

Unlearning the Routines of Intelligibility: A Reading on Roland Barthes's Postmodernist/Poststructuralist Stance

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Abstract

Roland Barthes's theoretical attack on the intelligibility of structuralism has always sounded like philosophical reasoning that should be revered as such. His theory is a paradigm shift in human effort in the creation of a better life and its understanding. Through a written text, it is possible to view cultural entities that reveal the forwarding of the world's civilization being conveyed by the author. This possibility is granted by individual/reader's cultural background, which varies with the variation of the latter's life conception. In this context, do we consider the author's biography or his/her imagination in our construction of the text's meaning? In other words, should we perceive life through the same lenses of the author by the help of the text? This article has argued that Barthes's stance on poststructuralism/postmodernism is not a philosophical reasoning but a necessary step in the human free psychological development. On the other hand, confining a written passage to the author's intended meaning (which is not feasible), does not verify the human cultural diversifications; and finally, both poststructuralism and postmodernism are aiming the same cultural objectives which do not go for the understanding of the world through a single discourse.

Index terms— poststructuralism/postmodernism, theory, author, text, reader, meaning, culture.

1 Introduction

great work of art has the capacity of hatching multiple readings. And the articulacy of a narrative drives a certain conduct that calls the attention of the reader on the author. But the traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities. Thus the savvy and popular differences between Roland Barthes's poststructuralist or postmodernist stance connotes altogether the idiosyncratic reader's freedom to act without constraints. What then are the consequences of ignoring the author in the process of reading? And through Barthes's attunement to poststructuralism, can we realize the hitting of postmodernist targets? This article considers the simulacra on Barthes's stance which is straddling between poststructuralist postures and postmodernism.

On the other hand, the idyllic creative ability to move against the literary composition establishments advocates the freedom in writing and reading. Therefore, the death of the author gives birth to the reader in order to do away with complexities and confinements of reading, which encode the fidelity to an origin, a unified meaning, an identity or any other pre-given exterior or interior reality.

In effect, the revisionist views forced by the evolving global civilization which are also thought up in the epochal condition open the liberation gates to do away with standardization of judgment. Alice Jardine in "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva" argues that:

A text is not a text if it is totally opaque, refusing to be brought to light, completely impervious to the hermeneutic gesture; and a context is never totally transparent, appearing in some kind of referential purity.

44 Now, somewhere in between these two readings-the clear, fast, so-called spontaneous, more transparent one, and
45 the unclear, slower, so-called reflexive, more opaque one-between the first reading and the second reading 'first
46 and second only by virtue of our intellectual habits', is a certain kind of difference which is political: a difference
47 in attitude toward interpretation. The concept of inter-textuality soon became Kristeva's hallmark. She wanted
48 to show how a text always communicates with another text or other texts, in a polyphony of different voices that
49 meet in the act of reading, which engender other, and new, interpretations of the text. Kristeva's polylogous
50 understanding of the text and especially her rereading of literary works soon brought her into conflict with
51 the structuralist establishment in France at the time, and through this, she became one of the groundbreaking
52 theoreticians of the French poststructuralism. 3 The above quoted passage insinuates the constant changing of
53 any living language through the development of words due to the rise of diverse needs. Therefore, what is at stake
54 in the poststructuralist theory is 'the death of the author,' which explores the consequences of freeing the reading
55 process. The easiest way to kill the author resides in the consistency of theory, which: "consists of grammar,
56 rhetoric, dialectic, poetics, hermeneutics, semiotics, grammatology, and other modes of understanding textuality."
57 4 Thus, this article will be articulated around two subtitles. The first is about the flexibility forced on texts to
58 be opened for the centrality of the reader's opinion. The reader's free use of a text that is conducive to giving to
59 the text a meaning not meant by its author constitutes the focus of this part. The second subtitle observes the
60 abjuration of structuralist ethos. This part emphasizes the fact that poststructuralism is not adulation. It has
61 rather been made compulsory by the linguistic needs forced by freer expression and human civilization through
62 cultural variations.

63 2 II. Flexible Networks of Language Games in a Text

64 The polylogue that is allowed by the poststructuralism eventually underwrites possible ways and means to reach
65 veracity or justice, which is universally accepted according to the reading idiosyncrasies. ".we must arrive at
66 an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus." 5 Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida
67 would say if in different ways, that the image upon which our Western Identity and Ethics is founded-the visage,
68 the human face-the one that has been heretofore White, European, and Male-is cracking apart. All that remain
69 are simulacra and masks. For Foucault, modernity began 'when words ceased to intersect with representations
70 and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things' The existential requirements are the rules of the
71 linguistic game. Moreover, many revolutions such as feminism have had the paradigm shift in human civilization
72 from the turning of the twentieth century. Alice Jardine assures that: 6 A self [which] is discursively oriented to
73 'the understanding of identity as multiple and even selfcontradictory' (de Lauretis 1986, 9) is clearly incapable
74 of practicing the disciplinary selfgovernment of a self-oriented within a culture of selfmastery (mastery by reason
75 of the passions, instincts, or drives). The former self is one which understands and resists the exclusionary terror
76 of self-mastery whereby the integrity of a self is established through the exclusion and repression of all that is
77 rigidly deemed non-self. Martin and Mohanty (1986,1987), show how Mannie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical
78 narrative enables reflection on postmodern selfhood. This means words in a text are no more static in meaning
79 and do no more follow any conventional standardization.

