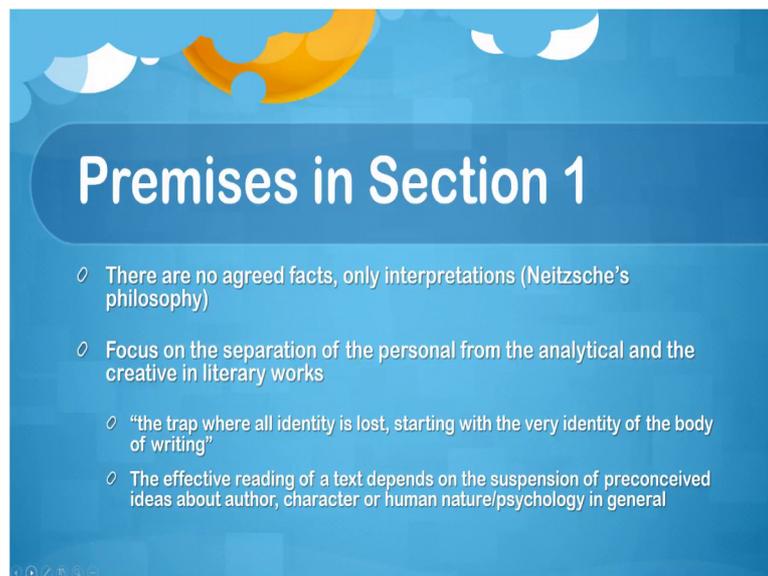


Postmodernism in Literature
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Week - 02
Lecture - 03b
The Death of the Author and its postmodern implications

Hello and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. In the previous session we had started looking at the essay the death of the author in which Barthes discusses the text reliance on a single self determining author and also how he questions the traditional assumptions about the literary criticism and traditional assumptions about the text and the author.

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We started looking at the essay in which he begins with an epigraph where he talks about Balzac's story Sarrasine and here we also find an extension of the Nietzsche's philosophy that there are no agreed facts only interpretations. And we also find how Barthes begins to focus on the separation of the personal from the analytical and the creative literary works in Barthes own words the traps where all identity is lost starting with the very identity of the body of writing.

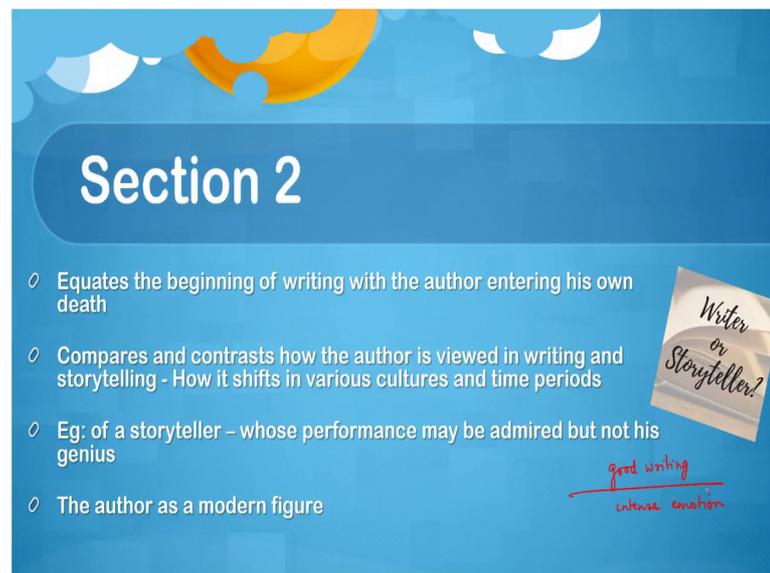
So, in the epigraph of the essay where he talks about Balzac's works he begins by negating the presence of the identity of the author and by arguing and by reiterating that

the moment the process writing begins the identity of the author is also forced to go into the background.

And he also begins to engage with this assumption to engage with this assumption that the effective reading of a text depends on the suspension of a preconceived ideas about author, character, or human nature or psychology in general which we also noted in his discussion of a particular sentence from Balzac's story.

Throughout the discussion of this essay which we would also realise it is a very short piece of barely 5 or 6 pages. The essay is divided into 7 sections which are also divided into 7 short paragraphs in that sense it is highly readable and short essay. For the convenience of the discussion we will be looking at each sections step by step and referring to each paragraph as a separate section.

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Section 2

- Equates the beginning of writing with the author entering his own death
- Compares and contrasts how the author is viewed in writing and storytelling - How it shifts in various cultures and time periods
- Eg: of a storyteller – whose performance may be admired but not his genius
- The author as a modern figure

Writer or Storyteller?

good writing
intense emotion

In the second section after the epigraph Barthes directly started talking about how he can equate the beginning of writer with the author entering his own death. So, he started engaging with this element in the title death of the author right from the beginning of the essay and articulates it in many different ways.

