
A CELEBRATION OF “THE DEATH OF AUTHOR” IN ROLAND BARTHES’S ESSAY

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Abstract:

The impact of Reader Response Theory or Criticism on literary criticism over the past thirty-five years has been profound and wide-ranging. It emerged in the 1970s as an influential critical theory of the Post-Structuralist tradition firmly establishing the readers' role in interpreting/analysing literary texts. In essence, Reader-response theories reject New Criticism, the dominant literary theory and criticism from the late 1930s through the 1950s. The Reader Response critics claimed that the text comes alive only with the readers' active participation and interaction with the text. Here in the paper, I have tried to point what are the views of Roland Barthes about the author and the reader, what role does he assign to the reader and what place the reader has taken in the history of Literary Criticism.

Keywords: modern scripture, literary theory and criticism, author, the role of reader, position and difference of reader, expectations and violations, deferment and satisfaction, formulation and un-formulation and restructuring of expectation, gap-filling etc

Introduction:

Interpreting literature is a way of raising questions about it. The more questions raised, and the more difficult they are to answer, the more likely we are going to be tempted to want some kind of "toolkit," and theory provides just the variety of tools that readers can employ to answer the questions that literature raise. Formalist and structuralist theorists tend to emphasize a predictable relationship between the reader and the language of literature because individual readers, as Roland Barthes has pointed out, "cannot by [themselves] either create or modify" language, for "it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate." At the same time, as poststructuralists emphasize, language can be slippery and unstable, because the signifiers (the words in the text) lack a clear and direct relation to what we think (or hope) is the signifieds (the ideas or concepts) to which they refer. If the hermeneutical tradition is concerned with self-understanding through interpretation, reader-response theory explores the specific mechanisms whereby this self-understanding is achieved through the act of reading.

The importance of the reader in literary theory has long been acknowledged, but the reader's role has historically been subordinated to an understanding of the text's content. Here Roland Barthes argued that authorship is just a linguistic function. The author is a subject position in a text or discourse, not a psychological being who serves as locus and origin of meaning. In the place of the author, Barthes introduces the "modern scripture." The script is a "subject with the book as a predicate," "born simultaneously with the text." So too is the reader, but "at the cost of the death of the Author." The paper is divided into two parts the first is a general introduction of Roland Barthes and his works and the place in literary criticism, the second is the detailed discussion about his essay with summing up with conclusions.

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg, northern France, but after his father's death in World War I, his mother relocated to Bayonne. In 1924, the family moved to Paris, where Barthes studied classics, grammar, and philology at the Sorbonne, receiving degrees in 1939 and 1943. 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 academic appointments include director of studies at *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (1960–76), and chair of the department of literary semiology at the *Collège de France* (1976–80). His early work emphasized semiology and structural linguistics. *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) introduced the concept of *écriture*, the "written" quality of language, while *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *S/Z* (1970) focused on the structuralist analysis of literary texts. In works like *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), he transcended the limitations of structuralism and became a pioneer of post-structuralism. His last work, *Camera Lucida* (1980), explored the communicative potential of photography, bringing to bear on that medium his unique brand of poststructuralist semiology. The present paper analyses 'The Death of the Author'- the seminal essay of Roland Barthes. In "The Death of the Author", he argues against traditional literary criticism's practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text and instead argues that writing and creator are unrelated. In this particular essay, Barthes argues against the method of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity

II

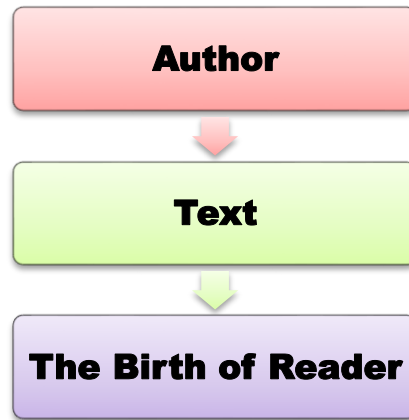


Figure no. 1
The Birth of Reader

As the above figure describes and according to M.H. Abrams, authors as "authors are individuals who by their intellectual and imaginative powers, purposefully create from the materials of their experiences and reading, a literary work which is distinctively their own". This definition describes implicitly that an author cannot produce anything unless he could find an opportunity as his experience and words as an expression of the experience. Barthes believes that writing is not subjective in nature rather it is objective and no other element can intervene in establishing its meaning. The Death of the Author is an essay where Barthes depicts a kind of post-structuralism or deconstructive view of the author. While announcing the metaphoric death of the author he mutates himself by taking different stands. It also specifies the death of structuralism. In this essay, Barthes pulls strings against the pattern of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity—their social views, historical context, creed, ethnicity, psychology, or other aspects such as biographical or on their ascribe—to distil meaning from the author's original work. This type of criticism involves the experiences and biases of the author describe as a definitive "explanation" of the text. Barthes considers this methodology of reading may be evidently tidy and convenient but in general hasty and flawed: "To give a text an author" and assign a single, correlating interpretation to it "is to impose a limit on that text". Here, the ancient issue regarding the place of the author in the text is being questioned by Barthes. He squabbles that the author loses his voice as the moment he writes the text. How text is being correlated by the reader is more important. The author is nothing more than a dragoman and imitator and everything is not original for him. He simply recreates the materials that were already used.

Writing is the loss of our own voice or redacting of 'self'. The author starts stepping toward his death at the moment he starts writing. The language itself speaks in writing not the author. Hence, it is language that functions where the author is nothing less. As the moment writer starts writing, he is dead he writes as he has no control over the text but lays on the interpretation of readers. Even the writer begins to write it is unimaginative. Fabrication of quotations from thousands of cultural sources is considered as text. The author doesn't confine the language to a certain limit he involves infinite meanings. He licenses the readers to decode the text. Further, the result ends with reader producing multiple meanings. So, every text is the result of reusing of used ones.

Barthes states two main reasons why the death of the Author is inevitable and favourable. Starting with Barthes, he states that the author is solely a way through which a story is narrated. Neither created the story nor formed it, these have been there since the whole time. Merely the story is being retold which has already been told several times. He has a dispute against the original notion that is very flattery, mainly considering the many ways that the stories are logically broken down into pieces of a predictable sequence of events. Barthes states in his second statement that reader if views through the author's eye it would be non-beneficial from reading. By the interpretation of the Author with the text, the text is limited automatically. Instead of conveying the original message from their own experiences and therefore creating their own ideas of their lives and how its interlinked with the world around them the reader is restricted to and starts guessing what the author is meant. The reader only focuses on clarifying the Author's opinion and whether they agree or not with the Author and don't focus on their own thoughts and opinions of the piece.

Barthes claims that it is the status of the reader should be elevated instead of the Author. Any knowledge gained from a piece of writing should be considered as the personal experiences of the reader and by his insightful interpretation not as dexterity of the Author. Barthes considers that if it is the reader who brings life to the text then it has got no limits to the imagination because everyone in this universe has their own unique incidents and experiences that have paved and carved them. In most cases, the death of the Author is necessary for maverick readers. The Author's death is not always needful, however, in few cases; the Author's ideology is needed for the reader to be compactable and for greater understanding of what is being read. If the writing of the Author is linked with any past own experiences of the reader then there is a compulsory birth of the reader and adequate reasons for the death of the Author. However, if the reader is like a blank paper without any experiences on which the judgment is based or in extracting the meaning from the text then there is a necessity of the Author to guide the reader of their own experiences.

It appears that when Barthes says "the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the death of the Author," the idealistic him is speaking, not realistic. The understanding and interpretation of the reader might help and this has no connection between the author and the text, Barthes is unerring in that. The only thing that Barthes tried is to extend the meaning and interpretation of the work of art to embrace the interaction of the other texts and the responses of the reader. This notion of the active reader and develop the role of the reader will be taken by The German School of Constance into "reader-response" criticism and the impact of plural readings upon the act(s) of interpretation. They the theoreticians of Constance have developed a theory named Reception Theory in order to explain the interaction between the work and the audience as the "horizon of expectations," but it is always important to make a distinction: the student movements in the late sixties motivated them/the scholars of Constance. Barthes viewpoint is that reading is not a consumer but a producer. This suggests the superiority of the reader over the writer and reader is not an end-user but an ever-producer. After writing a certain piece of literature the writer loses his authority over the writing. The expression is the property of the writer and perception is the property of the reader. The reader enjoys multiple doors to enter into the field of reading and has even more when he comes out.

To sum up, a writer is nothing since he gets everything from cultural dictions. The writer is the one just holds the language but doesn't have hegemony the meanings and words. The old and traditional authors who had dominance to catch up the meanings are dead. The reader response

theory is on the place of a nation and death of the authors. It is the one who reads and justifies the meanings. The reader or critic never gets anything from another side of the language than writer/author as original persons flourish and get them beyond the known language.

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