

Lectures on Structuralism

Lecture II

**“Author Versus Reader: Trends in Post-Structuralism”
with reference to
“The Death of the Author” by Roland Barthes**

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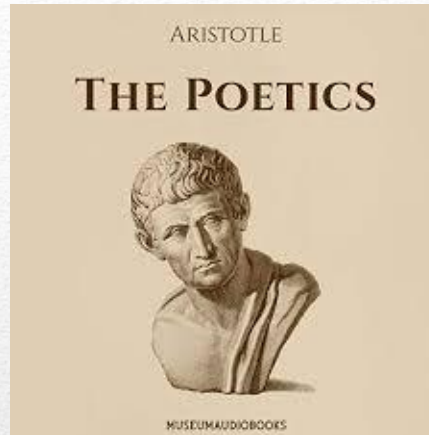
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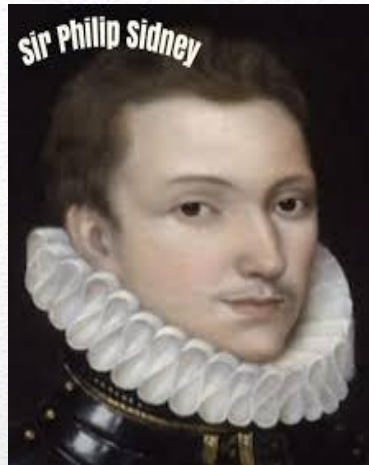
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A reader centered approach through the concept of ‘catharsis’

“A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language...in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish catharsis of these emotions”

-Aristotle



Philip Sydney quotes Horace:

‘A poem is a speaking picture with this end to teach and delight’
-Horace

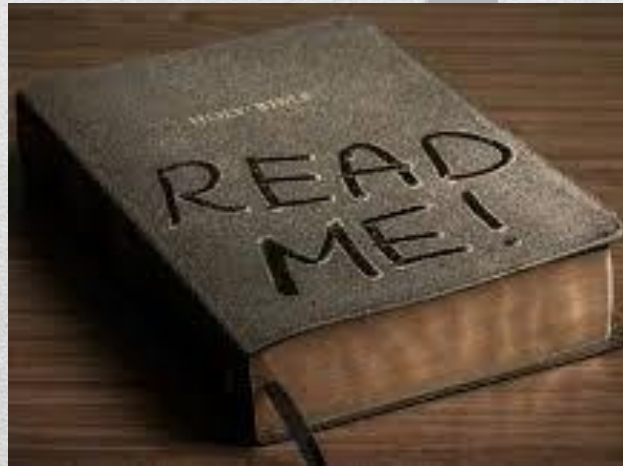
Sydney’s stand:

Literature has as its primary aim the giving of pleasure to the reader and any moral or didactic element is necessarily subordinate to that or at least unlikely to succeed without it.

Beginning of tradition of
practical criticism in England



Dr. Samuel Johnson



'Entry of Author God with Romantics

“... poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”

-Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballad (1800)

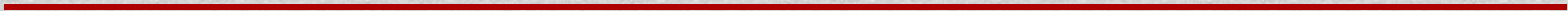
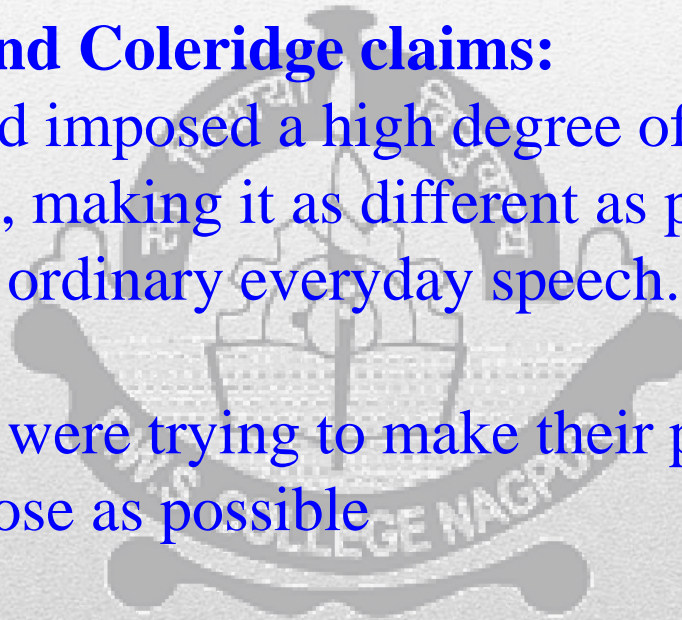


