

Travel, Classicism and Writing in Barthes's 'En Grèce'

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Introduction

Roland Barthes is searching for something in ancient Greece, and indeed seems to find it. From his very first writings, his texts are heavy with classical references. His first published text (if we follow Éric Marty's edition of Barthes's complete works), the article 'Culture et tragédie' (1942), examined modern culture in its relation to Greek antiquity. According to Barthes himself, his original 'Premier texte', as he referred to it in 1974, was also on Greek antiquity, a pastiche of a Platonic dialogue, supposedly written in 1933, although – as we shall see – we need to exercise caution regarding the dates Barthes attributes to his work.

Barthes does not explain anywhere why he attributed so much importance to Greek antiquity as a point of reference for his thinking and writing.¹ However, the idea that his fascination with Greek antiquity was a crucial aspect of his so-called 'formative years', is generally accepted, and resurfaces in every biography. Studies in classical languages at the Sorbonne, including his recently rediscovered thesis on Greek tragedy, his founding role in the *Groupe de théâtre antique* at the same university, his first official as well as non-official writings all testify to the role that the study, and above all the imagination of, ancient Greece played in Barthes's life, well before his work took off in the 1950s.

Whilst Barthes has repeatedly warned against the tropes that can straitjacket biographies, the idea of a formative period, of course, is such a trope *par excellence*. After all, one's training tends not to end with either education or youth. Also, in his later years, ancient Greece is a place that keeps offering up concepts, examples, metaphors, and reference points for his thinking. From the outset, it has done so in close dialogue with other formative figures, modern writers such as André Gide, Paul Valéry, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who also remain present throughout his work.

Ancient Greece functions then as a 'reference culture', giving Barthes's oeuvre its own form of continuity.

This interaction between modernity and antiquity is already evident in Barthes's 1941 postgraduate thesis. In the thesis, he studies scenes with incantations and evocations from ancient Greek tragedy, focussing not so much on the historical context of the theatre of Athens, but on the aesthetic and religious experience of tragedy in theatre, experienced via language in the broad sense of the word and so, music and gestures are also considered. Incantations and evocations are moments at which the performative quality of language makes itself known: language *does* something, it enchants, brings forth, or directs the fate of the characters. The thesis demonstrates aptly Barthes's thorough knowledge of the (then) new research into classical studies, including archaeological and historical research. He is well-trained in the classics yet, at the same time, Barthes includes quotations and insights from modern writers such as Paul Claudel, Paul Valéry, Maurice Barrès, Jules Michelet, Victor Hugo, and Friedrich Nietzsche as cornerstones of his work – names that one might not expect in a philological study. These are, however, determining moments in his thesis, lifting the veil on that which Barthes seeks in both antiquity and modernity: the agency of words and music, the clarity (*clarté*) of language, and a new dialectical way of thinking – in this case, the tragic dialectic, as first described by Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872).² These themes, principles, and questions continually emerge in Barthes's work, even when he is not discussing antiquity, right up until his final lecture series at the Collège de France, *La Préparation du Roman* (1978-1980), and his last monograph, *La chambre claire* (1980).

In this article, we examine the position of ancient Greece in Barthes's so-called 'formative' years. A limited, yet diverse collection of sources has been preserved from this period, including his postgraduate thesis. The focus here however is upon Barthes's journey to Greece in the summer of 1937, accompanied by his fellow students and members of the *Groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne*, narrated in the text which resulted from this journey, namely, 'En Grèce'. Barthes published this short *récit de voyage* in 1944, seven years after the journey, whilst in the sanatorium at Saint-Hilaire-du-Touvet. For several reasons that will soon become clear, this text is pivotal within Barthes's oeuvre.³

Whilst Barthes visits modern Greece, in 'En Grèce' he frequently writes about ancient Greece, as many travellers had done before him.⁴ Rather than the more expected 'philhellenism', the journey to Greece

resulted, for many travellers, in a form of what Sophie Basch calls ‘mishellenism’.⁵ With Barthes, we can observe a similar disappointment in his overall Greek experience. At the same time, however, he constructs his travel journal in such a way that it moves far beyond this disappointment, because he also finds something in Greece: an experience (accompanied by an epiphany), of a much more sensual and even materialist nature, *and* a textual form, which comes into being only seven years later whilst writing his travel journal in ‘En Grèce’.

Unlike many of Barthes’s other texts, we have no insights into the genesis of ‘En Grèce’: no notes, manuscripts, or typescripts are available in Barthes’s archive.⁶ Nevertheless, as will become apparent, it is possible to consider this brief travel journal as an exercise in writing. Barthes experiments with his own form of classicism, whilst searching for a relationship with the Greek landscape which, despite the scarce material presence of the classical past, fascinates and inspires him.

It is important to stress that Barthes became acquainted with the classical past during the interbellum period between World War I and World War II – during which many artists engaged with antiquity. During this period the well-known trope of Greece as the cradle of Western civilization was widespread in discussions of antiquity. One could conceive here of a kind of ‘formative years’, albeit of a culture rather than an individual. This is one more reason why this period has played an important role in education and thus the formation of the young for a long time. For example, the ‘Grand Tours’ of the eighteenth century not only brought young people into contact with classical or classicist civilisations, such as the Renaissance, but the tours were also meant to teach them the correct moral discipline; as such, Grand Tours were a form of educational tourism that were intended to establish a new elite.⁷ During their travels, individuals discovered not only the world, but also themselves, confronting the past as well as modernity, especially in the ways in which they experienced these, themselves, as travellers. Here, antiquity serves as a place of discovery and reinvigoration, similar (albeit on a much smaller scale) to those that occurred throughout postclassical history: the Carolingian Renaissance, the Italian Renaissance, and French classicism in particular. Indeed, we tend not to associate the interbellum with a broadly supported revitalisation of classical antiquity. This is understandable, as the world had by then become much larger, faster, and more voluminous, leading to an explicit desire to look to the future instead of the past.⁸ After the global turmoil and the horror of World War I, there was a deliberate move towards classicism, towards repairing the idiom of simplicity and

clarity, of moral beauty and rational order, which ancient Greece seemed to embody *par excellence*.⁹ The horrors and the mutilated bodies of WWI needed the antidote of an untouchable, classical beauty.¹⁰

Interestingly, during this period, Greece no longer remained imaginary or, as in Basch's words, solely 'a Greece of references'.¹¹ Indeed, in the period of relative political peace following the Balkan and Greco-Turkish Wars, thinkers, publicists, and artists could now visit Greece with relative ease.¹² Hence, their idealised image of Greece met modern, physical Greece. Though not mentioned in Basch's study, Barthes has a similar encounter which is vividly present in his 1944 text and certainly not to the detriment of modern Greece; as the narrator visibly indulges in the small pleasures available in modern Greek life (strolling in the shopping streets of the Pláka, enjoying a visit to the barber shop or a Greek coffee in the harbour), while at the same time trying to imagine to what extent modern Greece still coheres with his imagination of ancient Greece. What this journey meant to Barthes, in which context we can understand his journey – and his written account of it in particular and what was at stake in this text – are the central objects of this article. Hence, we must begin with a brief historiographical correction.

