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## AUTHORSHIP IN LITERARY THEORY AND FICTION: WRITING ON WRITERS

GERO GUTTZEIT

### 1. Introduction: From the Author to the Study of Authorship

Hardly any other topic in literary and cultural studies has been such a matter of life and death as authorship. The discussion about what role the author can or should play in interpreting literature is as heated as it is metaphorical. The many attempts to put an end to the author as a critical category have been countered by just as many attempts to bring authorship back. After the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had dealt with literature primarily in terms of the biographies of canonised writers, critical movements such as the American New Criticism focussed solely on the literary text until the late 1960s and 1970s brought literary studies to focus on the reader, with poststructuralists declaring the "death of the author". Yet, bridging the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there is a return of and to the author, who seems to have been present in our every-day dealings with texts all along. Authorship is as much a key concept in literary and cultural studies as it is a research field in its own right. One of the best ways of gaining a survey as well as of problematising the results already attained in order to generate new research questions for researchers at all levels is to examine writing on writers.

The question of what authorship is cannot only be answered in a variety of ways, but it can also be posed very differently in the first place. 'Authorship' is an abstract noun derived from the word 'author', which means, as the Online Oxford English Dictionary tells us: "The person who originates or gives existence to anything" (2000: n. pag.). Looking at authorship through the lens of literary theory makes clear that talking about authors is not something 'natural'. Rather, asking how the notion of the author has developed historically means investigating how it has been constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed and what meaningful use can be made of the concept today.

This article provides a historical overview and a theoretical framework for the analysis of both theoretical and fictional writing on writers. The first part deals with the origin of that concept of the 'author' that dominated most of the modern critical history of authorship and with which literary and cultural theory has been concerned up until today: the romantic author. The second, largest part provides an overview of the most important stages in the theory of authorship from the end of World War II up to the present day. The third and fourth parts examine writers' own perception of authorship, both in theory and literature. The third part analyses non-fictional authorial poetics, whereas the fourth is concerned with the metafictional representation of au-

thorship *within* literary texts, with both parts using Edgar Allan Poe's writings as the main examples.

## 2. The Birth of the Author: Origins of a Concept

No single period has influenced modern conceptions of authorship more than the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when German and English Romanticism developed the notion of original genius, thus giving metaphorical birth to the author. Like many other concepts still in use today such as 'literature' itself or the 'novel', the concept of the 'author' was developed in an era of rapid modernisations. The *bourgeois* revolutions in North America and France, the beginnings of industrialisation, ongoing secularisation and the further development of liberalism and individualism came together with the emergence of the capitalist marketplace, the rise of printing technologies and the institution of copyright laws, to name a few major political, economic, technological, legal and cultural determinants of this central epoch in the history of authorship. Works like Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) and Karl Philipp Moritz's "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeteten" (1785) shaped an understanding in stark contrast to the image of the poet as a competent artisan that had dominated neoclassicism and other earlier periods. "The Romantic theory of authorship", writes Andrew Bennet in his useful introduction, *The Author*, "may be said to account for everything that is commonly or conventionally taken to be implied by talk of 'the author'" (2005: 56).

While the hiatus between the neoclassical and the romantic author is arguably the most important one for our modern understanding, the differences from ancient, medieval and early modern models of authorship are not to be underestimated. Antiquity developed a rich vocabulary for different aspects of the writer such as the learned poet (*poeta doctus*). The major systematic opposition between writers in control of their texts, i.e. the concept of the autonomous writer, and writers, subject to external influences, i.e. the concept of the heteronomous writer, are already summed up in two well-known terms: the *poeta faber*, meaning the poet as artisan, and the *poeta vates*, the poet who is inspired (or enthused) by the gods.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's conception of the dramatist in what amounts to the founding document of Western literary criticism, the *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), stresses not so much – as modernity does – the style aspect of authorship, but rather the productive aspect of writing: the *poiētēs* ('maker', 'poet'), in accordance with its Greek meaning is mainly a producer of plots or fictions, in Aristotle's term, *mythoi* ('myths') (cf. *Poetics* 1447a = Aristotle 1995: 2316). Put in very broad terms, the medieval writer is thought of more as a copyist relying on authorities

<sup>1</sup> On the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, cf. Detering (2002b) and the table in Berensmeyer et al. (2012: 14), which is partly based on my own research in my unpublished MA thesis (Guttzeit 2010: 28-30 and *passim*).

sanctioned by the catholic church, rather than being an author himself, as, is shown, for instance, by the then prominent concept of the commentary (*commentarius*). In the Renaissance, writers and thinkers become again interested in the lives of individual artists and writers, as works like Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550) evince, but for English and American literature and culture none of these changes compares to the birth of the romantic author.