80 An agent solving a problem or interpreting a piece of literature obviously is substituted by a whole arsenal
81 of the cultural background at stake. Thus, Anna Yeatman suggests that: 7 A reading that excludes the reader
82 prevents the latter from grasping their voice through the process. 5 Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Postmodern*
83 *Condition* 1984, cited in Anna Yeatman, *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1994),
84 p. 117. 6 Barthes's stance is not the only evidence of the forwardness of poststructuralism. Moreover, this literary
85 movement has been a respite to writers and thinkers who have willed for a freer expression and less opaque texts.
86 It is not the context of "the periphery is in many cases the center." 2 It is rather the context in which the varieties
87 of cultural backgrounds call upon inter-textual ability to convene thinkers on the understanding that a single
88 interpretation of a piece of literature connotes with the singularity of the center. While the centers have been
89 multiplied by the multiplicity of understandings, the confinement to a solitary text in the construction of meaning
90 leads to the rigidity on world cultivation judgment. Thus, Julia Kristeva and Birgitte Huitfeldt Midttun clarify
91 it by saying:

92 Because the construction of meaning to a work calls on the interpreter's cultural background, the latter gives
93 him/herself the chance to leave a discursive watershed. Yeatman argues again that: "A non-consensualist politics
94 of difference develops rhetorical procedures which problematize a subject speaking on behalf of another and which
95 put a premium on subjects finding their own 'voice' within whatever politics of representation is at hand. Within
96 this politics, subjects are understood to be discursively positioned within the conjectural historical moment of
97 contested narratives?." 8 Hence, a psychological confrontation is prepeded by necessity. Barthes thinks that
98 "Just as Einsteinian science compels us to include within the objectstudied the relativity of reference points,
99 so the combined action of Marxism, Freudianism, and structuralism compels us, in literature, to relativize the
100 relations of [scriptor,] reader, and observer (critic)."

101 This contestation drops the real quality of a duel just because of the physical presence of the author. This
102 absence rather takes the value of the latter's death leaving only his/her imagination. And as a text is taken to
103 be a field to enter, the reader enters the field uneventfully to sow what she intends to. 9

104 The text is approached and experienced in relation to the sign. The work closes upon a signified. We
105 can attribute two modes of signification to this signified: either it is claimed to be apparent, and the work

106 is then the object of a science of the letter, which is philology; or else this signified is said to be secret and
107 final, and must be sought for, and then the work depends upon a hermeneutics, an interpretation (Marxist,
108 psychoanalytic, thematic, etc.); in short, the work itself functions as a general sign, and it is natural that it
109 should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practices
110 the infinite postponement of the signified, the Text is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier; the signifier must
111 not be imagined as "the first part of the meaning," its material vestibule, but rather, on the contrary, as its
112 aftermath; similarly, the signifier's infinitude does not refer to some notion of the ineffable (of an unnamable
113 signified) but to a notion of play; the engendering of the perpetual signifier (in the fashion The subject in front of
114 a text is as a critic in hermeneutics for that text. And since it is a field to enter (process), Roland Barthes finds
115 that -the quotation is a bit longer because it encompasses a comparison between a text and work: of a perpetual
116 calendar) in the field of the Text is not achieved by some organic process of maturation, or a hermeneutic
117 process of "delving deeper," but rather by a serial movement of dislocations, overlapping variations. 10 The
118 logic governing the Text is not comprehensive 'trying to define what the work "means"' but metonymic; the
119 activity of associations, contiguities, cross-references coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy 'if it failed
120 him, man would die.' The work (in the best of cases) is moderately symbolic 'its [symbolics] runs short, i.e.,
121 stops;' the Text is radically symbolic: a work whose integrally symbolic nature one conceives, perceives, and
122 receives is a text. The Text is thus restored to language; like language, it is structured but decentered, without
123 closure 'let us note, to answer the scornful suspicion of "fashion" sometimes lodged against structuralism, that
124 the epistemological privilege nowadays granted to language derives precisely from the fact that in it [language]
125 we have discovered a paradoxical idea of structure: a system without end or center.' This openness of the text
126 becomes a challenge for the subject who is willing to find her voice in the text through its interpretation. In
127 other words, is giving the chance to draw the whole context into her own conception of life ignoring utterly the
128 author's intent. How is it conceivable to cooperate with the author when words in the text are deployable and can
129 easily be refastened to various meanings? Barthes furthermore finds that: 11 French philosopher Jean-Francois
130 Lyotard argues that a skepticism toward the 'grand narratives' of modernity defines the 'postmodern condition.'
131 This skepticism extends to any philosophy or theory, This is to show the hermeneutic code in the text, which
132 leads to the voice of truth because of the historical facts inherent in it. And since the author may have obviously
133 been inspired by other texts or cultural drives, foreshadow or anticipation codes also could be found there in an
134 empirical way; which undoubtedly would indicate the machine that helps the free flow of the narrative. It is in
135 the same inclination that the author's meaning cyphers could be felt -thetimbres of the text. But here only the
136 voice of the author is heard not his intended meaning for the symbol of a mountain does not stand for the same
137 implication in every cultural entity. Though the reader may feel the cultural background of the author through
138 his use of symbols, this does not come to transfigure the reader's life conception but scientifically cultivate him
139 about the other side of the world through the help of his own cultural background. Paula Geyh et al find that:
140 10 Ibid. p.58. 11 Ibid. p. 59. such as Marxism, which claims to provide a complete explanation of culture and
141 society. Lyotard argues that there is no longer any hope of a single conceptual system or discourse through which
142 we might aspire to understand the totality of the world. Indeed, one can no longer speak about 'totality' at all.
143 Instead, we have a plurality of worlds and multiple, often mutually incompatible discourses through which to
144 understand them. 12 III.

