# Birth, Death, Readers, and Authors:
## The *Separation* of Literature in the Digital Age
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Annie Abrahams in her digital interactive, literary piece entitled "Separation" invokes the idea in the minds of her readers that there is a lack of humanity within the construct of digital literature.  This lack of humanity can further be evaluated with the analysis of separation between authors and readers of literature in this digital age.  Critics such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes are known for the theory of absence, or the death of the author in literature, whereas others exclaim an importance of authorship and that the writer lives on within texts.  The belief that the author must die to give birth to the reader also illustrates the separation of humanity in the digital read as it proposes that the two cannot coexist.  However, that is not the case.  By analyzing these primary texts and using secondary scholarly articles, this essay will exhibit the humanized interconnection of reader and writer as two active roles within digital literature constantly communicating through the means of intent and interpretation.

In his essay "Authorship and Authority," Nickolas Pappas speaks about authorship and the difference between authors and readers and the separation primarily focusing on point of view.  William Page in his essay entitled "The Author and the Reader in Writing and

Reading" talks about the relationship and intent between both the reader and the writer, whereas Theresa Enos, in her "Reports of the 'Author's' Death May Be Greatly Exaggerated But the 'Writer' Lives on in the Text," offers more insight by establishing a deeper distinction between the author and the writer and further refutes that all are part of the same melting pot embedded in the gravy of rhetoric. When rhetoric becomes an integral part of the conversation of readers and writers and the coagulation of both in the examination of digital literature, it is important to draw insight from Kristie S. Fleckenstein's essay "Who's Writing?: Aristotelian Ethos and the Author Position in Digital Poetics". Finally Janet Swaffar, in her article from the South Central Review discusses the same human limits presented by Abrahams' primary text, in which readers are confronted.

What is observable in all of this analysis is the premise that writing and reading, though they commence from diverse point of views, are both crucial in literature. The separation between the two does not reject the other, but proves their coexistence, and that there actually is no separation but the writer and reader functions are cohabitants in literature interacting with one another thus humanizing the digital literary experience through emotion and action.

Digital literature is dehumanized because it takes the physical book out of the reader's hand, and places the interaction of reader and author at bay with the

addition of the computer. Hyperlinks, images, and the divergence of digital literature create a separation but not one where the reader is separated emotionally. In the short description of Abrahams' "Separation," it says it promotes the paradox that "separating from the computer is painful, but to write with it again is painful as well". This idea is the epitome of this analysis in that it displays the human traits of pain, the dualism of one act though separated, as well as the unity of said act. Here pain is describing neither birth nor death, however we can assimilate the human emotion to the digital literary experience accordingly.

Barthes, in his essay "The Death of the Author," introduces the idea that "the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author," but why is it impossible for the two to coexist? If separating from a computer and writing with it again are both painful, the emotion remains constant, and thus the pain never truly dies. Pappas states that an "authors' desires drop out of the picture- not because they cannot be known, but because the authors' desires or intentions do not determine the outcome of [the] reading," (325) but they don't die. The author's desires, voice, intent, all remain and coexist at the same time the reader is interpreting. In Abrahams interactive piece, the reader is forced to separate from the poem and advised to stretch different muscles to reduce the physical strains of reading at a computer, however the methods she introduces also creates an annoying level of pain which agrees with the

recurring theory that pain, emotion remains constant. When Swaffar states "readers confront human limits to assimilate 'nonlinear' texts," (116) she is exhibiting the same sort of separation as Abrahams' stretching techniques, however these only physically create a rift between man and machine, text and reader, rather author and reader. From an emotional standpoint, the two remain interconnected.

When talking about interconnections, there is an importance in discussing the writer and the author. The question of death of the author, the existence of the writer, and birth of the reader must be evaluated and decided if any actually happen, and the affect it has on the text. This problem is expressed in Abrahams second line of her poem as she states "not knowing how to differentiate between you and me." The reader and the writer and the relationship between the two have as complicated connection as the writer and author. We must first define the terms author, writer, and reader, and realize the distinctions between them if any. Barthes claims the author owns the work, is the originator, and is its father, as stated in his lines the "author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it" (145). According to Theresa Enos "the author performs a function, the writer an activity." Enos continues discussing how "Barthes sets up a useful dichotomy between author and writer: The author's role is "priest"—intransitive; the writer's role is "clerk"—transitive activity" (340). In this case the

author need not be accompanied by anything and stands on his own, where as the writer is dependent on something, such as the reader, and further demonstrates the interconnection between the two. If they are in fact connected, then as the reader delves into the literary work, the writer must remain active and alive. Foucault contests that "it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form… [and] will disappear," (222) and this separation between author's existence and the text is caused by the reader's birth. William Page agrees with this theory and says, "once the author has produced surface structure or writing, the reader can enter the process and the author's part is complete. The reader must be able to sense or perceive the writing while the author no longer need be present" (Page 177). Enos opposes these views and contends the writer and reader have a relationship that proves they coexist when she declares that the "interconnectedness of the two can be strengthened if the "tyranny of the reader" is replaced, not by the author as authority, but with the reality that ethos is a rhetorical construct, requiring both the writer's textual presence and the reader's interaction with this living, active presence" (341).

