169] de Man, "Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism," 180.

[170] de Man, "Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism," 179-80.

sentence, a rumination held together by colons and various signs of equivalence (‘in other words, ‘i.e.,’ ‘in short’); clearly he is reluctant to let his sentence go until, like Jacob’s angel, it turns and blesses him.”[171] As a stylist Barthes falters with technical semiotic materials (eg. *The Fashion System*); he reaches his peaks, unsurprisingly, when writing about literature, rhetoric, and writing.

5.20 *Topoi*

Fortunately, when Barthes’ reprobate linguistic methods failed him his rhetorical *topoi* more than compensated, at least in a literary milieu. Though others have pointed to their presence in his work, in my understanding, the *topoi* constitute a powerfully integrated method that spans from the material organization of his writing to the abstracted, discrete locations of his thought. Though he elaborates their power in classical rhetoric in his course, he also envisions elsewhere their new relevance for *les sciences humaines:* a “sort of grid ... through which one could successfully pass all the sciences that we today call social and human.”[172] There are at least three levels of *topoi* in Barthes’ oeuvre. Firstly, his compositional strategy of thousands of index cards, which were used as “an organisational device, a kind of ‘creativity machine’ that served a crucial function in the very construction of his written texts.”[173] Secondly, many of his published texts reveal a piecework, “topical” structure, which resists a treatise form on a macroscopic level. Thirdly, on the most conceptual level, there are the *topoi* abstracted from his texts. For instance, potential *topoi* that link Barthesean “themes” with rhetorical and classical notions include myth/mythology, sport/*agon*/contest, drama/theatre/spectacle, pedagogy, play (ludic rhetoric), politics, and fashion/figuration (and its absence, nudity).

Though elaborating these must take place in further work, it suffices to say that Barthes’ *topoi* took him everywhere and are largely responsible for the sense that, more than any contemporary, Barthes touched on the broadest elements of culture. He was thus a “topologist,” and though this word is only used today for one field of mathematics, it conveys the recurring

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[171] Howard, "Translator's Note," ix-x.

[172] Barthes, "Reading Brillat-Savarin," 269.

[173] Rowan Wilken, "The Card Index as Creativity Machine," *Culture Machine* 11 (2010): 9.

patterning of his thought that we see prominently from early texts like “In Greece” all the way to late texts like *A Lover’s Discourse.* Literary critics and theorists tend to ignore *topoi* because they belong to *inventio*, or the compositional phase, and are thus furthest removed from the final, authorized work. Yet these *topoi* are the trellis upon which Barthes’ writing grows. His critically celebrated capacity for breadth has become attributed, in a sense, to semiotics: wherever there are signs in culture Barthes could freely roam. However, in those “signs” that appeared the most radical and unusual, Barthes often returned to the classics as both inventive wellspring (the classical role of the *topoi*) and legitimator of discourse (the prestige of classics).

5.21 Conclusion

No single turn of phrase captures Barthes’ trajectory, but perhaps we might say he got “caught up” in rhetoric: both carried forward and carried away. He describes himself with this same hedging: “My own historical position … is to be in the rearguard of the avant-garde. Being avant-garde means knowing what is dead; being ‘rearguard’ means still loving it—I love the novelistic but I know the novel is dead. There we have, I think, the exact place from which I write.”[174] Much the same could be said for rhetoric—with the twist that rhetoric was almost, but not entirely, “dead” for Barthes—nor were its old values. Near the end of his life, Barthes writes:

> Little by little I recognize in myself a growing desire for readability. I want the texts I receive to be ‘readable,’ I want the texts I write to be ‘readable,’ too. ... A ‘well-made’ sentence (according to a classical mode) is clear; it can *tend* towards a certain obscurity by a certain use of *ellipsis*: ellipses must be restrained; metaphors too; a continuously metaphorical writing exhausts me. A preposterous notion occurs to me (preposterous by dint of humanism): ‘We shall never be able to say how much love (for the other, the reader) there is in *work on the sentence*.’[175]

Barthes certainly worked his sentences. Ultimately, he internalized the values of the former rhetoric more than he knew (making it a current rhetoric of sorts). He never strayed too far from

[174] Barthes, "Answers," 32.