One of the major developments in 18th- and 19th-century romanticism is the increasing emphasis on the idea of originality, which is, even today, associated with the literary writer. Before romanticism, neoclassical poets and critics such as John Dryden (1631-1700), Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) had stressed the importance of technique and of generally accepted truths (understood as 'nature'). In his *Essay on Criticism* (1711) Alexander Pope characterised wit, one of the central traits of the poet, thus: "True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest [*sic*] / What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Express [*sic*]" (Pope 1961: 272-273, ll. 297-98). In accordance with ancient rhetorical and poetic thought, Pope and others do not define poets by their creative powers or the competence to discover new and original thoughts, but – broadly put – view them as craftsmen whose words clothe self-evident truths in a pleasant dress.<sup>2</sup>

As the importance of originality for the definition of the poet increased, the importance of craft decreased and was supplanted by the inspired expression of a unique individual. Inspiration no longer came from outside, from the gods as in antiquity or what neoclassicism thought of as 'nature', but from inside the genius:

as [moments of inspiration] are increasingly credited to the writer's own genius, they transform the writer into a unique individual uniquely responsible for a unique product. That is, from a (mere) vehicle of preordained truths – truths as ordained either by universal human agreement or by some higher agency – the *writer* becomes an *author*. (Woodmansee 1984a: 429)

At the end of this trajectory, it was the inner life of the poet that was to be expressed in literature, and not generally accepted truths *sensu* Pope. Probably the best example of this is William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) claim in 1800 that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (1991: 251).<sup>3</sup> The romantic author was an inspired male individual who created original literature by expressing his own inner nature. Shakespeare and Goethe came to be the pinnacle of literary genius in Britain and Germany, respectively. Not only does this romantic model of authorship still inform the every-day understanding of the author, but it also remains the focal point of debate in literary and cultural theory.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the editors' "Introduction" in Pope 1961: 212-22.

<sup>3</sup> This is from the Preface to the later editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (first edition 1798), the highly influential collection of poetry that Wordsworth co-authored with Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

### 3. The Deaths and Returns of the Author in Literary Theory

From its beginnings, literary criticism has been interested in authors. Yet these beginnings of the discipline are actually hard to pinpoint. They certainly differ in the national traditions of, for instance, Germany and Great Britain, but even in the case of Britain alone, the date is hard to determine: the institutional beginnings of literary criticism can be argued to lie in the late 18th century at Edinburgh, in the 1820s and 1830s at London University, or in the establishment of English Literature at Oxford and Cambridge in 1884 and 1919 respectively. No matter which case we make, literary studies as a university discipline in the 19th and 20th centuries until roughly the end of World War II were very much concerned with arriving at critical editions of canonical authors' works and *œuvres*, with literary scholars being in the main philologists aiming at the establishment of reliable texts. Today, work is being done in the field of attribution studies by means of computerised statistics (especially in the case of Shakespeare), but the focus of literary studies has shifted from this type of investigation into the broader field of culture and the media. The 19th century also produced such models of authorship as the Victorian sage, an eminent writer expected to present his readers not only with panache but, more importantly, with ethical guidelines for how to live with propriety. Modernism with its often highly complicated literary texts (T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is famous for the footnotes provided by the author) revived strong notions of the author, yet they were also modified, as exemplified by the fact that *The Waste Land* was so heavily edited by Ezra Pound that Eliot dedicated it to him, calling him the greater craftsman.

The problem of the author has always been intimately connected to the different developments in the theory and practice of literary and cultural criticism. Hence, the best way for both a historical and a systematic understanding of the different concepts of the author is to analyse them in relation to the other basic elements of the literary situation: text, reader and context. Viewed from this perspective, the 20th-century debate on the author in literary theory, especially in its postmodern phase, has many lines of development, in which most, if not all, imaginable positions were held. The following overview reconstructs some of the key arguments in the field by looking at the most important interventions in the debate so as to make understandable the diverse theoretical state of authorship theory today, beginning with the New Critical concept of 'intentional fallacy'.<sup>4</sup> It will be seen not only that most of the positions refer to the romantic birth of the author but also that the deaths of the author have always been intimately connected with the returns of the author and vice versa.

<sup>4</sup> The following reconstruction is based on a chapter in my MA thesis (Guttzeit 2010: 9-16).

#### 3.1 The Intentional Fallacy (W. K. Wimsatt/M. C. Beardsley)

The major question that the so-called New Critics addressed was the status of the intention of the author and its (non-existent) function for the evaluation of literary works. The American New Criticism, the common doctrine of literary studies in the United States roughly from the 1930s through the 1960s, took prime interest in the text and deemed the author's intention irrelevant for the understanding and evaluation of a literary work. The thesis that speaking of the intention of the author unnecessarily doubles textual structures is still relevant in discussions today. The paradigmatic arguments for this position can be found in William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's influential 1946 essay, "The Intentional Fallacy". The two New Critics view the author as a mysterious and indecipherable oracle whose divinations stand in the way of scientific inquiry into the text, arguing that it is an *intentional fallacy* to look at the purpose of the author:

How is [a critic] to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. (1946: 469)

Wimsatt and Beardsley, like many later critics, hold that to speak of the intention of the author would simply be a useless doubling. While there is a psychological connection between an author's intention and the literary text, they assume this to be irrelevant for literary analysis. Instead, Wimsatt and Beardsley posit that judging a poem should be "like judging a pudding or a machine", demanding that "it work" (*ibid.*). The New Critics' extreme scientism was heavily and rightly criticised, and the conception of the author in their text-centred study of literature is hardly nuanced, yet their arguments can still serve as an antidote to reducing the literary text to an author's biography, as is often done in biographical or 'biographistic' studies.

