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"The Death of the Author" and Schism within Postmodern Feminism: A Revision

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Abstract

The paper, while attempting a revisionist reading of the proposition and hypotheses of Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author" (in French *La mort de l'auteur*) from the perspective of postmodern feminism only, seeks to examine its intersection with some postmodern feminist perspectives which, again, are at loggerheads in some ways. The aim is to reassess its relevance to feminism in postmodern times when so many female 'authors' are making their marks and attaining worldwide recognition.

Keywords: feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, author, Barthes

The present paper seeks to make a revisionist reading of Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author" (in French *La mort de l'auteur*) from the perspective of postmodern feminism only. It aims at inquiring how far Barthes' idea of the death of the author is compatible with the feminist anxieties of authorship continuing in postmodern times and also explores how the (in)famous concept of Barthes has led to schism within postmodern feminism. The word 'revision' denotes the act of looking back—an act that refreshes the order of the existing critical opinions. It is not only embedded in the idea of retrospection with fresh eyes but also involves a reappraisal of the content. If the initial infatuation after the publication of a critical text—for that matter any text—is the sense of wonder inspired by 'the cover design of a text'; if the inclusion of the text in the personal book collection is 'the reading of the introduction' to that text, then revision, usually done much later after the publication of a work, is 'the negotiation with meanings of the content' of that text. Revision purports to approach the same old text from either a

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radical perspective or from a slightly different perspective. The present paper seeks to make no comprehensive revision of the essay by Barthes but will examine its intersection with some postmodern feminist perspectives which, again, are at loggerheads in some ways. There is no reason to think that the emergence of dissenting views within postmodern feminism is a retrograde sign. Dissenting views are the sine qua non of any healthy group and are the very condition of a group's subsistence. After its publication in 1967, the essay by Barthes received bouquets from the majority of the French postmodern feminist thinkers among others. When the initial infatuation with the essay was over, some of the postmodern feminists began to feel uneasy about Barthes' idea of the death of the author. They thought that 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were the times when so many female writers articulated a desire to become 'authors' of their own lives. At precisely this time, Barthes was announcing the death of the author, women authors had just gained ground after centuries of anxiety and suppression. Having been relegated to the position of the 'second' in the patriarchal cultural set-up through centuries and having been reduced to the status of being the 'objects' instead of the 'subjects' in art and literature created by male authors through the ages, women writers had started to make their 'presence' felt as authors. At such a moment of resuscitation and aeration in the field of the feminist movement, the proclamation of Barthes came down as a kind of 'blow'. Women writers were forced to negate themselves as authors because they belonged to a postmodern era dominated by feelings of incredulity towards authorship. Throughout history, they argued, the male has been in the subject position and women have been 'silenced'. History has been dominated by the male as the subject. It is unfortunate that at a time when after centuries of subjugation and silencing, women had begun to demand the right to name themselves, the concept of subjecthood and authorship became so problematic. The present essay seeks to make a revisionist reading of the proposition and hypotheses of Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author" with a view to reassess its relevance to feminism in postmodern times when so many female 'authors' are making their marks and attaining worldwide recognition.

Since its publication in 1967, the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author", published in the American journal *Aspen* (no. 5–6), has been enjoying great popularity. The essay has been hailed by postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers as Bathes' entry into poststructuralism and establishing his reputation as a major poststructuralist and postmodern thinker. The most interesting thing about the essay is it's challenging of the conventional idea of who an author is. Barthes announces that writing is the "destruction of every point of origin" (164). In writing, the subject slips away. The identity of the author is lost. It is a 'negative space' in this sense. The ideas in a text are not the expression of an author's self and intention. The author works in a field without origin because language, the origin of the author, calls into question all origins. Alluding to Balzac's *Sarrasine*, Barthes asks a volley of questions regarding who is hidden beneath the woman (actually a castrato) with whom the protagonist falls in love in Balzac's text. He wonders if it is Balzac who is furnishing his personal experience of the philosophy of woman. "Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas of femininity?" asks Barthes (164). Barthes then says that we shall never know the answer and then he writes that writing is the space "where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (164-165). The death of the author has been understood in terms of the death of God that Nietzsche talked about.

