The Re-Emergence of Medieval Authorship Models in Contemporary Genres

Gabriela DEBITA[*]

Abstract
Medieval, pre-print authorship differs significantly from modern authorship in that it is often anonymous, derivative, collaborative or 'conspiratorial.' While the invention of the printing press completely revolutionized book production and led to an unprecedented diversification, availability, and affordability of printed material, it also profoundly changed authorship models and introduced new material and legal constraints. With publishers acting as gatekeepers, and with copyright laws limiting imitative and derivative authorship, informal authorship became difficult and derivative authorship dangerous from a legal point of view. However, the introduction of digital mediums eliminated some of these constraints, allowing medieval authorship models to re-emerge in a number of genres which were initially considered 'fringe,' but which have been gradually joining the mainstream over the course of the last decade: fantasy fiction, videogames, and fanfiction. This paper analyzes two cases (the continuation of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time fantasy series by author Brian Sanderson, and the expansion of the World of Warcraft universe from the initial MMORPG to a complex network of canonical and non-canonical works, including fiction, visual art, animation, and cinema), and argues that medieval authorship practices are present in both. Our conclusion is that due to the popularity and profitability of fantasy franchises and to the flexibility of digital mediums, such authorship practices are gradually spreading upwards and inwards into mainstream publishing and are likely to become increasingly common in decades to come.

Keywords: *medieval, authorship, fantasy, video games, fanfiction*

While the invention of printing liberated the book from the constraints of scarcity and laborious production, and allowed unprecedented diversification and dissemination, it also brought about material and legal concerns, such as the necessity of a fixed form, authors' rights and

[*] PhD Student, Teaching Assistant, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați, gabriela.debita@ugal.ro

royalties, and copyright laws. The impact of these concerns on the act of writing and on the formulation of authorship models cannot be overstated. With publishers acting as gatekeepers, informal authorship became difficult, the dissemination of material produced by non-professional authors almost impossible, and derivative authorship dangerous from a legal point of view.

It is not surprising, therefore, that once some of these constraints were removed by new digital mediums, older and almost forgotten authorship models (anonymous, imitative, interpretative, corrective, collaborative, 'conspiratorial') started to re-emerge. This happened despite the fact that many of their most enthusiastic users and supporters have little knowledge of the medieval and early Renaissance roots of such models, or little awareness of the part mediums have to play in the shaping of authorship. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to explore the similarities between pre-print and post-print authorship models, and to demonstrate the fact that, due to the freedom afforded by digital mediums, some medieval practices are re-emerging in fantasy writing, video game production and the derivative genre of fanfiction, and from there spreading upwards and inwards into mainstream publishing[1].

Although authors like J.R.R. Tolkien have brought both attention and respectability to fantasy writing, and fantasy books, along with their associated film productions, have earned their publishers millions of dollars, the genre is still situated at the outer limits of 'serious writing' compared to more canonical literature; insofar as fanfiction is concerned, many, including its adherents, place it on the fringes of the literary world, and a good many authors have spoken against its legitimacy (*Authors and FanFiction: 'Precious Sparkly Unicorns'* 2010, *Thus Spake the Creator – Fans and the FAQ*, n.d.). Interestingly, the distance from spheres of authority, such as literary criticism or official publishers, along with relegation to the realm of online publishing, are contributing factors to the nurturing of new authorship models, since they involve relatively little interference or limitations, and allow free and widespread dissemination.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, two cases were selected for further analysis, although it is undeniable that both fantasy and fanfiction universes are present in large numbers and in every medium. The first case is that of *The Wheel of Time* series, envisioned and written to a large extent by Robert Jordan, and finished by Brandon Sanderson, despite Jordan's

clear directives against any continuations after his death and his antagonistic position towards fanfiction. The second case is that of the *Warcraft* universe, including lore development in game, official novels, the *Warcraft* film, and the activities of the fanfiction community. Both cases present unorthodox authorship models, some of them originating in the unofficial communities surrounding these franchises, along with the co-existence of several authorship models in the case of *Warcraft*. While it is not realistic to expect mainstream literary and authorship practices to change overnight, especially considering that the digital age is still in its infancy, the commercial success of the practices emerging from fantasy and fanfiction writing may lead to a reshaping of mainstream authorship practices in the course of the upcoming decades.

The pre-print era – anonymous, collaborative, and 'conspiratorial' models of authorship

Authorship is, according to Sebastian Coxon, "the most fundamental and provocative literary issue of all" (2001: 1). As modern readers and cultural products of the print era, we take it for granted that every published text has a known author, both ready to stand behind his or her written work and to defend it from unauthorized plagiarism and copyright infringements. Therefore, Coxon's assertion may seem hyperbolic: 'fundamental,' certainly, given our interest in canonicity, biographies, literary influences, and schools of thought, but 'provocative' may seem far-reaching considering the efforts of publishers and lawmakers to define the boundaries of legitimate authorship and to dispose of uncertainties. However, as Hobbins succinctly puts it, "authorship before print is different from modern authorship" (2009: xii), and "all the things we thought we knew about authorship, books, and publishing, are not timeless but historically conditioned and contingent on the printed book" (2009: xi). Thus, in order to understand the uncertainty, flexibility, even 'lawlessness' of medieval authorship, we must step outside the norms and definitions we have developed in relationship to the printed book.