#### 3.2 The Implied Author (Wayne Booth)

As one way to analyse authorship and, at the same time, keep the focus on the literary text and avoid the danger of biographism, Wayne Booth, a critic of the so-called Chicago School of Criticism, suggested the notion of the 'implied author'.<sup>5</sup> In his seminal book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Booth argues why some concept of the author is necessary for an evaluation of both the artistry and the ethical values inherent in a text: Booth's solution is not to look at the author in terms of history or psychology, but at the author-within-the-text: the *implied author*. Booth explains: "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" (1983 [1961]: 74 f.).

<sup>5</sup> A very helpful overview of the debate on this narratological concept is Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller's study (2006).

For Booth, the critic's task is intimately connected to the author's intention, not to a 'psychological' intention, but rather an intention which is either artistic or moral. The evaluation of the text by the critic depends on a reconstruction of the author's choice of a certain aim (usually an effect on the intended audience) such as to write "a play with a blood-and-thunder ending"<sup>6</sup> and this becomes the basis for shaping the material. When the critic reads the finished product, she/he infers what artistic and moral choices of the author are implied in the text and evaluates the text as a means of fulfilling these or other ends: "If this author is, as I infer, ordering everything toward such-and-such an effect (always of a *kind* that has been or might be pursued by other authors as well), then we can appraise the effectiveness of this or that move" (Booth 1983: 437; emphasis in original).

Critiques of Booth's concept have centred on what is seen as an unnecessary doubling of the literary situation and held that the differentiation between the historical author and the narrator is sufficient. Booth's concept was taken up, for instance, by the German Anglicist Wolfgang Iser who complemented it with his notion of the *implied reader*. Booth's terminology remains most influential in rhetorical narratology which modified it to make it retain its conceptual power (cf. e.g. Phelan 1996). The term remains the subject of heated debate within narratology: as Wolf Schmid puts it, there are "perfectly legitimate" criticisms, yet they "are not sufficient to justify excluding the implied author from the attention of narratology" (2013; cf. also Richardson 2011).

### 3.3 The Death of the Author (Roland Barthes)

The single most important attack on the romantic author, indeed the metaphorical death-blow, came from the pen of the French literary critic, Roland Barthes. Barthes' text, "La mort de l'auteur", written in 1967 and published in 1968, broke new ground in literary and cultural studies, and remains the epitome of an author-critical stance even today. While Booth in a moderating way tries to reintegrate authorship into a modified text-centred approach to literary studies, Barthes' text, far from being a typical academic essay, places its critique of the author in the larger context of a series of critiques of metaphysical concepts such as God and Man. Barthes thus stands in the tradition both of Nietzsche's claim that God is dead and the critique of the subject put forward by the so-called poststructuralists. Indeed, Barthes' and Foucault's texts on authorship are central for poststructuralism in that they deconstruct the view of the human subject as a being who is the conscious source of its own actions and in a position of power against nature. Joining the critique of God and Man with a fundamental critique of the author, Barthes claims that the meaning of the text does not emanate from a god-like authorial subject but that it is constituted in the act of reading, as the famous last lines of the essay show: "we know that to give writing its future, it is nec-

<sup>6</sup> This phrase is taken from another rhetorical critic, Kenneth Burke (1962: 49).

essary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1977 [1967]: 148).

Initially, Barthes outlines a critique of the biographical interpretations of literature which he viewed as dominant at that time, demanding a different notion of literature, namely literature as *écriture*. *Écriture* is the French noun for 'writing', especially handwriting, but in literary theory it is understood in a very specific sense which was introduced by Julia Kristeva and connected to the concept of intertextuality.<sup>7</sup> For Barthes, *écriture* is a self-sufficient system of symbols that in no way aims at an extratextual context. It is utterly self-reflexive and its aims do not go beyond linguistic play. The absence of any personal goal is the central condition of the death of the author who loses his voice when *écriture* begins: "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (ibid.: 142). Reading has to take this into account, since:

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 ... literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law. (Ibid.: 147)

To make visible the difference of his theory from the old, essentially romantic idea of the author, Barthes distinguishes several conceptions of the author, introducing the notions of the *Author-God* and the *scriptor*. At a certain point in the text, Barthes starts to capitalise the 'a' in 'Author', so that it is not the normal sense of 'author' to which he is referring but the specific sense of a godly author whose voice determines all meaning: the "Auteur-Dieu", "Author-God" (ibid.: 146). In its place, Barthes offers a different notion of the person through whom the process of language flows that becomes literature. Barthes contrasts the Author with capital 'A' and the *scriptor*, a writer who is not imbued with authority and who is "born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing" (ibid.: 145).

