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**“That old magic:” The
Representation of Authorship in
Stephen King’s Works**

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Abstract

Stephen King is de koning van horror en heeft al meer dan zestig boeken op zijn naam staan. Onder dit grote oeuvre vallen een aantal fictionele werken gebaseerd op auteurs of personages die creatief schrijven.

Binnen de literaire theorie is er veel veranderd op het gebied van auteurschap. Veel verschillende theorieën zijn aan bod gekomen, zoals Roland Barthes zijn 'dood van de auteur'-theorie en de lezing van Michel Foucault getiteld 'Wat is een auteur?' Ook nu vinden er veel veranderingen plaats. Digitalisatie en het internet hebben veel veranderd aan auteurschap.

Deze scriptie bekijkt zes werken van Stephen King waar auteurs in voor komen en analyseert de representatie van auteurschap die daar tentoon wordt gesteld. Deze representatie wordt vervolgens vergeleken met andere representaties van auteurschap en uiteindelijk ook met de theorie over auteurschap.

Keywords: Stephen King, authorship, representation of authorship, Barthes, Foucault

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Introduction

“The object of fiction isn’t grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome and then tell a story... to make him/her forget, whenever possible, that he/she is reading a story at all.”¹ Stephen King, also known as the ‘King of Horror’, wrote this in 2000 when he published his non-fiction work *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. In this work, he explains his view on creative writing and authorship. He starts the book with an auto-biographical telling. The chapter after this is called ‘What Writing Is’. He answers the question immediately: telepathy. When a writer puts something on a blank page and years after a reader picks it up and reads it, both parties are seeing relatively the same picture in their minds. This is what is central about King’s view on authorship: a writer is trying to portray a picture as truthfully as possible to a reader who is in a different place and a different time. After this, he explains how a writer has a toolbox similar to that of a carpenter and authorship includes mastering these basic tools (vocabulary, grammar and the elements of style). He advises against using too many adverbs and the passive voice. He also believes that “while it is impossible to make a competent writer out of a bad writer, and while it is equally impossible to make a great writer out of a good one, it is possible, with lots of hard work, dedication, and timely help, to make a good writer out of a merely competent one.”² Here, King seems to combine the idea that writing is a skill that can be learned together with the idea that writing is a talent and cannot be learned. His main advice

¹ Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 151.

² *Ibid.*, 160.

is also to read and write a lot because he believes that is the main source from which one can learn and brush up on basic writing tools.

Another interesting remark King has made on authorship was during an interview for *The Paris Review* in 2006. King speaks about how he had an idea for a story about a woman who gets bitten by a rabid dog. She contracts rabies from the bite and King wanted to show how she starts to become rabid while she hides from the dog in her car. During the writing of this, King found out that the incubation time for rabies is too long to make this scene work. The interviewer then asks what he does when he finds out his story does not work in the real world. King answers: “You can never bend reality to serve the fiction. You have to bend the fiction to serve reality when you find those things out.”³ Here, King hints to a sense of realism that he finds important in his novels, even though his stories are always fictional and often include supernatural elements.

History of authorship theory

Amongst scholars and thinkers, views on authorship have changed drastically over the years. Throughout the late 1700s, authors were closely linked to an idea called the ‘genius’ which Betty A. Schellenberg explains as “some mystical force that either boils up from within or is breathed into the author, eliding the physical means by which a composition is produced.”⁴ Donovan et al explains the genius as someone who “creates his or her own autonomous world hovering above the mundane and commands a certain influence on a limited cultural elite.”⁵ People mostly began idolising figures such as William Shakespeare as an untutored genius but

³ Nathaniel Rich and Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, ‘Stephen King, The Art of Fiction No. 189’, *The Paris Review*, 2006, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5653/the-art-of-fiction-no-189-stephen-king>.

⁴ Betty A. Schellenberg, ‘The Eighteenth Century: Print, Professionalization, and Defining the Author’, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 138.

⁵ Stephen Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, and Rolf Lundén, eds., *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship*, *DQR Studies in Literature* 43 (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 6.

they also romanticised the lonely suffering of figures such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

During the nineteenth century, however, authorship became more of a marketable industrialised trade in which agents, publishers and critics became involved. The Copyright Act of 1814 especially enforced the notion of ownership and rights to sell. This also created a higher demand for new literary texts, as papers and journals were not allowed to reprint works. This development led to a more industrial view on authors. Authors who sold really well were seen as money grabbers who only wrote for the masses, while authors who did not sell much work were seen as writers who wrote what they wanted without regards to what the public wanted or what proceeds they could gain from it.⁶

A significant development that arises in the twentieth century is the importance of the critic's view. The critic seems to gain immense power over which books are read and which are not. The quality of the book is mostly determined by the critic "who has made it seem that the author is an effect of the critic's interpretation rather than the cause/origin of his or her work."⁷

During the 1910s and 1920s the Russian Formalists emerged. As Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen explains, they "set out to conceptualize the literary work as an autonomous aesthetic object available for rigorous scrutiny without recourse to its author's biography, authorial intentions, or social context."⁸ They mainly ignored the author of a text and completely focused on the linguistic and aesthetic devices that created literary texts.

Around the 1930s and 1940s, the New Criticism movement gained popularity. This movement mostly proposed the question if the intentionality of the author was important to a

⁶ Alexis Easley, 'The Nineteenth Century: Intellectual Property Rights and "Literary Larceny"', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 147–64.

⁷ Donovan, Fjellestad, and Lundén, *Authority Matters*, 3.

