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LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHOR: MIHAI IOVĂNEL'S *HISTORY* AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN AUTHORSHIP STUDIES

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ABSTRACT. ***Literary Historiography and the Problem of the Author: Mihai Iovănel's* History *and Recent Developments in Authorship Studies.*** The present paper examines the dynamics between literary historiography and authorship studies and the way in which these problems related to Mihai Iovănel's recent *History*. Ciorogar argues that authorship theories have always determined the workings of canonicity. Furthermore, the metamorphoses of literary histories could be viewed, he insists, as a series of conceptual revolutions. Consequently, arguments related to authorship have given rise to both new fields of research and disciplines. Finally, Ciorogar also suggests that the evolution of literary criticism and theory is more or less coeval with the history of auctorial models.

Keywords: *authorship studies, literary history, criticism and theory, the death and return of the author, research methodologies, Mihai Iovănel*

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REZUMAT. ***Istoriografia literară și problema autorului:*** **Istoria *lui Mihai Iovănel și noi dezvoltări în studiile de auctorialitate*.** Lucrarea de față examinează dinamica relațiilor dintre istoriografia literară și studiile de auctorialitate, precum și modul în care aceste două problemă se raportează la recenta *Istorie* publicată de Mihai Iovănel. Teza principală e aceea conform căreia teoriile auctoriale ar determina modurile de funcționare a canonicității. Mai mult, metamorfozele istoriilor literare ar putea fi privite ca o serie de revoluții conceptuale. În consecință, argumentele și dezbaterile centrate în jurul conceptului de autor au dat naștere atât unor noi domenii de cercetare, cât și altor discipline. În cele din urmă, textul sugerează că evoluția criticii și a teoriei literare reprezintă, astfel, istoria modelelor auctoriale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *teorii auctoriale, istorie literară, critică și teorie, moartea și revenirea autorului, metodologii de cercetare, Mihai Iovănel*

One of the main directions of contemporary authorship studies could be described as a simple extension of the research hypotheses laid down by Michel Foucault in "What is an Author?" and, more precisely, as a historical reexamination of the changes that the author-function has undergone in different epochs and socio-political contexts. Whether we will ever live in an age in which literary culture will also function on other discursive criteria is difficult to predict; and after all, the focus of the present text lies elsewhere. In an age of crises, however, we know that today, more than ever, it matters who speaks. Texts are still circulating under the names of authors.

A second direction is represented by the reaction of academic discourses to the evacuation of a disciplinary field. Simply put, scholars who moved away from Foucault's directives migrated to the analysis of literary textuality, where they began to rediscover the signs of authorship. All studies devoted to scriptural figuration have, since then, attempted to reintroduce the question of authorship into the sphere of literary criticism by shifting the center of gravity. Since psychoanalysis and the developments of Saussurean linguistics and ideological criticism had shown that the author could no longer constitute the main object of study, researchers were forced to invent alternative solutions. This direction had been announced or prefigured, in fact, by Roland Barthes himself.

However, this second strand of the auctorial return includes a whole range of feminist, postcolonial, and ethnic studies (gender studies, queer, gay & lesbian studies). It should also be noted that both strands (the genealogy of the auctorial function, on the one hand, and the study of authorship as a text or as a turn of identity politics, on the other) took hold in the last decade of the twentieth century. Before going any further, however, one should remark that

the return of the author is not a phenomenon confined to the sphere of literary studies. Quite the contrary. I think the field that has benefited most from the renaissance of the authorial image is none other than the book industry itself (the proliferation of biographies, literary festivals, book fairs, launches, colloquia, conferences and debates; the whole mechanism of publicity, after all, but also private launches are all centered around the author).

To sum up, we have seen that the death of the author presupposed the criticism of the creative subject. The author's intentions had been exposed as fascist, and the author himself had become a mere element within more or less systematic coercive structures (ideological, discursive, unconscious, linguistic). In Barthesian terms, the author was being transformed into an interpreter of language. But the death of the author also imposed the disappearance of the older types of academic criticism (biographical, positivist, historical). The author was neither the source of the text, nor was he in a position to guarantee the ultimate meaning of the literary work. The writer was now caught up in the texture, the forces, the perspectives, the voices, the discourses, the relationships, the dynamics of the text. The author could no longer be thought of in any other way than a textual instance, as its effect or function. The author's position was unraveled, so to speak, in a multitude of processes of micro-subjectification. The death of the author, thus, led to his (re)birth as a fiction or a figure of the text, a figure devoid of any form of authority.

Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1990-2020)* is designed, first, to redefine the notion of contemporary literature itself. Secondly, I think, one should stress the importance of his novel methodology—a mix of (post)Marxist ideology critique and materialist speculations. In a world lit-type of approach, Iovănel rightly argues that the mobility of literary forms is a transgenerational type of movement and he finally points out that his taxonomy is both typological and historical. This amounts to the production of a book wanting to discuss the evolution of the Romanian literary system. However, he fittingly acknowledges this as a failure when admitting that

> I resorted to micro-monographs by a kind of didactic compromise with my initial project; I had long had in mind a strictly systematic history of contemporary literature, a kind of factory novel in which individual faces and voices appear as mere details in the general choreography configured by the movement and roar of gears.[2]

[2] "De altfel, am recurs la micromonografii printr-un soi de compromis didactic cu proiectul meu inițial; avusesem multă vreme în minte o istorie strict sistemică a literaturii contemporane, un fel de roman de uzină în care chipurile și vocile individuale apar ca simple detalii în coregrafia generală configurată de mișcarea și vuietul angrenajelor" (Iovănel, 2021, 12).

Moreover, his discourse—as the paragraph above also clearly shows—tends to become rather allegorical while mixing his metaphors: "a literary historian [...] cannot invoke the luxury of wandering at random or at will through the area of his object of research, picking up a stray object here and there" or "like any RPG game, however *free world* and open to exploration it may be, literary history retains a number of objective limitations given by the reality of its subject matter."[3]

The author's return likewise produced his commodification. After almost two decades devoted to the play of signifiers, a new series of scholars returned to the study of figurality or authorial iconography during the 1990s. It was from this nucleus that the more recent strands of research developed: celebrity studies, for instance, or the study of literary careers. What we are dealing with here is a case, a special case perhaps, in which academic study has, in fact, followed the path laid down by the book industry. We should not forget that the death of the author represents the culmination of the evolution of a concept that has always been subject to severe contestation: "situated at the boundary between the inside and the outside of the text, the authorial function is projected as the space in which various contradictory voices, positions and identities come into conflict" (Detering 2002, xvi).