In the Year 1937

Barthes visited Greece in 1937 – rather than in 1938. Whilst this may appear to concern only a small historiographical detail, it is important to note that *all* biographies date his journey to Greece one year too late. Presumably, this error is due to Barthes's own chronological account of his life at the end of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.¹³ Louis-Jean Calvet dated the journey to Greece accordingly in his pioneering 1990 biography and all subsequent biographies have followed Calvet's example.¹⁴

There are many reasons to deem this date of 1938 a mistake. Firstly, the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France hold a small notebook with accounts of meetings of the Sorbonne theatre group.¹⁵ In this document, the visit to Greece is indeed dated 1937; and Barthes's name is amongst the list of participants. Moreover, from these accounts, it is possible to discern that by 1938 Barthes was no longer a member of the group. Secondly, the Archives of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama in Oxford hold a collection of letters and photographs of Wilhelm Leyhausen, a German theatre director and academic with a special interest

in the practice of Greek drama.¹⁶ Leyhausen had been in contact with the Sorbonne theatre group and had seen them at work in Greece. In the collection of his possessions in Oxford, there are photographs of scenes from a performance or rehearsal of *The Persians*, dated 1937 in pencil. Although Barthes's face is not visible in the photographs below, since all the main characters wear masks (moreover, the character of Darius, which Barthes played, does not seem to be part of the scenes represented here, as in other pictures this character wears a long wide robe and carries a sword), a group picture, printed in the Greek newspaper *Akropolis* (dated August 6 1937) *does* show his face and thus proves his presence in Greece in 1937. A final indication that the journey took place in 1937 is a letter from Barthes to his friend Philippe Rebeyrol, which is cited by Tiphaine Samoyault in her biography of Barthes.¹⁷ In this letter, dated August 1937, Barthes tells of his travels in Greece. Surprisingly, the journey is dated to the summer of 1938 on the very same page – Barthes's own error, herewith rectified.



Image: Groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne, *The Persians*, Theatre of Herodes Atticus, Athens, 1937. Leyhausen-Spiess collection, APGRD; reproduced courtesy of the APGRD.

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Image: Groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne, (probably rehearsal of) *The Persians*, Theatre of Epidauros, Epidavrou, 1937. Leyhausen-Spiess collection, APGRD; reproduced courtesy of the APGRD.



Image: Groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne, (probably rehearsal of) *The Persians*, Theatre of Epidauros, Epidavrou, 1937. Leyhausen-Spiess collection, APGRD; reproduced courtesy of the APGRD.

In the Land of Greece

The journey to Greece in 1937 left an impression on the young Barthes. Published in 1944 in *Existences*, the journal edited by the students in the sanatorium at Saint-Hilaire-du-Touvet, 'En Grèce' takes us on a journey to modern Greece and allows us to see it through the eyes of a narrator who visits well-known tourist hotspots: Athens, Mycenae, and a series of Greek islands, including Aegina and Delos. A short fragment is devoted to each location, anticipating the style that would become associated with Barthes's later work – *Michelet, Empire of Signs*, or *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. 'En Grèce' is thus the first text by Barthes in which he employs a form of the *écriture courte*, the short form for which he would become well-known. Interestingly, this stylistic form can be seen to have a direct link with his journey to Greece.¹⁸

Let us first consider the context of this journey. Whilst 'En Grèce' itself does not include an introduction to contextualise the journey, we can assume that the travel journal is based on the journey to Greece made by Barthes with his theatre group in 1937, as we know of no other journeys to Greece.¹⁹ Barthes uses the perspectives of an 'I' and a 'we' narrator alternately, thus implying the presence of a group. The journey that the Sorbonne group made, similar to those made by pupils and students today, was in the tradition of the Grand Tour. It was initiated by the Sorbonne and made possible via an official invitation by a Greek diplomat, who asked the theatre group to perform at several prominent locations in Greece. In a letter dated 1 May 1937, Nikolaos Politis, the (then) Greek royal ambassador in Paris, discussed the invitation with Paul Mazon, professor of Greek at the Sorbonne and Barthes's thesis supervisor.²⁰ The group was given access to perform *The Persians* in Epidaurus and Athens, two legendary theatres dating from Greek antiquity. Yet Barthes's text mentions neither the invitation nor the performances, nor does it make any reference to the theatres, to any Franco-Greek exchange in the name of which the visit was officially conducted.²¹

Indeed, the most explicit reference to the fact that Barthes's 1944 account is based on an actual travel experience is the following sentence: 'I hold myself back above all'; and the only indication that the narrator was part of a group journey is the 'nous' [we] mentioned by the narrator a few times, without providing further context to this ('at Delos, we thought that we were approaching...'); but then, the 'I' narrator seems to leave the group on numerous occasions to wander alone ('I would often wander

[flâner] there').²² Therefore, it is not the occasion that is central to this text, but the perspective of a *flâneur* in the modern Greek landscape. This leads to a reflexive, sensorial form of travel writing in which the modern (that which is perceived and experienced) and the ancient (that which the narrator knows about antiquity, or what it has been imagined to be) are constantly juxtaposed, thereby entering into a dialogue with one another. Barthes gives hardly any consideration to historical Greece in the period *after* antiquity, even though that history is prominently represented in the landscape, for example in the Byzantine and Greek-orthodox architecture with its countless churches and cloisters. In the materials that Barthes, by his own admission, used in preparation for the journey – or his subsequent writings about it – this Christian Greece has a strong presence, for example, in a 1932 photo-book by Antoine Bon, which is also called *En Grèce*.²³ In Bon's work, we travel from place to place via images, following a linear course through Greece, summarised in a map. Also worthy of note is the fact that the book explicitly features landscapes, and shows hardly any people, let alone urban areas such as Athens, Heraklion, or Thessaloniki. The book depicts Greece as a land of ancient ruins, churches, and cloisters, and expansive nature. By contrast, in Barthes's text, these churches almost entirely disappear; people make a cautious reappearance, and we encounter primarily landscapes. Barthes is struck by the nature there that has enveloped the ruins like 'great white bones' – a metaphor that declares these remnants of antiquity itself to be like a *nature morte*.²⁴ Nevertheless, 'En Grèce' is anything but a *memento mori*, presenting an active search for that which inspires or vitalises the narrator.

The islands are a dominant element in the landscapes featured in the travel journal. This is understandable, as the journey took place primarily via the sea, aboard the S.S. Hellas. These islands feature prominently, both in the way Barthes experiences Greece, and in the form that his travel writing eventually takes.

