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Between Anonymity and Authority: Rethinking Authorship and Power in The Help

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ABSTRACT

*This study examines the dynamics of authorship, anonymity, and power in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009) and its 2011 film adaptation through the theoretical frameworks of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Employing qualitative textual analysis, the research explores how authorial identity operates within narratives of racial oppression and how anonymity functions simultaneously as a form of protection and erasure. The findings reveal that while Barthes' notion of the "death of the author" appears to liberate interpretive authority from the creator, Foucault's concept of the author-function persists as a regulatory mechanism that governs discourse, authorship, and social recognition. In both novel and film, collective authorship emerges as an ideal yet remains undermined by structural hierarchies that privilege white voices. The adaptation's shift in narrative perspective further demonstrates how medium and ideology shape the representation of authorship. Ultimately, the study concludes that authorship in *The Help* cannot be separated from power relations and continues to reflect broader questions of voice, legitimacy, and social inequality.*

Keywords: *Anonymity and Voice, Author-Function, Authorship and Power, Narrative Adaptation, Race and Textual Authority*

INTRODUCTION

The question of authorial presence and absence has occupied a central position in literary theory since the mid-twentieth century, generating extensive scholarly debate concerning the complex relationship between creators and their creative productions (Sovannara et al., 2023). The notion of who or what controls the meaning of a text has long fascinated critics, as it directly intersects with broader concerns regarding interpretation, power, and cultural production. Within this intellectual terrain, two theoretical frameworks have proven particularly influential: Roland Barthes' provocative declaration of "the death of the author" and Michel Foucault's more intricate theorization of the "author-function." Both frameworks emerged at a time of epistemological upheaval within the humanities, when structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers began to dismantle traditional conceptions of subjectivity, authority, and meaning. Together, Barthes and Foucault fundamentally redefined the boundaries between author, text, and reader, challenging deeply ingrained assumptions about textual ownership, interpretive hierarchy, and the institutional mechanisms through which meaning is produced and legitimized.

Barthes (1977) "The Death of the Author" constitutes a radical intervention in literary theory, rejecting the long-standing critical practice of interpreting texts through the lens of authorial intention. For Barthes, the moment a text is completed marks the metaphorical "death" of its author, as the text becomes an autonomous field of signification, open to an infinite plurality of readings. Meaning, therefore, does not originate from the author's consciousness but emerges through the interplay between text and reader. This shift from author-centered to reader-centered interpretation effectively dismantles traditional hierarchies of textual authority, democratizing the act of reading by positioning the reader as the ultimate producer of meaning (Yanti Harahap et al., 2023). The text, in Barthes' view, becomes a "tissue of quotations," an intertextual network where language, rather than individual intention, is the true creative force.

Foucault (1969) "What Is an Author?" offers a more complex and historically grounded understanding of the author's role within systems of discourse. Rather than declaring the author obsolete, Foucault reconceptualizes authorship as a "function" within discursive practices a regulatory mechanism through which societies categorize, attribute, and control texts (Rahmayani, 2022). The author-function, according to Foucault, is not an inherent quality of the writer but a cultural construct that governs how texts are circulated, valued, and interpreted. It determines which discourses are deemed legitimate, which are marginalized, and how authority operates within the field of knowledge. Thus, while Barthes seeks to liberate the text from the tyranny of the author, Foucault exposes the institutional and ideological frameworks that continually reassert authorial presence as a means of control (Afifuddin et al., 2023).

Contemporary literary and cinematic productions continue to grapple with these theoretical frameworks, often dramatizing the tension between authorial presence and absence in ways that reveal their enduring relevance. Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009) and its 2011 film adaptation directed by Tate Taylor serve as a particularly illuminating case study for examining how authorship, anonymity, and authority intersect within narratives of race, gender, and power. Set in Jackson, Mississippi, during the Civil Rights era, *The Help* revolves around the collaborative creation of an anonymous manuscript that records the lived experiences of African American domestic workers. The project, spearheaded by Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan a young white aspiring journalist depends upon the participation and testimony of Black maids such as Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, whose voices form the backbone of the narrative. This embedded text-within-a-text structure produces multiple layers of authorship, blurring the boundaries between creator and subject, fiction and testimony, and individual and collective identity.

