

Barthes on Writing and Authorship

A Polemical Précis

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abstract

In this paper we will try to revisit Barthes' brief essay 'Authors and Writers' by way of reopening the essay's proximity to some of the most important theorists of our time, such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and most especially, Mikhail Bakhtin whose individual writings on issues of language, translation, etc., to cite a few, mesh without conceptual and analytical difficulty. Their insightful provocations are known for their shared intuitive trajectories which altogether radicalize the concept of the writing craft and its complicated relation to the traditional conception of the author. Their writings carve out a common diacritical space in which, to place the centrality of Barthes in this paper, a kind of circuitousness in writing, or rather, writing around writing, similarly, a strategy intrinsic to autobiographical work, takes the reader to an affirmation of the redemptive potential of involution, ambiguity, and paradoxicality.

keywords

Writing, Authorship, Autobiography, Textuality, Polemics





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To initialize the subsequent discussions of Barthes' essay we will briefly introduce in the following section the idea of quotation as a form of literary discourse, arguably, that which throws either writer or author in a non-analytical, asignifying mix, thereby problematizing the independent function of each in relation to textuality.



If Hannah Arendt is to be believed, Walter Benjamin's ambition as a writer is "to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations."² Quotation transports by sheer change of location, resettlement if you will, words to a new beginning, a new home, albeit, in Benjamin's terms, a 'distorted simile' of their former

¹ See Rachel Gabara, *From Split to Screen Selves: French and Francophone Autobiography in the Third Person* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006).

² See Hannah Arendt, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin 1892-1940," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 1-55; 4.

habitation.³ Arguably, in this respect, the author becomes a writer, each position, author and writer, functions in a rather ambivalent way, takes language as a means of communication, hence, the serviceability of her quotable words. Meanwhile, to the extent that author and writer quickly shift positions in terms of their commonly perceived tasks (the author thinks, the writer expresses), to the same extent Mikhail Bakhtin writes of a kind of shiftiness in speech: “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear.”⁴ While shiftiness may be intended to be playful, as in the kind of distorted representation that quotation sets in motion, the moment of reckoning will soon impose itself upon any expression of freedom, spiritedness, and audacity.

Yet the imposition may in fact be too subtle as to be freely sought out as when, for instance, the risk of thought is institutionalized by the necessity of commerce, acclimatizing its expression to social demands as it wages behind the scenes a “vital warfare”⁵ against the possibility that it may withdraw deeply into interior, unusable monologue. Bakhtin for his part would take aim at playfulness as a kind of monologue: “The internal bifurcation (double-voicing) of discourse, sufficient to a single and unitary language and to a consistently monologic style, can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a game, a tempest in the teapot.⁶ But it takes some accomplished state to be able to reckon this as with Dostoevsky and Kafka, and many other writers of their class, who could utilize the monologue style with ease of function; in a manner of speaking, a kind of post-analytic condition of language after the manner of language-use itself; after writing, after utterance, after ‘text’; after *you* in the sense of the ‘other’ that demands the writing task, or

³ Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space: Rereading Walter Benjamin*, trans. Georgina Paul with Rachel McNicholl and Jeremy Gaines (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 115-118.

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422; 272.

⁵ See Roland Barthes, “Authors and Writers,” in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 185-193; 191.

⁶ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, 325.

the 'you' in Bakhtin's concept of transgredient 'I'.⁷ This post-analytic force of language-use, its function as falsification, rather creates an impression of unitary language in service of many varied languages; in Bakhtin, a paeon to *heteroglossia*.⁸ As we will discuss later, this post-analytic condition may also extend to the difficult task of reinstituting or reinventing culture.

II

It is of interest to note here that, in its essence as indeterminacy yet communicable in the polyphony of its voices, utterances and speeches, waiting to instantiate their specific releasement to textuality, language once refused a proper name, such as Rene Descartes, his ambition to become a writer.

Here, we refer to Descartes, his singularity as a thinker, as the model figure of the authorial function. All proper names in fact, which, as Derrida puts it, complementing the basic kernel of Barthes' critical announcement of the death of the author,⁹ "[pretend] to be the origin and end of a collocation of thoughts."¹⁰ An author par excellence, Descartes was relieved of the predicament of language which always demands translation; be it an advantage or a liability to philosophizing we need only assume that Descartes is an author whose thought expresses the end of writing. Curiously, the end of writing may also initialize the work of translation in which, as Benjamin argued elsewhere, both "translator and his translation" are "relieved ... of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed."¹¹

It is in this sense that the end of writing conditions the possibility of translation itself but will no longer depend on the traditional conception of *intentio*, but rather on "linguistic

⁷ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 31.

