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The author in literary theory and theories of literature

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We have become accustomed to regarding the question of the author in literary criticism and theory in anti-authorial terms. It is a quaintness of modern literary theory that the author, whom we would, commonsensically, expect to be the central agent in the production of the literary work, has, for the most part of the past century, been considered a liminal character of minor importance to literary criticism, and, if not completely dead, then at least a ghost haunting the limits of the literary work of art.

The turn away from the author in literary criticism to the literary text itself was, in the first half of the twentieth century, a way to lend credibility and objectivity to the burgeoning professionalization of literary criticism and a way to distance "modern" literary criticism from the connoisseurship and biographical positivism that had dominated the critical appreciation of literature in the nineteenth century.

The discourse of "the death of the author," associated with Roland Barthes and his famous 1967 essay with that title, has been widely accepted by shifting theoretical currents and in pedagogical practices, as "reading the last rites over the corpse of the idea of the author."[1] However, apart from the fact that repeated anti-authorial pronouncements have had the ironic effect of keeping the question of the author at the center of shifting theoretical debates, the ghostly figure of the author already haunted author-critics in the late nineteenth century.

In France, the dominant mode of criticism became associated with Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve's biographical method, the contention that the literary work of art gives access to the values of the author. In spite of the fact that contemporary admirers such as Henry James considered Sainte-Beuve "the acutest critic the world has ever seen" and that he has more recently been revived as "a father of modern literary criticism," his afterlife in the history of literary criticism was sealed with Marcel Proust's posthumously published collection of essays *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1895–1900; publ. 1954), which furiously refuted his biographical method of reading for the author, and with Proust's own *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), for which his essays against Sainte-Beuve provided a programmatic critical framework.[2] In this decisively modern work, Proust blurred the distinction between

author and narrator by portraying an author figure who is only able to write once the novel has ended. As Barthes summed up Proust's achievement: "[I]nstead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model."[3]

Proust's poetics represented a break with nineteenth-century connoisseurship and with what he called "literary gossip," and pointed towards Formalist and Narratological notions of "literary personas" and "implied authors," who are neither wholly inside nor wholly outside the literary work. According to Christopher Prendergast, the Proustian esthetic that supplanted Sainte-Beuve's biographism insists "on the rift or incommensurability between the social persona of the author and his creative self […:] 'a book is the product of a self other than that which we display in our habits, in company, in our vices.'"[4] Where the nineteenth-century narratorial subject was generally associated with the voice of the actual author, which was made accessible to the reader through the literary work, towards the end of the century "a sense of a growing distance and impersonality" began to alter the relationship between authors and readers, as well as the way in which critics and writers understood the relationship between the written and the writing self, the "private" creative work and the "public" persona of the author.[5]

Henry James's artist-tales from the 1890s are particularly illustrative of this gradual transformation not only of the relationship between authors and readers but also of the very "purpose" of literary criticism and its preference for the autonomous work of art. James famously allegorized what would later become known as "the intentional fallacy" committed by critics practicing the biographical method. In "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896) and "The Aspern Papers" (1888), James illustrates the trappings of a reader's ambition to "get at the author" through the literary work; in the latter tale exemplified in the absent God-like author Jeffrey Aspern, who appears as a "bright ghost" only accessible through "a morsel of papers."[6]

In James's "The Private Life" (1892), the problem of attributing the literary work to a living author is turned into a Gothic mystery haunted by a "ghost writer" creating his solitary art in the dark. While searching for a play the celebrity author Clare Vawdrey may or may not have written, the narrator enters the author's dark room, and is startled by a figure seated at a table in a writer's pose. The narrator believes this figure to be the author himself, but when calling him, he receives no reply. The writer does not turn from his writing pose, and does not reveal why he is writing in the dark. The narrator discovers that the writer could not, in fact, have been Vawdrey, since he was at the same time declaiming a scene from his

play on the balcony. Symptomatically, this divorce of the private writer from the public celebrity author leaves the "reader" with "an insane desire to see the author."[7] Looking for the author in the literary work leads to a ghostly encounter with a figure who both is and appears not to be the "actual" author; and it is precisely the mystical separation of the voice of the "biographical" author from the hand that writes, which results in a desire to see the author, who now no longer exists outside of the written text. Never quite inside, yet neither wholly outside the text, writers and literary critics have continued to explore the relationship between the writer and the written, the author and her literary inscription.

