

Fantasizing with Barthes: Writing the Present

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As Barthes will come to assert in the last course, ‘I is a *method*: part of a general effort to change what he calls ‘the rhetorical conditions of the intellectual’, to expand and vary of what it is possible to speak, and in what manner, in the hope of neither reducing nor crushing.

— Kate Briggs¹

File to be opened, to be constituted (if it isn’t done already): silence as sign. I think of this file (I offer it to whomever wants it).

— Roland Barthes²

In her 2007 article ‘Fail Better’, Zadie Smith asks us to imagine a young writer who is on ‘a familiar literary mission: he wants to write the perfect novel’.³ This writer has many things in his favour, including the fact that ‘he has read a good deal of rigorous literary theory – those elegant blueprints for novels not yet built – and is now ready to build his own unparalleled house of words’.⁴ I am sorry to report that I have also fallen into this trap. Or perhaps the present participle would be more accurate: I am falling, I am still falling. What strikes me about this, aside from the feeling of being so keenly seen, is Smith’s description of literary theory as ‘those elegant blueprints for novels not yet built’. I have struggled thus far to find a better description of Roland Barthes’s *The Preparation of the Novel*, and so when I return to my fantasy of writing a perfect novel, I also find myself returning to this course, not least because it has a fantasy, a writing fantasy, at its core. Indeed, Barthes begins the course by recalling a comment made in his inaugural lecture as Chair at the Collège de France: ‘I sincerely believe that at the origin of teaching such as this we must always locate a fantasy, which can vary from year to year.’⁵

In trying to justify this to myself (that is, the juxtaposition in my mind of my writing project with Barthes’s – or at least with Barthes’s

preparation), I find myself drawing from the text of the course itself. There is a phrase – or an idea – which appears on the first page of the text (that is, near the beginning of the opening session of the course), and which frequently reappears thereafter:

Dante: ‘*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.*’ Dante was thirty-five. I’m much older and have gone far beyond the mathematical ‘middle’ of my life’s journey (and I’m not Dante! Take note: the great writer isn’t someone you can compare yourself to but someone whom you can, whom you want to, identify with, to a greater or lesser extent).⁶

Identifying with, not comparing yourself to. This expression is repeated several times throughout the course as something of a linguistic ‘tic’ (or an axiom – or a mantra). We might read in this, then, one of the implicit methodologies of Barthes’s practice, of his preparation. In the attempt to identify with the different writers referenced throughout the course, Barthes gives us a model: a model for what? I don’t believe that this idea, repeated almost to the point of paranoia, stems from a fear of appearing egotistical (a reading which may otherwise tempt us since the writers Barthes references – Dante, Tolstoy, Proust – are all, of course, at or near the very top of the canon). Instead, the way I choose to understand this is as a model for considering the course itself: that is, as an invitation to identify – but not to compare! – with Barthes himself, the Barthes who is exploring the preparation of a fantasised novel. This thought occurs to me especially as I near the end of the text – at the point when it becomes plain that he can’t (or won’t, or shouldn’t) produce a novel, a *vita nova* – where Barthes says the following:

I can try to give a sort of profile of the Work that I should like, either to write, or to see written today, so that I might read it with the same satisfaction as I read certain works from the past; I can try to get as close as possible to that blank Work, to that Degree Zero of the Work (empty box but extremely significant in the system of my life).⁷

Two desires, then, or two fantasies: that I want to write a work, and that what Barthes has to say will help to illuminate my struggle. On this second point, I take encouragement from Kate Briggs’s translator’s preface, in which she underlines the pedagogical nature of transforming a personal writing project into a series of lectures – or rather, that this transformation

'leaves open – and even sets out to generate – the possibility that the story of *The Preparation of the Novel* is also yours'.⁸

