

STEPHAN DEDALUS AND A *PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN* AS
BARTHESIAN TEXTS EVADING THE AUTHOR

SHATAW NASERI

Faculty of Human Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University
PO box 1619914611, 11, Sepah Street, Tehran, Iran



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ABSTRACT

Roland Barthes was one of the French critics who raised the notions of “work” and “text”. For him, work is put upon the shelves of the library and is read and consumed forever, while text is a process which is reproduced every time it is a read. Barthes speaks on the death of the author and cancels eschews his dominance and power over the text. Author is never more considered the creator of the text but a site which mixes and blends the signifiers of the text. By killing Author-Father he indeed kills the Critic whose mission is to interpret the texts and dig the intended meaning of the author. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephan Dedalus* are also texts who struggle to evade the classifications of signifieds and to reproduce themselves in the play of signifiers. This paper attempts to explore the notion of Barthes’ “textuality” in *A Portrait* as well as *Stephan*.

Key words: work, text, textuality, readerly, writerly.

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1. Roland Barthes and His Poststructuralist Views

Roland Barthes (1915-80) is considered one of the prominent French literary critics who is an emblem of the turning point from structuralism to poststructuralist. Jonathan Culler calls Barthes “famous for contradictory reasons.” (Cain, E.,1316)

Because he was first interested in exploring the scientific and structural points of Saussure and his semiology as well as his notion of codifying the universe and narratives. On the other hand, Barthes attempted to explore the pleasure of the texts which is one of the major concerns of the poststructuralists.

In his revolutionary work “The Death of the Author” he takes the story of *Sarrasine* by Balzac, the tale of a sculptor who falls in love with a woman who is indeed a castrato. By analyzing this text Barthes declared the death of author as Nietzsche previously had declared the death of God. Barthes believed that the text and the author are composed of infinite quotations and that they are deprived of any origin. The author himself/herself is a text like a character of some novel and he/she is no longer considered the creator of some literary text.

This paper tries to explore these poststructuralist notions in *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* and *Stephan Dedalus*. It also seeks to introduce itself as a text full of gaps and fissures.

2. Barthes, jouissance, work, text

Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author" says that in his story *Sarrasine*, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence:

"This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling. Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology?" (Boyd-Barrett, 166)

Barthes believes that it is not possible to determine accurately who is speaking in this story and that no one will ever know since there is not any definite and omnipresent voice in the story. He says that when the author is killed and beheaded, there will be original and unified meaning and Barthes indeed killed the Signified which previously had stuck to the signifiers and the texts and which dominated the narrative. Now there is no author with a fixed signified and meaning within his mind inserted in the literary text.

For Roland Barthes the death of the Author was in some sense, the death of the critic, whose primary mission and Holy Grail was to decode the narrative and explore the central unified meaning injected to the text by the author. The beheading of the God-Author is death of interpretation and exploring the possible intended Signified of any text. Barthes was a savior who rescues the narrative as well as the literature and the world from the boring task of codifying the narrative into some limited codes and interpreting it.

The death of the author is the birth of Barthes' notion of "textuality". This slippery notion is marking of the transition from structuralism to poststructuralist. In fact, Barthes takes the literature from "work" to "text"; the text for him was a process, whereas the work is a product. "Text" is reproduced over and over while "work" is a product doomed to be consumed.

The readers of a product are some consumers and their Barthesian "readerly" activity is like buying some item; however the generative readers of a text take part in a "writerly" activity by producing eternal signifiers. Any work is a signifier with some signified which is consumed by the reader as it is bought and read while a text is the process of the endless play of signifiers which are like some slippery and never consumed.

In his essay "The Pleasure of the Text," Barthes states that "gaps in meaning, like the gaps in garment, are equivalent sites of pleasure" (1318). And the writerly process of reading a text involves experiencing these endless gaps. In his essay "The Death of the Author," Barthes poses that to throne the author is the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology "which assimilates everything into its work and the author is the owner of his written product" (1318). Barthes points out to the figures such as Mallarmé and Proust who in their written texts took the author and their own to the guillotine and beheaded themselves.

Barthes claims that "linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I, language knows a subject, not a 'person' and this subject ... suffices to make language 'hold together'" (1323). Author is a scribe who mixes and blends the signifiers within the text and these signifiers are born into some play which has no closure.

