

Authorial Textual Existence

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Abstract:

This paper hints upon the origin of texts referring them to their authors unlike what the French philosopher and critic Roland Barthes alluded to as the death of the author. Whether this Barthesian notion is symbolic or actual, one cannot but configure a source for texts, a very erudite source (author) that melted all of his precious metals in a pot that is text. Paradoxically enough, Barthes himself, as this paper will demonstrate, confessed in some of his works like *The Pleasure of the Text* that there must be an author to narratives. This paper triggers the question why the world of criticism should push itself to either extremes of author negligence or readers subordination and why it should not lean to a middle course of equal importance for both reader and writer. The spirit of twentieth century with its two world wars and the introduction of mass-destruction weapons had highly likely possessed some critics, thinkers or philosophers. Hence, this paper will give the author his due rights rather than declaring his death in a text that screams with its beauty, linguistic punning, plot, suspense, etc. of his literary uniqueness and knowledge.

Keywords: Barthes, author textual existence, modern criticism, violence against the origin, aesthetics of criticism and literature.....

"Death of father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures.

If there is no longer a father, why tell stories?"

– Roland

Barthes, *The pleasure of the Text*, p 47.

The text, as this paper will firstly demonstrate, echoes its origin back to the time when it was written. Claiming that, however, does not obliterate the wide waves of its echo at the moment it is read. Nor does this claim bypass the possible futuristic configurations of it. I believe, unlike some literary trends such as Formalistic approach and Barthes' notions regarding the death of the author, that the author's hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and intuition present themselves satisfactorily in the text as an origin.

Further, Jacques Derrida, in *Writing and Difference*, notes that "Husserl, by his rejection of system and speculative closure, and by virtue of the style of his thought, is attuned to the historicity of meaning and to the

possibility of its becoming " (155). This historicity implies that words have got a history of meaning and uses (etymology) and it signifies that words have contingent future semantic development. Further, this history of words and their meanings suggest a beginning or an origin when these words were first used, which also might recall an occasion for the use of these words. For example, the occasion for the word "space age" is the twentieth century discoveries of the space. Also, one can view the occasion for Husserl's 'historicity of meaning' as suggesting the inflation of the sign in language. Similarly, a text has an instant of happening, an occasion or an origin. Like words, it has a history of meanings or interpretations, none of which presides over the others or is truer than it since the temporal and cultural dimensions show variable factors for each of these meanings.

Moreover, the writer's "I" is never absent in any literary text since this "I" has an instant of writing itself, an occasion, and a history of referents similar to the textual temporally-various meanings. The "I" shows its history in the author at the time of writing and in the reader at the time of reading. The reader, in addition, could be viewed as involved in a quest for the "I" in the text. This quest of the "I" has got various phases. It is a quest of the "I" as author, character, friend, enemy etc.... This "I" as such makes a direct object for a transitivity that shows this "I" as a recipient of actions in the text. In other words, the

reader sees the 'other' receiving actions in the text. Similarly, the reader searches for the "I" as "me" in it. Here, the reader, himself, falls under the transitivity of the text, i.e. he is the direct object of the actions in the text. Another phase of the "I"'s readerly quest is the "I" as he / she carrying out actions in the text. In all of the three phases, the "I" should not be seen as a pronoun but as existence or as a body. Here, authorial existence or "I" is naturally anaphoric of the production of text and readerly interaction with it. In terms of the law of cause and effect, the author's "I" is the instigator of all readerly phases of the quest for the "I" mentioned above. Now, is the author dead in the text, as Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author" argues? If not, what is the nature of authorial existence in the text?

Homage to the Author:

In his essay "The Death of the Author", Barthes states that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin." (1977). It goes without saying that the word 'destruction' signifies a vehement abolishing of a literary text's background. It might be suggested that this word is meant to act connotatively to underscore the notion that priority must go to the reader of a text rather than its author. However, the connotative use of this word here, if it is metaphorically used, is too exaggerative as to completely erase the author who is no longer safe in the age of mass destruction. Why is this passion to destroy and annul? One can reduce an authorial supposed dominance

over the text simply through highlighting and prioritizing the role of the reader. Moreover, this destruction of the author shows writing as a weapon that is directed not against a writer's social, political or economic hardships but instead against the writer himself. This suggests that writers get involved in a process of self-annihilation as soon as they scribble the first sign of their textual existence.