[175] Barthes, "The Image," 352.

the Platonic path he articulated in 1963: rhetoric is “linked not only to all literature but even to all communication, once it seeks to make others understand that we acknowledge them: rhetoric is the amorous dimension of writing.”[176] Barthes’ attraction to this notion across his career ensures that he remained eloquent and readable while he programmatically detailed, but could not entirely deliver, a new “writerly” world built upon the ruins of the old rhetoric: a tragic indecision splitting Barthes between conservative and radical, between restoring and rejecting *l’empire rhétorique*. But his *hamartia*, if it exists, was not such a weakness. Rather, he erred in trying to imagine the outside of something that has no outside (not in Europe, at least). If he had wanted to see beyond the old rhetoric, he should have immersed himself, as Paulhan did, in Malagasy poetry—in any culture distant from the monument that so transfixed him. Barthes briefly toured through Japan, the “empire of signs,” but did not learn enough to genuinely relate it back to his homeland, the empire of rhetoric.

[176] Barthes, "Preface," xvi.

6 Cumulative Conclusion

Barthes did not like "getting the last word," and faced with the task of a conclusion, I hope to tie up and loosen various strands in equal measure. The first move is precaution. A grand synthetic history written by one hand—a multi-volume "decline and fall of the rhetorical empire" that would satisfy scholars in the five to ten most relevant disciplines—does not exist, and thus cannot be cross-checked against the comparatively skeletal outlines here (fleeting episodes and *factors* rather than bold narratives and *causes*). Rather than taking a view from nowhere, I have tended to explore historical receptions, which introduce their own contingencies.

But if after such disclosures we can still say that rhetoric survived in weakened form, then perhaps we should hesitate before writing up the broad contours of "French thought" as the usual narrative of almost pure "thoughts" and "thinkers" that moves in the same direction as the scientific exploration of language: forward. For rhetorical practices and passions confuse this directionality; radical French thinkers of the twentieth century looped back through rhetoric's history, advancing genuinely original thoughts nonetheless enmeshed in the conserved (even conservative) social structures of rhetoric. On the micro scale of intellectual history, one thinker seems to leapfrog past the next, moving inevitably forward. On the macro scale, however, the frogs play their game on a sinking log: the match between individual and institutional directions is illusory. This we particularly perceive in Barthes, who, despite appearing to move forward with the theoretical currents of language after about 1950, was curiously pulled back into the institutional mysteries I have explored. To go back is not inherently good or bad, but it does complicate things. Structuralism's "insistence on the signifier," claims Jameson, is what makes it so original—and yet also, from my perspective, so ancient.[1]

The notion of a "turn" is thus a tricky one. In *Linguistic Turns, 1890-1950*, Ken Hirschkop demonstrates that the (plural) European turns towards language carry latent within them an astonishing degree of social concern: "language is a metonym for problems of social

[1] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 111.

order and social division, democracy and consent, nationality and difference."[2] Structuralism represents the "grandest and most extravagant linguistic turn of them all," as well as the "most self-conscious."[3] Its enthusiastic embrace of Saussure and other doughty linguists indeed turned towards something new, delivered with emancipatory and democratic ideals (for instance, Barthes' "Saussure, the Sign, Democracy"). Simultaneously, however, structuralism in Paris summoned—and was summoned by—a weakened rhetoric (which, for the purposes of a more dramatic "rebirth of rhetoric," could be written off as fully dead). The new democracy of the sign thereby flirted with the old aristocracy of the word. But rather than figuring out precisely if and when the rhetorical "master's tools" can or cannot dismantle the "master's house," we examined a preceding problem: how much of the old rhetorical superstructure remained standing in the twentieth century. In short, quite a bit.

What I have called rhe-structuralism is but one of many possible opportunistic beneficiaries of rhetoric's weak survival scenario. Despite rhe-structuralism's many theoretical insights, it was too often alienated from its underlying social institution and overinvested in classifications. Valéry's avatar Monsieur Teste utters these last words: "Learnedly to die … *Transiit classificando*."[4] This means to die in (or by) classifying, to traverse or pass (though life) classifying. We first encountered the extremes of this taxomania in Dumarsais, his peers, and his strange reception, all of which forsook elements of the Jesuit tradition. *Transiit classificando* serves as fitting epitaph for the ambitions of a certain faction who perceived that a monstrously messy institution could be cleaned up in a matter of years.

This institution, on the face of it, attracted deeply strange temperaments in the twentieth century. There never was a second coming of Cicero. Paulhan tended towards veils of irony, cloaks of pseudonyms, and the backroom dealings of the *NRF*, whereas Barthes sometimes

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[2] Ken Hirschkop, *Linguistic Turns, 1890-1950: Writing on Language as Social Theory* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2019), 20.

[3] Hirschkop, *Linguistic Turns, 1890-1950*, 279.

