

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art

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Lamarque, "The Death of the Author: An Analytical Autopsy"

I.

\*Barthes' proclamation about the "death of the author" is importantly different from a statement of the Intentionalist Fallacy.

--Lamarque will examine versions of this proclamation as made by both Barthes and Foucault, as well as its relation to poststructuralism.

II.

\*Historicist Thesis: "...the idea that written works acquired authors only at a specific time in history..." (434)

--Lamarque offers 3 possible interpretations of this Thesis: a writer conception, criticism conception, and text conception.

--Writer conception: at a certain historical stage writers came to *own* what they wrote.

"An author so designated is a more weighty figure with legal rights and social standing, a producer of texts deemed to have value." (434)

--Criticism conception: at a certain historical stage criticism turned toward the author herself.

--Text conception: at a certain historical stage texts attained a higher status, or at least were understood differently, in virtue of being "authored".

III.

\*Death Thesis: "The author is dead." (435)

--Just as the Historicist Thesis (in any of its 3 forms) states that the author emerged at a certain time, the Death Thesis states that the author "died" at a certain (fairly recent) time.

--Lamarque distinguishes between descriptive and prescriptive versions of the Death Thesis (compare: "God is dead.").

--Lamarque runs through 3 versions of the Death Thesis, corresponding to the 3 versions of the Historicist Thesis. (The second version is similar to the Intentionalist Fallacy.) (436)

--The 3<sup>rd</sup> version is the strongest, and the one identified with Foucault.

#### IV.

\*Author Function Thesis: "...the author function is a property of a discourse (or text) and amounts to something more than its just being written or produced by a person (of whatever status)." (437)

--Lamarque identifies 5 components of this thesis.

--"The author function becomes a property of a text or discourse, not a relation between a text and a person." (437)

"If we say that a play is by Shakespeare, we mean or connote more than just that the play was written by a particular man (Shakespeare). For one thing we assign a certain honorific quality to it (it is likely to be a play worthy of our attention); we also relate the play to a wider body of work—to *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*, and so on. Being "by Shakespeare" signals not just an external relation but an internal characterization. We move from "X is a play by Shakespeare" to "X is a Shakespeare play" or even "X is Shakespearean.'" (438)

#### V.

\*Écriture Thesis: (This is Barthes' version of the Author Function Thesis.) "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin." (439, quoting Barthes)

--Lamarque's criticism:

"Writing, like speech, or any language "performed", is inevitably and properly conceived as purposive. To use language as meaningful discourse is to perform speech acts; to understand discourse is, minimally, to grasp what speech acts are performed. In his view of *écriture* and of texts, Barthes tries to abstract language from the very function that gives it life." (440)

--Lamarque also characterizes both Barthes and Foucault as preferring more meanings to restrictions on meaning. Lamarque challenges whether "more meaning" is a valuable goal in itself.