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The birth of the author

Co-creating authorship in Enheduana's *Exaltation*

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The Sumerian hymn known as the *The Exaltation of Inana*, which was attributed to the Old Akkadian priestess Enheduana, is the earliest known depiction of literary authorship. Through a close reading of the text, the essay argues that the figure of the author is created by a number of individuals acting together, including the addressee, performers, and copyists of the poem. Their involvement is necessary for authors to become authors, and authorship can therefore be seen as a collaborative creation even when a text is attributed to a single person. This notion of co-authorship, not as a collaboration between delimited individuals, but as the collective creation of an authorial persona, makes the author an inherently fluid entity—waxing, waning, dispersed, and regrouped over the course of the text. Having identified this form of co-authorship in the *Exaltation*, the essay then traces its dynamics across a wider selection of poems.[1]

KEYWORDS
authorship, collaboration, Enheduana, literary historiography, Sumerian literature

1 | INTRODUCTION

More than four millennia before Roland Barthes declared "The death of the author" (1967),[2] the connection between authorship and metaphorical death had already been eloquently established in a Sumerian hymn known as *The Exaltation of Inana*. The *Exaltation* is attributed to Enheduana, a high priestess who lived in the twenty-third century BC in what is now southern Iraq—an attribution that makes her the first known author in the history of world literature. If the reader is surprised to learn that the first known author was a woman, that is due to half a

century of neglect on behalf of literary history. Enheduana's authorship has been known at least since the first edition of the *Exaltation* appeared in 1968 (ironically, a year after Barthes's essay),[3] but the historiography of authorship still consistently begins with Homer, a Western man writing a millennium and a half later (see e.g. Bennett, 2005a, 29). This is inexcusable. Not only does the *Exaltation* constitute a much earlier instance of authorship, the poem even ends by describing its own composition: a striking moment of Sumerian meta-fiction that makes authorship central to the narrative itself, interweaving the death of the author that would later be celebrated by Barthes with the metaphorical birth of the text.

It is interesting to consider what the history of authorship would look like it if it began with Enheduana and not with Homer, but in order to answer that question, one must first know what Enheduana's authorship is like. In this essay, I argue that authorship in the *Exaltation* is depicted as a form of collaboration. It is not merely that the poem is created through collaboration: the figure of the author itself, the very image of Enheduana as the creator of the text, is depicted as the product of various voices working together. Enheduana does not become an author alone; her authorship relies on a dialogue with the goddess she addresses and the community of singers and scribes who circulate her text. To become an author, Enheduana must thus enlist a broader poetic community, and it is their collaboration that makes her an author in the true sense of the word. Enheduana's authorial self, the "I" who appears as the composer of the poem, is first shaped and then sustained by a dialogue between poet, subject, performer, and copyist. In short, it is not just texts but also authors who can be co-authored.

Over the past five decades, the notion of co-authorship has become increasingly important to the historiography of authorship, as part of a general scholarly demurral against the Romantic idea of authors as lonely geniuses, socially isolated creators whose texts are the product of nothing but their own originality. Against this idea of authors as exceptional individuals, a host of scholars have emphasized that literary production always involves multiple people working together. In *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, Jack Stillinger tracks how poems moved from draft to print in eighteenth-century England, finding that the poets' editors and correspondents often made changes to the text significant enough for them to merit the title of co-authors. Stillinger concludes that "[t]he frequency with which this kind of multiple authorship turns up, once one starts looking for it, is rather strikingly at odds with the interpretive and editorial theorists' almost universal concern with author and authorship as single entities" (Stillinger, 1991, 22).

Co-authorship has now become a central issue in a wide array of scholarly contexts, though the exact nature of the co-authorship being studied varies considerably. The studies range from technical analyses of possible collaborations, such as the debate over whether "Homer" was one or many poets (Fowler, 2004) or the parsing of which lines in Shakespeare's plays were written by the Bard himself and which by his associates (see e.g. Jackson, 2011; Vickers, 2007); through Harold Bloom's claim that good poetry always involves an agonistic reaction against a canonical predecessor, meaning that all literature of sufficient quality involves an interaction between more than one author (Bloom, 1997); to the post-structuralist notion that any text whatsoever constitutes a momentary rearrangement of a broader intertext, meaning that authors never fully speak for themselves but always repeat and reshuffle the words of others. One way or another, the main thrust of much work on authorship during the past five decades has been that a text cannot smoothly be traced back to a single person but always results from a number of individuals working with or against each other, consciously or otherwise.

The present essay makes a related, but somewhat different claim. I will not argue that the *Exaltation* is the product of a collaboration between multiple people, though such a claim could undoubtedly be made. Rather, I argue that, as depicted in the poem, Enheduana's status as an author is the co-creation of Enheduana herself, the goddess she addresses, the singer who performs the poem, and the scribes who copy it. What I am interested in is not the person who actually composed the *Exaltation*, but rather the *figure* of the author, the cultural image of a human being as the creator of a text. And that cultural image, I argue, is depicted as a collective effort. Enheduana does not become an author in isolation, by just composing the poem, but is transformed *into* an author by the literary community she engages through her text. Becoming an author thus requires collaboration as an indispensable element.

Further, because Enheduana's authorial self is constituted through a dialogue between a number of different people, that self in turn becomes a rather fluid affair. The authorial self is not contained within one person but is distributed across a number of voices that either speak it into existence or come to embody it. Enheduana's personal presence in the text ebbs and flows; it is vigorously established only then to evaporate again. The author announces herself with startling force—proclaiming: "I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!" (l. 67, en-me-en en-ḫe₂-du₇-a-na-me-en)—but then goes on to stage her own disappearance from the poem. This marks a key difference from co-authorship as it is usually understood. Even if a text is attributed to more than one creator, those creators are still often thought of as isolated, stable individuals who merely join forces to create a given text. But if the authorial figure itself is the product of poetic collaboration, then the authorial "I" will necessarily be seen as a far more composite, dialectical affair: the shared creation of a literary community.

The history of authorship has got off to a false start by founding its narrative on the primordial myth of Western men, from Homer and Hesiod to Shakespeare and Milton. By revisiting the actual origin of literary authorship, I want to show that the story could be told differently. The paper does not present a full history of authorship from Enheduana to the present day, but it does suggest how its first chapter could be written. I begin by presenting the background and plot of the *Exaltation* before delving into how authorship is depicted in the text. I focus especially on two key aspects of the poem: the dialogue between Enheduana and the goddess Inana, which is described through metaphors of communion and childbirth; and the relation between Enheduana, the performer, and the copyist of the poem, which is described through metaphors of death and rebirth. What emerges from this argument is that the "I" of the author is constructed, undone, and reshaped through a dialogue with the poetic community that is engaged by the text. Throughout the essay, I show that this notion of authorship is not unique to Enheduana's hymn, since similar depictions of authorial activity can be found throughout Western literary history, from Sappho through Horace to Keats, as well as in more obscure figures like Martin le Franc and Mechthild von Magdeburg.