Based on the notion of *écriture*, the text is not conceived as a package that the author sends to us so that we unpack it and understand the meaning that was encoded in it by the author. Instead, the text is fully intertextual, a web of textual fragments. No one text stands on its own, but depends on and is made from a multiplicity of other texts, of quotations without quotation marks. The resulting ambiguity and polysemy cannot, for Barthes, be made productive by the author, but only by the reader:

We know now that a 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 clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. [...] [T]here is one place where this multiplicity

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the importance of Julia Kristeva's work for authorship, cf. Horn (2010: 332-334).

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 lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (1977: 146, 148)

The importance of Barthes' essay for authorship in literary and cultural theory can hardly be overestimated and yet its reception history is more difficult than one would imagine. The essay first appeared in a short-lived American art magazine, *Aspen*, and was translated into German as late as 2000. While it seems difficult to read Barthes' text literally, the concept of the "Death of the Author" makes sense if regarded against the background of the idea of the romantic author, or rather Author. Barthes' attack puts the stress on the heteronomous moments of authorship, on language and *écriture*. While there is hardly any relation of the linguistic sign to the external, non-linguistic world, Barthes' understanding of literature as *écriture* leads to the influential replacement of the author with the scribe who is ultimately a (positively understood) unoriginal combiner of quotations. Barthes thus did for authorship what poststructuralism did for subjectivity in general: questioning its foundations to open the door for critique.

#### 3.4 The Author Function (Michel Foucault)

While Barthes' text argued on a very abstract level, the French thinker Michel Foucault, in 1969, asked a seemingly simple question, which he saw as vital after the disappearance of the author: "What is an author?". The central notion in Foucault's theory of authorship is the notion of the author-function, a notion that can only be understood in connection with the concept of discourse. Foucault's concept of discourse is a dynamic one; it stands in contrast to an abstract and ahistorical understanding of language and encompasses both texts and communications in all medial forms at a particular historical time, in a particular epoch. As Foucault stated in an interview: "my object is not language but the archive, that is to say the accumulated existence of discourse" (1996: 27). Foucault conceptualises the author as a function of discourse and, at the same time, examines the conditions of the discourse about the author, thus problematizing its historical development.

In "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?", Foucault initially discusses the author's name, which is not a common proper name such as, for instance, Pierre Dupont, but which has, in our culture, a "classificatory function" (1984 [1969]: 107): it allows us to separate certain discourses from others and gives the separated discourse a special status. Distinguishing between discourses that have an author-function and those which do not, Foucault marks as central to the understanding of the author-function four different features:

- (1) "the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses" (1984: 113)

This first feature of the author-function is about the law and the institutions of the state. Foucault draws attention to the fact that the notion of the author is historically in-

tertwined with the emergence of the censorship of print and laws of copyright, which were put in place in the 18th century. The juridical and institutional systems in Europe worked to codify copyright laws in the case of Britain starting in 1710 as well as notions of the *droit d'auteur* in France in 1793 and the *Urheberrecht* in Germany in 1794. The second feature of the author-function is:

- (2) The author function "does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization" (ibid.).

If the author-function is not an aspect of every discourse and if it appears at certain historical points in time, then it becomes necessary to research the interdependence of societal and literary conditions and the attribution of authors to texts or discourses. The third aspect makes clear that such historical research is indeed necessary:

- (3) The author-function "is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations" (ibid.).

In other words, to attribute a text to an author and an author to a text is a highly complicated process that cannot simply be taken for granted. This is obvious in the exemplary case of the difference between the name of the 'author' on a book cover and the ghost-writer who actually wrote it. But more generally, this aspect also covers the process that both the New Critics and Barthes were challenging: that is, viewing the author as both the origin and guarantor of meaning, "the principle of a certain unity of writing", as Foucault puts it (ibid.: 111).

The fourth and last aspect of the author-function is that the author cannot simply be equated with the historical person who wrote the book, as even this one person appears in very different ways in the text:

- (4) The author-function "does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects – positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals" (ibid.: 113).

This last of the characteristics of the author function pertains to the relation of the author and the text. For Foucault, the author exists in a cut, in a space in between the historical writer and the narrator such that there is a multiplicity of personal roles involved inside and outside the text. He argues that: "It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance" (ibid.: 112).<sup>8</sup> All discourses which have the author-function evince this "plurality of self" (ibid.).

Just as Barthes' 'Death of the Author' is aimed at romantic notions of genius, Foucault also makes clear that such a notion has to be critiqued. The only place where Foucault sees something like originality at work is in authors like Karl Marx and

<sup>8</sup> Following Andrew Bennett (2005: 26), one can argue that this aspect of the author-function presents an argument quite similar to the one Wayne Booth makes for the implied author.

