

Relocating the Author: A Re-Reading of Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author."

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Abstract

Whenever a piece of writing takes place, this task of writing comes from a conglomeration of the author's own state of being and whatever he has acquired throughout his nurturing in the social, political, economic, religious, geographic, ethnographic or philosophic surrounding that constitutes altogether a *Conscious line* within him. This *line* forms the internal structure of a *Subjective Preference* within himself that helps him differentiate from other works or *Author-function*. It builds him as a unique harbinger of *mass voices* that he experiences from his own personal life and which he blurbs into his writings through the *languasization* of events, feelings, emotions in the form of imagery, symbol and metaphors. So the claim of Roland Barthes that the author is *dead* seems to jeopardize this epoch making concept by a post modern, *post post structuralist* re-reading of this text in relation to the utter refraction of any text.

This paper intends to relocate the notion of the author as *dead* whenever a piece of writing is produced and to show how the omnipresence of the author plays a vital role for the greater understanding of that particular text which has been produced in the light of a rational, neutral perspective with a thorough study as well as quotations from the very text, *The Death of the Author*.

Key words: *Conscious line, Subjective Preference, Author-function, Mass Voices, Languasization, post post structuralist.*

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In his work, *The Death of the Author*, Barthes, after narrating a theory on his favor that he wanted to assert, states that “ *writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.*”¹ whose voice is destructed? From where the voice is conceived? The words that give shape to the language? Or the rhetorical structure that binds the language in a chain? If so, then what this voice speaks? About whom? Whose identity does it talk about? We have plenty of basic queries about the *identity* of the *voices* that his theory talks about for the reason that this very identity gives birth to a wider phenomenon-- who is saying this, what is said, whom it is said about. Therefore it accentuates an *authority* for its origin that itself upholds the society, the economy, the politics, culture, philosophy, science, knowledge from where it is born. Thus there is a significant relation between the author and the work that the author produces. Producing a literary work does not necessarily terminate the life of the author, rather the very presence of the author advocates a thorough understanding of the text.

The Knowledge, as primer, about the social-political-ethnic-philosophic -scientific and biographic history of the author looms a *Conscious line*, that consolidates the greater grasping of the text. This *Conscious line* is an amalgamation of the author's own self, his society, culture, religion, literature, and his experiences as a fellow creature in a world whom he writes about, and the finely knotting of all these into threads of a language which eventually raises the beauty of the text. It is this *line* where a reconciliation between the perceived knowledge and the oration of words altogether gives birth to a more accurate demonstration of the phenomenon on which the author wades. This *line* is the culminating force for defending the author's sovereignty onto its creation, its contribution on the production of the work, rather than solely on its verbal expression that Barthes like post structuralists emphasized. So, the *author* is the substitution of a society, of a history, of a topography, of an ethnography, of a human psyche that he embodies into his writings and that Barthes and Foucault like figures ignore at the time of their reading, by merely trusting on the treacherous acts of language. And as for the death of the author that Barthes implied caused by narrating the text, the text itself attests a mark of the author as an omnipresent ambiance that the language embodies in a structural pattern. The *Conscious line* facilitates the task of engraving the *author's* omnipotence onto its works as an inscription after a competent accommodation with the word formation of a particular language.

Barthes made a mistake when he said that “ *an author is a modern product,*’ a product of ‘*the Middle Ages*’² for the reason that he curbs the innumerable influence of the Classics,

namely that of Sophocles, Aristophanes, Plato or Aristotle whose works, though mythological some of them, illumine the then society, politics, religion that are the manifestations of the authors themselves. Whatever these writers had implored in their writings, each and every text

forms a discourse on the subject that seemed so significant to them. The verbal oration of language can not hold the stance on which they are compelled to pen down. And this is not only confined to the classics, this can also be very visible throughout the period of times in the world literature. For instance, this tactics can be viewed in T.S. Eliot's works--irrespective of any literary genres, to say, poem, play or novel. If we go through line by line of his epoch making poem, *The Wasteland*, the mere language is incompatible to decode the actual connotation of the poem. Here a pre-knowledge on the motif of the author behind writing this poem is very requisite for a fair understanding of the poem nevertheless every effort for extracting its kernel will be in vein. Thus, "what are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,/ you can not say, or guess, for you know only /A heap of broken images, where the sun beats....."³ will be absurd to begin reading without knowing its historical context. Here mere emphasis on its superficial expression can not hold the very context of writing this poem. Then how can post structuralists exhort their scream on the whims of words?

