

Introduction: *Authorship*

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Welcome to the first issue of the open-access online journal *Authorship*.

This journal aims to offer a venue in which to describe diverse historical and discursive settings of authorship, and to grapple with the complex issues of authorial authority, independence or interdependence, and self-fashioning. The Romantic concept of the solitary genius (if indeed such an entity ever existed) has for decades now been the subject of intense critical scrutiny and revision; as a result, what the general public might once have thought of as authorial agency is now submerged in an elaborate tissue of critical feedback, textual instability, editorial intervention, and accidents of publishing, branding, and spin. And yet the Author persists, as a nomenclature, as a catalogue entry, as a biographical entity, as a popular icon, and as an assumed agent of creativity and innovation. In analyzing cultural formations of ‘authoriality’ as they developed historically, over a long period of time and in a variety of geographical locations, in relation to cultural networks and social change, to transformations of the media, as well as to changing perceptions of gender and personhood, *Authorship* hopes to foster a more refined and precise theoretical and historical understanding of the complex ideological, technological and social processes that transform a writer into an author.

Open access is an integral part of our vision for *Authorship*. Our choice of adopting an open-access format is informed by the triple necessity for scholarly authors of getting our research out quickly, of having it read widely in our field, and of maximizing its impact. All these are issues that authors both in the academy and beyond it have struggled with since the dawn of print and before, and it is clear that *Authorship* is not only an opportunity to grapple with historical manifestations of authorship but also for us to reflect on the options twenty-first-century literary and academic authors have for disseminating their work, the manner in which they go about establishing their presence in print and post-print media, and the kinds of compensation (material and non-material) they might receive for doing so. It is clear that this entire process depends on

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networks of researchers, editors, peer reviewers, advisory boards, universities, international research councils, and tech support staff, and that open access journals offer a useful locus in which to build and sustain these collaborative networks.

Current debates over the high cost to libraries of scholarly periodicals are also worth taking into account. If a journal can publish online, with regularity, in an open-access format, with a rigorous peer-review process, there is no reason why it cannot be as authoritative a source as its print equivalent while at the same time extending its audience beyond what the limited runs of print journals have traditionally had. The Directory of Open Access Journals (www.doaj.org) currently lists 285 journals in “Languages and Literatures” alone, some of them going back more than ten years—well established and even venerable by the standards of the new medium. Other disciplines, including the social sciences and medicine, have even more such journals. There is no question that the online open-access format is valuable and sustainable, and we hope that *Authorship*, which is supported by an international advisory board, with dedicated editorial and technical staff and a strong process of double-blind peer review, will find a similar longevity.

As will be seen from the contents of this inaugural volume, the chronological, geographical, and disciplinary scope of *Authorship* is considerable. It encompasses studies of the performance of authorship from the Middle Ages to the digital age (our editorial board also includes classical scholars), and draws on disciplinary fields including reception studies; book history; historical studies and literary scholarship in all their branches and in all languages; media studies; and art history. We welcome future submissions and statements of interest from researchers working on the performance of authorship in any of these fields. Our second issue (a special issue on “The Rebirth of the Author”) is scheduled for spring 2012, and we are currently accepting submissions for our third issue.

Authorship is an initiative of the Research project on Authorship as Performance (RAP) at Ghent University.