The decision to employ anonymity as a central narrative device carries profound thematic and political implications. On one level, anonymity functions as a protective mechanism, shielding the African American narrators from social, physical, and economic repercussions in the racially segregated South. On another level, it serves as a rhetorical strategy that destabilizes the notion of singular authorship by foregrounding collective experience over individual voice (Batubara & Fotaleno, 2023). Through this narrative configuration, *The Help* simultaneously enacts and interrogates Barthes' notion of authorial death displacing the primacy of the named author while also illustrating Foucault's argument that the author-function continues to operate as a site of social regulation. Even as anonymity ostensibly dissolves the figure of the author, the text's circulation within both fictional and real-world contexts reveals persistent power structures governing whose voices are heard, authenticated, and commodified.

Moreover, the transition from novel to film adaptation introduces additional layers of complexity in relation to authorship and narrative control. While Stockett's novel grants interiority and narrative agency to multiple first-person voices, the film adaptation necessarily mediates these voices through visual and directorial frameworks. Tate Taylor's cinematic interpretation thus reconfigures the dynamics of authorship, shifting interpretive authority from the anonymous collective of narrators to the auteur figure of the director and the visible performances of the actors. This intermedial transformation underscores how different forms of authorship literary, cinematic, and collaborative interact and compete within cultural production, reflecting broader debates about authorship in a media-saturated age.

This study, therefore, undertakes a systematic examination of how authorial identity particularly anonymous authorship functions within both the narrative structure of *The Help* and the relationship between its novelistic and cinematic

forms. Specifically, it seeks to address three central questions. First, how do Barthes' and Foucault's theoretical frameworks illuminate the function and implications of anonymity within the text? Second, what distinctions emerge between the novel and its film adaptation in their respective constructions of authorial presence, narrative authority, and audience engagement? Third, how does the embedded anonymous text generate broader consequences for understanding issues of voice, representation, and power in narratives that seek to depict racial and social oppression? By addressing these questions, this research situates *The Help* within an ongoing critical dialogue concerning the politics of authorship and the ethical dimensions of storytelling in postmodern and postcolonial contexts.

This research employs a qualitative textual analysis approach that focuses on Kathryn Stockett's 2009 novel *The Help* and its 2011 film adaptation directed by Tate Taylor as the primary data sources. The qualitative method is chosen because it allows for an in-depth interpretive examination of how concepts of authorship, anonymity, and authority are constructed and negotiated across literary and cinematic forms. The analysis integrates close reading techniques with theoretical application, systematically exploring narrative structure, characterization, dialogue, and visual representation through the lens of authorship theory. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which both texts dramatize the tension between authorial presence and absence, as well as how they reflect broader cultural discourses concerning voice, representation, and power.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is grounded in a dual theoretical framework derived from Roland Barthes' essay "*The Death of the Author*" (1977) (Barthes, 1977) and Michel Foucault's lecture "*What is an Author?*" (Foucault, 1995). These two seminal works provide the conceptual foundation for analyzing how authorial identity functions within *The Help* (Stockett, 2009; Taylor, 2011). Barthes' theory posits that the author's biographical identity bears no inherent connection to the meaning of the text, asserting that interpretive authority resides with the reader rather than the writer. This framework is used to explore how the act of writing within the novel and film becomes detached from singular authorship and is instead represented as a collective and reader-centered process. In contrast, Foucault's concept of the author-function highlights the continuing relevance of the author figure as a discursive and institutional construct that governs the classification, attribution, and circulation of texts. Through this lens, the study examines how *The Help* reflects and critiques cultural mechanisms that confer authority, legitimacy, and ownership upon certain voices while marginalizing others (Tsarapatsanis & Aletras, 2021). The integration of these two frameworks allows for a balanced analysis that considers both the liberation of the text from authorial control and the persistent social structures that sustain authorial identity.

The data collection process involves multiple close readings of the novel and repeated viewings of the film adaptation. The novel was analyzed chapter by chapter, with particular attention to shifts in narrative perspective among its three main narrators Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan. These shifts are examined to uncover how multiple voices construct a sense of collective authorship and challenge the dominance of singular narrative authority. Meanwhile, the film adaptation was analyzed for its visual and structural representation of authorship, focusing on how cinematic elements such as framing, dialogue, and mise-en-scène reconfigure the textual dynamics of the novel. Scenes depicting acts of writing, storytelling, and publication were catalogued and analyzed in relation to both Barthes’ and Foucault’s theoretical models. Supplemental materials, including director interviews and production notes where relevant, were also reviewed to contextualize the adaptation’s interpretive stance toward the novel.