145 3 Abjuration of Structuralist Ethos and its Splenetic Commen- 146 tary

147 That is evidently elucidating how both poststructuralism and postmodernism are aiming the same critical
148 objectives which do not go for the understanding of the world through one and single discourse.

149 Manumitting a text for relative meanings far or near the author's is not a structuralist ethos. However,
150 commenting a text in confined zone of meaning (unique meaning) is one of the main characteristics of this
151 literary approach. Arnold Krupat argues that:

152 The truth value attributed to language when a signifier is seen to be correctly, even inherently, linked to a
153 signified is a phenomenon which is unique to cultures which use written forms of information storage. Historically,
154 oral cultures seem to be typically unconcerned with fixed meanings (118). However, he points out that there is a
155 tendency among scholars of Native literatures to hold a "signified-based theory of language," or to assume that
156 meaning is fixed and can be accurately communicated. He further writes that "as students of oral cultures and
157 traditions, Native Americanists have in particular referred this possibility to speech and voice." I propose that
158 King is playing off this opposition, not standing firmly in either camp, but getting the best of both of them.
159 In this war of written versus oral words, it is not a question of which culture has possession of the Truth, but
160 rather of which culture has the literary means of conveying it. In pitting the one narrative form against the
161 other, King questions first whether a written text really represents an inflexible, authoritative, dogmatic version
162 of reality, such as is being lampooned by the narrators of Green Grass, Running Water. ??? The recommendation
163 for a written text to really represent an inflexible, authoritative, dogmatic version of reality reflects the ethos of
164 structuralism. This character 12 is obviously conducive to the confinement of truth into only one angle of vision
165 and tends to annihilate the culturalism of other creative efforts from different visionary approaches. This also
166 forces each and every reader to belong to the cultural background of a written text's author. And consequently,

4 CONCLUSION

167 criticism and appreciation remain the affair of those who share the author's viewpoints and thus, the effort to
168 make such a text bear a sign of diversified meanings remains futile and the question revolving around the problem
169 of referentiality remains unsolved. Jakki Spicer asks in "The author is dead, long live the author: autobiography
170 and the fantasy of the individual": "Do the contents of the book correspond to a life lived, or only to the
171 contents of an author's imagination? What, in fact, is the relation between a life and a text?" 14 Take for
172 instance the "form and content" critics of African literature. Their bold statements of intentions to analyses the
173 form and content of chosen literary artifacts end up as exercises in the exegesis of content. This is due mainly
174 to the fact that most of such critics do not possess the tools of structural analysis which are indispensable to
175 a stylistic analysis of form. They, therefore, end up with superficial generalizations about "tightly structured
176 plots", "effective use of flashback", "impressive deployment of symbols" and other such vague

177 The only reality is that only the cultural background of the reader that commands the understanding and
178 creation of his related meaning becomes useless if related to the author's life. And the comment made upon such
179 a compact text remains superficial.