A New Textual Logic: Islands in an Archipelago

'En Grèce' comprises multiple block fragments, each with their own title. The travel journal thus gains a format akin to the photobook, as we observe, in its images generated, isolated unities of time and place that are seen from a specific perspective. However, Barthes departs from the format of the photobook by not setting out a linear route for the reader, instead imbuing the structure of his text with a discontinuous logic, as the order of the places mentioned in the text does not correspond to the chronology of the Sorbonne group's journey.²⁵ This means that the organisation of the text has its own order and therefore also creates its own logic.

'En Grèce' opens with a programmatic paragraph called 'Islands', which can be read as a hint at the insular structure of the whole text. The text continues via nine further paragraphs, comprising ten blocks in total, which together seem to form their own archipelago. This spatial logic can also be seen in the way in which all the paragraphs are connected to a specific location in Greece. They have titles that are either place names (Athens, Santorini, Delos), or topics related to a specific place (a vase in the museum of Eleusis, or the statues of Athens). The paragraph 'Mycènes, Argos, Tyrinthe' opens with the suggestion that these three ancient cities, now in ruins, look like *islands* of stone in a sea of rocks: 'three mounds of rocks on a stony plain'.²⁶ In short, a transposition has taken place, from the form of the landscape – the islands, the ruins – to a particular form of writing.

Ottmar Ette has argued that this insular form in 'En Grèce' would pave the way for Barthes's later travel writings on Japan, Morocco, the United States, and China.²⁷ The form with which he experiments in 'En Grèce' – one grafted upon the Greek landscape itself – returns in these later travel writings. Ette takes this a step further by defining this way of writing as a means of theorising; that is, as a *method*, what Ette calls 'a landscape of theory', in which 'En Grèce' presents itself as an insular landscape in two ways. On the one hand, there are the paragraphs that function as 'island-worlds', as separate, isolated units (or 'micro-texts'), each with their own logic; on the other, it could be argued that together these micro-texts form 'island-worlds' which, whilst fragmentary units in their own right, also constitute a 'multiplicity' via the way in which they are included in the work, the way in which they enter into relations with one another and, of course, with the reader.²⁸ In order to constitute such a multiplicity, they have to be written in such a way as to have an open

structure: separate, yet not confined within themselves. This requires a particular form of writing that makes it possible for these micro-texts to be both islands and, simultaneously, part of an island group or archipelago.

What do we gain from looking at Barthes's texts from both an 'insular' *and* 'archipelago-like' perspective? After all, 'En Grèce' offers itself to the reader in a very specific way. When we start reading the text as a theoretical work, as a text that invites us to simultaneously look and think with the speaking subject (the narrator), then a specific way of thinking and theorising resides within the form of the text. This form is neither especially classical (it is not a traditional anecdotal or contextualised travel-journal), nor radically experimental (we still clearly recognise the subject position of the narrator, who offers us a view on a journey through Greece). With this dialectic between island and island group, Ette urges us to consider how the dialectic, formulated within the text itself, affects the subject position of the one who connects these micro-texts, as both narrator and reader.²⁹ It is, as we will see now, thanks to the multiplicity of islands treated that it is not easy for the subject to situate himself in relation to the whole.

In the opening sentence of 'En Grèce', Barthes formulates this as follows: 'In Greece there are so many islands that you do not know if each island is at the centre or the edge of an archipelago'.³⁰ According to Ette, Barthes sharpens this disorientating (or, at the very least, decentralising) effect by turning both subject and object into mobile entities; Ette also shows that Barthes is already an innovative travel writer. After the opening sentence, the travel journal continues: 'It is also the country of moving islands: you seem to come back to the one you thought you have just left behind'.³¹ Not only does the subject travel; the object is also presented as traveling, and with it the thinking itself, in which subject and object interact with one another. For Ette, the short, fragmentary textual forms used by Barthes configure a '*Mobile*' of thought and writing; and in this condensed poetic form, Ette asserts, we can see many characteristics of Barthes's future writings; and, notes Ette, the cultural and semiotic theory that we often see developing in the writer's work of the 1960s, was actually present from the very start.³²

In his analysis of 'En Grèce', Ette demonstrates how the act of theorising – or, of considering in a more general sense – is placed within a landscape in a literary-textual manner, and itself partly takes on the shape of that landscape. Ette also establishes a connection between the spatial organisation of the Greek islands, and Paris, the city in which Barthes spent the majority of his life, and where he is also studying at the time.³³

Interestingly, the classical heritage seems more vibrant in Paris than it does in Greece, particularly due to the many architectural ‘renaissances’ that define the neighbourhoods in which Barthes spent the majority of his life, varying from the Renaissance and classicism, to Art Deco. Here one may think of the eighteenth-century *Panthéon*, standing opposite the home of Barthes’s maternal grandmother; the classicist statues in the Jardin du Luxembourg, where Barthes played as a child; or the neoclassical frieze that adorned the façade of his secondary school, the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. There is even a nineteenth-century neighbourhood in the ninth district of Paris that was called ‘Nouvelle Athènes’ because of its neoclassical architecture; and the extravagant Opéra Garnier also dates from the nineteenth century. In Paris, the classical appears to be more alive than in Greece, at least in its meaning as a leading stylistic element. Hence it is important, following Ette, to consider not only the spatial element – the islands – and how this installs a *method* of writing and theorising, but also another organising principle of Barthes’s writing during this period: classicism. For Barthes, classicism, as both a stylistic element *and* a question, is of essential importance. After all, the Opéra Garnier and similar extravagant buildings from the heyday of the bourgeoisie do not fall under the kind of classicism he proclaims. In this sense, Greece *as a landscape* has much more to offer Barthes.

‘Negative Writing’: Barthes and Gide

Barthes’s insular method is based on a relation of contiguity: a relation of touch, and of convergence between the text and the landscape that is being described in ‘En Grèce’. The reader observes this in the gaps between the blocks of text – in its visual form. The rhetorical structure of the text, too, has a *fragmentary* character – a characteristic that makes its return in many of Barthes’s later works. Barthes has written about his definition of the fragment on multiple occasions, amongst others pointing towards the importance of the fragment as a literary style in Romanticism.³⁴ Interestingly, for Romantics, such as Schelling, this style was inspired by the remnants of antiquity, including both ruins and the incomplete transmission of texts, such as those of Greek lyric, the empty spaces of which can trigger the imagination.³⁵ Therefore, it is significant that Barthes first employs this fragmentary style whilst staging the Greek landscape, which is full of ruins and empty spaces.

