



The Death of the Author

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Abstract

In the present paper a research has been done on the essay 'The Death of the Author' by Roland Barthes'. It has been explained into much simpler language about what the author conveys for better understanding and further references. Also the criticism has been done by various critics from various sources which is helpful from examination point of view. The paper has been divided into five main contexts with an introduction and the conclusions. Also the references have been written that depicts the sources of criticism.

Keywords Psychological Context, Linguistics, Historical Context, Cultural Context, Critical Context.

1 Introduction

The Death of the Author (French: La mort de l'auteur) is a 1967 essay by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes. This essay 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 creator and writing are unrelated. The essay's first English-language publication was in the American journal *Aspen*, no 5-6 in 1967; the French debut was in the magazine *Manteia*, no 5 in 1968. Barthes argues against the method of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of author's identity – their political views, historical context, religion, ethnicity, psychology or other biographical or personal attributes – to distil meaning from the author's works.

Readers must thus separate a literary work from its creator in order to liberate the text from interpretive tyranny. Each piece of writing contains multiple layers and meanings. The

essential meaning of a work depends on impressions of a reader.

2 Psychological Context

"Once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality – that is finally external to any function but very exercise of the symbol – this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins"

Here, Roland Barthes states that 'when an author dies the reader is born'. He says that when the action or the work of the author is recounted or reconsidered it is not the act that directly relies on the reality rather it is that act which goes for intransitive ends that is, the action taken indirectly on the object and due to this the author's voice is lost. The voice of the author or the perception of the author that he put into his work no longer exists and so is further transferred to the interpretations and the perceptions of the reader wholly. The work then has nothing to do with the author and is solely the reader's response to that particular work of the author. The meaning of the text does not come from the author once it is out of author's hands and in the reader's hands but from the reader's own perception and his own very personal experiences, for example, The author has talked about Satan and his sins in the novel 'Dr. Faustus' by 'Christopher Marlowe' and showed about the doomed Doctor Faustus in the end but yet many people are attracted to the sinned world and keeps on doing the deeds against the nature and gets through it but still there are some that believe in karma and thus perform good deeds. So it is not the meaning and the perception that author gives or tries to give but it is rather the interpretation of the reader and what meaning does the reader gets from the work of the author.



Critic - It rejects the idea of authorial intent. According to Jacquelyn Atchison, Roland Barthes is thinking idealistically, and not realistically about 'the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the death of the author'. He says that author should neither be praised nor be blamed for the text or his work but the readers want heroes and villains, people to look up to and people to despise. A good writer earns praise but a controversial writer can draw just as much negative attention as an inspiring writer draws positivity. In this way people get to categorise their lives and its agendas and to categorise books readers need labels. Their favourite labels are the authors who wrote the books. The readers are partially responsible for the continued presence of the author as well as the author's own interests in being involved.

3 Linguistics

"For Mallarme, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach – that point where language alone acts, "performs, and not "oneself".

The author here Roland Barthes says that the language it is which is most important and the way of expressing it. Language is the main element that actually gives the literal meaning to the thoughts of the author and which further extends a friendly shake into the reader's mind. Language is very important as it puts the thoughts of the author into action in the text which gives the reader an opportunity and the agenda to go through the text. Language is basically the vital criteria so as to attract the readers to one's work or text. It is the language which helps reader if understandable to connect to the author's work and create an as per illusion according to the reader's own interpretations. It is usually the language and the way through which it is expressed to give rise to the reader's interest. The thoughts when translated into the language the specific voice of the author is lost and the only thing that is left is reader's own perception. It is then the language that speaks rather than the author. Language is basically the words that are stringed together with is literal meaning and put into action in the text.

Critic - Throughout an author's body of writing there are certain features, techniques and styles that they use continuously, which characterise their work. Each writer has their own range of vocabulary that is limited, possibly due to their limited knowledge and possibly due to the context. New words are invented every year from technology words to words describing new fashion or even street slang, and writers invent many of the new words. Reading a certain author's work is like listening to music by certain composer. You are unlikely to confuse music of "The Bach and The Beetles".