⁸ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 67.

⁹ See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Text, Sound: Essays*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-148.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 99.

¹¹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 78.

complementation"¹² in the sense of regaining a kind of "pure language" in the exercise of linguistic freedom.¹³ There, the presence of the author is likened to a figure of *castrato* that makes of every writing an effect of "the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin."¹⁴ In retrospect of the problem of quotation which problematizes (in Benjamin) a similar function of voice and of origin as well, Barthes adds: "The text is [therefore] a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture."¹⁵ In this respect, Descartes and all the proper names whose claims to unity and origin are already marked out as pretensions altogether become reduced to utter unquotability. Only writers can quote and can be quoted; this event of quotation arises not as a matter of structural necessity in linguistic composition, rather as a linguistic predicament of existence whose structure or foundation is always in need of composition.

III

Professional thinkers or so like Foucault and Derrida generously affirm the idea that with the death of the author "the insouciant critic gives way to the philosopher."¹⁶ What obtains here is a function of complementarity between writing and thinking, or literature and philosophy; a function otherwise established in Barthes through the figure of the *castrato*.¹⁷ But here, the dismemberment that castration complex presupposes, at the outset negative in its sense, notwithstanding, denies relationality in the positive sense, specifically between author and writing.

When Barthes speaks of the "hand [or writing] cut off from any voice [which] traces a field without origin,"¹⁸ he means precisely that writing is cut off from the author function.

¹² *Ibid.*, 79

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 142.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 146; emphasis mine.

¹⁶ See Clara Claireborne Park, "Author! Author! Reconstructing Barthes," in *The Hudson Review*, 49. 3 (Autumn, 1990), 377-398; 398.

¹⁷ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 142.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146; emphases mine.

Derrida, for his part, and in terms of its complementary fallout in speculative thought, distances philosophy from the supposed centrality of the voice, whereby philosophy is left entirely to the aporetic conditions of writing. The common sense realism which actively structures the correlation between speech and thought (read: philosophy has never overcome the function of common sense despite its claim of transcending ordinary forms of thinking) takes the voice as the “producer of *first symbols*,” and, as Derrida argues, establishes, in addition, “a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind.”¹⁹ In his rather enigmatic way, Foucault otherwise affirms that the text always “points to [the figure of the author] who is outside and precedes it.”²⁰ Although, Foucault’s statement may turn out to be counter-intuitive to Barthes’ dismissal of the author and Derrida’s deconstruction of its presence in any given text, the idea that the author is necessarily invoked in textuality does not mean he is arguing for its resurrection. Aware of the ambiguous reception of his claim in respect of the author function, Foucault writes:

Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. That is, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.²¹

There, Foucault’s view of writing like a game can resonate in Barthes’ own conception of the writer: “His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as to never rest on any one of them.”²² Complementing Foucault’s critique of expressionism, Barthes

¹⁹Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University, 1997), 11.

²⁰Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, and trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138; 115.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²² Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, 146.

says: "Did he (the writer) wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words explainable only through other words, and so on indefinitely."²³ This critique of the function of the author will not be complete without Derrida: "In the extent to which there is already a text, a network of textual referrals to other texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly 'simple term' is marked by the trace of another term, the presumed interiority of meaning is already worked upon by its own exteriority."²⁴ To this extent therefore we may now want to consider the author as having lost all claims to truth.

In the meantime, when Barthes argues that "it is absurd to ask the author for 'commitment' [because] a 'committed' author claims simultaneous participation in two structures, inevitably a source of deception,"²⁵ he is in essence directing us to recognize another important correlation between author and intention in terms of interrogating the goal-orientation of textual production that the function of the author traditionally demands, in fact its singular most absolute demand, namely, to write for the other. If "[an] author's true responsibility is to support literature as a failed commitment,"²⁶ one may wonder if the status of the other, the proverbial oppressed, is rather explained away or is made to bear the stigma of literary isolation as does the author. Barthes goes on to argue that writing's support for 'literature as a failed commitment' is most representatively articulated in Kafka whose distinctive style of writing celebrates his own responsibility for the author-function (i.e., himself through his writing), albeit, enigmatically, in terms of his "Mosaic glance at the Promised Land of the real."²⁷ Here, we are inclined to extend this kind of commitment to failure as a sign that writing, though not explaining away the status of the other, has welcomed a new responsibility to bear upon its craft, such as, perhaps, the Foucauldian notion of writing as a game. For a Jew like Kafka, the 'promised land' is what it is, a promise bound to fail on its own terms. To write in order to revisit,

²³ Ibid.; emphasis mine.