Thus, discontinuity dominates both text and landscape. The way in which the text expresses itself and interacts with the reader, is characterised by what Emily Apter has called ‘negative writing’.³⁶ She does so in the context of her research into the interaction between the works of Barthes and Gide. Whilst she does not consider ‘En Grèce’, she does discuss other works from this period.³⁷ Understandably, Apter’s attention is drawn towards the rhetorical approach of both writers, and their shared interest in a new form of classicism. Their shared ‘rhetoric of negativity’ comprises leaving out, fragmenting, or thinning expected or decorative elements – as evidenced, for example, by their frequent use of rhetorical figures such as the ellipsis, the anacoluthon, and the litotes.³⁸ These figures of speech leave out, strip, and disturb (by introducing the ungrammatical). This style was intended to offer an alternative to the busy, Baroque, Symbolist style of Gide’s contemporaries around the turn of the century, striving instead towards simplicity or sobriety. Barthes follows this countermovement, not only by reflecting upon the style, as he does in his 1942 essay on Gide’s diary and in *Writing Degree Zero*, but also by employing it within his own writing. He thus enters into dialogue with Gide, and consequently with antiquity and classicism, because Gide experimented with this type of negative writing in both its form and theme, in his many rewritings of classical narratives, such as *Le Traité du Narcisse* (*Narcissus*, 1891), and *Corydon* (1924); indeed, as a young man, Barthes wrote a short play entitled *Le voyage d’Arion*, whose title undoubtedly alludes to Gide’s *Le Voyage d’Urien* (1893).³⁹ Barthes thus engages in a writing experiment in which antiquity plays a crucial role. He also does this in his early years by adapting classical texts, such as his *Premier texte*, a pastiche of Plato’s dialogue *Criton* (just as Gide’s *Corydon* also works with the genre of the Platonic dialogue). However, Barthes’s fascination with the genre of the *journal*, as practised by Gide, soon overtakes his interest in adaptations.⁴⁰ His work is no longer about antiquity as a theme, but rather concerns classicism as a form.

This rhetoric of negativity employed by Gide returns in ‘En Grèce’. The I-narrator reports and reflects in a fragmentary manner, both in terms of form and content. As we have seen already, Barthes deprives the reader of the context of his journey. Not only does this entail leaving out information, but it also fits well with the strategy of *depersonalisation* within this form of negative writing: it is not Barthes’s biographical persona, but how Greece appears to a subject that has been written into the text, that is of importance here. Hence, a certain excess of information

and decoration has to disappear. Such is the *ensor* necessary to achieve a certain form of classicism.

Classicism and the Clarity of Writing

In *Classicism of the Twenties*, Theodore Ziolkowski defines the aesthetic style of interbellum classicism as the thematic or formal emulation of the past with the hope of imbuing one's work with the values of simplicity and order that epitomised earlier forms of classicism.⁴¹ The writing experiments of both Gide and Barthes tend towards this (positive) value of simplicity which they would advocate, rather than it being only a *negative* form of writing. Nevertheless, its relation to the classical value of order is far more complex. It is at this point that the typically classicist theme of *clarity* comes in, which, as mentioned in the introduction above, is one of the paramount themes of Barthes's work, and which can already be found in his 1941 thesis, written three years before 'En Grèce'. As we shall see, however, Barthes's conception of clarity has an unusual relationship with order.

Within classical rhetoric, *claritas* is an important official term: it is one of the four so-called virtues of style.⁴² It belongs to the level of *elocutio*, which means that thought as part of an argument, the *res*, has to be expressed as meticulously and effectively as possible (*elocutio*) so that the audience is able to follow the text without difficulty. *Claritas* is sometimes also called *perspicuitas*. When one aims for *claritas*, ambiguity, difficult words, and cumbersome formulations are to be avoided. Within classical hermeneutics, in particular that of the Bible, *claritas* is a concept that has led to violent disagreement and even to religious divisions. For example, the Protestant principle of the *claritas Scripturae* entails the conviction, and the desire, that the Holy Scripture is, by definition, determined by *claritas* and thus by a lack of ambiguity. For the believer, the Scripture is always clear. For Luther, the absence of ambiguity was of crucial importance in order to prevent other institutions, such as the Catholic Church, from appropriating the interpretation of the text for themselves. Not the Scripture itself, but the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church would then determine the meaning of the Scripture.

This principle of *claritas Scripturae* possibly resonated with Gide's striving towards classicism, and with Barthes's search for *clarté* particularly, as both are of Protestant descent. In any case, this principle would lend to

their aim both a metaphysical and a social dimension: metaphysical, because the text has to adequately express a notion of being-in-the-world; social, because this principle includes the rejection of the hegemonic appropriation of meaning and interpretation by a central, supra-individual institution of power. Both aspects certainly play a role in the works of Gide and Barthes, even if their relationship with the Protestant faith is, to say the least, tense. Barthes in particular seeks a secular approach to the metaphysical and the social, or at least an approach that does not allow itself to be limited by the orthodoxy of an established religion or ideology.⁴³ With his texts, he strives for a certain openness, providing insights into a subjectivity that does not allow itself to be constrained by (or confined to) a particular ideological position. Yet, how can this openness also be *clarté*? If *claritas* is the effect or the characteristic of a textual configuration – with its goal to realise the classicist values of simplicity and order – how is this classicism to take shape in texts that are purposefully discontinuous, fragmentary, and centrifugal (and, not to forget, in a writing style that at times comes across as highly literary, almost artificial, with archaic sounding words like ‘ossements’ [bones] and ‘alliciante’)? Is this the most successful form of *elocutio* to provide clarity as to our state of being in a modern text, and in a modern world?

One can read ‘En Grèce’, as Ottmar Ette has done, and primarily emphasise the centrifugal aspect. However, the text does most definitely come to a close, even deploying a powerful finale, a spiritual centre that the narrator reaches at the end, and towards which the text seems to work. Hence, in addition to a centrifugal character, the fragmentary structure thus operates also a centripetal movement. After all, both the first and the final micro-texts discuss the island of Delos, thus giving the text a circular structure – a classical rhetorical intervention that gives cohesion to an argument. That Barthes’s textual journey ends on Delos (the excursion with the theatre group ended in Athens), is significant: Delos is the geographic centre of ancient Greece, and a very important religious centre. Moreover, the role of the small island as a religious centre is primarily due to the worshipping of the god Apollo that took place there. According to classical mythology, the inhospitable island in the heart of the Cyclades was the birthplace of Apollo, the god of the sun, and of light. Barthes, however, does *not* mention this information in his text.

