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The Death of the Author

by Roland Barthes

In his story *Sarrasine* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: "This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fustings, and her delicious sensibility." Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of 'Woman'? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied, in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' - the mastery of the narrative code - may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. Mallarmé's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader). Valéry, encumbered by a psychology of the Ego, considerably diluted Mallarmé's theory but, his taste for classicism leading him to turn to the lessons of rhetoric, he never stopped calling into question and denying the Author, he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favor of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition. Proust himself, despite the apparently psychological character of what are called his analyses, was visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his

Yazarın Ölümü

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Balzac öyküsü "Sarrasine"de, kadın kılığına girmiş bir hadım şarkıcıyla ilgili şu tümceyi yazar: "O, kendi olağan korkuları, usdışı kaprisleri, içgüdüsel endişeleri, düşüncesizce cüretkarlığı, yaygaracı ve enfes duyarlılığıyla bir hadımın kendisiydi." Bunları kim söylemektedir? Kadın kılığında gizlenmiş hadım şarkıcıyı tanımayı tercih etmeyen öykünün kahramanı mı? Kişisel deneyimleri ona bir kadın felsefesi sağlayan **Balzac** mı? Dışılık hakkında belirli "yazınsal" düşünceler ortaya koyan yazar **Balzac** mı? Bu evrensel bilgelik midir? Yoksa romantik bir ruhbilim midir? Biz bunu iyi bir neden olarak, yazının bizzat bütün seslerin ve kökenlerin yıkımı olmasından dolayı asla bilemeyiz. Yazı, nesnemin gözden yitip gittiği yansız, karmaşık ve dolambaçlı uzam, bütün özdeşliklerimizin yitdiği olumsuzluktur ve gövde yazının tam da tanımlanmasıyla başlar.

Hiç kuşku yok ki durum her zaman şöyle olmuştur: Yazı, bir olgu nesnesi, olmayan amaçlar için anlaşıldığı ve gerçeklik üstünde daha fazla doğrudan etkide bulunamaz olduğu bir durumda, başka bir deyişle bir boşluğun görüldüğü, simgenin kendi etkinliğinin beklenen herhangi bir işlevinin dışında, sesin kökenini yitirdiği ve Yazar'ın kendi ölümüne girdiği zaman başlar. Yine de bu görünümün etkisi çok çeşitlidir; budunbilimsel toplumlarda anlaşılan, bir kişi tarafından olmaksızın çok, dehasından dolayı değil de performansından dolayı hayran olunan bir arabulucu, şaman ve anlatıcı tarafından ortaya konulur. Yazar İngiliz deneyciliği, Fransız ussalcılığı ve Reformasyonun kişisel inancıyla birlikte ortaçağlarda doğmuş çağcıl bir figürdür, yazar bireyi daha kıbarca söylemek gerekirse "insan kişisi"ni keşfetmiştir. Bundan dolayı yazarın "kişiliğine" çok fazla önem bahşeden kapitalist ideolojide doruğuna ulaşan ve tamamlanan pozitivist yazınsal materyalde

