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Umschlagabbildung: *Poems by Mrs Anne Killigrew*, London 1686. Frontispiece.

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INGO BERENSMEYER, GERT BUELENS,  
MARYSA DEMOOR

## Authorship as Cultural Performance: New Perspectives in Authorship Studies

**Abstract:** This article proposes a performative model of authorship, based on the historical alternation between predominantly ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ author concepts and related practices of writing, publication and reading. Based on this model, we give a brief overview of the historical development of such author concepts in English literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. We argue for a more holistic approach to authorship within a cultural topography, comprising social contexts, technological and media factors, and other cultural developments, such as the distinction between privacy and the public sphere.

### 1. Authorship Now, or: How the Digital Humanities are Changing the Way We Think about Authorship

Ever since new technologies of hypertext first gained wide recognition in the 1990s, many proponents of the ‘digital revolution’ have been regarding the potentials of electronic authorship as a liberating force. For some, electronic authorship and hypertext were the *de facto* realization of Roland Barthes’ poststructuralist vision of an emancipated, decentred, agentless and non-proprietary form of ‘writing’ after ‘the death of the author.’ Instead of ascribing agency and authority to individual authors (as originators and, sometimes, owners of text), the prophets of the brave new digital world have frequently been viewing technology itself as an agent to whom cultural authority is ascribed. The recent debate about the legal, economic and cultural implications of Google Books – the digitization of millions of books, periodicals and other print matter and their availability on the internet, together with Google’s infringement of national and international copyright laws and authors’ rights – invites humanities scholars to rethink their theoretical and methodological foundations.

Arguably, this global cultural change in accessing and processing print matter is not merely a ‘paradigm shift’ or yet another ‘turn’ in literary and cultural studies (cf. Kuhn 1973; Grabes 2010); it is a sea-change – whether “into something rich and strange” (*Tempest* 1.2.405) remains to be seen. Whereas a ‘turn’ in the humanities is best described as “any attempt to develop new categories of analysis by focussing on particular aspects of culture or anthropology” (Grabes 2010, 20; cf. Bachmann-Medick 2006), usually consisting in a set of new questions (if not deterministic ideologemes) addressed to the same old texts (e.g. ‘capitalist accumulation in John

Donne,' 'the colonial other in Dickens,' 'the body in Shakespeare,' 'queering Jane Austen,' etc.), technological advances in the (digital) humanities affect both the object domain and the methodological toolkit of literary and cultural studies. They promise or threaten a genuine historic shift, "a total change of direction and relevance" (Graves 2010, 21) because they will not only introduce new theoretical vocabularies but determine *what* we read, *how* we retrieve, read and/or (!) analyse texts (images, songs, films, etc.), and how we discuss and publish our findings in an increasingly global scholarly community.

One does not need to assume the pose of a prophet to realise that the digital humanities will thus have an impact not only on literary epistemology, but on the very *ontology* of literary and cultural studies, gradually transforming it from the model of (individual, speculative) scholarship to that of (collaborative, empirical – i.e. data-oriented) science. Linguistics, with its increasing reliance on very large corpora of data, has been a trailblazer in this regard. The process of 'scientization' will also have more mundane material effects in that it is likely to increase competition among universities, in which some research institutions will have access to expensive databases (and the researchers who know how to use them in innovative ways), while others will be demoted to second- and third-tier learning factories.

Generally speaking, the digital revolution appears to favour a collaborative or even corporate model of authorship over a more traditional model of individual authorship that is often identified, by its proponents as well as its detractors, as 'humanist.' One of the most radical voices speaking out against the 'antihumanist' position taken by many advocates of the digital revolution is Jaron Lanier, whose manifesto *You Are Not a Gadget* (2010) registers an anxiety less about the theoretical, legal or economic 'death of the author' but about the loss of individual human agency, responsibility and control:

According to the new creed [of the digital revolution], we technologists are turning ourselves [...] into computer peripherals attached to the great computing clouds. The news is no longer about us but about the big new computational object that is greater than us. [...] We are accused of fearing change, just as the medieval Church feared the printing press. [...] Yet] printing presses in themselves provide no guarantee of an enlightened outcome. People, not machines, made the Renaissance. [...] What is important about printing presses is not the mechanism, but the authors. (Lanier 2010, 45-6)

Lanier asserts that in the world of information, the concept of authorship stands for "the very idea of the individual point of view" (Lanier 2010, 47), which is threatened by disappearance in "the cloud" (i.e. internet-based computing facilities) and in "mashups of fragments" (*ibid.*, 46). In this view, it will be increasingly difficult or even impossible to link speech acts, opinions and ideas to a definite (human) source of origin. For Lanier, this development will not lead to a joyful celebration of writing *sensu* Barthes; on the contrary, it harbours the threat of a return to a totalitarian society. One does not need to share Lanier's rather pessimistic view, however, to realise the stakes involved in these discussions. In a 'dialectics of enlightenment,' the rise of new technologies usually brings with it positive as well as negative developments, both cancer and its cure: e.g. internet plagiarism in student papers *and* the technological means to detect it.

Yet no matter whether we regret or applaud these developments, there is no denying that we are currently in the midst of a technological and cultural revolution which involves a major transition from analog to digital media. In the process, we are seeing a massive restructuring of print culture, with its privileging of individual efforts and rewards, into a new media ecology that cultivates anonymity and collectivism, the “hive mind” (Kelly 1994, 5) and the “wisdom of crowds” (cf. Surowiecki 2004). There is no doubt that new research tools like Google Books, Google Scholar, Literature Online or Eighteenth Century Collections Online, databases that allow full-text searches of huge amounts of data, open entirely new approaches to the study of literature and culture. But how do mass aggregates of literary data affect the way we understand literary and cultural history? And how will authors and booksellers, who are economically dependent on the business model of the copy, adapt to a ‘brave new world’ of digitization that blurs the edges of the printed book? Blinded by the apparent magic of innovative technological products, many customers and users fail to see the far less magical consequences looming beneath the shiny surface, such as data mining, personal location tracking databases, targeted advertising and commercial monopolies.