The final fragment of ‘En Grèce’, called ‘Délös’, ends on a remarkable epiphany, albeit one that can be interpreted in different ways. The narrator describes how he ascends Mount Cynthus, reaching the remnants of an ancient villa. From this position, he overlooks the islands

and the sea. He observes there that the island changes into 'the centre of a circle of Cyclades'; or even that 'the island is the centre of a solar dazzle'.⁴⁴ The narrator describes this experience as follows:

The miracle of this dazzlement is its freshness, it is light in the pure state, with hardly any heat. It is certain that up there you are initiated into something that you take for Greece and which is perhaps only Fire.⁴⁵

In this passage, we can clearly observe the strategy of depersonalisation employed in the work. Not only the sentences cited above, but also the fragment as a whole avoids the naming of an 'I': 'one is initiated into something.' A second characteristic of negative writing are the many implicit and hence concealed intertextual elements that are evoked by this scene: the climbing of Mont Ventoux by Petrarca, which has become a symbol for the shift from theo-centrism to anthropocentrism; Plato's true philosopher, who dares to leave the cave of reality to face the light of the sun; the burning Greek midday sun that enabled Marguerite Yourcenar's revelation regarding the myth of Apollo and Cassandra in her travel narrative 'Apollon tragique' (1934); the meandering journey over the river Nile conducted by the protagonist of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), who reaches the deepest darkness and is initiated into the darkness of the human soul. As a travel narrative, Conrad's novel is generically related to Barthes's text on Greece, especially in the way in which the journey is positioned as a traditional pilgrimage or initiation, in which one discovers something about the self, and/or the world.⁴⁶ This multiplicity of potential intertextual relations is characteristic of negative writing: little is explicitly revealed, yet the text evokes, and is marked by, such a potential. The attention given to the sun in the text could, in line with Gide's opposition to Symbolism, be a countermove against the fascination with the moon that prevailed towards the end of the nineteenth century in general, and in Symbolism in particular. In the first half of the twentieth century, this fascination shifts towards the sun instead – something that would not only be reflected in the arts during the 1930s, but also in tourism, where sunbathing was no longer considered a socially undesirable activity.⁴⁷ Moreover, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the 'heliophobia' of the nineteenth century changed into a real 'heliophily'. Suddenly, sunbathing was considered to heal the human being, especially children and tuberculosis sufferers, as is evidenced by the popularity of heliotherapy in sanatoria. Is it a coincidence that Barthes, himself suffering

from tuberculosis, wrote 'En Grèce' whilst in the sanatorium, but remembering the experience of the healing 'embrace' of the sun in a mountainous landscape? Is it a coincidence that he gives preference to a classicism in which beauty and purity ('à l'état pur') are being practised, whilst his own body falters and hinders his intellectual career? For someone like Barthes, being a war orphan and himself in a precarious physical situation due to his illness, the Greek idealisation of the body – and the male body in particular – potentially gains a biographical dimension in its own right.

Thus, in the final fragment of 'En Grèce', Barthes manages to include a centripetal movement – the initiation, the illumination that the sun evokes in him, an island in an archipelago that suddenly turns out to be a centre – with numerous centrifugal elements. Most remarkable perhaps is the 'miracle' evoked by the Mediterranean midday sun. Where the reader might expect this sun to burn, it turns out to be pleasantly refreshing, as if this experience of the sun is a negation of its very essence: a burning fire ('le Feu'). Here we may find an opening via which to gain insight into the form of *clarté* sought by Barthes. After all, this experience of the sun is rhetorically constructed from the stylistic figure of the paradox: there is an unexpected absence of heat, and an unexpected presence of coolness, which at first sight appears illogical or incompatible. Yet they come together. Here we witness the paradox at work, a figure of style which Barthes wrote about on several occasions, and which he considered essential for his way of writing and theorising: the paradox (via the 'doxa' or 'the established order') brings contradictory elements together, bringing together that which goes against the doxa, demonstrating unexpected relations and connections via which a form of *clarity* comes into existence.⁴⁸

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Barthes chose to make fire the central element in this epiphany, also writing the word itself with a capital.⁴⁹ After all, it is the primordial element which the pre-Socratic Heraclitus argued was the foundation of the cosmos. This same Heraclitus was designated by Nietzsche as his teacher, as the very first true 'free spirit' – someone who was capable of *thinking* the becoming and interrelatedness of things, including those things that appeared to contradict one another.⁵⁰ If indeed Barthes's writing here is striving towards a form of *claritas*, then his aim is to present, and thus entails, a rhetoric that gives clarity towards, or insights into, what it means to be in the world – an insight that is particularly strong whilst traveling, when one steps outside of one's usual frames of reference. This would also explain the overall absence of his

travelling companions in 'En Grèce', and why the emphasis is placed on the perspective of a wandering 'I' who discovers the world. The fact that Barthes rhetorically constructs his epiphany as a paradox, could therefore mean that Barthes employs this figure of style to suggest the connection between counterparts, and hence the becoming of the world. Greece gives him this insight, like Heraclitus gave insight to Nietzsche. It is not an insight that one can expect from looking at the Opéra Garnier in Paris. The classical repertoire that Garnier finds so appealing in this building, and the exuberant *amplificatio* of its decorative neoclassical elements, form an antidote to the dense and slightly unsettling classicism with which Barthes experiments in his travel journal.

Barthes is aware that classical Greece also lends itself to an escapist or orthodox style – something towards which he is also critical, such as when he notes in 'En Grèce' that the remains of the ancient world are

capable of adorning just as happily [*avec autant de bonheur*] a château from the Renaissance period, a 17th-century park or a play by Giraudoux; but sometimes it would be good if, getting away from the style for which they are so praised, they managed to find in each other a lack of concert, which is much more fitting for the admirable disorder of the world and for the passion of their time.⁵¹

In the introduction, we pointed towards the role of classicism as a promise of hope and beauty, both during and after the chaos of the world wars. In the quotation above, Barthes decides that a convincing form of classicism should also acknowledge the disorder of the world and not allow itself to be seduced by a naïve illusion of order, no matter how comforting ('bonheur') this may be. When the classical is employed as a defence mechanism against overwhelming barbarity or chaos, the skill is precisely also to point out, or make felt, this darker side. However, if for writers such as Gide, Barthes, and Nietzsche, classicism – that is, the purposeful deployment of the classical repertoire – is a way to resist overly naïve concepts of beauty, or an overly rational, compulsive notion of order, what remains then of our definition of classicism? Can classicism be – or become – this complicated, so that light and dark may co-exist?

In any case, this seems to be the task Barthes assigns himself: to find a form of classicism that does not think solely in terms of order, rules, regularity, and continuity, but opens up to chaos, variation, contingency and complication, gaps and discontinuity. This assignment seems to come straight out of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he described how

the modern 'I' should not be so arrogant as to assume they can steer their boat over calm waters, whilst beneath dangerous currents are sweeping the boat to and fro.⁵² A classicism that allows this insight or feeling about life to enter, offers *clarté*, at least in Barthes's sense of the word.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the end goal is radical fragmentation, or the blowing up of any kind of centre. Rather, traditionally, classicism establishes a communal or sharable language between people – and thus, fosters connections. We already saw that the strategy of depersonalisation is characteristic for negative rhetoric, but the effect of using the impersonal here to stage his epiphany is that it reveals an experience that is not radically singular, but that can be shared with other people. This is underpinned by a great desire for continuity, in the sense of connection, and for that which Barthes himself calls 'sociability': the aim of literature to make contact with the reader, and thus to be a social action. No matter how strongly Barthes has stirred the idiom of classicism towards a negative writing, communication in a shared language remains intact, and perhaps even forms the basis of his interest in classicism. Nevertheless, it is paradoxical that he writes the group out of his text, and that we initially get to read the perspective of the individual – the modern *flâneur*. Is the idealist idiom of classicism one with which to replace the reality of the group, with all its irritations and its mutual discussions?

