

Postmodernism in Literature
Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Week - 02

Lecture – 03

The Death of the Author and its Postmodern implications

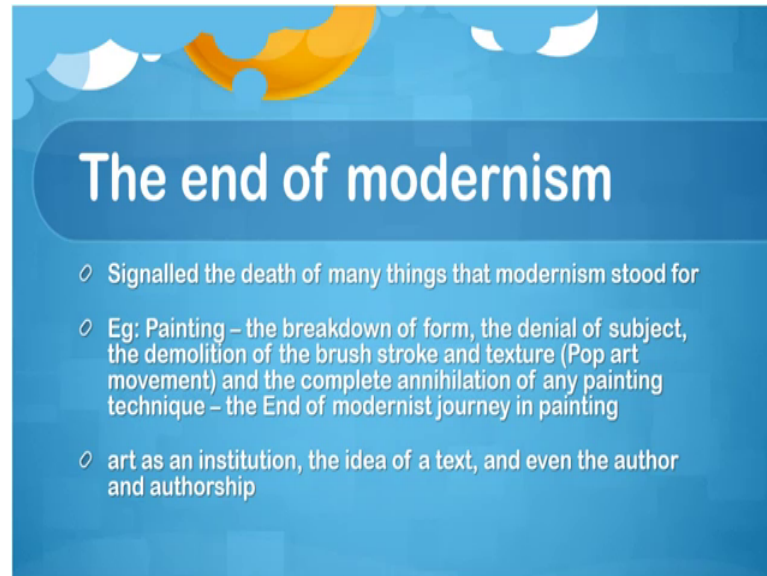
Good morning everyone; welcome to today's session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. In the first week's lectures we started looking at the idea of postmodernism, we spoke about the different frame works within which postmodernism exists and the multiple ways in which one could begin to access it as an idea and also as a critical frame work.

So, in today's session we begin to look at particular text, we begin to undertake a close reading of texts which are helpful to frame and understand postmodernism as an idea as a movement and as a conceptual and theoretical frame work. We also in the first weeks lectures reiterate the idea that postmodernism in this course is being used as a conceptual and theoretical frame work which could be used to analyse particular cultural trends particular literary events and also various intellectual and a various intellectual reprises.

So, today's lecture is titled the death of the author and its postmodern implications. Death of the author as some of you may know is very general text which is increasingly being used by post structuralists and also by postmodernists to talk about the ideas related to text and author and also the practices of reading in the contemporary.

So, we try to undertake a close reading of this text by Roland Barthes by engaging with it within the postmodernists frame works. And also to see how this text enables us to question and to and to redefine the way to redefine various conventional aspects related to reading text author and also the practices of criticism.

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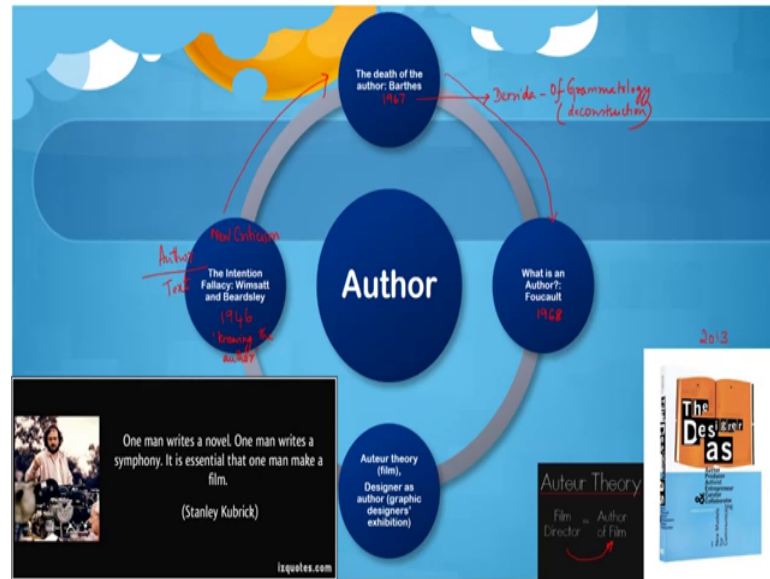


The end of modernism as we have seen in the previous lectures it signal the death of many things that modernism stood for. So, when we talk about the death of the author it is not a singular thing that happen in the postmodern phase. The end of modernism and the beginning of post modernism also signalled and marked the death of multiple frame works various objects and subject of possession as well.