It is here that language calls into question the entire origins over and over. Therefore, now "text is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1324) and the only power of the scribe is to mix writings and insert any meaning in their fissured garment.

The text here is a play of signifiers infinitely deferred and thus the Criticism is dead because "historically, the reign of Author has been that of the Critic" (1325). Author and the critic now are not the kings anymore, but some clowns clashing the signifiers. The king has become a clown and thus the text is a carnival which dethrones everything and everyone and upsides down the monarchy of the Author-as-the-King.

Text is now a porous site full of gaps and dancing signifiers and full of pleasure and ecstasy. The text dethrones all the principles of the owner and the consumer along with the capitalistic ideology by denying the ultimate meaning. The tragedy of the deferring signifier is never finished since text avoids being the object of the capitalistic ideology. It is not an object to be computed and then consumed.

For Barthes, "work" is a classic and "text" is an avant-garde. Text evades any classification since it is always paradoxical. It crosses any border and is an orphan without any Father. Text is the site of production and practice. Barthes in his essay "From Work to Text" holds that "I can delight in reading and re-reading Proust, Flaubert, Balzac, even why not? Alexander Dumas, but this pleasure ... remains in part (except by some exceptional critical effort) a pleasure of consumption; for if I can read these authors, I also know that I cannot re-write them" (1331). But the text is bound to *jouissance* that is to feel pleasure without having the sense of separation since the text is a space where no language is over another and there is a dance.

3. Barthes and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is such a text. Some of the critics have always seen it as an autobiography of James Joyce but it is indeed a text full of paradox and a site which cancels the reign of the Author. Barthes called autobiography a "novel that dares not speak its name" suggesting that it is detached from any person. Also, *A Portrait* cannot be attributed to Joyce, as he is dead as the Father of the text and he is a text himself and a character like one of the characters of the novel. The novel is a text, a site full of quotations and slippery narratives.

This novel and Stephan Dedalus, both of them as texts, evade the notion of the Father as they escape the Catholic as the Father as well as Joyce as the Author-Father. Both of them are orphans; they want to be orphan as they have castrated the Father.

The notions of Author and Irish Catholicism are the products of capitalism ideology. They are interwoven with the notions of possession and consumption. Irish Catholicism consumes its subjects as it tries to insert into them just one Signified, God. It is a market since it stresses that God is the owner of the subjects and the whole world. God is the Shepard of its subjects in this ideology.

Stephan as well as *A Portrait* are escaping consuming and being consumed as they are texts, full of signifiers who evade being interpreted. They are escaping the Signified since they want no meaning and thus no coffin; if they have signified, they are consumed and as they are consumed, they are no longer alive but dead thus they should be buried in a coffin.

A Portrait is oozing, it doesn't want to be a work, put on library shelves and be read and read. It doesn't want any reader-consumers which suck in its Signified because in fact, it has no signified. Stephan-as-text is oozing too because it beheads all the Fathers. Stephan and *A Portrait* want to be reproduced over and over and thus they cross the boundaries in order to experience their own gaps and therefore *jouissance*.

The novel is full of paradoxes and violates the codes of linear work. It isn't a work to be consumed since this text as well as Stephan is full of fissure and gaps which the reader in the generative "writerly" process of reading should try to fill them and because these gaps are eternal fissures with no end, they cannot be filled.

As I have previously mentioned in my essay "Studying *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* through Heterogeneous Philosophy of Georges Bataille," Stephan crosses the border of Irish Catholicism over and over and thus crosses the borders of the narrative. Narrative is a notion belonged to a work, and not a text; it is also a consumer product doomed to be consumed. However, Stephan-as-text is full of paradoxical notions and he evades the notion of history which is a product and which always thrones the Author and all the Fathers.

For him, even God is a signifier and it is called by different terms in different languages. "God was God's name just as his name was Stephen, *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too" (Joyce, 16) but for the Church and its subjects, He is a fixed signified, consumed forever and a notion which grants salvation to the obedient subjects. He is involved in a process of giving and taking market because if the subjects do good works and obey His orders, they will be given salvation. The subjects, too, are the consumers of the notion and Father-God and read and consume it in a readerly process. However, God and Irish Catholic Church for Stephan and *A Portrait* are some texts full of fissures and play of signifiers which struggle to be or seem fixed Signifieds. They struggle to be consumed from the first lines of the text and the presence of Dante and the Father Arnall is the obvious evidence of this struggle.

