Káñina, Rev. Artes y Letras, Univ. Costa Rica. XXXI (1): 83-95, 2007 / ISSN: 0378-0473

A GENEALOGY OF THE AUTHOR: FROM AUCTORS TO COMMERCIAL WRITERS

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RESUMEN

El siguiente artículo pretende hacer una breve reseña genealógica sobre el origen y la evolución del concepto autor en la crítica literaria y su manejo en la producción y distribución de libros y materiales impresos. Se inicia con el análisis de la concepción medieval de *auctor*, como agente anónimo de la autoridad monárquica en Occidente, y se desemboca en el uso del concepto autor para definir una gran grama de escritores entre los que sobresalen aquellos escritores comerciales que comienzan a surgir en el siglo 18. Además se hace mención al uso y concepción del término autoría y su papel en el desarrollo económico y social de las comunidades occidentales a partir del descubrimiento de América hasta el siglo 19. Brevemente, también, se hace un análisis paralelo de aquellos cambios tecnológicos, filosóficos, estructurales e ideológicos que permitieron la evolución del concepto autor hasta sus usos más contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: teoría literaria, autor, función-autor, genealogía

ABSTRACT

The following essay is a brief genealogical review on the origin and evolution of the concept of the author in literary criticism, and of its role in the production and distribution of books and printed material. This essay begins with an analysis of the medieval concept of the *auctor*, an anonymous agent of Western monarchical authority, and ends up with the use of the concept of the author to define a large group of writers, among which 19th century commercial writers stand out. Moreover, the word authorship, its use and concept, is also analyzed, as well as its role in the economic and social development of Western communities from the discovery of America to the 19th century. Briefly, there is also a parallel analysis of those technological, philosophical, structural and ideological changes that catapulted the evolution of the concept of the author to its more contemporary uses.

Key words: literary theory, author, author-function, genealogy

Many have been the forces shaping the concept of the author through time. Since the beginning of writing, there has always been an intrinsic fascination about the origin of texts, their knowledge and the information included in them. More recently, literary criticism, 20th Century legatee of textual activity and analysis, has opened a seemingly bottomless debate around the notion of the author, a debate that has invited several experts to disentangle the historical implications of the evolution of the term author. It is clear by now that the word author has undergone radical changes in meaning and use, according to the different historical and economic conditions; indeed, the word has had a rough history, full of detours and arguments; it has witnessed the rise and fall of complete social structures and has gone through extreme metamorphoses from its origin until the 21st Century. The following is a brief review of such uproar, from the use of the word *auctor* in Medieval times, until the more sophisticated contemporary uses of the term author in relation to the commercial activities of writers.

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Recepción: 12/10/06 Aceptación: 31/11/06

The word "author," its value and function, has been subjected to an intense debate in contemporary literary theory, both as the main figure in the creation of a literary work as well as in terms of the author's significance within the reading process. Thomas McLaughlin summarizes, *in extremis*, modern literary theory as "the debate over the nature and function of reading and writing that has followed on the heels of structuralist linguistics and cultural analysis" (1), thrusting authorship as the main issue. During the last century, the debate around the author has been enriched through a meticulous revision of concepts in various disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, semiology, psychoanalysis, and psychology. McLaughlin characterizes literary theory as a territory in which questions and answers constantly arise, meaning questions whose answers have a "cumulative effect" that "leaves readers with more complicated and more unsettling questions" (2). Questions about meaning, intention, literature, writing, or value are common in contemporary literary theory and criticism. Therefore, as a mediating element between the acts of writing and reading, the notion of authorship emerges as a central concept. Of all the key concepts revised, no other literary term has raised more questions or suffered deeper changes than that of the author. Consequently, no other concept in literary criticism and theory has been so central and subject to investigation and controversy.

What is *an author*? How has this term changed, and how has it been understood and used in Western societies? Contemporary literary critics and writers have tracked down the history of the term, either to explain its variations, to give it a new place in history, or to obliterate it. Researchers have shown how the idea of the author has gone through numerous variations in meaning and use through history, being the one taking place during the 20th century the most determinant, for the idea permeated a great number of different emerging discourses. Donald E. Pease describes the historical controversy around the concept of the author by stating as its basic function the process of "turning anyone in general into someone in particular," and by posing as its most fundamental inquiry this question: "Can an individual ground political authority on individual creativity?" (105). Even though the term "author" may be employed to denote different activities, for Pease its most important function has always been to transform an "anonymous agent" or doer into an "individual" upon which certain authority may be bestowed (105).