For example, if we take the case of painting after the modernist period; we saw a gradual breaking down of a form leading to a denial of a subject. And then we also saw how brush stroke and texture was altogether demolished from the practice of painting, we also saw significantly the emergence of emergence of pop art with Andy War Andy Warhansa digital art, digital painting it also became a movement and a cultural dominant cultural iconic practice. And gradually towards the end of the modernists period and with the high a period of postmodernism we also saw there is a complete annihilation of any painting technique.

So, this is a modernist this is the end of a modernist journey in painting and in in various other forms of practices and trains we could see similar kinds of deaths happening. In fact, we saw the death of art as an institution, the idea of a text has undergone a number of changes and even the author authorship all of those are the contested notions in the contemporary times the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

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So, in today's session we begin to look at the idea of the author if Roland Barthes essay talks about the death of the author. And the beginning it is also important for us to trace within which intellectual tradition discussions about the author had begin to emerge; this is not a new thing that Barthes entirely initiated and this is not the discussions about the author even now we need to reacerated it is not yet over.

For example, there is a book as recent as published in 2013 about the designer title the designer as author producer activist entrepreneur accurate and collaborator this is a work by R Steven Mccarthy; it has been much discussed in this field of graphic designing also elevate in the position of a graphic designer to that of the author.

And in film theory this has been discussed a little earlier in the previous decades itself there is auteur theory which film critics often talk about where the film director is equated with the author of a film. And as Stanley Kubrick his famous (Refer Time: 04:37) stated one man writes a novel, one man writes a symphony, it is essential that one man make a film.

So, this these discussions about the author is not limited to the printed words on the on a page it is not limited to books it. In fact, could be extended to a number of texts whether it is a graphic design or a movie or anything that we see around.

So, in that sense the ideas about the author the discussions the discourses generated about the author is a very very prolific and a thriving field in itself. So, if we try to trace the intellectual tradition of this even before Roland Barthes wrote the death of the author we have an essay published by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946 title the Intention Fallacy.

So, this work was a product of this school of criticism known as new criticism; we may also begin to see certain echoes of new criticism in some of the arguments and parts begins to make in his own essay. And in fact, the Intention Fallacy is a work which went down in the history of literary criticism as a seminal work which draw a wedge between the author and the text.

So, there is a distinction that this work mix between the author and the text. So, this is in stark contrast with the previous periods in literary history; where the author and the text function as inseparable objects. The text becomes a product of the author and the authors biography the authors intention. So, to speak in writing the text becomes very very important inner understanding of the text itself.

So, we have the new critics we have the new critics emerging in the 1940s and 1950s who argue that this entire notion is a fallacy. And they also begin to the new critic particularly they also begin to argue that the reader could never really know the author. So, knowing the author also becomes a very contested notion and further in their arguments Wimsatt and Beardsley; they began to say that the point is not really belong to the author is detached from the author right from moment of its birth and the poem actually belongs to the public.

So, to assume that to believe to assume that the author has got any control over the intent of the poem or any sort of a power to control how the poem is being received it is a complete fallacy to even assume that such a power is being invested on the author. So, the new critics began to argue for a way in which the text could be read in isolation with the author by focusing only on the practices of reading, only on the aspects of reading.

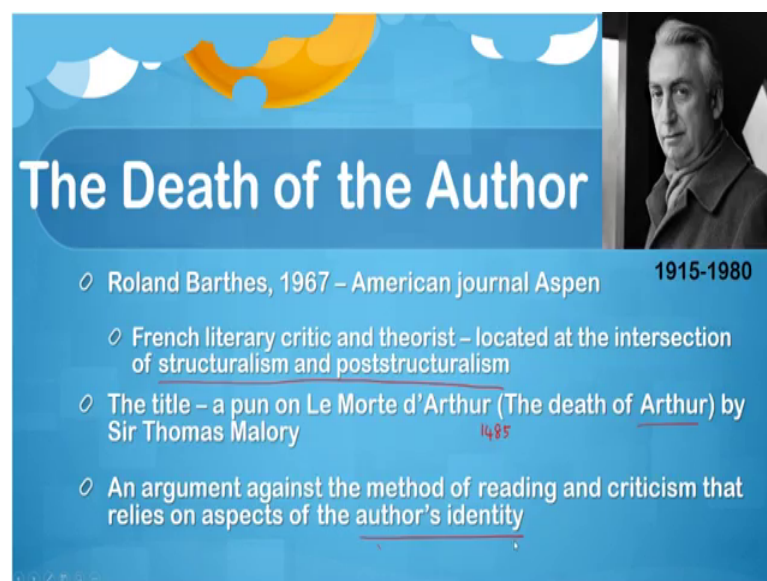
So, from this moment we come to Roland Barthes death of the author which is published in 1967; 1967 is an important date in the history of literary criticism and also in history of postmodernism. In fact, this is one year after the year that (Refer Time: 07:52) designates as the starting point of postmodernism, this is also the year when Derrida