Barthes also wrote that writing is a 'neutral, composite and oblique space' (164). Neutral because the preponderance of the subject is lost after the birth of the text and language knows no man or woman as 'person'. Language knows the 'I' as the 'subject', not as the 'person'. Meaning is created not by the author but by the play of signifiers. The 'author' is outside the meaning-making process. Writing is 'composite' because the text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend. Writing is 'oblique' because a fact is narrated intransitively—an act in which the author is like a symbol. Alluding to ethnographic narration, Barthes says that the author is a 'shaman' or mediator. His 'performance' (i.e., mastery of the narrative code) is more important than his genius and the 'performance' takes place 'here'

and 'now'. The enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered. Looking at history, Barthes opines that the author as a ‘human person’ is a relatively modern figure emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation. The author is the creation of capitalist ideology. Positivism, the epitome of capitalist ideology, has attached the greatest importance to the person of the author, though some writers (e.g., Mallarme, Paul Valery, Marcel Proust, surrealist writers, and many linguists) have long since attempted to loosen the power of the author. Refusing to give any precedence to the author over the thing written, the author is born simultaneously with the text and does not precede the birth of the text. Writing begins only when the author enters into his or her death. According to Barthes, the author is a ‘scriptor' whose gesture is one of 'inscription' rather than 'expression'. The text is a tissue of quotations from innumerable centres of culture. The text is nothing but a tissue of citations resulting from the thousand sources of culture. The author imitates and mixes writings already present. What he expresses is nothing but a ready-formed dictionary whose words are explainable through other words. The author is not the writer but a repository of language that cites from the lexicon to 'script' a text. Text is not an expression of the inner self of the author but a tissue of citations resulting from the thousand sources of culture. He simply recycles the signifiers. Thus, Barthes frees the text from interpretative tyranny and revolutionises the method of reading and criticism by diminishing the importance of the author and by lending more freedom to the readers. He envisages a split between authority and authorship. The text is a tissue of signs infinitely deferred. It further proves what a writer incorporates in a text is not his or her own but are 'quotations', i.e. things or ideas already existing in culture. An author puts the existing things together and hence he is a 'scriptor’. Finally, Barthes famously wrote that reading and criticism are not deciphering the meaning of a text. According to Barthes, the author is the ultimate arbiter of meaning, but the 'explanation' of a work is not to be sought in the 'man or the woman' called 'author'. Meaning inheres in reading. Meaning is more in the destination (reader) than in the origin. The birth of the reader takes place at the cost of the death of the author.

It is not surprising that such novel ideas as enunciated in Barthes' essay elicited spirited response from the poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers, including those belonging to the feminist fold. Michel Foucault, for example, in his essay "What is an Author" (1969) did not mention the name of Barthes, but he engaged with Barthes' ideas. Foucault problematised the "author function". He explained the author as a classifying principle within a particular discursive formation. Adopting historicising approach, Foucault is of the opinion that the idea of the author, which we are inclined to consider as a timeless, irreducible category, is rather a function of discourse which has affected history (Lodge 195). For example, before the Renaissance, the attribution of authorship was more important in science, whereas in the era of humanism and capitalism the reverse has happened. Jacques Derrida, in his essay "The Death of Roland Barthes" (1981), paid homage to Barthes. It is worthwhile to note how the postmodern feminist thinkers responded to Bathes' essay. French feminism was greatly interested in theory. Taking as its starting point poststructuralist theory, especially that of Derrida's concepts of linguistic uncertainty and Foucault's ideas of sexuality and authorship and also Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the French feminists, despite far from being identical in their opinion, on the whole, believed that the literary text is not a reproduction of personal voice expressing the minute of personal experience. They believed that literary text is never primarily a representation of reality. They lay more stress on language, psychology, philosophy, and art of representation than on texts and authorship. They come to the texts at last and authorship is of the least importance to them. Carried away by the wish to reject the modernist assumption of the rational, autonomous 'subject' who tries to arrive at 'truth', the French feminists believed that the individual identity of the author is a 'fiction' and a creation of the patriarchal culture that 'otherises' women. For example, Luce Irrigaray (French) in *The Sex which is not One* (1977) embraced 'pluralistic epistemology' (Hekman 98) which critiques the idea of the author as an 'individual' or 'person'. Julia Kristeva was an important member of the male-dominated Tel Quel group in Paris to which Roland Barthes, Lucien Goldmann, Philippe Sollers (later married Kristeva) and others belonged. Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault belonged to the group, among others. It is Tzvétan