[4] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, trans. Jackson Mathews (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 34. Barthes applied this phase to Quintilian, and to himself. Though it fits a certain moment in his career, I do not think it fits him overall. Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire," 25.

elected to become an oratorical mute, only feeling secure in writing. Gifted with the best voice of all his recorded peers—a timbre sonorous with a touch of sweet—he was scared to use it, lest he sound like Charles de Gaulle or Pierre Poujade inflicting his finale upon a captive audience. Barthes could muster incisive political-rhetorical analyses—glimmers of a French Kenneth Burke—but these were far from his standard fare.[5] The *writings* of Barthes and Paulhan proved antithetical to the robust public oratory to which classical education had aspired. In their own distinct ways, they enact the "literaturization" of rhetoric: George Kennedy's term for rhetoric's tendency to shift from primary (oral, civic) to secondary (literary, personal) contexts. Quite curiously, Sartre will be the most oratorical—and most indifferent towards rhetoric—of all his peers. Despite their textual (and sometimes oral) brilliance, the *intellectuels* of post-Dreyfus France proved to be a fundamentally new entity in the social order.

6.1 Slow history and *le regard lontain*

I do not begrudge the journalists and scholars who threw themselves into documenting the structuralist turn in France as a "revolution"—who only had a few years' distance from its happenings and lacked today's copious resources—or the professors who assign the same old chapter of Saussure followed by Barthes' "Myth Today"—who have only known the odyssey of the sign in French thought. But as I hope to have shown, we have reason to believe that the "event" of postwar Parisian intellectualism's infatuation with language does not exactly belong to the conventional history of *discovered* ideas, for it is so enmeshed in peculiar and powerful French "structures" almost entirely invisible to the standard primary texts. In this perspective, rhetoric endured as a cultural bassline; the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism was but a deceptive cadence improvised on top.

If we insist that this "spell of language" properly belongs to the order of events, then we should at the very least expand beyond the moments of linguists (e.g. Saussure and Benveniste) and their readers (e.g. Barthes and Derrida). For beyond this relatively tight network of texts, we have perceived an immense *attitudinal* realm, the dialectical realm of Rhetoric and Terror, which fluctuates over various timescales. In the way that Paulhan perceived it, this space does not

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[5] I am reminded of Burke in a text such as Barthes, "On a Use of the Verb 'To Be'."

belong to linguistics, but rather to those language-users overly confident in or doubtful of (mere) words. The anxiety of Terror operates upon this much larger and less vocationally bound demographic, and sweeps up literature and philosophy for obvious reasons but it also affects more casual discourses (as well as fields I have not covered such as visual arts). Paulhan cleverly detached his thinking from linguistics so that he could insinuate the Rhetoric-Terror dynamic into an "everyday" aesthetic-psychological domain (everyday for those who worry about originality and banality, at least). Postwar French thought turned *away* from a century and a half of Terror as it much more obviously turned *towards* language. A true Terrorist might indeed perceive the peak structuralism of 1966 as a kind of (Thermidorian) reaction.[6] The intensity with which Barthes' circle threw themselves into *langage tel quel* became commensurate with the long-term summation of Terror and its repressive effects.

Paulhan's sense of Terror, with all of its aesthetic and affective extremism, draws upon a much broader and more diffuse terrain: the ancient and plural forms of contempt for rhetoric in general. In exploring the failure of the trope-focused "rhetoric restrained" hypothesis, we first met an "Enlightened" hostility to rhetoric in the eighteenth century. But this was a half-hearted disdain, for the *philosophes* still respected "eloquence" even when they rejected the "rules" taught by their clerical teachers (as Fumaroli suggests, one can speak of a "Voltaire jesuite" trained at Louis-le-Grand, "le collège des lumières").[7] Later, this contempt for rhetoric intensified through a litany of anti-clerical, republican, and positivist dimensions. Regrettably, I have had to leave out many potential members of the anti-rhetoric "Committee of Public Safety" from Pascal to nineteenth-century Romantics. And instead of engaging the important and thorny reception of the ancient sophists, their modern avatars, and their enemies, we encountered the more recent "clerical sophists" and their over-the-top mythologists such as Michelet. But I hope to have at least evoked the deeply plural dimensions of this contempt for rhetoric, from theological ruptures to positivist dogmas and from anti-elitism to artistic anxieties over clichés. The complexity of this contempt ultimately rivals the richness of its object, and prompted Paulhan to pursue his untimely linguistic-turn-without-linguistics.

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[6] This same year, Sartre complains that this anti-historical milieu is merely the "latest barrier that the bourgeoise once again can erect against Marx." Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism," 110.

[7] Fumaroli, "Voltaire Jésuite," 109.