published his celebrated work of grammatology of grammatology incidentally also become a foundational text of deconstructive literary criticism.

So, Barthes essay gets published as such a critical juncture in literary and cultural history and he very controversially titles it the death of the author. And that text is not just the end of the discussion and after Barthes essay in 1967 which announces the death of the author we come to Foucaults work in 1968, where he asked this question what is an author he breaks down the idea of the author, he tries to problematise the author function and talks about how the author function has changed historically and what its position is in the contemporary which is the 1960s.

So, these two texts also as we see in the later sessions; we will be reading these two texts in dialogue with each other trying to see together what kind of sense they help us to make about take stand the functions of the text and functions of the authors.

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The slide features a blue background with a stylized sun and clouds at the top. On the right side, there is a black and white portrait of Roland Barthes. The title 'The Death of the Author' is prominently displayed in white text on a dark blue banner. Below the title, there is a list of four bullet points, each starting with a small circle icon. The text is white and includes some underlines and red annotations.

- Roland Barthes, 1967 – American journal Aspen 1915-1980
- French literary critic and theorist – located at the intersection of structuralism and poststructuralism
- The title – a pun on Le Morte d'Arthur (The death of Arthur) by Sir Thomas Malory 1485
- An argument against the method of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity

So, here we now begin to take a look at the essay the death of the author this is published by Roland Barthes in 1967. And first it appeared in an American journal title aspen and Roland Barthes instantly is an was a French literary critic and theorist most of his works were available to us in translation.

And his work in terms of criticism in terms of cultural theory, it is a very interesting and it is considered as a particularly important because he has located at the intersection of

structuralism and poststructuralism. And here there is also a way some of the Barthes works we will get to know in his early phase he was more structuralist in his approach, but towards the towards his towards the second half of his carrier; we find him being more influenced and also becoming more influential in poststructuralist practices.

Death of the author is one such essay which could be located as a seminal text in the within the sphere of poststructuralism, it is also considered as one of the essays which would help us to begin talking about not just postmodernism, but also the various practices within poststructuralism and this title the death of the author.

In fact, is a pun on Le Morte d Arthur which is which could be translated as death of Arthur referring to King Arthur and a Thomas Malory had popularise Arthur in legends by compiling the various legends folk tales stories about King Arthur and this text was published 1485. So, this title the death of the author is a (Refer Time: 10:57) to the fifteenth century text Le Morte d' Arthur.

So, the primary argument in this essay the death of the author is against a method of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of author's identity. So, throughout this essay what primarily tries to contest is the author's identity and also pronounces his or her death towards the end of the work.

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Reader and Texts

- The earliest moves in rebelling against structuralist reading of texts
- Readerlytext – passive reader / writerlytext – active role of the reader
- Meaning – embedded NOT within the text but within the reader who derived meaning from the textual process
- A Text's unity – not in its origin but in its destination (The Death of the Author)

↓ Author X → TEXT ← Reader ↓

It is important to see how Barthes establishes a connection between the reader and the text. So, he begins to see that the reader is directly connected with the text and the text has an identity, the text begins to reach its destination only through an engagement with the reader. And his work in his works in general Barthes works in general could be considered as some of the earliest moves in rebelling against structuralist reading of text.

So, this is very important because though Barthes begins his intellectual journey as a structuralist though most of his early works are predominantly structuralists towards the end, he is better known in history as a post structuralist theorist or someone who rebelled against the structural methods and practices of reading and criticism.

