CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor

Why do texts and readers need authors? Why is "authorship talk" so prevalent in literary conversations – whether at book fairs, book clubs, or readers' groups, in literary magazines, newspapers, university seminars, or social media? These questions may seem absurd, at least to those who are blissfully unaware of, or have happily moved on from, twentieth-century debates about "the intentional fallacy," "the death of the author," or indeed his or her "return."[1] But, as we hope to show in this handbook, these questions have a relevance for literary studies that transcends the theory wars of the past or the narrow confines of the discipline itself. They are – or should be – central to the field if only because questions of authorship are of great popular interest, given the media attention devoted to, for instance, celebrity authors and the size of their advances, accusations of plagiarism, the gender of an anonymous author, or the Shakespeare authorship cottage industry.[2]

We Call upon the Author to Explain

Perhaps, first and foremost, "we call upon the author to explain," as a Nick Cave song has it.[3] Fittingly, Cave leaves unspecified what exactly needs to be explained, and who is supposed to do the explaining, the author or "we" – presumably, readers and critics who invoke the author to justify how they make sense of textual meanings, or indeed of ambiguities such as the one contained in this very phrase. The song touches on various aspects of authorship, ranging from the author as a figure of explanation to one of authority and responsibility not only in literary but also in economic and legal terms. For example, it refers to God as the ultimate "author" responsible for an imperfect creation, but it also compares a trio of male American literary heavyweights (Bukowski, Berryman, and Hemingway) and quotes an unattributed line from Wallace Stevens's poem "Dry Loaf," thus implicating another American poet in the lyrics. The song also comments

on literary publishing and on an author's or editor's task of revising the "prolix" effusions of authorial expression: "Prolix! Prolix! Nothing a pair of scissors can't fix!"[4]

Despite, or perhaps because of, its ironic and self-referential manner, this song provides a useful starting point to this handbook, since it may serve as a reminder of some of the many aspects involved in the term "authorship," or more narrowly and specifically, "literary authorship." To explicate but a few, literary authorship can be or has been understood, among other things, as:

- the practice or activity of (literary) writing, especially of writing for publication;
- a creative activity shaping not only words but also turning the author's life into an artistic experiment that (re-)shapes both life and work, style and man; a romantic but also classical Roman notion of authorship (see Christian Badura and Melanie Möller's chapter "Authorship in Classical Rome");
- a form of textual control that involves cutting and taking away as well as adding: something a pair of scissors can fix; editorial and censorship practices that shape an author's work and/or image in the field of production and reception (see Trevor Ross's chapter "Censorship");
- a complex of values and moral rights associated with individual creative acts in literature, such as responsibility, authority, sincerity, authenticity, which entail certain legal rights and obligations, as mandated by copyright and libel laws, such as rules for quotation and acknowledgment (see Jack Lynch's chapter "Plagiarism and Forgery," Alexis Easley's chapter "The Nineteenth Century," and Daniel Cook's chapter "Copyright and Literary Property").

Since all of these aspects are interlinked and historically and culturally complex, it is perhaps impossible to unite them into a single, coherent narrative – as in "the history of literary authorship" – or a unified "theory of literary authorship." It is easier to dismiss authorship talk entirely from literary studies and just focus on texts or readers, as the New Criticism and reader-response criticism tended to do (see Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's chapter "The Author in Literary Theory"), but this neglect leaves out an essential aspect of literature – its creation – and willfully reduces the scope of the field, leaving the study of literary creation and production to sociologists, with the exception of landmark studies such as Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, whose (all-male) major poets create by misreading and revising the work of their precursors, or Sandra Gilbert and

Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which revived interest in authorship by women.[5] Yet, since the turn of the millennium, there have been a number of important shifts and changes in the field of literary studies, as well as in literature itself, that have brought authors and authorship back into focus. For decades now, the "return of the author"[6] has been an undeniable phenomenon not only in literary studies, book history, and related disciplines but also in literature itself, in such practices as autofiction, for example, which closely links novelistic narrative with the author's personal life, as in Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* (1997), Dave Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), or Karl Ove Knausgård's *Min Kamp* (2009–2011) (see Hans Bertens's chapter "Postmodernist Authorship"). The revelation of the (putative) real name behind the pseudonym "Elena Ferrante" and the media storm surrounding this journalistic scoop, in 2016, showed again that there is a deep-seated public desire to relate the work of a writer to that writer's identity, age, gender, and her/his life story; also, perhaps, that women writers, even in the twenty-first century, are often denied the privileges of anonymity, privacy, and impersonality – that most modern of literary credos – that the wider public ungrudgingly grants to their male colleagues (see also Robert J. Griffin's chapter "Anonymity and Pseudonymity" and John Burrows and Hugh Craig's chapter "Attribution").

After decades of neglect and poststructuralist posturing about the "death" or, at the very least, utter irrelevance of the author as a critical concept, authors have returned to the focus of attention not only of readers – who never relinquished their attachment to authors, real or imagined – but also of professional critics and scholars. This is not an uncritical return to biographical criticism or to the much-disputed "implied author" of Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*,[7] nor a backlash against reader-response theory or deconstruction so as to reinvest interpretative authority in the author. The rise of what one might call "authorship studies" in recent decades is not merely driven by the common-sense notion that texts require somebody (or, indeed, some machine) to write them. It is, rather, part of a wider development in literary studies to take into account not only texts and readers but also authors among other agents within what Robert Darnton has called "the communications circuit."[8] This development builds on recent trends in a range of fields and subfields: actor-network theory; attribution studies and stylistics; bibliography and textual studies; book history; periodical studies; cultural archaeology and cultural memory studies; gender and sexuality studies; literary sociology; narratology; the New Historicism; the New

Materialism; media history; performance and performativity studies; rhetoric; new methodologies of research made possible by databases, personal computers, and the Internet; to name but the most obvious ones.[9]

If these new "authorship studies" for the twenty-first century are as yet vaguely defined, the present volume sets out to present a – somewhat selective – survey of historical, systematic, and practical perspectives on literary authorship on which to build future inquiries. Even with the generous space granted in this handbook, it is not possible to cover all the aspects and perspectives of this burgeoning field of research. Despite its broad historical range, from about 3000 BCE to the contemporary world, and its disciplinary plurality, from Chinese studies to digital media studies, there were practical limits to what we were able to include, and – with some, we hope, notable exceptions – the focus is, by and large, Western and predominantly Anglophone. Nevertheless, the handbook's obvious geographical and cultural limitations should be understood not as arising from ignorance or willful neglect; the fact that we include a chapter on China, for instance, but none on India or Japan, is not meant to signal any judgment of relative importance on our part. Rather, these obvious lacunae should be viewed as invitations for future endeavors by *migliori fabbri.*

This introduction is not the place to delve into the long history of authorship concepts from antiquity to the present (which is the subject of the first part of this handbook), nor into the intricate and hard-fought battles about authorship in twentieth-century literary theory (these are examined in part two, especially in Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's chapter "The Author in Literary Theory and Theories of Literature"). Even less space is there for a precise definition of *literary* authorship – a term that might be even more contentious than authorship *per se*, especially in pre-modern contexts. The adjective is there because without it, the term "authorship" would have a much wider remit, a conceptual horizon – or conceptual baggage – that is frequently evoked in discussions of literary authorship but that would have led us too far away from our principal interest in literature. For the "author" in a broader sense of "original creator," some languages have a special term, such as the German *Urheber*, whereas the literary "author" can also carry a narrower meaning and just be a synonym for "writer" (*écrivain, Schriftsteller, scrittore,* писатель, etc., vs. *auteur, Autor, autore,* автор). "Literary authorship," then, should be understood as limiting authorship to the literary field, however culturally and historically defined, and as invoking an area of social practice as well as scholarly study in which authorship, more or less sharply defined, figures strongly in various forms and meanings and in

connection with related and contrasting terms such as writer, poet, playwright, novelist, scribe, hack, agent, editor, publisher, ghostwriter, translator, commentator, plagiarist, secretary, biographer.

