

ROLAND
BARTHES

*A Lover's
Discourse*

FRAGMENTS

Translated by Richard Howard

“Adorable!”

adorable / adorable

Not managing to name the specialty of his desire for the loved being, the amorous subject falls back on this rather stupid word: *adorable*!

1. . . . “One lovely September day, I went out to do some errands. Paris was *adorable* that morning . . . ,” etc.

Diderot A host of perceptions suddenly come together to form a dazzling impression (to dazzle is ultimately to prevent sight, to prevent speech): the weather, the season, the light, the boulevard, the Parisians out walking, shopping, all held within what *already* has its vocation as memory: a scene, in short, the hieroglyph of kindness (as Greuze might have painted it), the good humor of desire. All Paris is within my grasp, without my wanting to grasp it: neither languor nor lust. I forget all the reality in Paris which exceeds its charm: history, labor, money, merchandise—all the harshness of big cities; here I see only the object of an aesthetically *restrained* desire. From the top of Père Lachaise, Rastignac hurled his challenge to the city: *Between the two of us now; I say to Paris: Adorable!*

Balzac

After an impression of the night before, I wake up softened by a happy thought: “X was adorable last night.” This is the memory of . . . what? Of what the Greeks called *charis*: “the sparkle of the eyes, the body’s luminous beauty, the radiance of the desirable being”; and I may

Greek

DIDEROT, like Lessing, elaborates a theory of the *pregnant moment*.

even add, just as in the ancient *charis*, the notion—the hope—that the loved object will bestow itself upon my desire.

2. By a singular logic, the amorous subject perceives the other as a Whole (in the fashion of Paris on an autumn afternoon), and, at the same time, this Whole seems to him to involve a remainder, which he cannot express. It is the other *as a whole* who produces in him an aesthetic vision: he praises the other for being perfect, he glorifies himself for having chosen this perfect other; he imagines that the other wants to be loved, as he himself would want to be loved, not for one or another of his qualities, but for *everything*, and this *everything* he bestows upon the other in the form of a blank word, for the Whole cannot be inventoried without being diminished: in *Adorable!* there is no residual quality, but only the *everything* of affect. Yet, at the same time that *adorable* says everything, it also says what is lacking in everything; it seeks to designate that site of the other to which my desire clings in a special way, but this site cannot be designated; about it I shall never know anything; my language will always fumble, stammer in order to attempt to express it, but I can never produce anything but a blank word, an empty vocable, which is the zero degree of all the sites where my very special desire for this particular other (and for no other) will form.

3. I encounter millions of bodies in my life; of these millions, I may desire some hundreds; but of these hundreds, I love only one. The other with whom I am in love designates for me the specialty of my desire.

Lacan This choice, so rigorous that it retains only the Unique, constitutes, it is said, the difference between the analytical transference and the amorous transference; one is universal, the other specific. It has taken many accidents, many surprising coincidences (and perhaps many efforts),

Proust for me to find the Image which, out of a thousand, suits my desire. Herein a great enigma, to which I shall never possess the key: Why is it that I desire So-and-so? Why is it that I desire So-and-so lastingly, longingly? Is it the whole of So-and-so I desire (a silhouette, a shape, a mood)? And, in that case, what is it in this loved body which has the vocation of a fetish for me? What perhaps incredibly tenuous portion—what accident? The way a nail is cut, a tooth broken slightly aslant, a lock of hair, a way of spreading the fingers while talking, while smoking? About all these *folds* of the body, I want to say that they are *adorable*. *Adorable* means: this is my desire, insofar as it is unique: “That’s it! That’s it exactly (which I love)!” Yet the more I experience the specialty of my desire, the less I can give it a name; to the precision of the target corresponds a wavering of the name; what is characteristic of desire, proper to desire, can produce only an impropriety of the utterance. Of this failure of language, there remains only one trace: the word “adorable” (the right translation of “adorable” would be the Latin *ipse*: it is the self, himself, herself, in person).

4. *Adorable* is the futile vestige of a fatigue—the fatigue of language itself. From word to word, I struggle to put “into other words” the ipseity of my Image, to

LACAN: “It is not every day that you encounter what is so constituted as to give you precisely the image of your desire.”

PROUST: Scene of the specialty of desire: Jupien and Charlus meet in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Guermantes (at the beginning of *Cities of the Plain*).

express improperly the propriety of my desire: a journey at whose end my final philosophy can only be to recognize—and to practice—tautology. The adorable is what is adorable. Or again: I adore you because you are adorable, I love you because I love you. What thereby closes off the lover's language is the very thing which has instituted it: fascination. For to describe fascination can never, in the last analysis, exceed this utterance: "I am fascinated." Having attained the end of language, where it can merely repeat *its last word* like a scratched record, I intoxicate myself upon its affirmation: is not tautology that preposterous state in which are to be found, all values being confounded, the glorious end of the logical operation, the obscenity of stupidity, and the explosion of the Nietzschean *yes*?

Nietzsche