⁸ Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, 'The Author in Literary Theory and Theories of Literature', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 273.

literary text. This post-war sensibility mostly relied on anti-authorial ideas. They rejected authority, as a result of The Second World War. This idea was extended to literature in which the authority of the author was questioned and undermined.⁹ Within literary criticism, it was still popular to focus on historical contextualisation, creating biographies of the author and focusing on the intent of a writer. New Criticism was explicitly against this. The text itself was more central to New Critics and authors were supposed to remove themselves from their work as much as possible.¹⁰

One of the most significant works on authorship theory during the twentieth century is Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1967). In it, he argues that a literary text should be considered separately from its author.¹¹ Barthes was not the first one to express such views but he was the first one to explicitly and coherently propose these ideas in a single text.¹² Stéphane Mallarmé and Marcel Proust were two authors who expressed similar views and Barthes also quoted these writers in his essay. Proust, for example, mainly emphasised the difference between the creative persona of an author and the social self. A literary text does not reflect the ideals of an author because their writing persona is different from their actual self.¹³

Barthes's views regard the author more as a "scriptor" – a term he uses instead of author in his essay. He coins this term in order to remove the association between the words author and authority. According to Barthes, after authors write their texts, they lose all authority over it, therefore they are merely a scriptor. He also believes that when literary criticism focuses on the author's intention, it is imposing a limit on the text. A text is not defined by its creator, it derives its meaning from its relation with other texts while the reader is the main 'centre' in this intertextual web. He also believes that it is impossible to find out an author's original

⁹ Stougaard-Nielsen, 'The Author in Literary Theory and Theories of Literature'.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Aspen* 5–6 (1967).

¹² Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

¹³ Stougaard-Nielsen, 'The Author in Literary Theory and Theories of Literature', 271.

intention in the first place.¹⁴ As a reader, there is no way to precisely detect what the writer's intention was.

Barthes also touches upon the Surrealist movement which put forth the idea of "automatic writing". This concept relies on an author not being aware of what they write. This phenomenon is often considered paranormal and associated with séances but the key of this process is that the writer has no authority over what they write. The text seems to be writing itself through the writer.¹⁵

Another significant text on authorship is Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?". It was originally published in French in 1969 but translated to English only in 1977. Similar to Barthes, Foucault believes attention should be focused on the text itself and not on the author's intentions or context. Still, he warns against completely removing the author from the interpretation of a text. He argues that there is part of the author as a construct that can be very valuable in interpreting a text. He calls this the "author-function". This is a social position separate from the human entity known as the author. He explains this as "the result of a complex operation which constructs a rational being that we call 'author.'"¹⁶ Foucault believes that if we ignore the author completely, we would also ignore integral parts of the text.

According to Hans Bertens, contemporary views on authorship contain the idea that authors should "expose the illusions and false truths with which our world is riddled."¹⁷ Bertens also claims that contemporary notions of authorship focus on "moral seriousness" while still promoting "human imagination" at the same time, he says it incorporates "contradiction, discontinuity, incoherence, or the arbitrary," and he also argues that the "author's hand is more visible than ever."¹⁸

¹⁴ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'.

¹⁵ Barthes.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *What Is an Author?*, 1969.

¹⁷ Hans Bertens, 'Postmodernist Authorship', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 198.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

Similarly, Adriaan van der Weel writes on authorship in the digital age. He explains the case of E. L. James's *Fifty Shades* trilogy. James started writing on an online website and her stories were picked up by publishers who worked with her to publish the immensely popular trilogy.¹⁹ The digital age gives writers more opportunity to self-publish their stories but it also changes the contact between authors and readers. On Twitter and Facebook, readers can message authors and authors can post more about their day-to-day life.²⁰ This creates more interest in the personal life of an author but also poses more dangers for the author. Readers can leave hate messages and sometimes are able to obtain phone numbers or home addresses.

Van der Weel also comments that the internet leads to an immense increase in available literature. This leads to a decrease in quality because there is no quality regulator on the internet.²¹ Everybody can post anything they would like, including texts that are riddled with grammatical errors. This wide range of available texts might also, in the future, lead to an economic crisis for professional writers.²² There are so many literary texts available online for free that readers might be less inclined to actually buy a book.

Research aim and method

What I mostly want to research though, is how these theories are represented in popular literature. Stephen King has also written non-fiction work on authorship and writing, but a number of fictional works feature characters who are authors or partake in creative writing. The first novel which features an author is *The Shining*, which was published in 1977. The newest novel with a character who writes is *Billy Summers*, which was published in 2021. What I aim to find out is how these representations of writing and authorship in King's novels have

¹⁹ Adriaan van der Weel, 'Literary Authorship in the Digital Age', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 218–34.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

changed over the years and how they relate to authorship theory. How does the representation of authorship in Stephen King's works compare to the representation of authorship in other works and the literary developments within the theory of authorship from Barthes' theory onwards?

I will answer this question by investigating what other researchers have found in fictional and non-fictional writing. These elements I will use in analysing five novels and one short story by King that contain a character who is an author or who partakes in creative writing. These works are: *The Shining* (1977), *Misery* (1987), *Desperation* (1996), *Bag of Bones* (1998), the short story "Rat" in *If It Bleeds* (2020) and *Billy Summers* (2021) and they will appear in this thesis in chronological order. I have chosen these works because they are relatively spaced out over the entire oeuvre of Stephen King. Unfortunately, between 1998 and 2020 there have not been any works by Stephen King that have featured a prominent author character which is why there is a gap of twenty years. I will now investigate how other researchers have found instances of representation of authorship which will form my theoretical framework. With this theoretical framework in mind, I will close-read all the selected works and pay attention to any examples of the features in my theoretical framework, as well as other features that have to do with the representation of authorship which might not be part of my theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

Previous research on the representation of authorship has focused on a wide range of aspects. Jerome McGann, for example, wrote a chapter in the book *Authority matters: rethinking the theory and practice of authorship* (2008) called "Life of the dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry". This chapter focuses on poetry specifically but there are still aspects that can also apply to prose. McGann analysed modernist poetry and found some representations of authorship. He found that criticism of authorship and literary developments

are often hidden inside stories. Similarly, he also found that the boundaries between fictional and non-fictional works are often blurred when a work represents authorship in some way. The works he analysed specifically also carried an insistence on the truth-function of writing. According to these works, an author should be writing about some sense of truth. These works also insist on a certain function of creation that authors – and other artists – have to conform to.²³

Another chapter in this same book – “Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*” – was written by Anna Linzie and it focuses on an autobiography. The author of this autobiography is often disputed as it is advertised as Gertrude Stein’s work, while many believe Alice Toklas herself was the author. Linzie analysed this book on the topic of authorship and found various aspects that I will be using in my research as well. According to Linzie, this work focuses partly on the financial aspect of authorship. This book explains how ‘money-making’ works are considered to be low art. A literary genius should not focus on making money, they should be focusing solely on the quality of the work. This is something that the characters in this book struggle with because Stein is considered to be a literary genius but because of her financial struggles she wants to write a ‘lower quality’ work that sells well. In this way, this book also blurs the line between high and low art. Another aspect that Linzie writes about in her article, is how the book itself provokes the question of who the author is and it subsequently deliberately withholds the answer. This suggests a sense of ambiguity with regard to the identity of the author. Linzie also found that this book addresses the role of the publisher, editor, and agent and their power and control over an author’s creative output but also their life.²⁴

²³ Jerome McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’, in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 121–40.