Pease depicts the history of the concept in terms of four different epochs: The Middle Ages, the 15th century, the 18th and 19th centuries, and the 20th century. During these epochs the idea of individualism also changed, and the idea of the author became likewise transformed through its application in several discursive practices. Pease traces the origin of the word "author" back to the meaning of the medieval term *auctor*, a "writer whose words commanded respect and belief" (106). The *auctors* were the writers of ancient authoritative books that deeply influenced the daily activities of people. Pease explains this historical process as follows:

> In the Middle Ages, the relationship between these authoritative books and the everyday world was primarily an allegorical one. Worldly events took place in terms sanctioned by an authoritative book or were not acknowledged as having taken place at all. To experience an event in allegorical terms was to transpose the event out of the realm of one's personal life into the realm of the applicable authority. (106)

People interpreted their life events in terms of the sentences included in the authoritative books, "as a reenactment of a sacred custom" (106). According to Pease, the value assigned to the interpretation of everyday events was a spiritual one, and it was related to the Monarchical organization of feudal economy. The Monarch was the auctor *par excellence*, since his authority had been given to him directly by the divinity, so the world was shaped according to his edicts. The individual as such was not the central figure, and the interpretation of events was not upon individual reach (106-107).

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze places Pease's first epoch within what he calls the "classical historical formation" (Deleuze

Foucault 160). Like Pease, Deleuze identifies everyday events of common individuals and their connection to divine orders with the lack of individual autonomy in the interpretation of their life events. For Deleuze, every single author writing before the 17th century understood the term "individuals" as limited beings unable to explain the potency of higher infinite orders (160). Everything written by that time responded to a *God-formed*, not to a *Man-formed* interrelation of forces. So, the final purpose of all writing was to "explain" natural phenomena in terms of the divinity (162). Every productive practice was controlled by the monarchical institutions, and the participation of the individual was kept to the minimum.

The dichotomy between the *auctors'* authoritative books and the Monarch's power started to break down in the 15th century, the age of discovery, as opposed to the Dark Ages. According to Pease, after the events following the discovery of the New World, *auctors* were replaced by *authors*, agents whose sense of authority "depended on what was newly discovered in the new lands," (107), and not upon ancient authoritative books. In other words, since the authoritative books of the medieval *auctors* could not account for the New World people's languages, customs, foods, and rituals, the *new authors* and their narratives obtained "cultural prominence in alliance with other individuals," such as explorers, merchants, colonists, traders, reformers and the alike (107), who started using new discursive practices to represent the new world around them. At the same time, these new cultural performers started to gain economic power and began to have control upon several productive practices. The Monarch finally had competition. As a consequence of the outcome of a new land, new concepts and new identities, authors also became "an emergent political and cultural category" (108) constituting a new caste, producing new authoritative discourse, separate from the old well-established, highly-educated monarchical institutions. Parallel to the emergence of these new castes, people also started to redefine their values and role as individuals. All over Central Europe, mainly in Italy, the individuals' creations began being revaluated, current dogmas became challenged, and social orders were re-examined.

The concept of the author can also be connected to the notion of genius, already present in ancient civilizations. Precisely, Shel Kimen's essay, "The Power of Genius" traces the use of the word *genius* back to the 15th century. First defined by ancient Romans as the guiding spirits who protected all people through their lives, she explains, geniuses were external divine forces who could control and influence individuals for good or bad (1). Geniuses, to use Deleuze's words, corresponded to a *God-Form* concept. However, after the Renaissance, the concept started being used to describe an inner characteristic of a certain individual's capability to create unique works. Kimen summarizes such a change as follows:

> It was during the Renaissance that [the] perception [of the word genius] began to change. The Renaissance is characterized as a time of revival for the humanities and a revived interest in the classics. It was a time of great scientific progress. Italy as the world center of banking, where banking was invented, developed trade, which promoted the exchange of ideas. The merchant class superseded the feudal class contributing to the rise of the nation state, advances in the legal system, and consequent development of specialization and bureaucracy. It was the age of the many sided, or 'universal' man, well educated in a variety of disciplines. Individualism, freedom and change replaced community, authority, and tradition as core European values.
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> It was during the Renaissance, particularly the attention given to Michelangelo and other Italian artists that the word genius evolved to being characteristic of an individual. (3)

According to Kimen, the new meaning of the word genius helped create a new kind of gifted individuals whose work had a different value, as the new first traits of individualism started to be drawn.