Nothing a Pair of Scissors Can't Fix

Summing up the debates about authorship in literary studies, mostly in the twentieth century, Peter Lamarque makes a useful distinction between three major conceptions of literary authorship:

- contextualism (connecting a work essentially to its author: in this view, it really makes a difference if you know who the real Elena Ferrante is);
- institutionalism (defining literature as a practice with norms and conventions that define what readers and authors are and do); and
- expressivism (regarding an author's intention as the ultimate authority over textual meaning).[10]

The New Critics famously denounced the cult of personality surrounding authors. Although they acknowledged the fact that "a poem does not come into existence by accident"[11] (see Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's chapter "The Author in Literary Theory and Theories of Literature"), they effectively cut off a long-standing Romantic tradition of the poet as genius or "sage"; genius, as defined by Kant, meaning "the exemplary originality of the natural endowments of an individual in the *free* employment of his cognitive faculties."[12] The works of a genius, according to this eighteenth-century definition, are not the result of an imitation but an object of emulation, whose purpose is to wake up other, later geniuses, according to Kant. Since the Romantics, this has developed into the expressivist theory of authorship that closely relates authors' lives to their works. As Lamarque shows, there are numerous problems with this view, not least in "the paradoxes of inspiration and expression":[13] is the poem that derives from inspiration the experience that the poet has before writing it down, so that the written text is only a copy of the experience, or is the linguistic expression identical to the poet's inspiration, and thus something given to the poet by a higher power than his/her "own voice," not an act of self-expression at all? In that case, "genius" would be defined as heteronomous rather than autonomous, and characterized by "impersonality" rather than a unique and original personality.[14]

These questions also then extend to the concept of style in literature; is style an expression of the author's personality or rather a social (and political) relation, determined as much by social circumstances such as

class, gender, and education as by something as difficult to pinpoint as "personality"?[15] Finally, debates about intentionalism and anti-intentionalism pivot on the question whether literary works can, as it were, speak for themselves or should, must, or must never be related to what the author (might have) intended. These questions affect not only literary theory but also critical understandings of attribution studies and textual editing (see John Burrows and Hugh Craig's chapter "Attribution" and Dirk Van Hulle's chapter "Authorship and Scholarly Editing") as well as wider social conceptions of reading and writing, the issue of censorship, and the intricacies of literary publishing and marketing (see Jason Puskar's chapter "Institutions: Writing and Reading," Trevor Ross's chapter "Censorship," and Andrew King's chapter "Publishing and Marketing"). After the poststructuralist deflation of the expressivist concept of the author-genius, more modest recent authorial self-descriptions are eager to resist the honorific implications of the term "author." As the novelist Tom McCarthy professes, "an author is more like a by- or waste-product of the work, and of literature in general."[16] Yet such a view ignores the fact that there is now an industry concerned with the marketing of "name-economy" authors as media products, hosting professional author websites and creating social media "buzz" to generate maximum profit.[17] The social and economic conditions of how authors are made invite closer analysis and contextualization, including the question whether writers whose work – for whatever reason – is not published should count as authors.

These ramifications should make clear that literary authorship, whether as a privileged origin or a "waste-product" of literature, cannot be understood outside of larger institutional settings in which literary writing and its dissemination among readers are situated. This is the domain of reader-response criticism, for example, as in Stanley Fish's idea of "interpretive communities" that determine textual meanings,[18] but also the context of literary history and book history. These wider contexts allow us to view literary authorship under at least two different aspects: as an *activity* (something that writers do) and as an *ascription* (something that writers are thought to do or to be). To perform authorship means to write as an author, certainly, but this is more than a mere tautology – it also means to follow certain rules or protocols that define authorship. This notion of "performativity" derives from speech act theory and cultural studies and is inspired by Judith Butler's description of social protocols shaping gender and sexual identity.[19] In other words, authors are, to some extent, free to follow or ignore these protocols, but when it comes to the field transition

from writing to publishing, they ignore them at their peril. Even though writers commonly – if not exclusively – write alone, this powerful myth of authorial individuality, loneliness, and freedom obscures a common reality of social bonds and connections, educational and collegial support networks, and the power of audience and market expectations.[20]