Against this background, it is certainly timely to investigate the *historical basis* of traditional concepts of authorship and copyright. Numerous studies on authorship in various historical periods and regions have appeared over the past thirty years; some of these have taken up the challenge of Roland Barthes to investigate the rise of the literary author as owner and central authority over the ‘work’; others have followed Michel Foucault’s lead in describing ‘author functions’ as concrete manifestations of historical processes. Conceptual and historical studies of authorship abound, and the field is now thriving more than ever. The question that we wish to address in this article – based on the work of the RAP (Research on Authorship as Performance) group at Ghent University<sup>1</sup> – is to what extent the concept of performativity can be made fruitful for historical research on literary authorship in English studies. We are currently also experimenting with quantitative methods for studying changing concepts of authorship, bringing new digital research technologies to bear on a large corpus of data; but a discussion of these methods is beyond the scope of this paper.

## 2. Towards a Performativity Theory of Authorship

In this section of our essay, we will briefly outline what we see as the major advances and challenges in current studies of the concept and practice of authorship. We shall sketch a performative model of authorship, based on the historical alternation between predominantly ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ author concepts and related practices of writing, publication and reading. Such a model needs to be both system-

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<sup>1</sup> The RAP group, operative since 2009 and scheduled to run until 2014, currently consists of the authors of this article as project directors, postdoctoral fellows Yuri Cowan, Sören Hamerschmidt, Elizabeth Walters, and doctoral fellows Isabelle Clairhout, Alise Jameson, Jasper Schelstraete and Vicky Vansteenbrugge. For more information, see [www.rap.ugent.be](http://www.rap.ugent.be).

atically coherent and sufficiently flexible to accommodate historical change. Based on our model, we shall then suggest routes for future inquiry and methods of studying authorship.

Our point of departure is the observation of a gap between a ‘strong’ concept of authorship as autonomous agency, original creativity and intellectual ownership, and a ‘weak’ (but historically much more prevalent) concept of heteronomous authorship as a product of cultural networks and their acts of authorization. To understand how authorship was historically performed, we are focusing on the material dimensions of culture and media in order to explore their effects on the diffusion of ideas, knowledge and literary forms related to authorship. Applying elements from theories of performance and performativity, we also hope to re-examine the role of gender in the emergence of modern authorship, the professionalization of writing, and processes of canon-formation across boundaries of gender and genre. How did writers situate themselves within cultural networks? How did male and female ‘self-fashioning’ (Greenblatt 1984) in coteries map onto genre and media constellations (poetry/drama/prose; print, manuscript, public/private performance), and how did (male/female) writers negotiate their relations to audiences in prefaces and other peritextual matter?

In the context of the RAP research group, we are interested in historical concepts and practices of authorship, especially in its variously autonomous or heteronomous, ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ (network-based) instantiations. Authorship studies, as we are trying to envisage it, needs to be distinguished from traditional approaches of biographical studies, literary sociology or psychoanalysis, i.e. from reading works of individual authors in order to find meanings in literary texts that can be related to information about the author’s life; or from the ‘implied author’ debate, a narratological category introduced by Wayne C. Booth on the level between the empirical author and the narrator of a narrative text – a category that many narratologists, applying Occam’s razor, find they can easily do without (see Booth 1983, 70-5, 151, 157; Kindt / Müller 2006).

Obviously, very different concepts and models of authorship apply in different periods, disciplines and cultural fields. A good example of this is film, where one can find ‘auteurs’ like Godard, Truffaut, Hitchcock, Ford – but here, one might ask why, for instance, James Cameron or Stephen Spielberg are usually not considered as ‘auteurs’ (cf. Caughie 1990). The Hollywood studio system, like Elizabethan and Jacobean England, has no need for the solitary genius, the strong model of authorship that first came into being in the Romantic period. In so-called real life, writing is very often characterized by multiple authorship rather than solitary practice; only recently, studies in Shakespeare – aided by computer stylistics – have arrived at the point of openly acknowledging the evidence of ‘other hands’ in some of Shakespeare’s plays – passages in *Macbeth* that are more likely to be by Middleton, entire plays like *Henry VIII* co-written by John Fletcher, etc. – a concept that goes against the very grain of the tenacious Romantic idea of the genius as a single, solitary author (see Vickers 2002, Hirschfeld 2001 and 2009, Stillinger 1991, Stone / Thompson 2006).



Even in the Romantic era itself, genius concepts varied between strong, affirmative notions of authorial autonomy and originality on the one hand (often, it needs to be said, promoted by empirical authors whose real conditions of writing were economically precarious) and, on the other hand, much weaker, indeed heteronomous notions of divine inspiration – or, in Goethe’s case, an idea of collective subjectivity. Goethe famously referred to *Faust* as the work of a collective being (“oeuvre d’un être collectif,” qtd. in Detering 2002, xii) which just happens to bear the name of Goethe. As William St Clair reminds us, a past culture is not a parade of great authors, but “a dynamic system with many interacting agents” (2005, 5); looked at from the point of view of book history, the evidence for the ‘political economy of reading’ in the Romantic period actually suggests that it is not based on the original ideas of a handful of geniuses, but on those more affordable texts from the 18th century that could easily be accessed by a large number of readers:

Contrary to what Wordsworth believed and wrote about in *The Excursion*, his mind was not formed by experiencing Nature direct in the mountains of the Lake District. He was participating in a tradition that went back many centuries. [...] The more complex aspects of our minds [...] may be, to a larger extent than we understand or care to acknowledge, temporary outcomes of the consumption of the texts to which we and our predecessors have been exposed. (St Clair 2005, 16)

In writing the history of authorship, therefore, we cannot merely study the works or biographies of individual authors; we need to give an account of the dynamic system that produced them, which also involves giving an account of complex social, economic and epistemological shifts in cultural and book history. We need to relate the material and concrete practices of ‘actors’ and their own ideas about these practices to other ideas and practices that determined the historical cultural and media context, as well as to non-human ‘actants’ (such as texts and books) that shaped these practices (cf. Latour 2005). It is not enough, then, to study individual authorship models or cases of empirical authorship; yet the question, theoretical and methodological, is how to relate individual cases and models to their wider context(s) or media settings.

