

Rolland Barthes' From Work To Text An Analysis

Arun B.Chavhan Digras Dist. Yavatmal

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Abstract

Roland Barthes is both a structuralist and post-structuralist. The Barthes of Elements of Semiology and Mythologies, and The Fashion System is a structuralist and the Barthes of the Pleasure of the Text, and From Work to Text, is a post-structuralist. As a structuralist he is concerned with the human world and tries to uncover it through detailed observational analysis and as a post-structuralist he is concerned with the philosophical position of the work. He draws our attention to the fact that concept of language has undergone a sea change over the years.

In his essay, "From work to Text" Barthes states his position clearly and emphatically in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist approach to language and meaning. The approach to literature studies has become interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary approach to criticism necessarily involves not only two disciplines but a new language. This approach gives rise to the study of intersexuality - a term employed by both structuralists and post-structuralist. In this approach to criticism, a text is regarded as a stratified structure containing echoes and references to other text. Here, the critic is expected to respond to the intertextual potential of a text in taking out its parts layer by layer.(1)

In stead of the monistic approach adopted by the new critics, Barthes wants to make a combined approach such as Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism and so on to the study of Literature. Having said this, Barthes comes to the central point of his essay, From Work to Text." In opposition to the notion of the work traditional that has long been and still is thought of in what might be

called Newtonian fashion-there now arises a need for a new obtained by the displacement or overturning of Previous categories. This object is the Text"(2)

Having said this Barthes proceeds to define the text in clear-cut terms distinguishing it from the work At the outset he states that there cannot be a material separation of works and texts, the difference is that the work is concrete occupying a portion of book-space (in a library, for example) the Text, on the other hand, is a methodological field. The work can be seen in several places such as book stores, card catalogues and on course lists but the text reveals itself against certain rules, Barthes notes that:

While the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language, it exists only as discourse. The Text is not the decomposition of the work rather it is work that is the Text's imaginary tail. In other words, the Text is experienced only in an activity, a production. It follows that the Text cannot stop, at the end of a library shelf for example, the constitutive movement of the text is a traversal (traversee): is can out across a work several work (414-15) (3) It is difficult

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to describe the text for it defies the classification on the basis of genre. A poet, a novelist, an essayist and even an economist all are said to have written texts. In the words of Barthes. The Text is that which goes on the limit of the rules enunciation (rationality readability and so on) (415)

If we take each linguistic unit as a sign, then the work itself functions as a general sign. A sign consists of a signifier (sound image) and signified (the concept) the field of the Text is that of the signifier and the work closes it on a signified Barthes brings out the difference between the work and language. The work (in the best of cases) is moderately symbolic (its symbolism runs out comes to a halt) but the Text is radical symbolism. A work whose integrally symbolic nature one conceives, perceives, and receives is a text.”(6) In this way the text is restored to language. “Like language it is structured out de-centered, without closure here one might note, in reply to the scornful faddishness which is often directed against structuralism, that the epistemological privilege presently granted to language proceeds precisely from our discovery in language of paradoxical idea of structure a system without end or center.(7) Etymologically the text is a cloth and texts from which the text derives, means woven. Like all structuralists and post-structuralists Barthes believes in multiple meaning or polysemy of interpretation. Hence the text does not have fixity of meaning. On the other hand it has potentiality for meaning. Barthes like other] post-structuralists directs his attention primarily to now a piece of literature exemplifies the language system. In other words, he treats

literature as Text it is in this sense he says that the text is plural. The Text it is in this sense he says that the Text is plural. The Text yields to plurality of meaning. In the language of a stylistician we can say that the Text has plurality of signification and it is for the reader to does it value in a given context.

Barthes rightly acknowledges that each text is an inter text of another text but at the same time maintains that the originality of the text should not be missed upon the readers. They should search for the sources of and influence upon a work to satisfy the myth of filiations It is the plurality of the text that distinguishes it from work in the words of Barthes.

The Text on the other hand, is read without the father’s signature. The metaphor that describes the text is also distinct from that describing the work. The latter refers to the image of an organism that grows by vital expansion, by development (a significantly ambiguous word, both biological and rhetorical). The Text’s metaphor is that of network, if the Text expands, it is under the effect of a combinatorial, a systematic (an image which comes close to modern biology’s views on the living being) (8)

In another essay, The Death of the Author, Barthes denies the author and banishes it from the text. But in his unguarded moment perhaps, here in this essay from work to Text, he admits the author through the back door. Thus he writes: It is not that the author can’t come back in to the Text however; he can only do so as a guest so to speak. If the author is a novelist he inscribes himself in his text as one of his characters, as another figure sewn into the rug, his signature is

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colonne privileged and paternal the locus of genuine truth, but rather lucid. He becomes a paper author. His life is not longer the origin of his fables, but a fable that runs concurrently with his work. There is a revealed it is the work which affects the life not the life which affect the work the work of roust and Genet allows us to read their lives as a text.(9)

The text is said to act upon the reader and makes him reproduce the text in the process. This is a great innovation. In other words, Barthes tries to drive home the point that it is the critic that execute the work. He is of the opinion that while the work gives the reader pleasure, the text gives him enjoyment. What he tries to suggest is that while the reader or the critic reads a work he derives pleasure out of it but very rarely he creates the work himself. On the other hand while reading the text the reader or the critic re-creates the text for him and enjoys it. Barthes proclaims the death of the author and advocates for the pleasure derived in interpreting a writerly text Hence the justification of the shift from the work to the Text.

References

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