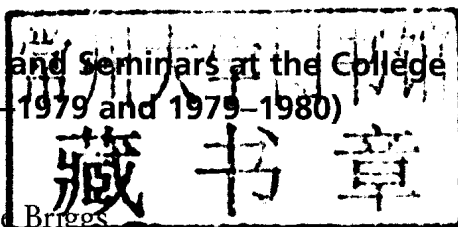


THE PREPARATION OF THE NOVEL

Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège
de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)

Translated by Kate Briggs



Text established, annotated, and introduced by Nathalie Léger

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NOTICE

This "Notice" is a shortened version of the general foreword that introduces the publication of Barthes's lecture courses. For more details, one should consult Comment vivre ensemble.

The organizing principle of the three volumes of Barthes's lecture courses at the Collège de France is the course session, since that was the true rhythm of the reading,¹ a rhythm that Barthes would retrospectively inscribe on his manuscript by marking the date and time where he had left off that day and where he would take up again the following week.

Unlike in the earlier courses, where the course sessions were organized by fragments, "traits," or figures, this course is composed of an infinitely long speech that unfolds continuously. Nevertheless, the lecture course is punctuated by the subtitles, pauses, and breaks that aerate and clarify that speech.

As for the "text" of the lecture course itself, the principle adopted here was to intervene as little as possible. The symbols that Barthes uses—for instance, to condense a logical construction [→, ≠]—have been retained, although we have completed abbreviations where they are a matter of a habitual shorthand (for example, *Mémoires d'outre tombe* for M.O.T.) and corrected the punctuation where it is too muddled.

Where Barthes's written argument is too obscure, we also took the liberty of paraphrasing the overall sense of the passage in a footnote, to spare the reader an unnecessary enigma. We took advantage of the wide margins in the "Traces écrites" collection: the bibliographical references that Barthes uses for the quotations appear there, at the same place on the page as in the manuscript itself. It should be added that the rare passages that Barthes crossed out have been retained but are identified as such in footnotes indicating where the deleted passage begins and ends. When a session is prefaced by remarks relating to letters received or the argument of the previous week, these remarks appear in italics. Finally, the editors' interventions in the text of the course are indicated by square brackets ([]). Occasionally, Barthes breaks off a quotation to make a point; these interventions are indicated by angle brackets (< >).

The footnotes are in the traditional philological style, essential in a text that is occasionally allusive. As far as possible, quotations, proper names, expressions in foreign languages (particularly ancient Greek, which we chose to transliterate into Latin characters), place names, and historical events are identified and explained in the notes, which the inclusion of a complete biographical index saves from becoming too repetitive. References to other texts or books by Barthes are to the new edition of the *Oeuvres complètes*, published in five volumes in 2002, and appear in the following form: OC 1, OC 2, OC 3, OC 4, and OC 5, followed by a colon and a page number or range.² In addition to the index of names and places, we have included an index of concepts, which appear in alphabetical order. When Barthes refers to an old or unlocatable edition of a text, our footnotes refer the reader to a more accessible one.³

A short preface places Barthes's lecture course in context and highlights its most salient features.

Éric Marty

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Nathalie Léger

I have transmitted these things as they were then, in my passion—new, lively, blazing (and delightful to me), under love's first spell.

—Jules Michelet

Here one enters the last circle of research.¹

It is, of course, the irruption of death that retroactively renders the manuscript of this lecture course the last writing project and structures a destiny. Roland Barthes, for his part, was nurturing new projects, imagining topics for a number of future courses, putting the finishing touches to a paper for a conference on Stendhal; in short, he was working, he was constructing, he was envisaging the future. Although, when it occurs, death always confers the solemn resonance of an epigraph or an enigma upon the last words to be pronounced, in this case it can be said with certainty that it is the course that harbors the secret of a final achievement and not the other way around. It is in the perfection of its trajectory that *The Preparation of the Novel* marks the culmination of a reflection that began with *Writing Degree Zero* and, from 1953 on, constantly explored and expanded upon (in the form of the countless ruses and detours to which Barthes's oeuvre bears witness) one question and one question only: that of literary utopia. More than a response, *The Preparation of the Novel* is fully a lesson in that it stages the peregrination of a quest {*une recherche*} and dramatically sets out the law governing all quests before its audience: to know nothing of the object sought, simply to know something of oneself. Upon learning of his dismissal from the Collège de France in 1981, Michelet took comfort in the words of some of those who had attended his lectures: "We learnt nothing from your lectures. It is simply that our soul, absent, came back to us."² Reading between the lines, that declaration could contain Barthes's teaching program for the Collège de France, the one announced in the inaugural lecture of January 7, 1977, and exemplified in each of his lecture courses: to learn nothing—Barthes even says to *unlearn*—and to undertake that long labor of rediscovery, that return, within each