Before we begin to understand the ways in which pre-print authorship differs from modern authorship, we must consider the implications of the words *auctor* and *auctoritas*, which cannot be directly translated into modern English without careful contextual delineations.

Auctoritas can be translated as both 'authority' and 'authorship,'[2] of which the former precedes and supersedes the latter in a medieval context. As Coxon explains, the notion of 'authority' had 'juridical connotations of responsibility' (2001: 5) due to the fact that the word *auctor* referred to ''guarantor' in ancient and medieval common law' (2001: 5). In a scholastic and literary sense, 'authority' expands beyond its juridical origins to encompass truth, intellectual value, and adherence to divine revelations and precepts. Hence, the Church Fathers, or scholars like Duns Scotus and Ockam "may have been authors in the sense that they possessed authority and were recognized" (Hobbins 2009: 2), and their works were valued, copied, cited, and memorized. Similarly, the notion of authority applied to writers of the classical and late antiquity whose works encompassed "the sum of learning" (Coxon 2001: 5), as revealed by the title of Conrad of Hirsau's book, *Dialogus super auctores*. In essence, the attribution of a text to a recognized and revered *auctor* was an act of institutionalization and legitimization, of investing the text with divinely sanctioned authority. Nevertheless, the accuracy of such attributions is far from precise, as we will see in the examples of Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas.

"Auctor est aequivocum", however, according to Honorius of Autun, quoted by Coxon: *"Est autem auctor civitatis, id est fundator ur Romulus Romae; est et auctor sceleris, id est princeps vel signifer, ut Judas Christi mortus;* ***est quoque auctor libri, id est compositor****, ut David Psalterii, Plato Thymaei"* (Honorius cited in Coxon 2001: 5, my emphasis). If we choose to translate *auctor* as the 'originator' or 'composer' of a book, someone able to claim the "individual creation and ownership of texts" (Hobbins 2009: 2), then 'authorship' is perhaps an imprecise way of describing the 'authority' of some medieval scholars and writers, as Hobbins points out. Hobbins mentions the example of Alexander of Hales, a 12th century theologian, who was unable to finish his *Summa* before his death in 1245. Not wishing to leave his work unfinished, the Franciscan order commissioned a group of writers in order to see it to completion (Hobbins 2009: 2). A similar situation involves the continuation of Thomas Aquinas' work by the Dominican order, using 'fragments of odd treatises and even memories of his teachings' (2009: 2). As Boureau explains, "[t]he true author [of Thomas Aquinas's works] […] is not the person who died in 1274 but 'the mind of Thomas' that inspired these works and their continuations" (Boureau cited in Hobbins 2009: 2).

These two cases clearly show the impossibility of choosing just one facet, one meaning of the word *auctor* – Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas were *auctores* in the sense that they possessed authority, just as they were *auctores* in the sense that they were 'originators' of their works. Yet, despite modern editions displaying their names on the cover, neither can claim sole ownership of his works or individual creation, starting with the formulation of their ideas and ending with the composition of their sentences. In fact, neither had any semblance of control over the shape and content of their works after their deaths, or any say in whether they considered the continuation of their works an acceptable solution. The accuracy of their disciples' memories is also profoundly questionable, and allows the seamless insertion of foreign interpretations and formulations into the oeuvre itself. In a way, we will always be one degree removed from the 'true' work of Thomas and we must understand his 'authorship' in the loosest sense, as osmosis between his authentic writings and his disciples' contributions. Hence, the authorship model that emerges is collaborative and partially anonymous, more interested in investing the final work with its proper authority than with preserving authenticity or recording individual contributions with accuracy.

According to Minnis, a shift in the construction of authorship took place by the 13th century, when "the aspect of divinely sanctioned authority no longer presented an obstacle to attempts to grasp the individual literary and moral activity of human authors" (cited in Coxon 2001: 6). Coxon explains that this shift was the result of a rising interest in 'the literal sense of the Bible' and to a 'new critical idiom' (2001: 6) based on Aristotle's four causes, which allowed the differentiation between the primary effective cause – God (the unmoved mover) and the secondary effective cause – the human writer, drawing his inspiration from God. As a consequence, various contributions to the production of a literary work could be classified in a more precise manner, from *scriptor* (scribe), to *compilator*, *commentator*, and *auctor*, as outlined in Bonaventure's scale, for example[3].