Abandonment of conventions of verbal decorum

Wordsworth and Coleridge claims:

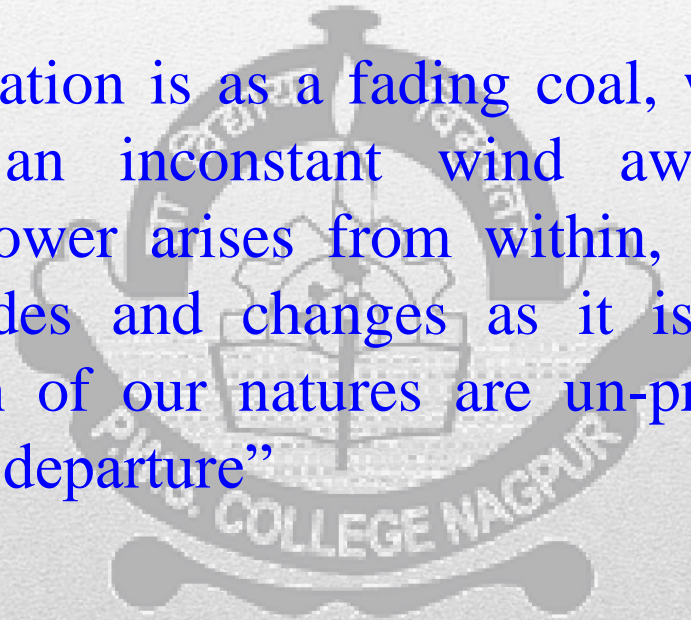
Conventions had imposed a high degree of artificiality on poetic language, making it as different as possible from the language of ordinary everyday speech.

Therefore, they were trying to make their poetic language as much like prose as possible



“The mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influences like an inconstant wind awakens to transitory brightness this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed and the conscious portion of our natures are un-prophetic either of its approach or of its departure”

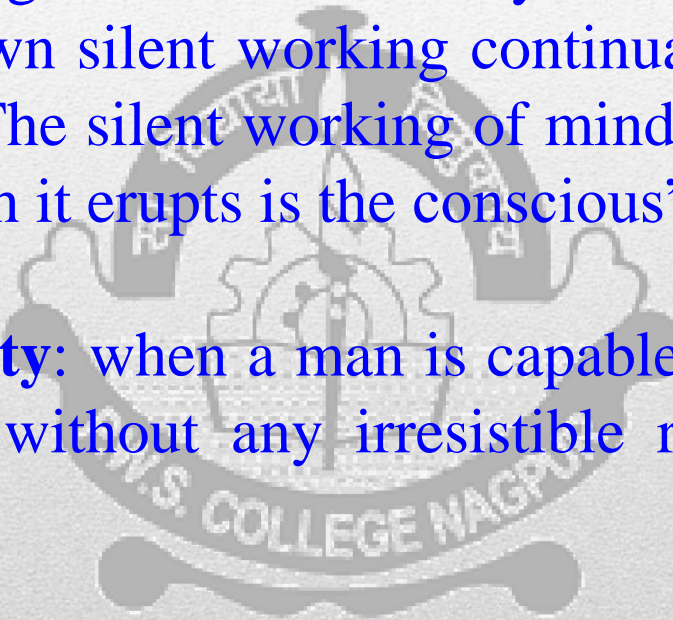
-P.B. Shelley



“The simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent working continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness. The silent working of mind is the unconscious and the spirit into which it erupts is the conscious”