²⁴ Derrida, *Positions*, 33.

²⁵ Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 188.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

reframe or restate a promise is thus to diacritically prolong the experience of its failure. Yet writing also allows the writer to realize an ethical proximity to the 'other' that he is supposed to represent, at the same time that he also wanted to isolate him or her if only to carry out a more critical experience of being in the same shoes. It is a game the writer plays vis-à-vis her commitment to literature, or rather her commitment to representation which is also a commitment to its failure. Commitment to failure supervenes, that is, upon any attempt to go deeper into the interior, the rather elusive self of the author, as that too risks soliciting an absent meaning. For Barthes, 'meaning' in the traditional sense is superseded by "a text ... made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation."²⁸ But more than dismissing its function, the author as the modern extension of the Greek immortalization of the hero, Barthes seals the death of the author in the figure of the reader: "Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader [To] give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."²⁹

Literature then must be the outcome of the end of writing in the same context in which commitment to literature involves the uncanny task of forcing its failure. Such commitment to literature aims to frustrate language, to foreclose the possibility of language finding its true home in the comfort of words. It is with such self-conscious foreclosing function of language that literature may most necessarily be without an object, without goal and direction, whose most immediate model comes to mind. Here, as we are about to introduce the next section, we may want to slightly diverge from Barthes.

The child: she who has no direct object of pleasure, this is what comes to mind; she whose desire is intransitive and, like the author, aims "to neutralize the true and the false."³⁰ We are not saying this child is way ahead of her age; quite the opposite. If it is true that an adult is a measure of how he is able to suppress the enduring savage in his projections of civility, then

²⁸ Ibid., 148.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 188.

the child never matures in terms of distinguishing herself from the function of the adult mind. This is not a sign of measurable immaturity as no child ever turns to countable age. Her desire is unsettled; hers is a failed commitment to desire. In her the world is a play, a space carved out of the dominance of adult signs: “a mask with no face underneath,³¹ a message without a code, a *punctum*.³² If she is to mature she must relinquish the world by taking on responsibilities sufficient to disenfranchise her claim to *this* world. Meanwhile, the kind of simile that subsists between the author and the child may also encourage us to extend the correlation to Barthes’ assertion, simply, that it is absurd to ask a child “for [her] commitment” to writing.

IV

In *Authors and Writers*, Barthes argues that unlike the author who is more inclined to repel the demands of social expression the writer possesses the capacity to externalize thought. Barthes writes:

The writer performs no essential technical action upon language; he employs an utterance common to all writers, a *koiné* in which we can of course distinguish certain dialects (Marxist, for example, or Christian, or existentialist), but very rarely styles. [The writer] does not admit that his message is reflexive, that it closes over itself, and that we can read in it, diacritically, anything else but what he means: what writer would tolerate psychoanalysis of his language?³³

In relation to the figure of the child, we can acknowledge here a shift from child to adult at the precise juncture where the writer begins to oppose herself, that is, to the analyst who demands a major commitment to language. Psychoanalysis imposes a certain demand, that is, to write in terms of offering

³¹ Timothy Scheie, *Performance Degree Zero: Roland Barthes and Theatre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 95.

³² See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 25-26; 42-46.

³³ Barthes, ‘Authors and Writers’, 189-190.

evidence, or proof of style, which, as Barthes contends, is very rare (because writers utilize a common language). It may also be the case that style is rare on account of a singular pressure suggestive of pornography, to perform in front of the analyst who demands naked proofs. But there is also a gaze of a non-analytic kind; Bakhtin would refer to such gaze as that of 'outsideness,' or culture, which demands rather differently; simply, to answer for what takes place, what occurs before and after; to answer for the event of existence as that of co-beingness in time.³⁴ This is the kind of temporal synthesis rather achieved in literary disciplines, for instance, as emplotment with which one demonstrates a style. But arguably, only culture as opposed to psychoanalysis can elicit this rare response. Thus a child who chooses to grow up chooses culture, and is rescued from pornography through which she transforms herself into a figure of creativity, or a mature commitment to outsideness.