He also gets it historical engagement when he begins to compare and contrast how the author is viewed in different cultures in different times in various ways he focuses on the shifts the assumptions about the author across cultures and time periods and he also talks

about a primitive culture an ethnographic culture in which the story teller was more predominant and that of the narrative.

In his own words he talks about how in the primitive societies narrative is never undertaken by herself, but by a mediator someone or speaker whose performance may be admired that is his mastery of the narrative code, but not his genius. And he here focuses on very fine distinction between the writer and the story teller and also brings to our attention that the writer is the person according to the modern narrative writer is the person who has got an attribute of genius.

And in this story teller the primitive societies there was no intention to look at the narra look at the genius of this narrator, but only the focus the focus was only on the performance aspect which was also getting manifested and articulated through the medium of language and here we also find here we also find that Barthes totally disagrees with this idea of investing the responsibility of a narrative on a single person with whose in the modern times designated as the author.

And he also goes on to say that the idea of the author is a very modern figure produced no doubt by our society in. So, far as at the end of the middle ages, when English emperessor, French rationalism, and the personal faith of reformation it is covered the prestige of the individual or to put the (Refer Time: 04:19) of the human person.

So, here we find him making a very succinct claim about the author being a modern figure and also not in a way a figure who was always already there. And here he also makes a separation between good writing and intense emotion , and Barthes goes on to argue that good writing need not always be dependent on the intense emotions of the author.

But there have also been a number of critics who believe that the authors product the work the book is also related to his intense emotions and his emotional conflicts and his experiences so on and so forth. Though many may prefer to disagree with Barthes on this point this is also one of the things that he continues to talk about in many of his works about the separation between the art of good writing and also the intense emotional engagement of the author with whatever he is writing.

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THIS IS THE AUTHOR

Section 2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- The author still rules
- Tyrannically centred on the author
- The explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it

And again in the section 2, he continues to talk about the way in which the author is has always been dominating contemporary literary cultures. And he uses expressions such as the authors still rules and also that the entire idea of literature tyrannically centred on the author.

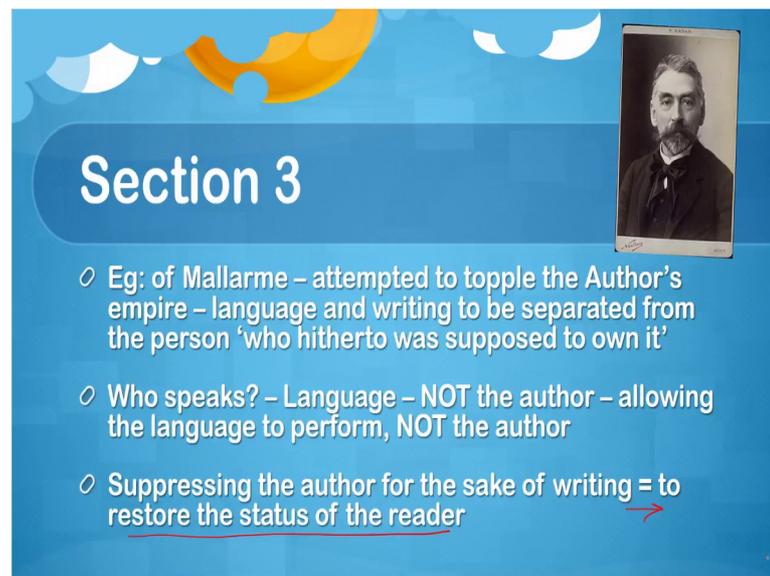
And he talks about how we can find the rule of the author getting manifested in various aspects such as manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men anxious to unite by their private journals, their person, and their work. The image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his taste, his passions, yeah.

So, he goes on to tell us in the multiple ways in which the author continues to dominate contemporary literary culture, and also the ways in which we understand literature and also approach literary criticism. And he says the problem here is that there is also a tendency to seek the explanation of the work in the man who has produced it.

And here he is also drawing our attention to his own critical ideas towards biographical, and historical criticism where the focus is always been on the biography of the author on the personal taste and the personal context of the author and how that has influenced directly or indirectly the production of the work.

And here he again draws our attention to one of the first points that he began talking about in the epigraph that there is an impossibility to identify a single voice and here he reiterates that point towards the end of the section 2 that there is an attempt being made to find the voice of one and the same person the author which delivered his confidence and here we are again reminded of the fact that there is only there is no single voice, but only several indiscernible voices.

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Section 3

- Eg: of Mallarme – attempted to topple the Author’s empire – language and writing to be separated from the person ‘who hitherto was supposed to own it’
- Who speaks? – Language – NOT the author – allowing the language to perform, NOT the author
- Suppressing the author for the sake of writing = to restore the status of the reader →

In the section 3 taking off from the previous take the previous discussion he continues to focus on the idea of the authors empire as he puts it and he gives a particular examples to talk about how certain writers have been able to topple this topple the authors empire.