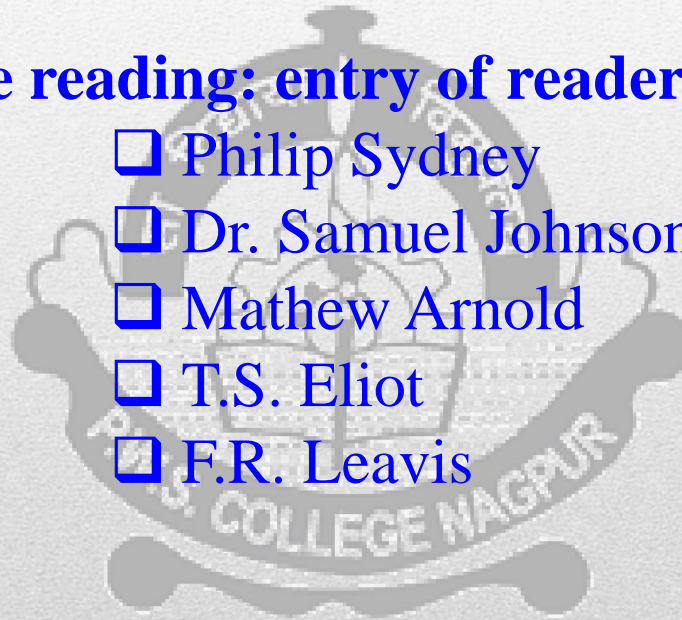
- **John Keats**

Negative capability: when a man is capable of being uncertainties, mysteries doubts without any irresistible reaching after fact and reason



Exponent of close reading: entry of reader in this business:

- Philip Sydney
- Dr. Samuel Johnson
- Mathew Arnold
- T.S. Eliot
- F.R. Leavis



Entry of Reader:

“The critical power is of a lower rank than the creative. True: but in assenting to this proposition, one or two things are to be kept in mind. It is undeniable that the exercise of a creative power, that a free creative activity is the highest function of man; it is proved to be so by man’s finding in it his true happiness. But it is undeniable also, that men have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art; if it were not so, all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness of all men”

-Mathew Arnold

(The function of criticism in the present day, 1864)

Eliot brought a Reader back into the critical discussion

Idea of Submerging the artist's personality in process of poetic creation

The progress of an artist is a continual self sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality

The great poet's mind is a finely perfected medium in which special or very varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations”

Countering Wordsworth Eliot maintains “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality but an escape of personality.”



Need for the Extinction of the author

In his ‘Tradition and individual Talent Eliot’ pleaded for extinction of the empirical author –the author in the biographical sense.

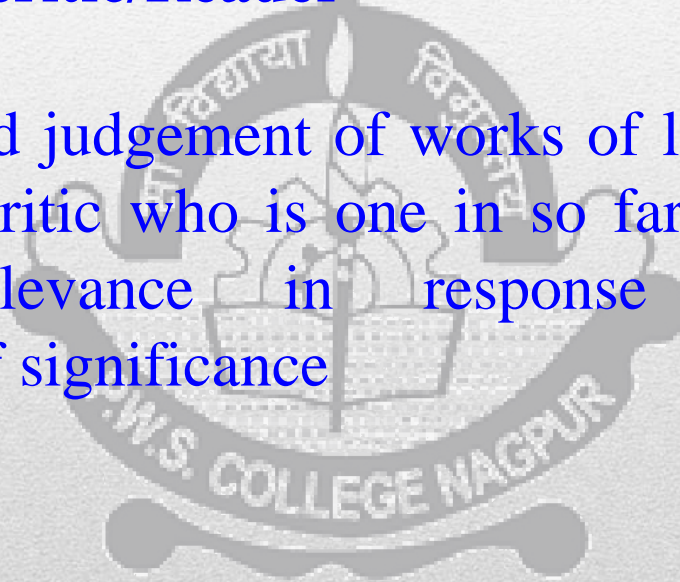
“poetry is not a turning loose of a emotion but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality.

New tradition set by Eliot depersonalizes the individual author to make the literary criticism objective.

Importance of critic/Reader

The analysis and judgement of works of literary art belongs to the literary critic who is one in so far as he observes a disciplined relevance in response comment and determination of significance

F. R. Leavis



Textual Importance rather than Author with New Criticism:

New Criticism with close reading:

- The literary work is self sufficient, autonomous object whose success or failure charm or lack of it are to be sought within the work.
 - The literary work as being a linguistic construct, a special use of language which differentiates it both from ordinary language and scientific language
 - Exploration of literary language and characterized it variously as being emotive language or the language of paradox, gesture, tension, irony, and ambiguity showing the union of logical structure and irrelevant structure
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Structuralism:

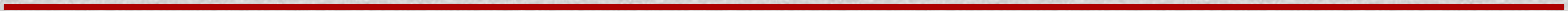
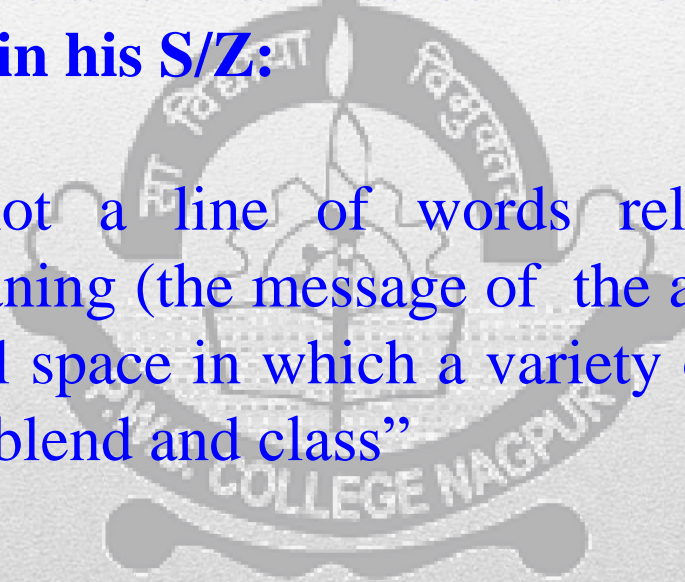
- Ferdinand De Saussure claims language is a sign system that communicates in relationship or interdependence.
- A sign gives meaning only in relation to the totality of other sign
- A sign consists of signifier (sound image) and signified (concept)
- The relationship between sign and signifier is arbitrary
- He further claims:
- The linguistic sign writes not a thing and a name but a concept and a sound image.

Saussure's Four Dichotomies :

- La Langue-La parole
 - Synchrony-diachrony
 - The signifier-signified
 - Paradigmatic-syntagmatic
-

Radicalism of Roland Barthes come from structuralism when he claims in his S/Z:

“The text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the message of the author God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original blend and class”



What is an Author (Lecture in 1969) by Michel Foucault

(A Post-Structuralist Thinker)

- Lecture came after two years from the Barthes' The death of the Author
 - For Foucault, the "Author" is an unnatural, historical phenomenon that has unfortunately obtained mythological, heroic status.
 - "First, we need to clarify briefly the problems arising from the use of the author's name. What is an author's name? How does it function? Far from offering a solution, I shall only indicate some of the difficulties that it presents."
 - Foucault introduces the concept of the "author function"
 - connected to the legal system
 - varies according to field and discipline
 - carried out through "complex operations"
 - An "author" doesn't necessarily connote a specific individual;
-

Deconstruction: where is author?

No work of literature whatsoever has been able to express exactly what it wanted to say and thus the critic's business is to deconstruct and recreate them, taking their words as not the outward form of their meaning but only the trace of a quest.

Derrida argues: There exist no signified that transcend the text, no signified that in imagination, intention or experience thematises what text mean with results that the text ceases to express or represent any polysemous truth.

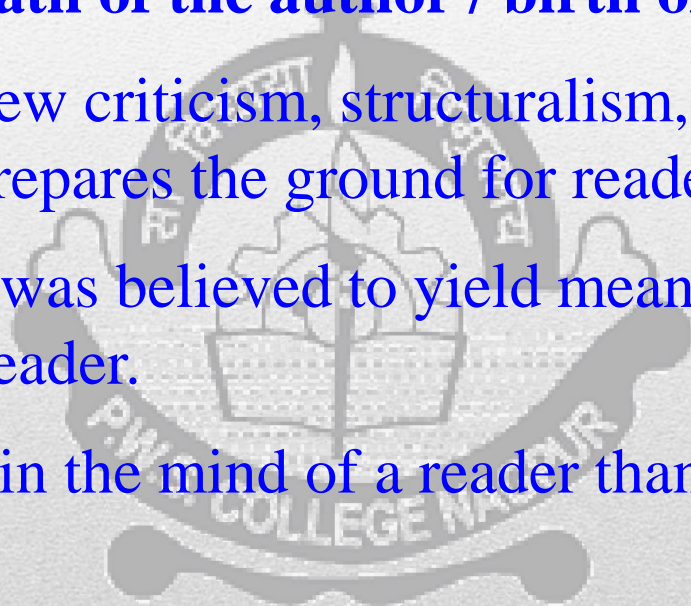
Birth of a reader!

