

Editorial

In the introduction to his 1983 book *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, Jerome McGann discusses the 'Introductory Statement' produced in 1977 by the MLA Center for Scholarly Editions. The Statement contained the basic recommendations of traditional textual criticism, such as the identification and choice of copy-text, the importance to be attributed to the author's complete manuscript (or, subordinately, to the first printed copy), the emendation of erroneous readings, the incorporation of genuine authorial revisions and so on. All these editorial practices are traditionally directed towards the reconstruction of a text which reflects the final (and genuine) intentions of its author. McGann remarks that implicit in the Statement 'are ideas about the nature of literary production and textual authority which so emphasize the autonomy of the isolated author as to distort our theoretical grasp of the "mode of existence of a literary work of art" (a mode of existence which is fundamentally social rather than personal)' (8). He then completes the comment and outlines his editorial view as follows: 'These ideas are grounded in a Romantic conception of literary production, and they have a number of practical consequences for the way scholars are urged to edit texts and critics are urged to interpret them'. They are indeed 'also widespread in our literary culture, and since they go largely unexamined . . . , they continue to operate at the level of ideology' (9). The project of his book, he thus declares, is 'to develop a fully elaborated argument for a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority' (8). These statements were at the time revolutionary, for they contested a whole time-honoured tradition of scholarly editing, both American and European, in a way which appeared incompatible both with those studies and with centuries of strenuous attempts at reconstructing texts that would reflect their author's *genuine intentions*; and they obviously impinged on the idea of Author and of Author-function in an almost unprecedented way. *Almost* unprecedented, for the concept of authorial intention had already come under attack in a different but contiguous field: that of literary theory. Already in 1954, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley had dismantled that idea and exposed it as a 'fallacy': although not contesting the idea and ideology of authorship (an author is for them still an Author), they prepared the ground for American New Criticism and for the European *lignée* of theories which constituted one of the most controversial issues in twentieth-century literary, textual and philosophical theorizations. If, on the one hand, it is true that the twentieth-century theoretical drive has now exhausted its *élan vital* and remains as either a challenged or an embraced perspective in sophisticated critical essays, it is equally true that the issue of authorship, especially as regards particular cases, is once more gaining ground.

The preceding remarks, therefore, serve to explain why it was thought that a new interdisciplinary humanities journal should take its first steps by engaging in a discussion of authorship in general and by examining a number of different cases in which the issue of authorship is either problematic or particularly relevant in various fields: literature, the theatre, history, religious writing, the visual arts and certain practices of law-training.

The two essays which appear in the 'Theory and History' section of the present volume serve as an introduction to the general issue. Hans Gabler's contribution illustrates a textual scholar's point of view on the much debated problem of final authorial intentions and suggests an innovative perspective which shifts attention from the notion of 'Author' to that of 'Author function'; Dario Compagno's article deals with the same issue, but in a perspective which illustrates historically the important and intense philosophical debate which developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The essays which appear in the 'Case Studies' sections are devoted to particular activities in various spheres of 'invention'. Although *JEMS* is a journal of early modern studies, it was soon clear that the topic to be debated in this first issue needed a temporal expansion. Indeed it appears that, although it was only late in the development of European thought that the theme of authorship received specific and continuous theoretical attention, it had surfaced much earlier either as an individual claim or as the claim of a group or trade. In many European contexts, for instance, writing in the vernacular, especially on lofty subjects, was perceived as an abasement of the writer's authority; thus, already in the late Middle Ages (our *terminus a quo*), the issue seems to have been present in the consciousness of those writers who wanted to reach a wide, and not only male, readership, as argued in the essay by Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti. In this case, the writer's status as author and his right to dispense spiritual advice were asserted textually, by means, that is, of certain strategies which entitled the author to use the vernacular without losing authority.

The *terminus ad quem* has also been expanded because we felt that at least one case that evolved during the period when Authorship was first explicitly affirmed, both ideally and legally, must be included among the contexts surveyed. The essay by Bianca Del Villano deals with mid-to-late eighteenth-century adaptation, an issue that is much in fashion today, but which, in most cases, is not discussed in connection with the idea of authorship and originality. Del Villano's contribution explores how authorship was affected when the Neoclassic ideal of art as imitation was replaced by the (pre)Romantic ideal of art as originality, one that advocated the cause of the Unique Author.

