FORUM

Introduction

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This Spring 2011 issue of *FORUM* aims to explore the notion of authenticity as it is deployed in a series of fictional, or fictionalising, works. Whether the concept is treated as an ideal, an impossibility, or an overarching apparatus, the articles chosen for inclusion share a concern with the role of 'authenticity' as an ambition or illusion which is consciously sought or employed within the creative process. We have selected these pieces not only for their shared aspiration to stimulate further critical discussion regarding authentic representation, but also for their interrogation of the function of narrative compositions within which fictional, or fictionalised, individuals are represented.

Each article is grounded in discussion of a particular form of description, illustration or recording – whether poetry, novel, or film – which is then carefully examined to consider how such framing devices might simultaneously construct and/or challenge the possibility of 'authentic' representation. As such, the author emerges as an often self-conscious arbiter of situation and identity, whose role is at once challenged and developed in the search for authenticity. If authority is given to the creator, then s/he may dominate or even destroy the invented object's message; conversely, the creator may search for an 'authentic' voice or product that never seems quite achievable. The subjective roles of both author and artefact bleed into the invented worlds where characters may have many "faces" that hide the true (authentic) role, or may reveal that there is in fact no genuine portrayal beneath the façade. Taken as a body of work, what emerges from this issue is an impression of artistic production as a

continual process of self-conscious authentication, in which the seeking and questioning of fact, truth and virtuosity are nonetheless balanced against the illusory nature of the authentic construct.

Professor Peter Ainsworth structures the issue with a discussion of the role of modern technology in establishing an "authentic" archive and reconstructing the generative experience. He elaborates on how modern technology and scholarly efforts may (physically or virtually) gather related items together in a recreation of their original context despite their international dissemination. Discussing the reunion of sibling manuscripts now owned by different libraries at a 2011 exhibition at the Invalides in Paris, Ainsworth notes that the particularly exciting point is not simply the texts' close proximity, but the way in which "their entire contents could be explored in virtual format via interactive touchscreens nearby." Such an interactive endeavor opens these works to new studies in history, literature, art history, and palaeography. With digitisation and specialised software, scribal hands and illuminators workshops can better be decoded and classified, and thus "assist scholars to refine current knowledge of the human presence behind" the anonymous creations. From such collaborative projects, the individual scholar may gather the material and turn to objects with new knowledge. Only from this foundation in the extant object may we then ask, as we do in this issue *of* FORUM, "What makes this authentic?"

Simone Knewitz opens the discussion with an article on the conjunction of visual physicality with 'framing' processes in her essay "Black Bodies, White Subjects: Modernist Authenticities and Anxieties in the Avant-Garde Film *Borderline*". Knewitz argues that *Borderline* (1930) is exemplary of a wider trend within modernist literature and culture, in which the material body appears as a locus of authenticity and anxiety. For Knewitz, *Borderline* is "driven by two conflicting and intersecting notions of authenticity", relating to physicality of the body and materiality of the screen medium, and

she argues that it this intersection which creates a mechanical, ruptured projection of self-presence and immediacy. Her article draws out the ramifications of these intertwined approaches, combining contemporary critical analyses of *Borderline* with poststructural theory. Analysingthe anxieties surrounding representations of the body and 'authentic' portrayal in the early days of film, the article relates the ways in which the films' creators viewed the manufacture of their object in relation to the performativity of a so-called authentic 'face'.

Continuing with the thread of the authorial role is "The Authentic Artwork? *The Paris Review* Author Interview" by Becky Roach. In her meticulous analysis of a 1953 *Paris Review* interview with Graham Greene, Roach tackles the portraiture of the interview process, exposing the interviewers' attempts to frame the author in a fictionality of their own creation with the apparent aim to "transform" the author himself "into a literary character who can be read and interpreted." Noting that "writers and interviewers... often express anxiety about the authority of the interview utterance within a culture of mass media", Roach combines critical responses to the interview form with Walter Benjamin's theories regarding the role of the work of art in modernity, arguing that the "loss of 'auratic basis' for authenticity" renders art "particularly vulnerable to modern forces of commodification". Yet the creation of the authorial persona intersects with authority, where the author may become more greatly privileged through encouragement of the fictionalised persona. Roach argues that this endorsed portraiture (constructed by the interviewer, but approved by the author) both exploits and questions the use of authenticity as a validating concept.