As Coxon explains, Bonaventure's scale is based on the degrees to which a writer fuses borrowed and original material, which allows us to see a perhaps greater acknowledgement of the role of personal contribution (as well as the tension between 'authority' and 'authorship' at work). For example, scribes, whose role was mostly that of copyists, 'also functioned as interpreters, editing and consequently altering the meaning of texts'

(Johnson 1991: 820). And, even though, according to Bale, 'in many medieval vernacular texts the author is represented as a craftsman and translator rather than a visionary or virtuoso' (Bale 2008: 920), this is probably a convenient means of seamlessly (and, occasionally, subversively) inserting and concealing original contributions while making recourse to the authority of classical and patristic texts. Interestingly, this is the polar opposite of modern authorship formulations, which seek to distinguish the author from others who may have undertaken similar pursuits and to emphasize the originality of the work, even if the latter is located in approach or interpretation rather than in subject.

In the late medieval period, a greater preoccupation with the role and status of the author emerged, "signalling a growing trend of attaching an authorial identity to a text worth reading", as Bale points out (2008: 920). While the writer of *The Wanderer*, or the *Pearl* poet, or even writers whose identity is known, such as Chrétien de Troyes, are faint, undefined, presences in their works, the same cannot be said of Christine de Pizan or Geoffrey Chaucer. Pizan obsessively repeats the phrase "Je, Christine" throughout her works, as a permanent reminder of her status as an individual and as a professional writer, and Chaucer is the first English writer "to use the word *author* in its secular meaning […] the word *tale* in its literary sense […] the words *audience* and *auditor* without their legal implications" (Sanders 1991: 111). After Chaucer, particularly through the works of John Lydgate and the prologues of William Caxton in the early print era, we can see the emergence of the English 'laureate poet' and the attempt to solidify the notion of personal authorship in a form which is similar to its modern incarnation (that is, investing individual authorship with authority derived from its own merits, rather than from a divine source).

At the same time, considering that the authorship of Chaucer, or, later on, that of Shakespeare, is based on the same claims to individuality and originality as modern authorship would be a gross oversimplification. Chaucer owes a great debt to classical mythology and Greek tragedy, to Ovid, the Bible, Boethius, Boccaccio, and to oral medieval tales in circulation during his time. Although his contributions to the development of English vernacular literature are undeniable, and his treatment of popular themes, plots, and genres shows a great degree of innovation, Chaucer is, in a manner of speaking, one of the most refined fanfiction

writers in English literature, for his works unfold in borrowed or conventional 'universes,' and make ample use of characters not of his invention (from the stock characters of his *Canterbury Tales*, like the popular Johan and Alysoun, or the figures of his pilgrims, to Troilus and Criseyde). This is by no means a sin from a medieval perspective, and certainly not what would be considered an act of plagiarism today; on the contrary, it is an exercise in the art of *conspiratio*, which has the connotation of multiple voices 'breathing' together as they intermingle, if we are to use Macrobius' metaphor: "Not only do different authors proffer different versions of a single story, but each individual author must negotiate among the many voices heard in order to arrive at a new version" (Kelly 1999: xi), as Kelly elaborates. Rather than simply imitating, Chaucer engages in a literary 'conspiracy' of intertextual allusions, rewriting, correcting, or adding to earlier voices instead of relying solely on personal inspiration. From here, a complicated model of authorship emerges, one in which individual contributions are finely interwoven with borrowed material, to the point where untangling the separate threads is no longer possible.

A very similar model applies to Shakespeare as well, whose plots appear to be almost entirely borrowed, although with added complications: none of Shakespeare's original manuscripts survive today – only the printed folios –, which makes it exceedingly difficult to document where Shakespeare himself ends and the additions and corrections of his collaborators and contemporaries begin. In addition, a number of Shakespeare's plays are the result of literary collaborations, and it is possible that works attributed to other playwrights, such as John Fletcher's *A Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed* may have benefitted from Shakespeare's indirect contributions (aside from the fact that the play is a response to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*).

Besides the theological, philosophical, and aesthetical influences presented above, there is one more factor which contributed to the fluidity of medieval authorship: the medium itself – the manuscript book. Although great care went into the production of presentation and display copies, the manual reproduction and production of books allowed the relatively effortless incorporation of editorial corrections and annotations, the collation of multiple versions, and the revision of earlier ones. Individual authorship, even in times when the individuality of creation started emerging as a concept, is difficult or impossible to separate from

subsequent, signed or anonymous, contributions. The picture emerging from the pre-print era and the ensuing transitional period, therefore, is that of multiple and complicated authorship models, involving heavy reliance on: divine authority and on the authority of preceding scholars; anonymous contributions; anonymous modifications, editing, and continuations of existing works; collaborative writing; intricate allusions to and rewritings of previous works (in other words, involving the clothing of old books in new flesh).

With the introduction of the printing press, however, new concerns and practices emerge, which, over the course of over 500 years, solidify a more concrete model of authorship: one which is more familiar and coherent for the modern reader. While the exploration of authorship in the print era is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to summarize the factors which led to the fixity of texts and the crystallization of modern authorship.

