
ROLAND BARTHES ON WRITING: LITERATURE IS IN ESSENCE

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Abstract:

This paper intended as Roland Barthes views on writing. Barthes argues that language is a relatively autonomous system. The literary text is opaque and unnatural. The denial of the opacity of language and the notion that true art is verisimilitude is a bourgeois fallacy. A *Zero Degree Writing* in contrast, call attention to itself. It reveals itself as language and as a sign system.

Keywords: Idiolect, Narratology, Realty, Revolution, Semiology, Supernatural, Structuralism,

Introduction

Narratology will address the functions of duration, repetition, the chronological or anachronic recording of events out of a progressive temporal linear sequence, the role of the narrator and the various levels of discourse, along with their hierarchical or architectonic relationship, which constitute narrative structure- the study of the structural, formal and temporal elements of narrative and the relationships between them. In A Dictionary of Stylistics compiled by Katie Wales, Narratology is defined:

A term that has come into favour since the 1960s from French under the influence of structuralism referring to the theoretical study and analysis of narrative and its structures. It embraces the manifestation of narrative in language and media, eg., film; and also covers a wide range of approaches. It is , commonly applied to those studies which concentrate on plot structures, as in Narrative Grammar (315-316).

Analysis

According to Roland Barthes, all narratives share structural features that each narrative weaves together in different ways. Despite the differences between individual narratives, any narrative employs a limited number of organizational structures (specifically, five of them) that affect our reading of texts. Rather than see this situation as limiting, however, Barthes argues that we should take this plurality of codes as an invitation to read a text in such a way as to bring out its multiple meanings and connotations. Rather than read a text for its linear plot (this happens, then this, then this), rather than be constrained by either genre or even temporal progression, Barthes argues for what he terms a "writerly" rather than a "readerly" approach to texts. According to Barthes:

"the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (5).

This closing of the text happens as you read, as you make decisions about a work's genre and its ideological beliefs; however, when you analyze any one sentence of a work closely, it is possible to illustrate just how impacted with meaning (and possibility) any one sentence really is as Barthes says, every given mode of *écriture* owes its existence to:

"the writer's consideration of the social use which he has chosen for his form and his commitment to this choice."

Écriture, which in French normally means only 'hand Writing' or 'the art of writing', is now more and more frequently used as a substantive corresponding to all senses of the verb *écrire*, generally to mean the style, the fact of composing a work, or the actions which properly belong to a writer. It is used here in a strictly technical sense to denote a new concept, and is translated as 'writing', 'mode of writing'. This concept is discussed further in relation to that of 'idiolect' in *Elements of Semiology* (1.1.6 and 1.1.7), as is that of 'zero degree'.

The writer literally takes nothing from it; a language is for him rather a frontier, to overstep which alone might lead to the linguistically supernatural; it is a field of action, the definition of, and hope for, a possibility. It is not the locus of a social commitment, but merely a reflex response involving no choice, the undivided property of men, not of writers; it remains outside the ritual of Letters; it is a social object by definition, not by option. No one can without formalities pretend to insert his freedom as a writer into the resistant medium of language because, behind the latter, the whole of History stands unified and complete in the manner of a Natural Order.

Hence, for the writer, a language is nothing but a human horizon which provides a distant setting of familiarity, the value of which, incidentally, is entirely negative: to say that Camus and Queneau speak the same language is merely to presume, by a differential operation, all languages, archaic and futuristic, that they do not use. Suspended between forms either disused or as yet unknown, the writer's language is not so much a fund to be drawn on as an extreme limit; it is the geometrical locus of all that he could not say without, like Orpheus looking back, losing the stable meaning of his enterprise and his essential gesture as a social being. A language is therefore on the hither side of Literature. Style is almost beyond it: imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art. Thus under the name of style a self-sufficient language is evolved which has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology, that sub-nature of expression where the first coition of words and things takes place, where once and for all the great verbal themes of his existence come to be installed. Whatever its sophistication, style has always something crude about it : it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention, and, as it were, a vertical and lonely dimension of thought. Its frame of reference is biological or biographical, not historical: it is the writer's 'thing', his glory and his prison, it is his solitude. Indifferent to society and transparent to it, a closed personal process, it is in no way the product of a choice or of a reflection on Literature.

Style is properly speaking a germinative phenomenon, the transmutation of a Humour. Hence stylistic overtones are distributed in depth; whereas speech has a horizontal structure, its secrets are on a level with the words in which they are couched, and what it conceals is revealed by the very duration of its flow. In speech, everything is held forth, meant for immediate consumption,

and words, silences and their common mobility are launched towards a meaning superseded: it is a transfer leaving no trace and brooking no delay. Style, on the other hand, has only a vertical dimension, it plunges into the closed recollection of the person and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter; style is never anything but metaphor, that is, equivalence of the author's literary intention and carnal structure (it must be remembered that structure is the residual deposit of duration). So that style is always a secret; but the occult aspect of its implications does not arise from the mobile and ever-provisional nature of language; its secret is recollection locked within the body of the writer. By reason of its biological origin, style resides outside art, that is, outside the pact which binds the writer to society. Authors may therefore be imagined who prefer the security of art to the loneliness of style.

Now every Form is also a Value, which is why there is room, between a language and a style, for another formal reality: writing. Within any literary form, there is a general choice of tone, of ethos, if you like, and this is precisely where the writer shows himself dearly as an individual because this is where he commits himself. A language and a style are objects; a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History. Everything separates them: tone, delivery, purpose, ethos, and naturalness of expression.

Conclusion

The conclusion is that to live at the same time and share the same language is a small matter compared with modes of writing so dissimilar and so sharply defined by their very dissimilarity. These modes of writing, though different, are comparable, because they owe their existence to one identical process, namely the writer's consideration of the social use which he has chosen for his form, and his commitment to this choice. Placed at the centre of the problematics of literature, which cannot exist prior to it, writing is thus essentially the morality of form, the choice of that social area within which the writer elects to situate the Nature of his language.

But this social area is by no means that of an actual consumption. It is not a question for the writer of choosing the social group for which he is to write: well he knows that, save for the possibility of a Revolution; it can only be for the self same society. His choice is a matter of

conscience, not of efficacy. His writing is a way of conceiving Literature, not of extending its limits.

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