After the emancipatory movements of the late 18th century and as the outcome of a pre-industrialized capitalist economy, authors started seeing themselves as a distinct class and a new powerful, productive group. For Pease, during the 19th century, authors began to be

differentiated among those "individuals who owned their labor from those who did not" (109), the difference between the men of genius and the craftsmen. The genius was able to create, through his or her imagination, other worlds different from the existing ones, for "the realm of the genius was defined as utterly autonomous" (108). Contrarily, the craftsmen neither had possession of their own work nor had any power over production means. They simply "worked with material and produced commodities owned by someone else" (109). However, the dividing line between men of genius and craftsmen was not always easy to draw. Indeed, the intellectual and cultural activities of authors during the 19th century were actually characterized by a constant dispute about intellectual ownership and control of the means of production. At the same time, the variety of fields in which authors could participate increased dramatically during the last part of the 18th century and the whole 19th century: newspapers and journalism, political campaigns, literature both for the masses as for the elites, treatises, intellectual societies, magazinists, and reviewers.

Like Pease, Kimen also views the usage of the word "genius" during the 18th century in relation to the increased importance of the individual, the changes in technology, and people's access to different economic activities (3). Thus, in the late 18th century, the work of a genius was highly appreciated, understood as the work of a "superior human being" and as impossible to be learned (7). Kimen identifies the difference of geniuses as opposed to craftsmen in the belief that the work of a genius was the product of inner genuine talent, while the work of the craftsman was the product of learning and apprenticeship. These notions became central in the further growth of Romanticism as an artistic movement in Europe.

Taking into account the deep changes concerning the status of authors as gifted men, the outcome of Romanticism, and the revaluation of intellectual work during the 18th century, Deleuze identifies three new significant forces coming into play: the forces of "Life", the forces of "Work", and the forces of "Language" (Deleuze *Foucault* 162). These forces gave origin to biology, politics, economy and linguistics, which are, according to Deleuze, *Man-formed* forces, in opposition to *God-formed* forces. Departing from these new disciplines, authors could start writing about totally new topics, impossible to be represented by old orders or accounted for the authoritative books (164). A new class of authors was born besides chroniclers, adventurers or inventors. Western societies started having people writing authoritatively about all kinds of subjects and changing everyone's perspective of the world around them.

Additionally, French philosopher Michel Foucault not only describes the evolution of the concept of the author or genius as Pease and Kimen do, but goes a step beyond. By asking the question "What is an Author?," Foucault redefines the idea of "the author" toward one of the "author-function" (In *The Foucault Reader* 101-120). Yet, he agrees that the period between the last part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century was preponderant in the way the idea of author was to be understood. Nevertheless, Foucault does not focus his comments on the way individuals' work was revalued, but upon the different discursive practices and struggles emerging at that point. Foucault shows that "in a civilization like our own there is a certain number of discourses endowed with the 'author function', while others are deprived of it" (107). In this way, Foucault tries to differentiate those cultural practices and discourses that ask for an author-function from those which can do without it. Foucault attaches value to the author-function as long as it becomes "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (108).

Foucault is basically responding to French semiologist Roland Barthes. In 1968, Barthes had published an essay announcing the death of the author. He considered that the idea of the author had been invented by Western societies after the Middle Ages as a consequence of the appearance of mercantilism and capitalism in Europe, and described the ruling of the author as dictatorial and tyrannical since then:

> The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the "human person." Hence it is logical that with regard to literature it should be positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the author's "person." The author still rules in manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men, anxious to unite, by their private journals, their person and their work; the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence." ("The Death of the Author" 1)

Barthes defines writing as an autonomous phenomenon composed by many "voices," not just that of the author's, which makes it impossible to locate a single origin for writing. For Barthes literature should be "neuter." He describes it as a "composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (1). Therefore, if attention is drawn away from the idea of the Author of a text, texts are not limited to a unique source of signification. On the contrary, texts become "multiple writing" open to interpretation (3).