In order to build a new investigative trail, the clichés of the field must first be clearly mapped. There are two areas from which the discipline's most commonplaces originate: poststructuralism, as we have seen, and hermeneutics. The principles of the two lines of thought are, of course, contradictory. What they have in common, however, is the fact that both discursive regimes agree on the idea that the author has the capacity to influence the attitudes we adopt towards texts; and secondly, that the creative individual is just one element of the literary context. If, for poststructuralism, the empirical subject has no relevance in the interpretative process, literary hermeneutics is interested in the recomposition of auctorial intentions.

However, as Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, Matias Martinez and Simone Winko rightly point out in the introduction to the volume *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*, even the methodology of philological research is determined by the author, in the sense that bibliographies and libraries utilize the names of writers as their ordering element. Moreover, societies, foundations, literary prizes, museums, and monuments are named after authors. Philological research is also

[3] "Un istoric literar, fie și el unul al literaturii contemporane (un concept prin excelență deschis, în curs de developare), nu poate invoca luxul de a se plimba la întâmplare sau după bunul plac prin zona obiectului său de cercetare, culegând de ici sau de colo câte un obiect rătăcit [...] Ca orice joc de tip RPG, oricât de free world și deschis explorărilor ar fi acesta, istoria literară păstrează o serie de limitări obiective date de realitatea obiectului său" (Iovănel 2021, 12-13).

based on the design of critical editions, volumes of correspondence or biographies centered around the same creative subjects (Jannidis 2009, 7-8). We also know that the methods of history and biographical criticism were also formed around the authorial figure. Of course, the role of the empirical author in the interpretation of texts depends on the nature of the biographical information and the way it is used, but the development of literary theory has shown that deriving the final meaning of a work (only) through or with the help of empirical data remains impossible. Equally absurd, however, has been the scope of deconstructivists to eliminate the role of agency from literary studies. The literary history of auctorial theories could therefore be understood as a series of small methodological revolutions in literary studies.

Thus, we can say that, against biographism, hermeneutical positions have sought a middle way between life and text. Friedrich Schleiermacher spoke of the conscious or unconscious intentions of the empirical author. Whichever it was, it had to be reconstructed in order to understand the text: this could just as well be concrete biographical data or simple statements (Jannidis 2009, 12). Let us also recall Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of the 'author's experience' which is then reflected in the work. Against hermeneutics, psychoanalytic criticism starts from the presupposition that the unconscious mechanisms of the author's psyche exert an influence on the creative process, which is why the method seeks to unearth the unconscious springs behind any textual approach. With Sartre, finally, phenomenological existentialism showed that more important than the author's unconscious is the writer's ideological positioning and the relationship he or she has with the world and the reading public (Jannidis 2009, 12-13). I will not be discussing those positions that presuppose an articulation of phenomenological hermeneutics with Marxist or formalist criticism because they have had (almost) no impact on the development of authorship studies. However, two conclusions are worth drawing from the volume edited by Fotis Jannidis: reading will always consider the existence of an author, determining, to some extent, the interpretation, just as the authorial reference does not (or should not) discredit the interpretative approach (Jannidis, 24-25).

After the experience of postmodernity, identity can no longer be thought of outside of performativity. Least of all, the auctorial one. In order to adapt to extremely unstable times, "performance" identities are nowadays rapidly changing, combining different registers and media, as Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema rightly observe in *Identity Trouble* (Caldas-Coulthard 2008, 1). Whether we place it in the framework of "liquid modernity" (Zygmunt Bauman) or in the realm of Peter Sloterdijk's foams, the identity crisis nevertheless arises from the need to constantly reinvent, redefining the nature of the creative subject through dynamism, fluidity, and complexity. By bringing together meanings, resources, affects, events, and existential regimes,

the identity of the auctorial subject is constantly multiplied (Caldas-Coulthard 2008, 2-5). Articulated somewhere on the borderline between the social dimension and phenomenological experience, identity is not only relational but also multimodal (Caldas-Coulthard, 6). Iovănel himself defines postmodernism as a form of meta-realism and meta-fiction (Iovănel 2021, 357, 399). Furthermore, in Romanian literary history, Iovănel writes,

> the 80s model was constructed through the conceptual network of realism-narrativism-biographism-authenticism-transitivity-contingency-urbanism-postmodernism, as opposed to the metaphysical-metaphorism-archaicism ruralism-(neo)modernism.[4]

Coming back to it, we can, therefore, only fix the ambiguities of the concept of author. To that end, I would like to list some of the most important dichotomies that characterize the functioning of authorship: 1) genius vs. craft, 2) autonomy vs. heteronomy, 3) undermining vs. subversion, 4) singularity vs. multiplicity, 5) celebrity vs. anonymity, 6) authenticity vs. falsity, 7) presence vs. absence, 8) authority vs. inferiority. These are not exclusionary terms. It would be more appropriate, therefore, to say that they indicate the existence of a plurimodal auctorial spectrum. The authorial idea can never be identified, so to speak, in its pure state. The ambivalence, hermeticism, imprecision or uncertainty of authorship will always be 'performed' through or with the help of these eight (8) categories. Theoretically speaking, the author is regarded as irrelevant in the interpretative process. We have also seen that other branches of the literary field still use the term. This means that there is a huge discrepancy between the image of the author within literary theory and the status that the author continually maintains in the practice of literary criticism (Claassen 2012, 2).

To explain the process of literary comprehension, Eefje Claassen articulates the methods of cognitive psychology with the tools of literary theory. The death of the author, she is right to note, functions as a slogan for various theoretical positions that dispute the role of the author in literary interpretation (Claassen, 3-4). In order to counter normative acceptances of the author's role in literary readings, the theorist simply presents the results of empirical research on readers' auctorial representations.