Seán Burke maintains that the question of the author is *the* question of literary theory. According to Andrew Bennett, the author "is an inescapable factor in criticism and theory, not least when she is most firmly being pronounced dead."[8] Bennett and Nicholas Royle, picking up on a rich narrative tradition of ghost-writers and Barthes's late-modern pronouncement of "the death of the author," conclude that the author remains "a kind of ghost" in literary theory: "the author cannot die precisely because [...] the author is—always has been and always will be—a ghost. Never fully present or fully absent, a figure of fantasy and elusiveness, the author only ever haunts."[9]

Against biographical positivism: New Criticism and Russian Formalism

Writer-critics such as Proust and James came to play an important role in the burgeoning professionalization of literary criticism in the early decades of the twentieth century. James's championing of impersonality in narration ("as a narrator of fictitious events [the novelist] is nowhere")[10], pointing towards Wayne C. Booth's conception of the "implied author," defines novelistic narrators not as coterminous with the empirical author, but as "the impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied."[11] James's early critical considerations of novelistic discourse were echoed in T. S. Eliot's formulation of an ideology of authorial self-effacement, a poetic "extinction of personality" or depersonalization, which to him pushed the appreciation of poetic art closer to a more objective evaluation of the literary work of art.[12]

To Eliot, poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," and the poet has "not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium."[13] The Poet, in Eliot's famous 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," is properly understood as "individual," "original" and creative when evaluated esthetically and placed,

"for contrast and comparison, among the dead"—as a medium that not only recalls but also eventually transforms the tradition of dead poets and artists.[14]

Literary-critical studies of narrative soon took up the mantle from the modernist esthetic of impersonality. Percy Lubbock's proto-New-Critical *Craft of Fiction* (1921), one of the first works of Anglo-American literary criticism to focus on the techniques of modern writers and the novel as a form, engages explicitly with the question of "impersonal narration" and asks of James's use of authorial delegates in *The Ambassadors* (1903): "How is the author to withdraw, to stand aside, and to let Strether's thought tell its own story?"[15] In exploring the author's "craft" through the intrinsic workings of fiction, Lubbock makes a distinction between two modes of writing: the "pictorial" and the "dramatic." The first describes the way "the reader faces towards the story-teller and listens to him," while in the latter "the recording, registering mind of the author is eliminated."[16] The Jamesian "unobtrusive" authorial technique, Lubbock's ideal form, is a hybrid of the two: it is "the method by which the picture of a mind is fully dramatized."[17] While not discounting that some works may be more "pictorial" than others, Lubbock rejects as irrelevant the question of an author's biography, the external consciousness or intentions of the author, or indeed any other social context: "there is no authority at the back of a novel, independent of it, to vouch for the truth of its apparent wilfulness."[18]

If the Anglo-American New Critics were generally against turning literary criticism into an "objective" science, Russian Formalists in the 1910s and 1920s set out to conceptualize the literary work as an autonomous esthetic object available for rigorous scrutiny without recourse to its author's biography, authorial intentions or social context. Common to Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Boris Tomashevskii, Yury Tynianov, and Roman Jakobson was a methodological concern to lay bare the linguistic and esthetic devices that defined "literariness" as a phenomenon clearly divorced from the communicative properties and intentions associated with everyday speech. This preoccupation with literary devices, literary forms, and their universal application would influence European Structuralisms and Narratologists such as Gérard Genette.

If the author was largely ignored by the early Formalists, the question of intentionality took center stage in post-war New Criticism. W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley most persuasively countered the still prevalent tendency in literary criticism towards historical contextualization, biographism and moralization with their seminal 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy," a central reference point for the elusive movement of New Criticism that rose to prominence in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s and

subsequently found local expressions throughout Europe. Beyond a rejection of authorial intentions ("the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art"[19]), New Critics were joined in their primary concern with the close reading of texts: examining a poem's "technical elements, textual patterns, and incongruities."[20] An early statement regarding the New-Critical method is found in Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938), where the poem itself is seen to dramatize themes exclusively in terms of textual characteristics such as situation, character, imagery, rhythm and tone. Brooks's 1947 study *The Well-Wrought Urn*, devoting several pages of close analysis to a short poem, makes no reference to the poet's biography or historical contexts, and does not present any "speculation on the mental processes of the author."[21]

