Editorial:
Roland Barthes at 100

Neil Badmington

And lead us not into doxa... I have an uneasy feeling that Roland Barthes, were he still alive, would have doubts about this venture.\footnote{And lead us not into doxa... I have an uneasy feeling that Roland Barthes, were he still alive, would have doubts about this venture.} An academic journal bearing his name and devoted to his work? In English? The noun ‘studies’, with its ring of stillness and seizure? The implicit claim to a field or a fold? Is not the very idea of a publication called Barthes Studies at odds with the drift, the unlearning, the reinvention, the non-arrogance, the escape, the \textit{non-vouloir-saisir}, and the ‘desperate resistance to any reductive system’ that so often fire the pages of Roland Barthes?\footnote{Might not this journal set or settle at once into doxa – that fatal term enlisted repeatedly in Barthes’s work to describe established knowledge, common sense, the obvious, the natural, what-goes-without-saying?} Have I forgotten that Barthes told the audience at the conference held in his honour at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1977 that he had twice refused the invitation, and that he only accepted on the third occasion because he did not wish to create the image of ‘he-who-refuses-conferences-in-his-name’?\footnote{Have I forgotten that Barthes told the audience at the conference held in his honour at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1977 that he had twice refused the invitation, and that he only accepted on the third occasion because he did not wish to create the image of ‘he-who-refuses-conferences-in-his-name’?}

‘The risk is great’, wrote Mathieu Messager in his introduction to the inaugural volume of the Paris-based \textit{Revue Roland Barthes} in 2014. The dangers of ‘coagulation’ and canonisation were, he acknowledged, all too real as the new publication set off on its way. But he added immediately that the \textit{Revue} was determined above all to avoid hagiography, statue-building, and the formation of canons; the focus instead would be upon the multiple ‘becomings’ of Roland Barthes.\footnote{‘The risk is great’, wrote Mathieu Messager in his introduction to the inaugural volume of the Paris-based \textit{Revue Roland Barthes} in 2014. The dangers of ‘coagulation’ and canonisation were, he acknowledged, all too real as the new publication set off on its way. But he added immediately that the \textit{Revue} was determined above all to avoid hagiography, statue-building, and the formation of canons; the focus instead would be upon the multiple ‘becomings’ of Roland Barthes.}

In some ways, the \textit{Revue} is the francophone cousin of Barthes Studies, and I have been conscious throughout the process of preparation of a similar risk threatening the direction of this journal. How could we avoid what Barthes dismissed as ‘dead repetition’?\footnote{In some ways, the \textit{Revue} is the francophone cousin of Barthes Studies, and I have been conscious throughout the process of preparation of a similar risk threatening the direction of this journal. How could we avoid what Barthes dismissed as ‘dead repetition’?} The trick, as I see it, is to clear and to preserve an open space for innovative, revealing, challenging, questioning research in English on diverse aspects of Roland Barthes’s work and its implications for cultural analysis. The commitment to openness explains in part the decision to make \textit{Barthes Studies} a fully open-access affair: authors pay nothing to have their peer-reviewed work published here, and every article is free to read online. We welcome future
submissions that have something new to say and that do not merely repeat
the known. There will no doubt be temptations to fall into the easy arms
of doxa, but I hope that there will also be vigilance against what Clarice
Lispector called ‘varnished immobility’. (This does not mean, however,
that I have been able to forget the words of the narrator of Thomas
Bernhard’s Correction: ‘I shall never be a so-called editor, the most
detestable type of criminal there is’.)

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The essays collected here in the first volume of Barthes Studies have their
roots in a conference entitled Roland Barthes at 100 that took place in the
School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University
on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 March 2015. While a wild wind raged
across the city and made Park Place a test of courage and a graveyard for
umbrellas, around eighty scholars from all over the world came together
to discuss Barthes’s work, legacies, and futures from a rich, respectful
variety of perspectives and positions.

The event, while large when considered in isolation, was merely
a small part of a global series of centenary celebrations that has made 2015
a truly remarkable year for readers of Roland Barthes. Some of us had
rushed down to Cardiff from Leeds, where the Department of French –
thanks to a bit of careful planning by Andy Stafford, Nigel Saint, Richard
Hibbitt, and Claire Lozier – had hosted a colloquium entitled ‘Roland
Barthes and Poetry’ on 27 and 28 March. Other celebratory events took
place in: Paris, Bordeaux, Orthez, London, Providence, Lisbon, Tartu,
New York, Leeds, Athens (Georgia), La Paz, Londrina, São Paulo,
Bucharest, Lancaster, Boston, Bayonne, Kaslik, Saint Petersburg, Buenos
Aires, and Zagreb. Michael Sheringham summed things up perfectly
when, opening the conference in Leeds, he spoke of the ‘Barthes-athon’ in
which we were fortunate to find ourselves. Keeping up with all things
Barthes this year has been both impossible and impossibly exciting.

When we gathered in Cardiff at the end of March, the precise
anniversary of Roland Barthes’s birth was still some months away. Today,
on 12 November 2015, this inaugural volume of Barthes Studies is
published on what would have been the author’s hundredth birthday.
These texts go out into the world to mark a unique and unrepeatable
moment, then, but they also, as writings that have no need of their
creators, move towards moments (2115, 2215, 2315...) at which readers as yet unborn find themselves drawn together irresistibly to celebrate the ongoing centuries of Roland Barthes.

12 November 2015, Cardiff.
Notes

1 *Barthes Studies* was founded with financial support from a research fellowship awarded to me in 2014-15 by Cardiff University. I am also indebted to those who technical knowledge, expertise, and wise words allowed my primitive scribblings on sheets of paper to become a digital reality: Liam Goldstein, Ann Heilmann, Becky Munford, Matthew Pengelly, Andrew O’Sullivan, Julia Thomas, David Tucker, Steffan Williams, Jeffrey Alderman, Anthony Mandal, Dean Burnett, and Nathan Heslop. Above all, my thanks go to Calum Gardner, the journal’s Reviews Editor, for supervising me here while I was technically in the role of supervisor. We somehow ended up coming back to Cardiff on different trains after the ‘Roland Barthes and Poetry’ conference in Leeds, but it has been a joy to share a carriage on the *Barthes Studies* express, even when the track ahead looked like it was heading over a cliff and I had been merrily filling the diesel engine with petrol.


3 For a fine overview of *doxa* in Barthes’s work, see Anne Herschberg Pierrot, ‘Barthes and Doxa’, *Poetics Today*, 23.3 (2002), 427-42.


9 I should like to take this opportunity to salute a number of people without whom I could not have run the conference in Cardiff: Calum Gardner, Helen Clifford, Wendy Lewis, Julie Alford, Dean Burnett, Nathan Heslop, Rajesh Singh, Michael John Goodman, Christine Johns, Caleb Sivyer, Laurel Newnham, Megan de Bruin-Molé, Marija Grech, Wanda O’Connor, Emma Mason, John McKeane, Paula Chamberlain, and Becky Williams. The Institut français Royaume-Uni generously provided funding that made it possible to offer a number of bursaries to students speaking at the conference. Thanks are due to the Institut and Catherine Robert, the French government’s Attachée for Higher Education in the UK, for their generosity and support.
Some of the papers from the Leeds conference will be published in 2016 in Volume 2 of Barthes Studies, which will be guest-edited by Calum Gardner.

I discussed the centenary celebrations in more detail in my ‘Fiches and Biographemes’, Times Literary Supplement, 12 June 2015, 17-18.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Neil Badmington is Professor of English Literature at Cardiff University and the founding editor of Barthes Studies.

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