For other researchers, the author-function appears and becomes active under very specific historical circumstances, answering to a variety of applications. It cannot just simply be disposed of. Foucault, unlike Barthes, sustains this conception. Through a historical analysis of those appearances, Foucault discovers a radical change in how Western societies would view the author's role during the end of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century, without annihilating, as Barthes tries to do, the value of the Author-function for previous decades. For example, Foucault notices how writers of poetry and fiction, who hardly ever attached their names to their works in the Middle ages, started to print their signatures on their works, and to value their activity as a new profitable profession, while other kinds of issues concerning the name of writers radically changed. Foucault explains:

> There was a time when the texts that we today call "literary" (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation and valorized without any question about the identity of their author; their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status. On the other hand, those texts that we now would call scientific [….] were accepted in the Middle Ages, and accepted as "true," only when marked with the name of their author.
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> A reversal occurred in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always redemonstrable truth [….] By the same token, literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. (In *The Foucault Reader* 109)

Such a change of view coincides, according to Foucault, with the emergence of "a system of ownership for texts." This conjuncture motivated a fundamental change ranging from the simple use of an author's name attached to their work, to a system in which "discourses be[came] objects of appropriation." So, authors were made "subject to punishment" since "discourse could be transgressive" (108), which takes us back to Pease's previous question: Can an individual ground political authority on individual creativity? In Foucault's terms, it is not as simple as to erase the author's idea. On the contrary, the author-function has numerous traits. Foucault lists four as the most relevant:

1. The author-function is linked to a juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses.
2. The author-function does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and all types of civilizations.
3. The author-function is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse

to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations.

4. The author-function does not refer purely and simply to a real individual. (In *The Foucault Reader* 113)

Coincidentally, during the last part of the 17th century the debate around the idea of the author was complemented by two other social struggles: the emergence of a debate around copyright and exclusive printing rights, and the end of the practice of literary patronage.[1]

The first law related to copyright in Europe appeared right after the old system of patronage came into crisis during the last decades of the 17th century in 1710, and was known as the *Statute of Queen Anne* (Samuels 11-13). However, it was not until the 19th century that practices such as the use of pseudonyms or anonymity in relation to literary works and criticism started to be perceived as morally inappropriate, and authors started to be seen as guarantors of the benefits and dangers of textual ownership (In *The Foucault Reader* 109). Either defined as agents of authoritative knowledge, as human beings of genius with unique innate talents, or as guarantors of ethical textual responsibilities, the debate around the role of authors in literary theory remains open. Questions such as "What is an author?," "How has the concept of the author evolved?," or "What are the implications of attaching a name to a literary work?," are far from being fully answered. Contemporary critics and researches are still exploring the different elements that make up the concept and function of authors in literature. The work of Pease, Kimen, Barthes and Foucault are just a few samples of the different efforts made upon the revision of concepts such as *the author.*

In the period between 1815 and 1860, dramatic changes in the marketplace scene of the United States were taking place. The forces that caused those changes marked the first symptoms of the later emergence and development of the concept of authorship in the newly-industrialized United States. The concept of authorship came to life as an opposing trend to the most traditional agrarian concept of craftsmanship. As stated by Michel Foucault, it is precisely the reversal in a relationship of forces what generates a change in the way discourse is used and understood by societies (in *The Foucault Reader* 88). In terms of authorship --the way in which different works are organized around the idea of the author--, that reversal took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. In previous centuries, the activity of authors was expected to account for the authority of an aristocratic institution of power by giving authority to aristocratic ruling; therefore, the most important writers were sponsored by the different European crowns. In the early United States, although writers were not supported by any crowns, they wrote from the perspective of a new kind of authoritarian self: *the individual*, the platform on which a new democracy was meant to be built. Kenneth Dauber explains:

> As Benjamin Franklin puts it in the opening lines of his *Autobiography*, "this may be read or not as any one pleases." For all its modesty, the statement sounds a revolutionary American note. The prose is casual. There is no radical stridency. Franklin, easy and self-possessed, does not need to attack any established authority in order to justify himself. Indeed, he does not even justify himself by establishing some new authority in its stead. All the more, however, he thus exhibits a self-determination, as it were, prior to justification. He exhibits the independence of selfhood as a sort of inalienable right and guaranteed by the right to selfhood that he grants others as well. (xvi)

Franklin was able to "grant" his readers the power of choice since self-determination bestowed on him, and other authors of the epoch, a renewed sense of authority. But more than an author, Franklin was a Renaissance man: he was a scientist, an inventor, an artist, and above all, a politician, roles that give the idea of the author its most specific character.

