

Why does Barthes proclaim the 'death of the author is the birth of the reader'? You should refer to Barthes's arguments in 'Death of the Author', and discuss the significance of intertextuality.

For Roland Barthes the 'death of the author' is the 'birth of the reader'. By this, Barthes is saying that the author is not the authoritative figure of the text and that the meaning of the text does not reside in the author's intent, but in the reader's own individual interpretation.

The process of reading a text as the product of an author implies that it is an individual piece of writing that precludes all preceding influences and ignores the multiplicity of references, allusions and other sources which combine to provide the text with its ultimate meaning: '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.'<sup>1</sup> Barthes thus states that the author's name is a signifier of finality and of closed meaning that allows the reader no room for interpretation. The phrase, 'death of the author' is a 'paradoxical idea [that] refers not to the empirical or literal death of a given author, but to the fact that... the author is absent from the text.'<sup>2</sup> If we remove the author, there can be room for different interpretations from readers and there would be no one similar interpretation. Barthes is 'rejecting the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority for interpretation'<sup>2</sup>. This is what Barthes calls the 'birth of the reader' because by removing the author, we are placing the power of interpretation into the hands of the reader.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author. Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988) p.171

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2016) p.21

In *'Death of the Author'*, Barthes says that '[a text] is a space of many dimensions... [and] is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture.'<sup>3</sup> Here, Barthes is talking about the tissue of citations which means that there is no original idea and how 'each text refers back differently to the infinite sea of the 'already written.'<sup>4</sup> and how all authors' ideas come from other authors which Barthes describes here as the 'thousand sources of culture'. This idea links to Barthes wanting to take the power away from the author and place it into the hands of the reader. In Michel Foucault's essay, *'What is an Author?'*, Foucault argues that authors do have a sense of power and 'they have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for formation of other texts.'<sup>5</sup> Foucault is arguing that even though authors haven't had a fully original idea, they still have a sense of authority because their work might influence another author to write something similar. For Bennett and Royle, Barthes' 'idea of the author is not a timeless given: the figure and significance of the author vary across time, and from one culture to another.'<sup>6</sup> no authority over the text, instead it transcends time and is interpreted by different cultures, who then adapt the author's work and use ideas from it for their own texts. When this happens, this is called tissue of citations - or intertextuality.

Intertextuality is significant because it conveys how influential different types of texts are and showcases that there never is one original author. Authors are always using inspiration

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author. Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988) p.170

<sup>4</sup> Selden, Raman, and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary and Literary Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) p.134

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *What is an Author? Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988) p.206

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2016) p.24

around them to use in their work and because of this 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'<sup>7</sup>; whether it's another author's texts or their surroundings, there is always a reference to another text or surrounding when they are writing their work. In J.K Rowling's *'Harry Potter'* series, she can be seen drawing on influence of Arthurian legends, folklore and different worlds which are inspired by J.R.R. Tolkein's *'Lord of the Rings'* and C.S Lewis' *'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe'*. Intertextuality is forever present within society and Barthes' idea of the birth of the reader shows that every reader can interpret in different ways, but Foucault shows that an author retain authority if they can influence other author's.

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p.66.

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