



## **Roland Barthes**

*Roland Barthes , Richard Howard (Translator)*

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"*Barthes par Barthes* is a genuinely post-modern autobiography, an innovation in the art of autobiography comparable in its theoretical implications for our understanding of autobiography to Sartre's *The Words*."--  
Hayden White, University of California

### Roland Barthes Details

Date : Published September 28th 1994 by University of California Press (first published 1975)

ISBN : 9780520087835

Author : Roland Barthes , Richard Howard (Translator)

Format : Paperback 186 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Cultural, France, Theory

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## From Reader Review Roland Barthes for online ebook

### Christopher says

My favorite book by Barthes. Autobiography in the third person. Or to adapt a phrase by Barthes, the autobiographical without the autobiography. Barthes shows how thoroughgoing attention to one's mental habits -- with the lightest dose of self-deprecation -- can bring great rewards.

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### Damon says

I just glanced at this up at St Mark's Books last night. I opened to a place where he is talking about having a piece of rib removed in an operation, and how the doctors gave it to him afterward wrapped in gauze, and from this he launches into a discussion of those things like old movie stubs that we can't bring ourselves to throw away. I frequently have this experience with Barthes where I feel like he is finishing a thought I didn't realize I had, but which feels so intimately familiar.

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### Brian says

This isn't Barthes' best work, but it is always interesting reading him and seeing how his criticism continually evolves. The problem with this meta-autobiography is, like he says near the conclusion, "an aphoristic tone hangs" about it. His reading/interest base is so broad that it lacks focus much of the time. And since his "aphorisms" are quite humorless, unlike the ones by his "model" for this book, Nietzsche's, they can be a slough. While this is no "The Plesure of the Text" or the infinitely enjoyable "S/Z," it is yet another fun read by Roland Barthes ... by Roland Barthes :)

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### Vincent Scarpa says

No less satisfying, mystifying, engaging, frustrating, enlightening, and humbling than it was the very first time I read it.

“Self-commentary? What a bore! I had no other solution than to rewrite myself—at a distance, a great distance—here and now: to add to the books, to the themes, the the memories, to the texts, another utterance, without my ever knowing whether it is about my past or my present that I am speaking. Whereby I cast over the written work, over the past body and the past corpus, barely brushing against it, a kind of patchwork, a rhapsodic quilt consisting of stitched squares.”

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### Debbie says

Roland Barthes is an incredible writer. His prose is beautiful and his application of philosophy to his writing augments his work. The emotions and pain he brings to his writing is felt by the reader when he needs them to, a trait I find desired in any writer. Magnificent.

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## Margot Note says

Read an 1977 version of this book, bought for 1 cent on Amazon, and it crumbled in my hands as I read it(something I found oddly satisfying). This is the part that made me laugh on the train:

La côtelette ~ The rib chop

Here is what I did with my body one day:

At Leysin, in 1945, in order to perform an extrapleural pneumothorax operation, a piece of one of my ribs was removed, and subsequently given back to me, quite formally, wrapped up in a piece of medical gauze (the physicians, who were Swiss, as it happened, thereby professed that my body belongs to me, in whatever dismembered state they restored it to me: I am the owner of my bones, in life as in death). For a long time I kept this fragment of myself in a drawer, a kind of body penis analogous to the end of a rib chop, not knowing quite what to do with it, not daring to get rid of it lest I do some harm to my person, though it was utterly useless to me shut up in a desk among such "precious" objects as old keys, a schoolboy report card, my grandmother B.'s mother-of-pearl dance program and pink taffeta card case. And then, one day, realizing that the function of any drawer is to ease, to acclimate the death of objects by causing them to pass through a sort of pious site, a dusty chapel where, in the guise of keeping them alive, we allow them a decent interval of dim agony, but not going so far as to dare cast this bit of myself into the common refuse bin of my building, I flung the rib chop and its gauze from my balcony, as if I were romantically scattering my own ashes, into the rue Servandoni, where some dog would come and sniff them out.

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## Maurizio Manco says

"Scrivere per frammenti: i frammenti sono allora delle pietre sulla circonferenza del cerchio: mi sparpaglio in tondo: tutto il mio piccolo universo a pezzi; al centro, cosa?" (p. 107)

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## Tosh says

Whenever I put my pen onto paper or I type on a computer, I often think of Roland Barthes. For the sole reason he's a very entertaining writer and a great thinker as well. This book is his autobiography or memoir. But it goes off the subject and comes back freely. Right now working on my own memoir and i often think about this book as a role model for my own work. The thing is I am not that good or brilliant as him. But the key is to find the 'voice' that is your voice. And I learned that from this particular book. Nice photos as well.

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## Vojtěch says

Barthesova "honitba" o sobě samém nad sebou samým je jistým prokazováním přirozenosti autorových myšlenek. Nejlépe pak Barthes, dle mého, až lapidárně vystihuje artikl o dvojznačnosti - nachází se slovy tak, že je možné najít více možností výkladu. To způsobí v podstatě rozklad textu (nehledě na to, že fragmentárnost je pro něj už tak podstatná) a skrze něj pak možná spočívá jistý pohled na literaturu i

spole?nost.