The challenge is to establish a model, or set of models, and then to find the methods and tools with which to access empirical data which allow us to test the plausibility of our models. One possible approach, suggested by Franco Moretti, is “distant reading” (2007, 1): turning the massive scope of our object domain – thousands, maybe millions of texts – into a virtue with the aid of electronic databases and research tools, by performing quantitative research based on statistical knowledge comprising vast amounts of data. One problem, apart from the technological difficulties of accessing and processing data, is theoretical: will such projects confirm or disrupt traditional conventions of periodization?

A complex model of authorship as cultural performance will have to include the performance of individual agents as well as other ‘actants’ in the sociological sense, including textual and other objects (cf. Latour 2005) within changing ‘horizons of expectation’ (Jauss 1982), ecologies of media (Postman 1973, McLuhan 1994 [1964]) and socio-cultural ‘discourse networks’ (Kittler 1990) that enable and

constrain performances. Such a model will, we hope, provide a better account of the linkages between historical author concepts in various fields and empirical situations of writing. Understanding acts of authorship as, at least in part, culturally constructed, as performances that are enabled and constrained by social norms and different media configurations, we can analyse the social and cultural determinants that influence how writers conceive of their labour, their ‘work’ and their own status; how mediating agents (scribes, printers, publishers, literary agents, journalists) interact with writers and other institutions in order to create an author’s public ‘image’; and finally, how readers perceive the relationship between a text, or a set of texts, and its author. Authorship is thus one aspect of what Bourdieu (1993) has termed the “field of cultural production.” We argue that concepts of authorship, as they are mediated in this field, are crucial for understanding the literary field as a whole: they influence all its levels, from the production of texts to their mediation and reception. Authorship might therefore be said to be the linchpin of literary studies. No recent theory of literature, be it deconstruction or discourse theory, new historicism or reader-response, seems to have taken sufficient account of this.

Following what is sometimes called ‘the performative turn’ in cultural analysis, “culture is theorised and investigated primarily as an embodied performance and an ensemble of performative practices” (Berns 2010, 14). The consequences of this shift for the study of culture, and by implication of authorship, are succinctly summarized by Ute Berns:

Analysis moves beyond the study of texts as representations; as expressing pre-existing meanings or identities. Instead, texts, images and other cultural objects are taken into consideration to the extent that they take part in the performative processes of making meaning and of shaping identities. (Berns 2010, 4)

Performance, it should be clear, must not be reduced to the mere utterance, rendition or enactment of something given; nor is it to be confused with intentionality or agency. Rather, it is an open process of engaging and interacting with other cultural ‘actants,’ a process that can transform reality or bring forth something entirely new, in the sense of ‘performative’ in speech act theory, as developed by J.L. Austin and as applied to the study of culture in the pioneering work of Victor Turner.<sup>2</sup> Yet again, this productive dimension of performance should not be confused with ‘originality’ or ‘creativity’ in the sense of creation out of nothing; performances are limited by existing discursive and social constraints, which – as Judith Butler has argued (1990) – co-shape or ‘co-author’ that which is produced by and in performance. In more literary terms, this is nothing new. Marxist analyses of literary form, for example, have for a long time emphasized the co-creative role of language, of existing genres and media in what Raymond Williams calls “alignments,” i.e. “our normal ways of seeing the world” (2001, 216):

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<sup>2</sup> Austin 1975; Turner 1969 and 1976. For a survey of current performativity concepts across the disciplines see Wirth 2002; Loxley 2007; Krämer / Stahlhut 2001; Fischer-Lichte 2008.

When I hear people talk about literature, describing what so-and-so did with that form – how did he handle the short novel? – I often think we should reverse the question and ask, how did the short novel handle him. Because anyone who has carefully observed his own practice of writing eventually finds that there is a point where, although he is holding the pen or tapping the typewriter, what is being written, while not separate from him, is not only him either, and of course this other force is literary form. (Williams 2001, 216)<sup>3</sup>

Based on these theoretical premises, a performativity theory of authorship would proceed to address questions like the following: how did literary authorship in the early modern period differ from authorship in the nineteenth century? How did writers perform authorship, and what performative acts secured ‘successful’ ways of authorial self-presentation? How is authorial success to be defined in the first place? In what ways were authors thought to be ‘present’ in, or in control of, their texts? How were the relations between authors, texts and readers conceptualized? How (if at all) were authors distinguished from mere writers, scribes or secretaries? Was writing, or having written, a necessary precondition of someone’s status as an author? What was their authority? And what their role in literary interpretation?

Obviously, these are very large questions that cannot be answered by means of theory alone, although it is in theory that authorship in the emphatic sense – the author as a god, the creative genius – has been joyfully debunked since the 1960s. Yet even though Foucault demoted the author to a ‘function’ that regulates the production and proliferation of discourses, giving to textual productions “a local habitation and a name” (*Midsummer Night’s Dream* 5.1.17), he reintroduced an emphatic, strong type of authorship in the ‘founder of discourse’ (Marx, Freud and, perhaps, Foucault himself) who triggers the production of more texts of a certain type. In general, however, the author function serves as a filter of textual arbitrariness and contingency. It is no longer necessarily related to the situation of writing and the person of the writer; the modern author in this regard is an ordering category that is wielded first in cataloguing texts – necessary as soon as many texts need something to distinguish them from each other, to separate one body of work from another –, then in editing (according to the principle of author’s intention), and finally as a category in interpretation. The latter has recently been revived in Spoerhase’s *Autorschaft und Interpretation* (2007), using Davidson’s ‘principle of charity’ as a theoretical foundation for understanding the need to refer to the author in interpreting texts. From a philological standpoint, it seems, authorship and interpretation cannot be thought of independently of one another (Spoerhase 2007, 439). The philologist steps in for the absent author, as a hermeneutic ventriloquist (cf. *ibid.*, 442, quoting Robert Brandom); even the real author would not be able to contradict the hermeneuts, because *their* author functions as a necessary methodological construct in the process of interpretation. The author’s presence in interpretation, according to Spoerhase, is a contrafactual fiction that serves to prevent a hermeneutics of actualisation or improvement (*ibid.*, 448).