Sigmund Freud, whom he views as examples of “founders of discursivity” (ibid.: 114). A picture such as the one that Barthes paints of *écriture* is far from Foucault’s approach: “It would be pure romanticism, however, to imagine a culture, in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state” (ibid.: 119). Yet, for Foucault, the author remains “a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction” (ibid.). Foucault thus raises our awareness of the historically determined connection between discourses and authors, making clear that there are discourses which have the author-function and those which do not.

### 3.5 The Return of the Author

The development of authorship theory since World War II thus engages in an oscillation. It shifts from the New Critics’ dismissal of authorial intention as a category of interpretation to Booth’s reinstatement of the author as the implied author and back to an anti-authorial stance in Barthes and, to a lesser extent, in Foucault. Following this logic, it is no surprise that by the 1980s the author is, so to speak, resurrected from the dead and makes his/her comeback into British-American scholarly discourse in the 1990s, with Germany following a few years later, a comeback which is known as the “Return of the Author” and “die Rückkehr des Autors”, respectively.

While the development of the field of authorship studies has not entailed the institution of degrees and courses, the research which has already been done or which is still in progress is far too large and diverse to be neatly summarised. Categories of authorship play a role in law, technology, the media and the sciences as well as philosophy, literature and culture in general. Topics such as plagiarism are making the headlines not only because of literary scandals but also because of politicians’ disregard for academic citation standards. Our current idea of authorship in general is fragmented and so is the one of literary authorship. What research has achieved is to have traced the various determinations of explicit and implicit models of authorship in their historical constellations. As Andrew Bennet summarises, “recent studies in the history of authorship suggest that the ‘modern’ configuration of authorship is related to developments in legal, political, economic, commercial and other discourses, to the spread of and innovation in print technology and to changes in the legal constitution of literary ownership and commercial society” (2005: 56).

One of the most important strands in authorship theory is based on the poststructuralist critique of the author, which established the foundations for research into the origins of the romantic author and earlier strong notions of authorship in the Renaissance. Research from the 1980s linked the romantic original genius to the development of the marketplace, law and religion.<sup>9</sup> The critical debate has already reached a point

<sup>9</sup> Cf. especially the American literary and legal scholar Martha Woodmansee’s articles (1984a, 1984b) and the volume she co-edited with Peter Jaszi (1994).

where the poststructuralist discourse on authorship itself and its origins have been investigated.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, traditional attribution studies have received new impulses via the possibilities of large computer databases (cf. Love 2002).

The question of the relation between authorship and the meaning of a literary work has been in the limelight not only in British-American philosophy and criticism, but also in their German counterparts.<sup>11</sup> German studies scholars Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, Matías Martínez and Simone Winko, in the introduction to their edited collection, *Die Rückkehr des Autors* (1999), argue for the usefulness of the author as an interpretative norm (‘Verstehensnorm’), saying:

1) that a reading of a text always presupposes a certain understanding of the author, and that this presupposition has considerable influence on the way the text is interpreted; 2) taking the author into consideration when interpreting a literary text does not mean that the interpretation degenerates into naïve biographism (Jannidis et al. 1999: 24-25; my translation)

One of the conclusions we can draw from the German debate is a non-exhaustive typology of authorship that includes the aspects of intention, inspiration, competence, individuality, authority, style, copyright, gender and collective authorship.<sup>12</sup> Authorship as intention, inspiration (heteronomous models) and competence (autonomous models) has been discussed above. *Individuality* is meant to refer to a special interest in the author as an individual historical person. Authorship as *authority* is an aspect that pertains to the Middle Ages, when an imitation of older authors, Christian as well as retrospectively Christianised heathen authors, marks the only possible access for new authors to become *auctores* themselves, if at all. Authorship as *style* is often explained with reference to the eighteenth-century author, Comte de Buffon whose famous dictum “le style est l’homme même” (“style is the man himself”, from his lecture “Discours sur le style”, 1753), can be interpreted in such a way.

The problem of authorship as copyright links to the proprietary right of the author to her/his text in the economic field, which is intertwined with the problem of plagiarism. Gender, but also race and class (which are not included by Jannidis et al. and Martínez) are important when it comes to the question of who is actually allowed to write as an author.<sup>13</sup> The author is coded male throughout most of the history of authorship, and there have been attempts, in France for example, to arrive at an *écriture*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Seán Burke’s *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (1992). Burke also published a useful reader with the title *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern* in 1995.

<sup>11</sup> In philosophy, this problem has diversified into a debate between intentionalist and anti-intentionalist positions. Cf. Livingston (2008).

<sup>12</sup> These categories are translated and adapted from the already-mentioned *Rückkehr des Autors* volume by Jannidis et al. (1999: 7) and a short lexicon entry in the *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie* by one of the group, Matías Martínez (2008: 45).