Towards the Death of the author / birth of a Reader

The ground of New criticism, structuralism, and of course deconstruction prepares the ground for readers response.

Because the text was believed to yield meaning according to the response of the reader.

The text is more in the mind of a reader than in the words on the page.







Therefore Roland Barthes in his famous article : ‘The Death of the Author’ refutes the conventional notion that the author is present in work like God in the universe controlling and directing its various components to a certain end

* Source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/roland-barthes-centenary-death-of-the-author/>

Roland Barthes: (November 12, 1915 - March 25, 1980)



- French essayist and social and literary critic
 - A dominant theoretical voice of the 1970s
 - Leading critic of his generation
 - Highly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology
 - One of the founders of structuralism and the New Criticism
 - A prolific interpreter, disseminator, and reviser of most of the complex theoretical concepts
 - Worked at **the Centre national de la recherche scientifique**
 - Elected chair of literary semiology at the College de France in 1976
-

The Death of the Author: an Argumentative Essay

Essay begins with the character of Zambinella taken from *Sarrasine*, a novella written by Balzac.

Here Zambinell is actually a castrato (a castrated male) disguised as a woman, Balzac writes, “It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling.”

Barthes here introduces some questions whether it is ever possible to know whose ideas are coming forth in these expressions:

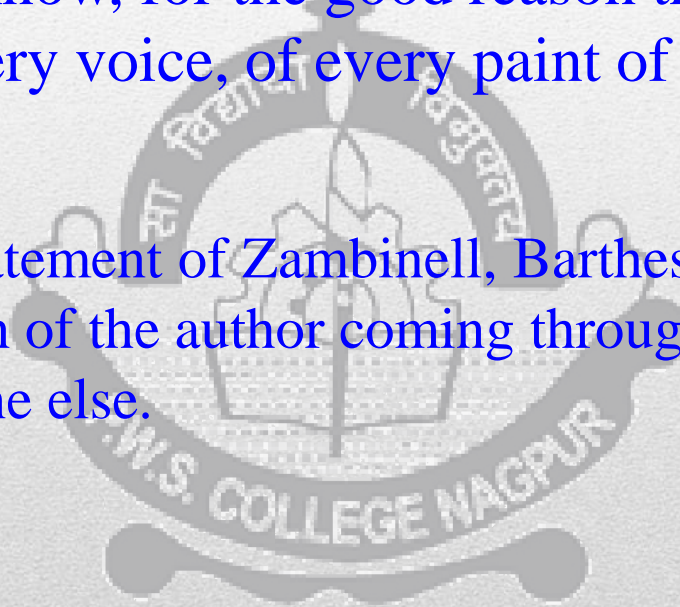
Who is speaking thus? Is it hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?



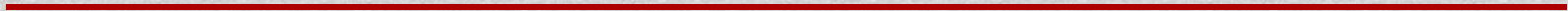
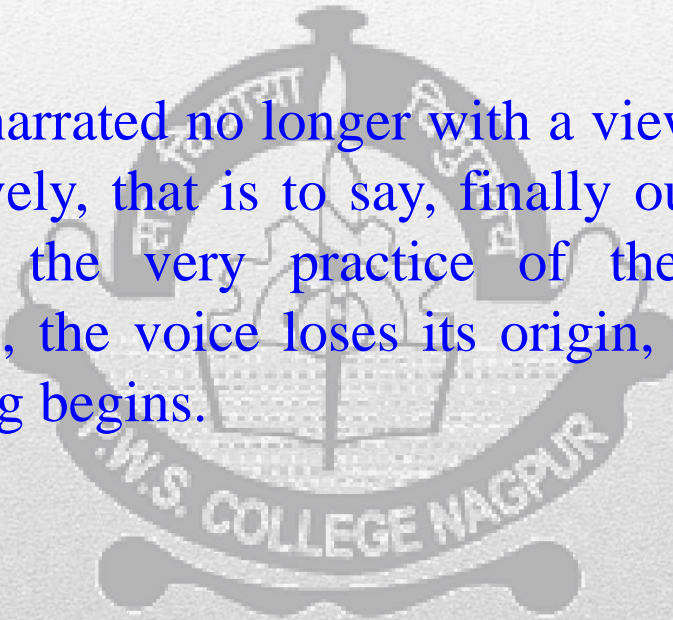
Barthes Observes:

“We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.”