But if it is imaginable for the writer to choose culture over psychoanalysis, can we also imagine the author who willingly submits to this gaze? The author who does, nonetheless, must have already ceased as a child in the sense that he is now capable of asking questions; *'Why the world?'* or *'What is the meaning of things?'* Unfortunately, he is not supposed to answer these questions as it would require of the author to finally write. The author of course can write but unlike the writer his language is refractive. In contrast, it is in the writer's (or the child's) interest with respect to her utmost need of the author-function, her rather missing foundation, to answer for the author's predicament on his behalf. Does not the writer dream of authorship, especially his enviable autonomy? But to the extent that he forbids himself to answer his questions, to the same extent the author forecloses the possibility for the writer to become 'him.' In contrast, it would be the writer's challenge to restore the author to a position that she believes complements her relationship to him by providing the author the literary context in which he can ask the world:

The author is a man who radically absorbs the world's why into a how to write... [By] enclosing himself in the how to write, the author ultimately discovers the open question par excellence:

³⁴ Holquist, *Dialogism*, 40.

why the world? What is the meaning of things? In short, it is precisely when the author's work becomes its own end that it regains a mediating character: the author conceives of literature as an end, the world restores it to him as a means: and it is this perpetual inconclusiveness that the author rediscovers the world, an alien world moreover, since literature represents it as a question - never, finally, an answer.³⁵

There, the writer silently exchanges place with the author; she is now the one asking, in fact, answering in terms of providing the author the kind of literature evocative of his 'perpetual inconclusiveness' with which he 'rediscovers' the world in it. Interestingly, unlike the author, the writer can escape the demands of reflexivity. Reflexivity means that the author is within the very object of his gaze; he is the pornographer of the object of his own pornography; hence, the impossibility of a literary text, a novel, a poem, etc., or the inconceivability of language-use. Simply, the author cannot write.³⁶ In contrast, "the writer," Barthes adds, is a "transitive' man" unlike the author who has no goal to posit in terms of an evidence to give, "to explain, to instruct."³⁷ Lacking the writer's advantage in terms of her attunement to language, the author cannot treat language as a means to "restore [it] to the nature of an instrument [or] a vehicle of thought."³⁸ By taking language as a means, the writer enables herself to "[support] a praxis," which is a sign of her power to externalize thought. Comparatively, the author cannot

³⁵ Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 186-187.

³⁶ We are not saying the author cannot practically write. As Barthes himself affirms, "every author is eventually digested by the literary institution, unless he scuttles himself, i.e., unless he ceases to identify his being with that of language: this is why so few authors renounce writing, for that is literally to kill themselves, to die to the being they have chosen" (Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 189). The point in this passage is that the author has no greater power to resist the literary institution. Eventually, he will be digested, *killed* in the sense that his death will be sold, the death of the author. Barthes mentioned Racine as an exception who "stopped writing tragedies and became a royal functionary" (Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 189). But isn't the Racine who stopped writing and the Racine as a royal functionary twice killed by the Racine as the writer of tragedies?

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

externalize thought as he lacks the means to do so. Whereas, the writer, equipped with language as a vehicle of thought, thinks that “[her] work resolves an ambiguity,”³⁹ the author “knows that his language, intransitive by choice and by labor, inaugurates [it].”⁴⁰ Meanwhile, by attempting to resolve what the author cannot, the writer enjoys a proximate relation to culture.

This relation is mostly, however, of the writer’s creative initiative, offering her writing to the gaze of culture, to the objectivity of the seer who, without assuming the positive role of a seer, sees the writer in her externalization of language-use, anticipating a kind of co-beingness in time as with Bakhtin’s rendering of outsideness. Conversely, the author remains invisible to the outside as his language ‘closes over itself.’ In this sense, culture (in the Bakhtinian sense) is the anathema of the author who is too absorbed in the immanence of his thought as to be capable of externalization. But let us unpack this without delay: Culture is not the position of the reader. As Barthes says, the reader is without biography, without history, without gender.⁴¹

Culture demands; the reader, at least in Barthes, does not commit the writer to endorse a cause. Unlike the outsideness of Bakhtin, Barthes’ reader comes close to being totalitarian. In Bakhtin, the outside demands of the writer to imagine a faceless audience, to create it in the ‘transgredient’ sense of literary manipulation.⁴² But the audience is not the reader. There is no reader’s position in Barthes except perhaps as a vanishing mediator. Along this line Barthes argues:

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal...⁴³

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁴¹ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, 148.

⁴² Holquist, *Dialogism*, 32.

⁴³ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, 148.