As the United States developed and became an industrialized nation, new writers began to appear, but their sense of authority did not depend on what they could "grant" their readers, but on their ability to create a body of work popular enough for profit. The aim of these new writers was to organize and authorize their work around their name: their signature, to use Foucault's

term. The commercial writer was born, and so was authorship, the path to the professionalization of authors. As described by Steven Watts, from the last part of the 18th century through all the 19th century, a new sense of authority emerged that put aside old paternalistic regulations of colonial institutions of power; he specifies:

> Rising from the wreckage of colonial paternalism, with its traditional reliance on the authority of ministers and magistrates, courthouse and church, an invigorating sense of ambition detonated an explosion of entrepreneurialism in the economic arena, massive geographical movement in the social one, and participation in the political one. The crumbling of deferential restraints encouraged a growing attachment to the advancement and profit accruing to achieve status. (6)

New authoritarian institutions were based on economic parameters, and a market-oriented society developed new concepts of value, family and social organization. Individualism, freedom and, most of all, ambition, according to Watts, fueled a "social crisis of authority" during the first part of the 1800's, which affected all kinds of cultural practices and social relationships. The result was the dawn of a marked individualism (Watts 6) that supported "a social creed of hard work, thrift, shrewd investment and social advancement" (6). The ambivalent concept of authorship, first as a source of authority and then as a lucrative profession, appeared more or less during this same period of turmoil. Before the 19th century, writers did not need to group their work under their signature. With the emergence of commercial writers, to arrange their production under the specificities of their name became an imperative, as their economic stability depended upon this. As it might have been expected, book writers and aspiring literati found it very difficult to adjust to the changes taking place from the colonial to the early republican American society. Commonly linked to aristocratic financing and support, "artistic endeavor had always been somewhat suspect in republican thought" (8), but pressured by the emerging "context of an ambitious society of individualist and materialist striving," soon writers also had to start thinking about different ways to "commodify their work" (9). Soon an interesting "type of author" was born: one who "wrote to live and lived to write" (9).

Many were the reasons why authorship came to be conceived as a lucrative profession. As explained by Watts:

> As literary scholars have made clear in recent years, authorship was shifting toward professionalization at the same time that the reading audience was transforming dramatically. By the late 1700's literacy and education were spreading rapidly through the middling ranks of American society. Moreover, changing reading standards --the growing of the popularity of journalism, didactic tracts, and sentimental stories-- were molding the taste of a growing bourgeois public. (9)

The fast and steady growth of the population, mainly in large urban spaces, the changes in the manufacturing of products, the proliferation of cheap and varied formats for the exchange of information, and innovations in technology were all forces that propelled the metamorphosis of authorship from a form of artistic craftsmanship supported by the aristocracy into a quite lucrative market-centered activity.

Commercial writers were soon subjected by the fast changing pace. The industry of books underwent the same process of transformation as all other kinds of industrial activity did. Soon discourse and productive practices started to be mobilized toward the same direction. Statistics, for example, started to show that the population of the country had grown almost four times as numerous during the first decades of the 1800's, while the value and volume of manufactured products also increased, bringing about an enormous industrial development (Rogers Taylor, 207). Such transformations were triggered by a number of factors well detailed by Rogers Taylor in his book *The Transportation Revolution*:

> Certain factors were fundamental: a rapidly growing population, rich natural resources, a stable and favorably disposed government, and the absence of social impediments to economic change and of restrictions on the free movement of goods over a wide area. (207)

One important difference in the manufacturing of products that dominated the scene, as described by Rogers Taylor, can be delineated by comparing the way in which early household manufacture had taken place and the way in which market-oriented production developed afterwards. Before 1815, a series of protective laws forbidding the importation of manufactured goods, the Embargo and Nonintercourse Acts (206), for instance, favored the expansion of household production, which consisted of "goods made in the home chiefly for family use" (Rogers Taylor 211). The work of the families was "supplemented" by the work of "specialists," craftsmen, such as cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, and others, who would usually travel from "house to house, living with the family and typically utilizing" the products manufactured by the families (208-9). In some communities and seaports, small markets and shops were established by craftsmen that "provided an important industrial activity" (209). Referring to a regular town of 500 inhabitants, Rogers Taylor comments:

> If to [commercial activities] had been added the multifarious household manufactures of the time, including the making of the home of a wide variety of products from soap and candles to leather and maple sugar, a fair picture would be presented of the household-handicraft-mill complex which accounted for a large portion of the manufacturing in the United States in 1815. This organization of industry was dominant in most parts of the country until well into the forties and continued important in remote areas until long after the Civil War. (208)

Nonetheless, after 1815, household manufacture started to decline, being replaced by production for the market, a requisite for the emerging factory system (R. Taylor 215). This change implied a radical re-engineering of labor force organization, product manufacture and transactions. Manufacturing for the market consisted in directing the whole production of the family or specialist to satisfy the demands of a growing market, instead of only satisfying the needs of families. The production for home use turned into the "production for sale" (215). This movement from one kind of manufacturing process to the other was not always well organized or systematic, as explained by Rogers Taylor:

