

## Mythologies of Roland Barthes

*Mattia Acetosio*

On November 13-14, 2015, the graduate students of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Boston College organized an academic conference in honor of Roland Barthes (1915-1980). In commemoration of the French critic's centennial, scholars from all over the country gathered in Stokes Hall for two days of discussions and intellectual exchange. While relevant for the timeliness of its subject, the event was also poignant with significance for our graduate program. Not only did we celebrate an intellectual figure that has guided generations of scholars with his groundbreaking ideas and multifaceted personality, but we finally were able to celebrate the return of a graduate conference, a longtime tradition of our department that was discontinued a decade ago. The event was a great success and garnered a considerable amount of interest among our colleagues in the Boston College community, our undergraduate students, and scholars from the greater Boston area.

The keynote speaker for the conference was Jonathan Culler, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University, and an international authority on Barthes. Culler honored us with a presentation entitled "Barthes in America/America in Barthes," offering a unique perspective on the reception of Barthes in the United States as well as a glimpse of the critic's experience within American academia. During the conference, students from Brown, Columbia, Harvard, Boston College and other preeminent institutions discussed different aspects of Barthes' works, underscoring his contribution to today's academia. In closing our event, Larysa Smirnova, Visiting Assistant Professor of French at Boston College, responded to Culler's Keynote address and offered further critical insight into the ideas of the French critic in a presentation entitled "Barthes as Galileo." Smirnova's response was followed by a roundtable discussion of Boston College faculty members in the Romance Languages and Literatures Department—Kevin Newmark, Stephen Bold, and Ernesto Livon-Grosman—as well as Robert Lehman, Assistant Professor of English at Boston College and Marc Redfield, Professor of Comparative Literature at Brown University. The roundtable brought to a conclusion a stimulating event of academic cooperation that projected the scope of our discussion beyond the boundaries of our conference, and towards future critical inquiries.

This monographic issue of *Romance eReview* seeks to capture the energy and liveliness of our graduate conference. The first part of the journal proposes a more theoretical approach to Barthes' writings, reassessing some of his most fundamental ideas. Anyck Boyd ("Mythologies of Tragedy: Recovering Meaning Through Barthes") discusses the death of tragedy in relation to Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957), emphasizing the problem of classification of tragedy among genres. Elisabeth Todd ("Literature as Struggle: Variations on 'The Death of the Author'") elaborates on Barthes' idea of the death of the author, describing it as "an eternal struggle between writer and reader that provides the text with its general literarity." Finally, Dalila Colucci ("Roland Barthes, Japan and *l'utopie de l'écriture*") delves into Barthes' *Empire of Signs* (1970), arguing that Japan is for Barthes a metaphor for the utopia of writing itself.

The second part of the journal proposes close readings of different media, from several national traditions, through the lens of Barthes' writings. Kaitlynn Quaranta ("Dresses and Children: the Myth of Domestic Happiness in Varda's *Le Bonheur* ") explores the myth of domestic happiness in Agnès Varda's 1965 film *Le Bonheur*. Thea Diklich-Newell ("*La nausée* Through Barthes: A Retroactive Reading") examines Jean Paul Sartre's philosophical novel *La nausée* (1938) through the lens of the ideas developed by Barthes in *Mythologies*. Laura Gagliardi ("Tondelli's *Camere separate* Through the Lexicon of Roland Barthes") offers an original insight into Pier Vittorio Tondelli's novel *Camere separate* (1989)—the first Italian novel to explore the themes of alienation and social isolation during the 1980s AIDS epidemics in Italy—through the critical lexicon of Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977). Finally, Jamie Monterroso ("Barthes in Post-Colonial Guatemala: Dismantling the National Hero") explores the myth of Tecún Umán—16<sup>th</sup>-century Mayan prince—as a Guatemalan national hero, through the lens of Barthes' *Mythology*, in the attempt to create a post-colonial imaginary for Guatemala.

These articles are a testimony to the genius of Roland Barthes and to the influence it still exerts on younger generations of scholars. As these authors poignantly have witnessed, his studies still provide us with unique tools of critical analysis beyond genre, media, and literary tradition. It was an honor to work with them, both as one of the conference organizers and as principal editor of this monographic issue. However, this endeavor would have never been possible without the help of several colleagues in the Romance Languages department and our graduate students, who demonstrated great professionalism and generosity throughout the

editorial process. My deepest gratitude goes, first and foremost, to those who helped with the graduate conference, in particular to Larysa Smirnova, not only for her insightful contribution to our academic discussion, but also and especially for sharing the organization duties with me and our students, making the event possible in the first place. I would also like to thank all the many colleagues and students who served as editors of the journal. Among my colleagues at Boston College, I would like to mention Esther Gimeno Ugalde, Kevin Newmark, Laurie Shepard, and Wan Sonya Tang, for kindly offering their service as reviewers, and for providing our authors with invaluable insights. Among our students, Alexandra Brown, Ashton Fiucci, Mario Lorenzo, Alanna Noe, Timothy Provost, Regina Pieck Pressly, Clara Gonzalez Tosat, Emmanuelle Udom, and Bryant White, have done a magnificent job of editing, reviewing and offering their insightful opinions.

We hope you will enjoy the works of these young scholars, who shared with us the product of their research, and laid out important premises for future inquiries into the work of Roland Barthes. This monographic issue of *Romance eReview* is an homage to his genius, but is also testimony to the livelihood of the Master of Arts Program in Romance Languages at Boston College. We are looking forward to continuing our intellectual traditions, with further discussions and academic exchanges, both in the form of graduate conferences and collections of essays like the present one.