As Hellinga notes, the material investment in paper and equipment, and the complicated processes of typesetting and printing "encouraged careful control over texts before they were committed to print and during production" (2009: 211). The implication is that gradual and collaborative contributions were no longer feasible from a material point of view. The commercial nature of book production also invited authors to claim ownership of their texts, beyond the scarce rights they were entitled to in the 16th century, when "they owned their copyright so long as they held the only copy of their book" (Shaw 2009: 229). In this respect, one of the most important developments came in the 18th century in Britain, with the creation of literary property under copyright legislation, which "allowed authors legal rights to be recognized as originators and therefore owners of a specific commodity (in this case text)" (Finkelstein and McCleery 2006: 275). This development settled the ambiguity and polysemantic nature of *auctor* and *auctoritas*, by recognizing the precedence of 'originator' over that of vessel of divine inspiration and authority. The 19th century witnessed the emergence of one of the most important copyright acts, which extended copyright to "42 years or seven years after the author's death, whichever was the longest" (Eliot 2009: 293). While references and allusions to prominent texts continued in established literary practices, copyright laws created the necessity for much more drastic delineations between individual works and between the contributions of individual authors. As

the medium itself, the printed book, required formal fixity in order to permit inexpensive mass dissemination, anonymous, collaborative, and 'conspiratorial' models of authorship fell out of grace, and public, individual, original authorship became the norm.

The post-print era – the rediscovery of Mediaeval models of authorship in fantasy writing and fanfiction

The introduction of digital production and reproduction technologies, along with the exciting opportunities provided by online publishing and distribution are perhaps the most significant influences on the re-emergence of fluid authorship models in the new digital mediums. That is not to minimize the contributions of Barthes and Foucault to the critical debate surrounding authorship, which served to emphasize the pre-eminence of language and the role of the reader (Barthes) or the historical variability of the *fonction auteur* (Foucault), and which encouraged scholars to review and rethink their considerations on authorship from antiquity to the modern era. However, the formulation of authorship should not be regarded solely as an academic preoccupation, ultimately removed from within the reach of writers themselves and of their audiences. On the contrary, the accessibility of digital mediums and the almost complete permeation of the internet have enabled those who were previously voiceless to become actively engaged in the formulation of new authorship models. Ironically, these apparently new models bear striking resemblances to the medieval models reviewed in the previous section, and certainly not due to an overall acquaintance with medieval history, philosophy, and writing practices. While literacy has reached unprecedented levels, the return to these models cannot be ascribed to it, but to some inherent similarities between pre-print and post-print mediums.

The image of the medieval scribe or *auctor* as it comes to us from miniatures, carefully inking letters on a sheet of vellum, is not at all congruent with that of the contemporary writer (professional or amateur), typing his or her piece on a computer and e-mailing it or posting it on an online forum. The production of a manuscript was a laborious process, which could stretch over months or years, and the ability to reproduce a work was painfully limited, by our contemporary standards. And yet, the pre-print book could 'soak' generations of corrections and annotations, the

contributions of its readers sometimes absorbed into recopied versions, and could certainly morph into a very different version of itself if new sections were added or removed. In a similar vein, a piece of fanfiction posted on an online forum can change considerably based on feedback from its readers, and could even become incorporated in further versions of the canonical work (assuming the work is not considered finished), therefore impacting the latter's shape and direction. Although the manuscript book and digital productions are vastly different in themselves, what they share is a certain flexibility lacking in the printed book, an ability to accommodate authorship models which are not always public, individual, and original (as a reference to 'origin,' rather than to creativity per se).

The genre of fantasy writing is not a product of the digital age, but has benefitted greatly from the convergence of various mediums, including the audiovisual and the digital, and has arguably created a nurturing environment for online fan communities and has stimulated the development of fanfiction as a genre. In terms of authorship models, an important distinction which needs to be made is that fantasy itself has not necessarily embraced the diversification of authorship, except in some cases, but has certainly encouraged its development in derivative genres. Therefore, it is important to preface a discussion of fanfiction-related models of authorship with an analysis of the potential inherent in fantasy writing.

Considering the seminal role played by fantasy in the development of fanfiction, it is surprising (and, to an extent, amusing) that its most hallowed paragons have shown a definite distaste for unorthodox models of authorship, and, in particular, for derivative/imitative authorship. The reasons behind this staunch opposition to fanfiction, which involves the creation of original stories taking place in borrowed universes and, occasionally, but not always, involves established characters, converge into two main considerations: lack of literary value (perceived in the milder cases as a form of artistic immaturity[4], and in others as a form of intellectual violation[5]) and copyright infringement, with its negative material consequences for the original author. Charlie Stross, author of *Down on the Farm* and *Trunk and Disorderly*, has summarized these positions in fittingly 'medieval' metaphors: "I am not a precious sparkly unicorn who is obsessed with the purity of his characters — rather, I am a glittery and avaricious dragon who is jealous of his steaming pile of gold. If you do not

steal the dragon's gold, the dragon will leave you alone" (*Authors and FanFiction: 'Glittery and Avaricious Dragons'* 2010). Robert Jordan, author of the celebrated *The Wheel of Time* series, was ostensibly of the latter persuasion: tolerant of music and art illustrating his works, but adamantly against copyright transgressions and the dissemination of fan creations based on his work for material gain.[6] That is not to say that all writers have shown a similar level of intolerance towards fanfiction,[7] but the sheer existence of such objections underlines the conflicted nature of a genre caught in the transition between print and digital cultures – a genre based on traditional print authorship models, yet serving as a source for alternative, non-print models.