> This whole development of manufacturing for market sale, which took place between 1815 and 1860 was, like most important economic changes, neither orderly nor systematic. Rates of change varied from industry to industry and no orderly progression appeared from one form of industrial organization to the next. (215)

After 1815, the demand for manufactured products by the market increased as never before. Some industrial organizations could respond faster to the demand than others. But in all cases, the rapid demand of the new market for manufactured products was well canalized through new important managing figures in the economic scene of the United States. The "merchant capitalist" stood out as the most important figure of the market, the one who "assumed risks, provided capital, and became an expert in the technique" of discovering profitable markets for low-cost products (215). The merchant capitalist became the central agent around whom the production of the market spun and the one who provided the raw materials necessary for the production of goods. Craftsmen and families became production units with no direct contact with the market. On the contrary, the merchant capitalist became the wholesale agent in charge of selling the products directly to the consumers.

According to Rogers Taylor, the switch from household production to market production coincided with the development of new technologies, being those related to transportation among the most important (215). The development of better machine tools, the introduction of precision manufacturing, "a unique American development" (221) that allowed the use of interchangeable parts, and adaptations of main power sources (such as water and steam) ended up in improved techniques of manufacture (224). As indicated by Rogers Taylor, the impact of technological advances cannot be doubted and is reflected in the sudden increase of patents and changes in products during the first part of the 19th century. The technological changes had great impact on every single productive activity

in the United States, including the production and commercialization of books, the exchange of information, and the organization of profit.

Technological discourse and the language of mechanization had long permeated the vocabulary of almost every cultural practice in the emerging United States. In the work *To Make a World: The Discourse of Mechanism in the Early American Republic*, Colleen E. Terrell identifies a linguistic tendency that underlined American politics during the first decades of republican life, ranging "from ordering the natural environment and educating a virtuous citizenry to drawing new instruments of government and narrating the nation's emergence --in enthusiastic mechanical terms" (viii). Terrell identifies opposing philosophical trends that view technological advances and mechanization either in negative or positive terms in relation to human development. According to Terrell and Looby, widely influenced by Michael Foucault, writers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur favored an agrarian social theory which would connect "America's physical attributes and 'America' as a political, social and cultural construct (1).

But the development of the machine and, therefore, of industrialization, which entailed the growth of urban areas, was followed by an ideological conflict that made Nature appear "firmly fixed as the antithesis of the 'mechanical'" (3). The abundance of mechanical terms in the founding of the United States as a new nation is fundamental in the understanding and usage that, during the 19th century, people would make of terms such as authority and authorship. Terrell synthesizes the importance of mechanical discourse in the early United States and its interrelation to the creation or authorship of a nation:

> There is, in addition, an almost metonymic relation between artifact and nation; at some level the material work of building America's specific infrastructure of land – and cityscape, commodity production, and print media flows into the ideological work of building 'America' as a place (3)

Since early republican life, mechanical vocabulary and discourse has influenced and fed the primordial notions of artisan work, the role of the creator and the authority derived from the construction of a new nation and the organization of a new place to live. Terrell explains:

> There are conceptual parallels between clockmaking and political confederation, automatism and pedagogy, ploughing fields and inscribing culture, assembling machines and assembling national narratives, that taken in the aggregate, constitute what we might call a discourse of mechanism, a discourse that has everything to do with manufacturing a nation, a landscape, and its people. (9)

Mechanical discourse, technological advances and improvements, and the development of market manufactures modified the very notion of authority and its relation to individual freedom in ways that can still be observed today. For Terrell the United States was founded on a paradox, "not the paradox of a simultaneous commitment to nature and to the machine [but of] the inherent conflict between individual liberty and traditional republican theory" (10). Howard Horwitz describes a similar disparity in terms of law and nature and their relation to commercial and liberal values. Horwitz defines transcendentalism and protectionism as two of the most important values in the United States in the 19th century: protectionism advocates for "high tariffs to protect the home market" and was then "a conservative plank" (57). On the other hand, transcendentalists were more in favor of a free market, regulated not by imposed law but by "custom, nature and natural law" in terms related to mechanization.