2 | THE FIRST AUTHOR

In the twenty-third century BC, King Sargon of Akkad united the previously independent city states of Sumer to create the world's first empire. The Old Akkadian dynasty, as it is known today, was a magnificent bubble of a state: brief but all-engulfing. The rule of Sargon and his successors was a highly turbulent time, marked by unprecedented military conquests, ambitious reforms, and constant revolts (Foster, 2016). Sargon installed his daughter Enheduana as high priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur, effectively making her a cultural ambassador of the new empire in its southernmost corner. Babylonian scribes would later attribute to Enheduana a series of Sumerian hymns, but the earliest preserved manuscripts of those works date to the Old Babylonian period (19th–16th cent. BC), some five centuries after Enheduana's death. By that time, Sumerian had died out as a spoken language, becoming instead a written language of scholarship and religious ritual, much like Latin in the Middle Ages. Old Babylonian students were made to learn how to read and write the dead Sumerian language, and it is because of that curriculum that Enheduana's poetry survives today: the *Exaltation* is preserved as hundreds of clay tablets copied out by Old Babylonian students grappling with its complex Sumerian language (see Helle, 2019).

Five poems were attributed to Enheduana: the *Exaltation of Inana*, an anthology of hymns to Sumerian temples, another hymn to Inana, and two highly fragmentary hymns to the moon god Nanna.[4] The *Exaltation* is generally considered to be her masterpiece, and with 77 preserved manuscripts, it is among the best-attested works of Sumerian literature. Its most recent editor, Annette Zgoll (1997, 40), even refers to it as "der erste Bestseller der Weltliteratur." But despite the serendipitous survival of her texts, our knowledge of the historical person Enheduana is practically nil. We know that she existed, which is more than can be said for most authors of ancient Iraq (for authorship in cuneiform cultures more generally, see Foster, 1991; 2019; Helle, 2018; Lambert, 1962). We know that the office of the high priestess entailed an exceptionally high social status, wide-ranging administrative duties, and a key role in

religious rituals (Weadock, 1975; Westenholz, 1989; 2006). Further, in some inscriptions Enheduana is referred to as the symbolic embodiment of the goddess Ningal, the wife of the moon god she served, suggesting that she acted as the god's consort in some ceremonies (Westenholz, 1989). What we cannot know for certain is that Enheduana actually composed the poems attributed to her by the Old Babylonian scribes. The question is not Homeric, exactly, as no one doubts the existence of a historical person named Enheduana. However, because no manuscript of her works has survived from before the Old Babylonian period, some Sumerologists have speculated that the poems attributed to her, including the seemingly autobiographical *Exaltation*, were written later in her name. The debate has carried on for close to 40 years but remains unresolved (see e.g. Bahrani, 2001, 116; Civil, 1980, 229; Foster, 2016, 207; Lambert, 2001; Lion, 2011, 96–97; Michalowski, 1996, 184–185; Westenholz, 1999, 76).

In this essay, I leave that question aside to focus instead on how authorship is actually portrayed in the *Exaltation*. As argued by Barbara Graziosi (2002) and Alexander Beecroft (2010; 2011), purportedly biographical anecdotes about ancient authors may reveal little or nothing about the actual lives of those authors, but that does not make those anecdotes any less important, because they can still illuminate broader notions that were prevalent in the ancient world about literary composition, performance, reception, and circulation. Ancient narratives of authorship are rich sources of information for what Beecroft calls the "implied poetics" of ancient readers, that is, their underlying assumptions about the nature and uses of literature (Beecroft, 2010, 2). Ancient debates about whether or not Homer was blind, for example, probably tell us nothing about Homer himself, but they do reveal differing notions among ancient writers about whether epic poetry was fundamentally oral or written, since a blind man could not have composed his poetry in writing (Beecroft, 2011). As Graziosi puts it, "the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer's life does not warrant our 'disregard'"—on the contrary, the possible fictionality of ancient accounts of authorship can reveal all the more clearly how literature was perceived (Graziosi, 2002, 3). Likewise, whether or not the *Exaltation* was actually composed by the historical Enheduana is not the key question here. What matters is that, when the *Exaltation* was attributed to her, the notion of authorship came into being for the first time in world literature, and in so doing, it took on a distinctive form—one that I set out to investigate below. The attribution is thus a key event in literary history regardless of its historical accuracy.

3 | A NARRATIVE OUROBOROS

The *Exaltation* is framed by a hymn to the Sumerian goddess Inana, patron deity of the Old Akkadian empire. Inana is a strikingly complex figure: the goddess of sex, war, transformation, paradox, and otherness (Bahrani, 2001, chap. 7; Harris, 1991). The poem begins by describing Inana's overwhelming might and the fury with which she destroys all who dare rebel against her rule (ll. 1–65). After the initial hymn, the narrator Enheduana introduces herself and her reason for beseeching the goddess (ll. 66–108). She is the high priestess of Inana's father, the moon god Nanna, but though she has served Nanna without fault, she now finds herself in lethal trouble:

> Though I sang aloud the hymns of joy, holding high the offering basket,
> funeral gifts have been laid out (for me): do I no longer live here? (ll. 68–69)

> (^{gi}ma-sa$_2$-ab i$_3$-gur$_3$-ru asilal-la$_2$ i$_3$-du$_{11}$
> ki-si$_3$-ga bi$_2$-ib-ĝar ĝa$_2$-e nu-mu-un-ti-en)

The poem then tells the story of a revolt in Ur that has expelled Enheduana from her office as high priestess and cast her into exile. Enheduana prays desperately to Nanna for help, but the god remains unresponsive. He does not answer her prayers or resolve the crisis one way or the other, leaving the priestess suspended in uncertainty—a situation that is described in the text as an open court case (Zgoll, 1997). Enheduana therefore turns to Inana, begging her to intervene in Nanna's stead:

I will let my tears flow free, as if they were fine beer,
in the presence of holy Inana! I will say to you: "The decision is yours!"
I cannot make the moon god care (for my case). (ll. 82–84)

(er$_2$-ĝa$_2$ kaš du$_{10}$-ga-gin$_7$
ku$_3$ ^{d}inana-ra šu ga-mu-ni-re-bar di-zu ga-mu-ra-ab-du$_{11}$
^{d}aš-im$_2$-babbar na-an-kuš$_2$-u$_3$-de$_3$-en)

