

# The author and his doppelgangers

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## RESUMEN

El artículo trata de dos concepciones del término "autor": teórica y biográfica. Como se muestra en la referencia de Roland Barthes, metáfora de la "muerte-de-autor", que influyó fuertemente en las discusiones de la poética posteriores; una creencia común en la que ambos entendimientos relacionados con la obra literaria, parece ser falsa. Barthes de la "muerte-de-autor" entonces está relacionado con los pensamientos de Michel Foucault en cuanto a la desaparición del tema. En una obra literaria, la escritura representa un espacio donde la identidad del escritor se disuelve y, al mismo tiempo, ese mismo espacio permite la creación de una nueva, de ficción "YO". Esta transición a la ficción se trata en la celebración, ilustrada también en la obra de Fernando Pessoa.

## Abstract

The paper deals with two understandings of the term "author": theoretical and biographical. As it will be shown with reference to Roland Barthes's metaphor "death-of-the-author", which strongly influenced discussions of the poetics to come, a common belief that both understandings relate to literary oeuvre appears to be false. Barthes's "death-of-the author" will then be related to Michel Foucault thoughts on disappearing subject. In a literary work, writing represents a space where identity of writer dissolves and, at the same time, that very space enables creation of a new, fictional "I". This transition to fiction is dealt

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with in the conclusion, where also illustrated by the work of Fernando Pessoa.

The concept of author is specific and ambiguous ever since it has been "discovered". It has been used in psychology, where author's person serves as key to the meaning of art. It has also been used in literary theory, where, initially, it had been given a crucial importance (author as a focal point of textual meaning), later to be deprived of this privilege. At last, the concept of author has been used in philosophy in order to guarantee integrity of a subject (subjectivity being base of all philosophy). While philosophical texts were closely connected to their authors' legitimacy until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the situation has now changed radically. Truth becomes a part of anonymous independent structures, which do not have an author: *"Our relationship to modern way of thinking and acting, therefore to ourselves, constantly opens up the opportunities for reflections and dialogues that contribute to the internal modifications in a given rationality"* (Gogora: 2009, p. 367). Text's legitimacy is no longer a matter of text's origin (the author, as a writing subject), but rather a matter of structures, language and discourse.

The concept of author is dynamic. Do we, however, know what an author is? We know that it is used in more than one science. The first possible definition of the author could be, then, an abstract derived from various definitions by various sciences. I will now try to define the author using this encyclopedic method.

Such a definition suggests an author, which creates a work of art or a scientific work addressed to recipients. Still, this definition is not complete, due to the fact that the author is a part of the work's context: author's personal life, experiences and knowledge are related to what he/she is saying. At the same time, the author is determined by history, society and space, which influences the work as well. From the point of view of literary history, every author can be categorized by means of a certain historical literary group or movement. And yet, every artwork

reveals its author's individuality. Speaking in terms of law, an author can only be a natural person, although not necessarily with legal capacity. In the history of science, we know authors of discoveries, patents or concepts. We could add more and more items to our list of what an author is, but even the most complete list would only tell us that an author is a creator. A creator of what we usually call a work of art. Here, the problems occur.

Do we know with certainty, what a work of art is? We only know that it "gives birth" to the author, because there is no author without a oeuvre. It seems, then, that nothing is easier than to label certain amount of text with a name. The homogenous function of the author's name, however, is far from being unproblematic, considering the question "what is a oeuvre"? Is it everything that some writer wrote? Not just completed books, but also book fragments, text sketches, drafts, marginal notes, scratched sentences? Shall we count even texts signed with pseudonyms and everything found posthumously amongst work? We can see now that work of art is a controversial entity and that the whole connected to this entity, just as the author's individuality, are controversial as well.

In addition, the work has an autonomous existence, independent from author's life. Once published, the work no longer expresses opinions, capabilities or thoughts of its author. It gains significance (value) in comparison with other works. A work is considered unique to the extent it does not resemble, understood to the extent it reflects other works. When thinking of a book, Michel Foucault writes poignantly in *The Archeology of Knowledge*: "*The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network*" (Foucault: 2004, p. 17)

Reflecting upon author as a category, we experience that the author disappears. The disappearance is a result of the *death of the author*. The concept of author's death is crucial to philosophical and literary research of sixties. Philosophy and literary criticism inspired by linguistics, realized that a usual understanding of literature focuses uncompromisingly on the author, his person, preferences, passions and personal history. As a result, author's life became a key to his/hers work, thus creating a crucial category in literary criticism – the category “man – work”. *Death of the author*, as announced by Barthes, embodies a critique of statements such as: “Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his confidence”. (Barthes: *The Death*. web page)

When reflecting upon death of the author, Barthes uses modern linguistics: “*linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I: language knows a subject, not a person, and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language work, that is, to exhaust it*” (Ibidem). When there is no person or the person does not speak in the work, we cannot subscribe work's voice to the author's person. But Barthes goes even further, stating that the work's voice originates not from writing, but from reading: “*...the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of... the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted*”. (Ibidem).