individual, of a soul that has been absent for too long: "It is the *intimate* which seeks utterance in me, seeks to make its cry heard, confronting generality, confronting science."³

The last two lecture courses that Barthes taught at the Collège de France under the general title *The Preparation of the Novel* form a diptych—the two parts can be accessed independently of each other, yet each one is indispensable to the other. First, "The Preparation of the Novel 1: From Life to the Work," a lecture course comprising thirteen hour-long sessions that ran from December 2, 1978, to March 10, 1979. This was completed the following year by "The Preparation of the Novel 2: The Work as Will": eleven two-hour sessions that ran from December 1, 1979, to February 23, 1980. The lectures were delivered on Saturday mornings in the big amphitheater on the place Marcelin-Berthelot. Both lecture courses were linked to a seminar: for the year 1978–1979, Barthes decided to invite several outside speakers in to discuss "The Metaphor of the Labyrinth." That seminar took place on Saturday mornings from 11:30 to 12:30, immediately after Barthes's lecture. For the year 1979–1980, the seminar was supposed to begin in February (once the lecture course had finished) and to run on Saturday mornings between 10:30 and 12:30. It was to involve the discussion of a number of photographs of members of Proust's circle taken by the photographer Paul Nadar. That seminar, as we know, never took place: on Monday, February 25, 1980, Barthes was knocked down on the rue des Écoles, in front of the Collège de France; he was hospitalized for one month at the Salpêtrière and died on March 26, 1980.

The lecture course on *The Neutral* ended on June 3, 1978. At the time, Barthes envisaged devoting several years of teaching to a new project that promised to be "if not tenacious (who can say?) then at least broad in scope (ambitious)," as he explains in the first session of *The Preparation of the Novel* (December 2, 1978). Given the explicitly broad scope of that project, it is worth briefly describing the panorama of writings that form a backdrop to the two-part lecture course: texts that either anticipated it or can be read as variations on it. Since it is unquestionably the totality of Barthes's oeuvre that can be heard echoing throughout *The Preparation of the Novel*, it seems sensible to refer the reader to the five volumes of Barthes's *Oeuvres complètes*, published by the Éditions du Seuil, thanks to Éric Marty's editorial work. Here, then, we shall limit ourselves to those texts that directly preceded or were contemporaneous with the last two lecture courses. That chronology begins