Interrogating the statement of Zambinell, Barthes makes us realise that the personal opinion of the author coming through the mouth of that character or someone else.



As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.



Barthes introduces the basis :

How does an author as a person received importance?

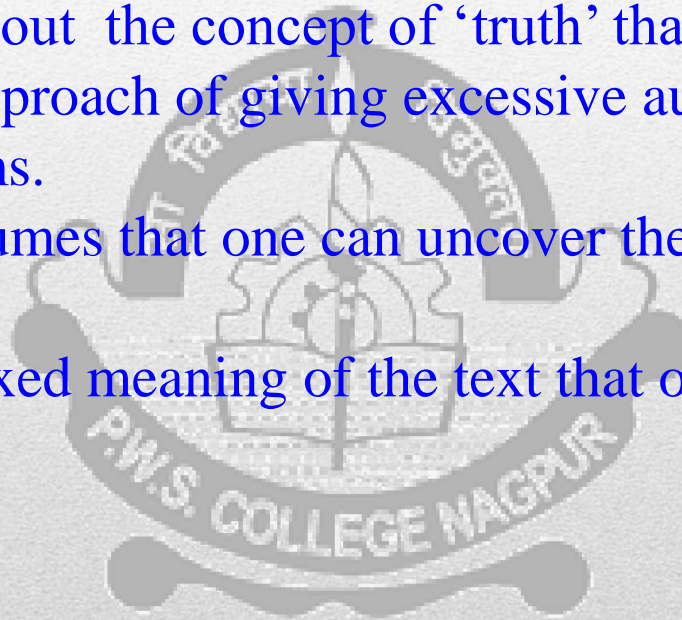
The author is a modern figure.. a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'.

Barthes argues here that The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters.

The problem for Barthes is the image of literature which is found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author.

Barthes here points out the concept of 'truth' that one associate with the author. But such approach of giving excessive authority to the author has various problems.

1. Falsely assumes that one can uncover the intentions of the author
2. there is a fixed meaning of the text that one should try to find.



Barthes cited here the concepts of Mallarme who was first to claim that it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality, to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'.

Therefore, according to Barthes, the intentions of the author are irrelevant because the writer intentionally or unintentionally is involved in a process of meaning-making.

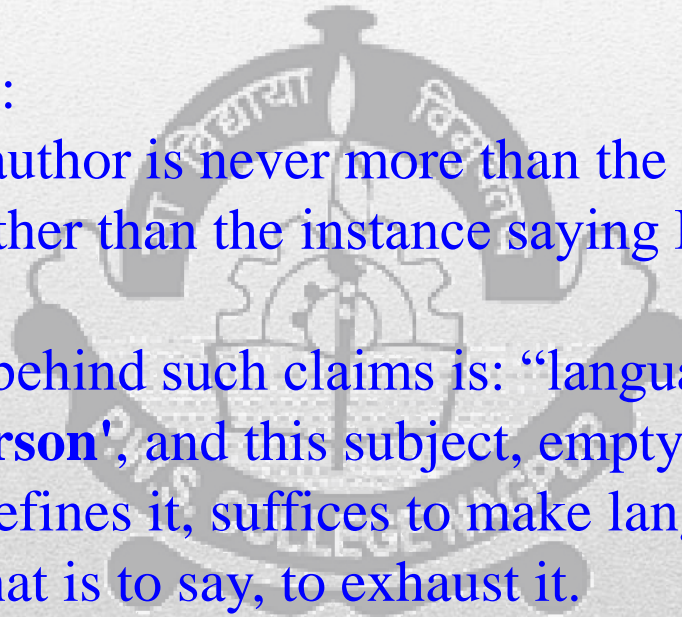
Thus the pursuit of trying to figure out the author's intentions are unnecessary as even if the author is alive, one can't be fully certain if the author is genuine about his intentions.

For Barthes linguistics offers variety of measures to analyze and understand the structures of language which manifests the text.

Therefore, he claims:

“Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I”

Now Barthes’ logic behind such claims is: “language knows a '**subject**'," not a '**person**', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.



Considering the ideas of Brecht (the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) Barthes see the removal of the Author as the historical fact which transforms the modern text.