There are interesting limit cases of authorship, when a writer's work is published posthumously or is continued by other writers, in the form of sequels, prequels, or fan fiction (e.g., Stieg Larsson), or cases where authors stop writing or publishing during their lifetime while their status as authors remains unchanged or their reputation actually grows because of the "mystery" of their silence (e.g., J. D. Salinger or Wolfgang Koeppen). Such cases illustrate the fact that authorship and the act of writing, although necessarily related, are not identical and should not be confused.

As both an activity and an ascription, authorship is a crucial part of the literary field, and it would be difficult to imagine literary studies without a concept, or concepts, of authorship. Hence it is not merely worthwhile but imperative for scholars of literature to think as systematically about authors and authorship as they have thought, and are still thinking, about readers and reading, and about texts and their various contexts. For literary studies, authors are more than merely providers of one more (biographical) context for a poem, play, or novel. They serve as crucial anchor points for textual meaning, if only to exclude historically impossible meanings in interpretation (because a particular reading would not have been available during the author's lifetime)[21] or to locate a text within a particular period or cultural moment (as is common practice, for instance, in the New Historicism) or in an author's nationality, race, or gender (see Mita Banerjee's chapter "Postcolonial and Indigenous Authorship" and Chantal Zabus's chapter "Gender, Sexuality, and the Author: Five Phases of Authorship from the Renaissance to the Twenty-First Century"). The ways in which authors are invoked and the purposes they serve in more or less institutionalized and formalized, culture- and class-specific routines and conventions, still remain underexplored.

Finally, the choices made by authors (or the choices they ascribe to themselves or that others ascribe to them) also depend on media-historical configurations: orality or literacy, clay tablet or papyrus, manuscript or print or digital text, book or periodical. They depend, not least, on available literary forms. As Raymond Williams reminds us, "anyone who has carefully observed his [*sic*] 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."[22] Literary genres have their own protocols of authorial performativity, throwing into relief the manifold ways in which literary creation is enabled and constrained by existing media and publishing formats, forms, and formulae (see, amongst others, James Phelan's chapter on "Authors, Genres, and Audiences"). Finally, while authors may have (good) intentions, they cannot control what others (editors, publishers, readers' groups) will make of their texts, and they have few or no opportunities to determine where their texts will be placed in the fields of production and reception: drawer or award, backlist or bestseller list, oblivion or canon.

Expressivism, contextualism, and institutionalism as the three major strands of conceptualizing literary authorship are all, explicitly or implicitly, covered and questioned in the contributions to this volume. Their historical roots are laid open in part one; their systematic implications for literary theory and criticism are explored in part two; and their practical effects in the fields of production and reception are discussed in part three. This handbook attempts, in its first part, to map something akin to a global cultural history of the conditions that, in different circumstances, determine how writers become – or are turned into – authors; how this origin of textuality, the "zero point" of literary communication,[23] has been envisaged, understood, and constrained throughout history. The second part presents established and emerging systematic perspectives on this much-contested category of literary discourse, from rhetoric and poetics to feminist and postcolonial criticism. The third part engages with a set of concepts and problems relating to authorship in literary and scholarly practice, ranging from new methods in authorship attribution studies (computer stylistics) and scholarly textual editing to questions of publishing and marketing that influence how literary authorship "works." Authorship may well be a key category in literary creation, but it also plays – or assumptions about it play – a central role in the fields of production and reception, from antiquity to the present and, it is safe to say, the future.