²⁴ Anna Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’, in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 141–62.

The chapter: “In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment” is written by Stephen Donovan and it focuses on the modernist moment as well. Again, there are significant features that Donovan finds that will be useful to my research, regardless of the time period of the work. In this chapter, Donovan analyses how authors such as Hardy and Joyce were influenced by the upcoming newspaper media at the time and how they responded to this in their work. For example, Donovan shows that their works seem to warn against believing everything one reads in newspapers but they also show that authors struggle with these media because many aspects about their private lives are suddenly reported in newspapers. This is similar to how Donovan argues that these works also respond to literary developments. Another aspect of authorship that Donovan investigates in these works is the goal of writing and the goal of imagination in general. In these cases, active imagination serves as a form of escape. The texts Donovan analysed also focus on the economic struggles of authors, as well as the power that readers, advertisers, editors, and critics have over creative output. Donovan also notices an attention to the relationship between the reader and the author. In this specific case, the reader feels that they have a real intimacy with the author because of reading their work. Another aspect that Donovan found is the distinction between literary value and economic value, as well as the presence of sexism and classism in the literary field that authors often have to struggle with.²⁵

Interestingly, there is a very different chapter in this book as well that will be useful. “Knowing the Dancer: Modernism, Choreography, and the Question of Authority” by Susan Jones focuses mostly on the representations of dance in novels but there is one significant point that Jones makes. She finds that in the texts she studies, a clear connection is made between dancers and authors in the sense that they both have a performative identity. The text represents

²⁵ Stephen Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’, in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 163–92.

authors as having a double identity. There is a separation between the author as a ‘normal’ person and the author as a person who performs in a certain way in front of their audience.²⁶

There is also a book that focuses more on readers but this also contains important points on authorship in general. Gail K. Hart’s *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller* (1989) focuses specifically on the German writer Gottfried Keller but Hart reveals some significant aspects that will be useful for my research as well. Something she has found is the focus on the relationship between author and reader, and the control they have over each other. Similar to other articles, Hart finds that Keller’s representation of authorship focuses partly on how readers often feel an intimate connection with authors through reading their novels without ever meeting them. She also found that these novels pay extra attention to the fictional nature of a book and the boundaries between reality and fiction. What is interesting about Keller’s novels in particular is how they seem to focus mainly on the consequences of imagination. It seems to prevent a person from functioning properly in a community. Keller’s novels suggest that imagination – including reading and writing – serves as an escape from reality. However, many people seem to use it as a substitute for reality, which Keller’s novels seem to warn the reader for. Another aspect is one that has also been mentioned before. Representation of authorship often comment on the distinction between good quality novels and bad quality novels. Keller’s novels also reflect on the saleability of both of these categories.²⁷

The last book that I will use is Judith Ryan’s *The Novel After Theory* (2012). She discusses multiple works which contain representations of authorship. What she has noticed in these novels is also mostly in line with the other articles. She has found that these novels comment on the relation between art and reality. Many novels also focus on the reader’s

²⁶ Susan Jones, ‘Knowing the Dancer: Modernism, Choreography, and the Question of Authority’, in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 193–222.

²⁷ Gail K. Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller* (University of North Carolina Press, 1989), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469656779_hart.

identification with fictional figures. There is often empathy between the reader and the text, and some novels highlight the possible dangers of this empathy. Ryan also found comments on how readers are often ignorant of the writing process, literary structures and other features that an author usually has a lot of knowledge on. Ryan also found that the ambiguous identity of the author is often highlighted, as well as the power and control a publisher has over creative output. The last element she found is a literal death of the author which symbolises Barthes' death of the author theory.²⁸

In the following chapters, I will use these works and the elements they mentioned in order to assess the representation of authorship in King's works. I will see if these elements come back in the selected works or not, or if they come back in a different form, or if there are any more elements in King's works that other researchers have not found in the works they analysed. I will use the history of authorship theory at the end of this thesis to compare it to the general representation of authorship in King's works.

²⁸ Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

Chapter 1 – *The Shining*

Before analysing King's *The Shining*, I will quickly recapitulate the thirteen elements that I will be focussing on. These elements have been discussed and explained more elaborately in the introduction so I will simply list them here: criticism on authorship or the literary field embedded in the story (McGann, Donovan), focus on the boundary between fiction and non-fiction (McGann, Hart, Ryan), insistence on the function and goal of writing (McGann, Donovan, Hart), focus on the creative writing process (McGann), distinction between popular 'low' art that generates large profit and 'high-brow' literature written by a literary genius (Linzie, Donovan, Hart), provoking the question of authorship (Linzie, Ryan), role of the publisher, editor, agent and their power and control (Linzie, Donovan, Ryan), focus on economic struggles that authors often have to face (Donovan), focus on the relationship between author and reader (Donovan, Hart, Ryan), focus on sexism and classism within the literary field (Donovan), separation between the author's private identity and performative identity (Jones), focus on the reader's ignorance on literary structures and techniques (Ryan), and the literal death of the author (Ryan). I will look for these elements in *The Shining* in order to relate the representation of authorship within the novel to the theory I have comprised.

The Shining is one of King's most popular works. Published in 1977, it was King's third published novel and his first hardback bestseller. It was adapted into film in 1980 and King wrote a sequel to it in 2013 which was also adapted into film. *The Shining* is one of the main works that established King's reputation as a master of the horror genre.