The case of Robert Jordan and of *The Wheel of Time* series is perhaps the most interesting in its ironic turn. Despite his reticent position towards fanfiction and somewhat uncomfortable relationship with digital mediums, evidenced by the fact that he kept track of online fan activities by having webpages printed for him (*Thus Spake the Creator – Fans and the FAQ*, n.d.), Jordan attempted to connect with some of his fan communities, like *Dragonmoun*t, founded in 1998, and which has since become a major online hub for Jordan fans (*About* Dragonmount n.d.). Such fan communities, which engage in a direct dialogue with writers and their representatives, may have played a part in a major decision taken by Jordan's widow, Harriet Rigney, following the author's death in 2007.

When asked in an undated interview about the future of the series after his death, Jordan adamantly insisted that it would remain unfinished and that he had taken precautions to ensure a continuation would be difficult to accomplish (*What If He Dies?* n.d.). At the same time, Jordan kept extremely detailed notes for the final book of the series, which he never had the chance to finish himself. Despite the writer's alleged refusal to see his work brought to completion by another writer, in 2007 Harriet Rigney commissioned young Brandon Sanderson with the monumental task of writing the last book in the series (*Brandon Sanderson: The Official Site* n.d.). While it is impossible to know exactly what motivated Rigney to go against Jordan's wishes (and difficult to find out whether Jordan changed his position before his death), financial gain from the sales of an additional book (which ended up being developed into three separate novels) was likely not the sole reason. After all, Jordan had been compared positively with the titan of fantasy writing, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the success of his series

had been tremendous up to that point. Sanderson faced the difficult task of living up to a reputation of epic proportions, and it is a fair assumption that literary critics and audiences alike awaited the release of *The Gathering Storm* with a mix of fervent anticipation and anxiety. A disappointing performance on Sanderson's part, especially if met with scathing criticism, may have painted the act of appointing a successor as morally corrupt and surrounded the franchise with negative publicity. An educated guess regarding the causes of this decision is that Rigney understood the anxiety of long-term fan communities when faced with the perspective of never finding out how the series was slated to end, especially when these communities found a voice through the online medium.

The appointment of Sanderson as Jordan's successor, in the light of the preceding section, is resonant of the Franciscans' and Dominicans' decision to continue the works of Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas, using the deceased authors' notes and teachings as a basis for a post-mortem literary collaboration. While contemporary mediums allow a much more detailed documentation of which parts were produced by the original author and by the successor, the seamless construction of the three Sanderson novels, *The Gathering Storm*, *Towers of Midnight,* and *A Memory of Light* does not make their readership privy to such details. From a reader's point of view, the latest books exemplify a model of authorship which is quasi-medieval in its construction. Without scholarly training and extensive research, we have no way of telling where Jordan ends and Sanderson begins, especially since these recent works have not been subjected to the sort of critical attention afforded to Aquinas' works (and, in all fairness, never will).

In light of Jordan's attitude towards imitative writing, Sanderson's authorship is twice tinged with uncomfortable irony: Sanderson began his creative career as a fanfiction writer, and his work with *The Wheel of Time* series is, in effect, glorified fanfiction (of admittedly superior quality compared to what is normally posted on online forums like *Dragonmount* and *Fanfiction.net*). From a literary perspective, however, Sanderson's authorship is revolutionary: once relegated to imitative writing, he was offered the chance to engage in 'conspiratorial' writing, using his predecessor's notes and plans as a basis for original writing set in a borrowed universe. Given Rigney's training as a literary editor, perhaps

this transgression was an act of auctorial innovation – allowing the possibility of a controversial authorship model for the sake of the *oeuvre*.

While this model is certainly not a natural result of the far more orthodox models embraced by the fantasy genre, it could be argued that it appeared at the fortunate intersection between fantasy, the possibilities offered by online mediums and communities, and the existence of derivative genres, which emerged from fantasy and science fiction writing. Sanderson's predicament could be qualified as the ultimate experience of fandom – not only actively engaging with a beloved universe, but having access to the author's private notes, and developing a form of authorship which is inextricably linked with that of the original author – which is collaborative, 'conspiratorial,' imitative to an extent, yet raised to an official, canonical position. To date, Sanderson's books have been released to critical acclaim and excellent sales, which prove that an authorship model inspired by medieval practices can have significant commercial value, in the spirit of print-era material concerns.

However, not every fantasy universe was conceived within the boundaries of traditional print practices, and some juxtapose unorthodox authorial practices in their very canon with a very active fanfiction community. The case of the *Warcraft* universe is particularly interesting, since it came into being as a product of the digital age, and its *auctores*, its originators, have recognized the collaborative circumstances of its conception and allowed the practice to continue by commissioning several writers for the canonical novels, stories, comics and manga, working with director Duncan Jones to produce a collaborative script for the *Warcraft* film, and encouraging the development of a fanfiction community.