with the so-called general-interest lecture entitled “Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure,” delivered at the Collège de France on October 19, 1978—an indispensable text that condenses the issues that Barthes will discuss in his course into a few striking figures. Barthes delivered a variation on this lecture at New York University at the end of November. The week following the introductory session of December 2, 1978, Barthes’s first column, or *Chronique*, appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*. These short texts, published between December 18, 1978, and March 26, 1979, accompanied the whole of the first lecture course. The weekly magazine would appear on Saturdays; some members of the audience can still recall how people would turn up at the Collège with the latest *Chronique* under their arms. The *Chroniques* amounted to more than the new-style little mythologies that their readers so eagerly awaited. As he states in the column dated March 26, 1979 (which marked the end of his journalistic experiment), for Barthes they were in the first instance a “writing experiment” that involved the “search for a form,” “fragmented attempts at a novel.” In January 1979, Barthes wrote “Ça prend” for the *Magazine Littéraire*, a text devoted to Proust’s writing that repeats and anticipates some key passages of the lecture course. In the spring, between April 15 and June 3, 1979, he wrote *Camera Lucida*, a book based on analyses presented in the lecture course (notably in the session of February 17, 1979, of *The Preparation of the Novel 1*) that develops Barthes’s meditation on time, on the disappearance of forms and the brief glimmers of a few ghosts. It now forms an indispensable bridge between the two parts of the lecture course. Having submitted the typed copy of *Camera Lucida* to his editor on August 21, 1979, and having in all likelihood begun work on the second lecture course, Barthes then wrote the first outline of his project for a novel, *Vita Nova*, an outline that he would spend the whole summer modifying, as he would continue to do so up until December 1979—the date that appears on the last rough sketch of that new work. The only trace that Barthes left of that new work is the architecture that also underpins the writing of the lecture course. In that same time period—between August 24 and September 17, 1979—Barthes kept the diary that posthumously would become “Paris Evenings” (published in *Incidents*, 1987) and “deliberated” whether or not it is possible for a diary to become a work. (“Deliberation,” which reproduces fragments of the diary from 1977 and the spring of 1979, was published in *Tel Quel* in the winter of 1978). Late January 1980: publication of *Camera Lucida*. Late February: the last

session of *The Preparation of the Novel*. At his death, a page of a work in progress devoted to Stendhal was found in Barthes's typewriter, entitled: "One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves."⁴

As with his two previous lecture courses at the Collège de France and all of his seminars, talks, and lectures, Barthes took great care in drafting the manuscript of *The Preparation of the Novel*. Although the text of the first course is not dated, we can presume that Barthes devoted the summer of 1978 to it, a summer spent in the seclusion of Urt, on the banks of the Ardour. As a note at the bottom of the last page indicates, Barthes completed the draft of the second lecture course on November 2, 1979, one month before the first session took place. There are very few lines crossed out and seldom any corrections in the dense and uniform writing of this ensemble of 198 pages drafted in blue or black ink (seventy-one pages for the first part, 127 for the second).⁵ Occasionally, a few notes (marked with an asterisk in felt-tip pen and affixed to the margin) complete the point being made; sometimes what was clearly a deleted half-page is reintegrated into the text with a paperclip or a bit of tape. Barthes would change his mind, hesitate, and make corrections, but what is striking about the manuscript as a whole is the homogeneity and consistency of the writing. As is often the case in Barthes's manuscripts, the very frequent bibliographical references are noted in pencil in the margin. Barthes probably read over his manuscript for the last time just before the lecture course began, taking the opportunity to make a few minor annotations to the draft in ballpoint pen. It was with the very same ballpoint pen (he did not like using them but, considering them useful for making the odd note, always carried one with him) that Barthes would systematically make a note of the date of the session that had just come to an end and mark where he had left off.

Those who attended his lecture course recall the remarkable fluidity of his delivery, the deep and enveloping timbre of his voice, the warm phrasing that endowed his authority with infinite goodwill— oratorical skills that are confirmed by the sound recording of the lecture course.⁶ When describing the course, many of those who attended the lectures emphasize the crowds, the fight to get a seat from the moment the doors opened, and how calmly Barthes could invent on the spot, his ability to improvise in a very consistent, sustained fashion. Very few recall him reading from a manuscript. Yet a comparison between the written version with the spoken version recorded by some members of the audience reveals scarcely any discrepancies between the two: only infrequent digressions in the