In short, Enheduana invites Inana to replace Nanna as a divine arbiter. In order to remedy her own desperate situation, Enheduana must convince Inana not only to rule in her favor, but also to rule in the first place, thereby replacing her father as a ruler among gods. This is why the text combines a hymnic section with an autobiographical one: the *Exaltation* seeks to exalt Inana precisely so that the goddess will then be in a position to judge Enheduana's case. Enheduana argues that Inana fully deserves this position as cosmic queen, even though her might had not previously been recognized:

You were born to be just a second-rate ruler,
but now! How far you have surpassed the Anuna, the greatest of the gods. (ll. 114–115)

(u$_3$-du$_2$-da-ta nin ban$_3$-da-me-en
^{d}a-nun-na diĝir gal-gal-e-ne-e a-gin$_7$ ba-e-ne-diri-ga)

However, the question is whether Enheduana will succeed in her attempt to exalt the goddess and to sway her heart. As she is cast into exile, Enheduana discovers that she has also lost her eloquence:

My once honeyed mouth has now become froth,
my power to please hearts is turned to dust. (ll. 72–73)

(ka lal$_3$-ĝu$_{10}$ šu uḫ$_3$-a ba-ab-du$_{11}$
niĝ$_2$ ur$_5$ ša$_6$-ša$_6$-ĝu$_{10}$ saḫar-ta ba-da-ab-gi$_4$)

A central tension in the *Exaltation* is therefore whether Enheduana will recover her "honeyed mouth," regaining her ability to exalt Inana, to convince the goddess to help her, and thus to save herself from exile. The crisis of the text is explicitly self-referential, as the outcome of the poem depends on whether its narrator will recover her poetic skills.

The crisis of eloquence is resolved in the climax of the narrative, which is the moment when Enheduana composes the text and thereby becomes an author:

Queen, beloved of Heaven! I will recount your wrath.
I have piled up the coals, I have prepared the purifying ritual.
The Holy Inn awaits you. Will your heart not have pity on me?
(My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
what I told you in the dead of night,
a singer shall repeat for you at midday. (ll. 135–140)

(nin ki-aĝ$_2$ an-na-ĝu$_{10}$ mir-mir-za ga-am$_3$-du$_{11}$
ne-mur mu-dub šu-luḫ si bi$_2$-in-sa$_2$
e$_2$-eš$_2$-dam-ku$_3$ ma-ra-an-ĝal$_2$ ša$_3$-zu na-ma-še$_{17}$-de$_3$

im-ma-si im-ma-diri-ga-ta nin UN-gal ma-ra-du$_2$

niĝ$_2$ ĝi$_6$-u$_3$-na ma-ra-an-du$_{11}$-ga-am$_3$

gala-e an-bar$_7$-ka šu ḫu-mu-ra-ab-gi$_4$-gi$_{4)}$

In this passage, Enheduana describes herself composing the *Exaltation* during a night-time conversation with Inana in the temple of the Holy Inn, promising that the text will then be performed by a singer on the following day. This scene effectively resolves the tension of the narrative: by composing the text, Enheduana regains her eloquence, exalts Inana, and sways her heart. In the ensuing epilogue, we are told that Inana has accepted Enheduana's prayer and that Nanna has expressed his approval of Inana's elevation. In short, the composition of the poem resolves the tension of that poem.

This kind of self-referential climax places the emergence of the author at the narrative center of the story itself (this kind of self-referential climax is in fact a common trope in cuneiform literature; see Foster, 1991). The poem's climax (ll. 137–140) is structured by a series of binary transitions: "dead of night" turns into "midday," the privacy of the Holy Inn turns into a public performance, the poem is transferred from author to singer, and the crisis of Enheduana's eloquence is resolved into poetry. The moment when Enheduana becomes an author is thus represented as a key threshold in time, space, voice, and plot. Further, the transition is also realized in the grammar of the text. Up to that point, Enheduana's story has been told in the first person, but after the singer repeats her poem, taking over the telling of the tale, Enheduana is instead referred to in the third person, as in the line: "Inana's holy heart has been reconciled with her" (l. 145, ša$_3$ ku$_3$ ^{d}inana ki-bi ba-an-na-ab-gi$_4$). In short, the description of Enheduana's authorship is not merely an appended postscript, but an integral part of the narrative itself, a key moment of transition that resolves the plot and transforms its characters.

The entire *Exaltation* thus revolves around its own composition and the coming into being of its authorial figure. The rest of the essay will unpack how that figure is depicted, and the main point I wish to make is that the author is constituted by a number of people acting together. In order to become an author, it is not sufficient for Enheduana to compose the text: she becomes an author only through a conversation with Inana, the performer, and the copyists of the poem, all of whom participate in the creation and the transmission of the author's identity. The next two sections explore Enheduana's conversation with Inana, stressing the metaphors of communion and childbirth; and the following two sections then turn to her interaction with the singers and copyists of the poem, stressing the metaphors of death and rebirth.

4 | THE PRINCESS AND I

Judith Butler (2005) argues that when we give an account of ourselves, our past, and our person, we in fact end up creating the self we set out to describe: the words we apply to ourselves call that self into social existence, fixing our identity within the logic of discourse. But crucially, this self-construction is shaped by the fact that our account will always be directed at someone else. The implicit presence of an addressee invariably affects the story we tell about ourselves. Our attempts at self-description thus end up making us entangled beings, our "I" shaped by its address to a "you."

Much the same dynamic is found in the *Exaltation*, where the individuality of the author is gradually constructed through her invocation of the goddess. In the introductory hymn to Inana—as in many other Sumerian hymns—the only mention of the first-person pronoun is in the refrain "My lady!", which refers to the "I" exclusively through its relation of devotion to the addressee (ll. 6, 20, 27, and 34). Tellingly, the first appearance of the "I" as a grammatical subject of a sentence comes in the exclamation, "I will sing your holy song" (l. 63, šir$_3$ ku$_3$-zu ga-am$_3$-du$_{11}$), where the "I" is again defined by a relation of address. Only after it has been constructed through its address to another person can the "I" step forward in her own right and begin to tell her story: "I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!" (l. 67, en-me-en en-ḫe$_2$-du$_7$-a-na-me-en).

The figure of Enheduana is thus constituted by her speaking to Inana, and the "I" of the poem is entirely given over to the goddess she invokes. Enheduana portrays herself as fully dependent on the whim of the goddess, as she begs her to spare her life: if Inana does not have mercy on her, Enheduana will perish in exile. But the logic of exaltation implies that the dependency is at least somewhat mutual. Enheduana seeks to convince Inana to step into her father's role as divine arbiter, thereby becoming the queen of the gods, and Enheduana's exaltation of the goddess is aimed at bolstering this claim to power. Through her hymnic description of Inana—as a magnificent warrior goddess who flattens foreign lands, crushes skulls, devours corpses, and punishes all who oppose her— Enheduana effectively shapes the reader's perception of the "you" she addresses. In short, Inana will essentially become whatever Enheduana is able to make her.