<sup>3</sup> The authors would like to thank Daniel Hartley for drawing their attention to this passage.

So, in a very clear sense, philological hermeneutics has no truck with actual, empirical authors, but merely requires the author as a fictional construct. This is, to some extent, different in attribution studies, but the empirical author in this field is often not more than a name, or a pseudonym, and a set of more or less reliable statistical data that serve to distinguish, say, 'Shakespeare' from 'Heywood' or 'Rochester' from 'Behn.' Computer philologists have a lot of interesting things to say about weighing internal and external evidence of individual authorship, but they tend not to speculate about the secret of creative genius. The problem, here as elsewhere, is how to relate actual, empirical authors with abstract notions about authorship (cf. Love 2002; Craig / Kinney 2009; Vickers 2011).

This may be the main reason why the field of authorship studies is currently marked by a conflicting multitude of concepts, coming from different disciplines and historical periods. Historical conceptual accretions and assumptions impinge upon any scholarly desire for systematic tidiness. If it is now clear that the debate on authorship has moved away from grand narratives like Barthes' 'death of the author' to more complex theoretical arguments and methodological assumptions (cf. Livingston 2008, 197), we need to begin a renewed investigation into concrete historical manifestations (performances) of *empirical* authorship, as well as a renewed effort to come to terms with different *concepts* or *models* of authorship in different disciplines, and in different areas of culture. In this sense, authorship may be regarded as a 'travelling concept' (Bal 2002; cf. Neumann / Tygstrup 2009), but it is far from homogeneous and unified as *a single* concept, as it is characterised by a high degree of mobility and conflict. Moreover, it is not only a concept with a history – it is also more than just a concept, but related to a set of sometimes very concrete human practices, activities, agencies, institutions and socio-cultural 'alignments' (Williams 2001).

### 3. Existing Authorship Concepts and the Performative Model

Translating and slightly modifying a typology of authorship concepts in literary studies presented by Heinrich Detering (cf. Polaschegg 2002, 322-3), one can arrive at the following tentative (and probably incomplete) list of existing authorship concepts:

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>author:</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the individual or collective originator and communicator of texts, tied to valid rules of discourse and communication – weak heteronomy</li> <li>2. the creator of an immaterial conception ('work') that is materially represented in the text; this creator inserts that textual material into aesthetic discourse – weak autonomy</li> <li>3. the originator of a text who stages him or herself, or is perceived by others as, the sovereign and absolute ruler over the work – strong autonomy</li> </ol> |
| <i>writer:</i> | the writing agent of intersecting discursive, rhetorical and intertextual strains (Barthes' 'scripteur') – strong heteronomy   |

<i>empirical author:</i>	extratextual instance of text production
<i>implied author:</i>	representation of the empirical author in the text as a ‘communicated communicator’ (cf. Kindt / Müller 2006; Booth 1983)
<i>narrator:</i>	speaker figure in narrative texts
<i>lyrical I:</i>	speaker figure in poems
<i>author function:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Historical (contingent) device (‘dispositif’), controlled by and produced in discourses and institutions, that governs the classification and reception of texts (Foucault)</li> <li>2. Reference to the author in the context of text editing, translation and interpretation</li> </ol>

While this typology combines text-external and text-internal functions of authorship without privileging either of these dimensions, Harold Love’s typology, developed in the context of authorship attribution studies, introduces a completely different set of functions, which Love calls “authemes” (2002, 39). These refer not to authorship as “the condition of being the originator of works,” but to “a set of linked activities [...] which are sometimes performed by a single person but will often be performed collaboratively or by several persons in succession” (*ibid.*). Thus Love is able to combine notions of authorship as an activity (performance) with notions of authorship as the result of ascriptions (which can also be regarded as performative acts):

<i>precursory authorship:</i>	if “a significant contribution from an earlier writer is incorporated into the new work” (40)
<i>executive authorship:</i>	if the author is a ‘maker’ or <i>artifex</i> , solo or collaborative (43)
<i>declarative authorship:</i>	if the author is a “validator” (e.g. King James Bible; 44-5)
<i>revisionary authorship:</i>	if the work is revised by the executive author or someone else, e.g. an editor or censor (46-9)

Reducing the Detering typology to four basic author concepts in literary studies, one might arrive at a table like the following. This needs to be supplemented by Love’s authemes (something not attempted here), which could arguably apply in various forms in each of these ideal types of authorship:

	heteronomy	autonomy
weak	author as originator and communicator of texts, tied to rules and conventions	author as creator of immaterial 'work' that is materially presented in the text
strong	Barthes' 'scripteur': writer as merely a textual function, a compiler	author as absolute ruler over the work and its meaning, a genius

Table 1. Typology of author functions

The extremes marked in this diagram are the strongly heteronomous concept of the writer as a mere function of the (inter)text (bottom left), and the strongly autonomous concept of Barthes' 'Auteur-Dieu' (bottom right); other existing models could be classified as belonging to any of these four major types, with many transitional concepts along the scale.<sup>4</sup> It needs to be remembered that we are here not dealing with authorship as a single activity, but with a performative model based on ascriptions as well as actions.