But I would like to qualify some of Claassen's comments. When an interpretative or contextualizing error (some would say it is basically the same thing) is repeated enough times, you begin to wonder if there is some form of

[4] "Modelul optzecist a fost construit prin rețeaua conceptuală realism-narativism-biografism-autenticism-tranzitivitate-contingență-urbanism-postmodernism, opusă rețelei șaizeciste metafizică-metaforism-arhaicitate-ruralism-(neo)modernism" (Iovănel 2021, 496).

truth in the inadvertence. Thus, the "death of the author" is not just an anti-authoritarian or anti-patriarchal struggle. It is true that the gesture is, politically speaking, directed against bourgeois ideology, but, as we know, the essay cannot be objectively linked to the social context of counter-cultural movements. "The Death of the Author" has little or nothing to do with the "May '68" moment (as we know, the essay was published a year earlier in an American magazine). But, nevertheless, I cannot disagree with the idea that these are the (false) reasons why Barthes' intervention became the most influential text in the theoretical debates of the time. In other words, it may be that it was precisely this false and allegorical interpretation that contributed to the text's erroneous contextualization.

I will not dwell on Foucault's text because, unlike the Barthesian one, the significance of the auctorial function has been well understood by almost all the commentators involved in this debate. However, Claassen turns out to be, in fact, a very subtle analyst of the anti-intentionalist problem. She demonstrates, in other words, that the two representatives of the *New American Criticism* (Wimsatt and Beardsley) had a problem not so much with interpretation per se, but with the evaluation of literary works. Going further, however, it should be noted that what is fascinating about cognitive literary criticism is that the perspective manages to analyze, almost simultaneously, all three elements of the communicative relationship (author, text, and reader). However, this observation can be turned into a kind of main accusation. In other words, cognitive criticism can only think about the phenomenon of authorship through the eyes of the reader and the reading activity. In this way, the author loses ontological consistency. Moreover, Claassen does not seem at all interested in analyzing the conditions of existence that ensure the status of the author (neither in the literary field nor in the creative industries). Its existence or the need for its existence is simply assumed.

Paradoxically, the implied author has contributed, as Claassen rightly observes, to the diminished importance of the author in the interpretative process. The author is created either by the author himself, by the structure of the text, or by the professional reader. The concept remains, as we shall see, problematic. There are plenty of alternative suggestions. I will mention here only a few such solutions: empirical author, textual intention, inferred author, postulated author, hypothetical author, or constructed author. A crucial observation, however, would be the following: Claassen shows that, instead of proposing neutral descriptions of phenomena, anti-author theories turn out to be, without exception, normative (Claassen 2012, 10-13).

On the other hand, the author's return includes an entire series of new methodological directions. Perhaps one of the best known remains the so-called "persona criticism" developed by Cheryl Walker (1991). There are, however, reactions or directions in feminist literary criticism that, starting from the same phenomenon of the "death of the author", have chosen to ignore the said normative

requirement. Claassen claims that "the death of the author and its implications have not stopped feminist or postcolonial criticism from examining the identity, gender and ethnicity of authors" (2012, 15-16). Quite on the contrary, "the author functions as a category for valuing literary works" (16).

Thanks to developments in digital technologies and new social networks, authors can today not only express their intentions directly, but also influence the reception of their texts (Claassen 2012, 22-23). It would seem that things are quite clear: on the role of authorship, says Claassen, literary studies are still on the side of the death of the author, while other areas of the literary field act as if the author were still alive (34). I do not think, however, that things can be simplified so easily, because, as we shall see, there is a whole series of investigations interested precisely in examining the "vivacity" of this auctorial figure: literary celebrity studies and the francophone preoccupation with posturality, for instance.

However, Claassen succeeds in demonstrating that the author is one of the elements that structures the process of reading literature. Specifically, she points out that "empirical investigation says that even when readers have absolutely no information about the actual author, they still project a mental image of a person who has written a text for a purpose" (2012, 211). When the empirical author is implied (and identified), however, there seem to be only three elements that make up this figure: aspects of identity, presumed intentions, and moral stance (219). Even if readers construct mental images of authors, this does not tell us much about the interpretive process.

Reading is not synonymous, however, with exegesis. The implicit author image is affected if and when the reader receives information about the empirical author. I would also note that the implicit author is closely linked to the empirical author: "after all, it is the empirical author who wrote the text from which the reader constructs the image of the implicit author" (Claassen 2012, 221). If you juxtapose, metaphorically speaking, a whole series of implicit authors, the reader arrives, writes Claassen, at what Foucault called the function of the author (223). The difference would be, however, that if the Foucauldian function had been constructed with the help of cultural-legal skeletons, the chain of implied authors remains the result of the links that the reader establishes between different texts—a conglomeration, then, of abstract figures.

An excellent dramatization of the genealogy of the concept of authority and its relation to the idea of authorship is exemplarily summarized in the following paragraph:

> in short, the development of authorial authority starts from that of the Roman poet whose personal and initiatory authority was actual, goes through the medieval author who is authorized by God to speak with

> authority and the author's extraordinary prestige as a genius in the Romantic-modern period, and reaches the ever-decreasing social authority of the modern author in the twentieth century. (Donovan 2008, 8)

Literary property rights, for example, are in an extremely close relationship with the cultural constructs of authorship, which in turn are based on the ideas of originality, creativity, uniqueness, and inspiration. Deconstructing the idea of genius has led to an examination of the economic-political practices and institutions that contributed, in concrete terms, to the crystallization of the concept of romantic authorship (Donovan 2008, 9). I find it interesting to note that the editors very succinctly contextualize the issue of the emergence of the theories signed by Barthes and Foucault. The whole atmosphere of the 1950s, they go on to write, was dominated by the anti-authoritarian currents broadly associated with the 'New Left' (Herbert Marcuse being their main representative) (Donovan 2008, 10). Even more fascinatingly, the anti-authoritarian efforts of the American New Criticism are also relativized by problematizing other historical examples: Russian formalism or pre-structuralist narratology (11).

The difference between the two great discourses oriented against the intentions of the creative subject is superbly rendered here: if the anti-authoring stake of the formalists had methodological consequences, the representatives of the theory of the "death of the author" were interested in issues of a more philosophical nature (Donovan 2008, 12). What most scholarship in this field lacks, however, is an awareness that these debates should nevertheless be overcome. The anti-authorial discourse is countered by many other parts of the literary field (the issue of critical editions, organizations, prizes, platforms), but also by the metamorphoses of recent literary sociology. They identify the need to sketch answers to the questions generated by new developments in information technologies: "even if these questions seem urgent, they are not really new" (Donovan, 13). It remains, however, simply prolix for critics such as Jeremy Hawthorn to attempt to demonstrate that anti-auctorial poststructuralism could find many opponents, even if he is right to observe that if Barthes simply wanted to reinvent the auctorial figure, Foucault had established a much subtler (and, consequently, profitable) critique of the way it works (Hawthorn 2008, 72-73).