Although Christopher Metzen was the creative director of the *Warcraft* franchise from its inception until 2016, and likely responsible for major lore decisions, the proper authorship of *Warcraft* cannot be pinned on any single developer or writer – the original lore was developed by a team, not anonymous per se, but whose separate, individual contributions are impossible to untangle after almost a decade of creative development. This patchwork authorship is further complicated by the addition of several novelists and short-story writers – Richard A. Knaak, Christie Golden, Charles L. Grant, Jeff Grub, Grace Randolph, Troy Lewter, Brian Kindregan, Aaron Rosenberg, among others, whose works are considered canonical along with Metzen's own novel, and by the occasional

collaboration between some of the authors (Golden and Rosenberg, for example). While Grant and Rosenberg are not considered particularly influential, Knaak and Golden stand out as major contributors to the development of official lore – Knaak as the creator of the Dragonflights and of the infamous character Rhonin, and Golden as a fictional biographer of major lore figures (Thrall and Arthas Menethil, in particular). Given the organic intermingling of elements originating in different novels, or the free, bidirectional exchange between lore aspects and details found in game and in the novels, the authorship of *Warcraft* becomes very much like that of the *Arthurian* cycle – a tangled weave of uncertain origins and a collective product of mixed authorship.

As a brain-child of the digital medium, *Warcraft* exemplifies perhaps one of the most fluid models of authorship in existence today, considerably more complicated and more flexible than what classical fantasy has been able to produce. The locus of this authorial experimentation and rediscovery (it is tempting to qualify it as 'innovation,' but its similarities to medieval models require caution) is likely its remoteness from what is considered canonical in the literary world. Literary scholarship may have embraced Tolkien, yet Tolkien came to it not only as a fantasy writer, but also as a medieval scholar, one who imbued his works with enough allusion and 'conspiration' to satisfy the most sophisticated tastes. The writers behind *Warcraft* come to it as much more humble figures from a cultural point of view – their work, in terms of content, is by no means revolutionary or erudite; quite the opposite, despite its commercial success, it is little more than fodder for the masses. And yet, this removal from the critical eye of literary scholarship, from the responsibility which comes with 'real literature,' has likely enabled the continuation of a chaotic authorship model, in which individual contributions were enmeshed with each other, and the story itself became more important than its writers. By separating single, consolidated authorship from the lore of *Warcraft*, its developers allowed it to remain open and limitless as text.

In terms of this openness and limitlessness, the nurturing of a fanfiction community on the official *World of Warcraft* boards seems like as a natural choice. While many fantasy authors distanced themselves from fanfiction or considered it an inferior genre with limited possibilities, it is likely that the game developers have understood that a born-digital

product cannot alienate its online audience without consequences. If online communities have become a marketing trick used by authors in order to concentrate their fan base and maintain the illusion of a bottom-up type of convergence, born-digital products with frequently-altered structure and content are dependent on the feedback of their audiences and have a vested interest in allowing the latter to submit creative suggestions. Despite the fact that lore decisions have elicited considerably less debate than changes impacting game mechanics, the existence of a Roleplay Forum (currently known as The World's End Tavern: Roleplay and Fan Fiction) and the addition of the Story Forum indicate that developers are not ignoring the massive untapped potential of millions of users, many of them capable of suggesting interesting developments. While users normally create their own stories and discussions, occasional 'blue' (i.e. created by the moderators) threads direct the stories in certain directions associated with in-game events – *The Northrend Journals* and *Tales of the Tournament* are such examples. More recently, the Roleplay and Fan Fiction forum has included 'stickied' topics, which offer advice regarding character and story development.

The response to the inclusion of fanfiction on the official website has been overwhelmingly positive, with many threads and new posts being added every hour. However, despite their enthusiastic participation in fanfiction-related activities, contributors do not generally feel that their personal work is prominent enough to impact the official universe in any significant way. This feeling of irrelevance or insignificance is to be expected in the context of anonymous, unofficial, un-authoritative authorship. At the same time, the tension between insignificant personal contribution and strong collective contribution is a revealing and constructive one: despite the fact that we continue to operate under the assumptions of the print era (in which individual authorship is rewarded with authority via official, in-print publication), we are starting to acknowledge the importance of collective authorship and of genres capitalizing on collective potential. While one author, especially an unrecognized, anonymous one, may not leave his or her imprint on the canon, the fanfiction community as a whole is making a positive impact on the official environment and can be viewed as an intellectual and creative training ground for more significant initiatives involving non-traditional authorship.

This tension between individual and collective authorship can also be noticed in *Warcraft*'s network of professional writers. Knaak's work is certainly controversial among *Warcraft* lore fans, many of whom consider his writing vapid, self-centered, and tainted by 'Mary Sue' character development. Having read some of Knaak's *Warcraft* books, I found myself in agreement with these discontents; at the same time, from a theoretical perspective, his commercial success is perfectly understandable. Fans do not purchase Knaak books per se, but *Warcraft* books (or, alternatively, they purchase *Warcraft* books *despite* their being written by Knaak), which serves as another reminder that the work has outgrown its creators and that Knaak as an author is secondary to the importance of the work and to the contributions of the professional network as a whole.