The first example that he gives is that of the French symbolist poet Stephane Mallarme and a Mallarme was a poet who lived from 1842 to 1898 his contemporaries include Baudelaire and reboot. And Barthes goes on to argue that Mallarme was one of very few writers who could who could sense and also reflect in his own [vocalized noise] art works, in his own body of writing that language and writing has to be separated from the person who hitherto was suppose to own it in Barthes own words.

So, the language became separated from the person who wrote it in the in other in other to put it in other way the writer ceases to be the owner of the work that he is writing sees to be the owner of kind of language that he is reproducing as a part of a book and here he also goes on to ask a couple of questions which would also lead us to further be further

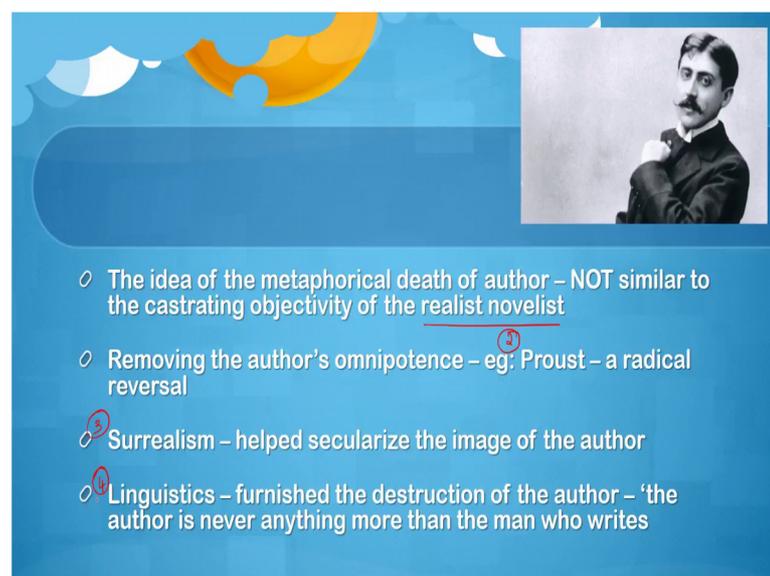
convinced about the argument that the author is separated from the work that he produces that the author is separated from the language, that produces the text.

And he in that sense goes on to ask this question about who speaks in any body of a work and Barthes gives us the answer that it is language and not the author. So, it is the language which allows the text to perform not the author here the focus is being taken away completely from the author and the foregrounding of language keeping in tune with the shift from structuralism to post structuralism.

We find a very definitive foregrounding of a the aspect of language taking place over here and he also says that there is a there is a deliberate suppressing of the author which takes place for the sake of writing, and why is this being done this is being done in order to restore the status of the reader.

So, in the beginning of the essay itself right in the initial discussion Barthes gives us a sense of where he is leading us to that with the death of the author we are moving away from the from the dominance from the privileges associated with the author towards a kind of reading of a text where language is supreme and also which is more reader oriented reader centric where the final destination lies with the reader.

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The slide features a blue background with a decorative top section containing a yellow and orange sun-like shape and a white crescent moon. In the top right corner, there is a black and white portrait of a man with a mustache, likely a literary figure. Below the portrait, there is a list of four bullet points, each starting with a small circle containing a number (1, 2, 3, 4).

- 1 The idea of the metaphorical death of author – NOT similar to the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist
- 2 Removing the author's omnipotence – eg: Proust – a radical reversal
- 3 Surrealism – helped secularize the image of the author
- 4 Linguistics – furnished the destruction of the author – 'the author is never anything more than the man who writes

Even when he is talking about this detachment of the author from the text or from the language that he is using, he is also telling us to be aware of the fact that the idea of the

metaphorical death of the author is not similar to the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist. Here he makes the fine distinction between what we understand as the author's omnipotence and also what Barthes tells us about the separation from good writing and the emotions and the experience of the author.

So, here Barthes is trying to tell us that when he talks about the separation of the author from the text a separation of the author from the language that he is using he is not talking about a realist sort of a narrative which was also dominant during those times on the other hand he is in fact, talking about a radical reversal which he believes could be illustrated through the second example that he talks about that is through the works of Marcel Proust.

Marcel Proust was a French novelist who lived from 1871 to 1922 his best known work was *In Search of Lost Time*. So, here after Stéphane Mallarmé Barthes gives us the illustration of Proust in Barthes' own words. Proust is given modern writing it is epic by radical reversal instead of putting his life into his novel as we often say so he makes his very life into a work for which his own book was in a sense the modern.

So, here we find Barthes also talking about taking away the omnipresent, omnipotent states us that the author here hitherto was invested by so when he talks about the death of the author he also realises that it is not just a metaphorical and physical death of the author that Barthes talks about instead there are number of such things that he alludes to in course of his discussion.

And thirdly Barthes gives us the example of surrealism and according to Barthes surrealism was something that helps secularise the image of the author. How is surrealism achieve this? Because surrealism itself as a movement as a artistic literary movement it was a play on the system of writing and meaning.