<sup>13</sup> On the implications of class for literature, cf. the articles by Birte Christ and Daniel Hartley in this volume.



feminine as opposed to a patriarchally formed literature. The last category of collective authorship is relevant as a counter-statement to the romantic original genius which assumes that literature is written by one author. Historically, however, this has often not been the case and is certainly not the case today: renaissance drama might be the prime example here, but Gordon Lish's editing of the American Raymond Carver's short stories in the 1980s is also a case in point. This non-exhaustive typology of aspects of authorship can serve as a very good starting point to analyse literary and theoretical texts both before and after the death and the return of the author. Two especially interesting cases of such kinds of text are authorial poetics and metafiction of authorship.

#### 4. Writers on Writing: Authorial Poetics

In the examination of what writers wrote about writing, one has to distinguish between two different modes of this self-reflexive writing: either in critical or in literary texts. While the critical texts by authors about writing are seldom analysed on their own (authorial) terms and, hence, not assigned a generally accepted term, they can be referred to as *authorial poetics*, especially if they deal with a writer's own writings. The second, literary, type of writing is discussed under a variety of accepted terms such as 'poetological' or 'metafictional' writing. The last part of this article is devoted to an example of metafictional writing, whereas this part treats authorial poetics.

In terms of analysis and interpretation, authorial poetics is a difficult genre, because it tends to mix strictly critical topics and theses with a very elaborate and often literary mode of presentation, as was visible in the above-mentioned example of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), a critical text written in heroic couplets. Indeed, a large part of the theoretical material we have about authors and their relation to literature is by authors themselves. To give a few more examples in addition to the already mentioned texts by Pope, Young and Coleridge: Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (1595), Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1840) and Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" (1846) are well worth mentioning, as well as a variety of texts in the 20th century such as T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921), Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929) and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). Today, writers also very often speak about writing in interviews (for example in the *Paris Review*) and many, especially in the United States, teach Creative Writing at universities. Often, the line between being a critic and being a writer is so blurred that it is best to speak of a writer-critic or a poet-critic. Hence, when discussing authorship, one also has to come to terms with authorial poetics, with writers who are speaking and writing about writing in a critical mode.

Perhaps one of the best examples for the mixture of critical and literary elements in authorial poetics is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). Poe's

essay is an example of authorial poetics in a narrow sense in so far as he discusses a literary text of his own (and not those of others, or literature in general), namely, his most famous poem, "The Raven" (1845). "The Raven" is a very melodic narrative poem about a scholar who is visited by a raven which repeats the word 'nevermore' to every question the man poses to him; this eventually drives the scholar to despair and possibly death. Due to its dark tone and its plethora of internal and end rhymes it has often been parodied, for example on the American TV show, *The Simpsons*.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to the question of the autonomy or heteronomy of the writer, Poe, in "The Philosophy of Composition", makes the strongest imaginable claim for the autonomy of the writer and thus for his own competence, stating of "The Raven" that "no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (Poe 2009 [1846]: 61-2). Poe also uses the concept of intention, not as a means to understand somebody else's work, but as an explanation of how he wrote "The Raven" and an illustration of how literature can or even should be written. For Poe, intention is co-extensive with the choice of an effect: "I prefer," he writes, "commencing with the consideration of an *effect*", an anticipated one that the text is supposed to have on the intended recipient, in this case a reader (ibid.: 60). Poe writes of how he looked for a "*non-reasoning creature capable of speech*" and chose the raven instead of a parrot, because a raven was more apt to the atmosphere of the poem (ibid.: 65). While we do not have to agree with Poe's explanation that he had the "intention of making [the raven] emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*" (ibid.: 70; emphasis in original), there is, nonetheless, a consistent argument in "The Philosophy of Composition".

Yet, many of the explanations Poe gives in this text seem less like discursive arguments and more like a staging of himself as a master author, an *Auteur-Dieu*, as Barthes would say. For instance, Poe argues that the perfect length of a poem is one hundred lines, and "The Raven", with 108 lines, seems to fit this all too well. The most extreme example in terms of credibility is Poe's choice of the one-line chorus *Nevermore*: having decided on a one-word refrain for the poem, Poe writes that he next chose the sounds /o/ "as the most sonorous vowel" and /r/ "as the most producible consonant":

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself. (Ibid.: 64-65)

While some critics such as Roman Jakobson have viewed this as a perfectly plausible explanation (cf. Jakobson 1981), many readers feel that this is very unlikely, if not im-

<sup>14</sup> In season 2, episode 3: "Treehouse of Horror I". Cf. also the article by Judith Hofmann and Maik Berger on *The Simpsons* in this volume.



possible, as a factual statement. In a literary text it would not pose such a problem, but in Poe's authorial poetics, theoretical content, on the one hand, and the staging of himself as a perfect, almost machine-like author, on the other, seem hard to reconcile.