Until this point in time, the *World of Warcraft* universe has successfully sustained several separate networks of authors and an interesting variety of unorthodox authorship models. While much work remains to be done regarding the further integration and convergence of these networks, it will be interesting to see whether these quasi-medieval models of authorship will be able to permeate mainstream publishing circles in the years to come. The work of the fanfiction community is not yet at a stage where it can make a fundamental impression on the canon, but the willingness of the creators to foster and encourage this community certainly reflects an understanding of changing authority and authorship concepts (along with a much more pragmatic understanding that actively-involved, fully-immersed audiences are far more likely to maintain their loyalty, and thus to contribute to the steady flow of income in the company's coffers). As it happens, Amazon has already launched Amazon Worlds, a platform which allows the publishing of authorized fanfiction based on a selection of universes, which, if successful, will likely greatly expand in the future.

Conclusions

As Jordan would say, "The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again" (1990: 1). While the Middle Ages have not returned, the old bones of the manuscript book and its corresponding authorship practices have been

clothed in the new flesh of the digital medium. Collaborative, anonymous, imitative, allusive, or 'conspiratorial' models of authorship, discarded as inconvenient or financially inefficient during the print era, are slowly re-emerging as viable alternatives to the model we have held on to for the past few centuries. The continuation of *The Wheel of Time* series by a different writer, an act of collaborative, imitative, and 'conspiratorial' authorship, has provided readers with a long-awaited conclusion based on the original author's notes. It is certainly debatable whether this act was ethical in light of Jordan's own statements, although perhaps this question will be settled in the future, once more documents regarding the decision process become available. From a medieval point of view, however, the completed series fully reflects Jordan's 'authority' despite the intervention of a secondary author. In its turn, the *Warcraft* universe's highly complex network of interconnected genres, works, and authors represents just one example of a growing number of multifaceted fantasy and science-fiction universes which have fully embraced a collaborative model. The most high-profile recent example is that of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy series, which has already spawned a highly successful (and divergent) TV series and a number of smaller projects, such as the Telltale Games PC game, which explores a non-canonical episode carefully inserted into a corner of the main universe so as to avoid any changes to the major storylines. If Martin is unable to produce an official conclusion to his book series, a debate similar to that surrounding *The Wheel of Time* is likely to erupt, although its terms will inevitably be influenced by the prior existence of a multi-genre, collaborative network of related works. Although still relatively removed from the literary mainstream, this re-emergence of pre-print authorship models in the post-print era represents a significant phenomenon and will undoubtedly lead to the development of new models as both legislation and technology evolve.

Notes

1. In accordance with the theories of vertical convergence (Jenkins 2004) and horizontal convergence (Castells 2004).
2. The complexities of this term and of its separate meanings are explored by Alastair Minnis with reference to medieval scholastic commentaries of scriptural texts (2009).
3. In addition, starting in the 12th century, monastic scriptoria were no longer the only book production centers, with commercial production centers appearing

in major cities and employing professional scribes as part of a separation of roles in book production (Clanchy 2009: 195), which arguably allowed for a finer differentiation in authorship degrees.

4. For instance, Jasper Fforde, author of *First Among Sequels* and *Shades of Grey*, has expressed this position: 'My thoughts on Fan Fiction are pretty much this: That it seems strange to want to copy or 'augment' someone else's work when you could expend just as much energy and have a lot more fun making up your own. I feel, and I think with good reason, very proprietorial about Thursday and all her escapades; clearly I can't stop you writing and playing what you want in private, and am very flattered that you wish to do so. But anything published in any form whatsoever – and that specifically includes the internet – I cannot encourage, nor approve of' (*Authors and FanFiction: 'Precious Sparkly Unicorns'* 2010). Others include Anne Rice, who encouraged her readers to 'write [their] own original stories with [their] own characters,' George R.R. Martin (*Authors and FanFiction: 'Precious Sparkly Unicorns'* 2010), and Robert Jordan.
5. Anne Rice and Diana Gabaldon have been particularly vocal. Rice has commented that "it upsets [her] terribly to even think about fan fiction with [her] characters," and Gabaldon has been unequivocally dismissive of fan creations: "I think it's immoral, I _know_ it's illegal, and it makes me want to barf whenever I've inadvertently encountered some of it involving my characters." She goes on to compare fan creations to theft or violation (*Authors and FanFiction: 'Precious Sparkly Unicorns'* 2010).
6. Jordan is quoted as saying: "To protect my copyright, I have to keep on top of anyone who violates it. So, no fan fiction using my characters or my world. Sorry. Using the ornaments out of the books is a different matter. That is a violation of copyrights, trademarks. When I say I like seeing art about the *Wheel of Time*, I mean art that the fans created themselves. And remember guys, you can't try to make money out of this stuff" (*Thus Spake the Creator – Fans and the FAQ*, n.d.).
7. Naomi Novik, author of the *Temeraire* series, and herself a former fanfiction writer, considers fanfiction a part of literary history (*Naomi Novik Says Fanfic Is Part of Literary History - and Reveals What's Next for* Temeraire, n.d.) and others, like W.A. Hoffman, Catherynne M. Valente, Cecilia Tan, and J.K. Rowling have taken tolerant, if not particularly enthusiastic positions (*Authors and FanFiction: Complex Positions* 2010).

