Introduction:
Reconfiguring Authorship

This special topic section of *Authorship* presents selected contributions to the international conference on *Reconfiguring Authorship* that took place at Ghent University from November 15 to 18, 2012. The conference was organized by the Ghent-based Research Group on Authorship as Cultural Performance (RAP) and co-funded by the Flemish Research Foundation (FWO).

Reconfiguring Authorship provided a venue in which to showcase current developments in authorship studies and to debate theoretical and historical understandings of the complex ideological, technological and social processes that transform 'writers' into 'authors'. With nearly a hundred participants, the conference could address problems of authorship in connection with numerous related issues, such as authenticity, authority, agency and attribution; questions of gender, self-fashioning, and the canon; fame (or lack thereof), branding and marketing; anonymity and pseudonymity; patronage; translation; collaboration and co-authorship in cultural networks; new technologies and media; and the staging of authorial personae or author images in literary texts and peritexts. Although predominantly focused on Anglophone literature, the conference also provided a general sounding-board for new ideas, concepts and methods for the study of authorship beyond the fields of English and American literary history.

The guest editors would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped to organize this conference, particularly Vicky Vansteenbrugge, Sören Hammerschmidt, and Jasper Schelstraete, but also Isabelle Clairhout, Yuri Cowan, Alise Jameson, Çiğdem Mirol, and Lisa Walters. This event would not have been possible without their untiring support.

In this issue of *Authorship*, we publish three of the four keynotes delivered at the conference (by Dame Gillian Beer, Margaret Ezell, and Richard Wilson) and three papers selected to present the wide conceptual, theoretical and historical range of the conference from the early modern period to contemporary literature.

In her opening salvo, Gillian Beer explores how readers become co-authors of the literary experience, through the imaginative act of filling gaps or, indeed, through their resistance to authorial propositions. Her examples—the "virtual witnessing" in Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* and the companionable tone of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books—testify to the broad range of literary genres that invite readers to interact with and react to "author" texts beyond the initial writer's control.

In his engaging reading of Shakespeare's authorial "self-annulment" in his plays and poems, Richard Wilson finds possibly deliberate acts of evasion and self-concealment that he links to early modern problems of social class and to Shakespeare's ambition to become "a subject without an identity". His birth as an author in print was

"aborted", according to Wilson, by strategies of absence that avoided institutionalized forms of authorial representation.

Margaret Ezell's contribution explores a media configuration of authorship that literally necessitates the "death of the author" as a condition *sine qua non*: the printed "dying words" of executed men and women in the Restoration period. In her essay "Dying to be Read", she examines this type of "gallows literature" of the 1670 and 1680s as a form of "performed narrative" that highlights "the complexity of seventeenth-century authorship practices".

Such practices are also in evidence in Sarah Herbe's article on mid-seventeenth-century peritexts, as revealed through a close reading of the front matter of the little-known poet Thomas Beedome's *Poems Divine, and Humane* of 1641. She argues that these peritexts, especially the commendatory verses, use print-publishing as a means to claim the author "not only as singular creator, but also as proprietor of his work", irrespective of its literary quality, with the main purpose being to distinguish him from a mass of other writers.

Problems of authorial recognition are exacerbated in the Romantic era, as demonstrated by Adam White in his essay on popularity and fame in the writing of John Clare. White diagnoses Clare's "obsessive fear of being forgotten" as a crucial concern of the Romantic writer who is socially marginalized and also needs to worry about commercial success. White's essay is not merely a contribution to Clare scholarship but also an interesting case study of authors in competition with one another for commercial and critical attention.

Last but not least, Despoina Feleki's article on Stephen King takes questions of popularity and historical media cultures into the present-day literary field. In a historicizing view of contemporary literature in connection with technologies of writing and publishing, her case study illustrates the place of authorship in a Jenkinsian "convergence culture". The constraints she sees imposed on the author in a consumer society are already expressed in Stephen King's earlier works, such as *Misery*; King's recent experiments with digital publishing, Feleki argues, do not merely assign new roles to authors and readers but also transform the "death of the author as the omniscient creator" into "his re-birth as a colleague, co-star, co-producer and co-worker".

Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor. Ghent, 2014.

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