

The death of Author.

Subject: literary theory and criticism 2.

Topic: The death of Author.

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"The Death of the Author" is an essay written in 1967 by French literary critic and philosopher Roland Barthes. It is a highly influential and provocative essay (in terms of the various claims it is making) and makes various significant development and changes in the field of literary criticism.

Through this relative short but artistic piece of work, Barthes critiques and shakes up the traditional way of approaching and analysing the text, one that is too author-centric: which is too focused in looking for the intentions of the author and analysing the life and background of the author to unravel the meaning of the text instead of just assessing the content of the text alone.

In the first paragraph, Barthes tries to explain the fundamental idea that he lays forward in his essay through the character of Zambinella taken from *Sarrasine*, a novella written by Balzac.

Talking about this character, who is actually a castrato (a castrated male) disguised as a woman, Balzac writes, "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling."

Barthes poses a question of whether it is ever possible to know whose ideas are coming forth in these expressions. Is these the character of that novella speaking? is it the man Balzac speaking with his preconceived knowledge and prejudice of women or is it someone else?

Basically, what Barthes makes us realise as a reader is that one can never find for certain through what a particular character is talking if it is the personal opinion of the author coming through the mouth of that character or someone else.

In the similar fashion of what W.K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley do in their essay titled "The Intentional Fallacy", Barthes also warns the reader to not pay unnecessary attention to neither the life of the author nor the 'real meaning' that author was trying to say through his work.

According to Barthes, the intentions of the author are irrelevant. The work isn't an exact replica of his intentions and in the process of giving words to the thoughts, writer intentionally or unintentionally is involved in a process of meaning-making on which he has not complete control as the author/ writer isn't a God.

Thus the pursuit of trying to figure out the author's intentions are a complete distraction and unnecessary as even if the author is alive (which is the not the case several times if the author is dead), one can't be fully certain if the author is genuine about his intentions.

And, in case even if the author is honestly telling his intentions behind what he has written, there is no guarantee that author was successfully able to depict that in his work, which would not only show a supposed failure but in fact add beauty to the text due to the various possible interpretations that it might offer.

Barthes critiques the idea of 'originality' and 'truth' that one associate with the author. This approach of giving excessive authority to the author has various problems. This approach makes us take the biographical approach to read the text.

This approach has two problems, one that it falsely assumes, as discussed above, that one can uncover the intentions of the author. Second, that there is a fixed meaning of the text that one should try to find.