When the notion of authorship passed through the filter of literary theory, it was conceptualized in a negative sense. In other words, when the concept of authorship entered the field of literary theory, it was instantly removed from the sphere of literary criticism and history. Of course, the debate is somewhat more complicated because there has been talk of Theory's death since the 1980s, but it is clear that today that authorship is understood more in institutional terms. Not surprisingly, defined as a set of practices, authorship is

the subject of sociological, rhetorical (rhetoric should be understood here in a very broad sense: the set of mechanisms responsible for the production of images, figures, postures, styles) or pragmatic investigations.

The concept has been, in other words, relocated. From the narrow circle of criticism and literary history, the author moved—in the second half of the last century—into the ranks of theory, only to be redistributed in the 1990s into two other broad categories. It is, first, the success of cultural studies in having arrogated to itself the whole agenda of identity politics (postcolonialism and feminism, I repeat) and, second, the transformation of authorship into a textual property in a vast range of different fields (from narratology to iconography, most figural readings could be included in this category).

Michael Joyce is right: "authors have been replaced or relocated [...] which changes the way we measure the value of authorship and cultural production—that is, a change in the position that authorship occupies in relation to other social roles or functions" (Joyce 2008, 260). We already know that the hypertextual phenomenon has altered the status of authorship. Joyce suggests, in this sense, that authorship would have become modular. A commonplace of the current era is that, economically (and in a more or less Marxist understanding), information has replaced traditional capital (265). Authorship would thus be relocated in the ability of writers to recontextualize different information, to (re)modulate it.

A much more interesting approach, however, comes from the sphere of rhetoric. The title of Michelene Wandor's work is very suggestive in this respect: "The Author is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else." The author is not dead, he has simply been relocated. This thesis is interesting, I said, because the new space of authorship, Wandor suggests, would be none other than that of creative writing. The main thrust of her demonstration is to reveal the links between literary theory, on the one hand, and the practice of creative writing, on the other. Of course, the common denominator of the two discursive domains remains precisely that of authorship. Wandor begins with a brief summary of her career and education, only to declare that what interests her most—at least in this book—is the methodology and pedagogy behind creative writing courses. No great surprises: the critic is "convinced that creative writing must be historicized, theorized, problematized and ultimately reconceptualized" (2008, 4).

However, the cliché against which Wandor sets out to direct the book's entire demonstration seems more relevant. Namely, that theory would be somehow opposed to creative writing and, at the same time, that, against the theories of the sixties, the latter would have succeeded in (re)bringing the author back to life and into the text. The significance and fragility of the gesture lie in the fact that, while theory is certainly not opposed to creative writing, it

is not clear why the locus of authorship (of intentionality and subjectivity) would indeed be in the text. The discipline is defined, albeit ambiguously, in a fairly clear way and is somewhat reminiscent of Damrosch's rethinking of world literature: 'creative writing is a mode of imaginative thought' (Wandor 2008, 7). More complicated are the narratives that make up the necessary context or foundation for creative writing courses to have focused, in defiance of the anti-humanist tendencies of critical thought, on creative subjectivity (literacy, the liberalization and democratization of education and the educational system, post-war social developments, the emergence of cultural theory, ideological formations, and, finally, the emergence or consolidation of new pedagogical institutions) (6-7).

The establishment of creative writing courses was a step forward (perhaps the last) towards the full professionalization of writers. The characteristics of creative writing courses could be summarized as follows: on the one hand, they are concerned with the development of talent and genius in an aesthetic-vocational perspective that would have as its ultimate goal the growth of literary values; on the other hand, however, creative writing courses are also designed as educational interventions (whether in the field of teaching literature or simply in the cultural development of citizens). These two perspectives are both concerned with the cultivation of expressive capacities. Writing is conceived as one of the forms that learning or knowledge can take (Wandor 2008, 18). Wandor concludes: "the new discipline brought not only new methodologies to the seminar or workshop, but also the principle that art should be taught by experts - i.e. professional writers" (18-19). The movement, as one can easily see, is a democratic one.

Authors and the history of national literatures received canonical legitimacy only as a result of "the development of literary criticism, the principles and vocabulary that established the form of critical discourse" (Wandor2008, 33). Moreover, vernacular literatures had begun to be studied under the influence of philology. They had been reduced, in other words, to mere samples through which the curious could collect a whole range of knowledge about language. On American soil, literature had become, under the influence of Dewey's pragmatism, "a means of self-expression; literature was no longer a subject devoted to linguistic or historical examination, it had now become an element that could be involved in the process of self-development" (Wandor 2008, 37). In short, we can say, without exaggeration, that the strengthening of the professional status of writers was a more or less direct result of the articulation of the new principles of literary criticism with constructivist philosophy. Iovănel wrote his *History* as a direct reaction against this nationalistic outlook and frame. In the final chapter of his book, the critic

tries to reconstruct an international or, to be more precise, a transnational perspective on Romania.

Wandor reminds us that, when it was not oscillating between "pure science" or impressionism, literary criticism had been restricted, at least until the beginning of the 20th century, to a combination of paraphrase, biography, historicism, ethics and source-hunting (Wandor 2008, 38-39). Courses in creative writing were thus conceived both as an internal form of understanding literature and as a reaction to the older version of literary study. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that, in order to become an author, the individual enrolled in the creative writing course needed first to master all the concepts of literary criticism (42). Nor is it a secret that these were developed by I.A. Richards.