Enheduana and Inana are thus bound together in a dialogical relation, shaping each other's being with their words. This relation is further complicated in the epilogue, where, after Enheduana's shift from "I" to "her," both goddess and priestess are referred to with the same third-person pronoun. As William Hallo puts it, "the exaltation of Inanna implies at the same time the restoration of Enheduanna, their two fates being so closely linked that in lines 146 f. it is hard to decide whether the narrator [...] is speaking of the one or the other" (Hallo & van Dyjk, 1968, 62).[5] This confusion of identity becomes particularly clear at the end of the poem, in line 151, which may be translated literally as "her speaking to the holy woman was overwhelming" (nu-gig-ra du$_{11}$-ga-ni maḫ-am$_3$). This can be read in two irreconcilable ways. One is to take the "holy woman" as Enheduana, and the "speaking" as Inana's order that she be restored as high priestess. Benjamin Foster (2016, 336), for example, translates: "What she commanded for her consecrated woman prevailed." Alternatively, one may take the "speaking" as Enheduana's composition of the hymn, and the "holy woman" as Inana. Accordingly, Hallo translates: "her (Enheduanna's) speaking to the Hierodule was exalted" (Hallo & van Dyjk, 1968, 35). Both readings make grammatical sense,[6] and the reader can move back and forth between them in a poetic version of a gestalt shift, so that depending on how one looks at the line, now one, now the other figure steps forward as its subject. Tellingly, the verb that folds the two women together is the act of speaking, by which they make each other who they are: the goddess proclaims the restoration of her priestess, the priestess proclaims the might of her goddess.[7] When Enheduana becomes an author and composes the hymn to Inana, Inana is simultaneously speaking back, so that their two voices become virtually indistinguishable. It is as if the two women merge into something akin to a mystical union, almost folded into one person by their exchange of words.

However, the dialogical relation is never quite resolved into pure identity. It would be tempting to assert that in line 151 the two women have indeed fused into one, but in fact, it is precisely because a measure of difference between them persists that they are able to determine each other's status. This is the kind of relation that Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "double-voiced discourse," that is, speech "incorporating a relationship to someone else's utterance as an indispensable element" (Bakhtin, 1984, 186). Such discourse is never entirely directed at the object it appears to describe, but always repeats, reshuffles, refutes, or responds to the words of others. Similarly, speech in the *Exaltation* is never pure description, but is constantly shaped by its relation to others and the expectation of what effects it will have on others: invocation, persuasion, exaltation, judgment, performance. Throughout the poem, discourse is always oriented towards discourse, as Enheduana speaks on Inana's behalf in order for Inana then to speak on her behalf. In this dynamic of speech and speech, even silence can acquire a dialogical character. Enheduana tells Inana that "Nanna has said nothing, and so he has said: 'It is up to you!'" (l. 133, ^{d}nanna li-bi$_2$-in-du$_{11}$-ga za-a-kam bi$_2$-in-du$_{11}$-ga). Here Enheduana's speech to Inana incorporates Nanna's lack of speaking, but then reinterprets it as a kind of speech to Inana, and specifically as an invitation for Inana to speak.

As a result, authorship in the *Exaltation* becomes an inherently dialogical construct. Bakhtin notes that dialogical discourse yields dialogical characters, that is, characters whose sense of self is shaped by a constant awareness of other characters' awareness of them. That also applies to Enheduana: since the authorial figure that is created in the *Exaltation* is entirely given over to the speech, silence, and listening of others, the author herself comes into being as a dialogical being.

In fact, the dialectical relation between the author and a divine addressee finds surprisingly precise parallels elsewhere in literary history. Take for instance the Medieval mystic writer Mechthild von Magdeburg, who in *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* writes: "Ah, Lord God, who has made this book? I have made it in my weakness, for I could not hold back my gift" (quoted in Damrosch, 2003, 74). But who is speaking the second sentence? Is it God's reply or Mechthild herself? David Damrosch (p. 174) notes that, "[a]s writers of Mechthild's era didn't use quotation marks, this paragraph could either be meant to show Mechthild in dialogue with God or could be her own assertion of authorship. The passage hovers (perhaps deliberately) between both possibilities." In other words, the reference of the "I" is left ambiguous—and the authorship of the text becomes ambiguous with it. The book could thus be attributed to either God or Mechthild, but that distinction may not be so important after all, since the book could more precisely be said to emerge from a dialogue between Mechthild and God where the exact contours of their identity are left unclear. A more elaborate version of the same trope is found in Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite," where Sappho invites the goddess Aphrodite to come to her aid, recalling previous instances where the goddess had done just that (Sappho 1; Campbell, 1982, 52–55). Sappho's address to Aphrodite includes an account of how Aphrodite previously addressed Sappho, yielding what Jonathan Culler (2015, 12) calls a "fun-house mirror" of intertwined speakers. The relation between the goddess and the poet is further complicated by the same problem as that found in Mechthild: "The Greek does not use the quotation marks that are inserted in modern editions, so the transition is made by the play of pronouns, as Sappho passes from *I* to *you* and Aphrodite from *you* to *I*, and then back again at the end" (p. 13, emphasis in the original). Just as with Enheduana, the play of pronouns complicates the relation between the author of the poem and its divine subject and addressee.

Parallels may also be found within the cuneiform corpus. Kabti-ili-Marduk, author of the Babylonian *Epic of Erra*, describes how the god Erra inspired the creation of the epic: "He (Erra) let him (Kabti-ili-Marduk) see it at night-time, and when he (Kabti-ili-Marduk) recited it in the morning, he neglected nothing" (*ina šat mūši ušabrīšu-ma kī ša ina munatti idbubu ayyam-ma ul iḫṭi*, l. V 43; Cagni, 1969, 126–127). As shown by the parenthetical insertions needed to make sense of the text in translation, Kabti-ili-Marduk's description of his own authorship oscillates back and forth between two "he's," god and poet, obscuring the distinction between them.[8] As Foster notes, this "grammatically ambiguous statement about authorship" is part of a more general pattern in cuneiform cultures: "Authors in Mesopotamian civilization well knew and were wont to recall in their texts that composition was an ongoing, contributive enterprise, in which the author [...] was present only at the beginning" (Foster, 2019, 14, 23). Although Kabti-ili-Marduk depicts himself as the mere vessel of a poem originating with the god, whereas Enheduana composes the hymn herself, both figures describe a commingling of identity with the deities they address.