It should be clear by now that in order to apply a performative model of authorship in a useful way, discussions cannot remain purely theoretical and abstract, or be satisfied with delineating the boundaries between literary authorship and other arts or discourses, e.g. law and copyright (cf. Woodmansee / Jaszi 1994). We need, first and foremost, to analyse authorship in the context of concrete cultural manifestations (or performances), actual situations of text production, distribution and reception, taking into account material, discursive or institutional conditions and constraints.

#### 4. Some Historical Highlights in the Debate

This chapter will provide a brief and tentative survey of authorship-as-cultural-performance in the English-speaking world, indicating areas in which qualitative research (i.e. primarily based on concrete, individual readings of texts and studies of archival material) could be conducted.

<sup>4</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Gero Guttzeit in creating this model. Guttzeit's PhD thesis on Edgar Allan Poe (currently in progress) will provide a case study of authorship-as-performance in antebellum American culture.

#### 4.1 Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century

One area in which historical author concepts can interestingly be related to actual situations of writing is the field of anonymity, author initials, pseudonymity and paronymity. Here it is necessary to distinguish between formal anonymity (where authors are simply unknown) and intentional anonymity (where authors deliberately conceal, and sometimes later reveal their real name, or have their real name revealed by others). These practices belong to the history of authorial signatures, understood as actual traces of empirical authors (see Pabst 2011). In the Middle Ages, most texts were formally anonymous, and few authors whose names we know ever talk about themselves in their works, which appear to lack “any distinctive personality” (Burrow 2008, 37). However, even in the Middle Ages there are some authors who deliberately left traces of their names in texts; one example is the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf, who “wove his name, spelled out in runic letters, into the closing passages of four poems” (*ibid.*, 40), not from a desire for fame but probably in order “to be remembered by name in the prayers of others” (*ibid.*). Only the decoder of the runic script is able to learn and remember the poet’s name, which is not available otherwise. Such desire for prayer and remembrance is also present at the end of the Caxton edition of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*:

I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his knyghtes from the begynnyng to the endyng, praye for me whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good delyveraunce. And whan I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule. For this book was ended the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the Fourth, by Syr Thomas Maleoré, Knyght, as Jesu helpe hym for Hys grete myght, as he is the servant of Jesu bothe day and nyght. (qtd. in Burrow 2008, 38-9)

In these cases we have a performance of authorship not as a marker of textual ownership, but as a call for remembrance and a token of religious faith. Relationships of service also bind later medieval and Renaissance authors not only to God or to Christ but also to their friends and patrons. Authorship in this period usually is designed for a very specific audience; authors often directly address a fellow writer or patron as a client or friend, thus situating themselves in an intimate relationship of personal servitude (cf. Schalkwyk 2008). Another medieval example of this is Chaucer’s short poem “Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan,” in which the speaker/writer persona ‘Chaucer’ petitions a member of the household of Richard II to put in a good word for him:

Scogan, that knelest at the stremes hed  
Of grace, of alle honour and worthynesse,  
In th’ende of which strem I am dul as ded,  
Forgete in solytarie wildernesse –  
Yet, Scogan, thenke on Tullius kyndenesse;  
Mynne thy frend, there it may fructyfye!  
Far-wel, and loke thow never eft Love dyffye.  
(Chaucer 1988, 655, ll. 43-9)

Many of these texts are characterized by a highly personal flavour. This is not surprising since they were created in social networks of intimacy; often circulated in authorial or scribal manuscripts destined for a very concrete readership that in many cases would have been personally acquainted with the empirical author of the text. In such reading communities or coteries, personal acquaintance between author and addressee is the norm (cf. Marotti 1986, 1995; Bristol / Marotti 2000). Another striking example from the later Middle Ages would be the poet Thomas Hoccleve, whose writings are unusually autobiographical, drawing heavily on his personal life and his work as a scribe in the office of the Privy Seal, begging readers for understanding and sympathy. Hoccleve is also the only medieval English poet whose work survives in his own handwriting, whereas in most other cases scribal copies are the norm.

In the early modern period, texts, understood as performances, served to recollect the author to the reader by means of writing, to make the author present again as a person, by way of re-presentification through representation. Such textual performances of ‘social authorship’ (Ezell 1999), above all poems like Donne’s or Shakespeare’s but also of many less distinguished writers, were media of interaction among people who were known to each other, who were present or at least not too distant from one another. It can be frustrating to realise how little evidence there is left of these concrete material and personal contexts of early modern literature. Later readers thus often find it difficult, even impossible, to reconstruct an acceptable (or even plausible) biographical narrative out of Shakespeare’s sonnets, because neither of the text-internal addressees, the young man nor the dark lady, are named in the poems, and the famous 1609 dedication to the “onlie begetter,” signed “T.T.,” may well be the printer’s praise of Shakespeare himself, misprinted as “Mr. W.H.” for “W.S.,” the initials of William Shakespeare (see Bate 2009, 222).<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the study of scientific and medical texts offers insights into the way in which changing scientific attitudes inform authorial self-fashioning, even incorporating gender issues. In these texts, early modern authors are often remarkably present, as in the case of William Harvey, Jane Sharp, or the female authors of manuscript recipe books who position themselves in a community of knowledge consisting of friends and family.<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of print gradually introduces new performative practices of authorship. As textual production and reception become more and more disconnected from each other, authors’ names and signatures become more important as assertions of identifiability and coherence. As Thomas Hobbes explains in 1640,

<sup>5</sup> The narrative of the sonnets might also be entirely fictional, since early modern sonneteers and readers knew that “a man may write of love and not be in love” (Giles Fletcher, preface to *Licia*, 1593, qtd. in Bate 2009, 200). For a fascinating, albeit speculative, account of “Shakespeare’s idea of authorship” (75) in the tensions between manuscript and print culture, see Wilson 2010; cf. Cheney 2008.