6.2 What kind of institution is rhetoric?

But it is not enough to simply trace the purview and reputation of rhetoric, since these, in themselves, cannot speak to its full institutional nature. Rhetoric is no ordinary institution, and it is not the same thing as language. For Saussure, a language distinguishes itself from other social institutions by being uniquely unsuitable for revolution. A potential revolutionary would have better luck in more specialized and transitory domains: "systems used by a certain number of individuals acting together and for a limited amount of time," such as "legal procedures, religious rites, [and] ships' flags."[8] It would be vastly easier, Saussure implies, for certain seafarers to learn and implement a brand-new system of nautical communication than for an entire linguistic community to revolutionize its natural language. Using this sort of analysis, one could conceivably classify rhetoric, a social institution, based on its degree of inertia, and speak to its life, death, and or weak survival. Yet there is an immense problem with this line of thinking, since rhetoric sometimes refers to a certain kind of linguistic practice, and sometimes refers to a theoretical edifice descripting and prescribing such a practice. In other words, sometimes rhetoric is analogous to ships communicating with flags, and sometimes it is analogous to the captains or sailors pondering this nautical communication system.

This duality of *practice* and *discourse on the practice* proves potentially disastrous for historians trying to chart rhetoric's fortunes and for reformers trying to be rid of it. Much institutional knowledge has been lost in the gap between them. Rather than deal with these two layers of abstractions, I have tended to transpose rhetoric into the order of more tangible social structures (religious orders, educational institutions). Despite increasing the risk of reductionism, rhetoric's manifold interfaces with political, religious, and social history come into greater relief this way, and with these interfaces, so does the tenacity of *l'émpire rhetorique.* Here, systems of reproduction vastly outweigh systems of representation. In grasping the institutionality of French rhetoric, pedagogic plans (such as the *Ratio Studiorum*) are to ingenious treatises (such as Dumarsais' *Des Tropes*) as the Bible is to an apocryphal letter. Though the *Ratio* itself laid down a mighty blueprint, it had in fact amalgamated early humanist pedagogies, and these will invariably bring us back to antiquity. Though we have briefly visited five centuries of French

[8] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 74.

rhetoric over a comparatively long duration, I have shortchanged a true Braudelian approach by twenty to thirty centuries or more. To truly grasp rhetoric's institutional nature, one ought to start with Plato coining *rhêtorikê*, with sophists, or with Homeric rhetorical performance *avant la lettre*. In this way, one might (or might not) find an era of pure rhetorical practice without a system of commentary upon it. Or one could follow the example of Paulhan's pioneering ethnography in Madagascar to better measure the contingencies of European rhetorics, all too easily taken for universals.[9]

French reformers and critics deeply underestimated what it would take to destroy such an institution, but studying their thinking remains instructive. Though Renan serves us well as a cartoonish enemy of *l'empire rhéorique* who can be relied upon to brutally misconstrue it at every turn, he was less wrong about the French education system, and correctly perceived its relative (but not absolute) affinity for style, form, and literature compared to the land of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Asserting a series of false dichotomies—an exclusive choice between *la forme ou le fond, les mots ou les choses*—he sensed that the ENS, supposedly a "school of style" in its letters division, risked turning France into "a nation of speakers and editors, without concern for the substance of things and the real progress of knowledge."[10] Of course, France did not have to make an exclusive choice. French intellectualism opted for words *and* things, words-as-things, things-as-words, and all the messy states in between that would come to the fore via rhe-structuralism and other logophilic modes of thought. Educational critics, Renan included, ultimately pushed their contrasts too forcefully (form versus content, Jesuits versus Jansenists, France versus Germany). But their work informs a slower, more sober take on intellectual history in which individuals, and even organized groups of individuals, lack power over the most formidable institutions until they stop underestimating them (and perhaps even after). Paul

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[99]"Paulhan was the first to see the Malagasy language in an aesthetic light—to conceive that Malagasy people were doing something more with their words than trying to irritate Europeans by their verbosity. If these people's artistic speaking was so multidimensional, merely to translate it Paulhan would have had to learn to decipher its complex codes and unpack its density. But he wanted to speak it, to become as skilled as a Malagasy man-of-words (*mpikabary*)." Lee Haring, "Jean Paulhan's Research in Oral Literature," *L'autre voix de la littérature [online]*, no. 75-76 (2014).

[10] My trans. Renan, *Questions Contemporaines*, 94.