spoken version and the rare last-minute changes and cuts made to the written draft (in order to adapt it, where necessary, to the technical constraints of the lecture format) suggest that Barthes was reading, taking great care not to depart from the manuscript transcribed here. That manuscript therefore contains, *without remainder*, everything that was presented in the lecture course. Several commentators have noted Barthes's unease before the packed amphitheater at the Collège de France, his awkwardness before that dense and anonymous crowd as someone who, over the preceding years, had succeeded in creating a "circulatory space of subtle, flexible desires," a closed and perhaps even isolated circle of an "amorous phalanstery" grounded in "a subtle topography of bodily relations" simply by gathering some of his disciples around a table at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.⁷ However, it was indeed in the context of the Collège de France, in the context of the constraints it imposed and the ambition it embodied that—already in the inaugural lecture of January 1977—Barthes articulated his desire for this "Vita Nova." That desire, set out as the very principle of *The Preparation of the Novel*, was formulated for the first time upon Barthes's integration into the Collège and is as it were anchored to it.⁸ Thus it was in the first instance the assignation of his desire to a *specific* place, a place haunted by the illustrious thinkers to whom he frequently refers (Michelet has been mentioned; one could also cite Valéry or Jean Baruzi) that enabled Barthes to sketch out the contours of a new life. However, if the inaugural lecture was placed under the sign of Michelet's teaching, the two-part lecture course that makes up *The Preparation of the Novel* was undertaken with Dante as a guide. It is well known that with *Vita Nova*, his first great work, Dante inaugurated a new form—the product of the mutual engenderment of the poem, the narrative, and the commentary. For Dante, that new form was the only one capable of expressing the power of love and the depth of mourning he experienced upon Beatrice's death. Chapter 18 of *Vita Nova* announces why it was necessary to invent that form, a form so new that it is unnerving, almost inhibiting: "And then I resolved that thenceforward I would choose for the theme of my writings only the praise of this most gracious being. But when I had thought exceedingly, it seemed to me that I had taken to myself a theme which was much too lofty, so that I dared not begin; and I remained during several days in the desire of speaking, and the fear of beginning."⁹ In October 1977, a few months after delivering his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, the death of Barthes's mother abruptly interrupted the

steady progression of his work and served as a painful confirmation of his desire for a new writing life. The novel, that “uncertain form,” the material of remembered as much as of desired speech, was for Barthes the only one capable of expressing what he calls the “truth of affect” whereby meaning is revealed and undone: “Moment of Truth = Moment of the *Intractable*: we can neither interpret nor transcend nor regress; Love and Death *are here*, that’s all that can be said”¹⁰—an echo of that other figure of the *Intractable* proposed at the beginning of the lecture course, when Barthes describes that moment of illumination in which he grasped, in a sudden flash, the direction that his quest would take. For the origin of the decision to undertake the course is to be found in that abduction of consciousness that Barthes calls a *satori*, in the rapturous event of April 15, 1978, described in the introductory session. April 15, 1978, is properly novelistic not only in terms of the role that this one date plays in the architecture of Barthes’s planned work, *Vita Nova*, but also because it inevitably recalls moments when the mind is completely overwhelmed, great moments of fundamental caesura, when the subject falters, whose narratives punctuate our intellectual and spiritual history. In its abruptness and its fugacity, that Barthesian *eureka*, that brief instant of incandescence and joy that, in the middle of a foreign city, oppressed by heat and boredom, suddenly lit up a banal afternoon, contains all the aspirations of the lecture course that, session after session, investigates literature’s capacity to capture the passionate epiphany of the instant, to give it an absolute value, and then to reconcile the rending of the self with the creation of the self. Was it really so important whether or not the quest culminated in the writing of the novel, of a novel? Elsewhere, a few years earlier, in *A Lover’s Discourse*, every figure of which could be read as an “Address to the Novel,” Barthes wrote: “I’m not actually bothered about my chances of being fulfilled *in real terms* (I don’t mind that they’re nonexistent). It’s just the will to fulfillment that blazes, that’s indestructible.”¹¹

Together with the manuscripts of the two lecture courses, we are also publishing the texts of the two seminars that accompanied them.¹² As Barthes points out, the seminar at the Collège de France was in the first instance a space of exchange and dialogue, and the professor could call upon outside speakers should he wish. Barthes provided a list of those invited to discuss “The Metaphor of the Labyrinth” in his text for the Collège de France yearbook, which presents the work undertaken that year. Barthes took charge of the opening and closing sessions, and it is the nine pages of his drafted