One way out of this dilemma is to view Poe's text within the context of the history of different authorship models. Ideas such as the perfect length of a poem seem to us today to establish a strict rule which would inhibit or suffocate creativity. The choice of the chorus corresponds to this model, as there seem to be, for Poe, steadfast precepts which guide the process of literary production. Yet, while the romantic age with its concept of the original genius would be outraged by such an approach, it was the stock and store of rhetorical and poetical treatises of the 18th century, often known as 'normative poetics'. To begin the writing process with the intention of producing an effect on the reader was not only perfectly acceptable but regarded as the best way to proceed, as is exemplified by George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), in which poetry is regarded as one type of rhetoric: "In speaking there is always some end proposed, or some effect which the speaker intends to produce on the hearer" (Campbell 1963: 1). Poe's article thus becomes explicable in terms of an earlier authorship model that stood in stark contrast to contemporary ones.<sup>15</sup>

Poe's text offers the possibility of a multiplicity of different readings and in this way is paradigmatic of many instances of authorial poetics. The feature of polysemy that is normally associated with literary texts here comes to be a characteristic of a critical text. The short interpretation just outlined solves some of the apparent contradictions by viewing the text in the history of authorship models and by taking into consideration the fact that texts can very well disagree with what is understood to be common sense within a given cultural period. To make the most of authorial poetics, it is useful to read the texts both in terms of the models of authorship that the texts themselves suggest as well as in historically and systematically opposing terms. While literary writers never stop being writers when they compose a critical text, the texts themselves might contain valuable insights not only into authorship and writing but also into literature and culture in general.

## 5. Metafictions of Authorship

While authorial poetics tends to be a mixture of critical and literary elements dominated by the critical moment, metafiction of authorship work the other way round. Metafiction is a fiction that is self-reflexive: fictions about fictions. Hence, metafiction of authorship are self-reflexive in the way that they deal with authorship within the literary text itself. Thus, not only does one have to rely on all the categories and concepts for the analysis of authorship in historical and theoretical terms, but also to

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed reading of Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" in the context of authorial poetics, cf. Guttzeit (2014).

take into account the characteristics of literariness and fictionality. What we are dealing with in these cases is essentially a performance or staging of authorship in the medium of literature itself.

Metafictional writing was/is especially popular in the postmodern period, as can be seen in such famous examples as American author John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968), in which the narration is interspersed with comments about the use of the literary technique that is being used at that particular moment, for instance techniques of characterization. The Italian writer Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) is another good case in point: it is a novel about a reader trying to read a novel with the title *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* and every time he seems to be reaching a point where the story is picking up another book-within-the-book begins. Despite the metafictional dominance in postmodernity, there are many earlier examples, the most inventive being the English writer Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), in which Tristram begins his narrative not with his birth as might be expected but with his conception; in the book there seems to be hardly any progression of the narrative because Tristram keeps musing about the conditions of his narration and digresses all the time to such an extent that he even writes a chapter on digressions, paradoxically commenting that the book consists of nothing but digressions (book 1, chapter 22).

To put to use the above-explained concepts and look in more detail at one text that is a metafictional treatment of authorship, Edgar Allan Poe's short story on "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838) is a good example, especially since it represents a very different treatment from Poe's "Philosophy of Composition". In "How to Write a Blackwood Article", Poe gives a metafictional presentation of authorship by combining elements of horror and satire with (more or less) practical advice on how to write a short story. While Poe is credited with inventing the detective story, the Edinburgh-based journal *Blackwood's*, which Poe is satirizing in the story, offered many sources for his (and other 19th century authors') more gruesome tales; in that sense he is indeed reflecting on his own writing.

The tale has two major parts combined in a frame structure: the first is the proper "How to Write a Blackwood Article", in which the budding authoress Psyche Zenobia goes to Edinburgh and is given advice by Mr Blackwood so that she may publish a story in the magazine; the second one, "A Predicament", is the result of her quite unusual efforts to do just that. The two parts are linked together by what one might call the reflection of the critical advice back into the text. Blackwood's advice to Zenobia is a parody of contemporary notions of the art of writing, but they sometimes also border on quite reasonable advice. When a particular style is talked about, for example, the illustration of that style goes along with it. Blackwood says to Zenobia:

Having determined upon your subject, you must next consider the tone, or manner, of your narration. There is the tone didactic, the tone enthusiastic, the tone natural – all common-place enough. But then there is the tone laconic, or curt, which has lately come much into use. It consists in short sentences. Somehow thus: Can't be too brief. Can't be too snappish. Always a full stop. And never a paragraph. (Poe 1984 [1838]: 282)

It is fitting for the general tone of satire in "How to Write a Blackwood Article" that the "Predicament" that she both finds herself in and puts herself in, is written in the very style that seems congenial for a beginner, namely the "tone heterogeneous", a heterogeneity mirrored in Zenobia's first story (ibid.: 287).