Besides, their accentuation on the play of language for the perception of the text also validates the presence of their authority as an *author* while they undertook writing the preponderance of language-- after a complete disillusionment and disappointment on the social, political, exhausted human life-setting they are living. Can, thus, a single piece of a writing, that language gives a good syntax, be produced without the benevolence of the author? Can language or the syntax of language provide what the author does? In no way, it can. It is just a means of expression whatever the author cultivates in his mind. The rhetoric of language itself affirms the mastery of its creator-- the orators who are in authorial position. The selection of texts as well as its originators that Barthes quoted in this history making essay hints a *subjective preference*--that of the works of Balzac, Mallarme, Valery, Proust Thomas de Quincey and some other more, which in turn constitutes an authoritarian Western superlative outlook and therefore undermining the other important exponents of literature, science or philosophy that were very prevalent at that time. This subjective preference, thus, objects the claim that the *author* is dead.

Barthes's insistence on *surrealism*, as " [it] contributed to the desacrilization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning",⁴ as for enhancing the accuracy of his theory, insinuates an authorial choosiness as well as political overview in the world scenario as for as human apathy and loosened humanity is there as universal truth. The writers, emerged it as a sheer means of escaping from the wrath of *Dadaism*,⁵ in this enigmatic artistic movement, take themselves away, like that of *Deus exmachina*,⁶ from the world that is filthy, as they thought, unacceptable for the living of true humans and they madly ransack a room of peace, comfort, where man made hazardous deeds are not permissible. This process of isolating the ever changing way of writing genres and therefore ushering new trends of writing style is in many ways shows the mark of authority on the behalf of its writers. And that mark confides the holocaust, the death of humanity, values of human civilization at the cost of oppressed after the First and Second World War. The surrealist writers' attempt to create a new world totally impossible into the earthly world after their utter frustration, depression with on going moments they were going through into their writings hence constitutes the *author-function*⁷ as a background. Then how can surrealism lose its author? Or why should surrealism be deprived from its author?

In the line of Freud and Lacan what they explored in their respective studies of psychoanalytic criticism, that of *conscious, unconscious, subconscious, repression*⁸ and *dreams and its languages*,⁹ it becomes clear that human psychology has an innumerable influence for any writing. This facilitates blurring words with that which is tantalizing upon the writer's head. He writes about what hovers around his state of mind or had once occupied into his consciousness refracting from his social milieu. So this state of mind or consciousness builds the special identity of that particular author and separates other authors from him for the treatment of this psychic parameter. For instance, if we look at the writings of Virginia Woolf, we will see a lot of stances that talk about sex, women, physicality of women that invisibly construct the female identity and their potentiality. On the other hand, if we go through the novels of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, we will experience the treatment of sex as a natural compulsion that every human beings are subject to suck from its counter sex holder. Then it becomes clear that the author of any work has plenty of contributions for the formation of his or her text. And this extra information outside the text helps reader grasp the meaning as well as tendency of the text.

In another place Barthes said that “*to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing*”¹⁰ that seems to be ridiculous. Because if a text can not be understood in a *limited* sphere, then how the stimulus behind stepping this text down into pages be revealed? A piece of writing is an impromptu creation of certain events of life relating to social political-cultural or religious, whatever good or bad it may be, that its creators go through. This very state of the authors can not be perceived until we decipher the background of the author. So what is the result of composing texts if it can not be grasped into the brain of the readers? Does it have any task to accomplish? In another word, what will we do with the wider conception that may squirm into our heads in time of reading? Can anything be deciphered from such a multidimensional specter of inevitable events that the author intended to broadcast through his text at the time of writing? All the answers will be no!