The notion of "intentional fallacy" has been instrumental in shaping the legacy of New Criticism's anti-authorialism, yet, as Bennett has argued, the strong focus on this aspect of Wimsatt and Beardsley's work amounts "to something of a misreading."[22] While often taken to suggest that the literary work as such is bereft of authorial intentions, Wimsatt and Beardsley actually leave much more room for the author: "A poem does not come into existence by accident."[23] But if the critic is to understand what "the poet tried to do," only the successful poem itself will show: "if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem." The poet's "aim" or intention, therefore, "must be judged at the moment of the creative act […] by the art of the poem itself".[24] The poem "is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it. The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge."[25]

Booth's narratological study *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1965) adopts a less dogmatic view of the function of the author in the production of meaning without incriminating critics and readers for committing fallacies when evoking the figure of the author. He takes as his starting point Lubbock's modes of presenting events in narrative, and terms them instead "telling" and "showing."[26] In Booth's perspective, "[e]verything [the author] *shows* will serve to *tell*; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one."[27] The author is not so easily exiled from the premises of the literary work as impersonal esthetics, Russian Formalism or early New Criticism may have hoped: "we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear."[28] This not-quite-exiled author is what Booth names the "implied author"—an

author who, much like Wimsatt and Beardsley's intra-textual author, is not visible as the work's origin but veiled as the creation of writing: "As he writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote."[29]

Booth's "implied author" is an "effect" of reading: "However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner."[30] According to Carla Benedetti, Booth aimed to counter a fallacy closer to his own interest in narrative fiction, namely the fallacy of readers' "naïve identification" of "narrators with the author who creates them."[31] His answer was to maintain a principled distinction between author and narrator, and the implied author is introduced "in a negative way" to sustain this distinction. The instance of the implied author is perhaps most apparent in the case of "unreliable narration," where "the reader becomes aware of the existence of another instance beyond that of the narrator: a mute instance […] which is, nonetheless, indicating something. This instance is the implied author."[32] The implied author is a virtual author created by the reader based on the work; an amalgam of "core norms and choices" that govern a work's style, technique, narrators, characters, actions and world-view.

In these formal approaches to the literary work, which came to dominate literary theory and education from the 1920s to the 1960s, the author is, however, not entirely dismissed from the literary work of art; still she haunts the limits of the text and finds a new form as a discursive or interpretative construct in the reader's inevitable desire to "see" the author in the literary text as impersonal, an author's delegate, an implied or a disembodied literary persona created between an external authorial consciousness, an autonomous verbal art, and the reader's creative and interpretative imagination. While the author's return in literary criticism and theory as an intra-textual phenomenon would be drawn further into disrepute by Poststructuralists in the late 1960s, it is also here, in the second half of the twentieth century, possible to see that the author is not easily dismissed; she will return in similar gestures with Foucault's "author-function" and with a significant political function in feminist criticism.

The death of the author: Structuralism and Poststructuralism

The question of the author resurfaced in literary theory, ironically, with two authors, literary critics and philosophers, who came to embody a particular late-modern anti-authorialism

associated with French Structuralism and Poststructuralism: Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Barthes's "The Death of the Author" was originally published in English in 1967, in the American avant-garde magazine *Aspen*. The issue consisted of a box "containing twenty-eight artefacts, including movies, records, diagrams, cardboard cut-outs, as well as more conventional texts."[33] Dedicated to Mallarmé, it was "aimed at confronting and subverting conventional ways of thinking about, of approaching or theorizing, literature and art."[34] Peggy Kamuf relates the programmatic and montage-like quality of Barthes's brief "performative" contribution, written in a "polemical style, favouring reductive summary and rapid judgements to any more patient procedure," to the original context of its publication and its intended readership.[35] Its bombastic title, and many quotable assertions, have arguably played a decisive role in its subsequent academic canonization, while its frontal attack on authority came to coincide, when it was republished in French in 1968, with a year of seismic social and political change, civil rights movements in the United States, political assassinations, protests and revolutions in Europe.

Barthes insists that in a historical view, the history of the Author (with capital A, to refer to the "Author-God") and the attendant critical and cultural preoccupation with the Author's biography, is a historical parenthesis. He finds in Mallarmé and Proust evidence that writers themselves have fervently disavowed the Author figure: Mallarmé's "entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing."[36] Just as Proust's attack on Sainte-Beuve at the beginning of the century functioned as a poetics for his own creative work, Barthes's essay could, in a similar vein, be viewed as a theoretical statement prefacing and preparing for *S/Z* (1970)—his minute Structuralist study and disassembly of textual codes in Balzac's novella "Sarrasine" (1830).