At the very beginning of the text, it is Dante, who intensively defends the Irish Church in the debate over the table on Christmas Eve. As I have mentioned in the essay "Stephan Dedalus and Taboo," the dark and horrifying atmosphere of the religious Catholic order of the school is not only imposed through the orders and the punishment of the Jesuits, but also through the very dim and dark atmosphere of its buildings. The

terrifying grandeur of the Irish Catholic Church has been reflected in the low dark narrow corridors of the school.

The Church and its center 'Signified' are trying to fix the atmosphere of being a signified and they try to be a Barthesian "work" put on the shelves and be consumed.

When Stephan passes through the silent and dark corridors to get to the rector's room, he observes on the walls some portraits of the great saints of Christianity which convey a sense of awe and fear to the observer. He observes the portraits of the saints and the great men of Catholic cult,

Saint Ignatius Loyola holding an open book and pointing to the words *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* in it; saint Francis Xavier pointing to his chest; Lorenzo Ricci with his berretta on his head like one of the perfects of the lines, the three patrons of holy youth- saint Stanislaus Kostka, saint Aloysius Gonzago, and Blessed John Berchmans, all with young faces because they died when they were young, and Father Peter Kenny sitting in a chair wrapped in a big cloak (56).

Father Arnall is another struggle of the Irish Church and its Center to fix themselves as fixed signifieds. Arnall raises the notion of punishment for those subjects who don't consume God and Church as "works". He declares that "we have been sent into this world for one thing and for one thing alone: to do God's holy will and to save our immortal souls. All else is worthless. One thing alone is needful, the salvation of one's soul" (110). Through the promise of salvation, he urges people to do moral servitude and thus to obey the precepts of the holy Church as well as to attend the religious duties.

The obedient subjects consume them without paying attention to the paradoxes inside these seemingly fixed signifieds. For Stephan and *A Portrait*, God and Irish Catholicism are themselves texts and not works; they are not the Authors of the texts and Stephan, but some scriptors who are themselves texts and a space of the play of slippery signifiers. Stephan knows the fissures of these seemingly signified. He has perceived the cracks of himself and all the apparent signifieds.

Stephan starts oozing restlessly throughout the gaps of the text. He experiences the *jouissance* of producing himself and *A Portrait* over and over. He experiences the ecstasy of being involved in a "writerly" process of reading such texts. He feels the liberation from the Author and God-Father.

One of the scenes in which he experiences ecstasy and *jouissance* is the scene of seeing the girl at the beach in chapter four of the novel. Stephan and the girl become one and he is castrated at that moment just as the man castrated in Balzac's *Sarassine*. Stephan loses his own masculinity here and who can ensure that Stephan is a masculine here? He is not a boy but a text full of infinite quotations and texts; texts of femininity and masculinity and when he is oozing and loses the notion of fixed signified, no one can any longer guarantee that Stephan is a masculine. He is a signifier with no definite gender and therefore no definite identity.

In fact, the girl acts as a mirror signifier who reflects loosely the feminine narrative within Stephan as a Barthesian "textuality". She stirs the water "hither and thither" with her foot when she sees Stephan; "[t]he first faint noise of moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither; hither and thither" (172). She as one possible and loosely mirror of Stephan indeed stirs him as textuality and blends and clashes all the signifier in this merger.

When Stephan sees the girl, "a new wild life was singing in his veins" (171) and "cried Stephan's soul, in an outburst of profane joy" (172). Stephan wants to be wandering signifier and text unconscious of the point that he has always been a text. We as readers and at the same time textuality, hear this "hither and thither" of some goatish beings who Stephan sees in his nightmare, somewhere else in chapter three the novel. Here, in fact, the reader hears the voice of the clashing of signifiers just as the clashing of the waves in the ocean. The goatish beings are the loosely mirrors of some narrative within Stephan and *A Portrait* as a text. The reader hears the murmuring of the signifiers of the text; the signifiers which evade Father-Author and any other signified. "[s]oft language issued from their [the goatish beings] spittleless lips" (138); their language is not fixed but soft as they as the mirror of Stephan as a signifier, themselves are slippery narratives which don't have any fixed background.

At the first page of the novel, we hear the

Tralalalala,
Tralalatrallaladdy,
Tralalalala,
Tralalalala (7).