I suspect you will want to know what this perfect novel I am hoping to write is about. Tangentially, this also relates to Barthes (at least, that is, for me⁹). The journal you are currently reading, *Barthes Studies*, is published annually on 12 November: the date of Barthes's birth in 1915. When one looks for the latest issue of the journal, one might be forgiven – at least, if one lives in contemporary Britain – for lingering still on the events of the previous day. 11 November is, of course, the date on which Armistice Day falls, when people around the country are asked to hold silent for two minutes: a tradition dating back to 1919, on the first anniversary of the end of the First World War. At this point, Barthes is on the threshold of celebrating his fourth birthday, and his father is already dead – another life claimed by *la Grande Guerre*. As he writes in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

*The father, dead very early (in the war), was lodged in no memorial or sacrificial discourse. By maternal intermediary his memory – never an oppressive one – merely touched the surface of childhood with an almost silent bounty.*¹⁰

With this in mind, we realise that Barthes has something in common with that generation of Europeans living in the wake of the Great War – even if, as Tiphaine Samoyault has pointed out, Barthes once wrote (albeit in an abandoned fragment) that he seems never to meet people also born in 1915: 'as if – the height of paranoia – I was the only person of my age'.¹¹ However, a brief survey of contemporary culture – at least in Britain – reveals a very different sort of response to dealing with this kind of loss. My idea, then, is quite a simple one: to write a novel on the two minutes' silence. Or rather: to write a novel *in* the two minutes' silence. For while much has been written on memorial culture, particularly of and since the First World War, most – if not all – of this writing is from *without*; I want (or desire) to write something from *within*: a dramatization of those two minutes as they are experienced by someone participating in the silence, whatever their motivations. Something like a stream-of-consciousness, perhaps. In doing so, I would hope to bring a new perspective to what is familiar – perhaps overly familiar – territory. Such a writing (a writing, that is, from within the silence) would, I feel, also be an expression of what Barthes claims in that opening lecture: 'Better the illusions of subjectivity than the impostures of objectivity.'¹² Alas, this is a simple idea to conceive, but not to execute. This could be the most explicit point at which my

project corresponds with Barthes's: my idea, at least in its current form, can only be conceived as a novel of the present – I am, of course, using this word in both the sense of 1) the present, that is, in terms of the present day, this specific historical context, and 2) the present, that is, in terms of a writing of the here-and-now, a this-is-happening-to-me-right-now kind of writing.

It will be clear to readers of *The Preparation of the Novel* how the project of writing a novel of the present will find parallels with Barthes's course. Before I continue with this line of enquiry, however – and since we are already contemplating dates and anniversaries – it may be apt to recall the curious inaccuracy Barthes makes regarding his father's death: he records it as 28 October 1916; in reality, it was the night of 26 October.¹³ I mention this as it serves as an example of what Barthes diagnoses as his weakness as a writer: 'Memory, the ability to remember.'¹⁴ Now, we should be careful of taking Barthes completely at his word – including (and especially!) when he is talking about himself – and we might, therefore, wonder at the motivations behind this claim, since it is, in one aspect at least, untrue. (Indeed, the manner of Barthes's delivery of the lectures is itself a contradiction of this: as we know from Nathalie Léger's editor's preface, 'few recall him reading from a manuscript' – and yet, a comparison between the manuscript and the audio recordings 'reveals scarcely any discrepancies between the two'.¹⁵) Whatever the motivation, what is clear – and what Barthes makes explicit – is that this deficiency, this weakness of memory (which he defines as being of a different order to misremembering: it is, as he puts it, 'a true weakness = an *incapacity*'¹⁶) leads him to conclude that his fantasized novel can only be a novel of the present: 'The affective link is with the *present*, my present'.¹⁷

This leads Barthes to ask a question which will, he says, direct the first year of the course:

Is it possible to make a Narrative (a Novel) out of the Present? How to reconcile – dialecticize – the *distance* implied by the *enunciation of writing* and the *proximity*, the transportation of the present experienced as it happens? (The present is what *adheres*, as if your eyes were glued to a mirror). Present: to have your eyes glued to the page; how to write *at length*, *fluently* (in a fluent, flowing, fluid manner) with one eye on the page and the other on 'what's happening to me'?¹⁸

