

Reflections from "Death of the Author" to "Death of the Reader"

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Abstract. Roland Barthes put forward the famous literary theory of "the death of the author" in his masterpiece "The Death of the Author". Under the scope of literature and art, the discussion and debate about "the death of the author" has been enriched and deepened in the course of researchers' study. The intent of the literary theory of the "death of the author" is to remove the author's dominant position in the creation of the text in order to expand the scope of the meaning of the text itself and to enrich the space for the reader as an object of reception. Discussions about the theory itself have not only appeared in the fields of literary studies, literary criticism, and the history of reading, but have also generated new points of interest and focus along with cultural development, media changes, and social transformations. When the "death of the author" is re-examined and further extended to the reader's level, and combined with certain social realities, it will provide some new thoughts and inspirations for the study of literature.

Keywords: "death of the author"; "reader"; "death of the reader".

The development of literary theory requires the emergence of certain breakthrough theories, which may be highly subversive and cause great concern and discussion, or the logic of its own exposition is not complete enough and needs to be further transformed or supplemented. This kind of change is closely related to the development of society, and has its own research significance and value of the times at every stage of history. French writer, thinker, sociologist, social critic, literary critic Roland Barthes, in 1968, put forward the "death of the author" literary theory, is undoubtedly a very powerful new point of view, and its counterpart is the theory of "zero degree writing". Roland Barthes focused on deconstructing the text and dissolving the author's so-called "omniscience". To a certain extent, his conception of literature reflects the main trend of Western thought in the mid-to-late 20th century. This complete reversal of classical criticism, shifting the focus of literature to literature itself, is bound to cause extensive debate and research.

The Western discussion of Roland Barthes' theory is very rich. There are both affirmations and denials. For example, Wayne Booth, a famous literary theorist at the University of Chicago, opposes the so-called "demise of the author" in "The Resurrection of the Implied Author - Why Worry". There is a certain amount of literary research on this subject in Chinese academia, including Sang Mingxu's "How to View the Death of the Author" and Xu Zhaozheng's "Reexamining the Death of the Author", as well as studies relating the death of the author to the reader, such as Wang Chao's "From the Death of the Author to the Death of the Reader". For example, Wang Chao's "From the Death of the Author to the Death of the Reader: On the Value-Added Rights and Marginal Constraints of Discourse Analysis". This is the situation of relevant studies in the academic world, which mostly focus on the discussion of Roland Barthes's theories, with little derivation, and most of the dispersed studies were concentrated more than ten years ago, and there is still a lot of room for exploration. Discussions about "the death of the author" and "the death of the reader" are also related to the development of the times and need new cognition. The scope of research defined by the research overview and the existing results is the deep-rooted issue of the relationship between the author, the text and the reader. These points cannot be ignored by the Institute of Literature and Art. Therefore, in line with the principle of

academic innovation, the author intends to start from the discussion of the theory of "death of the author" itself, to sort out the history and evaluate its theory. Further to the text interpretation and reader's acceptance of the level of derivation, to examine the deeper value of literature and art. Combined with the development of the times and the social environment, the author will discuss the changes in readers and literature, and the corresponding thoughts, hoping to bring some references to the literary discussions, social values and practical significance.

1. Discussion of the "death of the author" perspective

The article *The Death of the Author* was published in 1968. In *The Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes begins with an archaeology of knowledge. He argues that at the beginning of civilized society, the narrator of a story was often a "mediator" rather than a person. This notion rejects the classical critical theory that "to read a work is in fact to read the author, and to know the author is to know the work". Roland Barthes then further elaborated that the modernist literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries either theoretically or creatively subverted and rebelled against the traditional notion of writing, denying the writer's sole subjectivity in the creation of works, and thus establishing the modern concept of writing. In the end, even "eliminate the author", in order to obtain the multi-dimensional space of the text, "the author's demise" in exchange for the so-called "birth of the reader". It can be seen that Barthes's point of view has been to emphasize the author away from the text, the essence of the discussion of the relationship between the author, the work, the reader. Whether to abandon all the influence of the concept of "author" in the work, or a certain degree of influence, this has become the focus of subsequent discussants.