<sup>6</sup> This research angle is one aspect of Isabelle Clairhout’s PhD project in the framework of RAP. On female scientific authorship, see Clairhout 2010. In at least one later instance, the author of a recipe book made herself present to her readers by adding her signature in handwriting to the title page of every printed copy: see Raffald 1769. The authors wish to thank Martin Spies for drawing our attention to this source. For the later practice of including facsimile signatures in printed books, see below.



it must be extreme [sic] hard to find out the opinions and meanings of those men that are gone from us long ago, and have left us no other signification thereof but their books; which cannot possibly be understood without history enough to discover those aforementioned circumstances, and also without great prudence to observe them. (Hobbes 1994, 76-7)

The connection between authors and readers through the medium of texts becomes tenuous and increasingly fragile.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the number of authors vying for attention with patrons and, later, buyers in a literary marketplace explodes to such an extent that the special mark of distinction connected to the “noble title of an author” (Young 1968 [1759], 565) begins to lose its value. When authorship becomes a mass phenomenon, it is no longer special and noteworthy. In the Middle Ages, Aristotle was ‘the author’ (cf. Minnis 1988). Because, in modernity, the number of authors is legion, the individual author disappears in a mass of authors. So for whom can one author, not to say *the* author, still become an event?

It is perhaps a kind of compensatory countermove to this development when the act of reading is conceived in analogy to the discursive model of oral interaction: “la lecture de tous les bons livres est comme une conversation avec les plus honnêtes gens des siècles passés qui en ont été les auteurs” (Descartes, qtd. in Proust 1992, 255). To this conception one can add the image of books as good companions or friends, which is developed by John Ruskin in the late nineteenth century and which Proust takes care to refute in his essay “Journées de lecture” by pointing out the radical difference in temporality which underlies literary communication. For Proust, reading becomes a solipsistic, reflexive, perhaps even masturbatory act: a dialogue of the self with itself (“travail fécond de l’esprit sur lui-même,” 257) – similar to the concept of ‘soliloquy’ as established by Lord Shaftesbury in the eighteenth century for the process of writing and authorship (cf. Shaftesbury 1981, 84).

In a discursive *régime* of mass authorship, there should no longer be any authors in the sense of ‘representative men’ (Ralph Waldo Emerson); there should no longer be a title of prestige or distinction to be gained by the practice of authorship, no special authority of the author. In reality, this could mean the self-exploitation of poetic talent for a precarious economic survival as a ‘hack’ on London’s Grub Street, with the printer-publisher as a “brain-sucker” in constant demand of fresh copy for the press. Thus, in the “Serio-Comic Caricature” (subtitle) “The Brain-Sucker: Or, The Distress of Authorship,” presumably by John Oswald, published in *The British Mercury* in 1787, the impoverished poet’s father only arrives in London at the last minute in order to save his son from starvation.<sup>8</sup> This humbled author returns to a life of subsistence farming:

The dreadful distemper that made such woeful havock in his brain, is radically exterminated. He has abandoned for ever the heathenish worship of Apollo; swears that he would not exchange a single smile of his lovely Nancy for the last favours of the *Nine Sisters*; and that he would rather plant cabbages on his paternal estate, than cultivate, with Homer, Ossian, and Virgil, the very summits of Parnassus. (Oswald 1788, 48)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. McKitterick 2003; for more detailed case studies in the 17th century, see Berensmeyer 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The authors thank Alise Jameson for drawing their attention to this text, which is accessible on EEBO. Jameson and Berensmeyer are currently preparing an annotated edition.

There could hardly be a better text than this to illustrate the paradoxical status of authorship as cultural performance from the eighteenth century onwards, caught between glory and misery, success and starvation. Public authorship loses its prestige. What is needed then is a surplus of energy invested in the staging and presentation of authors in the media, in the marketing of faces and signatures – some authors have to be made more special, more valuable than others. Hence the rise of author portraits;<sup>9</sup> hence the birth of literary criticism in the eighteenth century, when periodicals develop into an important public forum for the segmentation of the literary marketplace into more or less valuable authors. In the nineteenth century, the special status of a small number of authors was underlined by the design of their mass-produced books: on the cover of the 1867 ‘Charles Dickens Edition,’ the author’s signature was stamped in gold – even though Dickens’ signature was known to be exceptionally unstable. Name and signature, the prospectus for this edition claims, “may suggest to the author’s countrymen his present watchfulness over his own edition and his hope that it may remain a favourite with them when he shall have left them for ever” (qtd. in Schlicke 2011, 208), thereby intensifying the personal bond between an author and his readership.

Already in the mid-nineteenth century, this produces new tensions for authors, who are increasingly forced to stage their ‘personality’ in the literary marketplace. Evidently, the Romantic cult of genius – as expounded in Edward Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), which celebrate the poet as a cultural figure of sublime authority – depends upon a specific historical configuration of situations of writing and material conditions of publication and publicity. The widening gap between authorial self-descriptions and material realities is perhaps best illustrated by Thomas De Quincey. Like many professional writers of his time, De Quincey hovered on the edges between the aesthetics of genius on the one hand and the compulsion of purely quantitative literary production (hack writing) on the other hand.

#### 4.2 Nineteenth and Twentieth Century

“Of all the Victorians, none had a loftier conception of his calling than Carlyle, and none came to despise the whole trade of authorship more thoroughly.” (Gross 1991, 37)

With Dickens and De Quincey we have reached the nineteenth century and the controversy about what constituted authorship and how authors were supposed to be defined, an issue that preoccupied so many nineteenth-century authors who considered themselves professional authors and who were concerned about the position of authors in society. Both lesser-known writers and the very popular ones were drawn to the issue of authorship and the difficulties attending the growth of a writer into a deservedly popular author. They chose to dramatise the plight of the

<sup>9</sup> See the article by Margaret Ezell in this special issue. On the media history of author photographs, see Bickenbach 2010.

