

## Callie Gardner (1990-2021)

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This journal owes its existence to Callie Gardner, who has died in Glasgow at the age of thirty-one.

In 2014 I was awarded a year-long research leave fellowship by Cardiff University. Callie, who was writing their PhD thesis under my supervision at the time, helped me to use some of the funding attached to that fellowship to found *Barthes Studies*. As I remember it, I had a few brief, aimless ideas scribbled in my notebook and a sinking sense that nothing was possible in practice. ‘What if we did this ... and this?’, said Callie, instantly seeing a way to build, to fix, and to bring the journal to life.

At my suggestion, Callie became the Reviews Editor – a position that they held for the first five volumes before stepping down in late 2019 to focus on other projects. Volume 2 of *Barthes Studies*, a special issue titled ‘Roland Barthes and Poetry’, was guest-edited by Callie in 2016 and, like their doctoral research, set the scene for their groundbreaking book, *Poetry & Barthes: Anglophone Responses 1970-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018). I asked Callie on a couple of occasions if I should update the early volumes of *Barthes Studies* to replace their previous forename with the one that they used in the final years of their life, but they told me that this wasn’t necessary. ‘I think of it like other scholars who have changed their names’, they explained in an email. ‘I’m ok with others being out there’.

Callie and I co-organised the large ‘Roland Barthes at 100’ conference that took place in Cardiff in March 2015 and was recorded in part later that year in the inaugural volume of *Barthes Studies*. My presiding memory here is not of the conference itself, which was something of a euphoric blur, but of the planning stage in late 2014 or early 2015. The deadline for the submission of final abstracts had passed, and we found ourselves with around eighty proposals in need of sorting into parallel themed panels. Callie and I arranged to meet one afternoon to begin the work. I arrived about an hour early and tried desperately to arrange the dozens of sheets of paper into a plausible programme across several tables in a seminar room. By the time Callie turned up I was convinced that the task was impossible and that the conference should be cancelled. ‘I’m sure there’s no need for that’, said Callie, walking calmly around the tables,

looking at my hopeless efforts. ‘Why don’t we put this one here and that one there?’, they suggested, gently shuffling the pages around. ‘And what if we rename this panel, maybe merge it with that one?’ Within half an hour, Callie had fixed my disaster and built the foundations of the conference.

I’ve focussed on Barthes, *Barthes Studies*, and Cardiff in these paragraphs because that’s how and where I knew Callie. In the months since their death, I’ve read tributes to their remarkable work as a poet, as a publisher, and as an activist in Glasgow. I knew about Callie’s talents and commitment in those parts of their life, obviously – I remember them bringing the first issue of *ZARF* to my office in 2015, for instance – but our paths happened to cross elsewhere, and it’s devastating to realise that there can be no further crossings.

In the final email that I received from Callie, in January, they mentioned a resolution to learn a practical skill in 2021. ‘Maybe’, they wrote, ‘it’s not too late to build something or fix something’. I didn’t reply at the time, so I’m replying now, too late: you built and fixed so much, Callie, and the building and fixing will be so much harder without you.

**Callie Gardner, 18 June 1990 - 8 July 2021.**