Concerning the "author," Roland Barthes states, "The author is a modern figure, a product of our society, which has emerged from medieval society by a historical process: it carries with it the empiricism of England, the rationalism of France, and the personal beliefs of the Christian Reformed movement." In conjunction with history, the author did not exist from the beginning, but was a product of the continuous development and evolution of social history and literature, and it is still later in modern times that the author became a dominant figure in writing. In the era of believing in authors, authors dominated literary works and it was a popular literary phenomenon for people to study the author's life, interests and hobbies. With the professionalization of writing in the twentieth century, the emphasis on "man" himself and the emancipation of individuality, the increasing industrialization and utilitarianization of writing, etc., the identity of the author has been constantly dissolved. Roland Barthes also further dissolves the author's subject position in the subject of narrative work and the view of literary language. In terms of the subject of narration, Roland Barthes begins *The Death of the Author* by exploring who the speaker of a particular sentence is, using Balzac's novel *Saracén* as an example: 'Who is this who speaks'. Barthes argues that there is more than one speaker; it could be the protagonist of the novel; it could be Balzac with a different mindset; it could be the universally applicable Wise Words, and so on. Therefore, all the language of a narrative work cannot be seen as emanating from the author. For Barthes, the author is not the only subject of a narrative work, and even if one writes with personal pronouns such as "I," "you," or "he," they merely speak of "I," "you," or "he" only, and have no other meaning. In terms of linguistics, Barthes emphasized that literature is the science of human language, in which grammar, which represents historical traditions and laws, is the key to literature. The author's place is behind the linguistic system. Thus, this is the concept of "author" that Barthes dissolves in his own writings through a variety of discourses, almost completely abandoning the author from the study of the text, which gives room for debate and argumentation by later authors.

Roland Barthes' theory of the "death of the author" cannot be separated from the development of the times. From the point of view of the development of the history of Western thought, from the Renaissance to the "death of the author" put forward by Barthes, the author was in fact "eliminated" twice: the first time was the author in the sense of pre-modern theology (God), and the second time was the author in the sense of modernity (the subject). At the economic level, these are related to the development of the capitalist mode of production and capital multiplication. At the ideological level, the formulation of Barthes' theory is an alternation between modernism and postmodernism, and can also be seen as a development of structuralism to deconstructionism and post-deconstructionism. At the social level, the 1960s and 1970s were a change between the historical periods of industrial capitalist society and modern capitalist society. All these show that the "death of the author" is logically related to the capitalist mode of production and capitalist society. The value-addedness of capital needs the cooperation of corresponding theories and ideologies, and "Death of the Author", combined with the social trends of the time, embodies the theory and value demands of capital development. It is an inevitable product of the development of the times.

Roland Barthes' theory of the "death of the author" emphasizes the following: the author's dominance over the text is not historically inevitable. The author's dominant and dominating position is not always present, and therefore not justified, let alone permanent. The author is also never the sole subject of the text. The author loses its subject position in the structure of linguistic signs, and the author cannot exist prior to the text. The elimination of the author is the only way to open up the multidimensional space of the text, and ultimately the death of the author announces the birth of the reader. Theory has both rational and irrational aspects. They need to be viewed dialectically in the context of literature. Rationality lies in the denial of the author's authority in the understanding of the meaning of the text. Because the creation of the work is completed, the author ends the mission of "author", the author still exists, but the "author" no longer exists, he himself has been transformed into a reader of his own work, and has become a comprehender of his own work. He has become a reader of his own work, a comprehender of his own work. He does not have a special status, and does not enjoy preferential interpretative authority. The theory also affirms the reader's agency. Again, elements of its irrationality exist. First of all, the theory of the "death of the author" is contrary to the historical fact that the individualized author has always been the master of poetry, prose, novels and other genres of text, and it is unreasonable to completely abandon the author and its related factors. The theory of the "death of the author" is also logically paradoxical. Barthes' theory of the "death of the author" contains the false premise that any author is God-like and omniscient. This, combined with the fact that the literary world of the time no longer claimed the existence of such an omniscient author, makes the theory flawed. In his later years, Barthes also re-examined his own views, including further statements, a change in his attitude towards 'authorship', and the statement that 'literature is a medium for speaking of the self', all of which confirm a certain degree of change in Roland Barthes. This is also a reflection of the richness of the development of literary theory.