Less well known is the idea that Richards succeeded in combining the analytical philosophy of the time with Freudian psychoanalysis, anticipating, to a certain extent, the experiments of today's cognitive sciences (Wandor 2008, 46). It becomes clear, therefore, that the New Criticism was not, at least not entirely, oriented against the examination of auctorial intentions. Which demonstrates, however, that from Richards to F.R. Leavis, "practical criticism" (as the technique of close-reading had come to be called) was not entirely disinterested in the relevance of social contexts to exegesis or evaluation (see also the discussion of the importance of Heideggerian phenomenology and Diltheyan philosophy in relation to the development of F.R. Leavis's conceptions of the practice of literary criticism in Michael Bell, "F.R. Leavis: The Writer, Language, History" in Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 75-91). Wandor repeats the neo-Romantic creed that united Arnold, Eliot, Richards and Leavis around the civilizing power of literature. Namely, that the critical study of literature "had become the key to the revival of values destroyed by industrialization" (Wandor 2008, 49). In short, literary criticism represented, through the means of a rhetorical trick, an indictment of the principles that structure extra-literary activities.

Following in the footsteps of Gerald Graff, who in the early nineties proposed the study of the evolution of cultural conflicts as a solution to the inconsistency of educational reforms (see *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*, 1993), Wandor argues, without for a moment claiming to follow the precepts announced by the former MLA president, that for a better understanding of the transformations that literary studies has undergone we should problematize not so much the theoretical additions, but rather the dynamics of the polemics that have arisen between the attempts of some to dilute the text into a form of "literariness" and those of others to reinforce the ontological-autonomistic definition of the literary work (Wandor 2008, 76). In short, the relocation of authorship could be read as follows: the debates surrounding the death of the author that had taken place

in the field of literary theory had been concomitant with the institutionalization of the auctorial practices involved in any form of creative writing. The irony, Wandor demonstrates with eloquence, is that the birth of the idea of creative writing remains, after all, the result of the interrogations that literary theory has addressed to textual processualism (84).

The historical emergence or birth of the professional writer is, however, a separate issue. The emergence of manuals dedicated to authors and creative writing, the establishment of specialized organizations and the consolidation of literary property rights are just some of the most important elements that have led, since the beginning of the 20th century, to the formalization of the current status of writers. The logic of creative writing courses is in direct contradiction with the stabilization of authorial norms. This is because the former relies on the existence of a romantic concept that presupposes creativity, talent or genius on the part of writers, whereas the latter operates in an egalitarian and, above all, prescriptive sense (Wandor 2008, 106-107). The didactics of creative writing seems to be based on a series of more or less irrational obstacles. Pedagogues involved in this field are determined to make authorial identity the main source of creativity. However, it is not necessarily the conscious self that is at stake, but rather the authors' attempts to express themselves by renouncing the self. In other words, creative writing has been replaced, as Wandor demonstrates, either by the idea of expressing individual experiences or by the notion of literature as therapy (117).

There are at least two categories of books that are, at least in appearance, dedicated to the death of the author. These are, on the one hand, those that either extend the theory of the disappearance or absence of the creative subject, or those that counteract it. Those who simply ignore the relevance, implications, effects, or consequences of ideas linked to the names of Barthes and Foucault are simply maintaining a naive illusion. As is the case, for example, when she argues that "creative writing is based on a theory of reading that returns us to the complicated problem of intentionality and the idea that authorial intention could be recomposed as a result of reading" (Wandor 2008, 147). The observation remains symptomatic of the physiognomy of literary practice. The implication would be that any teaching in the sphere of creative writing is still dependent on the structure and dynamics of literary theory. In short, talent cannot be taught. This seems to be the conclusion, Wandor suggests, that we should draw if we were to consider most of the discipline's simile-theoretical contributions. The solution would therefore be to move from normative to descriptive criticism.

Creative writing courses are based on the ideas that have been blown away by anti-humanist criticism and theory. The death of the author has led, as

we already know, to the denigration of the concept of subjectivity and, just as importantly, the notion of intentionality. The author's return also means the refocusing of entire disciplines around the creative individual. Even if this is no longer about developing interpretive reading strategies or methods, creative writing courses have attempted to re-establish a kind of new poetics. In other words, it is not the critic who benefits here from the processes or effects of theorizing, but the writer. However, in order to reflect on the new condition of authorship, we need to investigate the circumstances of its disappearance.

The issue is that Wandor merely repeats Seán Burke's ideas (Burke 1992). Yet the Irish critic's main thesis—that of pointing out the implicit contradictions of Barthesian theory—had already been discussed by Eugen Simion in the early 1980s. It is true that the position of power from which one proclaims the death of the author demands, first, precisely a (re)assertion of the legitimacy of authorial figures, but the fact is not, however, difficult to notice and was very clearly pointed out, a few years later, by Barthes himself. Let us recall that in 1971 Barthes wrote about "the friendly return of the author." This is not the time to criticize the work of the Irish theorist, but I do not agree with the idea that the death of the author has led to the seclusion of literary studies. Even more so since Burke himself states at one point that the French theorist's circular argument had demonstrated the impossibility of authorial non-presence. If the slippages that would characterize the absence of the author only strengthened the position of the creative figure, the isolationism that Burke points to would ultimately remain nonsense. I say this because it is precisely the secessionist agenda of the author's death (a theory, Burke argues, that those outside the academy would not grasp) that has produced a real democratization and widening of the literary sphere. Yet, it is also obvious that it was precisely because repression was well understood that a whole series of identity movements were born.

However, one cannot deny the reality that the critical bibliography devoted to Barthes, Foucault and Derrida is ridiculously vast, just as the vastness of this material is not necessarily an indication of the popularization of authorship theories, but rather a symptom of the self-reproductive mechanism of the academic system. Even so, I would still say that the multitude and breadth of the interventions due to the three thinkers signal, on the other hand, the need or the pleasure of the general public (and, therefore, of non-specialists) to have been up to date with the latest theoretical proposals. The idea that anyone can now become a literary critic (read author) also remains a liberal one. Recognizing that it is not the writer who has all the authority in the literary field also implies an awareness of the view that anyone can become an author if they give free rein to their passions. Barthes did not even argue, as the representatives of the

New Criticism had done, that access to literature depends only on the mastery of a set of critical tools. Barthes showed that authorship is ultimately a more or less hedonistic predisposition or attitude towards the text.