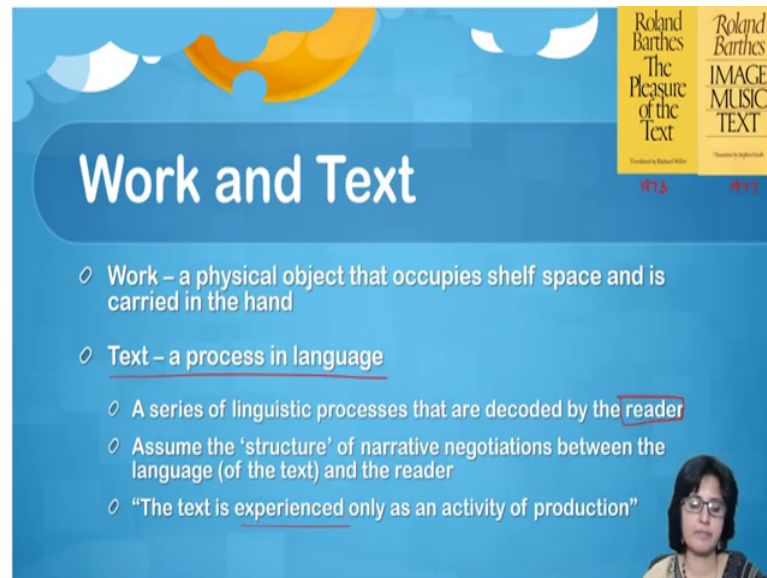
And Barthes also makes a distinction between readerly text and writerly text and for him the readerly text is sort of a text which does not demand anything much from the reader; it only acquire requires a passive reader because the author has already sorted out everything for the reader there is hardly any puzzle to solve there is hardly any work for the author there is hardly any work for the reader in the readerly text.

But on the other hand the writerly text demands a active role of the reader and here we also see that the reader when he engages with the text, he also participates in this meaning making process. And the meaning according to Barthes is not embodied within the text; text ceases to be a an object which offers meaning, but the meaning is within the reader.

So, only when the text comes in communion in connection with the reader; the text begins to send out meaning the set the text begins to make meaning. So, this is a derived meaning which comes out after a process as he identifies it. So, reading becomes an active process only when the reader engages with the text and participates in the meaning making process. And in that sense parts continue Barthes also argues that reader that text unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination which is when it reaches the reader and origin is with the author.

So, the text which gets produced originally by the author ceases to be the important and the relation between the connection between the text and reader becomes all the more important in the meaning making process and also in a in accessing the text as a as a coherent understandable feature.

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Work and Text

- Work – a physical object that occupies shelf space and is carried in the hand
- Text – a process in language
 - A series of linguistic processes that are decoded by the **reader**
 - Assume the 'structure' of narrative negotiations between the language (of the text) and the reader
 - "The text is experienced only as an activity of production"

Here it is also important to make a distinction between work and text; if text if the reading is if reading is a textual process then certainly the text are very different from works. So, Barthes makes this distinction in number of his works and some of his important works are the pleasure of the text published in 1973 and image music and text compilation of his essays in 1977.

Try to distinguish work from a text Barthes argues that work is a physical objects that occupies shelf space and it carried in the hand, it does not become a text until it reaches the reader.

But text is process in language; so, this is important to remember that this is also linked with some of the deconstruction practices and Derrid also had an immense influence in the way in which Barthes ideas taken a shape. And for Barthes texts series of linguistic processes that are decoded by the reader; so, when Barthe talks about a text the author ceases to be important, the reader emerges as the single most important entity whose participating in this meaning making process. And text also assumes a structure of a narrative negotiation between language of the text and the reader.

So, this is all of these aspects all of these negotiations all of these interactions happen between the text and the reader and we do not see the author emerging as an important figure any point of time. His task ends the moment he completes his work and the work becomes a text only when it reaches the reader and as he codes in one of his works the

text is experienced only as an activity of production. So, it becomes an experience in the hand of the reader and the work gets transformed into a text only when the reader accesses it.