Barthes here provided a Dichotomy:

The Author is thought to nourish the book

Versus

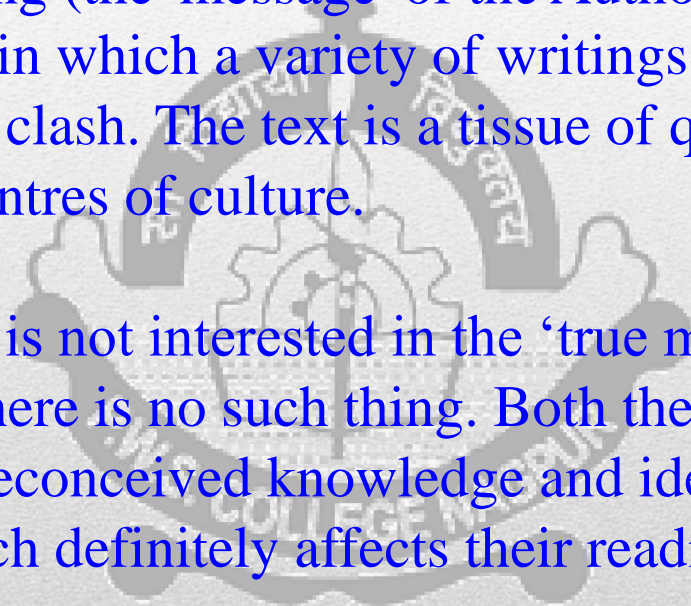
The modern scriptor who is born simultaneously with the text

In this way the writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' rather it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form in which the enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered.



Barthes believes a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.


Therefore, Barthes is not interested in the 'true meaning' of the text as according to him there is no such thing. Both the reader and author bring with them preconceived knowledge and ideas that they have of certain things, which definitely affects their reading of the text.



Importantly towards the concluding pages Barthes challenges to the place of critic as well:

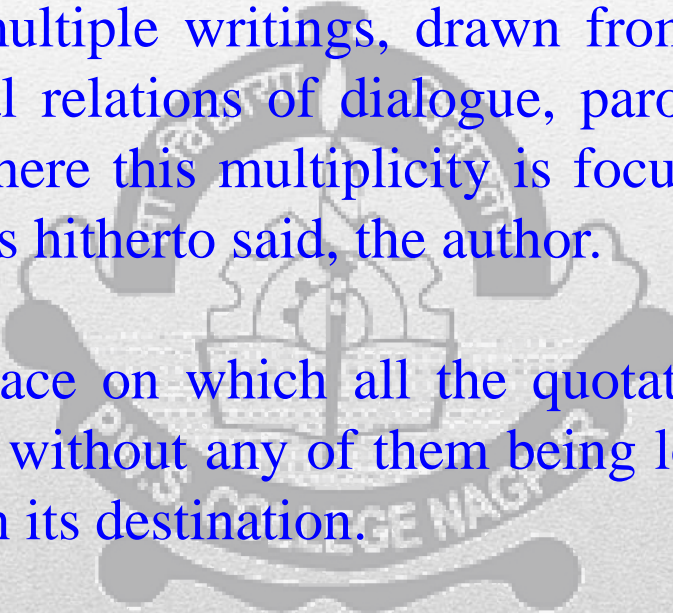
To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to 'close' the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' - victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic”


Therefore he maintains: “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile”. (end of critic’s play!)



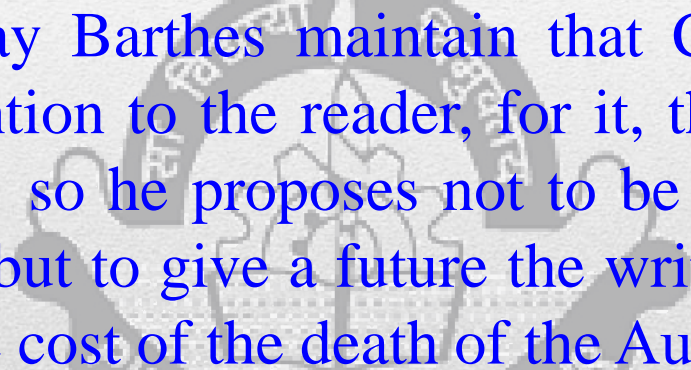
A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into" mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.





Concluding the essay Barthes maintain that Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader, for it, the writer is the only person in literature, so he proposes not to be fooled any more by believing in author, but to give a future the writing “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author”



Thank You