Zenobia is the autodiegetic narrator in her story, "The Predicament", but the danger she puts herself in to produce the sensational story that Blackwood and his magazine demand of her, makes even this classification problematic. After walking about town, Zenobia climbs the highest tower of a Gothic cathedral and, looking out from a hole on the top floor, she realises too late that she placed her head directly underneath the huge arm of the cathedral clock, which has descended irreversibly upon her neck, threatening to behead her. This authorial predicament is then satirically exaggerated by means of a truly horrific turn of events, as the scimitar-hand of the clock first makes Zenobia's eyes tumble from their sockets and then beheads the young authoress. What is remarkable is the way in which throughout all this she keeps her authorial composure despite dying a literal death of the author:

I was not sorry to see the head which had occasioned me so much embarrassment at length make a final separation from my body. It first rolled down the side of the steeple, then lodged, for a few seconds, in the gutter, and then made its way, with a plunge, into the middle of the street.

I will candidly confess that my feelings were now of the most singular – nay of the most mysterious, the most perplexing and incomprehensible character. My senses were here and there at one and the same moment. With my head I imagined, at one time, that I the head, was the real Signora Psyche Zenobia – at another I felt convinced that myself, the body, was the proper identity. (Ibid.: 295)

This is as far away from a standard autodiegetic narrator as it can be and thus an instance of untypical narration.<sup>16</sup> Her eyes fallen from her skull, her head severed from her body, how can Zenobia still narrate this story? Not only does the text thus question narratorial and with it authorial identity but also bodily and human identity as such. Zenobia's tale directs us towards a death of the author that is only possible in a meta-fiction of authorship, one that might be read in terms of the implications of Barthes' theory: *écriture* as the space where all identity is lost. What the whole story of "How to Write a Blackwood Article" thus treats is a literal death of the authoress through her trying to become one. That it is a female author who is beheaded by the course of time, is highly significant in terms of gendered authorship, especially since the narrative seems to transcend normal constructions of identity, but can do so only in a satirical mode. Within this horrific, sensationalistic parody of a common genre, we find a history of the author, a life from birth to death in some nineteen pages.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the article by Natalya Bekhta in this volume.

## 6. Conclusion

Authorship studies is a key topic in literary and cultural studies and is very likely to remain so for some time. Other fields also have to deal with problems of authorship, be it in the sciences where authorship determines scientific standing or in the law with its copyright questions regarding artefacts, especially texts, and their producers. As this article has shown, a varied understanding of authorship is possible only if the relation between producers, artefacts and recipients is analysed in its historical conjuncture. For literary authorship, this means, in James Phelan's words, examining the "recursive relationships between authorial agency, textual phenomena and reader response" (1996: 19). While the romantic author remains a focal point, authorship theory has moved far beyond this traditional idea and diversified into a vital field of research. Authorial poetics and metafiction of authorship are subfields that are still waiting for comprehensive systematic accounts and hence offer opportunities for further research. Finally, what the analysis of writing on writers might ultimately teach us is to become not only better critics and readers, but also better writers.

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## MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM, POST-POSTMODERNISM: CONCEPTUALIZING LITERARY PERIODS AND THEORIZING POSTMILLENNIAL CULTURE

ELIZABETH KOVACH

### 1. Introduction: How Can Something After the Present Exist Today?

If we use the word 'modern' to refer to the present, how can something exist after the present (post-modern)? And how can this be pushed even further, to after an after-present state (post-post-modern)? As difficult, irrational and even absurd as these words are, they represent established concepts for literary and cultural periods. The terms 'modernism', 'postmodernism' and – most recently – 'post-postmodernism' appear regularly within discussions of English and American literary products dating from the mid-19th century to the present, often without helpful explanations. It is, therefore, essential that any scholar within the field of English and American studies understand their salient characteristics and the theoretical frameworks that inform them. It is just as essential, however, to understand that these frameworks and characteristics are concepts as opposed to reality-based facts. They provide points of orientation within the vast landscape of literary and cultural production, allowing us to make comparisons, identify trends and provide points of reference in our work. Yet, they should be handled more as malleable tools than infallible representations of literary history's course. The aim of this article is, essentially, to pull the reader in two opposing directions: on the one hand, towards key concepts and definitions related to modernism, postmodernism and the still-nascent concept of post-postmodernism and, on the other hand, towards the idea that these concepts and definitions are a matter of perspective rather than cultural production that 'actually' takes place.

This article's title indicates that it addresses three literary periods as it deals with two main issues – namely, the conceptualisation of literary periods and the theorisation of postmillennial culture. Each of these periods and issues could fill libraries themselves, which is why the following remains general and is intended to provide initial impulses for papers, exams and final theses. It is also intended as a reference guide for further reading, with footnotes directing the reader to other introductory materials. Before dealing with the literary periods modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism, the article discusses what the conceptualisation of literary periods involves. The issue of conceptualising literary periods is significant for English and American cultural studies, because it highlights the importance of approaching the very notion of a literary period with a healthy dose of scepticism and an eye for complex circumstances. For instance, while introductory books on literary modernism often situate this period within the first half of the 20th century, there are many exceptions to the rule,