Wandor is right to value Burke when the Irish scholar demonstrates, without question, that authorship is a concept in constant feverishness: 'Burke suggests that there is a tension in discussions of the multiple manifestations and implications of authorship that can be reduced to the conceptual struggle between usurpation and authority' (Wandor 2008, 163). In other words, the author did not die of natural causes. He was killed, Wandor argues in Burke's footsteps, only to be replaced by the "new author" (the theorist as author). By rewriting the text, the critic now occupied the authoritative position in the relations established between the instances in the literary field: "the use of the concept of 'writing' as a metaphor becomes a camouflaged way of asserting the supremacy of the critical over the creative manner" (Wandor 2008, 163). Looking at the argument in reverse, the death of the author seems to be a critical decision, not a truth of the literary text. The absence of the author, Wandor continues, is not an easily verifiable fact about literature or discourse, but a statement of the auctorial form adopted by theorists. The debate surrounding the death of the author thus represented an investigation of the relationship between critic and text. The author's intention had been exposed as a form of control that the critic had to rid himself of.

I cannot, however, agree with the researcher's observation that "this is surely one of the most ridiculous ideational manipulations in the lexicon of literary postmodernity" (Wandor 2008, 164). It is not at all clear why the idea would be ridiculous since its influence has been paramount, in the same way that the author's death cannot be included, at least not entirely, under the umbrella of postmodernity. Equally problematic is the judgement that the demonstration could pass for manipulation. Those who have carefully read the Barthesian text know that the French theorist's intentions were fairly straightforward: at no time did he claim that the author's death would not mean an attempt to promote the new criticism against the academic (positivist, historical, biographical) criticism.

One other crucial observation that needs to be made is that most of Wandor's conclusions are, in fact, direct quotations. Without commenting on the views of others, Wandor mostly confines herself to reviewing some of the opinions of the most titled figures in the controversial discussion (Culler, Bennett, Burke). This is not to say that there are no instances where an author's intentions mismatch his or her words, but to invoke, as Wandor does, so-called recent interests in Bakhtinian theory, whose leading representative would be Peter Widdowson, is a sign of intellectual insensitivity, on the one hand,

because interests in Bakhtin's theory are by no means recent, and on the other, because the publication signed by Widdowson is, after all, from 1999. But leaving these points aside, I think what is more important is the way in which Wandor sets out to recontextualize the phenomenon of "auctorial return." If "at the heart of theory lies the relationship between language, the production of meaning and the individual subject" (Wandor 2008, 169), then we can say that the author seems to be the result or product of linguistic activities. The return of the author is sometimes equated with the birth of the modern reader, but is at other times relegated to the realm of identity politics. Wandor's conclusion, however, would be this: the author did not die because he was never 'there'. Which also means that the author could not return, as he was always located 'somewhere else'.

The author is, in fact, redefined in materialist terms. Drawing on the ideas of Benjamin or Brecht, she defines authorship as a kind of social activity or process. Leaving behind the figure of the inspired romantic genius, the empirical author is transformed into a producer. In this perspective, Wandor suggests, the theorist should also (re)focus his tools. Thus, he either becomes a sociologist or a historian: we should therefore consider "the social, historical, institutional and discursive boundaries and conventions of the author, as well as the effects of printing technologies and, finally, the evolution of copyright" (175). Lesser-known, the tradition is characterized by the interventions of Louis Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, Pierre Macherey, Bakhtin and Terry Eagleton. It is only bizarre that Wandor abandons the project, moving on to problematize pro- and anti-intentionalist proposals (from Wimsatt and Beardsley to Umberto Eco).

One also stumbles across a striking misreading of Eliot's famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." When the author of "The Wasteland" wrote that the author has no personality to express, the critic suggested that the author is a means by which different kinds of discourse and/or experiences could be (re)used. In other words, the author is a mediator. However, the intermediary nature of the author cannot and should not be confused with language: "the medium is language, its conventions and the way it is used in different contexts" (Wandor 2008, 188).

We have seen that many of the elements that influence or even determine the current features of authorship derive from a far from simple relocation of the phenomenon within other discursive-disciplinary spaces. It would seem, then, that the author somehow needed to pass through the filter of literary theory only to be sprayed into a whole series of other hypostases. Even if modestly assumed, the absolutely essential role that authorship had played within literary criticism and history had been decimated, in the heyday of theory, only to be reified, over the last decade of the last century, within the

practices of the literary industry. And perhaps it is precisely the analysis of the conditions conducive to these relocations that should be further studied. Authorship is a highly mobile concept, as we have seen, but the contexts that determine its fluidity also deserve careful examination.

Even if some scholars suggest that the recent evolution of authorship follows an anti-theoretical route, I would argue, however, that a serious contemplation of the material-historical conditions of contemporary authorship does not automatically equate to the abandonment of abstract reflection. Quite the contrary. I agree that authorship is no longer the subject of "Literary Theory" with a capital "T" (largely because there is no such thing anymore), but this does not mean that all the other disciplines devoted to the analysis of scriptural figures are simply devoid of a theoretical consciousness, as defined, along the Lukács-Goldmann-Williams line, by Edward Said—see "Travelling Theory" (i.e. the emergence of a notional ensemble describing the relationship between world and thought).

Thus, Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay suggest, and rightly so, that "the study of authoriality would be determined by two interconnected contexts" (2007, 1). These are, on the one hand, the continuous change of methodologies in the academic field and, on the other, the way in which a variety of historical, cultural, technological and literary conditions would determine the emergence of different forms of authorship. The implicit assumption would be that the former represents more than mere methods of approaching the phenomenon. In other words, epistemological metamorphoses within literary studies would alter the very historical definitions and practices of authorship. Their volume thus examines "the transformations that the relationship between literary criticism and the history of authoriality has undergone, both in terms of changing theoretical models and the conditions behind these developments" (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 1). The project is firstly historical and only then contextualizing (the conditions in which texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed). The editors therefore set out to put the identity of the auctorial modes and, importantly, the factors that contributed to their emergence into historical perspective.

The papers do not discuss authorship as a form of negotiating textual meaning (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 2). I can only agree with the observation that forms of conceptualizing authorship change in response to changes in technological means. It would be necessary for "the theory of authorship to illustrate the ways in which the perspective it proposes on notions such as self, agency, ownership and authority are elaborated in individual examples" (2). The death of the author, we now know well, has only led to his return as a projection of the reading strategies enacted by the enamored reader. Studies

devoted to auctorial figurality have shown, on the other hand, that it was then relocated to textuality. A third variant, I would like to suggest, seems to draw on Foucauldian readings, and this is because the function of the author remains an extra-textual matter, highlighted by the epistemological turn of literary research.

