
Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg, northern France, but after his father's death in the First World War, his mother relocated to Bayonne. In 1924, the family moved to Paris, where Barthes studied classics, grammar, and philology at the Sorbonne University in Paris, receiving degrees in 1939 and 1943. In the mid-1930s and again in the 1940s, he spent time in sanatoriums suffering from tuberculosis. He taught at a number of lycées in Biarritz, Bayonne, and Paris, and, in the late 1940s, at the French Institute in Bucharest and the University of Alexandria in Egypt. In the 1950s, he worked for the Direction Générale des Affaires Culturelles and held a research post with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. His most important academic appointment was the director of studies at École Practique des Hautes Études (1960–76). He was a visiting professor at Johns Hopkins University (1967–68) and in the last four years of his life he chaired the department of literary semiology at the Collège de France.

Barthes' career traversed one of the most important literary epochs of the twentieth century. His work of his early period emphasized SEMIOLOGY and structural linguistics. *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) introduced the concepts of *écriture*, the "written" quality of language, while *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *S/Z* (1970) focused on the structuralist analysis of literary texts. Barthes' unique mode of structuralist analysis was applied to a host of texts, including works by the Marquis de Sade and St. Ignatius of Loyola. In *Mythologies* (1958), he applied structuralist and semiological methods to a wide array of non-literary cultural texts, from wrestling and food to fashion and striptease. In 1966, he published the groundbreaking essay, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative.” In this essay, he used a sophisticated structuralist methodology to analyze the way narrative texts (literary and cinematic) function. Though grounded in structuralism and semiology, Barthes’ work frequently challenged the limits of these fields. His most celebrated essay, “The Death of the Author” (1968), announced that the reader, the "modern scriptor," had overturned the traditional authority of author. In works like *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), he transcended the limitations of structuralism and became a pioneer of Poststructuralism. Contrasting texts of *pleasure* (which conform to readers’ expectations) with texts of *bliss* (which challenge or overturn these expectations), Barthes formulated a theory of textual eroticism, an attempt to explain how desire operates within language and dictates the way texts are written and read. His later essays continued this new trend in poststructuralist analysis. His last work, *Camera Lucinda* (1980), explored the communicative potential of photography, bringing to bear on that medium his unique brand of poststructuralist semiology. In that same year, Barthes was killed in a street accident in Paris. In a posthumously published memoir, *Incidents* (1983), Barthes told the story of a life filled with intellectual and sexual passions.
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