Verlaine's injunction to "seize eloquence and wring its neck" is equal parts eloquent and impossible—that is, outside his poem.[11]

6.3 Historiographic reflections

Coming to the somewhat contrarian conclusion of weak survival has gone hand in hand with unusual approaches to this historical terrain (unusual for rhetoric, at least). Several historiographic maneuvers should be disclosed in case they were not obvious. The first move, the most basic one, was simply to take some initial distance from the individual's philosophical rationale for rhetoric and instead prioritize collective forces. Even if one fully believes Derrida and his good faith argumentation for the philosophic necessity of his prose styles, this process of justification wears thin when stretched across the most famous ten, twenty, or fifty French thinkers, with nary a dry or neutral writer among them. Rhetorical choices of course bear an individual, ethical aspect. But after (what I feel to be) an excess of close readings for rhetorically rich texts, a future anthropologist will hopefully elucidate the cultural order of rhetoric beyond texts, or at least beyond the usual ones. Barthes suggested such an investigation, but as was his endearing yet frustrating fashion, he quickly moved on to the next diamond in the rough. Rather than give elaborate methodological justifications for the range of "rhetorically interesting" personages I considered, I have simply amassed neglected historical details and interpreted them. These suffice, I hope, to show that rhetoric was not dead, but they also leave out a great many thinkers, teachers, and schools.

When considering the rhetorical richness of Parisian intellectualism, we should hesitate before situating the relation between thought and its rhetorical form in the individual thinker, and thereby underestimate the collective forces at work, whether creative, hortatory, or repressive ones. Acknowledging these forces at a level greater than the individual frees us from a certain moralistic framework. Here style, especially good or bad style, belongs to the order of the liberated individual, whose stylistic boudoir offers limitless "choices" for dressing up thought on any occasion. If our choices were truly this abundant and deserving of discrete moral consideration, our indecision would readily render us mute. Rather, the task should be to figure

[11] From "Art poétique" (1885).

out why and how our *gut* decisions—if they can be called decisions—came to be. For such answers, we might turn to the surrounding environment, culture, and society: anywhere except *l'homme même*.

A second move, which has sought to elucidate a rhetorical superstructure (and a bit of infrastructure), could be regarded as roughly Braudelian. Its risks are known: the abstraction or reification of such structures tends towards freezing history (*l'histoire immobile* is the classic reproach against structurally informed histories). In a hyper-Braudelian approach, humans seem to swarm on top of structures like ants upon a rockface, a monolith almost impregnable to anything less than geologic forces. But this is not exactly the approach I have taken. Human minds devised, or at least modified, the educational structures that often concerned us. Sometimes, however, I have indeed been concerned with abstractions: the rhetorical agonism and precocity endemic to elite French intellectualism has a certain cultural diffusion. Still, these educational structures trace back to blueprints devised by the human mind, blueprints with ideological and theological import on an almost personal scale.

Balancing the move towards grand structures, a third move looks towards the agency and ideology of small groups. This microhistorical tendency asserts itself in quarrels of the sixteenth-century Latin Quarter (and the religious strife about twenty miles away at Port-Royal-des-Champs). To perceive such contingencies, we can imagine a range of rather personal decisions along roads not taken. Had Ramus not forsaken Catholicism before dying as a St. Bartholomew's day martyr, perhaps France would have mired itself in "method," the Ramist watchword (complicit, for Walter Ong, in the "decay of dialogue"). Or had Loyola not recruited fellow humanists to join his brotherhood in Christ and ultimately form the greatest order of the Counter-Reformation, perhaps Rome would have found another instrument for its ideological objectives. But there is little guarantee such an alternative would have featured the robust, rhetoric-loving, precocious humanism that is the hallmark of Jesuit secondary education. Though one can no longer hear Latin on the streets of the Latin Quarter, without Loyola, Polanco, and Nadal imparting such life into the language through their pedagogic ambitions, it seems doubtful that Latin composition would have made it to the late nineteenth century (while its translation lingered on as an unavoidable exercise for the *khâgneux* we encountered).

The strangest and most powerful irony or tension of the Jesuit pedagogic and literary enterprise bears remembering: the order who did the most for eloquence and fine writing—and their *ideals*—implemented their ambitions through strikingly unpolished and utilitarian texts (the *Ratio Studiorum*, *Spiritual Exercises*, etc.) under rather *pragmatic* objectives.[12] These texts do not explicitly propound humanistic values and higher pedagogic principles, which is why we have to turn, for instance, to the letters sent between the first Jesuits and the scholarship that brings us backstage. I highlight them if only to show the importance of para-philosophical and para-literary figures in shaping philosophy and literature proper. Perhaps what we call theory still faintly follows the Ignatian wisdom of "becoming all things to all."[13]