It is precisely with a brief discussion of a short passage from "Sarrasine" that "The Death of the Author" opens. The eponymous "enamored sculptor" is wooing the singer La Zambinella, who, the reader will later discover, is a castrated man dressed as a woman. Barthes quotes the phrase: "This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings and her delicious sensibility,"[37] and asks:

> Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing "literary" ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?[38]

Is it, in other words, the character in the story, Balzac the author, dominant ideologies or the socio-cultural context that is speaking thus? The question clearly presupposes a Formalist or New-Critical insistence on the non-identity of empirical author, extra-textual phenomena, and words on the page.

In light of the widespread disregard for the author in dominant critical schools of the early part of the twentieth century, it is curious that Barthes should frame his question with the assertion: "[t]he *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs."[39] It would appear little has changed since the New Critics made a similar complaint against the profession of criticism and a wider culture of "authorism". Barthes asserts, without providing much in terms of evidence or discussion, that "the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it)."[40]

It is certainly possible to view New-Critical anti-authorialism as paradoxically maintaining a desire for the author even as its method professes a preoccupation with "the text itself". It is similarly possible to consider the modern esthetic of impersonality as promoting the author as a transcendental figure not dissimilar to a Romantic Author-God. However, Barthes's initial answer to the question who is speaking thus takes the theoretical question of authorship in a more radical direction: "We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is the neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the body writing."[41] An attention to "the text itself" does not, then, merely sever the empirical author from her literary work; writing *itself* is an activity that radically obliterates any sense of a stable subject, an originating voice. Barthes continues:

> No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.[42]

Barthes's anti-mimetic theory of narrative fiction, and its consequential renunciation of the Author, fits within a wider and ongoing contemporary "decentering" of the subject, as noted

by Foucault, in psychoanalysis, linguistics and anthropology, "in relation to the laws of its desire, the forms of its language, the rules of its actions, or the play of its mythical and imaginative discourse."[43] The subject, determined by "a series of systems," as Jonathan Culler puts it, is, then, "decentered" as "it is not a source or center to which one refers to explain events."[44] For instance, the Saussurean linguist Émile Benveniste held that "[i]t is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone established the concept of 'ego' in reality, in *its* reality which is that of being."[45] In his early writing on the mirror stage (1949), Jacques Lacan had already stated what would become a Poststructuralist mantra: namely, that human identity is "decentered," and perceived the unconscious as "structured like a language," which echoes in Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1962 dictum that "the goal of the human sciences" is not to constitute, "but to dissolve man."[46]

Foucault agrees with the necessity to move beyond the "typical questions" of how a free subject penetrates "the density of things and endow them with meaning" and how it accomplishes "its design by animating the rules of discourse from within." However, dissatisfied with simply noting the subject's disappearance, sceptical about the transcendental connotation of writing implicit in the Poststructuralist notion, and insisting that "it is not enough […] to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared," Foucault's essay is centrally preoccupied with locating "the space left empty by the author's disappearance." His 'implicit riposte to Barthes's dramatic authorcide asks instead:

> under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what function can it assume, and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.[47]

Foucault agrees, therefore, with the basic tenet of modern literary theory that the author-as-originator is a "dead subject," but he also insists that literary theory must instead consider the various ways in which the author remains and returns as a "function of discourse." One such way is through the peculiar classificatory function of authors' proper names, which occupy a liminal space between the inside and outside of the literary work. Author names, systems of ownership, and the question of what kinds of texts may be designated as having been authored pertain to what Foucault names the "author function": a "characteristic of the mode

of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society."[48] Rather than thinking of the author as originator, Foucault posits that the author is:

> a functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion.[49]

The author is "an ideological product," a discursive construction, whose transcendental veil of creativity and innovation is a mere cover for a cultural or institutional anxiety about "the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations." The author is, quite simply, "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning."[50] With this ideological critique of the "author function," Foucault inserts the question of the author into a much wider discursive, social and philosophical context, which Barthes had already gestured towards with his celebration of a textual "proliferation of meaning" beyond the death of the author and his deconstruction of the originating subject through writing.