Therefore, from the first page of the novel one hears the slippage of signifiers as these lines reflect everything and nothing. They bear no fixed meaning and thus no fixed signified and no one can guarantee what burden they bear as they are free of any load. Furthermore, from the first pages of *A Portrait*, one can see the struggle of Irish Church as well as God as seemingly fixed signified to dominate the atmosphere of the novel as a text and strengthen their place as a signified.

O Lord, open our lips
And our mouths shall announce Thy praise.

Incline unto our aid, O God!

O Lord, make haste to help us (18).

The signifiers Lord and God as well as the Irish Church struggle to be signified as they are not, and punishment is another signifier which they uselessly employ in order to hammer the nail of their fixity. However Stephan's restless heart "would be transfigured" (Joyce, 65). He is searching for Mercedes in utility and some point in the novel he experiences some unrest: "the unrest which he had sent him wandering in the evening from garden in search of Mercedes" (66). Stephan is at first looking for some signified but that signified is illusory and not real. Mercedes is not real since she is a signifier entrapped in the play of signifiers. "He continued to wander up and down day after day as if he really sought someone that eluded him" (67).

When Stephan in attempting to free himself of any illusory root and the networks of loose signifieds, "his prayer addressed neither to God nor saint." (88) He wants to cross all the borders of the entire illusory signifieds since Stephan and *A Portrait* have arisen from no origin; they don't have any root since they are slipping on the endless waves of restlessness. They don't have any womb since "Tralala la/ Tralalatrallaladdy" means nothing and lacks any origin. They don't have any beginning nor ending.

Stephan is pondering always on the origins which evade him. "His monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words. He had soon given in to them and allowed them to sweep across and abase his intellect, wondering always where they came from, from what den of monstrous images, and always weak and humble towards others, restless and sickened of himself when they had swept over him" (90). He at first images wondering on the origins neglected of the fact that he himself is a signifier, deprived of any origin.

These restless images are indeed the restless narratives inside Stephan as a text and a restless signifier and "he had wakened from a slumber of centuries" (100). He shakes everything and every root imposed on the ever and endless texts as root and origins. When he surrenders himself to the prostitute, he is indeed enjoying the Barthesian *jouissance* of experiencing the gaps within himself as a fissured signifier. This is the *jouissance* experienced by the reader (that he/she is a text) as he/she struggles to fill the gaps within the text. Stephan perceives this *jouissance* and he "burst into hysterical weeping. Tears of joy and relief shone in his delighted eyes and his lips parted though they would not speak" (101).

He experiences the endless gaps within himself and experiences himself as a slippery signifier and a text, thus "a certain pride, certain awe, withheld him from offering to God even one prayed at night" (104). Stephan doesn't believe in God as a Father Signified and the Author of the world; for him God is a signifier, a text full of slippery narratives.

A Portrait is the struggle of Stephan and the text in order not to fix themselves and to escape the fixity. Stephan's condemnation of himself and returning to God in the middle of the novel is the story of this struggle. "A restless feeling of guilt would always be present with him: he would confess and repent and be absolved, confess and repent again and be absolved again, fruitlessly (153). Here, Stephen's regret is not because of committing sin and his continuous orgies, but because of shaking God as the seemingly Signified and experiencing Him as a slippery signifier and a text full of fissures. God is a slippery narrative within Stephan and *A Portrait* and vice versa since all of them are Barthesian textualities.

In the last chapter of the novel, Stephan turns to be present actively in the play of signifiers and "his own consciousness of language was ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms (178). He wanders "whether words are being used ... according to the tradition of the marketplace" (187). He doesn't want to use the words in a capitalistic ideology of market. Stephan doesn't want the words as well as himself and *A Portrait* to be "works" and as Barthes says, consumed within the market of reading; he wants to go his own way. Stephan is an artist who loves playing with the signifiers and loosening all the restricting nets which have restricted him and *A Portrait* as a text.

The novel and Stephan don't have a closure. They are escaping closure as they are infinite signifiers. As mentioned in the essay "Studying *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* through the Heterogeneous Philosophy of Georges Bataille," Michael Levenson that "[t]he proud cry of the aspiring artist, 'on and on and on and on and on!' is a demand for a perpetual [and repetitive] crossing of limits, resolute march to the end of the universe" (1020). The play of Stephan and the novel as signifiers will continue forever and the eternal evasion of them as texts from closure ensures their survival.

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