In conclusion, the death of the author is reasonable in the sense that the author is the authority of interpretation of the text, and the relationship between the author and the reader is equal in the interpretation of the text. However, when exploring the meaning of the text, "the death of the author" is not right, we can not completely eliminate the role and significance of the author in the text of the aesthetic, criticism. Can not simply intuitively view and respond to the "death of the author", but to its dialectical, specific analysis. The significance of the theory of the "death of the

author" is that it impacts the argument of "author" orientation, reshapes the position of "author", and puts the author, the work, and the reader on an equal footing. This is a shift from classical criticism to textual analysis, and the dissolution of the authority of the "author" can also be seen as a further emancipation of aesthetics. The deconstruction of the author-centered literary discourse system has led to the emergence of symbolic forms of literary expression in the vision of researchers. It also changed the way 20th century literature was written to a certain extent, allowing for more freedom of expression and favoring innovation. The dissolution of the author, moreover, allows the reader, the object of literary reception, to derive a greater space for expression and reflection.

2. Derivation from the "death of the author" to the level of the reader

The dissolution of the author's authority symbolizes the expansion of the reader's receptive space. Focusing on the reader is an important implication of extending the "death of the author" to the level of the reader. Roland Barthes pushed the author into the valley of death, in exchange for the elevation of the status of the reader, as well as the gamification and carnivalization of reading practice. While constructing a new conception of the reader, Barthes also constructed a new conception of the text, including the publication of *From Work to Text* in 1971, and *Theory of the Text* in 1981. In this, Barthes argues that "the work exists relatively fixedly, possessing a part of the written space, as curated in a library, in a bookstore, in a card catalog. Texts, on the other hand, are indeterminate objects without a center, with a plurality of meaning practices. At the same time, texts are intertextual, starry-eyed with codes, familiar phrases, rhyming patterns, sociolinguistic fragments, and so on, all of which are continually disassembled, woven, fused, churned out and yet continually generating meaning in the activity of reading practices." Thus, Barthes compares the reader to an idle subject, a subject who imagines at will. There is no longer any need to search for an ultimate reference in reading; the receiver only needs to "walk through" rather than "penetrate". What the reader experiences in the reading activity is also complex and irreducible. This claim of focusing only on the text and the work strengthens the reader's freedom in literary reception and gives critics a new way of thinking, an assertion of literary criticism that is not dominated by the author. It allows critics to get rid of the author's influence and explore works, literature and art more objectively and essentially.

The connection can be presented in the statement: "The work is always the author's work, the text is destined to be the reader's text." This is a further rendering of the process of the "death of the author" to the expansion of the "reader". Reading mediates the transition from work to text, from reproducing meaning to generating it. This is the "beginning of writing" or, as Barthes puts it, "the future of writing". In the end, the so-called "death of the author and birth of the reader" replaces the author's verbal activity, or the reader, who generates new meanings in the text. This is also a point of contention among researchers. This expulsion of the author will inevitably complete the intertextuality of the text, and the reader will also become a new maker of the textual structure, thus dissolving the "center" and "hierarchy" within the text, and thus opening the Pandora's Box of meanings, and turning the closed text into an open text, which ultimately has an impact on the text. The closed text becomes an open text, which ultimately affects the reader's conception of the text and expands the reader's freedom of interpretation and interpretation. Similarly, this kind of behavior will, in turn, affect social reality, literature and culture, and many other aspects of reality.

From the "death of the author" to the "reader", this derivation constructs a new object, the reader, to replace the author's subjective position in the activity of writing. On the one hand, the "death" of the author completely liberates the reader. The traditional literary reading activity needs to grasp the

author's original intention, the main idea of the text. But now that the author has disappeared, the reader can read the text and interpret it according to his own ideas and interests without considering the original meaning of the work or the logic of the text. On the other hand, the reader's reading behavior is given a new interpretation. In Barthes's view, the reader's reading behavior is not a simple aesthetic judgment, but a kind of playful reading, and moreover, a kind of creative reading. Barthes's theory cannot simply be pushed from the "author" to the "reader". Because reading is not a process of creation by the author and passive acceptance by the reader, but a program of two-way construction. The market and aesthetic needs will also affect the author's creation. The identity of the reader is also mixed with the identity of the spectator and the consumer, so the process becomes a two-way and dynamic construction. And ultimately, this inspires researchers to look beyond the "death of the author" debate, which focuses only on the "author," and to bring new attention to the relationship between the two, and to the study of the reader as an object.