Building on the relationship of the author to their work, in "The Burden of Authentic Expression in the Later Poetry of Geoffrey Hill", Jack Baker examines Geoffrey Hill's "determination to forge an authentic and autonomous poetic voice". Acknowledging that "the poet's frustrated desire for authentic expression drives him away from persuasive lyricism to ever more forbidding

complexity", Baker frames this struggle with a critique of Hill's earlier writings. Hill's awareness of his artistic ancestry and predecessors combines with the struggle to both react and distance himself from this history. As a contemporary poet with current concerns, Hill's verses – if viewed as a form of "public address" – must confront modern idiom and restrictions of language in remaining "current", that is, authentic to his time and place. The essay offers a close reading of the poet-figure in Hill's recent work to argue that the 'authenticity' of this verse is derived from its difficulty, and argues that these later works engage with the paradox that poetry is capable of greatest influence when it is most singular, most autonomous, and most removed from grand meta-narratives. Baker posits that Hill's voice results not from a resolution of such issues but from the struggle itself.

However, what if the struggle with authenticity results in a denial of the existence of authenticity? In "Masks of Infamy: The About-Faces in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*", Larry Dudenhoeffer examines whether a work of art may reject the concept of authenticity. Taking care to examine *The Dark Knight* in the context of earlier *Batman* movies, Dudenhoeffer argues that *The Dark Knight* "calls into question the authenticity of the first film's title and narrative". The film is "more than a retelling of the title character's origins," instead, "it renders it as another 'mask'." Through a close study of personal aspects of display in relationship to physical and conceptual masks, Dudenhoeffer discusses how a narrative may raise questions of any true (authentic) 'personhood' beneath these masks, while noting that "we must take care not to reduce the film to ideological mystification or false consciousness." His article argues that the masks of Batman, the Joker, Two-Face, and even Gotham City at once retrace and de-authenticate such notions as subjective consistency, character depth, moral duty, and urban realism in the face of digital simulation, cinematic representation, and cultural and economic expansionism. Given authority and power, these masks challenge any concepts of authentic portrayal or persona.

The functions of documentation addressed by Ainsworth, Knewitz, and Dudenhoeffer, are reconceived in Kristy Butler's "Vampiric Narratives: Constructing Authenticity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*". Treating *Dracula* as a case study, Butler examines how a narrative can construct concepts of internal authenticity by using the written word to develop a sense of legitimacy. In her example text, a scientific framework of reason and documentation authenticate the overall narrative, which itself contrasts with the titular character. Applying theories of the 'Eastern Other' in which the West constructs a narrative to legitimise its own perceptions and thereby diminish threats to its own identity, Butler argues that this is symptomatic of a post-Enlightenment compulsion to define cultural authenticity. Her discussion exposes how characters may appear anxious for legitimacy, suggesting that the complex pattern of narrative structures and devices within *Dracula* reveal an urgent need to signify or self-create an impression of authentic description.

Conclusion

Authenticity has long been subject to academic discussions seeking to restructure and redefine the concept, in terms of its validity as an aesthetic concern and its reverberations within the domain of cultural production. The topic continues to be fraught with contentious questions, and this collection of articles does not presume to offer clear definitions or simplistic solutions. Instead, we hope to explore the topic by offering a series of creative and constructive viewpoints, each acknowledging the difficulty of the subject they engage. By gathering these articles together in this issue of *FORUM*, we hope to stimulate further discussion and exploration of an area which is both exciting and frustrating in its significance for our times.