5 | SEXTING THE GODDESS

In each of these cases, the author and the divine subject of the text are folded together through the use of ambiguous pronouns, leading to an entwined, dialogical relation between the two—and in each case, the text itself is then created through that entangled conversation. In the *Exaltation*, this moment of creation is described as the delivery of a child. Consider again the scene of composition:

> The Holy Inn awaits you. Will your heart not have pity on me?
> (My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
> what I have told you in the dead of night,
> a singer shall repeat for you at midday.
> Because of your captive spouse, because of your captive child,
> let your fury be great, let your heart be unrelenting! (ll. 137–142)

The key phrase in this passage is "for you I gave birth to it" (ma-ra-du$_2$), by which the text describes its own creation. Crucially, however, the phrase is also highly ambiguous, since the syllable /du/ can mean a number of different things depending on which cuneiform sign is used to write it. One manuscript has "I gave birth to it" (du$_2$), but others have "I created it" (du$_3$), "I spoke it" (du$_{11}$), or "I released it" (du$_8$; see Delnero, 2006, 2101, and further Attinger, 1993). With four attestations, "I spoke it" (du$_{11}$) is the most frequently used variant, but not necessarily the original one. Zgoll (1997, 489–490), argues that "I gave birth" (du$_2$) was the original meaning, since it is the *lectio difficilior* and since this phrase is also used to describe the composition of poetry in another text attributed to Enheduana, *The Temple Hymns* (l. 544). Indeed, most translators opt for this meaning, not least because it is the most evocative (see e.g. Foster, 2016, 335; Hallo & van Dijk, 1968, 33). However, given the variance among the manuscripts and the often obscure language of the *Exaltation*, this ambiguity could very well be intentional. The difference of meaning that is realized in writing may have been even less apparent if the poem was recited orally (though we know very little about how Sumerian was pronounced). The sound /du/ thus cunningly connotes many different notions of how poetry comes into being: spoken, created, released, born. All four meanings make sense in this context, and a many-faceted vision of authorship is compressed into one syllable.

However, the full significance of the scene of composition can only be grasped by comparing it to a previous section of the poem, which also uses the word translated here as "dead of night" (ĝi$_6$-u$_3$-na)— a relatively rare Sumerian expression which thus links the two passages clearly together. This earlier scene follows a description of how Inana obliterated a rebel city, leaving its citizens unable to repopulate:

> The womb (of the city) is out of order,
> the woman there no longer speaks beautiful words to her spouse.
> In the dead of night (ĝi$_6$-u$_3$-na), she will not have conversation with him,
> she does not reveal to him the pure things within her. (ll. 54–57)[9]

> (ša$_3$-tur$_3$-bi-ta ĝir$_3$ ḫe$_2$-eb-ta-an-ze$_2$-er
> munus-bi dam-a-ni-ta ša$_6$-ga na-an-da-ab-be$_2$
> ĝi$_6$-u$_3$-na ad na-an-da-ab-gi$_4$-gi$_4$
> niĝ$_2$ ku$_3$ ša$_3$-ga-na nam-mu-da-an-bur$_2$-re)

Like the scene of composition, this passage links speech and childbirth, though the association is here somewhat surprising. Line 54 introduces the notion that in the rebel city, reproduction has gone awry, but the cessation of sex is then described through the metaphor of speech. It is specifically because the woman of the city does not speak beautiful words to her husband that childbirth is "out of order," making intercourse and conversation functionally equivalent.

The two scenes in which the phrase "dead of night" appears thus form each other's mirror image, as they employ the same simile but do so in opposite directions. In the scene of destruction, we expect a description of the reproduction that Inana has brought to an end but find instead a metaphor of eloquence. Conversely, in the scene of composition, we expect to find a description of the eloquence regained by the narrator but find instead a metaphor of childbirth. The echoes and reversals that link the two scenes thus fold speech and birth together, as either one can serve as a metaphor for the other.

Crucially, this metaphorical association makes cooperation a precondition for eloquence. The reason why the repopulation of the rebel city has become impossible is specifically that the couples of the city no longer engage in a night-time communion of eloquence and eroticism: the woman cuts herself off from her husband, refusing to reveal "the pure things within her." It is because their partnership fails that their eloquence is lost—and with it, their sex and reproduction. This set of associations is the logical background for the scene of composition, where the successful communion between Inana and Enheduana does lead to an outpouring of eloquence and a

metaphorical birth. The phrase "dead of night" thus instills an association between the two passages in the mind of the reader, and with it, an association between night-time communion, eloquence, childbirth, and sex.

In fact, the communion between Inana and Enheduana may also carry an erotic connotation, though it is only hinted at in the text. First, it is worth noting that this communion takes place in a temple called "the Holy Inn," since in cuneiform cultures inns were generally associated with sexuality and eroticism (see Abusch, 2015, 67–68, fn. 17, with references). Second, as high priestess of Ur, Enheduana would have acted in religious ceremonies as the symbolic spouse of Nanna, embodying his wife Ningal (Westenholz, 1989), so when Enheduana urges Inana to replace Nanna as ruler of the gods, it might follow that Enheduana would become Inana's symbolic spouse instead. Third, the word I translate as "singer," *gala*, in fact denotes a more specialized profession, often translated "lamentation priest." But during the third millennium, these *gala*s seem to have been associated with two specific rituals: marriages and funerals (Cooper, 2006; Michalowski, 2006). The mention of the *gala* could thus allude to a metaphorical marriage between goddess and priestess. In sum, while I am not arguing that the passage should be understood as a specific reference to the Sumerian rite of the "Sacred Marriage,"[10] the allusions that cluster around the themes of marriage and sexuality could be read as a figurative, symbolic merger of Enheduana and Inana. The entanglement of the two and the parallel passage that equates sex with "beautiful words" further strengthen this interpretation. However, given the generally ambiguous and oblique style of the *Exaltation*, the suggestion must remain speculative.

Either way, the depiction of authorship as a kind of childbirth and the parallel to the scene of destruction serve to present literary composition as a form of co-creation. Just as one cannot have children alone or sex by oneself, so literary composition necessitates a dialogue with another person. Crucially, the rebel woman is presented as the foil to Enheduana's successful authorship. In the rebel city, there is no night-time conversation, no eloquent intimacy, no communion between spouses, and therefore no childbirth. The wife and husband have become estranged from one another, and so their speech, sex, and procreation all fail—seeing as these activities are treated in the text as more or less equivalent. For Enheduana, however, the communion with the goddess is successful, enabling her to give birth to the text we are reading. The contrast with the rebel city illustrates that one cannot become an author alone, since authorship, according to the logic of the *Exaltation*, requires a close collaboration with an entangled recipient.