The novel is mostly situated in the fictional Overlook Hotel which is located in the Colorado Rockies. The hotel's history is filled with deaths and suicides, including an off-season caretaker who murdered his family and then committed suicide himself. Jack Torrance, a struggling writer and recovering alcoholic, accepts the job of winter caretaker and moves into

the hotel together with his wife Wendy and their five-year-old son Danny who possesses a supernatural skill called ‘the shining’. He is able to see the hotel’s cruel past, can read minds and sometimes glimpses the future.

This chapter will mostly focus on Jack, as he is in the process of writing a play at the start of the novel. His dream is to be a famous author but at the start of the novel he has only been able to get a few short stories published. He is also unemployed as he got fired from his teaching job after he attacked a student who had damaged his car. He struggles mostly with anger management and alcoholism.

Criticism of the literary field

One of the elements that I have found in the theory is the criticism that is often embedded within stories. McGann found criticism specifically of authorship and literary movements.²⁹ Donovan found that criticism was directed at literary movements as well but also at changes within media.³⁰ In *The Shining*, this element is also seen, specifically criticism towards literary agents.

Jack has an agent in New York and he says that she “thought the literary sun rose and set on Sean O’Casey.”³¹ O’Casey was an Irish playwright who lived between 1880 and 1964, and mostly wrote on the bad circumstances in lower class families and the Dublin slums in times of war and revolution.³² This could be a critique of literary agents as Jack seems to feel that his agent focuses more on this playwright that has died instead of focusing on future playwrights that may also be worth reading.

²⁹ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’.

³⁰ Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’.

³¹ Stephen King, *The Shining* (Anchor Books, 1977), 151.

³² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Sean O’Casey’, Britannica, 26 March 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sean-OCasey>.

The function and goal of writing

McGann, Donovan and Hart have discussed how the works that they analysed, contained some focus on the function and the goal of writing. McGann found a specific insistence on the truth-function of writing. The twentieth-century poetry he analysed, seemed to advocate for writing about truth and incorporating truth within fictional works.³³ Donovan, however, did not find this in Modernist fiction. What he found was that those works focused more on the escapist function of writing (and reading).³⁴ This is something that Hart's findings agree with. She mostly found escapism to be an important function within the works that she analysed.³⁵

Within *The Shining*, the first clear reference to truth within writing is when Danny reads Jack's mind: "christ what a character. wish there was a place for him in "THE PLAY." i'll end up with the whole fucking human race in it if i don't watch out."³⁶ (Incorrect capitalisation copied from original.) This shows that Jack looks for inspiration in real life, specifically for his characters. Later, this is confirmed even more literally as Jack starts thinking about writing a book about the hotel's history and makes notes in a notebook he keeps with him when he finds an interesting element about the hotel that he wants to incorporate in this work.

The novel focuses on the consequences of truth-writing, as well. Jack tells his friend who also works for the Overlook Hotel about his plan to write about the hotel. This friend responds: "The thought of you doing some sort of a scum-job on my hotel and passing it off as a great piece of American writing, that makes me sick."³⁷ This shows the consequences of writing about real-life places and real-life people. Many people associated with the subject of such a work will not be pleased with it. This is something that is not addressed by McGann.

³³ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'.

³⁴ Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'.

³⁵ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

³⁶ King, *The Shining*, 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

Jack, however, does not seem to care about these consequences as he decides that there will be a book about the Overlook Hotel and that “he would pull apart the entire Overlook history, nasty, incestuous ownership deals and all. He would spread it all out for the reader like a dissected crayfish.”³⁸ Later, he says: “He would write it for the reason he felt that all great literature, fiction and non-fiction, was written: truth comes out, in the end it always comes out.”³⁹ This shows that writers sometimes feel as if they have to write a certain piece without mind for any of the consequences. They often have this grand idea of truth as their goal, which is something that McGann confirms in his research. Eventually, Jack dies and is never able to write this book. This could show that there is no such thing as a ‘truth’ that literature has to uncover, or it could show the inability for an author to uncover this truth.

Jack’s own view on the function of writing is mostly focused on the creative process. He considers writing to be his “real work.”⁴⁰ On his play specifically he comments: “Whether or not it was any good or if it would ever see actual production was another matter. And he didn’t seem to care a great deal about those things.”⁴¹ This means he is not at all focused on being a successful writer, even though he often mentioned dreaming of being a great American writer. At this point in the novel, he seems more focused on simply finishing the play. He explains that the writing block he is facing is mostly the play itself. Jack feels as though his job at the high school “was stifling whatever creative urge he had.”⁴² All that remains of Jack’s life of drinking and aggressive fits was the unfinished play and he feels that when he finishes it, he can move on to other creative works and move on from alcoholism and violence. This does not directly relate to the theory but it is very close to Donovan and Hart’s findings on escapism. In

³⁸ King, *The Shining*, 280.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 152.

The Shining, writing is not necessarily a form of escape but it is a tool of escape. Jack seems to use writing in order to escape from his unhappy life and turn it into a better one.

At the same time, *The Shining* seems to suggest a clear connection between addiction and authorship. Throughout the entirety of the novel, Jack's interest in writing seems to dwindle. At first, he is excited to spend a few months closed off from the rest of the world, in order to focus fully on his play. At the beginning of the stay, he seems to have broken through his writing block and makes fast work of his play. Then, he slowly seems to lose interest in his play and instead wants to write a historical work on the Overlook. This work seems to take over his mind as he forgets completely about his play and when the novel's supernatural endgame nears, the word 'writing' is not even mentioned anymore. In the novel's plot, Jack loses his mind and the Overlook Hotel seems to possess his body when he chases Wendy and Danny with a mallet. The Hotel uses Jack's aggressive fits and alcoholism against him in order to take over his body. This novel seems to suggest that issues such as alcoholism can impede heavily on a person's authority over their body and life. As writing is compared to alcoholism, it can even be said that this novel sees authorship as an addiction and can be seen as harmful. At the same time, it can also be seen as a refuge from an addiction such as alcoholism, as it gives the author a different world to step into and focus on while it gives them the same addictive feeling as alcoholism does, even though it is significantly less harmful. This connection is not seen in the theory but it can be closely related to escapism.