The analytical procedure followed a series of structured stages. First, all passages and scenes directly engaging with authorship, anonymity, and textual production were identified and categorized. Next, each instance was analyzed using Barthes’ and Foucault’s frameworks to reveal different aspects of authorial function within the narrative. Comparative analysis between the novel and film was then conducted to identify divergences in their portrayal of authorship and authority (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013). This comparison made it possible to assess how the shift from textual to visual storytelling transforms the representation of narrative control and interpretive power. Finally, findings from both analyses were synthesized to form interpretive conclusions regarding how anonymous authorship operates as a thematic and structural device in *The Help*, especially in relation to broader issues of racial oppression, narrative ownership, and cultural memory.

This study also acknowledges several limitations inherent in its scope and methodology. The analysis is confined to the English-language versions of both the novel and film, excluding potential variations in translated editions and international receptions. This limitation may restrict the understanding of how authorial identity functions across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Additionally, while the research is firmly rooted in Barthes’ and Foucault’s theories, it does not extensively engage with alternative frameworks such as postcolonial theory, critical race theory, or feminist narratology approaches that could yield valuable complementary insights into the intersections of race, gender, and authorship in *The Help*. The study also does not include empirical audience or reception analysis, which could further illuminate how meaning and authorship are negotiated beyond the text itself. Despite these constraints, the qualitative textual approach adopted here provides a rigorous and focused foundation for exploring how *The Help* engages with theoretical debates concerning the death and persistence of the author, while also revealing how questions of authorship intersect

with issues of power, identity, and representation in contemporary narrative discourse (Given, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the research, which examines how authorial identity, anonymity, and narrative perspective operate within *The Help* (Stockett, 2009) and its 2011 film adaptation directed by Tate Taylor. The analysis integrates textual and cinematic evidence with the theoretical frameworks of Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?". The discussion proceeds thematically, identifying how both versions of the narrative engage with questions of authorship, power, and representation, and how these dynamics illuminate broader theoretical.

Overview of Findings

Analysis of both the novel and the film adaptation reveals that *The Help* constructs a sustained dialogue between authorial absence and authorial regulation. While the text dramatizes attempts to dissolve the author's centrality particularly through collective and anonymous authorship social hierarchies of race and class continually reassert authorship as a function of control, legitimacy, and punishment. This paradox embodies the tension between Barthes' ideal of liberated textuality and Foucault's recognition of the author-function as a persistent social mechanism. The results are summarized in the following analytical table, which organizes thematic findings, textual evidence, theoretical interpretation, and critical implications.

Table 1. Summary of Results and Discussion: Authorship, Anonymity, and Power in *The Help* (Novel and Film)

Thematic Focus	Empirical Findings (Novel & Film Evidence)	Theoretical Interpretation (Barthes & Foucault)	Critical Discussion and Implications
1. Anonymous Authorship as Protective Strategy	Domestic workers in <i>The Help</i> choose anonymity to protect themselves from racial retaliation. Aibileen hesitates to speak; Skeeter insists that "This isn't about me," signaling authorial withdrawal.	Barthes' " <i>Death of the Author</i> " aligns with Skeeter's attempt to efface her presence, yet her racial and class privilege undermine full disappearance.	Anonymity functions as a pragmatic act of survival, not a pure theoretical gesture. Barthes' notion of liberated readership collides with structural inequality and racialized authorship.
2. The Failure of Anonymity: The Author-Function in Action	Hilly Holbrook identifies herself in Minny's "Terrible Awful" story despite changed names. The anonymous text fails to conceal its sources.	Foucault's author-function operates here: authorship persists through social recognition, contextual inference, and stylistic markers	The persistence of identification shows that authorship is socially produced and policed. The author-function organizes discourse by classifying and