The present: what is happening to me. Perhaps it would be well to understand – and underline – the present in and of which I am hoping to write. For the whole of Remembrance culture – with its parade past the Cenotaph, the sale and wearing of red poppies, and, above all, the two minutes' silence itself (occurring, that is, at precisely the same date and time, and for the same period) – is aimed, it seems, at shrinking (if not dissolving) the distance between past and present, then and now. The distance, of course, comes back to us: the silence ends, we return to our phones, to our electric cars, to our cryptocurrencies. And while I am interested in this distance – how it ebbs and flows, contracts and expands – the *absolute* difference created and defined by it is discussed, no less, by Barthes himself. In the session of 19 January 1980 – he is discussing the various things (administration, friends, life) which can get in the way, or slow down, a writer's practice – Barthes uses the example of Proust's 'originality' (or eccentricity) as a defence against the intrusions of the world. The moustache, the dressing gown, the inversion of day and night: all of which seem to say, *noli me tangere*. In speculating that this may no longer be possible today – today, that is, in the present that is (or was) 19 January 1980 – Barthes offers up the following story:

[E]ven though his eyesight was failing, Proust didn't want to see an oculist (because he could only go out at night). Today, he'd be taken by force in an ambulance (social security, etc.); likewise, upon the declaration of war in 1914, he was embarrassed because he wanted a doctor to call on him *at night* (since he couldn't go out in the day): can you imagine such naivety today!¹⁹

I think I laughed out loud on reading this for the first time. Which is one thing to be said in favour of the audio recordings – you can hear, at different points, the audience chuckling at some joke or other: it's possible, or so I tell myself, to experience – to taste – the lectures *as lectures*, in a room with bodies listening to a man speaking.²⁰ This, in turn, serves to underline and emphasise the pedagogical nature of Barthes's undertaking. And what I learn (or remember) in this moment is the great distance – or one of the dimensions of that distance – between now and then, between the present and the time of the war (and, in its wake, the inception of the silence).

So, Barthes wants to write the present. As do I. He begins by examining the haiku, which is for Barthes the 'exemplary form of the Notation of the Present'.²¹ The problem being, of course, how to go from this to a novel, from the short form to the long form? What's curious in

this is how Barthes seems to be reaching for a particular version, or ideal, of a long work: recall his pondering over ‘how to write *at length, fluently* (in a fluent, flowing, fluid manner)’.²² This thinking is repeated at different points throughout the course, and appears to be one that had crystallised – so far as one aspect of a fantasised novel can be crystallised! – for him. Or so it goes. Diana Leca has addressed this question, arguing that ‘although Barthes’ last lecture course, *The Preparation of the Novel*, was concerned with how to pass from a collection of dispersed, minimalist fragments to the undulating, sequenced, “premeditated” style of the “Book”, Barthes never in fact leaves the orbit of the fragment.’²³ (Even here, the silence returns: Leca, in reflecting on those perhaps more verbose examples of Barthes’s writing – *Mythologies*, *S/Z*, etc. – draws on the text of *Preparation*: ‘The resistance to the short form is not confined to the past, however. Modernity, too, according to Barthes, “tends to be more wordy” since it is “haunted by the idea that it’s being prevented from speaking”’.²⁴) While Leca focuses on Barthes’s experiments with the short form in the notebooks that became *Travels in China*, we would do well to keep in mind his *Mourning Diary* (which, alongside *Camera Lucida*, forms an unconventional triptych with *Preparation*). For in aiming, in *Preparation*, at a ‘fluent, flowing, fluid’ text,²⁵ Barthes seems to have in mind not only a textual form but a writing experience, a new, or different, temporal phenomenology. Different, that is, to what appears to be the case in *Mourning Diary*. If we are thinking about preparation, then perhaps we should take a moment to consider that there are some things one *can’t* prepare for: road traffic accidents, say – or the death of one’s mother. This is perhaps what Barthes means when he says, in that first lecture of *Preparation*, that ‘the middle of my life is nothing other than the moment when one realizes that death is real’.²⁶ If *The Preparation of the Novel* takes this realization as its starting point, then *Mourning Diary* plots the trajectory of that realization as it develops in time. This trajectory, however, is uneven (or, in other words, *unsmooth*): on 2 November 1977 – just over a week after the death of Henriette Binger – Barthes writes that ‘I know now that my mourning will be *chaotic*’.²⁷ And later that month: ‘What I find utterly terrifying is mourning’s *discontinuous* character.’²⁸