Notes

1. W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3–20; Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1967), in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142–48; Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

2. See James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).
3. Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, "We Call Upon the Author," from the album *Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!,* Mute, 2008.
4. Lyrics as published on www.nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/dig-lazarus-dig/call-upon-author/; all caps changed to lowercase letters and number of exclamation points reduced. Last accessed 4 January 2018.
5. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). For an impressive sociological study of the "life cycle" of a novel from creation to reception, see Clayton Childress, *Under the Cover: The Creation, Production and Reception of a Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), on authorship and authorial careers in the US in particular pp. 17–58.
6. Burke, *Death and Return*; see also Fotis Jannidis et al., eds., *Rückkehr des Autors: Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999).
7. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, eds., *The Implied Author: Concept and Controversy*, trans. Alastair Matthews (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).
8. Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?," *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), 65–83.
9. For a more ambitious systematic outline, see Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor, "Authorship as Cultural Performance: New Perspectives in Authorship Studies," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 60.1 (2012), 5–29.
10. Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 84–85.
11. Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Intentional Fallacy," p. 4.
12. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §49, quoted in Lamarque, *Philosophy*, p. 87.
13. Lamarque, *Philosophy*, p. 96.
14. On the formative impact of genius discourse in Europe around 1800, see the landmark essay by Martha Woodmansee, "The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author'," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17.4 (1984), 425–48, and Betty Schellenberg's chapter "The Eighteenth Century" within this volume. See also Christine Haynes, "Reassessing 'Genius' in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline," *Book History*, 8 (2005), 287–320.
15. On style as a personal quality – predating, in effect, Buffon's *le style c'est l'homme* – in antiquity, see Christian Badura and Melanie Möller's chapter "Authorship in Classical Rome" within this volume. On style as social relation, see Daniel Hartley, *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

16. Tom McCarthy, "Foreword: On Being the Subject of a Conference or, What Do I Know?", in *Tom McCarthy: Critical Essays*, ed. Dennis Duncan (Canterbury, UK: Gylphi, 2016), pp. 1–2, p. 2.
17. The term "name economy" derives from Brian Moeran, "Celebrities and the Name Economy," *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 22 (2003), 299–324. Cf. Childress, *Under the Cover*, p. 42 for the example of bestselling author James Patterson, who has "a stable of about twenty-five coauthors" and "a sixteen-person team solely dedicated to him at his publisher," allowing him to release as many as eighteen books in a single year (2015).
18. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
19. See, for example, the chapter on Butler in James Loxley, *Performativity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 112–138; for a more extended application of performativity theory to authorship studies, see Berensmeyer, Buelens, and Demoor, "Authorship as Cultural Performance." For a related study of (contemporary) authorial performance, inspired by Erika Fischer-Lichte's "aesthetics of the performative," see Sonja Longolius, *Performing Authorship: Strategies of "Becoming an Author" in the Works of Paul Auster, Candice Breitz, Sophie Calle, and Jonathan Safran Foer* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), pp. 44–50.
20. Cf. Ernest Hemingway's Nobel Prize acceptance speech (1954), as quoted in Childress, *Under the Cover,* p. 17: "Writing, at its best, is a lonely life . . . for [an author] does his work alone, and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day." Childress rightly calls for a distinction to be made between "the physical act of writing" and "the broader practice" of writing that "snaps back and forth from the individual act [. . .] to the mutually constitutive creative actions that take place in social interactions" (p. 34). A modern institution that supports and conditions literary authorship is the university, in the form of creative writing programs; see Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
21. Cf. Carlos Spoerhase, *Autorschaft und Interpretation: Methodische Grundlagen einer philologischen Hermeneutik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).
22. Raymond Williams, "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment" (1980), in *The Raymond Williams Reader*, ed. John O. Higgins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 208–217, p. 216.
23. Wolfgang Iser, "Auktorialität: Die Nullstelle des Diskurses," in *Spielräume des auktorialen Diskurses*, eds. Ralph Kray and Klaus Städtke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), pp. 219–41. On the author as "zero," see also Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 64–91, p. 75.