intervention (seven of which comprise the opening session) that are transcribed here. Although it never took place, the seminar on photography was drafted in the first weeks of 1980. The intention was to devote the few sessions of this seminar to a projection of Paul Nadar's photographs, with Barthes improvising a commentary based on biographical notations taken from some standard reference works on the world of Proust. The handwritten record of this undertaking amounts to a six-page "Presentation." Barthes wrote a further fifty-three pages that form a sheaf of brief notations arranged in alphabetical order. The very allusive nature of those notes means the document is full of holes and gaps. Any attempt to fill in those gaps would have been to replace it with something else. We are therefore publishing it with—in the form of an *exergue*—the same "warning" as the one Barthes issues in his opening session: "no non-Marcelians, please." The tenuous nature of the information provided in the document is to be supplemented by the remarkable biographical works and iconographic dossiers on Proust that have been in the public domain for over twenty years. As regards the images selected by Barthes (and conserved in his archive together with the manuscript of the seminar), they have been published many times since. Yet neither the few pages of an underdeveloped text nor the series of familiar photographs are enough to make us lose sight of the extent to which those few images, discreetly captioned by Barthes, present a vertiginous complement to the lecture course: the center of a labyrinth is always the site of an illusory goal, and the quest for the novel can only culminate in a melancholy and luminous world of apparitions.

For their libraries' resources and their friendship, I would like to thank Marianne Alphant, Bernard Brun, Anne-Sophie Chazeaux, Michel Contat, Olivier Corpet, Claude Coste, Albert Dichy, Pierre Franz, Anne Herchberg-Pierrot, Marc de Launay, Thierry Leguay, Virginie Linhard, Carlo Ossola, Claire Paulhan, Jean Pavans, Jean-Loup Rivière, and Chantal Thomas.

For the indispensable use of the sound recording of *The Preparation of the Novel*, I would like to thank Bernard Comment, Isabelle Grellet, and Christine Lemaire.

Finally, I would like to thank Jean-Claude Baillieul, Éditions du Seuil, for his invaluable assistance.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Kate Briggs

You'll have grasped—or, rather, as you already know because I've said and written it (Cerisy): that here Wanting-to-Write relates to the Novel, the Form fantasized is that of the Novel → I've even heard it said (the path rumors usually take) that I'm writing one, which isn't true; if it were, I clearly wouldn't be in a position to propose a lecture course on its preparation: writing requires secrecy. No, I'm at the Fantasy-of-the-novel stage, but I've decided to push that fantasy as far as it will go . . .

(p. 11)

By the end of the 1970s, apparently “everyone knew” that Roland Barthes was writing a novel. It was not until 1995, however, that the facsimiles of Barthes's eight-page plan entered the public domain. When they did, as Laurent Nunez documents, the general feeling was one of disappointment: What? Only eight pages? Only eight pages, amounting to eight variations on the same sketched outline of a prospective novel? Were these the pages that Barthes was proposing to “prepare” in the lecture course entitled *La Préparation du roman*, translated here as *The Preparation of the Novel*?¹ Barthes provides an oblique response to this question in the final session of the course. But for a reader as yet unfamiliar with the content of his lectures, the degree of anticipation—and disappointment—depends, at least in part, on how one chooses to read the course title. For as Nunez points out, the determination of the article is ambiguous: *The Preparation of the Novel* could of course refer to a specific novel, to the novel Barthes was planning, that is, to the project entitled *Vita Nova*. It could equally refer to any novel. Or to the novel in general. Or indeed to the Novel, to the particular conception of the novel that emerges from the course: the meaning of “Novel” expanded to include “Absolute Novel, Romantic Novel, *poikilos* Novel, Novel of the Writing-Tendency; in other words, all works of literature” (p. 144).

The question as to whether or not Barthes really intended to write *Vita Nova*—as to whether that novel would have been written

had his death in 1980 not cut short what he terms a “new writing life”—has preoccupied readers of the lecture course. For Antoine Compagnon, the last session of the lecture course is “melancholic”: “two years of teaching” had come to an end but, precisely, “the novel hadn’t followed.”² Other commentators have explored the implications of the peculiar “method” Barthes adopts in his lecture course: not to write a novel but to proceed *as if* he were going to write one (p. 20). Diana Knight argues that the novel was destined to be unrealized—that failure was built into the project from the start—and invites us to consider the creative possibilities of the plans for *Vita Nova* precisely *as* plans.³ Thomas Clerc proposes a reading of *The Preparation of the Novel* as a work of conceptual art: the final outcome of the project is subordinate to the documentation of a mental process, especially since the sole outcome of the lecture course *was* the “preparation,” that is, the lecture course itself.⁴