This tension finds itself in my own writing project. A tension which is double-sided, in the sense of being concerned with the form of the text (should I write a *novel-in-fragments*?) and with the organisation of the writing itself. In reflecting further on my fantasised text, however, I realise there is a third dimension to this *continuous/discontinuous* opposition (if not dialectic). I have shared the idea of writing a stream-of-

consciousness text before, and one response to this idea was to wonder at the reasoning behind what is now a convenient label for a voluminous field of writing: *Why a stream? That suggests a constant, unchanging flow... can't there be dams, tributaries, floods?*²⁹ Of course, the notion of a *stream* of consciousness can, on one view, hint at the same sense of a flowing, fluid text which Barthes seems to have in mind. Furthermore, it seems to betray a way of thinking about *a way of thinking*. An *A to B to C* kind of thinking. Indeed, Barthes seems to anticipate – and contest – this in *Preparation*. He is contemplating the process whereby we might move from the individual ('civic and psychological subject') to individuation ('relating the irreducibility, the founding nuance [...] to a given moment of that individual'³⁰) – a process, in fact, that may be one definition of my own writing project. In doing so, he returns to Nietzsche:

Once again I quote (MC, 53, Posthumous): 'The ego is a plurality of forces of person-like forces, of which now this one, now that one stands in the foreground and assumes the aspect of the ego; from this vantage-point, it contemplates the other forces, as a subject contemplates an object exterior to himself, an influential and determining outside world. The point of the subject is mobile.' That's the decisive word: subjectivity mustn't be denied or foreclosed, repressed; it has to be accepted in its mobility; not 'undulating', but an interweaving, a network of mobile *points* – what's important in the Nietzsche quotation is the notion of the *point* (of subjectivity): subjectivity not as a river, even an ever-changing one, but as a discontinuous (and yet unabrupt) mutation of sites (cf. Kaleidoscope).³¹

Here, then, we see an extension of the *continuous/discontinuous* dichotomy discussed above: extending, that is, beyond the form of (and the act of writing) the text and into the realm of subjecthood itself – and, thereby, in the fantasy of a new writing project (on which point I am identifying with Barthes), this heterodoxy of the self (a self which is being *privileged* in the text) must necessarily re-inform the text to be written. Such a figure is described by Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, in the passage titled 'Split' [*Clivage*] and which is worth citing in full, since it draws a space of the subject (that is, in Emily Dickinson's phrase, the 'Undiscovered Continent'³²), a space which it's my hope to explore (an exploration which, I'm beginning to understand, the silence anticipates, motivates, exonerates):

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss is an anachronic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture (which permeates him quietly under cover of an *art de vivre* shared by the old books) and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse.³³

One example of this, as it relates to the text I wish to write, would be the way my natural suspicion of and aversion to organised, collective activities – of which the two minutes' silence, if not Remembrance as a whole, could be the apotheosis – rubs up against those moments when, shamelessly, I experience a certain pleasure which runs counter to this suspicion and aversion, which seems to go against that kind of logic: for example, part of me becomes excited again when, let's say on a trip to the Lake District, circling Windermere, a jet passes overhead – perhaps from RAF Spadeadam? – and I am overcome, for a moment, with: well, I'm not entirely sure. Pride? Confidence? Perhaps something of the imperial awakens, like a latent bacteria reactivated. When I experience this, I am mindful of Barthes again, in offering another definition of the pleasure of the text: 'that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas I do.'³⁴ Or watching some war film or other: *yes*, I (or a part of me) think(s), *we took down the Nazis. Marvellous.* Something of this ambivalence – ambivalence, that is, both towards a writing of the silence and an engagement in the silence itself – is expressed in Keynes's review of Churchill's *The Aftermath* (Volume 4 of his *The World Crisis*). On reaching the end of the book, Keynes asks himself what he now feels: 'Gratitude ... Admiration ... A little envy, perhaps, for his undoubting conviction that frontiers, races, patriotisms, even wars if need be, are ultimate verities for mankind, which lends for him a kind of dignity and even nobility to events, which for others are only a nightmare interlude, something to be permanently avoided.'³⁵