Of course, the metaphor of poetic composition as sexual intercourse has a long history in the Western canon as well. Jesper Svenbro (1993, chap. 10), for example, discusses the "pederastic paradigm of writing" in ancient Greek culture, where writing could be depicted as an anal penetration of the reader. Jacques Derrida famously identified a recurrent association between writing and the penis under the term "phallogocentrism," a logic summarized by Gayatri Spivak in her translator's preface as: "the hymen is the always folded (therefore never single or simple) space in which the pen writes its dissemination" (Derrida, 1976, lxvi). In a similar vein, Susan Gubar (1981, 245) argues that "[w]hen the metaphors of literary creativity are filtered through a sexual lens, female sexuality is often identified with textuality." However, as these examples show, the Western version of the metaphor often takes the form of a male, penetrative sexuality—the pen identified with the penis, the book with the female body, and literary creativity with sexual procreation. The kind of sex we find in the *Exaltation*, by contrast, is of a non-penetrative sort, placing the emphasis on intimacy and entanglement instead. There is no dichotomy here between an active, inseminating author and a passive object of penetration. Rather, the metaphors of marriage and childbirth seem to denote a bodily closeness, a cooperative communion between author and addressee, and their mutual creation of the text.

The creation of poetry is thus imagined as a movement from a possibly eroticized conception in the intimacy of the "Holy Inn" to a public delivery—a delivery that, as we have seen, combines connotations of speech, creation, childbirth, and release into one syllable. But as the text is born and released into the world, it is also separated from the body of its parent. In the next section, I turn to what happens when the new-born poem leaves its author behind to enter a broader circulation. The trope of composition as childbirth marks the text's detachment from its source, the moment that it becomes an independent entity separate from its author. Recall that, after the scene

of composition, Enheduana is also transformed from a first-person narrator into a third-person character. The creation of the text thus leads to a sidelining of its author: as the text begins to circulate on its own, the author is forced to step back and hand it over to others.

6 | DYING TO BE READ

The trope of the author stepping out the poem may not be merely an accidental feature of the *Exaltation*, but rather an inherent part of authorship itself. In fact, it may be necessary for the individuality of the author to be at least partly effaced from the text in order for that text to become literature. Andrew Bennett (2005a, 112–118) illustrates this necessity through a reading of Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters*. The publication of the poems was bound to cause controversy, as they responded to accusations against Hughes over the suicide of his estranged wife Sylvia Plath. Bennett shows that the reviews of the poems, whether positive or negative, all gauged their literary quality by assessing the extent to which they transcended their strictly autobiographical context. In short, the poems could become literature—and not merely apologetic arguments—only to the extent that they left the individual specificity of their author behind. But it was also that same specificity that had generated the readers' intense interest in the first place. The figure of the author thus promises the reader that the text will be connected to reality, grounded in a definite and potentially intriguing context, but the text becomes literature only insofar as it then also leaves that context behind, transgressing it to gain a more general truth value or a broader emotional appeal. In short, the figure of the author provides the reader with the sense of an actual personal presence in the text, but if the text is to become literature, that presence must also be made general enough for a wider community of readers to relate to it and to appropriate it for themselves.

In the following, I am interested in how the movement sketched out by Bennett—the text transcending its author to enter a broader circulation and thereby become literature—also necessitates a collaboration between author and audience. In order for authors to become authors, they must recruit a community of performers, copyists, and readers who are willing to continue the circulation of the text and thereby carry it beyond its original context. This kind of cooperation both constitutes the authors, as it allows their text to circulate as a work of literature, and removes the authors from their own work, as the text is handed over to others. I would argue that in the *Exaltation*, this movement is represented through the figure of the *gala*. As noted above, *gala*s may have been associated with marriages in the third millennium BCE, but they were much more commonly associated with funerals and lamentation. In the cuneiform world, the *gala* generally represented the ritualization of grief, destruction, and death. Strikingly, in the *Exaltation* it is this figure who is tasked with the performance of the text, effectively establishing a connection between death and literary circulation.

It is telling that the disappearance of Enheduana's "I" takes place at the very moment that the *gala* is introduced. After the lines "what *I* have told you in the dead of night, / a *gala* shall repeat for you at midday," the *gala* becomes the new speaker of the text, and so the "I" disappears.[11] Given the *gala*'s associations with funerals, I would read that disappearance as a metaphorical death. The "I" of the author has to "die," or at least be removed from the narrative, in order for a wider community of readers and performers to engage with the poem, appropriate it for themselves, and turn it into literature. The disappearance of the author is thus connected with the repetition of the text. The "I" disappears specifically when the *gala* reenacts her words, ensuring the continuation of those words. The ritualistic framing of the scene invites us to imagine this reenactment as a kind of cultic practice, where the text is repeated not just on that one midday, but again and again, in the ongoing rhythm of ritual performance (Keetman, 2010; Zgoll, 2015).

In other words, if the author steps out of her text at the moment of its composition, she does so to enter instead another kind of textual existence, one that extends indeterminably into the future, both through a repeated oral performance and through the repeated copying of the text. Karen Radner (2005) has called attention to the "power of names" in cuneiform cultures, where naming was generally conceptualized as a form of extended

presence: a person was not only represented but also made physically present through the writing of their name (see also Bahrani, 2003, chaps. 4–5). As such, Enheduana's text comes to function as something like a funereal inscription posthumously preserving her name ("I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!"), an inscription that has to be carefully preserved and continuously restored to ensure the ongoing presence of the deceased. In the case of the *Exaltation*, this was achieved by the Old Babylonian school students who copied out the text of the poem, allowing it to survive to the present day. Even more palpably than in the modern print culture, in a manuscript culture such as the Old Babylonian one, the circulation of literature requires the active collaboration of copyists, whose labor allows texts to multiply and move.

Insofar as the metaphorical death of the author involves a transmutation of individual into text, it can therefore also become a form of symbolic survival. Through the repeated reenactment of the singer and the repeated copying of the scribes, Enheduana's presence in the world is extended into the future, in the form of a text carrying her name—but that presence is also given over to others. As the text moves from composition to performance, it yields itself to any singer willing to take its "I" into their mouths. The survival of the self, in other words, requires a surrender of that self. If the figure of the author was first constructed through a collaboration between Enheduana and Inana, then its continuation requires a collaboration between Enheduana, the *gala*, and the scribes. Enheduana surrenders her self to others in order for those others to take on the burden and carry it through time, continuously constituting the figure of the author through a repeated re-creation of the text. Just as the figure of the author was first created in a communion between priestess and goddess, so must it be sustained and reborn through a collective effort, in the ongoing performance and appropriation of the text.

7 | THE HONEYED TONGUE

As noted in the introduction, the co-creation of authorship also makes the figure of the author a far more fluid and entangled affair than the model of a single individual creating a single text, or even of multiple individuals creating a text together. The fact that the authorial figure is actually co-authored by a number of different people makes that figure a composite construct. I have already pointed to the entanglement of Enheduana and Inana, which can make it difficult even to tell the two apart in the text. The same is true of Enheduana's collaboration with the *gala*, for the simple reason that, when Enheduana turns from "I" to "her," the *gala* takes over that newly vacant "I."