The Role of Greece: Curative and Liberating

Barthes regularly makes explicit comparisons between modern and ancient Greece. He makes a similar comparison at the very start of the closing fragment about Delos. The narrator tries to imagine the ancient island of Delos whilst starting to climb the mountain, but quickly has to note: 'No, it is no longer Delos, it is already another island with its name, its past and other beliefs [cultes]'; and Barthes thus places his experience firmly within the domain of becoming, and of transformation.⁵³ However, the epiphany does have a relation of contiguity with antiquity. After all, the narrator is not standing on top of Mount Cynthus (as indeed he could have constructed the narration), but at a place where a (now ruined) ancient Roman villa was built that offers precisely *this* view. He is standing then on the spot where previous generations could have also experienced such an epiphany. The suggestion is that both are related to one another. The

fact that the Greeks are presupposed to have practiced pantheism, and thus some kind of nature religion, adds extra meaning to this epiphany, evoking the idea of a pre-modern religious experience, a quasi-unmediated interaction between a subject and the cosmos.⁵⁴

It is telling that Barthes gains his insights through an interaction with the landscape, rather than an antique artefact, such as for example experienced by Rilke in relation to Apollo's bust in the famous poem 'Archaischer Torso Apollos' (1918). The Greek landscape is, first and foremost, a natural landscape here. In Greece, one may expect a sophisticated mix of cultural and historical tourism, such as that of the Grand Tours in Italy. However, most travellers were more likely to discover nature and ethnic tourism. Nature tourism has a curative dimension: nature does the 'magical work of renewal' that we expect of travelling as a counterpoint to daily working life. That is, such is the argument put forward by Nelson Graburn when he described modern tourism as the striving towards 'a sacred journey, [...] to achieve an altered state by travelling and experiencing the extra-ordinary'.⁵⁵ He suggests that the common desire of tourists to be alone somewhere is a typical sign of tourism's curative dimension, for the relative absence of humans enables the renewal of the self. The empty landscapes in Antoine Bon's photo book and the narrator's desire to wander alone in Barthes's 'En Grèce', confirm this.

In addition to this emphasis on nature, 'En Grèce' brings to the fore a second important dimension: the eroticising of Greece. This is incorporated rather secretively towards the end of the epiphany: '[T]he fiery heat from the sun goes deep into the heart of the lands, inside the chest, and traces on the eyes like a sign a burn, dry like the pain of love.'⁵⁶ Less secretive is the passage in which the 'we' narrator elaborately reflects upon the search for a modern Greek who meets the image of classical beauty. This does not concern a modern Aphrodite, but rather a Greek young man, despite the fact that they are visiting the island of Aegina, where the famous temple of the goddess of love is located. The use of 'we' is significant here, as, of course, it is a form of depersonalisation. However, it may also be intended to direct attention away from the 'I' of the writer. After all, unlike Gide, Barthes was not open about his homosexuality. In this context, the following passage from his later work is remarkable – a fragment that, typically, ultimately did not make its way into his literary biography *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), in which Barthes directly links his interest in ancient Greece to homosexuality: 'Homosexual discourse can operate only via a sublimated mediation that

is organised: ancient Greece'.⁵⁷ The fragment is (revealingly) entitled 'À quoi sert la Grèce antique?' [What is ancient Greece useful for?]. Thus, if the young Barthes was looking for anything in Greece, it surely also was 'someone good-looking who reminds us of the splendour of the ancient Greeks'; and this passage on Aegina is worth citing in full, as the comparisons to the epiphany at Delos are significant:

[N]ow this is the opposite of what [ancient Greeks] used to be; many today are small with dark, flattened features and worn skin, with a look of oily skin and poor teeth; the only good-looking person we saw was a sixteen-year-old shepherd, with his blond locks, blue eyes, and a clean look he enveloped in an air of voluptuousness; it was Charmide, Lysis, Clinias or Antolcyos; on Aegina, he kept animals; with a smile he handed us some huge grapes, and all around the air was full of sunlight, and on the brown earth there was fresh dew that shone like acid.⁵⁸

This meeting – described so lyrically that it functions as an epiphany – connects sun, air, earth, and water. This scene, too, clearly carries with it comparisons between modernity and antiquity. However, what is even more remarkable here than anywhere else, is the orientalisng quality of this scene. As also evidenced by Gide's work, journeys to the Orient were known for their quest for sexual freedom. The bucolic framing of this scene, in which a young shepherd takes centre stage, clearly refers to the Greek love between men in nature. Whilst public homosexuality was not yet possible in many Western countries at the time, ancient Greece offered plenty of examples to form oneself an (idealised) image thereof. The narrator of Barthes's travel journey was clearly also looking for this Greece. In addition to eroticisation, the reduction of the Greek landscape to a *natural* landscape is also part of this orientalisng representation. It is a landscape still untouched by modernity, and the urban, economic, and industrial forces that accompany it. Therefore, this landscape can show us something that Paris cannot – partly also because the traveller *wants* to be able to find something in this 'other' landscape.

Barthes seems aware of this paradox: finding something because you are searching for something, and thus having the desire to find it. Whilst reflecting upon what exactly is at stake in the epiphany at Delos, he starts with an aside: 'Delos is a magical island [...]; it becomes slowly a mirror: mirror of what? No matter : mirrors have a supernatural beauty ; they do not know what they reflect and they do not always reflect what

they see'.⁵⁹ Whilst this somewhat enigmatic remark probably has a connection with the water in which Narcissus encounters his own reflection, it also places a centrifugal element at the centre of the experience: the mirror.⁶⁰ The 'miracle' that unfolds here is thus also, at least partly, a 'mirage'. The Greek landscape does not offer the viewer depth, but a surface that reflects, sometimes with and sometimes without the intervention of some form of mirror. This might make the mirror mimetic, but also performative. It is also a magical moment, considering that Barthes often mentions magic and the agency of things in the same breath, for example in his thesis on the use of magical language in Greek tragedy. Barthes is looking for these kinds of moments, in which paradoxes make themselves known and in which it is unclear how factual or straightforward the truth actually is. Despite, or sometimes precisely because of, this uncertainty, these moments can still be considered as falling within the realm of *clarté*. Their beautiful image trembles, because they have been touched by something else (sexuality, chaos, becoming). In his very first article, 'Culture et tragédie' in 1942, Barthes expresses it as follows: 'Tragedy [...] is an aristocratic form which presumes a deep understanding of the universe, a *profound clarity* [emphasis added] concerning the essence of humanity'.⁶¹ This *clarté profonde*, with which he became familiar in his reading of Greek tragedy, is precisely what Barthes thinks he has found in 'his Greece' during this period.

