2. For a powerful criticism of this figuration of the author, see Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, "The Mind of Milton," ch. 1 of *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 27–46.
3. For the classic New Critical statement, see Frank H. Ellis, "Gray's Elegy: The Biographical Problem in Literary Criticism," *PMLA* 66, no. 6 (1951): 971–1008.
4. Amanda Anderson, "The Temptations of Aggrandized Agency: Feminist Histories and the Horizon of Modernity," *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2000): 43–65.
5. Henry James, Preface to *The Tragic Muse* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), x.

Authorship

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LET us imagine that a diverse group of scholars of English literature were asked to provide a one-minute explanation of why authorship is a worthwhile subject for academic enquiry. *Prima facie*, the facts of the matter seem straightforward: a person conceives a series of ideas, puts them in writing, and publishes them; if enough people are prepared to pay to read the results, the author gets a share of the profit; if the writing brings about a crime or misdemeanour (e.g. slander or plagiarism), the author is responsible in the eyes of the law.[1] But in contrast to this straightforwardness on paper, literary scholars continue to produce an enormous quantity of research dealing with "authorship." Nor is this usually a matter of determining who wrote some unsigned piece (the most intuitive interpretation of the term). Articles are written, lectures given, bids for research grants tremulously penned to study a concept that to the layperson may not appear to need such an expense of intellectual application. So, why is authorship interesting?

I suspect that the immediate mental associations prompted by this bald request would be strikingly different for different literary scholars, depending on the prevalent directions that inquiry has taken in their subfield. Those of a philosophical bent, for example, would likely cast their

minds back to that episode of the "theory wars" that concerned the theoretical and ideological viability of the notion of the author, and which resulted in a steady stream of scholarship from Barthes's and Foucault's famous essays well into the 1990s.[2] Scholars of medieval and early modern literature, where questions of textual reproduction and distribution have dominated the field, would likely think of social or technological history.[3] The default direction for scholars of the eighteenth century would probably be the history of development of copyright law.[4] Romanticists' most likely first port of call would be intellectual history, following from M. H. Abrams's foundational study of Romantic poetic theory.[5] To read a broad-range book like Andrew Bennett's *The Author*, which lithely spans the period from antiquity to the present, is to become keenly aware of the differences in approach between different communities of scholars.[6] This methodological heterogeneity raises several questions: is authorship primarily interesting as a theoretical concept? As a historical notion? If so, which history—material, social, intellectual? If the answer is "all of the above," what is the relationship between these approaches?

I will come back to this point on heterogeneity in literary studies shortly. For now, one disappointing feature of Bennett's otherwise excellent introduction—that he makes no reference to Victorian writers—leads me to the matter of the significance of authorship for Victorian studies. From histories of criticism, introductions and readers one may well be led to conclude that between "The Romantic Author" and "Formalism" (to follow Bennett's headings) nothing much happened; or, less bluntly put, that the Victorian period was a relatively uneventful continuation and consolidation of the Romantic ways of thinking about authorship that were later challenged by Modernist criticism.[7] And yet, in the Project Muse database, if we restrict the results to studies in Victorian literature published over the past ten years, the keyword "authorship" yields 532 results between books, articles and reviews; and this is far from a complete overview of the field (Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press publications, for example, are excluded from the search results). Authorship is obviously an important keyword for many scholars of Victorian literature. The question, then, arises of what we are writing about.

While I cannot claim to have read all these works, I have frequented the scholarship on authorship in the Victorian period and the periods before and after it extensively enough, and I want to propose a generalization: that the foremost peculiarity of Victorian studies' otherwise varied approaches to authorship is a tendency to work quite closely within the paradigm of historical materialism. What this means in practice is

that most of us are less interested in the author and authorship as interpretive concepts that inflect our apprehension of literary works (as is the case for many scholars of Romanticism and Modernism) than in the economic, social and professional aspects of authorship in the dictionary sense—what Richard Salmon, in a notable study in this vein, calls the "Victorian literary profession."[8] Since the turn of the century, many research outputs on Victorian authorship have been published, dealing with such matters as patent law,[9] the Victorian publishing industry,[10] the economics of authors' readings from their works,[11] the material difficulties that some writers, especially women, had in getting published.[12] If we cast our minds back to the spectrum of approaches I outlined above, these studies are representative of the field in that they share a concern with material and social history, rather than intellectual history or the theory of interpretation.[13]

Of course, I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with this tendency—a common one in Victorian studies, whatever the topic—or that adopting one approach rather than another necessarily results in a better or worse book or article. I do want to argue, however, that we could do more to integrate scholarship on this topic in Victorian studies with the concerns shared by scholars dealing with the periods on either side of ours. Certain questions in literary history that extend beyond our allotted chronological boundaries would be the better for such an integration. For instance, what happened to the dominant Romantic theories of authorship in the Victorian period? Is it possible to inscribe the Modernist ideal of impersonality in a longer intellectual line that goes back to the literary culture of nineteenth-century Britain (and not only to French writers such as Flaubert and the Goncourts)? These are some of the questions I have broached in my own work, and the historical-materialistic approach alone will not answer them. Answering them requires an engagement with other approaches, such as the history of ideas and the theory of criticism. The result will be a more abstract kind of history, but a legitimate one nonetheless, and one that could prompt a fruitful interaction with colleagues outside Victorian studies.

Notes

1. For the U. K. law see the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (c. 48), Part 1, Ch. 1, §9.

2. Both here and in the other notes, I only give a few representative examples. Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," *Manteia* 5 (1968): 12–17; Michel Foucault: "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" *Bulletin de la Societé Française de Philosophie* 63 (1969): 73–104. For two influential articles in the analytic tradition, see Peter Lamarque, "The Death of the Author: An Analytical Autopsy," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30, no. 4 (1990): 319–31; Paisley Livingston, "Intentionalism in Aesthetics," *New Literary History* 29, no. 4 (1998): 831–46.
3. Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate and Their Books, 1473–1557* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
4. Mark Rose, "The Public Sphere and the Emergence of Copyright: *Areopagitica*, the Stationers' Company, and the Statute of Anne," in *Privilege and Property. Essays on the History of Copyright*, ed. Ronan Deazley, Martin Kretschmer and Lionel Bently (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010).
5. Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).
6. Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005).
7. E.g., Seán Burke, ed., *Authorship: From Plato to Postmodern. A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).
8. Richard Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
9. Clare Pettitt, *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
10. Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Victorian Authorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
11. Amanda Adams, *Performing Authorship in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Lecture Tour* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004).
12. Amanda Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
13. A notable exception is Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). There have also been a number of shorter studies in this vein.