author, often based on their own experiences, and therefore turned their literary heroes into authorial performances. Richard Salmon, in his article on the bildungsroman, provides a rich overview of authors and their novels on ‘apprenticeships’ beginning with Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, and followed by Edward Bulwer Lytton who wrote several bildungsromans starting with *The Disowned* (1828) and *Godolphin* (1833) and attaining its most “coherent expression,” as Salmon claims, in *Ernest Maltravers* (1837) and its sequel *Alice; or, The Mysteries* (1838). Several of the most prominent Victorian authors explained and commented on their views on authorship privately in their letters and diaries, and publicly in contributions to newspapers and magazines, finally to incorporate their views in their novels as part of their own fictionalised selves (Salmon 2004, 41). Authors such as Thackeray and Dickens, who publicly commented on the position of the author, fictionalised their own sometimes arduous route towards best-selling authorship in their respective bildungsromans *Pendennis* and *David Copperfield*. Their concerns with the professionalisation of their job resulted in their overt support of and allegiance to a Guild of Literature and Art founded in 1851 (Hack 1999, 698).

The sprawling number of writings in the nineteenth century and the growing diversity amongst authors themselves was reflected in the set of concepts used for those who earned a living by the pen. Authors, writers, men of letters, journalists, penny-a-liners, hacks, each of these, in descending order of respectability, referred to the professional writer (cf. Cross 1985). The end of the nineteenth century saw them united in the professional Society of Authors, established by Walter Besant and meant to protect them against piracy and unscrupulous publishers using authors for their own personal gain. These and other related issues were candidly addressed in George Gissing’s novel *New Grub Street* (1891), where Jasper Milvain represents the class of men of letters, Edwin Reardon the struggling author, Harold Biffen the genius author, and Marian Yule the young woman hack writer.

With Henry James’ work on authorship a new era is heralded. James’ views on authorship are explored both theoretically (in his introductions to the New York edition) and in fiction (as in his short stories “The Lesson of the Master,” “The Figure in the Carpet” – with its tantalising struggle over possession of the putative key to the true meaning of an author’s work – and “The Private Life” with its staging of a stark split between an author’s public persona and creative genius, literalized as two complementary people). In the Victorian period, then, the tensions and frictions between individual, communal and social performances of authorship are intensified; the most fundamental problem appears to be an increasing distance between the rising pressures of reality on the one hand and the need for selecting a convincing observer position, a stance that might allow a coherent perspective upon competing presuppositions of cultural meaning. Authors are called upon to create convincing and normative combinations of world pictures, values and dispositions of behaviour as the foundation for works of literature. Their theories of life and art fuse the aesthetic with the social and are intended to bridge the increasing gaps between different discourses and a strong social pressure towards consensus. In Victorian Britain, authors and ‘men of letters’ are hailed as

'sages.' But the manifold pressures on these public figures (Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Morris) to communicate a certain 'message' lead them into highly divergent political and aesthetic directions. In this regard, one strategy of maintaining internal consistency is the increasing predominance of the authorial narrator as a superordinate observer, a means of negotiating between and among individual, communal and social perspectives. But the position of the authorial narrator in fiction, like the position of the author him- or herself in relation to the work, is precarious.

J. Hillis Miller (1975) has shown how, in the work of George Eliot, the authorial narrator's criteria for ordering observations into a meaningful whole are undermined by the metaphorical quality of the criteria, thus creating a tension between the analytic, scientific validity claims of the authorial narrator and their incongruity. The Victorian erosion of treasured certainties, as embodied in the failure of the authorial narrator to guarantee the coherence of his/her observations, can already be seen to prepare the groundwork for later modernist experiments with narrative categories of experientiality. The two most prominent debates that eroded the canonical position of grand and classical authors were the one on the authorship of the Homeric epics, and the one suggesting that Francis Bacon had authored Shakespeare's plays. The steep increase in numbers of women authors towards the end of the century led to dramatic situations such as figured in Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1900).

By the turn of the century, the emerging visual culture and the creation of a mass readership had led to the rise of a celebrity culture, in which authors were no longer solely known for their work, but also for their personality, their home, and their likeness. The transitional novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy, claimed to resent this commercialisation of authorship and the new obsession with the author's persona, but at the same time eagerly cooperated in the development of the Wessex industry, based on the fictional region of his novels. Responding to the public interest in all things author-related, Hardy encouraged and helped writers, fans and journalists to brand his image. Over the years he assisted in bringing out postcards with photographs of Wessex scenes, a map that allowed readers and tourists to discover the Wessex landscape, a calendar with sentences from his books, a line of hand-painted pottery with designs and verses related to the novels, and much more. Hardy even proofread several manuscripts for books about his works and his imaginary Wessex region, and entertained, or corresponded with, numerous journalists who wished to write about him.<sup>10</sup>

In the US, a similar tension between concepts and performances of authorship is evident, for instance, in Herman Melville's relations and reactions to literary criticism and publicity. Continuity of the author persona from one book to the next was a normative expectation, connecting aesthetic, moral and psychological stability. Melville rebelled against this identification of aesthetics and morality

<sup>10</sup> Hardy is the focus of Vicky Vansteenbrugge's PhD project in the framework of RAP. As part of this work in progress, her articles entitled "Picturing Hardy: Authorial Self-Fashioning in the Early Twentieth-Century Literary Marketplace" and "A Chilling Atmosphere for Poems': Hardy's Poetic Contributions to the Newspaper Market" are forthcoming.

and the concurrent tendency to judge literary works in moral terms. Instead of conforming to the necessities of the marketplace, he withdrew from them, adopting “stances of evasion” (Kaenel 1992, 63; for a more detailed case study, see Berensmeyer 2010). Melville’s “resistance to the marketplace,” according to Jasper Schelstraete, is “an escalation of the romantic ideal of the Genius, where the Author is not only independent from society but also in contempt of it” (2010, 21). This anticipates high modernist authors whose creed was “*épater le bourgeois*,” to shock the middle classes. When Roland Barthes wrote “The Death of the Author,” his own authorship may still have been modelled on this anti-bourgeois attitude of the avant-garde, while being related to the French new novel’s anti-humanist reaction against the traditional norms of literary realism. Yet, as the demise of the *nouveau roman* since the 1970s shows, this has been a road not travelled by many.

