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## Waning Authority

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The view put forward by Roland Barthes in his essay “The death of an author” is very much in tune with the modern critical thinking. Barthes gives due importance to the reader in the scheme of reading he tries to bring the reader at par with the writer or author and tries to maintain the equilibrium.

As a reader to some extent I do agree with the theory put forward by Roland Barthes. It’s only with the death of an author that a reader can be born. Author is not an end in himself but only a means to achieve an end, however the beauty lies in the fact that there is no one specific end, the end actually varies according to the interpreting ability of the reader. Thus, it is the reader who is relatively more active than the writer himself. In order to concretize this abstract idea, we may take the example of the novel “Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Bronte, the section of the novel dealing with the red room is one of the most important sections of the novel and one crucial reason why this section doesn’t lose its importance is because of its flexible periphery. The readers are allowed to let loose their imaginations; the readers are given the liberty by the author to come at parity with him. The red room is the most enjoyed and also the most interpreted sections of the novel. The red room may be interpreted as a womb in which Jane was being forced inside, she was being encapsulated within the room, which was fulfilling her unconscious desire to be scared.

“prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world ..... I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down- I uttered a wild involuntary cry – I rushed to the door and shook the lock in a desperate effort.”

Moreover, the room also may be seen as an emotional prison, which haunts her even when she has grown into womanhood. It has also acted as a source of strength for Jane, whenever she was bothered by her feelings she would transgress to the horror of the red room to gather strength to fight back all odds. Furthermore, Charlotte Bronte has intentionally written this section in the first person, which helps the readers to understand Jane’s trauma in a much better way.

Furthermore, the character of Bertha Mason is another very popular character of the novel, and just as the red room the character of Bertha owes much of its popularity to the active involvement of the readers. More than Jane Eyre, the protagonist of the novel it is Bertha who draws readers’ attention. Bertha as opposed to any other character in the novel gives maximum scope of interpreting her character. The reader leaves the set path paved by the author and unravels his own path to understand the character of Bertha. She may either be interpreted as an angel or a monster, as per the free will of the readers. In fact, the character of Bertha has been painted by readers in so many colors that in 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar made a breakthrough in the field of feminist criticism with their work “the madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary imagination.”

Moreover, the talk about Jane Eyre cannot be complete without the mention of our strong female protagonist. Jane oscillates between being an angel and a monster. Charlotte Bronte like other authors does not confine her

heroin to any fixed dichotomy. She displays both the character of an angel as well as a monster at the same time. She is controlled in her behavior, and is essentially moral but at the same time is extremely passionate and unwilling to occupy a lower position to any man. Therefore, here too readers are liberated in their approach to analyze the character of Jane according to their personal experiences and understanding without any authoritarian voice guiding them to make opinion.

Gulliver's travel by Swift is another novel which supports the idea of power being shifted to the hands of the reader rather than the author. The novel begins with the baggage of identity, personality, prejudices hooked onto the protagonists, Gulliver, these aspects most of the time is linked with the author Jonathan Swift as well, but during the course of the novel, the protagonist loses all his personal traits, in the due process the readers are left alone to interpret the character of Gulliver on their own.

Gulliver starts his voyage with an identity, but his identity keeps on changing at every destination, sometimes he is a giant or a miniature creature being toyed with and at other times he even loses his identity as a human and is treated as a barbaric animal, the character is open to so many interpretations that by the end of the novel he even detaches from his essential identity as a human being thereby giving the readers complete independence to analyze his character. His loss of self-identity is revealed by his indifference to the Christian charity and kindness of Don Pedro and the Portuguese sea captain who helped him to return home.