At roughly the same time, Jacques Derrida began to develop what would later become known as a "deconstructive" critique of ideas of origins, or a "metaphysics of presence", which he regarded as central to the Western philosophical tradition, including linguistics. One influential strain of Derrida's critique was his deconstruction of the ingrained notion of writing as a mere supplement to or substitute for the absence of the "original" spoken word and the "presence" it implies, as expressed in the work of, for instance, Rousseau ("often credited with helping to bring into being the modern notion of the individual self").[51] However, Derrida demonstrates that Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, repeatedly refers to writing and supplements as necessary in order to correct the misunderstandings of his self as it appears in conversation, in speech, presumably when most "present." Therefore, writing and speech, absence and presence, follow a logic of supplementarity, according to Derrida, in which the origin, the self, the thing itself are constantly deferred: "ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of

originary perception. Immediacy is derived. That all begins through the intermediary is what is indeed 'inconceivable' [to reason]."[52]

Barthes's enigmatic phrase "the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins" resembles Derrida's notion of deferred origins, and the consequential dismantling of the idea of the author as an origin preceding the written: "there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references."[53] To conceptualize what this authorial instance of deferred origins may mean to a theory of authorship, Barthes employs another "supplement" and recasts, in a decidedly Derridean manner, the author as a "scriptor," or copyist, for whom "the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin— or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins."[54]

Barthes's modern "scriptor", who "is born simultaneously with the text" and "is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing," is related to Derrida's figure for the literary critic in the guise of Lévi-Strauss's mythopoetic *bricoleur*.[55] In his 1966 essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida explains that the *bricoleur* is one who uses the "means at hand": "the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them [...]."[56] Derrida equates the work of *bricolage* with "critical language itself" and determines that "every discourse is *bricoleur*." This may partly explain why Barthes saw the role of the critic as having been conceived as a mirror-image of the Author-God, as one who imposes a limit: "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. 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." What we need, Barthes suggests, is a criticism of *bricolage* that rejects any notion of deciphering and probing texts for singular meanings and instead understands its task as an activity of "disentangling".

This view of the absence of hidden ciphers below the surface of the text and the removal of the Author-Critic from the center of signification would lead Alexander Nehamas to reconsider the author as wholly "separated from metaphors of depth" and instead "conceived in terms of breadth and expansion".[57] Nehamas's author "has no depth", she is a "character" or an "agent postulated to account for construing a text as an action".[58] Instead of probing for the Author's covert meaning beneath a text's surface, Nehamas's Foucaultian

"postulated author" is the manifestation of "juxtaposed surfaces", of texts generating and made possible by other texts.[59]

      This "author without depth" or a "*bricoleur* critic" is what Barthes at the end of his essay defines as the "reader"; not an empirical reader outside of the text, but a destination holding together "all the traces by which the written text is constituted": "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."[60] In the end, then, the answer to the question of who speaks thus is surprisingly none of the options Barthes initially proposed, but the less imposing "reader," who may, nevertheless, merely substitute one authority (Author or Critic) for another (Reader), one origin for another. To Burke, "it remains unclear that Barthes's Reader is any less mystifying than the author (s)he (it?) would replace."[61]

      While mostly ignored by literary theory, the figure of the "reader" began to attract wider attention with Reader-Response criticism, which became influential from the 1970s onwards. Critical studies in which the reader was considered the locus of interpretation include Wolfgang Iser's Reception Aesthetics, which argued for the active and creative participation of, what he termed, *The Implied Reader* (1972) in the production of meaning in convergence with the text, while Stanley Fish's *Is there a Text in This Class?* (1980), proposed that the interpretation of literary texts is determined and constrained by readers' situatedness within varying "interpretive communities".

      While some mystification remains in Barthes's notion of the "birth of the reader", his is arguably a well-chosen figure to encapsulate the overturning of authorities, of Authors and Critics, and the democratizing forces underway in the late 1960s. Barthes's "reader" is a product of writing and discourse, a "scriptor" who exists as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash," "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." The montage-like quality of "The Death of the Author" is not merely a stylistic device fitting its publication format, but a performance of its own attempt to script its theory of unoriginal authorship and practice of a radical intertextuality in which multiple and disjointed discourses flicker as quotations without quotation marks.