In other contexts and through other forms of expression, the acknowledgement of authorship was obtained on the grounds of the actual value of the object produced. The case discussed in this volume by Corinne Lucas Fiorato shows how such craftsmen-artists as Benvenuto Cellini and Giorgio Vasari

negotiated their status as Authors on the basis of the priceless and unique (*inestimabile*) quality of their works; and how they found, in the context in which they worked, the support of a rapidly evolving market. Market interests were obviously a powerful drive also in the composition of texts for the theatre, both in England and Italy. The article by Janet Clare illustrates the contradictory situation in which the English playwrights of Shakespeare's time produced their texts. Two of the major writers of Elizabethan-Jacobean theatre, Jonson and Shakespeare, arguably embody two different attitudes towards the issue of authorship: extreme self-consciousness in the case of Jonson and apparent non-involvement in the case of Shakespeare. Clare's essay also discusses the connection between authorship and responsibility by raising the problem of censorship. Again in the field of theatre and drama, both in England and in Italy, Paola Pugliatti discusses certain 'authorless' activities which were considered ancillary either to the writing of well-made plays or to their actual performance: the various 'enplotting' activities, that is, the devising of *fabulae* (the most notorious are the *scenari* of the *commedia dell'arte*) as skeletons for further elaboration. 'Authorless' plot outlines, similar to the *scenari*, Carla Dente's essay argues, were also used as part of legal learning exercises in the Inns of Court. The essay, which endeavours to show mutual relationships between the practices of juridical training and theatre training, assumes that both practices, though belonging to different yet related discourses, adopted written 'scripts' and performance styles, which were meant to be used again on different occasions and with different aims. This hypothesis may open up, if further investigated, a new area of fruitful research.

The 'dispersal' and/or 'multiplication' of authorship is also observable in religious discourse, both Catholic and Protestant. Focusing on Italian and Spanish 'obedient writing', a widespread genre in the early modern Catholic world, Adelisa Malena's essay casts light on the complex relationships between the author/protagonist of the autobiographical report and the spiritual director who orders the report. Malena's conclusion questions the aptness of the contemporary concept of authorship as applied to early modern spiritual writings and argues for a more 'flexible' approach, one that combines and interconnects an *emic* and an *etic* perspective.

On similar lines, Donatella Pallotti's contribution draws attention to seventeenth-century English conversion narratives. After their first oral and public delivery, some of these reports were transcribed and published by the ministers of the church, who shaped them according to their own teaching and discipline. As the essay highlights, authorship in conversion narratives appears to be dispersed not only between the protagonist of the spiritual experience and the minister who re-presents it, but also within a close-knit community that influences their form and could eventually be held responsible for their contents.

The essays in the present collection, therefore, delve into models of authorship which involve different forms of collaboration. The discussion shows

how the construction and interpretation of authorship are closely related to a multiplicity of cultural and ideological factors. Power and commercial relationships, religious stance, 'systems of constraints', as well as practices of editorial and textual transmission, all contribute, in various forms and at various degrees, to the illustration of different ways in which historically authorship has been perceived and constructed. We hope that these essays will stimulate further treatment of such an important topic not only for our perception of our literary-artistic and cultural inheritance, but also for our understanding of new types of authorship associated with contemporary new media culture.

The 'Appendix' records some significant voices of writers and artists musing upon the construction of the authorial self, issues of poetics and, more generally, upon their creative endeavour.

As every author and/or editor knows, books can only be written, and collections of essays can only be compiled, with the help and encouragement of a community of friends and colleagues. We wish to thank the director of Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna, Beatrice Töttössy, for her unwavering commitment to making the creation of *JEMS* possible, and the Journal Manager, Arianna Antonielli, for her helpful cooperation, patience and good advice. We are also grateful to the students in the editorial team who assisted us in preparing the texts for publication. Special thanks go to Ilaria Sborgi and Margherita Versari for suggesting some engaging passages for the 'Authors on Authorship' section, and to John Denton for generously giving his time and attention.

Finally, the scholars whose essays appear in this first issue of *JEMS* have not only contributed insightful and nuanced studies but have been responsive and collegial throughout the process. Our thanks go to all of them.

Donatella Pallotti and Paola Pugliatti

Works Cited

- McGann Jerome (1984), *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Wimsatt W.K. and Monroe Beardsley (1954), 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Verbal Icon*, Lexington, Kentucky University Press, 3-18.