

:: STRUCTURE ::**5.0 Objectives****5.1 Introduction****5.2 About the Author****5.3 Analysis and interpretation of the essay "From Work to Text"****5.3.1 Work v/s Text****5.3.2 Paradoxical nature of Text****• Check your progress –I****5.3.3 The Text does not require any guiding force****5.3.4 Text removes the difference between Writing and Reading****5.3.5 Text and Pleasure****5.4 Seven Propositions to understand the essay****5.4.1 Method****5.4.2 Genre****5.4.3 Signs****5.4.4 Plurality****5.4.5 Filiation****5.4.6 Reading****5.4.7 Pleasure****• Check your progress -II****5.5 Let Us Sum Up****5.6 Books Suggested**

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to:

- Learn about Roland Barthes and his major works

- Closely examine the essay “From Work to Text” and learn about its implications
- Study the essay “From Work to Text” its seven propositions
- Understand the essay “From Work to Text” with a view to review any literary piece of literature based on poststructuralist theory of language

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Roland Barthes was a French literary critic and philosopher who is best known for his contributions to the development of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Structuralism is an intellectual movement that emerged in France in the 1950s and was characterized by an emphasis on the systematic analysis of cultural and social phenomena. Barthes was one of the leading figures in this movement, and his work helped to define the discipline of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols in language and culture.

In his early work, Barthes was heavily influenced by the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who is considered to be the father of Structuralism. Saussure argued that language is a system of signs that operate based on a set of rules and conventions. Barthes expanded on this idea by focusing on the ways in which meaning is produced through the relationships between signs. He emphasized the importance of considering both the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the meaning that is associated with the sign) in order to understand how meaning is produced in language and culture.

One of Barthes’ most famous works, “Mythologies” (1957), is an exploration of the ways in which cultural myths and symbols are used to maintain and reinforce dominant ideologies. Barthes argues that myths are not simply stories, but are also ways of representing and reinforcing cultural values and beliefs. He demonstrated this by analyzing a wide range of cultural phenomena, from fashion and food to advertisements and media images. Through his analysis, Barthes showed that even seemingly harmless cultural practices are imbued with meaning and can be used to maintain and reinforce dominant power structures.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Barthes began to move away from Structuralism and to develop a more critical and reflexive approach to his work. This new approach, which came to be known as Post-Structuralism, is characterized by a focus on the role of language and representation in shaping our understanding of the world. Barthes was particularly interested in exploring the ways in which meaning is produced and represented in language, and he challenged the idea that meaning is a stable and fixed entity. Instead, he argued that meaning is constantly being produced and re-produced through language, and that our understanding of the world is shaped by the ways in which language is used to represent it.

One of Barthes' most famous works from this period is "The Death of the Author" (1967), in which he argues that the author's intentions and biographical context are irrelevant to the interpretation of a text. Instead, Barthes asserts that the meaning of a text is produced through the relationships between its signs and the ways in which they are interpreted by readers. This idea has been extremely influential in literary and cultural studies, and it has helped to shape the field of cultural studies, which is concerned with the ways in which culture is produced, consumed, and represented.

Despite the fact that some of his works are marked by a Marxian perspective, Roland Barthes' theoretical growth is sometimes considered as encapsulating a shift from structuralist to poststructuralist ideas. Roland Barthes' essay on the distinction between the humanistic and poststructuralist methods to interpreting literature is arguably the most thorough and influential one. One of the most often anthologized pieces in literary theory studies is Barthes' "From Work to Text" essay.

In conclusion, Roland Barthes was a pioneering figure in the development of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, and his work continues to be widely studied and debated today. Through his analysis of the ways in which meaning is produced and represented in language and culture, he challenged traditional ideas about the relationship between language, representation, and reality. His ideas have had a profound impact on a wide range of disciplines, including literary studies, cultural studies, and media studies, and they continue to shape our understanding of the world.

5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

On November 12, 1915, Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg, France to middle-class parents. He was raised in Bayonne, France, finished secondary school there, and graduated from the University of Paris with degrees in ancient literature, grammar, and philosophy. As the foremost structuralist theorist, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology—the academic study of signs and signification—had a significant impact on Barthes. He was a prolific interpreter, communicator, and revisionist of the majority of the intricate theoretical ideas that were discussed in France's academic institutions starting in the 1950s. Barthes worked at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique from 1952 to 1959. In 1976, he was chosen to be the College de France's chair of literary semiology, and in 1978 he was one of the top critics of his generation. In 1976, he was chosen to serve as the College of France's chair of literary semiology. He was a key theoretical figure in both Europe and America during the 1970s, and his impact was also felt in popular culture. Barthes passed away at the age of 64 from injuries he received in an auto crash.

His works include *Writing Zero* (1953), *Mythologies* (1957), *Criticism* *Degree and*

Truth (1966), *S/Z* (1972), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), *Image Music Text* (1978) and *'From Work to Text'*.