And here the artist provides no solid conclusion about the author to the reader. So, surrealist art, or the surrealist movement Barthes identifies as a perfect site in which the image of the author could be secularised. Because in this surrealist movement or in the surrealist work of art the text does not provide any solid clues about the presence of the author or even what the author had intended.

And fourthly Barthes talks about the emergence of linguistics an idea which collaborates many of the things that he is also he is also he is also trying to argue out and in his own words linguists has just furnished the destruction of the author with a precious analytic instrument by showing that utterance in it is entirety is a void process.

So, in linguistically when we analyse the function of the author Barthes tells us that the author is never anything more than the man who writes. So, just as I is no more than the man who says I, he says the author does not have any more function than being the person who writes.

So, here we also find that Barthes we also find Barthes using contemporary text, and contemporary context, the contemporary evolution of various disciplines and various art movements to prove his own points to illustrate his own arguments in multiple ways. Thus in this section in section 3 Barthes talks about 4 examples that of Stephane Mallarme of Marcel Proust of surrealism and finally, about linguistics to talk about how certain authors are capable of top lengthy authors empire.

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Section 4

- o The absence of the author – utterly transforms the modern text – the author absents himself
- o Time – no longer the same / the author pre-exists the book – a relation of antecedence
- o The modern author – scriptor – born simultaneously with his text
- o The modern writer – buried the ~~Author~~

past present
Author → Book
father child

In section 4 Barthes draws our attention to the absence of the author and what it is implications could be? Barthes tells us that the absence of the author would utterly transform the modern text, and there also situations when we understand that the author absents himself as well and he tells us about how time plays a significant role in this in

this figuration of the author in our understanding of the relationship between the author and the text.

And here if we look at the look at the relationship between the author, and the book, there is a conventional sense of understanding that the author belongs to the past of his own book and that the book is a present and there is also a certain way in which the relation between the author and the book is in seen in the context of a relation of antecedence may be as in Barthes own words like that of a father and child.

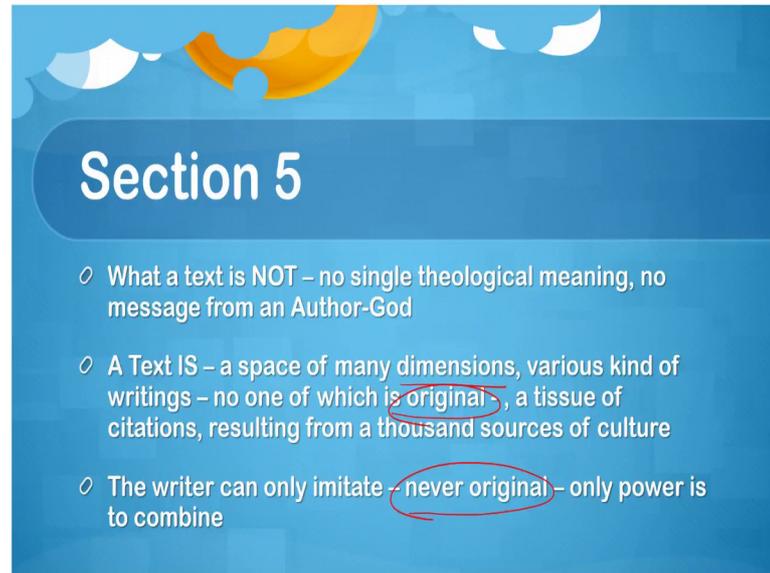
But according to Barthes this is a very limiting relationship which would not allow us to explore the various possibilities of this relationship, the various nuances of this relationship, and he says it is no longer the same in the contemporary in the modern scenario where the author pre exists the book.

And this relation of antecedence will not work anymore because the conventional understanding is that of the author being always already there and the author giving birth to the book the author being. The author pre relating the book in multiple ways and becoming a past of the book itself, but the more modern author Barthes own words and he also designates the modern author as a scriptor, he Barthes argues is born simultaneously with his text there is no way in which the scriptor can predate his work or his text or the book, but the scriptor is born simultaneously as and when this writing process is going on and if we read this.

If we read this along with one of the previous point that Barthes makes at the outset that just when the process of process of writing begins the identity of the author is forced to derive in the same way as a scriptor the identity of the scriptor begins to emerge only when the process of writing begins.

So, in that sense the scriptor has born simultaneously with his text and here he also draws us to his final point in section 4, that the modern writer has buried the author. So, we do not have an idea of the author in the modern sense according to Barthes in a very post structuralist way which also eventually becomes a foundations of postmodern critical reading, and thinking that we do not have any we do not have an idea of the author now, but on the contrary we only have writers and scriptors. And this understanding becomes important in order to be able to access the text and also know what the text is today? And what it is not?