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Work to Text

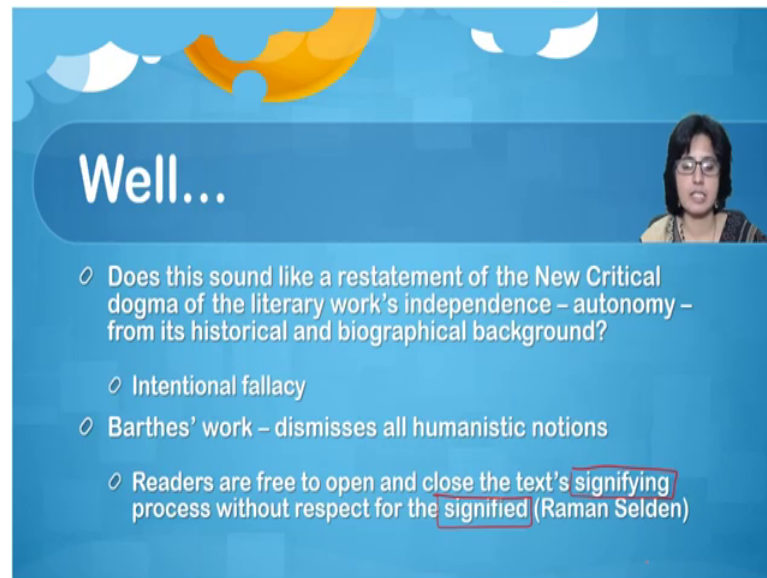
- A work becomes a text when the reader refuses authorial authority
- Author = authority, controller of meaning
- Text = play between the text and the reader

Having said that this transformation from work to text we need to see how this happens as well. So, a work becomes a text not just when the reader accesses it, but also when the reader refuses to engage with the authorial authority. So, author in this sense becomes a symbol of authority and also controller of meaning.

So, only when the reader refuses to acknowledge that the author is invested with the power to control meaning or author is invested with this power to be ultimate authority on what the text actually implies or what the text actually means only then the work actually gets transformed into a text.

So, the text is in fact, according to Barthes a play between the text and the reader and. You need to pay attention to this word play because he also uses it very deliberately because play is something which is which is not confined to any sort of rigid understanding. So, there is a lot of room to experiment a lot of ways in which the reader can play with the text the reader can interact with the text. So, this basic understanding is very very important to be able to understand and access the work the death of the author.

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Well...

- Does this sound like a restatement of the New Critical dogma of the literary work's independence - autonomy - from its historical and biographical background?
- Intentional fallacy
- Barthes' work - dismisses all humanistic notions
- Readers are free to open and close the text's signifying process without respect for the signified (Raman Selden)

So, when we talk about the absence of the authorial figure, when we talk about understanding the text in isolation with the author and about completely refusing to take into the consideration; the authors intentions while he was composing a particular work.

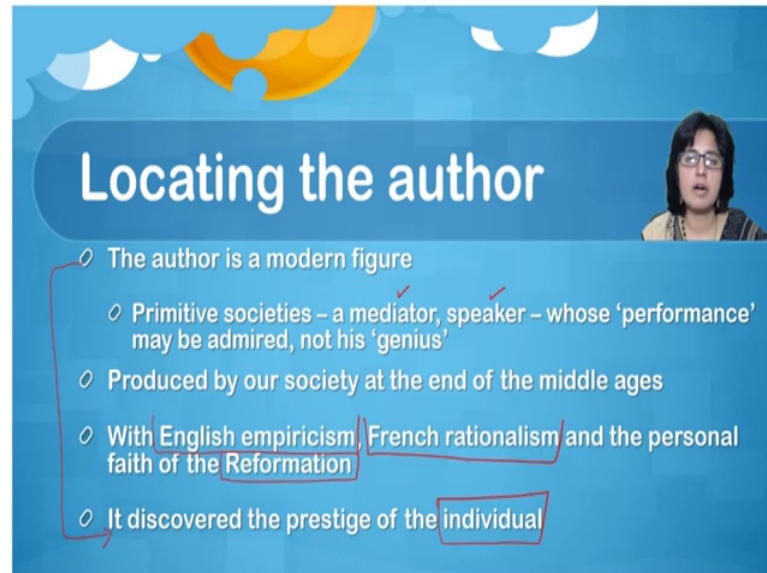
Well perhaps this almost sounds like a restatement of the new critical dogma of literary works independence autonomy at the new critics will put it. And this autonomy that the new critics celebrated from historical and biographical background reading a text in isolation with a in isolation with all the other factors that is surround the text production which also was articulated by (Refer Time: 18:23) 1946 essay Intention Fallacy.