As the discussion leads towards ethos and rhetoric, we have to realize that the author or writer is attached to the text, and "carries with it what's in the text, that is, we think not of the individual but the ideas in the text. The link carries with it a certain ethos. Ethos

is what brings the writer to life," (342) as Enos reports. Fleckenstein suggests, "Ethos is not located in the speaker or in an audience or in a site. It is dispersed throughout the ecology of speaker, audience, scene, and city-state." We can relate this to mean writer, reader, the digital text, and the cyber space community. If ethos brings the writer to life as the reader is reading, their coexistence is further exposed. Abrahams also demonstrates this coexistence in her lines "We are exchanging constructing, developing/to-get-her fusion, adaptation." This line shows the constant relationship between reader and writer almost like a conversation between the two. Page calls the "communication in writing and reading [a] dynamic process" (171) and speaks about the quality of its "imperfect isomorphism" (171).

      This morphing of reader and writer, which illustrates correlation between the two separate elements of a text, are further related through interpretation of the reader, and author/writer intent. "What the reader does [in some] cases therefore renders the author's intention irrelevant" (Pappas 325), and this changes the conversation between the two, however does not deny the conversations existence or the communication between reader and writer. The isomorphism is further expressed in Fleckenstein's essay as she speaks of rhetoric and the interactivity of digital texts by stating it "adds a third and fourth dimension to a reader's choices,

creating… not the reader but the writer-reader: the wreader."

Fleckenstein introduces the idea that "The traditional paradigm of artwork and audience is being challenged and rewritten. No longer is the audience a PASSIVE viewer but in web-based art becomes an ACTIVE participant in the artwork. The process of interaction between artwork and audience requires choices to be made by the viewer." This solidifies various arguments made as well as the thesis by interchanging the words art and artwork, with the word literary text, as well as the words audience and viewer with the word reader. This theory will now display the reader as becoming an active, integral part of the text especially in digital literature. "The author distinguishes between the conventional reader (the linear one) and readers susceptible to an extended textual world of multidimensional reading but he rejects the view that electronic texts as vehicles arrange information "in a fashion more closely related to the arrangement of information in the mind, where great leaps and sudden bridges juxtapose and unite the unexpected" (Swaffar 117).

Whether or not the author accepts the idea that the interactivity of digital literature is more related to the free association of information in the reader's mind, it is, as well as it increases the reader's activity in the text. Enos informs readers in her essay "Rhetoric implies action, which cannot be separated from either social

concerns or relations between writer and reader" (340). In "Separation," Abrahams has the reader click at a slow pace and interrupts the bridge of information if the reader clicks too fast. Those interruptions along with the stretching activities offered within Abrahams' digital text are unexpected actions that keep the conversation between reader and writer active, and allow both to exist in the now. Pappas further assists in the weaving of this idea by stating "To take a text as an action is to undertake to relate it to other actions, to account for its features by appealing to theirs, and for their features in turn by appealing to its own" (326). This also further develops the humanistic conversation theory between reader and writer via digital text.

Text messaging is a means of communication between two people, as is a literary text. Humanity has been so used to speaking to each other physically, just as we are used to literature speaking to readers through means of the conventional book, whereas now in this digital age, people communicate via electronic means. Within a conversation, one person speaks, the other listens, both parties are still actively involved in the conversation. The same can be said for the conversation of digital literature between the writer and the reader. There are multiple views in which to assess the discussion of reader and writer and the relationship between the two. The writer clearly has something to do with constructing a means of starting a conversation with the reader, and as the reader begins his or her journey

into this conversation. Foucault introduces the author function, and Enos the writer as an activity, the reader, the interpreter who relates the text to the activity of their own lives and minds, mean whilst the presence of the writer still exists through ethos. The reader and writer are both alive. The author never having actually died transcends his voice into existence as the writer where he and the reader coincide simultaneously on a parallel axis actively participating in a conversation of narrative.

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