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Section 5

- What a text is NOT – no single theological meaning, no message from an Author-God
- A Text IS – a space of many dimensions, various kind of writings – no one of which is original, a tissue of citations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture
- The writer can only imitate – never original – only power is to combine

So, in section 5 Barthes begins talking about what a text is not he tells us that there is no text is not a space where a single theological meaning could be attributed this is the text could not be considered as a as a as a message from an author got here we also find him drawing extensively from the 19th century philosophies of (Refer Time: 17:36), he also then tells us what a text is according to him.

A text is not just one coherent body of articulations by a single person, but on the contrary it is a space of many dimensions, various kinds of writing none of which is original a tissue of citations resulting from a thousand sources of culture. So, here we find a very radically different way in which take the idea of the text being presented over here, where there is no attempt to attribute any originality to the text, where there is no attempt to attribute any sense of coherence in terms of it is a structure, in terms of it is sources, in terms of the various references, and cultural contexts that it is trying to bring together.

And here Barthes further reiterates the point that the writer can only imitate never original and as he puts as he puts it the only power perhaps the writer has his to combine in his own words his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing to oppose some by others as to never sustain himself by just one of them.

So, he absolutely negates the possibility of a singular meaning about a single understanding about it text and celebrates the idea of plurality, and multiplicity by

redefining the idea of the text by looking at the text as a space in which all of these multiplicities come together. All of these all of these differences from different cultural sources, from different different other texts from different other philosophies and even from different other author figures they all come in into this single space of the text.

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Section 6

- The claims to decipher a text – quite useless
- To give an author to a text – perfectly suits criticism
- The discovery of the author = the 'explanation' of the text –
The Critic has conquered
- The reign of the Author = the reign of the Critic
- The space of writing is to be traversed not penetrated

And continuing with this claim continuing, with this understanding about the author and the text in section 6 Barthes tells us that the claims to decide for a text therefore, is quite a useless pursuit, there is absolutely no point in trying to decide for a text meaning through the conventional methods of literary criticism, or the conventional methods of reading a text.

In Barthes own words to give an author to a text is to impose upon the text a stop clause to furnish it with a final signification to close the writing as much as Barthes is in disagreement with this conception of reading a text, he also understands the fact and draws our attention to the fact that this is a conception, this is a method that perfectly suits criticism so on. All sides the discussion about the author and the text we find a new kind of theme to discuss here criticism, and we also find how organically Barthes manages to relate and connect all of these aspects within his within the discussion about the death of the author.

And here he also tells us how this works, he tells us how a critic through his process of discovery of the author also successfully manages to explain the text and here the

explanation of the text as he has mentioned before it is sort in the man who produce the text.

So, the critic assumes obviously and naturally that the explanation of the text relies only on the discovery of the author, the discovery of the author's passions the intentions. His context, the his biography and all everything related to the author and here it also gives us the sense that the critics has finally, conquered the text.

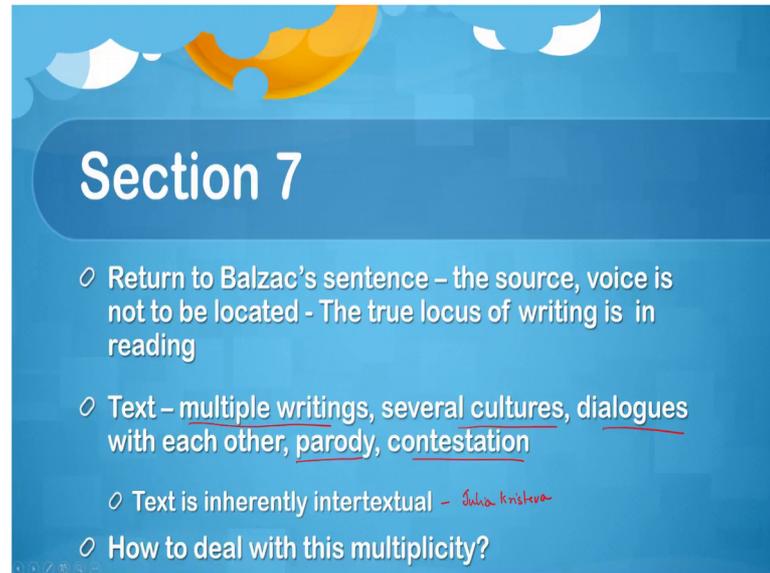
So, this relation by complicating and by problematizing this relation between the author the text and the critic Barthes goes on to argue that the reign of the author should ideally have been the reign of the critic as well. So, here he says that just like there is a tendency to fix meaning upon the text based on a single author, based on the authority invested upon the author there is also a way in which the critics have been trying to reiterate reiterates the reiterate this process through various methods of traditional literary criticism.

And here he also finds a problem with contemporary literary criticism and he succinctly remarks that the space of writing is to be traversed not penetrated, he finds many of the contemporary literary critical activities of his time rather problematic because there attempts were mostly to penetrate a literally text which Barthes things as a futile and useless item on contrary. He see the space of writing the space of literature as a space to be traversed because it is a multiple space; it is a space where many conflicting things many things from various sources and various cultures have come together to inhabit.