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## Angela B. says

I read this book many years ago, and I remember being completely captured by it. I thought I'd give it another read to see if it still resonates. It does. Though I suspect in a different way now than then. I'm not as immersed in the structuralist, poststructuralist etc. theory as I was then, and frankly I found myself getting a little dizzy amid the multitude of references and layers of intertextuality this time around; but still, it spoke. Yes, I enjoyed the giddy freewheeling in language, the "pleasure of the text," and the puns and self-deprecating jokes (especially the story about the "rib chop" tucked away in the drawer for safekeeping!). Barthes is a brilliant thinker and a marvellous writer (even though I was reading in translation--which seems apt, somehow). I particularly enjoyed the photos and Barthes' often ironic commentary.

But what emerged more powerfully for me this time was the inarticulate sadness that seems to leak through the pages: the story of being abandoned at the bottom of the well as a child, of being an outsider looking in at the happy, albeit conventional, country wedding, of feeling estranged from the people around him by the constant chatter in his head. How frustrating it must have been for him to have felt that drive to write the self, and to have all the words at his disposal, but to be thwarted by the unrelenting "surface" of the mirror which he knew would only ever let him see himself secondhand. Barthes so powerfully evokes the de-centred self. But there's a wistfulness about it: "To write by fragments: the fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle. I spread myself around: my whole little universe in crumbs. At the center, what?"

But I won't try to psychologize. Barthes understood that impetus to diagnose, to dismiss (he says his friends sometimes complained that he was too intellectual!), and to ridicule. He does this to himself often enough.

More than anything, and perhaps more strikingly now upon rereading, I find that I'm impressed by Barthes' unflinching courage, extraordinary intelligence, and yes, sense of humour, in addressing that vexed but always fascinating question of the relationship between self and language. After reading this, one can no longer be naïve about "telling one's story." But hopefully, we'll all keep trying!

I'll stick with my 5 stars!

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## Marcos Faria says

Depois de ler o romance do Laurent Binet, achei que era uma boa hora para voltar a esse livro. Não lembro agora, mas acho que na época da faculdade eu li os fragmentos aleatoriamente, pulando entre as páginas como num jogo de amarelinha (aquele). Dessa vez resolvi ler certinho, do começo ao fim. É estranho como, sem que exista uma ordem (uma *estrutura*) aparente, o encadeamento dos textos produz sentido. E esse sentido do texto, que surge como uma meta-obra, para além do que está dito em cada um dos aforismas, convoca o leitor a assumir sua responsabilidade diante da escrita.

Em resumo: continua sendo meu livro preferido do meu teórico preferido.

## Constance Hopkins says

A complicated read to begin with Barthes !

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## Olha Khilobok says

this is love. returns inevitable

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## David says

Autobiography/memoir is a strange genre in the literary universe. It is at once a piece of fiction and non-fiction, a chronicle of one's memories, and a perversion of history in favor of art. In Proust, who blends the lines of autobiography, fiction, and essay in his *À la recherche du temps perdu*, admonishes his readers: "*Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were.*" This is certainly true, our memories are not perfect accounts. We have only one perspective by which we can really view our personal histories, and with time those perspectives are corrupted by what we come to know of the "future" which follows, by the warm glow of nostalgia, by the distance of interceding time and the blurry faculties of our memory. An admirer of Proust, and perhaps the closest true successor of him stylistically who I have read, Barthes is expertly aware of the relative "truths" of history and art. Though *Roland Barthes* is ostensibly an autobiography, it is at the same time against autobiography, combative and resistant to it:

What right does my present have to speak of my past? Has my present some advantage over my past? What "grace" might have enlightened me? except that of passing time, or of a good cause, encountered on my way?

Pursuant to his own philosophy on semiology, *Roland Barthes* is both *doxa*, the status-quo, the obvious, and the *paradoxa*, or the nuance sign which opposes it.

Though *Roland Barthes* is presumably about its author, you will learn from its pages very little about him. This is not his story, not a "portrait of the artist as a young man" - no, it is Barthes' very essence. You are not informed of his youth's scraped knees, failed entanglements of first love, nor even much of friends or family, but rather you become immersed in the fishbowl of his memory, a slideshow purveyance of his *image-repertoire*:

Coming home in the evening, a frequent detour along the Adour, the Allées marines: tall trees, abandoned boats, unspecified strollers, boredom's drift: here floated the sexuality of public gardens, of parks.

As in all of Barthes' works, there is an apotheosis of language as both sacrosanct ritual and also a profane, sensual pleasure. As in Proust, there is an intermingling of the present Self and the childhood Self, which instead of complementing into a blend, become a layered portrait - one of innocence and one of adulthood: sexualized, self-awareness, bias, disillusion. But Barthes' approaches his memory with both a longing for closeness and a respect for distance: he views his childhood self, his young-adult self, his yesterday self, more like a series of divergent individuals, like many ancestors' portraits hung on the enfilade of his life - ancestors which inform him, but withhold something from him. He feels a warm nostalgia and affinity with

his former selves, but also a remoteness, something which is both impossible to regain and also impossible to fully grasp.