Thematic Focus	Empirical Findings (Novel & Film Evidence)	Theoretical Interpretation (Barthes & Foucault)	Critical Discussion and Implications
		even without attribution.	controlling who can speak.
3. Collective Authorship and Unequal Consequences	<i>The Help</i> is collaboratively produced by Skeeter, Aibileen, Minny, and others. However, Aibileen loses her job while Skeeter advances her career.	Barthes' collective authorship dissolves individuality, yet Foucault's social structures reimpose authorship through systems of reward and punishment.	The risks of authorship are unequally distributed along racial and class lines, revealing that authorship cannot be separated from material hierarchies.
4. Narrative Perspective: Novel vs. Film	The novel uses rotating first-person narration (Aibileen, Minny, Skeeter). The film centralizes Aibileen's voice but foregrounds Skeeter's career early on.	Barthes' plural voices reflect reader-centered interpretation, while Foucault's author-function is reasserted through cinematic framing and white perspective.	Adaptation transforms authorship across media: the film's narrative choices reintroduce authorial centrality and ideological control despite apparent inclusivity.
5. Authorship and Social Consequences	Publication benefits Skeeter (career success) but harms Aibileen and Minny (job loss, ostracism).	Foucault's author-function explains how society legitimizes certain authors and disciplines others.	Authorship emerges as a site of privilege and punishment. The unequal outcomes demonstrate how racial and gendered hierarchies regulate who may "author" history.
6. Representation and Appropriation	Critics question Stockett's legitimacy as a white author representing Black voices. Within the narrative, Skeeter mirrors this dynamic.	Barthes would deny authorial relevance; Foucault would argue the author's name structures authority and ethics.	The novel becomes a meta-commentary on authorship ethics. Authorship carries moral responsibility, especially in cross-racial representation.

Source: Author's Analysis

Analytical Synthesis

The thematic findings demonstrate that *The Help* enacts a complex negotiation between theoretical abstraction and social materiality. Barthes' declaration of the author's death is echoed in the narrative's emphasis on anonymity and collaboration. Yet, Foucault's

concept of the author-function more accurately describes how authorship persists as a regulatory construct, determining visibility, legitimacy, and consequence.

Barthes (1977) envisioned the author's "death" as liberation from interpretive tyranny meaning should arise from readers, not from authorial intent. In *The Help*, Skeeter attempts to embody this death by claiming neutrality ("It ain't matter what I feel"), positioning herself as mere transcriber. However, her position as a white, educated woman in the segregated South ensures that her authorial presence cannot truly vanish. The reader within the story the Jackson community inevitably attributes authorship to Skeeter, validating her voice while delegitimizing Black contributors. Thus, the text demonstrates the impossibility of complete authorial death under unequal social conditions.

Foucault (1995) concept of the author-function provides a more pragmatic model for understanding authorship in *The Help*. Even when the domestic workers' testimonies are anonymized, they remain subject to recognition and regulation. Hilly's identification of Minny exemplifies how discourse always returns to an authorial locus through mechanisms of surveillance, classification, and power. The author-function here does not merely identify who wrote a text it determines who *may* speak and with what consequences. For the Black women of Jackson, authorship remains dangerous precisely because it constitutes an act of public visibility within a society designed to silence them.

Comparing novel and film reveals how medium-specific forms mediate authorial perspective. The novel's rotating first-person narration disperses voice and authority across multiple narrators, approximating Barthes' reader-centered openness. In contrast, the film's partial centralization of Aibileen's narration and its early focus on Skeeter's professional storyline subtly reassert authorial control. This shift aligns with Foucault's author-function: cinematic adaptation reinstates hierarchical authorship to maintain narrative coherence and market accessibility, illustrating how authorship is shaped by institutional and commercial imperatives.

Beyond theoretical implications, *The Help* provokes ethical debates about representation and cultural appropriation. Critics argue that Stockett's authorship replicates the very racial hierarchies it seeks to critique, as the white mediator (Skeeter/Stockett) receives acclaim while the represented subjects remain voiceless. This tension exposes a gap between theoretical death of the author and ethical responsibility of authorship. Foucault's insistence on the author-function's social embeddedness provides a framework for understanding why authorship cannot be ethically neutral: who speaks, and on whose behalf, always matters.