Thus, such a safe distance of the author from the character allows both the reader and the text to grow to their maximum limit without being weighed down by the baggage of the author's like and dislike. Many critics have argued that Gulliver's Travel is more of an autobiographical novel with many altered events in the novel relatable with the actual life of the author Jonathan Swift, Cole Anna Marie says that the book four, in particular has numerous autobiographical elements. Much effectively Swift detaches the character of Gulliver from himself and allows the character to grow independently. However just like the extremist idea of Barthes the case too reaches to an extreme situation when Gulliver sheds all his identities associated with him, moreover he also sheds away his belongingness to his native society and exists as an individual spirit wandering the sea, in fact Gulliver's Travel could be described as one of the first novel of "modern alienation". However, with respect to both these examples we may agree with opinion that subduing the power of the author is prerequisite for the autonomous thinking of the readers, that being said the death of the author is not necessarily required for a reader to be born, but toning down of the power of author would actually suffice the objective. I believe that the complete death of an author would create a dearth within the text which would be very difficult for a reader to fill. In both the examples mentioned above, the author is not dead, but is relatively passive to the readers, both Charlotte Bronte and Jonathan Swift develop their respective texts, but do not encapsulate them within any fixed framework for the readers, they allow the readers to examine every shade of the character and conclude with the best possible analysis which in turn suits their experiences.

Roland Barthes brings about a paradigm shift in the basic definition of a reader, instead of merely incorporating and accepting the facts presented in a text, Barthes suggests that a true reader is as much involved in the formulation of a text as a writer is. Both of them are actively involved in the process of uncovering various layers of the text.

The idea proposed by Barthes gains more conceptual clarity when analyzed through the interpretation put forward by Alison carter in her essay "What is the role of a reader on a text?". "The boy hit the man with the cane", carter says that the above-mentioned sentence may be interpreted in a number of ways, for example, the first being that the boy used a cane to hit the man and second that the man who was hit by the boy used a cane to walk. The readers absorb that meaning which they make out of the text.

Barthes further elevates the status of a reader by receding that of a writer, he says that any written work produced by a writer is not original but has merely rearranged or prepared the preexisting ideas, he does not consider any idea as original rather, what he believes in is a merely a modification of the limited ideas circulating in the society, much ironically the idea proposed by Roland Barthes in his essay "The death of the

author” is very similar to that of Michel Foucault’s idea in a lecture titled “What is an author”. The death of an author first appeared in English in an American journal in 1967 while Foucault’s essay was first credited as a lecture.

This idea becomes even more comfortable to understand when we relate it to issues beyond the hard bound world of the books. Renowned traveler Christopher Columbus has been designated as a ‘discoverer’, “even though the Vikings had reached the land, what we today know as America more than 400 years earlier”. Another example worthy of being mentioned here is 1990’s much underrated movie “Ek doctor ki Maut” which highlights the obsessive culture of our society, “to oppose the idea of multiple discoveries and prefer the heroic theory of invention”.

Coming back within the hard bound world we as readers attach the heroic theory with the writer by placing him at an alter, way above the standing of the reader, and it is this mental construct which Barthes tries to deconstruct. He opposes the idea that the writer has more knowledge about the text than the reader, as the writing must have been impacted by his personal life, likes, dislikes prejudices etc. Barthes opposes this classical theory by proposing that the reader and writer are at parity with each other and play an equally important role, rather assist each other in understanding the text in a better fashion. Moreover, a parallel can be drawn with the idea proposed by Nietzsche about death of god where the literary world may be compared to a real world, and the writer with all knowing god. Using our reader’s liberty we may further interpret the idea “the death of an author” as a confession of the writer of his inability to provide to his readers anything original.

Therefore, the idea put forward by Barthes may also appear an extremist’s end. Though many a times the author disturbs the power relation between him and the reader, by assuming the interpretation power. But the extremist view of completely eliminating the author from the journey of interpretation would be an oversimplified solution for a not so simple problem, for instance complete elimination of the author would put the reader in a dubious situation, where they may find themselves an alien in the created world of the author with no prior background related to the situation and characters available with readers to aid their journey. Therefore the character of the author cannot be completely eliminated from the scheme of reading.

Therefore we may say that if the author is writing about a topic which may be able to trigger the interpreting skills of the reader, by appealing to his/her past experience, then the reader may be left alone by the author safely. However when the topic about which the author is writing is alien for the reader and is not able to stir his/her past experience, it is at this stage that the guidance and authoritarian voice of the author is required by the reader. Therefore, though I agree with Roland Barthes when he says that a reader is far more important in the scheme of reading than the author. However sometimes the presence of the author is indispensable for the better understanding of the readers of the text, moreover here again the emphasis is on the reader rather than the author. Therefore, what Barthes proposes maybe idealistically correct but is not realistically feasible.

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