Conclusion

Barthes's travel journal 'En Grèce' clearly has a different orientation to his thesis on Greek tragedy and his work for the Sorbonne theatre group during this period. Barthes was dismissed by the theatre group because, it seems (as we mentioned above), his attitude was deemed too 'propagandistic' and orientated towards the modern, rather than towards the study of antiquity itself. However, this does not mean that he fundamentally valued modernity over antiquity. On the contrary: Barthes frequently mobilises antiquity and Greek tragedy in particular, to call modern times to account – as he did in 'Culture et tragédie'. In 'En Grèce', he investigates the relationship between antiquity and modernity in the country that was once ancient Greece. He does so by drawing comparisons (in which antiquity thus appears as a theme or subject), but also by experimenting with form. Both aspects characterise the classicism of the

interbellum, as we can see in Gide's work. Essential here is that this classicism is not a historical study of antiquity, but rather the expression of an aesthetic and moral relation to antiquity, as well as to other forms of classicism in Western history – a relation that is often praised for its curative dimension, aiming to bring beauty and clarity to an epoch in which the world wars in particular have brought chaos.

In this respect 'En Grèce' fundamentally differs from Barthes's postgraduate thesis on ancient Greek theatre, revealing a writer at work. Moreover, this text is the first in which he experiments with the form we would see in his later work: *la forme brève*, bringing together fragments or micro-texts into playful connection, like islands in an archipelago, and employing a form of negative writing to achieve a *clarté profonde*. Greece is an important partner in this experiment: it provides a repertoire of narratives, figures of reference, ideas, and images (especially in relation to subjects that are taboo in modern Western society, such as homosexuality); it is the culture that has given us rhetoric and tragedy, and as such has become a relevant measure; and, it is in 'En Grèce' above all also a landscape with an oriental feel and a curative and liberating potential. Barthes wrote this text in 1944, whilst the world was burning, and he himself was forced to retreat to a sanatorium. From both perspectives, healing was welcomed, and this may explain his interest in classicism, and his choice for the genre of travel writing. Clearly, he very much hoped that ancient Greece would have, or give, meaning. For him, it is a promise of discovery. Therefore, what we see in the Greek mirror is never completely stable and, as both ourselves and the world change, it too may be subject to change.

Notes

¹ See Maarten De Pourcq, *Roland Barthes and Greek Desire: Tragedy, Philosophy, Writing*, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2008, which was a first attempt to interpret the role of ancient Greece, more specifically ancient tragedy and ancient philosophy, in Barthes's work; see also Maarten De Pourcq, 'Compared with Antiquity. Early Cultural Studies and Writing on Modern Life', in *Le Comparatisme comme approche critique/Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach*, ed. by Anne Tomiche (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017), pp. 171-80.

² In *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside, ed. by Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1993), Nietzsche describes this tragic dialectic as the interaction between two poles, in his words between 'art-drives' and 'living concepts': on the one hand, Apollo (the god of image, reasoning, and order) and, on the other, Dionysus (the god of feeling, music, and disruption); for Nietzsche, Greek tragedy shows us the reality of the dialectic between these two poles, a reality that is usually misjudged or simply abnegated by both artists and philosophers.

³ Roland Barthes, 'En Grèce', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. I, pp. 68-74. Barthes's *Œuvres complètes* will henceforth be referenced as *OC* followed by volume number.

⁴ For an anthology of travel writing on Greece, see Hervé Duchêne, *Le voyage en Grèce. Anthologie du Moyen Âge à l'époque contemporaine* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003).

⁵ Sophie Basch, *Le voyage imaginaire. Les écrivains français en Grèce au XXe siècle* (Athens: Librairie Kauffman, 1991).

⁶ For more information on Barthes's second, much later travel to Greece in 1978, see Claude Coste's article above, which uses Barthes's 'Grand Fichier'. This 'Fichier' contains also a few cards from his 1937 journey.

⁷ Nelson H. H. Graburn, 'Tourism. The Sacred Journey', in *Hosts and Guests. The Anthropology of Tourism*, ed. by Valene L. Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 24-25; John Tower, 'The Grand Tour: A Key Phase in the History of Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 12.3 (1985): 297-333.

⁸ During the interbellum in France, special attention was given to ancient Greece; see Corinne Barbant and Nicolas Surlapierre, eds, *La Grèce des Modernes. L'impression d'un voyage, les artistes, les écrivains et la Grèce (1933-1968)* (Roubaix: Gourcuff Gradenigo – Association des conservateurs des musées du Nord – Pas-de-Calais, 2006). A similar trend occurs after World War II; see Miriam Leonard, *Athens in Paris. Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Jeffrey Lieber, *Flintstone Modernism or the Crisis in Postwar American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

⁹ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Classicism of the Twenties: Art, Music and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. xiv.

¹⁰ Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

¹¹ Basch, *Le voyage imaginaire*, p. 142.

¹² Sophie Basch, *Le mirage grec. La Grèce moderne devant l'opinion française (1846–1946)* (Athens: Librairie Kauffmann, 1995), p. 7.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 183.

¹⁴ Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Sarah Wykes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 39.

¹⁵ At the BnF, the notebook can be found in the Barthes archives with the document reference 4-COL-33 (13).

¹⁶ Fiona Macintosh, 'Museums, archives and collecting', in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, ed. by David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 267-80.

¹⁷ Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p. 107.

¹⁸ In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* Barthes states that he spent his entire life practising the 'short form of writing' or 'écriture courte' (p. 93). See also Philippe Vercaemer, 'Roland Barthes. Le roman du fragment', *Modernités*, 4 (1993): 159.

¹⁹ For a brief account of the first years of the Sorbonne *Groupe de théâtre antique*, see Sylvie Patron, 'Le Groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne', *Les Cahiers de la Comédie-Française*, 23 (1997): 48-53. There is some confusion as to whether the group also performed in Greece in 1938, because that seems to have been the initial plan: a journey by means of preparation in 1937, followed by a tour in 1938. However, the archives of the group make no mention of such a tour in 1938. Furthermore, Barthes's name disappears from the group's archives from 8 May 1938 onwards. Already before the journey to Greece, there had been a forthright discussion about the figure of Barthes as the group's chairperson. In an account of a meeting held on 8 February 1938, a member of the group complains about the fact that, during their group readings, they read *modern* instead of classical texts. Towards the end of the meeting, Barthes is dismissed as chairperson, because he was considered a 'propagandist'. It may be that his interest in Greece is considerably less historical than that of his fellow students, and that his aim with the theatre group was primarily to make modern theatre, rather than to perform reconstructions of classical theatre. This possibly questions Barthes's later reflection upon this period as 'a collective experience, an amicable one, I would say' (*OC II*, p. 711).

²⁰ In this letter, Politis confirms my finding that their visit to Greece took place in the summer of 1937: 'I am absolutely delighted by the thought that the students from the Sorbonne Ancient Theatre Group have come up with the idea of undertaking a trip to Greece *this Summer*' [emphasis added]; see BnF, 4-COL-33 (17).

²¹ In the same letter, Politis states: 'The journey to Greece by these young people would be extremely beneficial in many ways, and it would strengthen further the

friendship that exists between French and Greek young people'. Politis was a key figure in the international relations between France and Greece during this period. That the political regime of Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas during this period was less than democratic, received little attention in France, as did Barthes's text; see Basch, *Le mirage grec*, pp. 409-11.

²² Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 68, p. 69.

²³ Antoine Bon, *En Grèce*, introduction by Fernand Chapouthier (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1932). In his 1973-1974 seminars, Barthes refers twice to this book (which he attributes to Fernand Chapouthier, a professor at the Sorbonne at the time Barthes was studying there, who only wrote the book's preface); see Roland Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur. Séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1973-1974, suivi de Fragments inédits du Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, ed. by Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Seuil, 2010), p. 254, p. 323.

²⁴ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 68.

²⁵ The Sorbonne archives contain a journey timeline with the name of the boat as well as the route taken: Ithaca, Itea, Delphi, Athens, Nafplio, Tiryns, Argos, Mycenae, Epidaurus, Delos, Santorini, Aegina, Piraeus, and Athens.

²⁶ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 72.

²⁷ Ottmar Ette, *Roland Barthes. Landschaften der Theorie* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2013), p. 28.

²⁸ Ette, *Roland Barthes. Landschaften der Theorie*, p. 29.

²⁹ Ette plays on the fact that, in German, *Insel-Welten* (island-worlds, that is, insularity) and its polar opposite *Inselwelten* (archipelago, that is aggregated non-insularity of islands) are almost identical words.

³⁰ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 68.

³¹ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 68.

³² Ette, *Roland Barthes. Landschaften der Theorie*, p. 31. Emphasis in the original German.

³³ Ette, *Roland Barthes. Landschaften der Theorie*, p. 32.

³⁴ On Barthes and the Romantic fragment, see Lucy O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 175-77.

³⁵ See Glenn W. Most, 'On Fragments', in *The Fragment. An Incomplete History*, ed. by William Tronzo (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009), pp. 9-22.

³⁶ Emily S. Apter, *André Gide and the Codes of Homotextuality* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1987), p. 8.

³⁷ Amongst others, Apter discusses Barthes's 1942 article on Gide, 'Notes sur André Gide et son "Journal"', published two years before 'En Grèce' in the same journal, *Existences*. In the same year as 'En Grèce', he also published a piece with the telling title 'Plaisir aux Classiques' (1944). Barthes himself even addressed the connection between Gide and 'En Grèce' in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, in the third person: 'One of his first articles (1942) concerned Gide's *Journal*; the writing of another ("En Grèce", 1944) was evidently imitated from *Les Nourritures terrestres*' (p. 99).

³⁸ For Gide, litotes embodies the fundamental stylistic figure – and thus is a virtue of style – of classicism; see Apter, *André Gide*, p. 4.

³⁹ See Calvet, *Roland Barthes*, p. 32. André Gide, *Narcissus: A Treatise on the Theory of Symbolism*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy, in Gide, *The Return of the Prodigal: Preceded by Five Other Treatises* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), pp. 1-16.

⁴⁰ In an interview in 1975, Barthes set out his fascination with Gide's diary; see *The Grain of the Voice. Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985) p. 226, where Barthes explicitly places himself within the tradition of writing as employed by Gide in his diary. In 'En Grèce', we observe a similar attention to what appear to be details, *bêtises*, and meetings, which function as Barthes's version of Gide's 'irisations of subjectivity', such as for example a visit to a barber shop in Athens ('En Grèce', p. 68). The fact that Gide, too, wrote frequently about his journeys, also in the Mediterranean, and often with sexual motives, is another point of convergence with 'En Grèce'.

⁴¹ Ziolkowski, *Classicism of the Twenties*, pp. 7-10.

⁴² Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, ed. by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson, trans. by Matthew T. Bliss e.a. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), *s.v.*

⁴³ In the same month as Barthes published 'En Grèce', he also published in the same journal a piece on the style of Albert Camus: 'The pleasure of style, even in avant-garde works, can be reached only by being faithful to certain classical preoccupations, harmony, correction, simplicity, beauty, etc., in short the *secular* [emphasis added] elements of taste' (*OC I*, p. 75). It is noteworthy that Barthes does not mention *clarté*, as if he wants to distance the concept from traditional classicism.

⁴⁴ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 73.

⁴⁵ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 74

⁴⁶ According to Duchêne, *Le voyage en Grèce*, p. 2, every journey to Greece takes the form of an *Odyssey*, and thus of an initiation: the primordial journey in which Odysseus tries to find his way, and in which his son, Telemachus, who is looking for his father, is initiated into the life of a man; on travelling and initiation, see Graburn, 'Tourism: The Sacred Journey', pp. 17–31.

⁴⁷ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 137.

⁴⁸ See for example 'Doxa/paradoxa' in Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, p. 71.

⁴⁹ Barthes more often employs this artistic gesture throughout his oeuvre; see Jean-Claude Milner, *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2003), pp. 10-15.

⁵⁰ See Dale Wilkerson, *Nietzsche and the Greeks* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).

⁵¹ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 69.

⁵² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 16. Nietzsche here uses an allegory which he found in the work of Schopenhauer.

⁵³ Barthes makes a surprising reference to a playing child on the beach ('not much less than the game played by a child on the beach') ('En Grèce', p. 73) using an image that is often used by Heraclitus, and subsequently by Nietzsche, in which change is a central element.

⁵⁴ There is an interesting parallel here with the work of Aby Warburg. Warburg's interest in the renewal of ancient formulas in Western art, the figure of the nymph in particular, is, according to Kurt Forster, 'an intuition of a force that really exists, albeit half-veiled behind transient phenomena'; this force has made constant reappearances, especially in antiquity: 'With the recrudescence of [Greek] religion in a later age it came back as *dunamis*, "magic power", in a higher sense as *phôs*, "light, knowledge", and in Christianity also as *charis*, grace'; see Kurt W. Forster, 'Introduction', in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. by D. Britt (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities), p. 21. Barthes had a similar interest in the *dunamis* (he also often uses the Greek word) or 'magic power' of the word, and in the idea of '*venusté*', a word that he uses in 'En Grèce' for the first time and would reappear in his later work.

⁵⁵ Graburn, 'Tourism: The Sacred Journey', pp. 24-26.

⁵⁶ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 74.

⁵⁷ Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, p. 323.

⁵⁸ Barthes, 'En Grèce', p. 71.

⁵⁹ Barthes, 'En Grèce', pp. 73-74

⁶⁰ André Gide's *Narcissus* is a potential intertext here, for instance the passage where Narcissus exclaims: 'Ah! to be unable to see oneself! A mirror! a mirror! a mirror! a mirror!' In the original French, the rhyme makes even the language reflect itself: 'Ah! ne pas pouvoir se voir! Un miroir! un miroir! un miroir! un miroir!'; see André Gide, *Le Traité du Narcisse*, in Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties. Oeuvres lyriques* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), p. 3.

⁶¹ Roland Barthes, 'Culture et tragédie', in *OCI*, p. 30.

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