Further, in attempting to give birth to the reader, Barthes announces not only the death of the author but also that of the reader. Barthes in the aforementioned essay argues that "every text is eternally written here and now" (1977). Therefore, in the Barthesian mindset, the reader becomes the new author of the text. Accordingly, regardless of whether they were produced by average readers or expert readers –critics, for instance– the past readings of any text could be deemed as 'authorings' of it. These readerly "authorings" descending from the past are not, as Barthes states, "written eternally here and now" (1977). Also, these past readings might form a reference point or an origin to the present readers of the text; we often go back to what critics have said about Shakespeare's works. Thus, these past readerly "authorings" of the text are also destroyed origins since the pronoun "every" does not spare a possibility.

Moreover, a writer could be a reader of his own text. Certainly, the first reader of the text is its writer. It would be an exceedingly extemporized view to

suppose that a writer hands his text out to a publisher without reading it over and again. Corrections made by the author on the text are re-readings of it since these corrections could reflect a shift in thought or a new outlook to what has been written. It would be a big loss to completely ignore, as the word "destruction" signifies, that the reader of the text could be its author. This loss arises from the fact that authorial readings of the text might comprise comments, interviews or even casual remarks on it. These authorial remarks, comments, and interviews are very special ones since they are author-produced and would provide readers with clues to understand the text. Like any response to stimuli in the world, reading literary works shows instances of relativity in reaction or counter-action. Readers form a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds and penchants, just like the authors of literary texts. However, authors reading their own texts could produce special readerly ones, i.e. they will dig special meanings out of them and their perception of the occasion, personal symbols, and realities of their texts will be higher than our conception of them.

More than that, some feminists tend to conceive of the relation between the writer and his text as biological, thus, inseparable. In a book titled *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, Judith Still notes that "male geniuses have seen themselves as 'giving birth' to their masterpieces, and this spiritual or

intellectual birth is, as they see it, of far greater value (and harder work) than common birth" (265). Hence, it is a biological or bodily affiliation that intertwines the author with his text. An author cerebrates and never spares his highest mental capacities to deliver his text. Feminists like Still intimate that male writers get through intellectual labor to give birth to their texts. Refinements, corrections or publication are probably authorial activities intended to disseminate the text or, better say, lead it, as we lead a child, into maturity.

In her preface to Derrida's *of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak explains that the relation between the word and its meaning from Derridian point of view is similar to father (meaning) and son (word). As soon as the father (meaning or origin) engenders the son (word), the word annuls its meaning or its father and lifts it up to a higher sphere of existence. This process is known as Hegelian *Aufhebung* (Derrida xi). For the first glance, this annulment of the father might appear to be congruent with Barthes' proposition in destroying the origin. Yet, Derrida focuses on the future of the sign rather than on destroying its origin. Spivak elaborates that Derrida views "the seed (word or signifier) as being disseminated but not capable of inseminating nor recovered by the father" (Derrida xi). Therefore, Derrida proposes the reductionism of the origin and focuses on the "seed"(word) and its future without killing or annulling this origin. Here, the origin, or the father, is

represented as capable of inseminating. He gives meaning once and becomes impotent, but he is not completely absent in his text because he has affiliations with what he has produced.

Similarly, the text could be configured as the seed (word) produced by the father (author or origin). As soon as the text is born, it becomes "disseminated" or ready to have new fathers (readers) without committing patricide. Thus, the text pays homage to the origin (author) that eagerly wishes it a prosperous future. Who is more eager and anxious about the reputation of the text than its author? The answer to this question is fairly crystal clear. Furthermore, the Derridain metaphor discussed above reflects a wide-spread notion about the father-son relationship between the author and the text. Like Barthes, Derrida eliminates the supposed author's dominant power over the text or its interpretive referentiality to him; yet, he does not completely uproot the authorial existence or text production instants.

Again, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida expresses this conception of the text as "an emission that can not return to its origin in the father. Not an exact and controlled polysemy but proliferation of always different, always postponed meanings" (ixv). Hence, the author is the origin of the text in Derridian thought but this origin could never be the focal point for the process of signification in it. Also, Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, deems the lack of authorial control over the text as

"Castration" (ixvi). This Castration, however, does not reflect utter authorial infertility but "Castration, the lack of superintendence by phallic authority, is what transforms the "author" or the book" into a text" (ixvi). As a result, the text contains the author as a sign despite of the "lack of superintendence" or "castration".

I think, therefore, that the body of the author writes itself –including its fears, its agonies, its orientations, and disorientations– in the text. Organs such as ears, eyes, nose, skin, and tongue make of the body a tentacle for the mind that ,in effect, processes what it (he) receives from the tentacle (body). The tentacle (body), being in pain, will send messages of pain and suffering to the mind that "I (the body) am suffering, help!" The body as a tentacle for the mind at moments of danger, pain or fear becomes more attentive to itself. The twentieth century has witnessed many unprecedented wars of massive destruction. Due to the ferocity of these wars and the shock they induced, the body has become in a crisis and in a vigil of impending danger. This might account for the abundance of apocalyptic and violent narratives found in this century, the century of mass-destruction weapons. A piece of evidence on this abundance of cynic and violent narratives would be the emergence of what is known as "Literature of wars" as a new branch in the literary domain such as the literature of the two world wars.