Todorov who introduced her (Kristeva) to leading critical thinkers of that time, including Roland Barthes. Barthes had an abiding influence on her. Julia Kristeva, in her essay "Woman can Never be Defined" (1974), critiques the author-centric patriarchal discourse in which the male is the subject. Her life-long preoccupation with the question of the 'construction of meaning' may be ascribed to the influence of Barthes among others. Like Barthes, she consistently attacked preconceptions and she wanted the reader to reformulate perceptions. Apart from being concerned with the question of language, she was, like Barthes, concerned with the questions of self and subject which, she also thought, was 'constructed'. Her belief that writing (*Ecriture*, i.e. a signifying practice in the context of cultural production) occupies a social space (reminiscent of the concept of 'intertextuality') instead of the space of the individual author aligns her with Barthes. She had little faith in any authorial denomination. She aimed to subvert the dominant power and structure of all discourse. Of course, the latter part of her career as a writer is marked by an increasing interest in the 'individual' and the 'personal.' Essentially, she sees subjectivity/identity as a *process* (not a *state of being*) and yet contained as a 'thing' within a humanist or essentialist framework (a social structure) because she wants to preserve a place for the *subject*, albeit a *subject-in-process*, because, without this, the 'pulsions'/drives in language cannot be explained. Helen Cixous (Algerian-born French), in her "Stories", "The Laugh of Medusa" (1975) and other writings, also questions the masculine subject which dominates patriarchal dualistic writings. Despite their individual differences, they are united by their advocacy for 'ecriture feminine' and distrust of the author, who, according to them, is a patriarchal creation. Apart from these French feminists, another postmodern feminist who has impacted the postmodern debates around subjectivity, identity and authorship is Judith Butler. Immensely influenced by Derrida, Foucault and the French feminists, Butler, in her *Gender Trouble* (1990), says that the identity of a woman is a 'fiction'—a pronouncement that aligns her with Barthes. She stands diametrically opposite to her predecessors in the fields of the feminist movement for replacing the male as the perennial 'subject' in literature and art when she says that there is no essential subject called 'woman'. She dissociates the noun 'woman' from the very 'is' and associates it

with 'does'. Gender, to Butler, is a ‘performance’–a word in which we catch echoes of Barthes’s utterance (according to Barthes author’s ‘performance’ is more important than his genius) in the essay under discussion. If Barthes’ essay sounded the death knell for the prospective 'authors', Butler's statement hit at the very core of the feminist movement hitherto done – i.e. establishing a unique feminine identity in the face of patriarchal erasure and existential crisis. The moment she rejects the identarian term ‘woman’ as ‘fiction’, all preceding movements for establishing women’s identity tend to be destabilised. Linda Nicholson, in her book Feminism/*Postmodernism* (1990), has opined that feminism and postmodernism are complementary and Linda is of Barthes’ party either knowingly or unknowingly.

The dismissal of the ‘function’ of a female author within postmodern feminism has led to controversy and schism. Some feminist thinkers have questioned the wisdom behind throwing away the' woman' category on the plea that this is necessary to erase the binaries, hierarchies, and structures related to modernism and Enlightenment. They question the postmodern strategies for challenging patriarchy because those strategies are, in turn, questioning the feminist 'subculture' itself. They argue that at the heart of the concept of the 'death' of the author as subject, there is nihilism which is the hallmark of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Hence, the concept of ‘death’ of the author–basically a ‘negative’ concept–is not in sync with feminism because the latter is a movement which is basically ‘positive’. Feminism strives to 'denaturalise' the dominance of the male author and the hierarchised binaries and not to 'delete' the author. Feminism seeks to ‘improve’ the condition of women in society and art and give ‘birth’ to new values which, though in a state of flux, are nevertheless positive and constructive. Postmodern feminists like Linda Hutcheon, Joseph P. Natoli, Chris Weedon, Patricia Waugh, Nancy Hardstock, and some other thinkers tend to critique the alliance of postmodern feminism with the idea of the death of the author. Their arguments take the following trajectories.