He is true when he stated “*a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination*”¹¹ but not with the point he had tried to imply, rather it is with the *Conscious line* that prompted him to write this text. The *destination* is in an overwhelming penetration of that antics of the author which accelerated this task of writing. Hence, the notion “*the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author*”¹² is misleading as with the case of readers' understanding of the text. The author as a background of the text paves way the deed of thorough swallow of events smeared in the pages by readers and not by causing ‘*death*’ of the *author*. Readers are, thus, the intensification of the *Conscious line*--a vantage position, which amalgamates the author's self-identity, his history and the sudden current of reasons for undertaking the task of writing a particular text, into the writings that forms altogether the identity of the reader.

The emergence of any form of art in any time or period of civilization, in fact, is a compromise, a combination, a reconciliation, a readjustment of the moment on which the art is being produced and the preceding epiphany that differs the tendency of their own expression, but are tightly in connection with each other as a whole. What parameter the newly conceived art shapes itself within that permeated boundary of time is already there in the years old history of civilization that our ancestors of humanity had signaled into their writings. So what we produce today as literary works are actually the transmutation, the semiotic presentation of the past with a touch of

contemporaneity that asserts its own author. In the words of T.S.Eliot, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation to the dead poets and artists.....the existing monuments(the writing trend) form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them.....the relations, proportions, values of each work(of the new and old) toward the whole are readjusted”¹³. The composition as well as motif of the *New Historicism* of the 1980s can also be paralleled with this notion of the influence of the author into a composed text. New historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt or Louis Montrose, had codified old history into the present time newly achieved history with a view to upholding the semblance and prevalence of that particular incident that he risked to pen down which was very prominent at their own time¹⁴. So it becomes clear that whatever attempts are taken to write down as a literary work have its roots somewhere in the past. And this also becomes clear that whatever Barthes had tried to robust in his essay is in any way, directly or indirectly--we can now exhort, the transmutation, the word to word or semiotic translation of a years old concept that he might have borrowed and which also shows the ever presence of the author.

As the last point of my opinion about the relocation of the author, I would like to shift my readers’ attention to the very first line of Barthes’ text where Barthes has quoted an event from an another text, namely *Sarrasine*, by Balzac.

Here we see that “a castrato disguised as a woman” elaborated a quite long sentence about the female identity of the disguised castrato. Now, a simple question arises simply from Barthes’ quotation of the text. Is he really speaking that Balzac had embodied any of his characters like this Castrato?If so, then how can we validate that by merely saying or writing this into pages? May Barthes not quote wrongly or mislead his readers into an unfathomable ignorance if the actuality of this very text is not checked? And the authentication of the text or the quotation , that is the creation of an author like figure, illumines itself with an authoritative stink. This shows the presence of the author unto its creation and that’s why we say or rather attest that this work is by Balzac. So the *birth of the reader* takes place at the cost of scrutinizing the honesty of the composition they are composed of which is handled by a mediator, who looms an authoritative subject. Thus every work, irrespective of any genres, necessitates their own creator for the benevolence of its readers. He is visibly invisible and invisibly visible throughout the text. The author’s presence accelerates the compulsion of the readers’ understanding of the text and hence we are to take him believing him as the mastermind of what we perceive as pleasure from his created things blurred into the pages as text.

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²Lodge,David. “*Modern Criticism and Theory*”,(2011).pp65.

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⁴Lodge,David. “*Modern Criticism and Theory*”,(2011).pp166.

⁵Abraham,M.H. “*A Hand Book of Literary Terms*”,(2009).pp303.

⁶this idea has been from the Greek playwright Euripides to denote the alighting of sorrows from the earthly world.

⁷This is the same denotation that Foucault meant in his “*What is an Author?*” essay,published in

1969.

⁸Nayar, K, Pramod, “*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*”,(2010).pp64-69.

⁹Nayar, K, Pramod, “*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*”,(2010).pp75-78.

¹⁰Lodge,David. “*Modern Criticism and Theory*”,(2011).pp167.

¹¹Lodge,David. “*Modern Criticism and Theory*”,(2011).pp168.

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¹³Eliot,T.S. Ed,Enright,D,J and Chickera,de Ernst. “*Tradition and Individual Talent*” in“English Critical Texts”.pp294-295.

¹⁴Barry, Peter, “*Beginning Theory*”.pp166-175.

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