

Authorship and Intentionality

1. What does Roland Barthes mean when he argues that the author is 'dead'? Discuss the 'death of the author' in the light of the following quotation:

'*Eugene Onegin* would have been written even if Pushkin had never been born'.
(Osip Brik, cited in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism. History-Doctrine* (The Hague, Paris and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1980), p. 253)

2. Read the following passage and discuss in what ways knowledge of the author's life may be relevant to the interpretation of a literary text.

'Balzac, indécrottable et embêtant. Dans la vie privée, ignare et ignoble, ne sachant rien. Ouvrant des grands yeux à toutes les explications, bouffi de lieux communs, une vanité de commis-marchand. Il semblait qu'il se fît un phénomène somnambulique lorsqu'il travaillait, et que concentré sur un point, par une intuition, il se rappelât toutes choses, même les ignorées'.

(Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, ed. by Robert Ricatte, 3 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), I, p. 46)

3. Compare the following quotations: how do they describe the relation between author and work? What is the role of the author in autobiographical works?

'Je veux qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contention et artifice: car c'est moi que je peins. [...] Je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre'.

(Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Marie-Madeleine Fragonard (Paris : Pocket, 1998), p. 24)

'*Gibraltar* n'est pas une projection de moi, c'est moi tout entier dans un disque'.

(Abd Al-Malik, interviewed by Mathieu Menossi,
<<http://www.evene.fr/musique/actualite/abd-al-malik-gibraltar-nap-rap-444.php>>, accessed 01/05/2012)

4. Distinguish between the concepts of the author and the narrator. What are their respective roles in a text?

5. Can a text exist independently of its readers? What is the role of the reader in determining the meaning of a text? Comment on the conclusion of 'La Mort de l'auteur':

'Pour rendre à la lecture son avenir, écrit Barthes en conclusion de son article, il faut renverser le mythe: la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'Auteur'.

(Roland Barthes, 'La Mort de l'auteur', in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), III, p. 45)

6. Think about the notion of authorship in relation to other media:

- who is the 'author' of a film, a dramatic performance and other collaborative forms of art?
- Prior to its release, a film has to meet with the approval of the producers and the studio. How does this complicate the notion of authorship? What is a 'director's cut' and what ideas about authorship does it imply?

7. Is the concept of the author necessary for the reader? Can the author really be 'dead'? Comment on the following quotations.

'l'auteur dans son œuvre doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part'

(Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973-2007), II, p. 204 (letter to Louise Colet, 9 December 1852))

'The author is present in every page of every book from which he sought so assiduously to eliminate himself'.

(Henry James, cited in Leon Edel, *Henry James. A Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. xiv)