Whether Barthes work is a continuation of this new critical approach or whether it echoes or restates any of the concerns new critics had in the beginning is a question that we shall come back to deal with. But; however, at this point it would justifies to know that Barthes works dismisses all humanistic notions and in that sense it is not a quite new critical in its approach. And in Barthes approach according to Raman Selden a leading cultural theorist and critic the readers are free to open and close the text signifying process without respect for the signified.

So, these are certain terms which are associated with number of structuralists poststructuralist and deconstructive reading methods; we shall be coming back to some of these terms in detail. So, Barthes work gives autonomy to the reader and it is more

about a celebration of the readers attempts to freely interpret without any limiting categories.

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Locating the author

- The author is a modern figure
- Primitive societies – a mediator, speaker – whose 'performance' may be admired, not his 'genius'
- Produced by our society at the end of the middle ages
- With English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation
- It discovered the prestige of the individual

So, as when we begin to discuss Barthes work it is very important to locate the author the figure of the author. Barthe argues it or the author is a very modern figure and this is significant point to be noted because he himself states that in the primitive societies the author the author figure was absent, it was only a mediator who was available or a speaker. And his performance was more valued the public who gather to listen to a story or a particular rendition or a narration.

Because oral literature was also prominent in the primitive societies the performance of the mediator or the speaker was more important and his geneous was not really admired. So, the function of the author; the role of the author was of a different kind altogether in this context it is also useful to remember that if we look at the ways in which the idea of the author has evolved across literary historical periods; in the in the in the earlier periods we come across a number of works who were authored by anonymous authors.

Because they considered it not very important to put down their name against their own works; it was not important to identify the work in connection with the author of the work. So, we have even you know if you take the case of the first available Anglo Saxon text (Refer Time: 20:57) the author is anonymous and number of attempts have been made in the later stages to see whether the author is a Christian writer or a writer a pagan

writer influence by Cristine elements. So, the current way in which we accesses text is entirely based on the identity of the author.

So, there was a period of time in history where the identity of the author or even the presence of the author was not very important narrative is when there is seen as repositories from which any one could freely borrow and freely take there were no there was no absolutely no idea of stories or particular art objects being copy writer.

And also significantly until about the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the author was not held responsible or accountable for a particular work that he produced. The responsibility and the accountability entirely rested on the printer because he was the one who published it the owner of the printer the owner of the publishing house was more responsible for it.

Given that printing was a very modern phenomenon which made its entry in the fifteenth century, it took a while to be able to understand that; the printer was perhaps only a medium in disseminating the work the primary responsibility rests entirely with the author. So, we shall be looking taking a more detail and closer look at the author functionary talk about Michel Foucaults work what is an author.

So, in Barthes works right at the beginning he tries to locate the author as a modern figure. And this is very important for taking the argument forward because Barthe also wants us to keep in mind that the author is a constructed figure that it was not an idea which was always already there that it is produced by our society at the end of the middle ages. So, this historical understanding about the idea of the author; the emergence of the author becomes very important in and also locate in the significance of the author (Refer Time: 23:00) the reader and also in context in connection with the text.

So, when he talks about the author being a very modern phenomenon that the birth of the author happens at a very modern stage in history, he also makes particular references here. He associates the birth of the he associates the emergence of author as a modern in connection with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of reformation.

So, it is also here we can also see that the author as Barthe sees it is a construct, is a plotted of the western dominant philosophical ideas; it is a product of western intellectual

thought. It is also a product of whatever the modern society required, whatever the modern society was responding to. As the essay progresses we will also see how he uses this historical location, how he uses this relatively modern emergence of the idea of the author to also talk about the text reader and the reading process equally as a historical phenomenon.

And Barthe in that sense makes a connection between the emergence of the author as a modern figure and how he discovered the prestige of the individual. So, there is a way in which the author gets situated historically; he is a product of a number of intellectual trends and thoughts he is also someone who helps discover the prestige of the individual.

So, as we wind up today's session it is important for us to keep in mind these starting points in order to be able to access the essay in the next session. I strongly encourage you to read the original version of Barthes essay the death of the author, it is a very short piece and the translations are widely available in the web for you to access.

So, a close reading of this particular text would be undertaken in the next session, where we shall be dissecting the various things that Barthes puts forward in order to be able to argue and convinces about the death of the author.

Thank you for listening, I look forward to see you in the next session.