



Barthes: A Very Short Introduction

Jonathan Culler

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Roland Barthes was the leading figure of French Structuralism, the theoretical movement of the 1960s which revolutionized the study of literature and culture, as well as history and psychoanalysis. But Barthes was a man who disliked orthodoxies. His shifting positions and theoretical interests make him hard to grasp and assess. This book surveys Barthes' work in clear, accessible prose, highlighting what is most interesting and important in his work today. In particular, the book describes the many projects, which Barthes explored and which helped to change the way we think about a range of cultural phenomena--from literature, fashion, wrestling, and advertising to notions of the self, of history, and of nature.

Barthes: A Very Short Introduction Details

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From Reader Review Barthes: A Very Short Introduction for online ebook

Alexander Ryuu says

This little book about Roland Barthes is actually more clear to understand than Roland Barthes himself.

Guillermo Macbeth says

Pasa con Barthes que fascina y desconcierta a la vez. De ahí sus defensores viscerales y sus detractores dogmáticos, ambos leyendo con un solo ojo. Lo mejor de esta introducción de Culler sería que no polariza, sino que parece insistir en esa inestabilidad a lo largo del libro, casi todo el libro. Describe y explica con precisión y claridad las múltiples identidades de Barthes. Está el semiólogo, el crítico, el historiador literario, el estructuralista, el hedonista, el mitologista, el escritor. Puro desplazamiento. Sujeto que rompe la sujeción. Entonces, si hay algo así como una identidad en juego, esa sería la del artista. Creo que el libro tomado en conjunto -casi- postula esa libertad como clave de la barthesidad. Sin embargo, tropieza Culler cuando dice hacia el final del libro que Barthes sería, en definitiva, un antropólogo de la vida cotidiana. Una especie de crítico de la cultura al estilo Adorno en versión post-estructuralista. Entonces, el Barthes cullerizado quedó al final desbarthesizado.

Daniel Wright says

This book is distinguished as the first book related to literary theory that I didn't at any point want to throw across the room.

- Chapter 1: Man of parts
- Chapter 2: Literary historian
- Chapter 3: Mythologist
- Chapter 4: Critic
- Chapter 5: Polemicist
- Chapter 6: Semiologist
- Chapter 7: Structuralist
- Chapter 8: Hedonist
- Chapter 9: Writer
- Chapter 10: Man of letters
- Chapter 11: Barthes after Barthes

Mohamed Karaly says

ger says

Excellent overview/introduction to Barthes. Clear in its premise and delivery if over long in its wrapping up.

Matt says

Roland Barthes stood at the crossroads of structuralist and post-structuralist literary and cultural theory in the second half of the twentieth century. "French theory" can either be a call to arms or a slur depending on who is speaking. Barthes carries the flag for this movement in his own distinctive way. He was not maddeningly opaque or over-burdened with jargon like Lacan, nor was he as overtly and doctrinaire-ly Marxist as Baudrillard. Potential readers were not as immediately defensive as they would be toward the French feminists Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva. Barthes is in some ways a cipher. He doesn't standout as strikingly in hindsight, and much of his fame has evaporated since the 70s.

Nevertheless, this book clearly shows how important he was as a writer and a thinker. His refusal to become as doctrinaire as many of his contemporaries allowed him to contradict himself and puzzle those who foolishly demand complete consistency from an author. But we all know, as we learned from Barthes, that the author is dead. Long live the text!

I would recommend this book as an introduction to literary and cultural studies for anybody, whether you lean more towards the humanities or towards the sciences. The book doesn't attempt to paste over Barthes' imperfections as a writer and thinker, but still gives a great picture of what his writings bestowed on posterity. The insights and perspectives that he adopts over almost 30 years of writing have had such a strong impact that we take many of them for granted. New Criticism, semiotics, aesthetics, mythology, and literary history all owe a great deal to the work of Roland Barthes.

Another insight one can gain from this text is how distinct an impression Barthes has made on Culler's work. If you have read much of Culler's other work, you will find many of his own basic insights attributed here first to Barthes.