What should be noted here is that theories of auctorial absence have given rise not only to a new field of research, but also to other disciplines. The methodological avalanche formed in the wake of the desperate cry of authorial death is truly impressive: "reception theory, deconstruction and semiotics are all reading practices that have arisen in the wake of attacks on the author" (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 2-3). Moreover, we can agree that "although it reduced authorship to a simple process of signification, the theory of the sixties questioned the authority of the literary canon, giving rise to new approaches and fields of investigation—from the New Historicism or cultural materialism to gender studies and postcolonial studies" (2-3). A certain political-democratic sensibility underlies all the directions listed. Adopting the perspective of the cultural left, the critical theory of the sixties finally turned into an ecumenical-pluralist movement. Under the guise of multiculturalism, critical thought deviated from the path of a profoundly anti-humanist attitude into a kind of affective-identitarian agenda of rehabilitation or recuperation of marginality, minorities, the periphery or the subaltern.

Perhaps in the contradictory action and effects of the theory lie the origins of the confusion or paradoxes surrounding the long reception of the idea of auctorial disappearance. The postmodern relativization of the creative subject has thus meant the elimination of the idea that the text is an expression of the auctorial personality. What is clear, then, is that the author's death was not a natural one. In other words, someone killed him for a reason, in a specific context. Things are quite clear in this respect. More enigmatic, however, is the suggestion that Hadjiafxendi and Mackay put forth: that the author's death could also mean suicide. A cyclical or continuous suicide. Authorship is, in this sense, nothing more than a little technological trick or artefact (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 9). The idea sounds quite promising, but is unfortunately readily abandoned. Eagleton's project is more lucrative: in the same collection, the famous theorist argues that any critical project requires, ideologically speaking, an auctorial form or model. His thesis is profitable because it manages to cover recent forms of theoretical authorship, interrogating the way in which different material practices have managed to rewrite the definition and/or function of authorship. Essentially, Eagleton claims that: "it is possible to interpret the history of modern thought as a series of subversive attacks on the Cartesian cogito" (Eagleton 2007, 185-193). The history of literary criticism and theory is, one could argue, the history of auctorial models.

In one of the most compelling articles to appear in the last five years in the sphere of authorial theory, Julie Marie Smith argues that, in the process of its formation, the authorial function can be altered, modified or taken over. The instrument through which these actions are operationalized, Smith says, is that of the "rhetorical chorus" (a concept adopted from the language of music theory). She emphasizes the idea that, although the auctorial stance is often invented (or initiated) by a single person, credibility or ethos—defined here as character, goodwill, and expertise—is ultimately a construct in which multiple people or institutions participate (or might participate). The same rhetorical chorus is, of course, responsible for the way an author's message circulates within different contexts. The demonstration is, as I said, enlightening, although I would not restrict the use of this notion to the digital sphere.

Taking up the proposal of Thomas Inge, the researcher then equates the "rhetorical chorus" with the notion of mediator or collaborator. The mediator is, quite simply, the instance that, standing between the speaker and the receiver, "uses its technical and rhetorical skills to distribute the speaker's message and at the same time promote or build the speaker's ethos" (the example targets a number of journalists, bloggers and activists) (Smith 2015, 22). Although they are "co-participants in the distribution of rhetoric, the chorus neither participates in the act of invention nor functions as authors or collaborators" (22). The rhetorical chorus is differentiated, Smith continues, from readers "because it possesses certain technical capacities to alter and rearrange the space of textual or digital artifact, technique, thereby contributing its own rhetoric" (22). Moreover, the mediator can contribute either to the construction of ethos or to the "authority and authenticity of the message" conveyed (34).

I would also mention the concept of "post-authorship." Paul Butler shows that by using the rhetoric of dominant groups, the marginalized are in fact in possession of a highly effective strategy by which an ideological conflict could be turned into a form of shared discourse (Butler 2015, 145). The demonstration is broadly similar to that put forward by Deleuze and Guattari with regard to minor literatures. In other words, if authorship is a classifying function of discourses, post-authorship, Paul Butler seems to suggest, would be that function whereby discourses—rather than distributing forms of authority (by constituting genres, works, destinies)—are, in fact, dynamized against each other to build a democratic platform (Graff's theory is, again, relatively similar). Post-authorship thus involves "a dominant and a contesting public, discourses and counter-discourses or, in the words of Roland Barthes, a mix of writings "that counteract each other" (Butler 2015, 145).

The main thesis of Mieke Bal's book—the idea that the humanities should rethink their methodological presuppositions, starting not from a set of

analytical tools per se, but rather from concepts (Bal 2002, 5)—is unfortunately not really new. I am afraid that Baudrillard had already suggested this when he described the object system in 1968. Moving forward, however, we should note that, in the author's view, concepts do not establish terms univocally, but in the form of a well-defined dynamism. Bal is therefore interested not only in what a concept can mean, but, above all, in what it can do (11). Analyzing most of the publications in the field of cultural studies published during the 1990s, she comes to the simple conclusion that all concepts are, in essence, "spaces for debate, for the recognition of differences and change" (13). However, Bal returns a few years with some additional details: concepts are never fixed—they travel between disciplines, individuals, historical periods, and geographical spaces. Of course, with these transmutations, the meaning, purpose, and value of concepts also change (13-23).

A concept such as authorship, for example, betrays, almost involuntarily, the historicity of the socio-cultural contexts in which it was produced and theorized. The problem, however, is that authorship remains a pluriform concept. This means that, for a better understanding of the notion, theorists should reconstruct the process of negotiation between non-conventional elements of the concept (the author as absence, for example) and the norms of a particular historical situation (the situation around May 68, for example). In a very important study devoted to the history of auctorial research, Christine Haynes outlines, for example, the evolution of the deconstruction of the Romantic genius in the second half of the last century. Moreover, she offers a clear overview of the current state of the discipline. Its characteristics, according to Haynes, were originality, sincerity, and inspiration. Over the past century, the heroic definition of the Romantic writer was dismantled by the onslaught of critical theory. The Romantic position of the author, Haynes declares, has thus been historicized by readings inspired by poststructuralism, New Historicism, the sociology of literature, and, finally, book history (Haynes 2005, 288). It must be said that Haynes' text remains the only scientific contribution that realizes and emphasizes the importance of topicality in analyzing the auctorial phenomenon. And this is not only about the effects of the digital revolution, but also about the divide between the image or representations of the auctorial phenomenon, on the one hand, and reality or scriptural practices, on the other. The most important contribution of the works dealing with the authorial problem (at least those that the researcher reviews here) is, in essence, the realization that the collaborative nature of authorship should also be conceptualized or reflected in the discourse or critical-theoretical representations of the cutting edge.