From the past, it is my childhood which fascinates me most; these images alone, upon inspection, fail to make me regret the time which has vanished. For it is not the irreversible I discover in my childhood, it is the irreducible: everything which is still in me, by fits and starts; in the child, I read quite openly the dark underside of myself - boredom, vulnerability, disposition to despair (in the plural, fortunately), inward excitement, cut off (unfortunately) from all expression.

The ceaseless evasion of the past, revealing itself only in fits and starts like an atavistic quirk, a borrowed gesture, a facial tick. The memory is both a removal from the present, but it is also alive in us. And it is alive in the fullest sense: it is changing, it is waxing and waning, corrupting and ameliorating ever. And to anesthetize memory, to pin it down, to write it out, is to ultimately let it escape.

To write the body.  
Neither the skin, nor the muscles, nor the bones, nor the nerves, but the rest: an awkward, fibrous, shaggy, revealed thing, a clown's coat

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## Tara says

Exactly the kind of enigmatic, fragmented autobiography you'd expect. Lovely to read if you like Barthes—and no doubt frustrating if you don't. Worthwhile just to get some sentences like this stuck into my mind: "This is to say that the art of living has no history: it does not evolve: the pleasure which vanishes vanishes for good, there is no substitute for it. Other pleasures come, which replace nothing. No progress in pleasures, nothing but mutations."

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## Geoff Wyss says

I probably understood 80% of this, but that 80% was a blast--thoughtful, funny, smart, honest, surprising. Not really an autobiography (which the title might suggest), or not in any traditional sense: you meet his mind instead of hearing about what his body has done in the past. (Though much of what he's used his mind for is thinking about the body...)

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## Ellen says

Roland Barthes, in his autobiography, *Barthes by Barthes*, arranges the fragments of his life in alphabetical order, deliberately subverting the artifice of presenting the continuous "flow of life" prevalent in traditional autobiographies.

Barthes' alphabetical autobiography functions like an index, collapsing time, the way it is collapsed when we reflect on our lives. The text of our lives, like the text of a book, parallels Roman Ingarden's assertion that, once read, a book "exists simultaneously in all of its parts and that none of these parts is 'earlier' or 'later' in

a temporal sense" (Packman qting Ingarden 88).

*from an earlier publication*

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### **Eliana Rivero says**

[...] no hay imaginario más puro que la crítica (de sí mismo)[...] (p.131)

A momentos aburrido, a momentos interesante, profundo y brillante. Barthes es como el profesor que admiras y tiene un montón de investigaciones serias. El libro es fragmentario: son ideas y escritos de las diferentes cosas que le gustan y disgustan, sus intereses, sus investigaciones. Es toda su vida, a fin de cuentas.

Para mí, es como un libro de ensayos que habla sobre sí mismo y un poco sobre los demás, pero Barthes piensa en este libro como un ensayo novelado, escrita en tercera persona, representando su ser, sin ninguna criatura de ficción ni nombres propios. Juega con los géneros. Es una narración que busca plantearse él mismo como sujeto central. Como dice:

Este libro no es un libro de "confesiones"; no porque sea insincero, sino porque hoy tenemos un saber diferente del de ayer; este saber puede resumirse así: lo que escribo sobre mí no es nunca *la última palabra* respecto a mí: mientras más "sincero" soy, más me presto a la interpretación ante instancias muy distintas a las de autores anteriores que creían que no tenían que someterse más que a una ley única: la *autenticidad* (p.131)

Creo que hay tres cosas en las que recae y son sus temas predilectos: la política, la estética y el cuerpo. Esto, a su vez, está interrelacionado con el arte y el lenguaje. El lenguaje es su vida y el cuerpo lo es todo para escribir: él escribe su cuerpo, cada fibra. Es un poco intrincada su dialéctica y su estudio, pero vale la pena: la prosa es sumamente refinada. El libro está ilustrado por dibujos y fotografías de Barthes. Básicamente, el libro es la pasión del lenguaje hecha escritura.

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### **Jenelle says**

skimmed the hell out of this but it's the best I could do. I love this guy and really wanted the book to be more personal, RB's own themes & image-repertoire, but shoulda known: he's too recursive for that! instead of writing a semiotics of himself, he wrote a semiotics of the autobiography format. I mean it's relentlessly evasive. I love thinking about the process, too, but here it's not insightful; it's boring, straying, elitist, and lazy. all his brilliant analyzing is an interference, like the nervous, self-despising paralysis of being way too self conscious (which is, at least, finally, a glimpse of personality).  
pourquoi cet air si sériouuuux, Roland?

## Maggie says

Confusing, but nonetheless a well curated multimedia experience on behalf of the author that pushes the limits of what a novel is, what it could be, and how we structure them. I only read it through once but I think that its the type of book that ages and rereads well and I plan to update this once I've done that.

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