The fourth and final move I will reflect upon allows the nonsynchronous nature of rhetoric and its host society to come to the fore. In times of restricted literacy, the institution closely attached itself to literate social groups in France. By 1950, however, the situation differs radically. Pierre Nora's "Khâgne 1950" conveys an elite culture of *logos*, an enduring humanistic cult of the word. While other twenty-year-olds seek jobs under the Marshall Plan or witness the defeats of Indochina, Nora struggles in his own pedagogic *anno domini MCD* with its requisite Latin and Greek. He fails the *concours d'entrée* and will not become a *normalien* (though he ultimately attains his *agrégation* in history). Despite this classical pedagogy's patent irrelevance to the national concerns of 1950, it will leave obvious traces in those thinkers politically engaged in their contemporary world (one does not see North American activists peppering polemics with arcane philological musings—at least until they acquired this affectation through French Theory). Despite the profound political and societal chasm between the Paris of 1600 and 1950, its pedagogical worldview—for a small cadre of talented humanists—remains more continuous than one might think. But of course, this pedagogic enclave could not keep out the political forces impinging upon the *khâgneux* and *normaliens*.[14] From an outsider perspective, a communist classicist is a rather strange character, but perfectly plausible from the inside.

[12] Cf. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 39.

[13] Cf. 1 Cor. 9:22, Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 66.

[14] See Sirinelli's voluminous writings on this topic.

6.4 Rhetorical training or rhetorical trauma?

Pedagogic priorities transpose themselves, imperfectly but perceptibly, into the thinkers who had once been under their yoke. The *khâgne*'s timetable and its implicit hierarchy of values rubs off on the *khâgneux*, supporting a more-than-theoretical interest in language: French and philosophy, six hours each. Latin, Greek, and history, three hours each. English, two hours.[15] Though Nora will undertake such a schedule and still end up a historian, such conditions remain rather unfavorable to a historicist revolution. If structuralism saw Clio's "exile," as per Dosse's phrase, then we should remember that this muse of history faced poor institutional conditions from the outset (with an important exception: the strong but narrow conception of literary history under Lansonism, which seemed to incite its own "reactionary" or contrarian tendencies).[16] Perhaps what Barthes once called the "student's structuralism" facilitated mature structuralism.[17] The elite echelons of French education infused and conditioned French thought, priming it—through humanistic values, specific aptitudes, and a diffused *habitus*—for its remarkable reception of structuralism and its fellow travelers.

As Perry Anderson initially suggested, a rhetorically rich elite education system wielded formative power even at those moments when thinkers called these institutions into question—during the incredible period of intellectual and cultural "effervescence" the nation experienced for two generations after the war, a time of "particular brilliance and intensity" under "an exotic marriage of social and philosophical thought," often conducted via "virtuoso exercises in style" and "oracular gestures."[18] Bourdieu's critiques stand out here. One of his aims, in a sense, was to liberate a modern *homo academicus* from the old Jesuit *homo hierarchicus*. Yet even his sentences—serpentine, hypotactic, and twisted with jargon—seemed to sprawl upwards, like ivy on an educational edifice, towards the sunlight of social distinction; even as style was questioned in theory, it triumphed in practice. Or in the words of Derrida, elite educational institutions

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[15] Nora, "Khâgne 1950," 88.

[16] François Dosse, "Le moment structuraliste ou Clio en exil," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 117 (2013).

[17] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 38.

[18] Anderson, *The New Old World*, 141-43.

dictate "a moral and political system that forms at once both the object and the actualized structure of pedagogy."[19] Given this vexing circularity, it is little wonder that radical thought sometimes stumbled in critiquing its own pedagogic origins and its elaborate rhetoric.

Just as the eighteenth-century *philosophes* were torn between the benefits and pitfalls of their religious and often-Jesuit educations, twentieth-century French thinkers, Derrida included, struggled to determine precisely where the demanding, "tough love" training in rhetoric, philosophy, and the humanities verged on pedagogic sadism (recall their descriptions: "monstrous," "terrible," "torture").[20] Foucault preferred studying prisons to schools, which, although laden with surveillance, discipline, and punishment, seemed rather boring to him. Postwar French thought lacked, with certain exceptions, the critical distance required to turn the hermeneutics of suspicion back upon the institutions in which it climaxed. The question of a just pedagogy resembles Kant's formulation of Enlightenment insofar as it hinges upon maturity—upon the paternalistic determination of the "best interests" of the immature student or of an immature humanity. Evidently, such interests are neither transhistorical nor universal, and we still have much to gain from an anthropological and comparative bent.

6.5 Politics of weak survival

The political stakes of rhetoric's weak survival ought to be highlighted for future research since my treatment has been regrettably thin here. The rhetorical resurgences in the twentieth century seemingly sprung from the nightmarish anxieties of the nineteenth—but with an enormous political reorientation. The nascent patrons of rhetoric would not be the anti-Dreyfusards such as Brunetière, nor the clerical authorities who rightly perceived rhetoric offering supple instruments of moral, religious, and political control. Rather, they would typically fall along the secular centre (Paulhan) to left (Barthes). However far such logophilic intellectuals skewed to the left, however, they typically passed through a highly competitive,

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[19] Derrida, "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends," 94.

