

The death of the author suggests that the author is an ideological construct rath...

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



The Death of the and the Life of the Audience In Death of the Roland Barthes s that the reading audience is affected by this death of the author. The core of Barthes' argument is that the reader brings his or her experiences, values and beliefs to the text, and this is how the text is interpreted. Because of this, the text is " living." If there was only one meaning, the meaning that the author " intends," then the text is dead, according to Barthes. It is therefore pointless for the critic to " discover" the author to explain the text. The critics use the life of the actual author to try to understand the meaning of the text, but this is but one interpretation. There are as many interpretations of the authors' work as there are readers, according to Barthes, because the reception and interpretation of the audience is what gives life to the book. The source of the writing, which is the author putting words to paper, is not the originator of the text. The reading of the text is where the actual texts originate, because the interpretation is what is key. Trimbur (2000) explains a little of what Barthes meant by the " Death of the Author." Essentially, the textual construct, or the reception of the text, is really an amalgamation of cultural practices that informs the reader and the reader's reception of the text. In other words, how a work is interpreted and received depends upon the cultural background of the reader. Trimbur (2000) states that Barthes' reasoning that the author is dead, and that, essentially, the reader is the one that brings life to the book, changed the way that critics interpreted books. The agency of a given work was assigned as much to critics and audiences as to the authors themselves. Stables (1997) concurs with this analysis. The readers are who make the text

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meaningful, and this does not really have anything to do with the author him or herself. “ The meanings share a network, and this network is what informs the work.” (p. 106). Patterson (2000) adds that the audience brings new meaning to the text, every time that he or she engages in the text. She states that the death of the author has implications for her schoolchildren, “ who bring these multiple meanings that are shifting and changing to the text.”

That said, the theory is not without contradiction. It is often said that a certain work is “ autobiographical” in a sense, in that the writer writes what he or she knows. This is a contradiction to what is said, because the implication of Barthes essay is that the author essentially disappears from the work, and the interpretation is in the hands of the audience. If the author is attempting to make the work autobiographical, in a sense, then the audience is asked to interpret concrete events in the authors life. These concrete events may not be open to interpretation, however, so this becomes problematic, and is contradictory. Moreover, another possible contradiction is that many books are not that complex. If somebody reads a potboiler novel that is designed for the masses, then most people would interpret the text in the same way, simply because the story and the characters are not layered. In other words, in many simplistic novels, there is really only one way to interpret what is there. In such novels, it probably can be said, after all, that the author was present, and giving his or her vision, and that the interpretations would not be as multitudinous as Barthes might suggest.

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The critical implications for what Barthes proposes is that criticism for any work would no longer necessarily revolve around the life of the author. Critics often bring the authors background into their critique of a book, and attempt to show how, possibly, the authors work was influenced by his or her own life. However, according to Barthes, the authors life is not relevant to the work, because the interpretation is what matters. The audience is all that really matters. Therefore, using the authors life and experiences would not be appropriate for critical reviews of work. Moreover, critiques of an authors work may not delve into the authors intent, whether the author is approaching the text from, say, a feminist perspective, or a Marxist perspective. What matters is how the audience is interpreting the work - if the audience interprets the work as decidedly non-feminist or non-Marxist, then that is how the work will be interpreted. The writers intention to show a certain ideological bent would be nullified, which might prove frustrating for the writer.

Barthes suggests that the author is not the most important aspect of a text, or even that the author's thought processes and vision for their work is the most important part of the text. What matters is the interpretation of the text. A reader will bring his or her own unique experiences, values, and culture to interpreting the text, and the text is living in this way. That said, it is naïve to assume that all books have the complexity that would necessitate multiple interpretations. Sometimes there is only one interpretation.

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