Michel Foucault argues in "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969) that the figure of the author seems at first to gather the many voices that appear in the text into one person. We imagine the author as a singular self, ventriloquizing her words through the various characters of the narrative. But Foucault argues that, because it is ultimately impossible to reconcile the multiplicity of voices coexisting in any work of literature, the figure of the author comes instead to be dispersed across multiple "I"s (narrator, characters, implicit author, etc.), yielding what Foucault (1969, 88) calls a "pluralité d'ego." As such, the authorial "I" that survives through the circulation of literature is not a single, easily identifiable figure, but an individual constructed through the interlacing of many voices.

Take the couplet:

My once honeyed mouth has now become froth,
my power to please hearts is turned to dust. (ll. 72–73)

(ka lal$_3$-ĝu$_{10}$ šu uḫ$_3$-a ba-ab-du$_{11}$
niĝ$_2$ ur$_5$ ša$_6$-ša$_6$-ĝu$_{10}$ saḫar-ta ba-da-ab-gi$_4$)

With the complex nature of Enheduana's authorship in mind, one might well ask: Who is actually speaking in these lines? Who do the first-person pronouns refer to? There is a curious self-contradiction here, since Enheduana describes her loss of eloquence with the eloquent metaphor of the honeyed mouth and the pleasant symmetry of the couplet. There is thus an Enheduana described in the text who has lost her poetic skill and an Enheduana composing the text who has clearly regained it, yielding a split between a narrated and a narrating "I." But there are still more Enheduanas in the couplet: there is Enheduana the implicit author, Enheduana the historical person, Enheduana the cultural memory, and so on. To these one may then add the voice of the *gala* who, according to the text itself, sings this passage and so actually speaks that first-person pronoun, stepping into the "I" of both narrated and narrating Enheduana. Rather than simply referring to the single person who supposedly composed the poem, the "I" of the text thus ends up demonstrating just how many people are actually contained in the authorial figure.

In short, the communal creation of the authorial figure gives that figure a rather schizophrenic shape. The continued survival of the text requires a collective will to keep reenacting it, and in so doing step into the role of the "I" created in the text—making that "I" a capacious construct. In other words, the production of literature requires the creation of a literary self that others can appropriate. This means that in the *Exaltation*, the author is neither constructed through a binary opposition between composer and audience, nor through a one-way transmission from one to the other. Since the author dies and then survives through the repetition of the text, she is constituted by the community engaged through the poem, and her self comes to be distributed among them.

In the opening volley of "The death of the author" (1967), Barthes notes that "literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost." Discourse, for Barthes, is fundamentally impersonal, and stepping into discourse therefore means surrendering one's personality. As noted above, in order for literature to become literature, it must first transgress the body of its author, who is thereby reduced to a purely textual existence. Barthes summarizes the production of literature as follows: "the author enters his own death, writing begins" (Barthes, 1967). However, the *Exaltation* also illustrates the shortcomings of Barthes's grandiloquence. The symbolic death of the author is just that: symbolic. It does not require the obliteration of the author's self. On the contrary, the metaphorical death of the author may be central to the subsequent construction of that self. The individuality of the author is not undone by its transition into collective discourse, rather, it can be sustained by a process of continued repetition and re-creation. This may give the individuality in question a dialogical or even schizophrenic character, but that does not efface it. The death and life of the author are therefore not as easily counterpoised as Barthes's comment suggests, insofar as the authorial figure is constructed through an alternation between individual assertion and collective appropriation. What is striking about the *Exaltation* is that it carries out both these movements at once, creating and erasing the authorial figure in the very same breath. The author comes into the world stillborn, but still born.

8 | HE WHO LIVES MORE LIVES THAN ONE…

Once again, it is noteworthy that the discourse of authorship established in the *Exaltation* is far from unique to this text, finding a number of parallels elsewhere. A striking example comes from Medieval French literature, where the author Martin le Franc meditates upon the reception of his book *Le champion des dames* (Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2016, 162–163). Knowing that he will not become famous within his own lifetime, le Franc addresses his book, saying:

> Once I myself am put into the ground, the *vers*
> and the leaves will flourish upon you.

> (moy mis en terre, les vers
> et les feulles te flouriront.) (quoted in Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2016, 163)

The word *vers* can here mean both verses, worms, and green branches, and le Franc employs the ambiguity of this word to imagine his book flourishing by the force of his own demise, as the text feeds on the putrefaction of his body. The author's literary fame is dependent on his death, or, as Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet (p. 163) puts it, "[t]he author begins to exist once he has disappeared." The author's death and his continued existence are thus one and the same.

A better-known case is Horace's ode 3.30, where the poet states that with his books, he has

> finished a monument more lasting than bronze,
> more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids.
>
> (exegi monumentum aere perennius
> regalique situ pyramidum altius) (ll. 1–2, Rudd, 2004, 216–217)

This literary fame guarantees that Horace himself will survive into the future:

> I shall not wholly die, and a large part of me
> will elude the Goddess of Death. I shall continue to grow,
> fresh with the praise of posterity.
>
> (non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
> vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera
> *crescam laude recens*) (ll. 6–8, Rudd, 2004, 216–217)

At first sight, the text seems to imply that Horace will simply live forever by the force of his own achievements, but a closer look suggests otherwise. The prospect of immortality is at least somewhat undercut by Horace's comparison of his odes with the pyramids, a comparison that emphasizes their longevity but also recalls their funereal association: the pyramids may live on, but the pharaohs entombed in them passed away long ago.[12] Further, Horace specifies that he will not *wholly* die, implying that at least a part of him will indeed be claimed by the goddess of death.

But most importantly, his immortality is explicitly dependent on the praise of posterity, meaning that his symbolic survival, like Enheduana's, relies on a community of readers who are willing to circulate his works. This dependence and surrender is reflected in a grammatical shift that leads from the active verbs of the first lines ("I have finished", *exegi*), to the passive verbs by which Horace describes his fame at the end of the poem: "I *shall be spoken of* where the violent river Aufidus thunders" (*dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus*, l. 10). Despite his self-praise, Horace thus acknowledges that literary fame cannot be established by an author alone—it requires a posthumous circulation at the hands of others, making the author an essentially passive construct. As in the *Exaltation*, the poet's "I" must be removed from the poem—at least in its active, assertive form—in order for the author to become an author.