The creative writing process

McGann found that the works he analysed seemed to focus heavily on how writing is not about structural plots but more of a natural flowing force.⁴³ This is something that can be seen in *The Shining* as well.

⁴³ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'.

When Jack is writing he is described as being “lost in the world he was making, staring at the typewriter”⁴⁴ and when he is interrupted, he becomes angry and sometimes even aggressive and violent. When he is contemplating the Overlook story he wants to write, the narrator says: “His mind felt sharp and accurate, all the way down to millimeters. It was the way he usually felt only when the writing was going extremely well or when he had a three-drink buzz on.”⁴⁵ This is similar to how McGann has found that writing is often described as being in a dream-like trance or hypnosis. Interestingly, what this quote also shows is the comparison between the creative process and alcoholism. Authorship is compared to an addiction, and combined with the aggressiveness that Jack shows when he is withheld from writing, this makes for a significant view that I have not seen in the academic discussions.

Something that McGann does not discuss but what does relate to the creative process is Jack’s focus on characters. At some point in the novel, he rereads the play and he thinks it is a bad piece of writing. He relates this partly to the fact that he has more interest in the work he wants to write on the Overlook history but also says that he “had developed opposing feelings about his characters.”⁴⁶ He says that within his usual writing process, he liked all of his characters, the good ones and the bad ones. He says that this “allowed him to try to see all of their sides and understand their motivations more clearly.”⁴⁷ The sympathy he feels for his characters helps him in writing about them and understanding them. All he wants is to create this character and it is the reader’s job to judge the characters: “Let the reader lay blame.”⁴⁸ Again, this confirms that authors are not raising a certain structural plot when they are writing, it is more free-flowing and often it seems like authors have no real influence over it.

⁴⁴ King, *The Shining*, 179.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

The question of authorship

Linzie and Ryan both found that representations of authorship often contained the question of authorship.⁴⁹ The works that they analysed often deliberately withheld the answer or made the reader doubt if the supposed author was the actual author of a certain piece of text. In *The Shining*, this question is posed as well. Throughout the novel, the Overlook Hotel seems to be taking over Jack's mind. He starts seeing past guests and past employees but he also starts thinking of writing a non-fictional work about the hotel. The hotel seems to be helping him in writing this piece because the hotel enables him to talk to previous guests and to find documents that were not present before. This raises the question if the supernatural presence of the hotel is taking over Jack's mind so much that it is also writing its own story through Jack. He does not seem fully in control of his body, therefore it is possible that he is not fully in control of his writing either. This could suggest that authors are more like scripters. They unconsciously write and are not always completely in control of what they write.

Relationship between author and reader

The relationship between the author and the readers, or the author and the public, is an element that often comes back in the theory. Donovan found this element as well and he noted that readers often seem to feel some intimacy with authors when they read their novels. The works he analysed, seem to critique this.⁵⁰ Hart also found this false sense of intimacy in the works she discussed but these works also argue that readers and authors have control over each other.⁵¹ Readers indirectly control an author's creative choices and their income, while authors are often able to influence readers through their works. Ryan also noted the focus on the relationship between author and reader but the works she analysed also seemed to highlight

⁴⁹ Linzie, 'Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas'; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁵⁰ Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'.

⁵¹ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

that readers often identify and empathise with characters. Ryan expresses how this is usually the goal of an author but she explains that the works she analysed show more negative consequences of this identification.⁵²

In *The Shining*, there is a distinction between readers feeling positive towards authorship and readers feeling negative towards authorship. Jack mentions, for example, that he “had been something of a catch” for the high school he worked at as he was “a slowly blooming American writer perhaps, and certainly a man well qualified to teach that great mystery, creative writing.”⁵³ This shows that he fell in favour for the high school because he had already published short stories and was an author. Similarly, Jack’s wife once refers to him as “the Eugene O’Neill of his generation, the American Shakespeare.”⁵⁴ Eugene O’Neill was an American playwright who received the Nobel prize for literature and William Shakespeare is one of the most famous playwrights in the world. This comparison shows that Wendy is very proud of Jack and seems to admire his creative abilities. Contrastingly, Wendy’s mother seems to think that Jack’s writing will not lead to anything: “*Big ideas*, her mother had said. *Sure. The welfare lines are full of educated fools with big ideas.*”⁵⁵ This shows that some people see authorship as wishful thinking and it brings attention to the economical side of authorship. Not many writers get published and some people might feel that the time that those aspiring writers put into writing should be put in finding a job that gathers an actual income. Another negative view on authorship that is expressed occurs when Jack tells the manager of the Overlook Hotel that he is planning on writing a history of the place. The manager says that it is not a good idea at all and that he wants to fire Jack because of it. Jack’s friend who also works for the Overlook Hotel responds: “The thought of you doing some sort of a scum-job on my hotel and passing it

⁵² Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁵³ King, *The Shining*, 55–56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

off as a great piece of American writing, that makes me sick.”⁵⁶ These instances show that there can also be a very negative relationship between authors and readers.

This is closely related to how Jack looks towards other authors. His wife Wendy, has also written a novel as an assignment for her job but it never got published “much to Jack’s very irreverent and very private glee.”⁵⁷ This highlights the relationship between an author and other authors. *The Shining* seems to suggest that there is jealousy and other negative feelings between authors, while this is not something that I have found in the theory that I used.

Chapter conclusion

Overall, *The Shining* most prominently features comments on the goal of writing and a focus on the creative writing process. Jack feels that the goal of writing should be to portray the truth and to stay as close to reality as possible. At the same time, the novel shows that it is not always advisable to do so as others could be offended by what one writes. The creative writing process is also significantly important in the novel because the novel seems to compare writing to an alcohol addiction. This is an interesting comparison to make, especially as I have not seen this within either the theoretical framework or the history of authorship theory.

