Author-centred approach – key quotations

**‘The Death of the Author’ – Roland Barthes**

“We shall never know [who is speaking or writing], for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space […] where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.” (p.142)

“The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding in us.” (p.143)

“It is language which speaks, not the author.” (p.143)

Barthes is interested in “suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader).” (p.143)

“The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it.” (p.145)

“We know now that a text s 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.” (p.146)

“The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the other.” (p.146)

“To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text.” (p.147)

“Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation.” (p.148)

“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.” (p.148)

“The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.” (p.148)

**‘What is an author?’ – Michel Foucault**

“Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author.” (p.117)

“In addition, we find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer […] which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing.” (p.117)

“It has been understood that the task of criticism is not to reestablish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author’s though and experience through his works […] criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work.” (p.118)

“The name of an author poses all the problems related to the category of the proper name […] It is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description.” (p.121)

“[An author’s name] is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts.” (p.123)

“The name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others […] In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within a society.” (p.124)

“There was a time when those texts which we now call ‘literary’ (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorised without any question about the identity of their author.” (p.125)

“At the same time, however, “literary” discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author’s name […] The meaning and value attributed to the text depended on this information.” (p.126)

“Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author […] are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handing texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice.” (p.127)

“It is well known that a novel narrated in the first person […] stand for a “second self” whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book.” (p.129)

“The distinctive contribution of these [great] authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts […] they both established the endless possibility of discourse.” (p.131)

“The author of a novel may be responsible for more than his own text; if he acquires some ‘importance’ in the literary world, his influence can have significant ramifications.” (p.132)

“A text has an inaugurative value precisely because it is the work of a particular author, and our returns are conditioned by this knowledge.” (p.136)

**‘The intentional fallacy’ – Wimsatt & Beardsley**

“Goethe’s three questions for ‘constructive criticism’ are ‘What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?’” (p.472)

“The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.” (p.468)

“One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do?” (p.469)

“The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public.” (p.470)

“The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author.” (p.477)

“For all the objects of our manifold experience, especially for the intellectual objects, for every unity, there is an action of the mind which cuts off roots, melts away context.” (p.480)

To focus on the author’s intent “is to disregard the English language, to prefer private evidence to public, external to internal.” (p.482)

“Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.” (p.487)

**‘The implied author’ – Wayne Booth**

“The act of narration as performed by even the most highly dramatized narrator is itself the author’s presentation of a prolonged ‘inside view’ of a character.” (p.155)

“Everything [the author] *shows* will serve to *tell* […] the author’s judgement is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it.” (p.157)

“We must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear.” (p.157)

“Everyone is against everyone else’s prejudices and in favour of his own commitment to the truth. All of us would like the novelist somehow to operate on the level of our own passion for truth.” (p.159)

“The author as he writes should be like the ideal reader […] who, in order to reduce the distortions produced by prejudice, considers himself as ‘man in general’ and forgets, if possible, his ‘individual being’. (p.159)

“As [the author] writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal ‘man in general’ but an implied version of ‘himself’ that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men’s works.” (p.159)

“Our present problem is the intricate relationship of the so-called real author with the various official versions of himself.” (p.159)

“[The author’s] different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms […] the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.” (p.159)

“The ‘implied author’ chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.” (p.161)