And he also ends this section by highlighting the fact that only when we move away from this traditional assumptions literature would began to be a liberating activity only when we stop assigning a secret assigning a single meaning to a text the reading of literature would begin to would begin to become a more liberating activity.

And he ends this section by saying there is a when you refused to arrest meaning arrest a single meaning to a text there is also a refusal of God and his hypostases reason science and the law. Hypostases could be usually translated as a foundation on the essential nature of anything.

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Section 7

- Return to Balzac's sentence – the source, voice is not to be located - The true locus of writing is in reading
- Text – multiple writings, several cultures, dialogues with each other, parody, contestation
- Text is inherently intertextual – *Julia Kristeva*
- How to deal with this multiplicity?

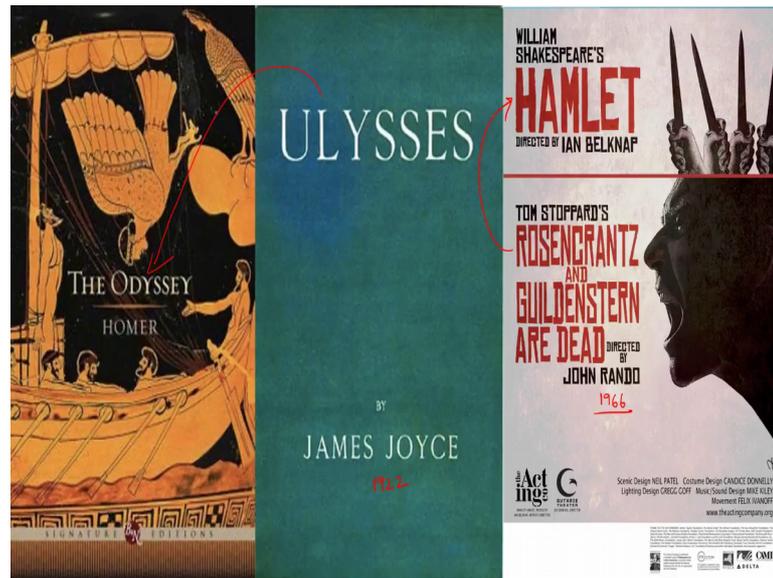
And in the final section which is section 7 Barthes again returns to Balzac's sentence which he discussed briefly in the beginning in the epigraph of the essay. And there in the final section he again reiterates his point that source or the voice which utters that sentence need not be located because the true locus of writing is in reading.

The text need not be penetrated in such a way that the voice source of the voice is important becomes important enough to be located on the other hand the pleasure of reading itself is in is in not in trying to locate the voice to a single identity, but in the knowing that the voice cannot be located because there are several indiscernible voices.

And here he again draws our attention to the space of the text which is encompassed with multiple readings, several cultures, dialogues with each other parody, and contestation and here though he does not mention the term intertextuality the obvious references also to the text being inherently intertextual.

Intertextuality incidentally is a very key term in postmodern criticism in postmodern theory we shall be coming back to look at it detail in one of the later lectures the term was also incidentally used and popularized and theorized increasingly by Julia Kristina to briefly take a look at some of the ways in which intertextuality functions.

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Here is an example of nineteen twenty two text by James Joyce Ulysses the understanding of which is also heavily dependent on Homers odyssey. This is also a play 1966 play by Tom Stoppard's titled Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead in order to be able to understand this play one needs to be very familiar with the play by Shakespeare Hamlet.

Because [vocalized noise] Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two minor characters of Shakespeare's tragedy the Hamlet. So, intertextuality is the conscious or unconscious ways in which a text or a context goes on to infer other texts and contexts and how the presence of various such contexts various such references could be found within a single text.

And if a text is inherently intertextual as Barthes tells us as and as many others have continued to talk about in the post structuralist and postmodern framework how do we deal with this multiplicity.

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Section 7

- There is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united – NOT the ~~author~~, but the reader
- Agency of the Reader
- The reader – the destination / The destination – no longer personal
- The reader – never the concern of classical criticism
- The birth of the reader

And this multiplicity Barthes and Barthes Barthes very briefly towards the end of the final section tells us gives us a roadmap as to how to deal with this multiplicity.

He tells us that there is one place where this multiplicity is collected and united, but incidentally this one is the not the author, but the reader here by negating the author by taking by taking the focus away from the author he is not just talking about the author, but the, but about the emergence of various other spaces, various other possibilities of reading a text and also the emergence of the significance of the reader.

And here he also highlights and draws our attention to the agency of the reader which had either to be ignored or not been foregrounded for a very long time within the space of literary criticism within the space of understanding literature.

And he then very very categorically states that the destination of the text is the reader, the destination of reading that in Barthes own words reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology, he is only he is only been seen as a sight as a place where these multiple parts of the text comes together where these multiple parts of the text is constituted.