In general, *The Shining* represents authors as humans who have personal problems that often interfere with their writing and who are walking the fine line between fictional escape and real life problems. The novel suggests that authors have to find a way around their personal problems in order to focus on their writing, while escaping into their imagination can also have the opposite effect.

⁵⁶ King, *The Shining*, 275.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

Chapter 2 – Misery

Misery is a psychological horror novel about a fictional brand-name author, Paul Sheldon, who has written the popular novel series also called *Misery*. In the beginning of the novel, he is celebrating his new finished manuscript, which is not a *Misery* novel. Due to the use of alcohol, he crashes his car and loses consciousness. He wakes up in Annie Wilkes' house, and finds out his legs are broken. Annie Wilkes is revealed to have worked as a nurse and she claims to be Paul's number one fan. She says there is a heavy snowstorm outside which resulted in the phone connection failing, thus explaining why she has not called an ambulance. She tells him that he has to stay in her guestroom bed until the storm clears and she can take him to a hospital. Eventually, Paul realises that Annie is keeping him prisoner and is deliberately not calling the authorities to keep him there. Annie reads Paul's latest *Misery* novel in which the character Misery dies. When she finds out about Misery's death, Annie has a violent fit of rage and eventually buys a typewriter for Paul to work on. She wants him to write a new *Misery* novel where she is revived. After the new manuscript is done, Paul manages to kill Annie and escape.

In this chapter, I will again use the thirteen elements that I have elaborately discussed in the introduction.

Boundary between fiction and reality

An element that is discussed in the articles that I have mentioned before, is the blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction. This was discussed by McGann, Hart and Ryan. This also features in *Misery* as the narrator says: "It was as if he was a character in a story or a play, a character whose history is not recounted like history but created like fiction."⁵⁸ This sentence

⁵⁸ Stephen King, *Misery*, Paperback ed (London: Hodder, 2011), 12.

not only shows that Paul is doubting if his reality is real or not but it also brings attention to the fact that Paul *is* a ‘character in a story.’

At the end of the novel, when Paul has escaped from Annie and returns to his normal life, his editor wants him to write a non-fiction work about his experience. However, Paul eventually says he does not want to write a nonfiction work because he would “*begin to tart it up... just a little at first... then a little more... then a little more. [...] Simply to create that roundness. I don’t want to fictionalize myself.*”⁵⁹ (Italics copied from original.) This shows that Paul wants to keep the boundary between reality and fiction very clear. He knows he would start to fictionalise the nonfictional version and he clearly seems to want to avoid this. This means that *Misery* is suggesting a clear distinction between fiction and reality is the best course of action. This is different to how McGann, Hart and Ryan have found in the works they analysed that they featured a heightened attention towards the blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality.⁶⁰ In the beginning of *Misery*, this boundary does seem to be blurred when Paul feels that he is a character in a story but the end of the novel seems to contradict this blurring by showing that Paul prefers to keep fiction and reality distinctly separate.

The function of writing and the creative writing process

These two features have most prominently been found by McGann. The function and the goal of writing is an element of the representation of authorship that McGann as well as Donovan and Hart have found. Both Donovan and Hart found a specific focus on escapism and how writing and reader can serve as an escape from real life while McGann found an insistence of the truth-function of writing.⁶¹ This truth-writing is also clearly seen in *Misery*.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 362–63.

⁶⁰ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁶¹ Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’.

The element of the focus on the creative writing process is only mentioned by McGann and the works that he analysed, discussed the way that creative writing is not a structural plot that an author makes up but it is a free-flowing force that an author is often not even aware of.⁶² This is also an element that can be seen in *Misery*.

I have decided to put these two elements together because they are easily discernible from a single quote. When Annie accuses Paul of murdering Misery, he reflects:

He might have murdered her... but he hadn't. In the end, in spite of his having grown to despise her, Misery's death had been something of a surprise to him. He had remained true enough to himself for art to imitate life – however feebly – to the very end of Misery's hackneyed adventures. She had died a mostly unexpected death. His cheerful capering had in no way changed the fact.⁶³

Paul clearly values art that imitates life as it is something he strives towards himself. He also expresses that he was surprised when Misery died in his story. This shows that he did not set up a structure to purposefully have Misery die. It simply came to him through his creative process. King's *Misery* seems to suggest that both of these aspects are very important for an author. This could reflect King's own views but this is not something that is easy to find out and so I will not speculate or dwell on it.

Low- and high-quality literature

Hart, Donovan, and Linzie discussed in their works the distinction between popular low-quality literature which generates large amounts of profit, and high-quality literature which is written by a literary genius but seems to be underappreciated by the public.⁶⁴ This feature can also be

⁶² McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'.

⁶³ King, *Misery*, 39.

⁶⁴ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'; Linzie, 'Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas'.

seen in *Misery* when Paul reflects that his fans always want to read more about Misery. The narrator says that “each time he had taken a year or two off to write one of the other novels – what he thought of as his ‘serious’ work,”⁶⁵ it never worked out well because his readers did not want to read anything else besides the novels about Misery. Paul sees the Misery novels as a way to make money, to support him when he writes his ‘serious’ work. This is confirmed when Paul reflects: “*I’m no whore. Fast Cars was about not being a whore. That’s what killing that goddamned bitch Misery was about, now that I think about it. I was driving to the West Coast to celebrate my liberation from a state of whoredom.*”⁶⁶ (Italics copied from original.) Paul seems to feel that his Misery novels are purely about making money as he describes them as “his main source of income over the last eight years”⁶⁷ while his ‘serious’ work is what he really wants to write and with which he feels “he may have just won next year’s American Book Award,”⁶⁸ even though it does not generate enough income. This clearly and directly shows how authors can struggle with this distinction. In this way, *Misery* takes this element a step further from the works that Hart, Donovan and Linzie have analysed because those works only mentioned or showed the distinction between low- and high-quality literature while *Misery* shows how authors can be negatively impacted by this distinction.

