Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens and Marysa Demoor (eds.). 2019. *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, xii + 491 pp., 5 figures, £ 115.00.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2021-0038

After decades of lamenting or celebrating the author's death and his/her manifold resurrections, and after so many theoretical turns, one is prompted to ask if a (hand)book on authorship can be comprehensive and up-to-date, while still offering fresh perspectives: Beckett's notorious phrase "what does it matter who is speaking" (qtd. in Foucault 1984: 101)[1], quoted ubiquitously in this context since Foucault's seminal essay on authorship, still matters, but how? The trio of editors of this Cambridge Handbook confidently undertake a comprehensive volume on literary authorship, and the result is impressive. Choosing a post-Foucauldian entry to enquire why "texts and readers need authors", their volume, comprised of 27 chapters, addresses the long history of literary authorship from antiquity to

1 Foucault, Michel. 1984. "What Is an Author?" In: Michel Foucault. *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books. 101–120.

the digital present, along with its various entanglements with questions of authenticity, legal rights, copyright, institutional contexts and so forth. "[B]oth an activity and an ascription", authorship is understood here in manifold terms – from expressive creativity, or writing for publication, to control. As such, it continues to be "a crucial part of the literary field", and authors are "crucial anchor points for textual meaning" (7).

Laid out in three sections to offer historical, systematic and practical perspectives, the book sets out with chapters covering individual stages in the history of authorship from its beginnings in the ancient Mesopotamian written culture (Benjamin R. Foster), through ancient Egypt (Antonio Loprieno) and up to the postmodern and digital ages. To those who come from a background in modern Anglophone literature, perhaps informed by the poststructrualist debates on the author figure, or by more recent medial reconsiderations, the first chapters afford new insights far outside their own field. They offer informative yet highly readable overviews of very early instances of authorship, with glimpses of, for instance, "a clearly defined notion of individual inspiration and authorship" (23) in the 3000-year history of Mesopotamian culture to marvel at, or of the difficulty of inferring authorship from the colophon of an Egyptian papyrus.

The subsequent chapters continue to delineate authorship's long historical trajectory: authorship in Greece (Ruth Scodel) and Rome (Christian Badura and Melanie Möller) and in early Jewish Cultures (Mordechai Z. Cohen), in medieval English literature (Andrew Kraebel), the early modern period (Margaret J. M. Ezell), the eighteenth (Betty A. Schellenberg) and nineteenth centuries (Alexis Easley) with their respective transformations of copyright and the world of print to its modern industrialisation (Sean Latham), concluding with the postmodern (Hans Bertens) and digital periods (Adriaan van der Weel). If in sum these contributions appear to construct a familiar narrative of key stages and transitions from manuscript to print culture, seriality and digitality, they do so by very usefully combining knowlegable overview and specific examples, along with brief reviews of key concerns and paradigm shifts in scholarship. This design works well. Moreover, at key points in the story, the narrative renders a far more complex picture, highlighting, for instance, the simultaneities of manuscript and print authorship and the often ambivalent, if not outright hostile attitudes that authors such as Sidney, Donne or Pope took to print, or pointing out the importance of location and language in the narrative spread of print and the importance of coteries (Ezell, "Manuscript and Print Cultures 1500–1700"). Again, with respect to the professionalization of authorship in the eighteenth century, Schellenberg stresses the variability of its practices, "dependent on the values and situations of individual actors within different media economies" (134). If her choice of Samuel Johnson and Frances Burney for her "vignettes" (134) is an obvious one – both highly

self-conscious authors, the former choosing booksellers as quasi-patrons, the latter negotiating her own position amidst competing authorship models – it is still compelling. It is set against the emergence of a literary market in the wake of the lapse of the Licencing Act in 1695 and the proliferation of print and legal decisions on copyright, which, by granting the author legal personhood, eventually made possible the discourse of originality and genius, as well as the autonomy of the literary work, all culminating in Kantian aesthetics. Next to authors forming a "professional identity based on a sense of specialized skill and concomitant claims to remuneration and social recognition" (136), there are also translators, abridgers and compilers who come to the fore, as do booksellers.

Towards the endpoint of this long history, Hans Bertens' fine chapter on "Postmodernist Authorship" illuminates just how entangled authorship is with textualist literary theory, with the issue of representation and narrative strategies in fiction, also reminding us that the much-sung demise of the author never carried much popular impact; on the contrary, the 'return of biography' was certainly quick, signifying an enduring interest in the author as subject. Finally, digital technologies and social media have enabled the reader to turn 'prosumer', transforming authorship into "wreadership" (226). As van der Weel dignoses how Web 2.0 has "recalibrate[d] the power balance between author and reader", affording its "democratization", he sees the distinction between public and private as "one of the chief casualities" of this process (227–228).

Some of the issues covered in the historical survey, such as the 'death of the author' or postcolonial rewriting, are taken up again in the systematic chapters. Beginning with the role of the author in rhetoric and poetics (Kevin Dunn), they explore authorship in relation to genre (James Phelan) and literary theory (Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen), strategies of rewriting in postcolonial and indigenous authorship (Mita Banerjee), and gender and sexuality (Chantal Zabus). The third and practical section pursues another set of avenues, discussing how authorship informs and is informed by theories and practices of textual/philological work and editing (John Burrows and Hugh Craig, "Attribution"; Dirk Van Hulle, "Authorship and Scholarly Editing"), as well as by publishing and marketing (Andrew King). Authorship is placed in the "network of editors, publishers, distributors, book stores, reviewers, and universities" (Jason Puskar: 430); thus institutions as key actors come into play. Chapters on copyright (Daniel Cook), censorship (Trevor Ross), plagiarism – capital among the "crimes of writing" (354) – and forgery (Jack Lynch), complete the broad scope of this book.

While some overlapping and repetition (Barthes, Foucault, Beckett, copyright…) is inevitable given the overall design, the contributions work well by themselves and in interaction with the long historical perspective offered in the first part, teaching or reminding us, for instance, how and why the heydays of

rhetoric and authorship "have very little overlap" (238), and, above all, about the fluidity of the notion of authorship, its broad range of forms in so many ways.

Laudably, the historical survey extends to a chapter on Chinese authorship (Kang-i Sun Chang), which makes for fascinating reading with its long perspective on problems of authorship and timing in ancient Confucian texts, the primacy of oral authorship, the author's link to the experience of misfortune and so forth. As the early role of biography and biographical readings is explained here so lucidly, one wishes that this had been explored further in other contributions, too. (Christian Badura and Melanie Möller also write about the "drive for biographical knowledge" (67) informing Augustan Rome textual criticism.)

Indeed, as Sun Chang's illuminating account transcends the focus beyond the bounds of Antiquity and English literature, it inevitably draws attention to what is not included in this handbook. While the editors acknowledge its "obvious geographical and cultural limitations" (4), what is a little puzzling is the absence of seminal non-English European concepts and theorists: when speaking of the author in literary theory, for instance, a mention of Dilthey's influential hermeneutics, or Jean Starobinski, would not have been amiss. As it moves into modernity, the handbook (with a few exceptions) features a specific focus, or bias, on English literature, which is perfectly acceptable und perhaps necessary in terms of coherence, but renders it less global in scope than the editors aim at. Still, this handbook is a remarkable feat. Its contributions allow highly informative, at times compelling reading by themselves and in interaction; at the same time, the first part also works as a very satisfactory history of authorship.