Down the ages, patriarchy has been uneasy about female authorship. A brief look at cultural history proves that women have

felt restrictions in both life and art. Reading and writing by a woman has not been accepted as something normal and desirable. This is true in varying degrees about almost all cultures across widely apart geographical regions of the world and historical eras. The woman has suffered the anxiety of authorship in a patriarchal cultural set-up. Writing has been thought to be the prerogative of the male as if the woman is an outsider in this field. She does not 'fit in' here. The word 'author' carries underpinnings of patriarchal 'authority'. Thus, the 'anxiety of authorship' has not allowed a woman author to form an established canon and stable literary tradition. Scattered here and there and across widely separated periods, women authors have formed a subsidiary culture which, unlike the male authors, was relatively free from what Harold Bloom calls the 'anxiety of influence'. Female authors need not have any conflicting relationship with their literary predecessors. On the contrary, they wished to belong to a 'tradition' of female authorship without adopting the strategies of 'swerves' and 'misreading' of the precursors. Instead, a female author's "self-creation involves her in a revisionary process" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). Her battle is not against her predecessors but against 'her' misrepresentation by 'him'. She struggles for self-definition–a struggle in which her precursors are compatriots rather than competitors. Not that the desire to have a room and literature of their own is a desire expressed in the twentieth century only. This has been an eternal wish nurtured by women of all ages, but patriarchy has been uneasy about this wish for authorship and also about the demand for a distinct space for women in the cultural arena. Rather, according to Anne Finch, those who have made such demands have been looked upon as intruders on the rights of men (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 8). For example, the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe were hardly for women. It was 'presumptuous' for women to try the pen and the 'sin' can't be redeemed by any virtue. It was better if she was the 'lady of the house'. She was hardly seen in the space outside the precincts of home and none saw the whole of her but herself (Riding qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 9). The creative gift was thought to be a male 'gift'. The 'pen' has been thought to have a natural relationship with the 'penis'. Though queen Elizabeth I was on the throne of England for quite a long time, the system of representations in art and

literature was dominated by the male. The literature and culture of the English Renaissance as a whole carried symptoms of a patriarchal culture, and female authorship was hardly wished for. The female body, as well as female creativity, was to a great extent "problematic" and "unstable" during the Renaissance. Sexual difference was the "logic of every discourse" and woman was defined phallocentrically as man's 'other'. The situation worsened during the Enlightenment. There was little change regarding the idea of female authorship till the end of the Victorian period. Poet-preacher Hopkins spoke for the late Victorian and early modern age when he wrote in a letter to his friend R. W. Dixon that an artist's power of masterly execution "marks off men from women" and "the male quality is the creative gift" (133).

Thus, after centuries of neglect, the female authors in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to have realised for the first time in the history of literature and criticism the significant role a woman author might assume. It was the time of the beginning of the real women's movement, out of which later feminism grew. Feminist thinkers seemed to have diagnosed the problem of women's inequality in society and, in some areas, proposed solutions. They realised the significance of the derogatory images of women promulgated by literature down the ages and felt that it was vital to combat those images and question male authority and coherence. Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was published in 1949 but exerted a strong influence in the 1960s, and this book played a crucial role in sparking the second wave of feminism. She questioned in significant ways the derogatory portrayal of women in the novels authored by male writers, especially D. H. Lawrence. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, was instrumental too in sparking second-wave feminism in the United States. Putting behind the feminist demand for voting rights, feminist literary movement had been concerning itself with the question of authorship and the question of holding the subject position in a literary work. It was a time of spirited response to the question of female authorship and identity. Feminists began to look askance at the heroines in 19th-century fiction who were concerned with seeking their marriage partner instead of working for an independent living. They critiqued Jane Austen's heroines who

believed that marriage determines their ultimate social position and fulfilment in life. Female authors like Iris Murdoch (1919 – 1999), Muriel Spark (1918 – 2006) and Doris Lessing (1919 –2013) were rediscovered and were read anew. The way they transgressed the rules and boundaries of society, the way they utilised their anger against the patriarchy and the way they vocalised female physical experiences as a source of female creative power were much praised in the 1960s. Feminist thinkers began to feel proud of their 'authors'. Feminist criticism turned out to be combative and polemical, exposing the mechanism of patriarchy. They questioned the cultural mindset that perpetuated sexual inequality. The feminist thinkers not only reassessed the female authors of the past, but critical attention was paid to books by male writers also in which influential images of women were constructed. Anglo-American feminist literary criticism, in particular, began to retrieve the lost tradition of women authors.

