No denunciation without an appropriate method of detailed analysis, no semiology which cannot, in the last analysis, be acknowledged as *semioclasm*.\(^1\)

Semiotics, structuralism, everyday life, popular culture, being gay at the Collège de France, occasional lover of Michel Foucault and avid student of the intricacies of literary theory, popular magazines and all things French – these are the things for which Barthes is known and still read (perhaps not so much in regard to Foucault). But I am interested in a less-travelled path through Barthes’s work, namely the writings on religion by this man who was brought up a Protestant.\(^2\) More specifically, his deliberation on myth in the long essay, ‘Myth Today’, is the focus of my intimate commentary.\(^3\) Around this theoretical centrepiece cluster a large number of incisive pieces in which contemporary myth is dissected and

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1 Barthes 1993a, p. 9; Barthes 2002k, p. 673.
3 I am less interested in the other group of Barthes’s writings on religion – the semiotic interpretations of Genesis 32 and Acts 10–11 (Barthes 1994, pp. 217–60; Barthes 2002ee; Barthes 2002mm). This is partly due to the fact that the readings of Genesis 32 and Acts 11–12 have been mined extensively by some biblical scholars (for example, see Collective 1995, pp. 130–5; Jobling, et al. 1995, pp. 48–9, 59–77) and partly due to the way they seem quite dated now. However, I have gained much insight from the work of Aichele, who has used Barthes creatively in order to develop a semiotic approach to interpreting biblical texts. See Aichele 1996, 1997, 2001, as well as Koosed 2008.
analysed – from steak and chips to the Tour de France, from margarine to Billy Graham. In this essay, Barthes offers a full-blooded theory of myth (his demurrer that it is all very preliminary notwithstanding).

In unfolding my intimate commentary on Barthes’s texts concerning mythology, I have divided my discussion into two parts. The first is an exposition that highlights the crucial moves in Barthes’s text, drawing out the basics of semiology, focusing on a tension in Barthes’s analysis between description and criticism and tracking his forlorn efforts at resistance to the baleful effects of myth. The second part seeks to apply to Barthes’s argument his own approach. He has a propensity to focus on the fragmentary hints and suggestions, the moments in a text – an odd feature of a sentence, an image evoked or a trigger – that make one pause, look up and follow a train of thought. In the same way that theorising those experiences of reading led Barthes to write, so also I use this approach on his own texts. In this second section, then, I begin to follow a series of hints and passing phrases that suggest other possibilities for myth, especially in terms of the dialectic of opposition that emerges from within myth. So what we find is that, despite Barthes finding myth baleful, distorting and best opposed, an undercurrent emerges in his analysis that leaves more room for myth – a cunning, oppositional and utopian one.

However, before I immerse myself in Barthes’s texts, a brief word is in order concerning the infatuations and phases that mark his work. The usual critical narrative is that Barthes passed progressively from Marxism and psychoanalysis, through a long structuralist phase, to the final emergence of poststructuralism (the signs of this later shift appear quite clearly in the

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4 The usual and disconcerting story applies here to translations from French: the texts have been pulled apart and reassembled in strange new formations. The original French of *Mythologies* (Barthes 2002k) may be found spread out in two translations called *Mythologies* and *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. (Barthes 1993a and Barthes 1997). The latter text adds a few extra essays that were not in the original French of *Mythologies*: Barthes 2002z; Barthes 2002v; Barthes 2002u; Barthes 2002o; Barthes 2002p. Beyond even these extras, there are individual essays that expand the analysis of myth into a number of further areas of French life, but they have not been translated into English: Barthes 2002b; Barthes 2002d; Barthes 2002c; Barthes 2002e; Barthes 2002i; Barthes 2002g; Barthes 2002h; Barthes 2002l; Barthes 2002q; Barthes 2002m; Barthes 2002s; Barthes 2002n; Barthes 2002r; Barthes 2002t; Barthes 2002aa. Finally, there are a few scattered and brief later reflections on mythology: Barthes 2002f; Barthes 2002k; Barthes 1977, pp. 165–9; Barthes 200200. Only one of these has been translated into English.

5 Those familiar with semiology may skip this section on basics. I prefer ‘semiology’ to the more common ‘semiotics’.