This particular conviction (including and especially its *undoubting-ness*) is, parenthetically, precisely the one at the heart of Remembrance culture, and therefore what drives the thoughts (or so I imagine) of those engaged in the two minutes' silence. Or is it? In my less generous moments, tired of the world and everyone in it, those around me seem little better than a mannequin: nice clothes, no expression, empty head. This may, therefore, be a fitting place to consider that I ought not only to reflect on and engage with my own subjectivity, but on and with the subjectivities of others. But I will return, briefly, to my earlier concern – that is, of how to write the split subject – by focusing for a moment on how this is discussed by Barthes in the lecture on 'Individuation':

The fact is, what is of great difficulty today is holding to an authentic discourse, which is to say, a discourse that clearly reproduces the differences which make up a subject, of which a subject is composed. It's a very live problem for me in the sense that I would like to write texts that make the plurality, the diversity of the subjects that are inside me heard, but when I try to achieve this, for reasons that we will perhaps analyse one day or will take the form of another digression, I don't manage to truly make them heard, and in the end, the discourse I produce is still a unitary one. I don't manage to produce a discourse in which others hear the plurality of voices, because the plural is always the most tiring thing in the world.³⁶

This is well put: and it's something that worries me even in writing this article, let alone the fantasised text itself. Of how to make this point, and give examples of it, without undermining the thing itself. What I would like to propose here – to myself as much as anyone (but without wishing to be narcissistic; in fact, the opposite!) – is that one might begin to address this by identifying with the other, their (own) plurality, the split subject which they are. Here we return to the principle we began with: Barthes's formulation of identifying with ≠ comparing to. But, rather than (just) identifying with the great writer(s) as a means of comprehending one's preparation for writing, the identification would be with those taking part in the two minutes' silence. They would, therefore, become part of the text itself. In answering the riddle of producing, in Barthes's phrase, 'a discourse in which others hear the plurality of voices', this is rearranged in order to hear the plurality of voices in others. In terms of writing a text of and on the two minutes' silence, I have previously conceived (or desired, wished for) a method in which, as a way of breaking out of a potentially

solipsistic writing which focuses only, entirely on the self – my thoughts, complaints, inadequacies – I would instead imagine, in a hallucinatory way, a dialogue of sorts: conversing (even if only in my head) with those around me. Asking questions, inventing answers. In this way, I would (or so I desire) manage to ‘make the plurality, the diversity of the subjects that are inside me heard’,³⁷ and in so doing open the text to the plurality of the other(s): not unlike the kaleidoscope Barthes mentions – except, if I may be so bold, one that is three-dimensional. Trying, in other words, to be generous: a word (and an ideal) that Barthes, I would argue, exemplifies.³⁸

The passage cited above – from the lecture on ‘Individuation’ – is, in fact, from the more recent edition of *Preparation*. That is, where the English translation is based on an earlier transcription of Barthes’s notes for the course, the newer edition – existing only, at present, in French – is instead based on the audio recordings of each session. It is for this reason that reading *The Preparation of the Novel* can be an unusual experience: as Kate Briggs puts it in her translator’s preface, what we are dealing with ‘is not a book in any straightforward sense’.³⁹ There is the feeling – at least on my part – that we should consider ourselves fortunate to be reading the text in the first place. As Briggs points out, Barthes had decided not to publish the previous year’s course on *The Neutral*. One of the reasons Barthes offers for this is as follows:

On the one hand, I think that a part of a life’s activity should always be set aside for the Ephemeral: what happens only once and vanishes, it’s the necessary share of the Rejected Monument, and therein lies the vocation of the Course [...] It’s something that, *ab ovo*, must, wants to die – to leave no more substantial a memory than of speech → What is present but *will* nevertheless die: this is the nuance of the Japanese *Ma*, *Utsuroi*, the flower (if I dare flatter myself in this way!) that will wilt.⁴⁰

What astonishes me, and what I hope justifies citing this passage at length, is the number of intersections with my other preoccupation: that is, in thinking about the culture and phenomena of Remembrance. Working backwards, there is the flower that will wilt; or rather, the flower that will *not* wilt, in the poppy: its mythological significance drawn from its hardiness (in the same way that French wine, despite its myth of being good, is still good). There is the inversion of *Utsuroi*: that which is absent but will never die – this is perhaps one interpretation of what we mean when we say: ‘They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old’.⁴¹ And the most obvious – or perhaps the most surprising – is the analogy we can

draw between the somewhat unusual status of the published edition(s) of *The Preparation of the Novel*, and the Cenotaph on Whitehall: surprising, that is, because it feels as if the Cenotaph has not only always been there, but also that it feels as if it was always *meant* to be. This may be a corollary of our gathering around it each November, as the focal point of the nation's official Remembrance services. And yet, just as Barthes's lecture notes were not necessarily destined for publication – perhaps even destined for the opposite, had he lived a while longer – the same is (or was) true of the Cenotaph: that most permanent of fixtures was, in the beginning, a temporary structure, the ephemeral made physical. It had to become, in other words, the Accepted Monument.

When we stop to consider the Cenotaph, we may judge it (for all its importance to British cultural identity) as a decidedly Barthesian object.⁴² Not only because its nominal function has in mind precisely those people – like Barthes – for whom there was no body to bury, no grave to visit. But, perhaps more importantly, it seems an expression of certain preoccupations of Barthes's, beginning with its name: Greek, of course (etymologically speaking), and usually translated as 'empty tomb'. Much has been written about this, but what occurs to me now is how, in re-reading *The Preparation of the Novel*, this monument comes to mind – particularly when I reach this passage, at the end of the session on 19 January 1980:

Reminder of the fantasized Form:

'... the idea and the first form of a book has to be a space, a simple site where the material of the book will be placed, and not material to be placed and arranged.' (Joubert)⁴³

A space: an empty box? If the Cenotaph offers us a physical representation of this, the silence gives us an aural version: a Cenotaph in sound. It's here that I feel the emphasis should be placed (since the Cenotaph is what is given, whereas the silence is what we create). If the Cenotaph is history, the silence might be conceived as being closer to what Barthes has in mind in the penultimate session of the course. In circling back to the problem of writing the present, his present, Barthes describes a scenario in which the would-be writer faces this problem:

the keen sense that you're both *in the present* and *not in the present*; that is to say, that you're at the very jointure between the new world, between the absent world of the past and the world of the

present that's in the process of being created – and that jointure is ultimately conceived as the *thing to write*.⁴⁴

This remark is particularly meaningful today: particularly, that is, if we are alert to the erosion of what is called democracy, especially when that democracy is held up as a – or the? – thing to be celebrated, defended, protected at all costs (a movement of which Remembrance is the best example). In exploring the two minutes' silence as a fantasised writing project, I would end (and only end: that is, in following Barthes's example, not to *conclude*⁴⁵) by underlining how this silence can (not unlike how I have read *The Preparation of the Novel*) be considered as an invitation to write. Or if not to write, then at least a preparation. Of what, I'm not completely sure. Perhaps another sort of text, a world-as-text? On one particularly anxiety-strewn 11 November, engaged in the two minutes' silence in a department store café, I found myself so focused on what I perceived as the intensity of the situation that I began to hold my breath: my own silence within the silence. At the end, people resumed their eating, drinking, speaking: life. It could be, then, that the silence is a preparation for this: an intake of breath, before we speak again.