Role of publisher and editor

Linzie, Donovan and Ryan have found that works that represent authorship often discuss the role of publishers, agents, editors, critics, and other figures in the literary field. Often, these works also show how these figures can have control or power over an author and their creative output.⁶⁹ This is seen in *Misery* as well, at the end, after Paul has escaped from Annie with his

⁶⁵ King, *Misery*, 30.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁹ Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

new *Misery* manuscript. The narrator tells us that it was the publisher's idea to publish the last *Misery* novel that Paul wrote as Annie's captive, as it would generate a lot of profit. In turn, Paul's editor "was begging him for a nonfiction account of his ordeal. That book, he said, would outsell even *Misery's Return*."⁷⁰ Paul eventually says he does not want to write a nonfiction work because he feels that he would not stay true to and objective about the events. This highlights the power that editors and publishers can have but it also seems to suggest that the author can break free from this, as Paul rejects his editor's wishes.

Relationship between author and reader

Donovan, Hart and Ryan have found that representations of authorship often contain some comment on the relationship between author and reader. Many times, authors and readers are represented as having control over each other as readers have indirect power over an author's income while authors can sometimes influence readers through their writing. Readers also often seem to connect with characters from a novel on a personal level which can result in them feeling as if they have an intimate bond with authors.⁷¹ This is also a feature that is seen very prominently in *Misery*. In this specific case, Annie takes the place of all of Paul's readers and she seems to feel like she knows Paul, simply because she has read his work: "You're *good*, [...] I *knew* you would be. Just reading your books, I knew you would be. A man who could think of Misery Chastain, first think of her and then *breathe life* into her, could be nothing else."⁷² (Emphasis in the original fragment.) This comment seems quite benign but it shows how readers often feel an intimate connection with authors through reading their novels, even if this connection does not exist. This intimacy that Annie seems to feel is confirmed when she

⁷⁰ King, *Misery*, 362.

⁷¹ Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁷² King, *Misery*, 22.

says: “I love you. [...] Your *mind*, your *creativity*.”⁷³ (Emphasis in the original fragment.) On the same page, Annie feeds Paul his painkillers which Paul describes as “shockingly intimate.”⁷⁴ The narrator also says multiple times that Annie gives Paul a ‘maternal’ look. This again suggests that Annie feels very intimate towards Paul even though this is the first time they ever speak to each other. These feelings are elevated when Annie finds out about Misery’s death and accuses Paul of murdering her: “*But characters in stories DO NOT just slip away! God takes us when He thinks it’s time and a writer is God to the people in a story, he made them up just like God made US up.*”⁷⁵ (Italics are copied from the original.) According to this fragment, Annie sees Paul as an omnipotent all-seeing force that completely controls the (fictional) world. The novel, therefore, seems to suggest that readers idolise authors to such an extent that they may become Gods to them. This not only shows that authors have some sort of power over readers but it is also an exaggerated version of Donovan’s and Hart’s point. They discuss works that argue that readers seem to feel some intimacy with authors but this novel seems to go beyond that.⁷⁶

This intimacy that Annie feels with Paul becomes more controlling when she says: “You ought to stick to your *Misery* stories, Paul. I say that sincerely. As your number-one fan.”⁷⁷ Later, it is also shown that it is not only Annie who feels this way, it is Paul’s entire group of readers: “And while she [Annie] might be crazy, was she so different in her evaluation of his work from the hundreds of thousands of other people across the country – ninety percent of them women – who could barely wait for each new five-hundred-page episode?”⁷⁸ Paul also explains that when he writes something different than *Misery*, he immediately receives “a flood

⁷³ King, *Misery*, 22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁶ Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

⁷⁷ King, *Misery*, 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

of protesting letters from these women, many of whom signed themselves ‘your number-one fan’.⁷⁹ These letters then contain lines such as: “*It wasn’t what I expected, it wasn’t what I wanted. Please go back to Misery. I want to know what Misery is doing.*”⁸⁰ (Italics copied from original.) This shows that readers do not only feel a connection with the author but they also feel they have the right to tell the author how to proceed with the story or what actions to take.

The control and power that Annie has over Paul already starts in the beginning when Paul realises that he does not know where his wallet is. He asks Annie about it and she replies that she has taken it from him and “kept it safe” for him.⁸¹ This already suggests some kind of financial control that Annie has over him. This is in line with Hart’s and Donovan’s findings. Both of them comment on how readers have certain powers over authors. Their reading behaviour does not only control the income that authors receive but they also often control what kind of work an author writes.⁸² In this case, Annie has literal financial control over Paul as she is in possession of his wallet. Thus, *Misery* is also pointing towards this financial control that readers can have over authors.

Another topic that Annie holds control over is Paul’s creative output. This is not very clear in the beginning of the novel, as it only surfaces later when Annie has exclaimed her dissatisfaction with Misery’s death. She brings Paul a typewriter and forces him to start writing a new novel by the name of *Misery’s Return*. This is a rather direct way of controlling one’s creative output but it does highlight the fact that readers often – indirectly – control the creative output of authors. As both Hart and Donovan argue, without readers, an author’s work remains unread and thus insignificant, as well as unsold which means the author has no income and can

⁷⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

⁸² Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’.

therefore not sustain themselves.⁸³ This too is made explicit just before Annie brings Paul a typewriter. She leaves Paul alone in the house for several days, after she stopped reading his new novel due to Misery's death. This means that Paul was in pain because Annie was the one who gave him his painkillers and he became hungry and thirsty as Annie was the one who kept him fed and hydrated as Paul could not possibly walk, and Annie kept the door to his room locked. This is a literal instance of the way authors indirectly depend on readers for their income and sustainability. No readers equals no income.

Ignorance of readers

Another aspect that clearly comes back is the ignorance of readers. Ryan found in one of the works that she analysed in her book *The Novel After Theory* that the work suggested that readers were not mindful of all the processes and techniques that go into creative writing. There are certain narrative structures that create certain effects, and there are specific techniques that deliberately function in a certain way, and readers are ignorant and unaware of these.⁸⁴ This is also apparent from *Misery* as Annie reads Paul's 'serious work' manuscript – which Annie calls 'manuscriptbook' and comments: "It's hard to follow. It keeps jumping back and forth in time."⁸⁵ Paul explains that it is part of an author's "technique," as "the subject dictates the form."⁸⁶ This is something that Annie simply finds confusing and cannot understand. Later in the novel, when Annie goes to buy paper for Paul's new Misery novel, Annie's ignorance is confirmed again. Annie buys the most expensive paper she could find but Paul shows her that the paper she bought is useless as the ink will smudge on it. He tells her which paper she should buy and Annie becomes angry at Paul and even violent as she smashes his knee with her fist in

⁸³ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'.