5.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ESSAY “FROM WORK TO TEXT”

The transition from “labour” to “text” is a significant implication of the poststructuralist interpretation of language. This essay should better elucidate it. It’s crucial that you understand what this novel approach to language implies in the interim. Apart from Barthes, Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Sollers, individuals connected to the *Journal Tel Quel* in the late 1960s and early 1970s established the theory of the “text.” Although the concept of “text” is implied in all of these theorists’ writings, it is best expressed in Roland Barthes’ theory of the “text,” to which this article significantly contributes. This deconstruction of structural linguistics is where the concept of “text” originates. A change has been occurring in our beliefs about language, and as a result, about the literary work, says Roland Barthes in his opening statement regarding the debt that the concept of “text” owes to the evolving understanding of language.

Barthes presents a few enunciations or specific assertions to show what he has in mind when he speaks of a text in order to elucidate the key concepts underlying the concept of a “text.” These enunciations have a metaphorical character, which means they don’t directly define the text but rather imply its essence. The deconstructionist doctrine is not something Barthes is prepared to embrace, as Derrida did earlier. With this as a starting point, Barthes goes on to explain what the concept of a “text” implies and how it differs from “labour”. The purpose of the term “From Work to Text” can be inferred from it.

5.3.1 Work v/s Text

The text is not a physical object, whereas the work is. They are therefore indistinguishable from objects. According to Barthes, the distinction is as follows:

“The work is concrete, occupying a portion of book space [say on the book- shelf]; the text on the other hand is a methodological field.”

The work is visible in bookstores, card catalogues, and course listings, and the text unveils itself and articulates itself in accordance with or in opposition to predefined standards. In other words, the text can only be understood through reading. Let’s go into Barthes’ ideas in more detail as his lucidity in this passage is deceptive. The terms “methodology” and “field” both refer to “the process or way in which a specific mental activity proceeds” and “the scene or place of an activity or influence,” respectively.

A “methodological field” is therefore a scene or environment in which a specific mental activity takes place, or a space that a specific type of mental activity creates. Try to understand this carefully as there is some abstraction at play. When we talk about “text,” we mean a brain area where a specific mental process that is triggered by reading a piece of art takes place.

5.3.2 Paradoxical nature of Text

An opinion that is generally shared by the public is referred to as “doxa.” So paradoxical refers to something that goes beyond what is generally believed. Barthes may be trying to convey that a text always tends to go beyond what is generally thought of as a work or form of writing. When he says that it transcends the bounds of “doxa” by saying that it contains the interplay of many interpretations. The text is freed from a rigid centre that keeps the work together, and this liberty endows the text with a subversive potential that allows it to perpetually challenge any restrictions imposed by widely held beliefs or theories. In other words, the text consistently challenges any preconceived notions about what it means.

Due to this, Barthes claims that a text is defined by its “subversive force with relation to old classification.”

Check your progress -I

1. Write an introductory note on the Author.

2. Discuss the background of the essay ‘From Work to Text’.

3. Discuss Work v/s Text.

4. Write a brief note on the Paradoxical nature of Text.

5.3.3 The Text does not require any guiding force

The work is typically perceived as the product of forces outside of it, indicating that both its meaning and construction were influenced by these forces. Barthes names them wherein the first contains “race” and “history.”

For instance, the Marxist school would hold that certain historical factors created or established the parameters of a certain work. Russian classics from the 19th century are frequently referred to as the embodiment and outcome of particular historical factors that culminated in the 1905–1917 Revolution.

Second, Barthes discusses the efforts made by traditional criticism to understand works as belonging to a greater tradition. As a result, it might view some works as starting a certain tradition while others carry it on, identifying the various stages of that developing tradition. This style of critique was practised by F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams for a long list of English novelists, from Dickens to Lawrence and Forster.

Third, Barthes discusses the tendency for attributing the work to a particular author, a propensity that seeks to frame everything in terms of the author’s experiences, viewpoints, and goals. The biographical school of criticism is the best illustration of this.

On the other hand, the reader reads the “text” without regard to the author, race, history, or tradition. All of these might influence how we interpret a text, but they don’t offer a solid foundation for understanding its meaning. A text cannot be linked to a single or multiple texts as its determinate product, despite the idea of intertextuality (covered previously) requiring the resonance of historical, biographical, or other texts in our interpretation of a specific text. As a result, the author participates in a reading of his or her text only as a guest and as one of the texts that will play a role in intertextuality, not as the driving or dictating force.

5.3.4 Text removes the difference between Writing and Reading

A work is typically anything that is consumed, which means that when we read a work, we assume that a well-known or less well-known author,

or one who has been worthy of publication or review, has something worthwhile to contribute. If necessary, an honest reading done correctly might diminish its value with the aid of critique.

On the other hand, the text devalues the work and replaces it with fun, creation, and action. The reader is now actively involved in the manufacture of meaning rather than having a clear meaning available for consumption. Meaning and relevance, which were once thought to be connected to the author, are now partly linked to the reader. The reader's engagement with the material is not made more intense. Instead, the reader feels like they are more directly involved. She rejects the predetermined meaning passed down through tradition and instead reads and writes at the same time to determine a text's meaning.