In sum, the authors' death is depicted in these passages as a vehicle for their survival through poetry, provided that they can enlist a community of readers to circulate the text. This dependence on others leads to an often rather unstable authorial figure, as the authors are shown disappearing from their own poem, rotting away, or cast in a passive form. This set of tropes finds a particularly eerie culmination in John Keats's "This living hand":

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,

So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights

That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood,

So in my veins red life might stream again,

And thou be conscience-calm'd. See, here it is—

I hold it towards you. (Keats, 1978, 503)

The poem seeks to recruit the reader into an almost vampiric scenario, where we are asked to provide our own blood for the poet to live on. The final couplet brings the metaphor to life, as we cannot help but picture an outstretched hand in our minds, lending the blood of our imagination to the poet's words and thereby fulfilling his request: the hand lives on (Culler, 1977, 68–69). The reader is thus recruited, almost against our will, to resurrect the poet, if only in our minds. Like the *Exaltation*, the poem relies on the success of its apostrophe, as the author invokes the reader and attempts to merge with us, drawing our imaginative blood. And like the *gala* of the *Exaltation*, our reading of the poem allows for the dead author to survive, as we momentarily step into the text and lend our voice to its re-creation. Once again, the figure of the author is created and sustained through a mixture of death, rebirth, fluctuating identities, and the collaboration of the audience.

9 | CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have examined the world's earliest known instance of literary authorship to argue that the creation of the authorial figure is depicted there as a collective effort, requiring the collaboration of a number of individuals. Enheduana does not become an author by merely composing a poem, rather, she is turned into an author by the literary community engaged through her text. Literary authorship is not a one-way transmission of poetry from an active speaker to a passive audience, since Enheduana's authorship is only made possible by a mutual dialogue that brings the text into existence, and by a repeated re-creation that allows it to circulate. The addressee, performer, and copyists thus have to be actively involved for Enheduana to become an author, and indeed for the cultural idea of "the author" to come into being.

This has significant consequences for the study of authorship. For example, rather than treating co-authorship as a specific kind of literary composition, we should acknowledge that authorship *as such* entails co-creation. When textual or historical analyses reveal that, for example, the *Iliad* was the product of an oral tradition and not a single genius, or that *Titus Andronicus* was co-written by George Peele, or that the *Eve of St. Agnes* was significantly modified by John Taylor (Stillinger, 1997; 1991, 22)—then it is important to recognize that these collaborations do not lessen the authorship of Homer, Shakespeare, or Keats, for the simple reason that authorship *is* collaboration. The authorial figure is inherently a composite entity, so the fact that a number of people participated in its creation does not undo the existence of that figure. Authorship is not a zero-sum game where one person's contribution comes at the expense of another's; it is more like a portrait that may depict a single person, but which was in fact painted by many different hands.

Further, the *Exaltation* lends some welcome nuance to the widespread trope of the author's death and rebirth, which has been a mainstay of authorship studies for the past 50 years. While Barthes famously declared the author dead in 1967, Andrew Bennett (2005b) points out that, ironically, the exaltation of authors in the eighteenth century had already anticipated their later effacement, as poets were depicted as the passive mediators of greater forces. As such, the Romantics "both inaugurated a certain sense of authorship and, at the same time, in the very same breath, announced the author's imminent demise" (Bennett, 2005a, 55). Conversely, Seán Burke (2008) has argued that Barthes's attempt to exclude authors from the study of literature paradoxically led to the renewed importance of authors for the definition of the literary field. In short, the author seems doomed to die and be reborn in an endless cycle. However, I hope to have shown that this historical oscillation between the death and rebirth of the author has far deeper roots, and that it has characterized the authorial figure from its earliest beginnings. The death and rebirth

of the author is therefore not so much a historical development as it is an intrinsic feature of literary authorship. It springs from the necessity of moving texts beyond their point of origin, a transfer that requires both the authors' disappearance from and survival through the texts—and, crucially, the willing collaboration of a literary community.

This co-creation of authorship can be expressed through a number of tropes. In this essay, I have attended to two in particular, noting that they are found not only in the *Exaltation* but throughout Western literary history as well. The first is an entanglement of the author and addressee, where the border between their respective identities is blurred and the text is created through that (possibly eroticized) encounter. The other trope is the disappearance of the author and their re-creation through a posthumous reception, ensuring the transmission of the text, and with it, the continuous survival of the authorial figure. In the *Exaltation*, the author's death and the circulation of her text are simultaneous events, as Enheduana's "I" is removed from the poem at the very moment that a singer repeats her words. Finally, both tropes show that the communal creation of the authorial figure also make that figure a fluid, dialogical, and composite affair: the author's "I" can wax and wane, its reference can be left ambiguous, and it can be taken over by other voices. By tracing the concept of the author back to its earliest instance, a new history of authorship thus comes into view, one less focused on the individual contribution of stable subjects, and more interested in how authors engage, address, merge with, and are sustained by the literary community around them.

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ENDNOTES

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[2] In this essay I refer to the English version of Barthes's essay, since this is the one that appeared first, a year before the French version.

[3] The most recent edition is that by Annette Zgoll (1997), though see also the score transliteration by Delnero (2006, 2021–2108). Where the reading of the text is disputed, I generally follow Pascal Attinger (2011). The translations are my own.

[4] Some modern scholars also attribute to Enheduana a composition known as *Inana and Ebih*, but this is a more speculative claim.

[5] Note that "Enheduanna" and "Inanna," with a double *n*, are older spellings of their names; Inana is now also sometimes spelled "Innana." The various spellings reflect differing understandings of Sumerian phonemics and orthography, but in either case refer to the same characters.

[6] See the inconclusive discussion in Attinger (2011, 11, fn. 113).

[7] Cf. Zgoll's schematic model of the interaction between supplicant and deity in cuneiform cultures, as presented in Zgoll (2003).

[8] Likewise, a common feature in Akkadian incantations is a closing formula where the priest reciting the incantation states that he is not its author: "the incantation is not mine, it is the incantation of the god" (see the references collected in Lenzi, 2010). By denying that he has made the words he speaks, the priest summons instead the force of a god, presenting himself as the mere vessel of a divine proclamation.

[9] For this translation, see Attinger (2011, 6, fn. 44).

[10] The historical existence of a Sumerian "Sacred Marriage" is debated. Some Sumerian literary sources, such as *Iddin-Dagan A*, do seem to depict ceremonies where the king symbolically married a goddess, especially Inana, but whether such rituals were ever practiced, and if so, how, are questions that remain unresolved (see e.g. Nissinen & Uro, 2008; Renger & Cooper, 1972). A connection between the Sacred Marriage and the *Exaltation* is proposed by Roberta A. Binkley (2004, 50), who sees in the scene of composition a specific allusion to the "Sacred Marriage," but I would be cautious in assuming that the reference is that specific. Rather, I read the poem as drawing on a more loosely defined imagery of marriage.

[11] Note that the last mention of the first-person pronoun is in the phrase "what I have told you"—the "I" remains defined by the relation of address to the very end.

[12] That the Romans knew that the pyramids were built as tombs for the Egyptian kings is shown by, among other instances, Strabo's *Geography* XVII.33.

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