References

'About Dragonmount'. *Dragonmount – A Wheel of Time Community*. [online] available at http://www.dragonmount.com/about_us.php> [07 November 2010]

Bale, A. (2008) 'From Translator to Laureate: Imagining the Medieval Author'. *Literature Compass* 5 (5), 918–934

Barthes, R. (2006) 'The Death of the Author'. In Finkelstein, D. and McCleery, A. (eds.) *The Book History Reader*. London: Routledge, 277-280

'Brandon Sanderson: About.' *Brandon Sanderson: The Official Site* [online] available from https://brandonsanderson.com/about-brandon [07 November 2010]

Castells, M. (2004) 'The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy'. In Castells, M. and Cardoso, G. (eds.) *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy.* Washington D.C.: Centre for Transatlantic Relationships, 4-21

Clanchy, M. T. (2009) 'Parchment and Paper: Manuscript Culture 1100-1500'. In Eliot, S. and Rose, J. (eds.) *A Companion to the History of the Book.* London: Wiley-Blackwell, 194-206

Coxon, S. (2001) *The Presentation of Authorship in Medieval German Narrative Literature 1220-1290.* New York: Oxford University Press

Dickinson Goodman, J. (2010) 'Authors and FanFiction: 'Precious Sparkly Unicorns''. *FeelingElephants's Weblog*. [online] available at <http://feelingelephants.wordpress.com/2010/05/27/authors-and-fanfiction-precious-sparkly-unicorns/> [07 November 2010]

Dickinson Goodman, J. (2010) 'Authors and FanFiction: 'Glittery and Avaricious Dragons''. *FeelingElephants's Weblog*. [online] available at <http://feelingelephants.wordpress.com/2010/05/27/authors-and-fanfiction-glittery-and-avaricious-dragons/> [07 November 2010]

Dickinson Goodman, J. (2010) 'Authors and FanFiction: Complex Positions''. *FeelingElephants's Weblog*. [online] available at <http://feelingelephants.wordpress.com/2010/05/27/authors-and-fanfiction-complex-positions/> [08 November 2010]

Eliot, S. (2009) 'From Few and Expensive to Many and Cheap: The British Book Market 1800-1890'. In Eliot, S. and Rose, J. (eds.) *A Companion to the History of the Book.* London: Wiley-Blackwell, 291-302

Eliot, S. and Rose, J. (eds.) (2009) *A Companion to the History of the Book.* London: Wiley-Blackwell

Finkelstein, D. and McCleery, A. (eds.) (2006) *The Book History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Foucault, M. (2006) 'What Is an Author?' In Finkelstein, D. and McCleery, A. (eds.) *The Book History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2006. 281-90.

Hellinga, L. (2009) 'The Gutenberg Revolutions'. In Eliot, S. and Rose, J. (eds.) *A Companion to the History of the Book.* London: Wiley-Blackwell, 207-19

Hobbins, D. (2009) *Authorship and Publicity Before Print – Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Jenkins, H. (2004) 'The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7 (1), 33-43

Johnson, L. S. (1991) 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe' *Speculum* 66 (4), 820-838

Jordan, R. (1990) *The Eye of the World.* New York: Tor Fantasy

Kelly, D. (1999) *The Conspiracy of Allusion – Description, Rewriting, and Authorship from Macrobius to Medieval Romance.* Leiden: Brill

Newitz, A. (2010) 'Naomi Novik Says Fanfic Is Part of Literary History - and Reveals What's Next for *Temeraire.*' *Io9. We Come from the Future* [online] available at <http://io9.com/5634183/naomi-novik-says-fanfic-is-part-of-literary-history- -and-reveals-whats-next-for-temeraire> [07 November 2010]

Sanders, B. (1991) 'Lie It as It Plays: Chaucer Becomes an Author'. In Olson, D. R. and Torrance, N. (eds.) *Literacy and Orality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Shaw, D. J. (2009) 'The Book Trade Comes of Age: The Sixteenth Century'. In Eliot, S. and Rose, J. (eds.) *A Companion to the History of the Book.* London: Wiley-Blackwell, 220-231

'Thus Spake the Creator – Fans and the FAQ'. *OoCities - Geocities Archive / Geocities Mirror*. [online] available at <http://www.oocities.com/area51/stargate/8513/creator-fans.htm> [07 November 2010]

Vickers, B. (2002) *Shakespeare – Co-Author*. New York: Oxford University Press

'What If He Dies?' *OoCities - Geocities Archive / Geocities Mirror*. [online] available at <http://www.oocities.com/area51/stargate/8513/creator-whatif.htm> [07 November 2010]