Instead of focusing on theory, the Anglo-American branch of feminist criticism concentrated on theme, motif and characterisation in literary works by female and male authors. The fact that they placed considerable emphasis on the historical and non-literary materials like the author's diary, memoirs, social history, medical history etc., bears proof of their trust in the 'life' of the 'author'. Mary Ellmann, in her book *Thinking About Women*, questions male attitudes towards female creativity. She says that men misread women's writing because they cannot think of women as anything but women. She puts it nicely: "With a kind of inverted fidelity, the discussion of women's books by men will arrive punctually at the point of preoccupation, which is the fact of femininity. Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips" (Ellmann n.p.). Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), and Elaine Showalter's (leader of the American group) *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) blazed a trail for the feminist literary movement. Though published in 1979 Elaine Showalter's *Towards a Feminist Poetics* respectfully looked back at women authors who wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male writers. Showalter also reassessed

women's writings that protested against male standards and values and advocated women's rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. She also emphasised how women have left behind the stage of imitation and protest and how the female experience has emerged as the source of autonomous art. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), focussed on the female anxiety of authorship in the nineteenth century. They felt that women writers share a set of similar experiences and that male oppression or patriarchy is everywhere essentially the same. Patricia Stubbs, in her work *Women and Fiction* (1979), not only focuses on Hardy, Moore, James, Gissing, Wells, Bennett, Forster and Virginia Woolf but also surveys the work of less famous writers, feminist and non-feminist—Olive Schreiner, George Egerton, Mrs Humphry Ward, Eliza Lynn Linton and others. To embrace Barthes' viewpoint regarding authorship in the backdrop of such a productive context was to miscarry a hard-conceived foetus.

This is to defeat the purpose of those female authors who, while suffering closure, prohibition and confinement, have tried to assert themselves as authors of both their lives and art. At different points in time, many women readers and writers, as well as a handful of male thinkers, have appreciated female authorship, but their endeavours have been piecemeal. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in the *Preface* to the First Edition of their seminal book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), have observed that in the nineteenth-century, women formed a literary 'subculture'. Female authors tried to relate to and support each other. They consciously tried to form a female tradition of writing, and Gilbert and Gubar have in their book, which alludes to Bertha Mason, the mad woman confined to the attic in *Jane Eyre*, have retrieved that tradition "in its entirety" (xi). After a long period of both literal and metaphorical confinement, women in the 1960s and 1970s began to feel the joy of being authors. Elaine Showalter, in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979), is not only concerned with "gynocriticism" but also with women as authors and producers of textual meaning. She is also concerned with "the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women" (25). Olivia Heal, in her recent essay "Towards a Matricentric Feminist Poetics" (2019), which recalls Showalter's essay, has drawn our attention to a concept which is

reminiscent of a central concern of Cultural feminism, viz., the importance of mothers as the author (117). She is interested in evolving a critical methodology for reading maternal writing. Heal, in her essay mentioned above, makes a mention of such essays as “Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers” by Andrea O'Reilly, “Practicing Matricentric Feminist Mothering” by Fiona Joy Green, “Towards Matricentric Feminism in the Caribbean: Inroads and Opportunities” by Talia Ensard. These essays are also more or less concerned with the question of mothers as authors. Susan Rubin Suleiman in her essay "Writing and Motherhood" has announced, "It's time to let mothers have their word” (120), though Adrienne Rich in her *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* and Jane Lazarre in *The Mother Knot*, clamoured the same call before Susan. The emergence of 'mom-literature' in the West further bears proof of this demand. Given this context of the 'birth' of so many female 'authors' and ‘critics’ in the 1960s and 1970s, some postmodern feminists find it difficult to accept the announcement of the ‘death of the author’ by Barthes.

The points raised by Barthes regarding the death of the author in hardly tenable in the context of the storming of the literary as well as social science canon by women’s life narratives. Emerging in the 1980s, women's life narratives have become a major area of study. The study of history, anthropology and ethnography can hardly do without the ‘origin’. Queer autobiographical narratives would seem to be empty vaunt without the ‘life’ of the author. Dalit women’s autobiographies have found a niche in recent times, and one can hardly read those without taking recourse to the life of the author. A folktale which is 'autotelic' is reliant upon the identity of the 'teller' (author's equivalent, to some extent) and his or her 'life circumstances' for meaning. The articulations of authorial identity and subjectivity have assumed new significance not only in women’s writings but in other areas of study as well. Contours of the ‘subject’ have been remapped in autobiographical discourses. The things which come out of the author's life are no longer irrelevant. It is found that in life narratives, the author's childhood memories, among other things, are distinct and discernible. Life narratives are concerned with the ‘processus’ of the construction of subject and subjectivities, and in case of women's autobiographies,