The decision to publish a transcription of those eight pages in the form of an appendix to this translation of *La Préparation du roman* could be seen as intervening in that debate: to append the plans for *Vita Nova* to the lengthy “preparation” of “the novel” is arguably to present the lectures in terms of Barthes’s failure to pull a novel “out of his hat” (as he puts it in the final session), to link the two projects together in ways that sit uneasily with Barthes’s sense of the specific ambition of the course (see, for instance, the passage quoted above). The reasoning behind publishing them here was more straightforward, however. Those pages have not yet been translated into English, and a reader of the lecture course will inevitably be intrigued as to the skeletal form of what, ultimately, did not get written. As Nathalie Léger discusses in her editor’s preface, *The Preparation of the Novel* was drafted in what was an intensely productive period for Barthes: the eight elliptical plans form part of what Léger calls the “panorama” of texts, teachings, and talks that formed the backdrop to the writing of the lecture course, the majority of which are available in English translation.

The Preparation of the Novel charts the elaboration of an intensely personal writing project: the bid to kickstart a new writing practice that would both enable and amount to a radical change in Barthes’s way of life, inaugurating a new life, a *Vita Nova*. After a long exposition of the particular features of the short form (which for Barthes is exemplified by the haiku), that elaboration takes the form of a more general inquiry into what Barthes calls “the conditions” under which a handful of writing practitioners have engaged

in the “preparation” of “a literary work, for convenience called a Novel” (p. 127). Nunez’s point with respect to the ambiguous determination of “the novel” in the course title could therefore also be made of “the preparation.” Is this a concept? A specific course of action? One undertaken by writers in general, novelists in particular, or Barthes specifically, between December 1978 and February 1980, in the setting of the Collège de France, before a packed auditorium?

The “preparation” of a novel is evidently something distinct from “*the fact of writing*” one (p. 127): rumor may have had it that Barthes was writing a novel but, as he indicates above—and as those eight *plans* attest—this was not the case. Even so, what the “preparation” of or for writing (of *and* for writing) involves is no more immediately obvious in French than it is in English. This, perhaps, is the point: as Barthes stresses repeatedly, working out how to go about writing a novel is in reality far from obvious; it is hard going, difficult, all consuming, and often a source of pain and distress. So “preparation” is in the first instance to be understood in the sense of an arrangement, a setting out or up, an organization both of a way of life, with the series of decisions that such an organization entails, and of a certain kind of material: the various pieces of cloth that the dressmaker tacks together, the fragmented notations of the present that the would-be novelist hopes to work into one long, continuous form. Referring to the subject of the action, “preparation” can also designate the series of operations required to obtain something, and it soon emerges that here the “preparation” of and for writing amounts to a quest, an initiation, fraught with setbacks, doubts, difficulties, and trials to overcome. The “hero” embarking on that journey is a particular kind of writer: a composite figure made up of that handful of “Romantic” writers (in Barthes’s sense of the term),⁵ among them Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Kafka, Proust, and Barthes himself. Which is to say that on one level this is indeed Roland Barthes’s story: he asks, “So why does this man insist on Wanting to Write (at least at this stage in my Narrative, which, as you’ll have guessed, is the story of my own life)?” (p. 160). But the fact that this personal writing project took the form of a teaching project, that the Work and the Course came to be “invested in the same (literary) enterprise” (p. 8) leaves open—and even sets out to generate—the possibility that the story of *The Preparation of the Novel* is also *yours*: those amateur writers among you who have experienced or are currently under the sway of the desire to write and who are similarly compelled to embark on a journey of initiation into the writing of literary works.

The lecture course can therefore also be read as the written trace of a singular pedagogical experiment.⁶ It was in order to preserve these levels of indeterminacy (which or whose preparation? of which or whose novel?), this slippage between the general and the personal (which Jonathan Culler characterizes as “a paradoxical operation: teaching a course about preparing to write a novel”),⁷ that I took the decision to translate the title of the lecture course literally.