Even the highly modern(ist), highly differentiated literary play with either the disappearance (Samuel Beckett) or the overly marked placement (Raymond Federman) of authorial traces in literary texts still partakes of the historical background of the performative, albeit compulsory, legitimation of communicative acts – until, with Blanchot, Barthes and Foucault, we arrive at the pathos of negation and dissolution. The incantations of the end of authorship and authorisation are yet another topos of modernity; they are the reverse of the medal which celebrated the author as the work’s god-like monarch.

When planning the RAP project, we chose to end our investigations in the early twentieth century, assuming that any authorship concept deconstructed by the modernist and postmodernist avantgardes must have been established beforehand (also assuming that their establishment was a more interesting process to analyse than their dismantling). According to *Marketing the Author* (Demoor 2004), modernist authors proved most adept at creating authorial selves which would benefit their symbolic as well as their economic capital. However, we assume that, even today and in the future, questions of authorship – in many different guises, and subject to new technological and economic pressures – will continue to have a social and cultural impact.

One might speculate, then, why readers – most of them, anyway – are not satisfied with authorless writing and texts without authors? One possible answer is, obviously, the common-sense notion that texts do not simply grow on trees but are produced – more often indeed than not – by real people in real-life conditions, and the intentions of these people and the influence of these concrete situations of writing cannot *not* matter, at least occasionally, so there is no good reason to ignore them if, in doing literary and cultural studies, we can avail ourselves of sufficient information about these. There is no reason to dogmatically exclude information that is accessible for the understanding of texts.

Another possible answer is related to the *author function*: in this respect, the author as a construct serves as a kind of coping device that helps readers to cushion the (potentially negative) effects of new media configurations. It is a coping device in two senses: quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative: it becomes increasingly important at a time when written and printed communication is increasingly dif-

difficult to manage, because of its sheer quantity (an argument made very strongly for the eighteenth century in Siskin 1999; cf. Maruca 2007). And qualitative, because authors also function as “focusing agent[s] for the precarious coherence of a literary text” (Eibl 1999, 59; our translation). In other words, readers cannot bear the insecure referentiality of texts, especially those texts usually perceived as literary. It is therefore necessary to establish a symbolic ‘contingency filter’ to embody and absorb what Žižek calls “the irreducible excess of contingency over necessity” (1997, 134). The author is the institution to which this capacity of absorption is ascribed, within the framework of cultural performances or enactments – in, one would have to add, different and varying historical figurations.

The history of authorship could then be written as the history of its affirmed or contested validity and legitimacy, as a part of the history of communication. One would need to formulate extremely divergent Foucauldian systems of constraint (and enabling) in order to break up the somewhat one-sided fixation of one author function to one specific local and historical time segment (as Foucault does) and to avoid epistemological simplifications such as, for example, a linear teleology from premodernity via modernity to postmodernity.

## 5. Conclusion

Truisms may, after all, be true. Perhaps the internet and other contemporary media inaugurate a return to quasi-‘premodern’ forms of collectivising and anonymising knowledge. Perhaps the web’s quasi-spatial representation of knowledge resembles the old order of rhetorical *topoi* as indicators and aids to text production, if only in a more mobile and fluid manner, in the electronic form of links and tags. It is being claimed, time and again, that the internet and its de-authorised ‘hive mind’ are about to supersede the legal relics of copyright and authorship as individual creation, as if the net were the realised utopia of a freely circulating Barthesian *écriture*. It is true that, similar to ancient rhetoric and the visions of poststructuralism alike, information that is linkable to an identifiable source is less important on the web than the generation of new connections, through linkability and searchability: the centrifugal dispersal rather than a return to the source. Wikipedia’s ‘disambiguation’ pages are now gaining a similar function for the sorting of information that rhetorical *topoi* fulfilled in former ages. But, on the other hand, the worldwide debate about the Google Book Settlement illustrates that at least the continental legal notion of copyright as an author’s right (in contrast to British and US legal traditions) is not quite dead yet.

The *pathosformel* of the death of the author, used in a positive or negative sense, has become a rather trite commonplace in these effusions of cultural critique. The more interesting, more demanding problems lie elsewhere. One can realise rather quickly how, beyond a comparatively unproblematic everyday understanding of authorship, wide vistas of “highly problematic *ascriptions of functions* and a complex history” open up (Bogdal 1995, 273; our translation). Having bid farewell to radical modernist and postmodernist aphorisms, we are now at the point of

reevaluating authorship as a living absence, neither to be declared dead nor much further deconstructible. I think we should pay attention to what Google Books will ultimately do to, or mean for, authorship in Jaron Lanier's sense: the individual accountability for bits of information, the distinction between a text and its context, or between text as product or process (cf. Fitzpatrick 2011, 8-12). The concepts of individual creativity and of the work's aesthetic unity, as opposed to the disunity of the mashup, are hard to kill. The idea of the 'masterpiece' – and our yearning for masterpieces written and signed by identifiable individuals – is only too alive.

In order to explore authorship as cultural performance, what is needed is less a history of concepts or ideas than a history of discourses and media. In this – more systematic, but hopefully also more empirical – perspective, modern literary authorship (understood as a specific, and thus also specifically limited, set of performances) depends on a certain configuration of society, a certain medialisation of literary activities, certain technological developments, and certain discursive features like the increasingly relevant distinction between private and public domains of existence. These factors, taken together, form a cultural topography. In order to study authorship as cultural performance, then, it will be necessary to take into account the continuous interrelations and irritations between actual historical practices of writing and publishing on the one hand, and changing concepts of authorship on the other. We hope that the RAP project (and, as part of this undertaking, its online electronic journal *Authorship*, launched in 2011) will be a further step in this scholarly endeavour.

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