Anonymity in *The Help* serves as both shield and silencer. While it protects the domestic workers from direct harm, it simultaneously denies them credit and public recognition. Drawing from distinction between protective anonymity and imposed anonymity, the text illustrates that both forms coexist in racialized contexts (Buckley et al., 2024). Aibileen's eventual unemployment despite anonymity demonstrates that the social surveillance of race and class renders total invisibility impossible. The narrative thus critiques the illusion of safety in anonymity, exposing it as a fragile construct within oppressive systems.

Synthesis and Implications

In synthesizing the findings, *The Help* emerges as a text that embodies the unresolved tension between liberation and control in authorship. The novel's structure and its adaptation's choices illustrate how Barthes' and Foucault's theories are not mutually exclusive but dialectically intertwined: (1) Barthes' ideal of liberated textuality informs the story's aspiration toward collective and anonymous authorship. (2) Foucault's

author-function explains why such liberation remains constrained by social hierarchies and institutional power. Ultimately, *The Help* demonstrates that the author never fully dies; instead, she is continuously reborn through cultural, racial, and ideological frameworks that determine who can narrate history and whose voices are legitimized. Anonymity, while offering temporary protection, cannot dismantle systemic inequality it merely reshapes its expression

Comparative Analysis: Novel vs. Film Adaptation

The comparative analysis between Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* and Tate Taylor's film adaptation reveals how the transition from text to screen transforms the operation of authorship, narrative perspective, and the politics of representation. Although both works share the same core storyline, they diverge in structure, focalization, and the distribution of narrative authority. These differences are not merely stylistic; they reflect underlying ideological and theoretical shifts concerning who controls the narrative, whose voice is amplified, and how the author-function operates across media. The following table provides a detailed comparative overview of these transformations, integrating textual evidence, cinematic observation, and theoretical interpretation.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Authorship, Perspective, and Theoretical Function in *The Help* (Novel vs. Film)

Analytical Dimension	Novel (Kathryn Stockett, 2009)	Film (Tate Taylor, 2011)	Interpretation through Barthes & Foucault	Critical Implications
Narrative Structure	Employs <i>rotating first-person narration</i> from Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter. Each chapter labeled by the narrator's name, distributing interpretive authority across voices.	Uses <i>third-person cinematic perspective</i> with Aibileen's limited voice-over narration. Many scenes presented without direct narrator commentary.	Barthes' notion of plural meaning is enacted in the novel through narrative polyphony; the film reinstates authorial unity typical of cinematic storytelling, aligning with Foucault's structured author-function.	The film simplifies narrative democracy into a more linear hierarchy. While the novel invites reader participation, the film curates audience perception through directorial control.

Analytical Dimension	Novel (Kathryn Stockett, 2009)	Film (Tate Taylor, 2011)	Interpretation through Barthes & Foucault	Critical Implications
Opening Frame	Begins with Aibileen's perspective ("Mae Mobley was born on a hot August afternoon..."), centering the Black domestic worker's consciousness.	Opens with Skeeter's journalistic ambitions and career trajectory, visually establishing her as the protagonist.	The shift from Aibileen to Skeeter reflects a move from <i>reader-centered textual openness</i> to <i>author-centered narrative framing</i> .	The change recenters whiteness and authorship, reasserting control by the privileged narrator even within a story ostensibly about Black voices.
Representation of Authorship	Authorship depicted as collective, collaborative, and anonymous. Skeeter acts as facilitator rather than sole author.	Skeeter is visibly shown writing, typing, and submitting the manuscript. Visual emphasis on her authorship.	Barthes' authorial death collapses in the film, as the cinematic image re-embodies the author. Foucault's author-function resurfaces as institutional recognition of authorship.	The film re-materializes the author figure, visually granting Skeeter authority while erasing the anonymity that underpins the novel's thematic core.
Voice and Subjectivity	Each narrator provides interior monologue and subjective emotion, granting psychological depth to marginalized characters.	Aibileen's voice-over offers limited internal reflection; much of her subjectivity is externalized through performance and gaze.	The novel enacts Barthesian multiplicity; the film mediates subjectivity through visual codes governed by the director's perspective.	The loss of interiority reduces interpretive plurality and reasserts the controlling authorial gaze.
Racial Dynamics and Authorship	Black narrators control significant portions of the narrative; readers access their voices directly.	Although Aibileen narrates, Skeeter's storyline dominates screen time and resolution arc.	Foucault's author-function appears racialized: Skeeter's authorship is legitimized by institutions (publisher, audience), while Black women's	Authorship is stratified along racial lines. The adaptation exposes the persistence of racialized narrative control within popular media.