Thanks to Barthes' adventitious interruption, it pays to renew our interest in quotations. Quotations that make up the entirety of writing can conspire to establish the unity of the text. Culture tolerates such conspiracy which allows for the very possibility of a faceless audience or the reader to place itself in the receiving end of the text. Even supposing, the reader exists and must exist outside of signification in the sense that it has no use for it. Imagine if the reader is a position within the sign, the reader, without biography and history, whose disinterest is total and absolute, who knows too well (read: disinterested knowledge) the alibis of the formalism of language-use.

Already in this context culture has an exemplary mission, that is, to prevent absolute literacy in the guise of the absolute dictatorship of the reader who, without biography, is also presumably transcendent to history. In the meantime, let us not lose sight of the author's place in this complex negotiation: the author has practically no need of reader or audience inasmuch as he has *no interest* in positioning himself within the sign (or sign-system). Surprisingly, culture enlists the service of the author to pre-empt dictatorship. Recall the author's indifference; that indifference is what culture needs. Because his type is too reflexive to externalize a thought, to expose its alibis, no one can be certain about the author's intention.

Here, we can liberally extend Benjamin's concept of atypical symmetry: the author is a distorted simile of the reader.⁴⁴ On the one hand, the author is impenetrable; on the other hand, the reader is without intention. As for the writer, she struggles with culture to vie for the author's attention. But here, to the extent that the author is indifferent, to that same extent he may also be indifferent to culture, **but** sometimes would succumb to the seduction of writing. Only Socrates had been successful against both culture and writing for which he became the enemy of both. When in the case of writing being able to convince the author to answer for existence, culture may be brought to her knees, courtesy of the writer, in the sense of being forced to articulate the real yet concealed demand of culture (which the writer helps to re-establish via emplotment) to restore

⁴⁴ Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space: Rereading Walter Benjamin*, trans. Georgina Paul with Rachel McNicholl and Jeremy Gaines (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 115-118.

the author to his complementary relation to writing (in the proverbial case of Plato, for instance, to restore Socrates).

V

We can take up another point of difference here between author and writer, this time by reframing this diacritical analysis of Barthes into labor-capital relation that the author-writer relation largely presupposes. Barthes argues: "Naturally ... society, which consumes the author, transforms project into vocation, labor into talent, and technique into art: thus is born the myth of fine writing."⁴⁵ In essence, this myth conceals the social transaction which permits the "sacralisation of the author's struggle with form,"⁴⁶ which in turn allows society to treat his labor as the effect of the author's self-alienation, and not of the takeover of literary institution, of society in general.

Transformed as a pure spectacle of writing, the author's struggle is released from its self-confinement into the non-reflexive, liberal application of the author's importance in the struggle against the "subversion of criticism"⁴⁷ which the author had already endorsed in advance, simply by committing himself to the praxis of resistance. It is in this sense that the author generates a scandal but whose effect is never total.⁴⁸ Already, his predicament has been divested of its critical force, its resistance against externalization at the precise moment he chooses to externalize this resistance, no less a self-blaming resistance, "exhausting itself in the no man's land of form."⁴⁹ Barthes adds: "This points up at least two new differences between author and writer. First, the writer's production always has a free but also a somewhat 'insistent' character."⁵⁰

For the author to win the battle against assimilation by productivity, he must become insistent like a writer. He must in the end by proxy desire his death through the writer. Thus,

⁴⁵ Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 189.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 191.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 190-91.

The author existentially forbids himself two kinds of language ... first, doctrine, since he converts despite himself ... every explanation into a spectacle, he is always an inductor of ambiguity; second, evidence since he has consigned himself to language, the author cannot have a naïve consciousness... [By] identifying himself with language, the author loses all claim to truth, for language is precisely that structure whose very goal ... is to neutralize the true and the false.⁵¹

But the author's failure to externalize thought in terms of positioning himself in truth and falsehood is also his opportunity to become unproductive; transcendent to production, breaking his immanent relation to capital. Thus, he performs what no writer can, to champion the absolute freedom of the unemployed. Some writers have acquired this malignant tendency of authors they envy. These writers learned how to imitate 'their' authors without necessarily becoming like them, unproductive. The trick is quite easy - to materialize the inconclusiveness of the author, for instance, as a character in a novel. The writer transforms the author into a text, into productivity, and yet production can also turn into an awful version of transgression. That is to say, if unchecked, the other can be manipulated to become a tool of the writer's design (the other/author as a character in a novel that the writer bends to her linguistic will), rather than as both other and self. This style is rare, according to Bakhtin; Dostoevsky is the only exception in the sense that his characters "are drawn into a movement of *perpetuum mobile*,"⁵² free willing actors beyond the writer's literary design. Bakhtin exposes here Dostoevsky's attitude towards a form of "plotted life," which, he argues, can be experienced only in dreams.⁵³ In this sense, Dostoevsky is a rare genius, a mixture of author and writer, of plotted (dreamy) life and real (everyday) life, a bastard type.⁵⁴

But also for Barthes, the writer must become an author, a function of a failed commitment essential in resolving the

⁵¹ Ibid., 187-88.