5.3.5 Text and Pleasure

A specific form of pleasure is connected to the work. Shakespeare or Milton can be enjoyable to read, but this enjoyment is one of appropriation or consumption. According to Barthes, this pleasure is one of separation. It has to do with the fact that I can't put what I read into words. Contrarily, the text produces a distinct kind of pleasure—a pleasure free of separation. There won't be any stability for the reader to appropriate and be detached from thanks to the play that characterises a decentered text. Instead, the reader will always be involved in creating the meaning that the text strives for. This results in a different form of pleasure that Barthes and Derrida refer to as “jouissance” in French. Despite the fact that it has an attractive component, we nevertheless call it bliss.

5.4 SEVEN PROPOSITIONS TO UNDERSTAND THE ESSAY

Barthes claims that our understanding of language and the conventional definition of the literary work has changed as a result of the increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity in literary and cultural research. A new object, the Text, has emerged and the work has changed. Despite his desire to avoid defining the Text in an absolute sense, Barthes claims that it is “that social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in a position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder” (Barthes “From Work to Text”).

Seven ideas serve as the foundation for Barthes' distinction between the Text and the work: method, genre, signs, plurality, filiation, reading, and pleasure.

5.4.1 Method

The text must not be thought as an object that can be computer. It is useless to attempt to separate work from text. It should not be said that works are classical and texts are avantgarde. Barthes implies that a work

can be identified as a text and not a work only when there is some concrete quality. A very ancient work may contain some text while many products of contemporary literature are not Texts at all. The difference follows:

The Work is concrete occupying a portion of book – space (e.g.in a library); Text, on the other hand, is a methodological field. This proposition is similar to that of Lacan’s distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘real’. Reality is displayed and real is demonstrated. Similarly, a work can be seen and held in hand, while a Text is a process of demonstration which is held in language.

5.4.2 Genre

A ‘Text’ does not come to a stop with good literature; it cannot be apprehended as a part of a hierarchy or even a simple division of genres. The ‘Text’ constitute a subversive force with regard to old classification. How one can classify George Bataille. Whether he is a novelist, a poet, an essayist, an economist, a philosopher or a mystic? Similarly, the ‘Text’ tries to place itself very exactly behind the limit of Genres. There is no literary ‘originality’: all literature is intertextual and paradoxical.

5.4.3 Signs

A ‘Text’ can be approached and experienced in reaction to sign. The Work closes on a signified. In other words, the work itself functions as a general sign and thus represents an institutional category of the civilization of Sign. The Text on the other hand, is dilatory. Text is the principles behind the work where the work is a book; book is literal, Text is how one interprets it. Work is ‘moderately symbolic’ whereas a Text is ‘radically symbolic’. A work may contain metaphors but a text itself conveys an idea through an overall metaphor. According to Barthes, Work is artificial.; Text is more organic. Work is just the window through which one views the Text.

5.4.4 Plurality

The Text is plural. This does not just mean that it has several meanings, but rather that it achieves an irreducible plurality. Instead of allowing for interpretation of its meaning, it leads to an explosion of meanings because it is composed of a web of significances without an ‘Origin’ or a ‘Destination’. The plurality of Text does not depend on the ambiguity of its contents, rather on stereographic plurality of signifiers who weave it. The meaning of a text entirely depends on how different readers interpret it in different ways. Hence, a text is plural.

5.4.5 Filiation

The work is caught up in a process of filiation. Barthes says that literary science teaches us two things: First to respect the work and second to respect the author’s intentions behind the work. But a text can be read without giving respect to its author as he is only a textual element in a text. The language is given importance and not the author himself. The

reader is the one who interprets the text and not the author. Hence, author is merely a 'guest' because a text is without a source.

5.4.6 Reading

A work is normally the object of consumption by the reader who focuses on the quality of the work rather than reading the text as a process. When the work is read as a process, then a Text is created. A Text cannot be consumed, it can only be played with. The Text narrows the distance between reading and writing by replacing consumption with collaborative reading. When one tries to consume a text, then it becomes 'unreadable' and boring. Reading is only consumption of work whereas, text itself through reading. Text is the practice which actively plays the volume.

5.4.7 Pleasure

The final approach to the Text is pleasure. According to Barthes, there exists a pleasure of certain works but this pleasure is passive. As for the Text, the pleasure is bound to be one without separation (Jouissance). Text is a space of social utopia which transcends social relations (author, critic, reader) and language relations. A text should not be taken literally.

Check your progress -II

1. Why does Text not require any guiding force?

2. How can Text remove difference between Writing and Reading?

3. How is Text and Pleasure related?

4. What are the seven Propositions to understand the essay *From Work to Text*.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

At the beginning and at the end of his essay, Barthes clearly indicates his intention to separate work and text. He attempts to maintain the distance between binary opposition of 'Work' and 'Text' by defining each term in contrast to each other with the help of his seven propositions. Though, these few propositions, inevitably, do not constitute the articulation of the theory of the Text. The theory of Text can coincide only with the activity of writing.

5.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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