Notes

- ¹ Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), p. 114.
- ² Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–1978)*, ed. by Thomas Clerc, trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 26.
- ³ Zadie Smith, 'Fail Better', *Guardian*, 13 January 2007.
- ⁴ Smith, 'Fail Better'.
- ⁵ Roland Barthes, 'Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France', in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, trans. by Richard Howard, ed. by Susan Sontag (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), pp. 457–78 (p. 477). Also cited in Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)*, ed. by Nathalie Léger, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 3.
- ⁶ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 3.
- ⁷ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, pp. 298–99.
- ⁸ Kate Briggs, 'Translator's Preface', in *The Preparation of the Novel*, pp. xxv–xxx (p. xxvii).
- ⁹ This 'for me' is, of course, borrowed from Barthes (and which he borrows from Nietzsche). While the phrase appears numerous times throughout the text of the course, we see perhaps its most famous formulation in *The Pleasure of the Text*: in the 'Brio' section, Barthes posits that the only judgement a text can extract from a reader is 'that's it! And further still: that's it for me!'. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 15.
- ¹¹ 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. 318. Cited in Tiphaine Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), p. 42.
- ¹² Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 3.
- ¹³ Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, p. 24.
- ¹⁴ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 15.
- ¹⁵ Nathalie Léger, 'Editor's Preface', in *The Preparation of the Novel*, pp. xvii–xxiii (p. xx).
- ¹⁶ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 16.
- ¹⁷ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 17.
- ¹⁸ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 17.
- ¹⁹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 221–22.
- ²⁰ See 'Roland Barthes: La Préparation du roman', *Revue Roland Barthes*, n.d., <https://revue.roland-barthes.org/audio/> [accessed 17 March 2024].
- ²¹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 23.

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- ²² Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 17.
- ²³ Diana Leca, 'Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism', *Barthes Studies*, 1 (2015), 100–22 (p. 101).
- ²⁴ Leca, 'Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism', p. 103. The citation is from Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 97.
- ²⁵ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 17.
- ²⁶ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 5.
- ²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), p. 31.
- ²⁸ Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, p. 67.
- ²⁹ Credit to Andy Stafford.
- ³⁰ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 43.
- ³¹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 44.
- ³² Emily Dickinson, 'Soto! Explore thyself!', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 403.
- ³³ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 14.
- ³⁴ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 17.
- ³⁵ J. M. Keynes, 'Mr Churchill on the Peace', *New Republic*, 27 March 1929.
- ³⁶ Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman. Cours au Collège de France (1978–1979 et 1979–80)* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 15. The translation is from Kate Briggs, in whose article this passage is discussed. See Kate Briggs, 'Augmentation infinie de la mayonnaise: On the New Edition of Roland Barthes's *La Préparation du roman*', *Barthes Studies*, 7 (2021), 49–64 (pp. 52–53).
- ³⁷ Barthes, *Préparation du roman*, p. 15.
- ³⁸ See Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 197: 'the Imagination that can make up stories is a generous force (*to create the other*)'. This is, perhaps, precisely his problem (in struggling to write his novel): a loss of generosity, following his mother's death. On 1 August 1978, he writes: 'Horrible figure of mourning: acedia, hard-heartedness: irritability, impotence to love. Anguished because I don't know how to restore generosity to my life – or love. How to love?'. Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, p. 178.
- ³⁹ Briggs, 'Translator's Preface', p. xxviii.
- ⁴⁰ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 7.
- ⁴¹ Laurence Binyon, 'For the Fallen', *The Times*, 21 September 1914.
- ⁴² This claim is made with the caveat that, as Andy Stafford (following Marx) has proposed, 'Barthes is not a Barthesian'. Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes* (London: Reaktion, 2015), p. 159.
- ⁴³ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 226.
- ⁴⁴ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 284.
- ⁴⁵ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 298.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Regan is an independent researcher and writer. He earned his PhD from Lancaster University in 2020, under the supervision of Professor John Schad. His thesis – which constituted one, long sentence structured around the four seasons – used Roland Barthes as an interlocutor to consider and critique modern British Remembrance culture, revealing Barthes to be concerned with the attendant themes of loss, mourning, commemoration and wider human emotions. His work can be described as creative-critical or ‘post-critical’, as well as auto-fictional or -theoretical; though in truth he is looking to transcend such labels or genres. He lives and works in York.

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