Authority started to be defined in commercial and mechanical terms and depended socially and politically on three axes: the control of the market, technological advances, and the exchange and flux of information. In terms of market control, artisans and family units were replaced by the merchant capitalist who would have direct contact with consumers and would usually pursue high prices, thus modifying the old notion of craftsmanship into authorship in

the form of brands --usually the last names of merchant capitalists--, and the factory system (Rogers Taylor, 229). Likewise, the new notion of authorship greatly depended on the use and control of the means of information exchange generated by the growing commercial activities of the moment.

Of all the different kinds of information means established during the 19th century, newspapers ranked number one in importance. No other media grew as much as newspapers did in the form of weeklies and dailies:

> In 1830 the country had 650 weeklies and 65 dailies, the average circulation of a daily was 1.200, so the total daily circulation was roughly 78.000. By 1840 there were 1.141 weeklies and 138 dailies. The daily averaged 2.200 in circulation for an estimated total daily circulation of 300000. (Schudson 13)

Not only did the increase of circulation astonish, but also the number in social, commercial and political changes that newspapers were dealing with. Schudson estimates that "1830 […] marked a revolution in American journalism" (14). Although the industry of weeklies and dailies already existed before 1830, these newspapers shared very specific characteristics that did not allow them to grow much in numbers as after 1830. Schudson explains:

> The typical American paper was generally a weekly […] The typical daily was four pages long. Its front page was almost exclusively devoted to advertising. These outside pages were like the cover of a book or magazine […] Page two carried the editorial columns. Much of page two and page three detailed the arrival of ships in the harbor and the contents of their cargoes, as well as other marine news. On page two one could find an editorial on politics, as well as short "items" of news […] lifted directly from other newspapers […] Other items were not distinguished, in layouts, typography, or style, from editorials – all were expressions of the editor or his party. (14-5)

Most of the dailies or weeklies that commonly circulated before 1830 were either commercial or political, financed by political entities (parties, candidates, etc.). Both kinds of newspaper were rather expensive, usually available only by subscription; their circulation was low, and their readers were limited to "mercantile and political elites" (15). Schudson goes on:

> True, dominated as they were by advertising and shipping news, they appear to have been little more that bulletin boards for the business community. But their editorial, in which they took great pride, were strongly partisan, provocative, and ill-tempered. Editors attacked one another ferociously in print, and this sometimes carried over into fist fights or duels. (16)

As a consequence, as Schudson says, newspapers were highly personalized as their operations were usually small, and editorship, reporting, management in general, and printing was often single-man-handed (16). Besides, since newspapers were financed by political parties, their editors were sometimes considered "secretaries dependent upon cliques of politicians, merchants, brokers, and office-seekers" (16).

After 1830, the revolution in American journalism was propelled by a "revolutionary movement" known as the "commercial revolution" characterized by the diverse types of advertising that started to appear in newspapers. Newspapers adapting to this new "mainstream" were called "penny papers." Penny papers were sold for a penny and were "hawked in the street each day by newsboys" in stead of being sold by subscription (17). Besides, their circulation was much larger than regular newspapers. Schudson states this importance as follows:

> Penny papers made their way in the world by seeking large circulation and the advertising it attracted, rather than by trusting to subscription fees and subsidies from political parties. This rationalized the economic structure of newspaper publishing. Sources of income that depended on social ties or political fellow feeling were replaced by market-based income from advertising and sales. (18)

According to Schudson, the fact that newspaper circulation did no longer depend on subscription or subsidies from commercial or political elites, made advertising and sales take on a "more democratic cast." As reported by Schudson, penny papers consistently cared little about who was advertising. In the short run, "all the penny papers, to greater or lesser

degrees, adopted the language and morality of *laissez faire*" (21).

In terms of content, penny papers were as innovative in other areas as in advertising. In Schudson's opinion, "penny papers invented the modern concept of news" (22). Penny papers started to include news on concerns more associated to a "varied, urban, and middle-class society of trade, transportation and manufacturing" than to a political or social elite (23). Derived from previous features of certain British magazines that were well known for combining tales of fiction with scientific reports, poems and moral arguments "literally on the same page" (Tresch 280), combinations on newspaper were also based on the magazine-tradition of balancing contents for audiences in search of both high-quality and popular products (Allen, M. 21). Schudson summarizes:

Until the 1830's, a newspaper provided a service to political parties and men of commerce; with the penny press a newspaper sold a product to a general readership and sold the readership to advertisers. The products sold to readers was "news," and it was an original product in several respects. (25)

Penny papers introduced a series of transformations to journalism. They were the first to focus on "the nearby and the everyday" of common and well-known people introducing reports on the police and court affairs, the commercial district, the churches, high society and sports (27). They also started to draw attention on international events that were otherwise ignored and began to draw attention on the life of the rich, inaugurating gossip as an important press element.