180 The superficiality of the comment of a text remains such due to the fact that it is made solely on the structure.
181 Moreover the comment on a text's structure has nothing to do with the latter's contents. For a splenetic
182 commentary on a piece of literature suggests only the whim of the writer or a specific reader who has no intention
183 of making his/her own cultural background valuable because when reading a piece of literature, it confirms or
184 infirm what one has previously believed in. Chinyere Nwahunanya in: "Structuralism and African literature:
185 a revaluation" illustrates how the structure or form of a text is the only entity that should be considered in
186 analysis/interpretation according to the tenet of structuralism:

187 statements which tell us virtually nothing about the form or structure of the works being analyzed. ??5 Can
188 evolutionary psychology say anything interesting about literature? My answer is that it is possible, that I am
189 not a prophet and can't predict the future. On the basis of what I've read up to now, I must confess that
190 I am a skeptic. Both the general understanding of literature and the interpretations of individual works are
191 crudely reductionist. Reductionism in the natural sciences is no vice; on the contrary, it enables one discipline
192 (for instance, physics) to explain another (chemistry). In the humanities, however, it subverts the uniqueness
193 and complexity of works of art. Carroll's complaint about "traditional humanist criticism," (which I exemplify
194 in his essay) is that lacking in empirical curiosity, it "operates on the level of the author's lexicon and seeks
195 no systematic reduction to simple principles that have large general validity" (Literary Darwinism 213). Well,
196 this hardly seems a deficiency. The alternative that Carroll and his fellow literary Darwinists propose is the
197 dissolution of the individuality a work (the very reason that enjoy and value it) into large generalizations that
198 remove all of its distinctive features and vitality.

199 Therefore, the oppugning of the ethics of structuralism becomes essential for the sake of universal covering of
200 an author's effort. Eugene Good heart in: "Do We Need Literary Darwinism?" argues for the uniqueness and
201 distinctiveness of a text: 16

202 If a text cannot be interpreted by the help of another it means its author has coined it without having read other
203 texts or might have written out of vacuum. If physics can easily help explain chemistry, it is because both are from
204 the same core of studies field, which is science. A piece of literature is always interpreted by the guide of other
205 culturally acceptable items that make them part and parcel of literature/fiction. "Although many critics think
206 that Barthes pushed this manifesto-like formulation too far, this celebrated idea, now a critical commonplace,
207 remains alluring for its implicit reminder that we rely on literary storytelling as well as documentary records for
208 the reconstruction of not only ??5 texts' informing intellectual contexts but also their authors' lives and deaths"
209 17 IV.

210 4 Conclusion

211 Literature has always given rise to its interpretation, but now that no argument of literary gossip goes unnoticed,
212 it may be time to reflect a little on the activity of literary criticism. Roland Barthes (like Proust before him)
213 launches an attack on the traditional biography-based criticism. This article is dedicated to him as a postmodern
214 ditty. And the slinkiness of this work resides in its being subversive for a reasonable cause. If the presence of
215 God in our minds reprieves our freedom, it has been possible to reason without including God in our quotidian
216 life. So much as Frederic Nietzsche has helped us succeed in doing without God; Barthes is helping us to read
217 without author through poststructuralism/postmodernism.

218 The second point raised by this article has focused on the illustrations of some structuralist ways of text
219 treatment. Some clear cut characteristics of structuralism vis-à-vis a written text and the commentary thereupon
220 advocate solely the consideration of the form of it, neglecting utterly the contents. Theorizing the author in a
221 position of monopolizing the means of writing, structuralism makes written text self-sufficient with concrete
222 reality. Rather, the ambiguous aspect of this is either to refer to the author's imagination or his life in the
223 construction of meaning. That is why it is better to refer to the text itself and with the help of one's cultural
224 background, construct a subjective meaning to the content that will diversify the author's intention. And, thus,
225 Roland Barthes's poststructuralist/postmodernist stance should not be taking for adulation; rather, this should
226 be regarded as a breakthrough that stands for the world's civilizational betterment. ??? It is in this perspective
227 that this article has raised firstly the point on the flexibility of poststructuralism in the networks of language
228 games in a text. The main argument has been the description of literature as a space where all identity is lost,

229 beginning with the very identity of the figure that writes. The death of the author marks the birth of literature,
230 defined, precisely, as the creation of this speech, to which we cannot allocate an exact derivation.
231 What is important to a text is not to be found in the original thought of its author but in the individual
232 reader's final product inferred thereof. The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author,
not for its plunder but to render it universally fashionable. ^{1 2 3}



Figure 1:

Figure 2:

Figure 3:

233

¹Michael Denning. *The Cultural Front*, (New York: Verso, 1997), p. 5.3 Julia Kristeva and Birgitte Huitfeldt Middtun."Crossing the Borders: An Interview with Julia Kristeva."Contemporary Literary Criticism, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 340, Gale, 2013. Literature Resource Center. 4 David H. Richter. *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2000), p. 112.

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