3. Reflections on the "death of the reader"

Why then, after giving the above meaning to readers, do we further mention the "death of readers"? The so-called death of the reader is actually related to the development of the times and society. Putting the reader in a wider perspective in the study of literature and art is a comprehensive scrutiny that combines reality and culture. In the social context of modern cultural mass production, the generalized massification of aesthetics, the developed media and information explosion together constitute a new reading environment. The slogan of "the reader is dead" is thus born. The traditional social writing in the information age under the impact of the positioning of reading, whether with the change of the relationship between the author and the reader and therefore change, has become a problem that can not be ignored. Another example is WeChat, microblogging and other modern forums, we are both the author and the reader in the platform. The multiplicity and interchangeability of identities, how to position and how to disperse. The impact of informationization has also changed the traditional way of reading, and all these have blurred the traditional sense of literary acceptance. The disappearance of traditional reading and the process of gradual dissolution of text-dominated literary products by new cultural products such as television, movies, and animation have brought the so-called demise of readers into the limelight. It is also worthwhile to discuss these literary issues in conjunction with reality.

As early as 2006, there was a debate on the "death of the reader", and in the 6th issue of Contemporary Literature Forum in 2006, there were three essays on the discussion of the "death of the reader" by Prof. Tang Xiaolin, Prof. Liu Chaoqian, and Dr. Ou Zhen, as well as an article by Prof. Zhao Yihang, who wrote a paper on the "death of the reader". The words of Dr. Ou Zhen were published on. Ou Zhen even put forward the thesis of "the reader's death first", arguing that in the context of the consumer society, the reader's subjectivity has been dissolved by the pervasive market forces before it is established, and the "self" has become a permanent illusion ...Once this rationally suppressed "self" emerges, the "reader" dies in an instant. More likely, and more tragically, the reader dies before reading. Such a debate is closely related to mass culture, new media, technological means, consumption, and the professionalization of literature. Because in the process of reading, the author and the reader's right to analyze the meaning of the text has the structure of uncertainty and stalemate, such a stalemate, reconciliation and the current consumer society, mass culture, media culture has produced a contradiction. The death of readers does not only refer to the "sharp decline" or "demise" in the number of physical readers or the decrease of literary attention, but is a mixture and joint effect of the value-added discourse right of literary

readers and modern cultural ideology. The consumer orientation of massification and capitalization will only allow universal discourse to dominate. The so-called "elite" participants and "small circle" constructors will also lose their voices in the context of cultural mass production.

From the "death of the author" to the "reader", and then to the "death of the reader", and even deduced to the demise of literature. Such a chain of logic is both alarming and thought-provoking. Regarding literature, the form of literary language will continue to develop and progress, regardless of the popularity of mass culture or the exponential explosion of new media, the theory of literature that runs through it will not change. Theories of literature and literary criticism apply to texts, as well as a wide variety of literary forms. Like art, movies, music, etc. Regarding readers, simply elitist readers have also been shown to be undesirable. Finding a balance between popular culture and elite consciousness will also be an important step to strengthen the foundation of literature in the future. Regarding inheritance, classicization and modernization are not always contradictory, and modern means have strengthened creation and circulation. It is important to promote literature and build culture in a pluralistic and contextually appropriate way, without easily asserting that readers are dead and literature is dead.

4. Summary

Examining the "death of the author" and then extending it to the level of the reader, and looking at readers and literature in the context of certain social realities, can provide researchers with a way of thinking. This can provide researchers with a way of thinking about readers and literature in the context of certain social realities. Weakening the influence of the author and liberating the reader can lead to a reflection on the reader in contemporary research. Using this kind of thinking to inspire the traditional literary history that emphasizes works, writers and genres, this can provide a new focus for the writing of new literary history that pays more attention to readers, gives more space for literary acceptance and literary criticism, and also facilitates the formulation and discussion of new theories.

Literature always exists in a dynamic way. Literary reading is also always seen as a dynamic process of construction. Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* denies the sole subjectivity of the author and regards the reader as the generator of the meaning of the text, believing that the text is a process in which the reader constantly participates in and constructs the meaning, showing the evolution of his structuralist semiotics to the theory of textual reading. This undoubtedly opens up a new path for the development of literary research. It inspires us to think about and explore literature from a new perspective, and also lays the foundation for the emergence and development of the theory of reader acceptance, and inspires us to combine the theory of literature with reality to explore a deeper meaning of the study, and to look at the tomorrow of literature with a more dialectical and up-to-date vision.

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