[20] "I think through deconstruction you should study and analyze these [rhetorical] models and where they come from, …what interests they serve—personal, political, ideological, and so on. So we have to study the models and the history of the models and then try not to subvert them for the sake of destroying them but to change the models and invent new ways of writing—not as a formal challenge, but for ethical, political reasons." Derrida and Olson, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," 9.

combative, hierarchical, and structurally right-wing education system: a system they sometimes fought and sometimes justified (it was hard for them, as it is hard today, to determine precisely where its boons end and perils begin). Raymond Aron indeed imagined the ENS as "Left or extreme Left"[21] and yet the grueling process necessary to pass its *concours d'entrée* would seem the stuff of heroic rightest mythologies.

Certainly, a lesson here is that liberatory projects can fall victim to their own linguistic elitism (inculcated rather than innate) and infighting (a largely cultural tendency). Barthes will accuse his nation of indulging an ancient *agōn*: the French represent the "heirs of the Greeks, without their genius," too eager for athletic competitions, too eager for intellectual combat. Comparatively speaking, at least, Barthes was right. Within this agonistic culture even leftist thinkers overemphasized their mutual differences. Or just as vexingly, they did not comment upon or acknowledge others in close physical and intellectual proximity (a passive aggression). A patient army of Anglophone scholars, though they might reject this characterization, laboured to subtract from radical, anti-hierarchical thought the aristocratic remnants of its genesis.

We should not commit the genetic fallacy and indict any given thought purely for its institutional origins. At the same time, however, assuming the great Parisian works emerged in peaceful, private, and monastic contemplation constitutes extreme institutional naivety. Rather, we often detect collective traces of the *esprit khâgneux-normalien-agrégé*: a confident, combative, and rhetorically ingenious worldview, all too aware of competition yet shy to spell out the rules of the game, a game which preceded and exceeded them and yet was masked by a "great naturalizing drive."[22] Barthes—an academically-informed journalist and essayist rather than a career academic—had a better vantage than most for creating a new *Mythologies* of French intellectualism. Though even he could not muster a comprehensive social-political critique of the "games," his style suffered less from their machinations.

The political dimension of weak survival continues into the present, and readily blends into the religious one. A formidable tension spans between the nineteenth century—where

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[21] Aron Raymond, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, trans. Terence Kilmartin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 213.

[22] Barthes, *The Neutral*, 127.

Michelet inveighed against the Jesuits with vicious and conspiratorial abandon, and more moderate critics charted their linguistic excesses—and the various rhetorical renaissances under largely leftist intellectuals during the twentieth. Today, one most often finds the Jesuits on the Catholic left. And just as curiously, their very conservation of a classical education and *eloquentia perfecta* now appears a "progressive" bulwark against a rising technocracy interested in stripping rhetoric of its humanism and harnessing it towards "effective communication" and "optimizing" the interfaces between capital and human "capital." Perhaps rhetoric might ultimately suffer a fate worse than death: an instrumental immortality, an institution permanently "degraded" and "technocratized," as Barthes noted four decades ago, into mere "techniques of expression" (lucrative ones).[23] Let us hope not. It would be remiss to ignore centuries of religious affinities (and disaffinities) with humanism in arguing for the contemporary humanities—or should I say, having *faith* in the humanities—for this sort of inquiry shields us from the bleak utilitarianism which already favours the enemy.

One of the problems with the genesis and reception of "theory," from my perspective, proved to be its (claimed) tendency of breaking away from its predecessors, from itself, and from its neighbors. At least a few of these breaks, as I hope to have shown, can be repaired through interdisciplinary history. In an age of fragmentary humanities, becoming a bit "Lansonian" is not a bad idea (without, of course, the hubris of purging rhetoric or other constitutive features). However unfashionable the term humanism might be today, it cannot be extricated from the intellectual history of modern Europe, nor from the secular and religious history of rhetoric, pedagogy, and literature. French Theory proved incapable of truly outstripping its profoundly humanistic origins, the *eruditio* and *eloquentia* tracing through a richly religious saga that, even when it reached the secular age, arguably retained a certain sacredness of word and text. Both the object and method of this dissertation suggest the continuity between "classical" and "theoretical" humanities (if Michelet could invent a concept as grand and powerful as the Renaissance, then surely a few of our quibbling distinctions could be uninvented). Though rhetoric will likely never become the *science des sciences humaines* it has sometimes aspired to

[23] Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 289.

be, its study effaces needless barriers and excessive radical posturing endemic to past and present discourses.