insights from the psychology and life attitudes of the woman subject are helpful in understanding the work. This is neither to say that women are beyond the impact of culture and history nor that the subject of a woman's life narrative is a singular universal category as a subject. But the fact is that the life of the subject and the author is of some importance even today. This is also true about the narratives of race and caste. To accept the fact that identities and subjectivities in women's life narratives are plural, fluid, ever-changing and culturally multiple is not to diminish the importance of the woman as subject and not to take it for granted that the author as a subject is never at the intersection and on some common grounds of resistance as a subject. There is separateness as well as some commonality in the saga of life narratives. Despite the fact that the concept of autonomous selfhood is problematic, the self is never erased. For example, while the collective life is important, so is oral narratives and testimonies; the selfhood of the 'life' that is intriguing to the readers, is never redundant, even in this postmodern and poststructuralist times of reconceptualisation of identity. Another example of commonalty in women's life narratives is the fact that the self of the woman is understood in relation to the mother who is not a universal mother but the mother of the individual author in the narrative and whose 'separation' from her mother is one of the root causes of her psychic dislocation.

Thus, there is no denying the fact that Barthes' concept of the death of the author has bred unease in writers who prefer to refer to their own lives in their creative work. Feminist writers in postmodern times hear a kind of 'warning' not only in Barthes' concepts regarding authorship but in some other poststructuralist thinkers too who think along Barthes' lines. For example, Paul de Man who considers autobiography to be a 'defacement' of the self of the author. According to him, all reference to real life is 'suspect' by the play of language. In his essay, "Autobiography as De-Facement", de Man says that autobiography does not go without some embarrassment. Compared to other genres, autobiography, according to de Man, looks disreputable and self-indulgent "in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of its aesthetic values" (68). Both Derrida and de Man have put forward theories of autobiography in which

'death', as much as life, "motivates or determines autobiographical discourse" (Malhotra 35). Thus, many postmodern feminist thinkers' (for example, Gayatri Spivak) alignment with the concept of the death of the author put forward by Derrida and de Man, after Barthes, has complicated notions of female subjectivity and agency in postmodern times and has bred schism within postmodern feminism.

Nobody knows if this schism within postmodern feminism arising out of the unease created by Barthes' proclamation about the death of the author will be bridged or at all needs to be bridged, but the schism has definitely given birth to two new tendencies among others within postmodern feminism. First, a renewed emphasis on the author's consciousness about the creative 'self' as well as the chosen genre(s). This has led to what Patricia Waugh in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (1984) and Linda Hutcheon in her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional* Paradox (1984) revalue as metafictional self-consciousness. This emphasis on the creator's consciousness within postmodern feminism has resulted in trust in some forms of grand narrative which seek to reach a 'consensus' to subvert 'accepted' practices of suppression and oppression. All postmodern feminists are not (for example, Linda Hutcheon) as distrustful of 'history' and 'subjectivity' as Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, who dismiss 'history' and 'subjectivity' as allies of Capitalism. Linda Hutcheon uses the term 'Historiographic metafiction' to describe those literary texts that assert an interpretation of the past but are intensely self-reflexive. They are critical of their own version of the truth as being partial, biased and incomplete. Second, postmodern feminism's tendency to look askance towards theory and to embrace life as lived in society. Today's feminism is more life-oriented than theory-oriented. Theory tends to generate a fit-all straight jacket, whereas, in life, problems are unique and culture-specific. It is true that feminism as a movement will not remain monolithic and women as a group will not be homogenous, but feminist thinkers need to be vigilant regarding some such questions as that of authorship, especially when subordination of women, inequality between men and women, exploitation of women, violence against women is not over. It is good to reappropriate an idea instead of getting subsumed

by it, however dazzling it may look. The mirror is not impartial and objective. The mirror is problematic too. We may conclude with a question raised by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk in their book *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (1988)—"After Irigaray, the question remains–how have women articulated their own experience, shaped their own texts artistically, met their own reflections in the problematic mirror of autobiography?" (87)

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