The penny press played a transcendental role in the establishment of what Terence Whalen describes as the Information Metropolis. As stated before, control upon the flux and exchange of information in an industrialized and market-oriented society like the United States of the 19th century was central to the notion of authority and authorship and the establishment of a new kind of discourse. In this sense, for Whalen literature, as well as the different industries related to information exchange, was "fast becoming a distinctly urban commodity, and those who produced it came into contact with all aspects of city life, ranging from the dizzying pace of commerce to the social ills of poverty, crime, and overcrowding" (77). More dramatically, according to Whalen, the fast growth of cities and, probably that of penny press, sped up the transformation of information into an "economic good" (77). The publishing industry, including the penny press, found fertile grounds to develop and, according to Whalen, to play an essential role in the general economic growth of the country. Statistics from the first part of the 19th century shows that "employment in information-related trades and industries grew at a more rapid pace than employment in any other sectors" after 1800 (77). For example, Whalen adds that "in some cities, moreover, the information sector produced more wealth than shipyards and iron foundries" (77). He explains:

> This can be ascertained by comparing the value added by the publishing industry with the value added by other industries. Though it is difficult to obtain reliable figures for antebellum cities, one largely complete set of data does exist for Boston's 1832 publishing industry (the figures encompass lithography, engraving, type founding, stereo-typing, bookbinding, printing, and other trades related to the production of newspapers, books, pamphlets and miscellaneous documents). According to these figures, the value added by the publishing industry exceeded that of any other class of manufacturing. (77).

The massive development of the information industry can be credited, as stated by Schudson, to at least three arguments that have traditionally been considered as the generators of such expansion: technology, literacy and natural law. The technological argument sustains that the development of the cheap press -- the information industry --, was catapulted by the advances in printing and related industries, railroad transportation and telegraphic communications (31). According to the literacy argument, since more people could read, the demand for printed material also increased (35-39). The last argument is supported by a more political agenda based on the idea of progress by natural law --the progress

from a "captive press to a free, independent press" (39), which was, at the same time, more modern. Schudson also mentions a combination of factors that favored the information industry:

> First, the population grew. Second, the public education and increased literacy created "a nation of readers." Third, more democratic forms of government increased popular interest in public affairs. Finally, the reduction in newspaper prices made the press available to poorer people. (42)

This reduction in newspaper prices was possible due to the "technological improvements in presses and paper-making" (42).

In addition, another factor that deeply affected the transaction of information during the early 1800's and forced writers to find other ways to sell their work was the financial crisis that came to be known as the Panic of 1837. According to Whalen the crisis had a strong impact upon the production of books and book trading in general. Whalen estimates that "during the 1820's books sold for an average of $2.00," but during and after the Panic of 1837, "they sold for fifty cents" (24). The Panic of 1837 forced writers to look for new audiences, changing drastically the relation between literary production and production in general, and the very notion of authorship.

During the 19th century, Western societies underwent a radical change in the way the word "author" was used and understood in literary discourse. This change was caused by the emergence of a large number of discursive practices that permeated the productive, economic, and social aspects of life. With the beginning of a new economic order characterized by a diversity of phenomena such as early capitalism, the mechanization of productive processes, the multiplication of literary formats and genres, the use of new discursive formulae in different disciplines, the philosophical understanding of the social roles of individuals, and new literary movements such as Romanticism and Transcendentalism, the episteme of the author evolved and became an issue of political speculation and literary reform. Undoubtedly, it was precisely the radical sophistication of certain discursive practices that deeply marked the function of the author. The understanding of the interaction between emerging discourses has led us to a clearer insight into the evolution of the debate around the nature and function of the author in literary analysis as critics and writers still use this term. The debate around the notion of the author in contemporary literary analysis is rooted in the changes that took place during the 19th century on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet it was in the United States where the conflict between old and new discourse practices appeared more intriguingly, and where the episteme of the author changed more rapidly and deeply.

In the 21st century, the concept of the author is still suffering profound chances that the debate around it and its legal repercussions are still to be analyzed in depth. There is a new and even more radical technological revolution which will doubly bring unexpected impressions to be added to the concept of the author. Moreover, contemporary economic ideals, such as globalization and free trade, will definitely leave their marks upon a concept that old medieval scribes will hardly recognize today.

End Note

1 See Michel Allen. Poe and the British Magazine Tradition. New York: OUP. 1969.

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