Analytical Dimension	Novel (Kathryn Stockett, 2009)	Film (Tate Taylor, 2011)	Interpretation through Barthes & Foucault	Critical Implications
			authorship remains hidden.	
Ethical Framing of Testimony	The embedded book <i>The Help</i> symbolizes collective testimony and historical reclamation.	The film foregrounds Skeeter's moral courage and liberation, aligning with the "white savior" trope.	Barthes' idea of "reader-produced meaning" is replaced by Foucault's institutional author-function that rewards whiteness as narrative moral authority.	The adaptation dilutes collective resistance into individual heroism, altering the ethical center of the story.
Ending and Consequence	The novel ends with Aibileen's reflective monologue, leaving authorship unresolved but spiritually empowering.	The film concludes with Aibileen walking away after losing her job, visually suggesting closure and personal redemption.	The novel maintains interpretive openness (Barthes); the film imposes authorial closure (Foucault's disciplinary resolution).	The open-ended novel encourages critical interpretation; the film's closure reinforces emotional catharsis over structural critique

Source: Author's Analysis

The comparative data reveal that adaptation inevitably involves translation of authorship not merely of words into images, but of power relations into visual codes. The novel's use of polyvocal narration approximates Barthes' readerly liberation: meaning is co-created through multiple subjectivities, encouraging interpretive multiplicity. In contrast, the film's visual grammar inherently centralizes perspective, reinstating the author as a visible organizing principle, in line with Foucault's author-function. This transformation is particularly evident in the film's visual emphasis on Skeeter's act of writing. The typewriter scenes, editorial meetings, and publication sequences render authorship tangible and embodied. In doing so, the adaptation reverses the novel's radical

experiment in collective authorship and re-materializes the author as the site of creative and moral agency.

Furthermore, racialized power dynamics intensify across media. The novel democratizes voice through alternating narration, while the film's visual hierarchy privileges Skeeter's mobility and self-actualization. Thus, what begins as a critique of white mediation in authorship becomes, in cinematic form, a reaffirmation of it. This ideological recentring exemplifies what adaptation theorists such as (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013) describe as the "double process of transformation and containment": adaptation both translates and limits the radical potential of its source. Ultimately, the comparison underscores a broader theoretical conclusion: (1) Barthes' "Death of the Author" finds partial expression in the novel's pluralized narration, where readers must synthesize multiple consciousnesses. (2) Foucault's "Author-Function" dominates the film adaptation, where authorship is visually institutionalized, gendered, and racialized through cinematic convention.

In sum, *The Help* in both forms dramatizes the endurance of authorship as a cultural construct. Even within narratives that seek to dismantle authorial hierarchy, authorship returns as an unavoidable site of identity, power, and recognition. Taken together, the analyses confirm that *The Help* functions as a rich textual laboratory for exploring the interplay between authorial disappearance and reappearance, collective authorship and individual privilege, and representation and appropriation. While Stockett's novel aspires toward Barthesian multiplicity and reader-driven meaning, the film adaptation exemplifies Foucault's insight that authorship is inseparable from institutional frameworks and sociopolitical power.

The comparative findings thus reaffirm that the "death of the author" remains an aspirational rather than achievable condition particularly within racialized systems of production and representation. In both novel and film, anonymity and collaboration provide temporary resistance but cannot escape the gravitational pull of authorship's enduring cultural and ideological functions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *The Help*, in both its novel and film forms, demonstrates the persistent tension between authorial absence and social power. While the narrative employs anonymity and collective authorship as strategies to challenge conventional hierarchies of voice, these efforts ultimately reveal the enduring influence of what Foucault terms the author-function. Barthes' vision of the "death of the author" proves aspirational rather than fully attainable, as material conditions particularly those shaped by race, gender, and class continue to determine whose voices are heard, credited, and legitimized. The novel's multi-perspectival structure offers a more democratic narrative form, whereas the film adaptation re-centralizes white authorship, reflecting the limitations of representation within mainstream media. Ultimately, *The Help* illustrates that authorship remains inseparable from systems of power, and that true authorial liberation requires not only theoretical abstraction but also structural transformation in how stories are produced, circulated, and received.

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