In the very first session of the course, Barthes announces: “to my mind, a lecture is a specific production: not entirely writing nor entirely oration, it’s marked by an implicit interlocution (a silent complicity). It’s something which, *ab ovo*, must, wants to die—to leave no more substantial a memory than of speech” (p. 7). This remark informed the translation strategy adopted here. For *The Preparation of the Novel* is not a book in any straightforward sense: it is the transcription of detailed, scrupulously drafted notes for a two-part lecture course and two accompanying seminars. Nor, can it be supposed, did Barthes intend it to become a book. Barthes decided not to publish the lecture course on *The Neutral* delivered the previous year for the reasons he gives here: not only does writing a course take up precious time, but: “I think that part of a life’s activity should always be set aside for the Ephemeral: what happens only once and vanishes, it’s the necessary share of the Rejected Monument; and therein lies the vocation of the Course” (p. 7). The resources of English are of course different than those of French, and the systematic use of contractions, together with translating Barthes’s impersonal *on* with a general “we” or an inclusive “you” aim to give a sense of that complicity, reflecting the fact that the lectures were drafted with a view to addressing and engaging with an audience, having no ambition to outlast the moment of their enunciation.

The Preparation of the Novel shares a common vocabulary with the “panorama” of writings that Léger describes, and, as a general rule, I have sought to achieve a degree of continuity with the available translations of Barthes’s writings from the same period, with one exception that needs to be noted here. In *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Richard Howard translates the expression “*Vouloir-Écrire*,” a formulation that chimes with “*Vouloir-Saisir*” and “*Vouloir-Vivre*” (translated in *The Neutral* as “Will-to-Possess” and “Will-to-Live,” respectively)⁸ as “Will-to-Write.” Here, the same expression has been rendered as “Wanting-to-Write.” While a “will” can of course designate a desire or wish, it can also imply a resolute intention. Now, *The Preparation of the Novel* is the dra-

matization of a journey: at the outset, “to write” is explicitly a desire, an urge or impulse in search of its object—specifically, an appropriate “form.” It is only as the course/quest progresses—as the trials that characterize that quest are, if not overcome, then at least enumerated and examined—that the desire to write begins to look more like a resolution, and a transition is made from a generalized *vouloir* (“wanting to”) to a formalized *volonté*: part 2 of the lecture course is subtitled “*L’Oeuvre comme volonté*,” or “The Work as Will.”

Throughout the lecture course, Barthes frequently quotes—often at length—from a small selection of what for him are key texts. Following the strategy adopted by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier in their translation of *The Neutral*, I have sought, wherever possible and practicable, to reconstruct that corpus in English translation, modifying the available translations whenever the logic of Barthes’s argument demanded it; I have also sought to respect Barthes’s system of abbreviations (for instance, *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, abbreviated to “*À la Recherche*” in the lecture course, is given here in shorthand as “*In Search*”).⁹ However, the approach to translating the haiku quoted in part 1 of the lecture course and the biographical notes accompanying the photographs in the drafted seminar on “Proust and Photography” requires some further explanation. Since a number of the translations of the haiku quoted in part 1 of the lecture course are Barthes’s own, translated directly from English versions published in R. H. Blyth’s four-volume collection of haiku, *A History of Haiku* (1963), it made sense to reproduce Blyth’s “original” translations here (indicated with a *). It also made sense to reproduce the translations of some of Barthes’s favorite haiku found in *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (indicated with a †). Wherever the Blyth or Howard translations differ greatly from the French versions, or wherever Barthes quotes a haiku that does not appear in *A History of Haiku* or *Empire of Signs*, the translations into English are my own. As Léger points out in her presentation of the Proust seminar, the handwritten notes intended to accompany the projection of the photographs are full of holes and gaps (see p. 305). The primary source for those notes was George Painter’s two-volume biography of Marcel Proust, which appeared in French translation in 1966. As it turns out, Barthes is often silently paraphrasing short passages from that biography, lifting anecdotes and expressions directly from Painter in translation. In my translation of the notes I therefore chose to go back to Painter’s “original” English (that is, his “original” version of events that originally took place in France and in French)