Conclusion: Resurrections of the author

The "Death of the Author" thesis promised to "liberate us from the interpretively restrictive views of literature," views, according to Barthes, that are "tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions," where the Author, according to Foucault, plays

the role of a "functional principle" that "impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction."[62]

Postcolonial and Feminist theory has on the one hand continued and modified this deconstruction of the subject and the literary canon in its "universalized" state as significantly Western, white and male. The death of this subject, "with its implications in racism, sexism and imperialism, can therefore be seen as part of a strategy of political liberation."[63] On the other hand, as Maurice Biriotti reminds us, "the Author's death denied authorship precisely to those who had only recently been empowered to claim it," anonymizing and disembodying the very voices it had helped to liberate, such as "black voices, women's voices, the voices of those in the margins."[64]

In their 1979 feminist study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar asked: "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are […] both overtly and covertly patriarchal?"[65] Struggling against a patriarchal literary canon, women writers had suffered, according to Gilbert and Gubar, from a debilitating "anxiety of authorship":

> Handed down not from one woman to another but from the stern literary "fathers" of patriarchy to all their "inferiorized" female descendants, it is in many ways the germ of a dis-ease or, at any rate, a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust, that spreads like a stain throughout the style and structure of much literature by women, especially […] throughout literature by women before the twentieth century.[66]

If women writers in the second half of the twentieth century began to claim their own sense of authority through writing, they stood on the shoulders of generations who struggled in "isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness," attempting to overcome the "anxiety of authorship." Gilbert and Gubar's challenge to the unequal regime of authorship was one that insisted on a counter-discourse to both the paternal lineage of the institutionally legitimized (male) canon, and to the silencing of all subjectivities, a universal author figure, as proclaimed by the "death of the author" discourse. Nancy K. Miller has argued that such a feminist non-alignment with a Poststructuralist attack on authorship, agency and subjectivity arises out of a realisation that a theoretical anti-authorism does not necessarily hold for women:

Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much self*, ego, cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentred, "disoriginated", deinstitutionalised, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position.[67]

However, rather than resurrecting a new universal "feminist" Author, modeled on an already thoroughly debunked discourse of patriarchal author(ity), as maintained also by Toril Moi, Rita Felski has pointed out that Feminist critics may opt for a "third position" that "does not naively assert that the author is an originating genius, creating aesthetic objects outside of history, but does not diminish the importance of difference and agency in the responses of women writers to historical formations."[68] Such a view involves the recognition that "female authors have themselves been authored" within, against and by a "multiplicity of social and cultural forces that exceed their grasp" (a view commensurate with Foucault's understanding of the author function). Yet such forces do not exclude the possibility and ability for the subject "to act and create." Viewed from this "third position," authorship is not depersonalized, ignored, eliminated or feared, but is, according to Felski, just "one strand in the weave of the text rather than a magic key to unlocking its mysteries." This position does not easily move from questions of authorship and agency to theoretical laws and generalizations—thus avoiding a trap of universalization into which Poststructuralist as well as New-Critical and Formalist theories of authorship have arguably fallen too easily.

Whether deemed self-contradictory, too reductive, counter-productive or simply products of their own time, Barthes and Foucault ensured that the question of the author would remain central to literary theory beyond Poststructuralism. Foucault's historization of the "author function" influenced New Historicism and Book History. These theories or disciplines proceeded, in the words of Roger Chartier, to "reconnect the text with its author," albeit with the caveat that the author is perceived to be dependent (she is "not the unique master of meaning," and her intentions are not necessarily imposed on the producers or readers of the work) and constrained (by the organization of the social space of literary production).[69] In what may appear as an ambiguous return to biographism and the Author-God, Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicist work on, for instance, William Shakespeare considers the "apparently isolated power of the individual genius" to be "bound up with collective, social energy".[70]

Foucault's and Barthes's essays not only continue to be a central reference point for theories of authorship and literary theory more generally, they have also been instrumental to theorizing writing in a digital age. In the twenty-first century, the writer-critic Kenneth Goldsmith has explored the potential of "uncreative writing" (drawing on Marjorie Perloff's notion of the author as an "unoriginal genius") by considering "an explosion of writers employing strategies of copying and appropriation […] with the computer encouraging writers to mimic its workings."[71] Perhaps there is no great difference between Barthes's "scriptor" and Goldsmith's uncreative writer as programmer: "While the author won't die," Goldsmith suggests, "we might begin to view authorship in a more conceptual way: perhaps the best authors of the future will be ones who can write the best programs with which to manipulate, parse and distribute language-based practices."[72] Whether the author-as-programmer will continue to function as a bulwark against the proliferation of meaning or as a Barthesian "scriptor", thriving in an anonymous and uncontrollable web of texts and writing, is a pressing question for literary theory in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

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[3] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.142–48, p. 144.

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[16] Lubbock, *Craft*, p. 111.

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[23] Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Intentional," p. 4.

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[28] Ibid.

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[30] Booth, *Rhetoric*, p. 71.

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[34] Ibid.

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