This (as planned) resulted in the critics' focusing on the process of reading. Let us think, however, how the death of the author influenced the author himself. In his manifest, Barthes states that *"writing is a destruction of any voice, any origin. The writing is the very neuter, the diversity, that inclined plane where our subject fades, a black-and-white space, where any kind of identity is gone, including identity of a writing body"*. We said that a language knows its speaker, but not its person. Because of that, it is the reader, who holds gathered all paths of which the text is constituted. What gives us right, however, to speak of the writer's disappearance? It is the very structure of modern literature that gives us an answer.

For modern literature, certain duplication is characteristic. The literature leaves narration and starts commenting itself. A modern work, instead of posing questions on its writer's psychology or person, asks about possibilities, meaning and methods of writing. Thanks to this self-reference, the literature continues to transcend own limits and becomes a comment on itself. The transition from literary language to self-commentary has two consequences. The first is, that the literature evolves as a net, where all nodes are unique and, simultaneously, equally distant from each other. It is the literary theory that deals with this consequence. The second consequence is, that in a self-referential assertion, the literature moves away from itself, thus transcending into its outer space. In this process of self-transcending, the subject (that which writes and that which is written about) turns into void. It is philosophy that deals with this second consequence.

On the writer's turning into void, Foucault writes in the paper named *Thought of the Outside (La pensée du dehors)*, which starts as follows: *"In ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: I lie, I speak, on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test"* (Foucault: 1998, p. 147). It would seem that there is no contradiction in the assertion "I speak". We have a subject and its activity, a speaker speaking about his speaking. We said that

modern fiction declines psychological approach and that the aforementioned meta-language marks transition to the void. The subject as a part of language is only a grammatical function, a place where no existence is to be found. The language is namely not an instrument meant to express the speaker's ideas, but rather something with its own, independent existence, existing even when not spoken. The nature of language relies on this very symbolic feature. The language brings us thus into the realm of signs. A sign is never identical with the signified entity: it is always a substitute, a replacement. It is here in place of somebody/something absent. If there is there a sign, the thing is absent. The assertion "I speak" becomes thus negation of "I am" and the subject dissolves in the word's neutral space (space which Barthes poignant named as a writing, that inclined plane of vanishing identity). We can see now how the writing pushes writer's existence into the void. Paradoxically, it is in this very labyrinth of all labyrinths that the most unique takes place: identity of the writer's I turns into a fictional entity.

*"I am nothing... I am fictional"*. These are the words of Álvaro de Campos, a Portuguese poet writing futuristic poetry, born in Portuguese town Tavira on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1890. He is tall and thin, a little slouchy. He is neither white nor black, slightly like a Portuguese Jew, his hair, however, is plain and side parted. He wears monocle. He studied marine engineering in Scotland and spent holiday on a journey to Orient, during which he wrote a poem named *Opiary*. And yet, Álvaro de Campos never lived. He is one of the poet Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms.

We have to bear in mind that heteronym is not a pseudonym. Heteronyms have their own, unique existence, born in the aforementioned void-place, where Barthes places writing. The heteronyms not only create works of art, they also have biographies and a physical appearance. They write books, publish poems and reviews, some of them even know each other. Thus, the author appears as a fictional entity, which is a result of the writer's I absence. Pessoa calls this

phenomenon "heteronomy", invention of other authors, fictional as much as real doppelgangers of the author Ferdinand Pessoa. However, creation of these authors was not just a repeated examination of the writer's hollow identity. The possibility of being everything enables one to experience one's self in a state of disintegration, a state where new forms and faces of the self appear. In the most trivial sense of word, Pessoa barely existed. It is this essential doubt concerning existence that we find in the majority of heteronyms' writings.

These fictional authors, as we now see, emerge in a specific space of writing, where not only writer's person, but also writer's I, disappear. This is the source of confusion, which the problem of author continues to trigger. We are looking for an author and find incoherent textual fragments by the author's fictional doppelgangers. Despite the experience of the writer's absence, I shall now – mistakenly, perhaps – sign this paper with my own name.

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