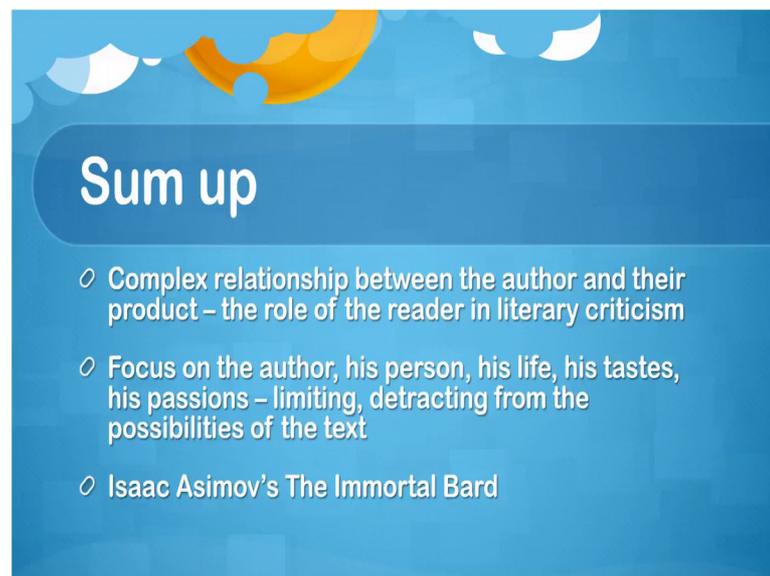
So, in such a way he also brings back the focus on the reader perhaps in a more direct way towards the end of the this section, towards the end of this essay by telling us that the reader has never been the concern of classical criticism so the towards the end of the

essay to almost seems as of the objective of the entire essay objective of this direct pronouncement of the death of the author was also meant to bring back the focus on the reader who never was the focus of attention throughout the history of literary criticism, throughout history of understanding literary understanding the literary text.

And he ends this essay with this succinct statement we are now beginning to be the (Refer Time: 29:47) no longer of such anti faces by which our society proudly champions precisely what it dismisses ignores his mothers or destroys. We know that to restore we know that to restore to writing a it is future we must reverse (Refer Time: 29:03) the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the author.

So, as we have pointed out in the beginning the death of the author becomes an emancipatory process becomes an emancipatory event and Barthes has managed to quite successfully trace this entire process eventually to lead to the final destination of the birth of the reader.

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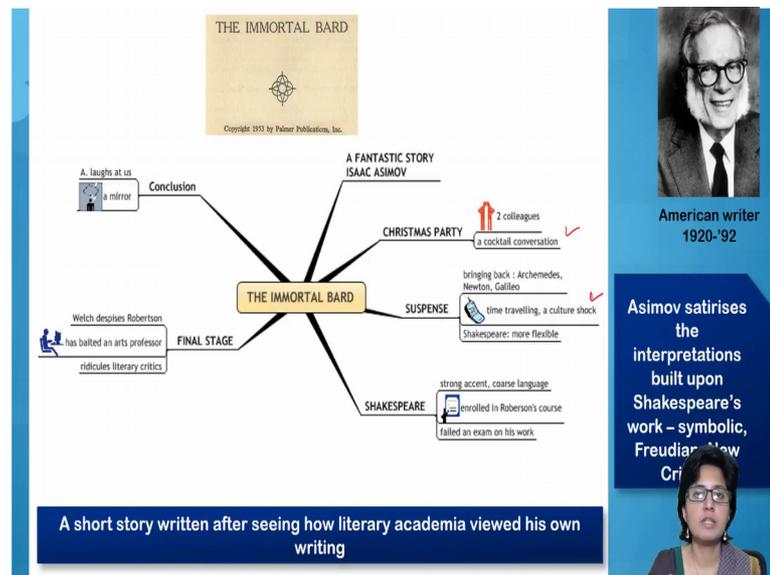
Sum up

- Complex relationship between the author and their product – the role of the reader in literary criticism
- Focus on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions – limiting, detracting from the possibilities of the text
- Isaac Asimov's The Immortal Bard

To sum up in Barthes essay the death of the author he engages with the complex relationship between the author and the product and also the role of the reader in literary criticism. We would also later know that number of readers response theories were had emerged after this essay taking inspiration from the way in which the role of the role of the author was completely negative.

And it this essay also tells us how our focus on the author, his person, his life, his taste, his passion, are all very limiting and also it becomes eventually detracting from the possibilities of the text.

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Here on a lighter note let us also briefly take a look at Isaac Asimov's short story the Immortal Bard Isaac Asimov was an American writer who lived from 1920 till 92 and he in one of his famous short stories fantastic work that will be immortal bard he an in fact, satirises the interpretations built upon Shakespeare's work through a symbolic Freudian new critical approaches.