Moreover, this violence in literature, or violence communicated via

literature, has also found its way in criticism. The process of signification in some literary trends such as Deconstruction is likened to a nuclear proliferation, which suggests endless meaning production through the split of any new signified into a signifier and a signified. Indeed, this rationalization of the sign as being similar to a nuclear proliferation goes against man's need for understanding. Besides, some critical views as the "death of the author" theory commit violent actions against literature such as 'killing' and 'annulment'. Having a panoramic view of some literary orientations that have been emerging since the advent of the twentieth century, one could observe that most of these literary orientations came as an unsatisfied and, sometimes, violent reaction to their predecessor orientations. For example, formalistic criticism that advocates the independence of literature underestimates traditional criticism such as biographical and moral approaches. Also, Deconstructionist criticism could be seen as a counter response to Structural approach. It seems that pessimistic impression almost prevalent in the literature of this century is also noticed in criticism. Therefore, criticism should come at peace with itself and with literary texts as well.

The body in almost numberless literary pieces, especially modern and post-modern ones, communicates its suffering and dilemma. The melancholic tone is heard clearly in these narratives. The characters suffer or even the

narratives suffer under the tension of wars, mass destruction weapons, fears, fascism, Nazism, or individualism. Criticism does not need "killing" of the author nor "dismembering" of the text. Readers, irritated by the complexities of modern life, need "in place of a hermeneutics an erotics of art" (Sontag 14). Cutting down off more violence and complexity, it is adequate to view the author as living in the text despite the fact that the latter could be sometimes hellish to the extent that the author detaches himself from it. However, this very detachment dialectically signifies attachment to the text and rejection of the real austere world represented in it. The author's absence from the text, also using dialectics, proves his presence in it; it is the absence of the presence or the presence of the absence. Barthes himself, incapable to act away from the effect of the archetypal nature of the existence of an origin or beginning, enunciates the existence of the author in his essay "From work to Text". He states: "It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the text, in his text, but he then does so as a guest. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological his inscription is ludic"(1971).

Comparing this excerpt to what Barthes proposes in his essay "The Death of the Author", one can notice that Barthes might be caught in a self-contradiction instant. Expressions like "'Destruction of every voice of origin',

'The author is never more than the instance writing', and 'writing is [.....] the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' " found in "The Death of the Author" could be refuted by " 'The coming back of the author and 'the author being inscribed in the novel like a character in it' "found in Barthes' essay, "From Work To Text". Destruction does not spare a possibility for the coming back of the author nor inviting him as a guest to the text that is, as Barthes insists on what he denies, "his text" (1971).

It is highly probable that the author, as Barthes argues in "From Work To Text", "is no longer privileged, paternal.... "(1971). However, I think that the author, "being inscribed in the novel," (1971) gains a semiotic privilege in the sense that he is a sign that can bear lots of meanings. I find it proper, thus, to view the authorial existence in the text as a somatic semiotic sign, i.e. a sign that is related to the body. The creation of any text is a special authorial bodily experience of the senses and the mind that begets meanings through these senses or tentacles. The authorial somatic existence offers the readers of the text possible alter-egos or counter-egos, if the reader stands against what is written. In addition, the text, through these alter/counter egos, gains a simulation of human body.

Also, the more readers we have for the text; the more alter/counter egos we would have to the author. This alter-ego ligament between author and reader

could also take place between author and character or character and reader. Such an interaction of vicarious reciprocity keeps the wheel of literature moving. In an illuminating essay entitled "The Somatography of the Written Sign: Literary Text through the Mirror Stage," Morana Cale observes that "human subject and aesthetic image of any kind, including a written literary text, are connected by a sort of mutual specularly, which arises in the very moment of their interaction, invoking almost inevitably an analysis of their relation in term of Lacan's Mirror stage theory" (2004). So, any literary activity of writing and reading involves an interaction process of viewing the self in the other; the other could be a text, an author, a reader, a character or a friend etc. Such elements conflating with one another get into reflexive meaning-productive forces through their bodiliness, be it animate (human) or inanimate (tangible). Therefore, the author's "I" is a somatic sign living in the text, bi-acting with the reader and formulating a text (a subtext) within the text. This subtextuality of the author, thus, makes the first sign of textual bodiliness.

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