Karim Abdel-Khalek? says

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Justin Evans says

Culler's introduction to Barthes is better than Barthes' actual ideas; the older Roland got the more nonsensical and silly his ideas got... and then he got hit by a laundry truck, one of the silliest deaths in intellectual history. Culler's analysis is sympathetic but also critical. It might be a good idea for most intellectuals to read this, because his criticism of Barthes' late infatuation with 'the body' is relevant to so many of them/us: why bother going through ideology critique, why bother revealing the way that we all treat out beliefs about the

world as natural facts about the world, if you're just going to base your thought on a quasi-natural concept like the body? Nice for you that you can hold onto that liberal-conservative world-view and justify it by such a 'radical' epistemology; not so nice for those who don't benefit from that liberal-conservative world-view.

This isn't a substitute for reading Barthes, but it did a good job of encouraging me to read *Mythologies* and *S/Z*. Not much more you could ask for from a meta-literary-critic.

Nahed.E says

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Nikki says

I am, I confess, not very good with literary theory. It seems strange that an MA in English Lit can assert that, or maybe I just knew a lot of literary theorists, but it's the case. Still, now I'm TAing for the SF/F course on Coursera, I find myself debating literary theory and understanding it more through trying to explain it, and being more interested in it as well. So I've started with Barthes -- 'The Death of the Author', at least, I've always understood reasonably well -- and I've got the short introduction to Derrida as well.

Culler's introduction works reasonably well as a quick tour of Barthes' life, opinions, relevance, and even some of his sillier points and ideas. And it makes me want to cast my net a bit wider and pull in some Sartre too. Still, I can't say that it entirely converted me to literary theory -- even a summary of Barthes' ideas makes my head hurt a little at times.

Adam says

Barthes seduced me in a college with his "Mythologies." I was thrilled by the possibilities of reading culture's signs and finding the hidden meanings within. Barthes fit alongside my anthropology readings, which also set out to expose beliefs and practices supposed to be "natural" as in fact cultural, and therefore, contestable.

It's funny; reading this neat little introduction to Barthes life and work shows that his ideas are so fundamental that it seems at first unnecessary to read him. While his thinking is integrated in a range of fields of study, his deft and witty wordplay make him a unique writer and a pleasure to read.

This book discusses Barthes many roles, and the Barthes as writer section increased my appreciation for him. Barthes as literary critic was less interesting, in part because I am unfamiliar with French literary canon he engaged with. And I found his reflections on reading and writing to be tedious and baffling. "Boredom is not far from ecstasy," he suggests, 'it is ecstasy viewed from the shores of pleasure'" (82).

It is Barthes as semiologist that remains for me insightful and playful: “Fashion obeys the laws of myth in its attempt to present its conventions as natural facts. This summer dresses will be of silk, the caption tells us, as if announcing an inevitable natural occurrence” (62).

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Barthes: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions #56), Jonathan Culler

Briefly outlines the career of the prominent semiologist and critic, and discusses his theories about literature, language, and their study.

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Katia N says

Wonderful introduction into the ideas of Roland Barthes written by Jonathan Culler, who himself is a literary theorist and wonderful writer. The book follows the evolution of Barthes as a thinker and briefly reviews his body of work. Understandably, Culler is more attracted to Barthes-theorist as opposed to the later Barthes - writer and hedonist. But he does not reveal his preference by the lack of details about the latter.

I took huge number of ideas from this little book. Here I would just stress one thing: everyone knows Barthes's "the Death of the author". But he also rejected the role of the story in the fiction. I never understood this dominating conviction, especially in the english speaking word, that people are able to see the world predominantly through the narrative (with its arch): a good book should tell the story; even a good image apparently should tell the story. I never think this way by myself. So it was quite refreshing that Barthes did not as well:

"Barthes saw in his 'rejection of story, anecdote, psychology of motivation, and signification of objects' a powerful questioning of our ordering of experience. Since . . . things are buried under the assorted meanings with which men, through sensibilities, through poetry, through different uses, have impregnated the name of each object, the novelist's labour is in a sense cathartic: he purges things of the undue meaning men ceaselessly deposit upon them. How? Obviously by description. Robbe-Grillet thus produces descriptions of objects sufficiently geometrical to discourage any induction of poetic meaning and sufficiently detailed to break the fascination of the narrative. (Essais critiques, p. 199/ 198")

Shahad al-ani says

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Hanadi Otaibi says