⁵² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 253.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', 192

tension between creativity and design. But more than this, the author fulfils by proxy his “responsibility to support literature as a failed commitment”⁵⁵ through the writer’s insistent character in whose writing the author, needless to say, can “say at once and on every occasion what he thinks.”⁵⁶ Thus, “we see *a contrario* - and this is the second difference - that the social function of literary language (that of the author) is precisely to transform thought (or consciousness, or protest) into merchandise.”⁵⁷

Barthes describes the writer’s function appropriately then as a salesman of thought, “exclusive of any art” where art means “the chief mythic attribute of ‘pure’ thought,” supposedly “produced outside the channel of money.”⁵⁸ Presumably, the writer generously gives away this thought to society.⁵⁹ But at the same time she acts as if she can totally ignore the correlation between society and the “institutionalization of the risk of thought.”⁶⁰ There, the writer sells the author; sells his death. The death of the author is the invention of the writer. The writer therefore assumes the role of society by “[recuperating] the author,” for what the author is worth, his enviable freedom of inconclusiveness, all in all, by institutionalizing his cult. Barthes concludes:

I am describing here a contradiction which, in fact, is rarely pure: everyone today moves more or less openly between the two postulations, the author’s and the writer’s... Today, each member of the intelligentsia harbors both roles in himself, one or the other of which he ‘refracts’ more or less well: authors occasionally have the impulses, the impatiences of writers... In short, our age produces a bastard type: the author-writer.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 191.

⁵⁷ Ibid..

⁵⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 191-92.

VI

Let us rewind the core aspects of our discussion. Whereas the author is deprived of the vehicle of primal fantasy in the sense that he is immanent in the object of his own gaze,⁶² the writer exults in the outcome of a modern revolution, the Copernican position of the subject moving around the object of its own gaze. The author remains stuck in the old geocentric paradigm whose tradition ironically goes back to Immanuel Kant, the expositor of the helpless condition of the author, in a word, *reflexivity*, or the immanence of thought incapable of escaping its ambiguity.⁶³ Meanwhile, by extending the author's questions to the test of literary production, the writer becomes the most generous human type. In this act of generosity, the writer and the author are united on a single page. Barthes makes a similar case in referring to Lévi-Strauss's notion of complementarity between the 'witch doctor and the intellectual':

⁶² In a Lacanian perspective, as here typified by Slavoj Žižek's critique of fantasy, the illusion of the non-reflexive is likened to the "fantasmatic narrative [which] always involve an impossible gaze, the gaze by means of which the subject is already present at the scene of its own absence" (Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* [London and New York: Verso, 2012], 273).

⁶³ Quentin Meillassoux defines this impasse in Kant's philosophy as *correlationism*: "[The] central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of correlation. By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call 'correlationism' any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined" (Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier [London: Continuum, 2008], 5). In our formulation of fantasy derived from psychoanalysis, correlationism applies to the status of the author situated within language, unable to externalize his thought, that is to say, from its correlation with the object [of thought], which is, by the way, its own immanent relation to language. It is the writer's task to pursue this externalization, although the aporetic conditions of writing seem all too insurmountable to yield to the writer's 'insistent character.'

[Both] witch doctor and intellectual in a sense [stabilize] a disease which is necessary to the collective economy of health. And naturally it is not surprising that such a conflict (or such a contract, if you prefer) should be joined on the level of language: for language is this paradox: the institutionalization of subjectivity.⁶⁴

In conclusion, we might want to accommodate a gratuitous intervention, even if it is too late at this point, in the manner of solving a puzzle, like, which comes first: the chicken, or the egg? This, in fact, is the heart of the matter; at last, we have reached the end: the play between 'the person of the writer in the author-function' and 'the function of the author in the insistent character of the writer.' The bastard nailed it.



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⁶⁴ Barthes, "Authors and Writers", 193.

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