Contrary to all expectations, the historical turn in literary studies has led, Haynes points out, to the perpetuation of the romantic definition of

authorial genius. Why is authorship such an important element? The answer, she believes, is very simple. The Romantic understanding of the idea of the author (centered on the notion of originality) gave birth to the tools used in literary studies. Historiography, biographism, psychology, and positivism, all aimed at recovering authorial intentions—and thus the meaning of the work.

The first wave, so to speak, of the demystification of the idea of the author came from the New American Criticism. The intentional error had been popularized even before the post-war period. The historical (Foucault), sociological (Bourdieu) and materialist interpretations of the fifties and sixties are the touchstones for transforming the image of authorship from a form of talent to a hypostasis of professionalism. This perspective is obviously Marxist and shows that authorship is, in fact, the result of the accumulation of a series of technological, social, and economic transformations and developments, such as the invention of the printing press, the emergence of the reading public, or the birth of the commercial/industrial market. Much more convincing, however, is the criticism coming from those working in the sphere of analytical bibliography. Interested exclusively in the physical aspects of the book, Haynes writes, they have ended up neglecting the role of the author altogether. The situation of distant reading (Franco Moretti) does not seem to be very different today, precisely because it does not reduce literature to a closed system (of forms, let us say), but paradoxically, I would say, restricts the space of existence of literature to the model of a network of nodes and transfers.

Haynes could not, of course, miss the moment of the author's death, where the meaning of the text is always reconstructed by each reader. Interesting and at the same time surprising, however, is the assertion that it was not Barthes but Foucault who first resurrected the idea of the author. In the Foucauldian sense, I repeat, the author is a function of discourse that plays a dual role—aesthetic on the one hand, and legal on the other. Mark Rose, Martha Woodmansee and Carla Hesse are rightly mentioned as the most important continuators of the Foucauldian work of investigative genealogy. They have explored the process of the emergence of the auctorial function in both legal discourse and aesthetic reflection, examining issues such as state censorship, copyright laws, the ideology of Romantic philosophy, and the dynamics of economic forces, among others.

The romantic notion of the author is projected as a kind of birth of the modern writer. The position is a little different from the generally accepted one held by Alain Viala. However, the next stage in the demystification of the figure of the Romantic author is marked, in the 1970s, by the interventions of *New Historicism*, which holds that the author is merely an intertextual construction or, so to speak, a by-product of discursive effects. Moreover, Haynes writes,

those involved in the field of book history had themselves succeeded in turning the author into an instance of the so-called communicative circuit (a network of relations composed of institutions and individuals). Whether we are talking about the cultural, technological or economic, or the social or political, the context itself suddenly becomes one of the keywords of literary research. Last but not least, it should be remembered that the sociology of cultural production has transformed the author into an agent of the literary field.

And while I agree with the observation that researchers today have at their disposal a heterogeneous mix of theories and methods from which they could borrow various concepts and tools for investigating authorship, I believe, however, that there are many more areas and disciplines that Haynes overlooks. To recapitulate, it must therefore be said that authorship is not only a function of discourse (Foucauldian genealogy) and more than the result of intertextual constructions (New Historicism), in the same way that, although it is rightly one of the instances of the communicative circuit (material history of the book) or an actor in the literary field (sociology of literature), the creative subject also remains the object of interest of many other investigative registers: narratology, rhetoric, ethics, hermeneutics, biography and others (Haynes 2005, 201).

David Saunders showed that the author is neither a representative of an aesthetic personality nor a discursive effect (or not just that), but rather a legal entity appointed to protect, writes Haynes, the economic interests of publishers and book distributors and, surprisingly enough, less so those of the writer. I quote the scholar's partial conclusion: "genius is not a result or a precondition of the idea of copyright, but an artificial construct that has legitimized and naturalized certain power structures" (Haynes 2005, 295). In any case, a proper and systematic examination of authorship would require, first, an epistemological reconceptualization of the existing methodology itself.

The researcher's proposal has value to it and can easily be associated with Koselleck's theories. And this is precisely because ideas of authorship, on the one hand, and scriptural practices, on the other, need to be analyzed in tandem with the material conditions and social relations (collaboration and the role of intermediaries) in and through which all these creative processes are expressed and/or embodied (Haynes 2005, 305-306). Haynes observes that, despite new insights from literary sociology and cultural history, scholars still rely on traditional methods such as biography or textual analysis. Even if they claim to be interested in the contexts surrounding the auctorial phenomenon, scholars often end up naturalizing the Romantic definition of the original author and the inspired individual. According to Haynes, "they fail to explain how auctorial ideas and practices have changed as the historical context has changed" (314). She argues for an eclectic approach from a theoretical and

methodological point of view. It is not enough, she goes on to say, to represent authorship as a linguistic construct, just as it is insufficient to represent the determinism that the ideological ideas a society entertains in relation to the notion of authorship are pure reflections of economic structure.

But what Haynes fails to address is precisely the problem she lucidly reveals. And this is not only because pointing out a few dichotomies is a sign of oversimplification (changing ideas about authorship and historical contexts; cultural conceptions of authorship and a range of socio-economic conditions), but, more importantly, because she seems to completely ignore the existence of other dimensions of the auctorial phenomenon. Because authorship is a multidimensional phenomenon (1. representations, 2. institutions, 3. agents, and 4. practices), Haynes does list some (not all) of the disciplines that should be included in any analysis of authorship: literary criticism, bio-bibliographical examination, and, finally, the historical study of contexts (Haynes 2005, 316). Given that Iovănel has himself broached the subject of literary history in an ecological, institutional, systemic, and networked fashion, it behooves one to conclude that the concept of authorship is also understood and re-described here as a global and relational phenomenon (Iovănel 2021, 666).

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