6.6 Resistance and conquest across the Atlantic

French thinkers were not mere pawns of the rhetorical superstructure, and this has consequences for their reception history. Some thinkers resisted normative strictures: Barthes more lyrically, Derrida more forcefully. Studying their travails inclines us to respect this right to resistance. But if it is true that our Anglophone superstructures are less centralized, hierarchical, and harsh than the French (and I have not explicitly proven this here) then we might question the way in which French thought was translated and instrumentalized in the last half century, far beyond the hexagon.

One can translate a book, but one cannot easily "translate" its surrounding pedagogical matrix. Simone Weil's fruitful study under an *éveilleur* such as Alain cannot be quickly recontextualized in North America, nor can one relay Pierre Nora's branding by the "red-hot iron" of French class in the *khâgne* of Louis-le-Grand. After realizing that aspiring philosophers passed (or failed) the arduous *agrégation de philosophie*, they are more easily forgiven for wanting to blow up the history of metaphysics with any rhetorical dynamite they could find. But this exigence—which demanded real argumentative violence given its original pedagogical conditions—lacks a North American analogue requiring the same degree of force. Rhetoric's closest thing to a golden rule is contextual (and hence cultural) propriety. As per Ignatian wisdom, to win over the powerful one must "study their temperament and adapt": in other words, do not be a deconstructive choleric in a faraway land of melancholics or phlegmatics.[24] The meeting of French and American rhetorical temperaments, which too often tended towards raw emulation rather than analogy, yielded a strange, meretricious progeny whose ungainliness we are still struggling with today.

Through all the capricious translations, non-translations, and mis-translations between the two intellectual worlds that Cusset details in *French Theory*, an often-inseparable bundle of philosophical "thought" and rhetorical "form" shaped significant portions of North American

[24] Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, 66.

academia. Critics and journalists often evoke this process as if it were simply a matter of intellectual cognacs and handbags, the import of the luxury goods and fashions of the Parisian mind. They use words such as *cachet* or *argot*, perhaps *maître à penser* or *maître-penseur.* Of course, this analogy is mostly fluff, because as trendy as certain ideas might be, Anglophone importers much more often seek intellectual sustenance than hedonism. I would render the trans-Atlantic encounter rather differently. From the perspective of the pedagogic *longue durée,* various Anglo-Franco hybrids in the orbit of "theory" might strike us as footnotes to the Reformation. The descendants of the Latinate and rhetorically adept pedagogic empire established, maintained, and ideologically justified by the Catholic church and its agents finally and decisively breached the sober strongholds of latent Protestant intellectualism, some of which had misconstrued rhetoric's provenance centuries ago. To see if such speculative narrative gambits have merit, we should expand our classic histories of conscious ideas to this pedagogic unconscious.

6.7 Final reflections

Though rhetoric is fundamentally "about" language, the *institutional* essence of rhetoric is ultimately not linguistic. This patently preposterous notion emerges from the sketches of weak survival I have given here. The narrative of the old rhetoric "progressing" to the theoretical consideration of language yields tools still useful today, but suffers from its scientisms and presentisms. The elite French tradition considered here features much more in common with classical dressage than with modern "communications." Horses, it is true, do not read Cicero. And yet like the equestrian institution, this rhetoric involved relentless exercise and evaluation within exacting but arbitrary standards of a martinet culture, conferring the highest prestige, elitist in the extreme, moving fluidly from one gait—baroque, overwrought, and decadent—to another cadence—muscular, disciplined, and robust—and back again. French rhetoric's performative *piaffes* and locutionary *levades* often betrayed its origins as a *gymnastique d'esprit*; the seemingly ridiculous and superficial "dances" of dressage built the deep musculature of its horses, strengthening their very sinews (equestrians speak of *gymnasticizing* the horse). Thus the rhetorical rococo of French thought—florid and flamboyant—blurs, in an ephemeral and almost imperceptible shift, into daring and genuine, but often intuitive, argumentative prowess (how can we know the prancer from the prance?). Perceived in this gymnastic dimension, which insinuates

itself between theory and practice and foils them both, and which concerns the *unsaid* beyond the ken of the *said*, we can ultimately appreciate rhetoric's tenacity, and the sources of its power. Whether we commend the vitality and supple elegance of the horse or contest its missteps and faulty comportment, we should not, in the end, forget about its trainer, nor the most mysterious covenant that spans between the two.

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"Rhetoric Meets Structuralism at the École Pratique des Hautes Études." Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric. Congress, Ryerson University. June 2017.

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