4 Historical Context

"The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text unity lies not in its origin but in its destination"

Here, Roland Barthes says that it is not the author who is solely responsible for the work, rather when writer writes they believe that they are the ideas of their own and are known as the author of the creation but the problem here lies that it is not his ideas but some from the previous text that he or she has become aware of for example, in music an artist is considered to be the author of particular piece but in actual it were the tools that were pre-existed that are unlike, like writer writes words which already exists in human expression. So Roland believes that it is the interpretations of the readers or the viewer regarding the particular text and that the author has nothing to do with it. It is the reader that decides of what does the text means and that if it has the creativity. He believes that the text is not created and so is not original and is always made up of pre-existing ideas and thoughts. Therefore, the author is not really an author but rather a scripiter that merely puts the pre-existing texts altogether.

Critic - The presence of the author is necessary for the reader to achieve a greater understanding of what is being read. For instance, in the book *Slaughterhouse 5: A Children's Crusade*, Kurt Vonnegut went through great effort to make himself known at the beginning of the book. The entire chapter is told in first person. What if the reader has no own personal past experiences to



compare it to the work of the author, how will the reader grasp the meaning of the text with then it might be necessary for the author to tell the reader of their own experiences. The understanding of the reader is best helped by the presence of the author.

5 Cultural Context

“We know that a context does not consist of line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning(the message of Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture”

There is cultural difference that affects the interpretation of the reader regarding the text or the work. Barthes says that the text provides with not single but rather various spiritual, religious meanings and the text has various dimensions as per its originality because it is adopted by many different authors from already existing ideas, cultures and texts. He states that author id no God because there is no originality to his work to which perceptions and interpretations cannot be changed and so has to be fixed. He says that text is like a thin woven fine transparent material of various context that manifests from thousands of sources of various different cultures, its lifestyles, the beliefs, the values of many different significant or trivial societies and countries. It is basically the multiplicity of writing in which it extricates and where nothing is deciphered for example, the epic Ramayana is interpreted by different people regarding their different perceptions and influences of cultures.

Critic - It is tempting to see hypertext as realising Barthes’ utopian dreams of a writing liberated from the author. The ability for each reader to add to, alter or simply edit a hypertext opens possibilities of collective authorship that breaks down the idea of writing as originating from single fixed source. Similarly, the ability to plot out unique patterns of reading, to move through a text in aleatory, non linear fashion, serves to highlight the importance of the reader in the “writing” of a text-each reading, even if it does not physically change the words - writes the text anew simply by rearranging it, by placing

different emphasis that might subtly inflect its meanings. The real allure of hypertext, it may turn out, is not its alliance with writerly text, but with the book, with its possibilities, through fixed links and narrow path choices, controlling and surprising reader. The author may be dead, but his ghosts may be more eloquent.

6 Critical Context

“Once the author is gone, the claim to ‘decipher’ a text becomes quite useless.... This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the author beneath the work: once the author is discovered, the text is ‘explained’: the critic has conquered”

Here, it is states that once the author is lost or gone and separated from the text it is quite difficult to then disentangle his or her text and get the idea or form a perception and interpretation. Thus this conception successfully suits the criticism as the discovery of the author is vital for the work or text and then once the author is discovered the text can easily be explained and interpreted. In this if the reader is not actually connected to the author, the signs system regarding the text can break down and can cause hurdles in the perceptions of the reader. That means that meanings cannot be instantly recognised and so a gap starts to form and widen between the text and its meaning, causing trouble for readers.

7 Conclusion

This whole essay by Roland Barthes relies on the death of the author where death signifies to if author is separated from the text only then the reader is free for its own perception and interpretation. He says that the text consists of multiple meanings, writings, issuing from several cultures, entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, contestation; but there is one place where the multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author but in fact the reader. The whole and the basic crux of the text, lies in the unity of the text is not in its origin rather in its destination; but this destination cannot be personal: the reader is the man without history, biography, psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths



of which the text is constituted. As Barthes says that birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author to set the reader free for its own perception of the text

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