And the story is about 2 colleagues who engage in a cocktail conversation and one is a scientist and other is the professor of arts the scientist tells the professor about how he is brought back Archimedes Newton and Galileo through a through a through a scientific method of time travelling, but they could not really fit in the contemporary because they all experience culture shock.

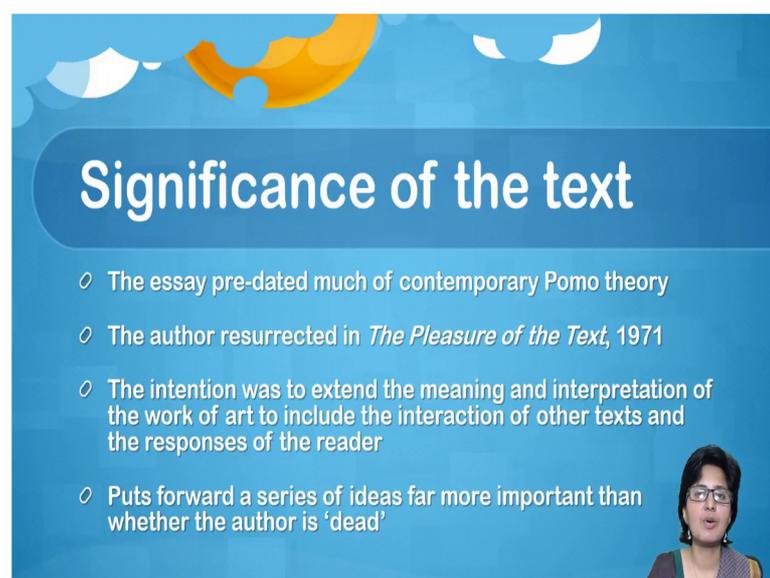
And then the scientist also thought that perhaps Shakespeare being a since he is in possession of a universal mind may be he will fit in well with any context and he decides to bring back Shakespeare to the contemporary from the 1600's and Shakespeare also thought it was a fantastic idea.

But there are also a lot of challenges that Shakespeare faces because of his courses language and a strong accent and nevertheless he also shows a keen interest in enrolling in a college course because he was very fascinated by the idea that his own works were being taught as a course in colleges. So, he was also enrolled in this professor's course in this literature professor Professor Roberson's course and in the story takes a turn.

The scientist tells the arts professor that eventually Shakespeare had to be sent back to the 1600s because of the humiliation that he suffered and what kind of humiliation was that Shakespeare eventually flung in a college course on Shakespeare. So, here keeping apart the satire inherent of this story the way in which Asimov is taking a dig at a lot of contemporary methods of criticism because the story was also published after seeing how the literary academy viewed Asimov's own writing.

So, regardless of the ways in which Asimov ridicules the contemporary system of criticism and also this entire industry of reading a text in multiple ways, this also draws our attention to many of the things that the death of the author talks about that the meaning of the text perhaps does not inherently rest with the author anymore, it is moved away from the author beyond redemption to such an extent that even if the author himself comes back author himself, or herself comes back to look at a text he or she may not be able to engage with a text in a fully comprehensible way so, having said that, on a more serious.

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Significance of the text

- The essay pre-dated much of contemporary Postmodern theory
- The author resurrected in *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1971
- The intention was to extend the meaning and interpretation of the work of art to include the interaction of other texts and the responses of the reader
- Puts forward a series of ideas far more important than whether the author is 'dead'

Note the significance of this essay death of the author is located at a very seminal point; because as we have noted before the publication of this essay happens at a time during a transition from the structuralist mode towards a poststructuralist mode which is also a predominantly postmodernist.

Though this essay predated much of contemporary post modern theory we find that this is a seminal textual inaugural text when we begin talking about postmodern critical approaches and the Barthes in any case did not really mean that the author had to be completely thrown out because he also resurrects the role of the author in the pleasure of the text published in 1971.

So, may be in the death of the author the intention of Barthes was to extend the meaning and interpretation of the work of art to include the interaction of the other texts in other words the idea of intertextuality and also the response of the reader as we would see in the reader response criticism of the later period. And here we also see that Barthes manages to put forward a series of ideas far more important than whether the author is actually dead or not.

So, the focus moves away from the author towards various other things including contemporary criticism, and also the renewed focus on the reader being the final destination of any reading process any literary text. Having now looked at the entire essay the death of the author let me also draw your attention to the availability of this essay online and this is a very short essay I strongly encourage you to take a look at the essay in original.

So, that this entire reading would also make more sense to you the discussion any discussion on the death of the author is not complete until we take a look at Foucault's what is an author. So, in the next session we shall be proceeding to a discussion of what is an author by Michel Foucault we will also be taking a look at how the poststructuralist mode of thinking the poststructuralist mode of criticism had tremendously influence the idea of postmodern criticism and the emergence of postmodern kind of a postmodern way of approaching literary text and the contemporary this is all we have for today.

Thank you for listening I look forward to seeing you in the next session.