⁸⁴ Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁸⁵ King, *Misery*, 24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

response.⁸⁷ Here, the novel seems to suggest that readers are not only ignorant of the writer's trade but they also do not seem to care in the slightest. It is like they do not want to know and only become annoyed when one points out their ignorance.

Death of the author

In the works that Ryan analysed, she found that the representation of authorship sometimes contained a literal death of the author. She relates this to Barthes's death of the author theory and though this relation is sometimes a little far-fetched, it is clear that some of these works symbolically respond to or engage with Barthes's theory.⁸⁸ In *Misery*, the ending is rather significant in a symbolic way as well. Paul manages to steal a match and for the second time in the novel, he burns his newest manuscript, although it is later revealed that he only pretended to burn it this second time. The manuscript he has written because Annie forced him to is hidden while a stack of blank paper is burning and during Annie's attempt to stop the flames, Paul crashes the typewriter on Annie's back. Paul destroys the two main objects of his captivity, the (fake) new *Misery* novel and the typewriter, and in doing so he destroys his captor as well. Annie eventually stumbles over the broken typewriter and hits her head. After much struggle, Annie seems to be dead and two police officers arrive and find Paul. Later, it is revealed that Annie "had actually died of the fractured skull she had received when she struck the mantel, and she had struck the mantel because she had tripped. So in a way she had been killed by the very typewriter Paul had hated so much."⁸⁹ This is significant, as the novel seems to suggest here that authors can take back the control that readers have over them. Eventually, Paul's legs heal although he will always walk with a limp. He even decides to publish *Misery's Return* which due to "the world-wide headlines generated by the bizarre circumstances under which

⁸⁷ King, *The Shining*, 80.

⁸⁸ Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

⁸⁹ King, *Misery*, 366.

the novel had been written”⁹⁰ is expected to bring an enormous amount of profit. Paul thinks of never writing again but eventually finds the inspiration for a new novel that seems to bring back his autonomy as an author, as he decides to write a novel that he actually wants to write. This is not directly related to Barthes’s death of the author theory but this ‘death of the reader’ event can be seen as a symbolic response to or engagement with literary theory. *Misery* is not trying to say that the reader is dead, it is simply showing, in a very literal way, that authors can, and maybe should, break away from the power that readers can have over them.

Chapter conclusion

Overall, King’s *Misery* contains most of the features that others have found in works on authorship. We have seen some small instances where the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction were blurred, there was a small insistence on truth-writing, and there were some small indications of criticism on seeing creative writing as a structural assignment.

However, the most prominent features are definitely the relationship between author and reader, the control that other parties (especially readers) can have over an author and their creative output, and the distinction between low literature which sells well and high literature which is less popular amongst readers. *Misery* begins with painting quite a dreary picture; an author is held captive by a reader, is forced to burn the only existing copy of the manuscript of his new ‘highbrow’ literature, and is then put to work by the reader in order to write more of the popular series he has grown to hate while the reader gives direct feedback and has full control over the creative process as she reads and edits every chapter as soon as it is written. In this large part of the novel, it seems to suggest that authors are under severe control and scrutiny by their readers. They have no real choice what to write because they simply have to deliver

⁹⁰ King, *Misery*, 362.

what the reader wants. Interestingly, this part also shows that readers have no real knowledge over the creative process while they do have control over it.

The ending of the novel shows that though authors may feel suppressed by their readers (or any other party such as editors and publishers), they can and should break away from this pressure in order to write what they actually want to write. At the same time, this novel is also showing that popularity, profit, and sustainability can only be earned by an author if he has a readership. Without Annie, Paul never would have survived, let alone written *Misery's Return* and he would never have been able to generate so much profit.

Therefore, this novel clearly represents authors as having a complicated relationship with readers. There is mutual dependency and control over one another, and a part of authorship is dealing with this relationship and not letting yourself succumb to it.

Chapter 3 – Desperation

Desperation was published in 1996 and it was turned into a film in 2006. The novel is set in a Nevada mining town called Desperation and the highway that runs past it. A town policeman picks up several people off the highway, seemingly for false reasons and brings them back to Desperation where he locks them in cells. The captives find out that the policeman has been possessed by an evil being named Tak. This entity has control over the desert wildlife around Desperation and must change ‘hosts’ to stay alive. Eventually, the captives find out that Tak has been freed from the mines during a mining operation and they realise that they have to destroy that mine together with Tak in order to be freed from its wrath. One of the captives is Johnny Marinville, a famous writer who is driving across America with his motorcycle to gather material for his new book. He eventually sacrifices himself to destroy Tak and the mine.

This chapter will focus on Johnny specifically to explore the representation of authorship in the novel, and I will be using the same thirteen elements as in the previous chapters.

Criticism on the literary field

Both McGann and Donovan have found representations of authorship that contain some form of critique on the literary field.⁹¹ Donovan discussed criticism specifically on how papers and magazines infringe upon the privacy of authors and try to profit off of famous people.⁹² This criticism on the involvement of media is also clearly seen at the beginning of *Desperation*. The introduction to Johnny Marinville starts with: “The man who had once been on the cover of *People* and *Time* and *Premiere* (when he married the actress with all the emeralds), and the

⁹¹ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’.

⁹² Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’.

front page of *The New York Times* (when he won the National Book Award for his novel *Delight*), and in the center-spread of *Inside View* (when he was arrested for beating up his third wife, the one before the actress with the emeralds).⁹³ The first thing the reader learns about Johnny is that he seems to be rather famous, he is an award-winning author and his private life is carefully inspected and laid bare by magazines. During the following pages, Johnny keeps being referred to as “the literary lion”⁹⁴ and “the literary Elvis Presley”⁹⁵ (both for his rock and roll life style and his talent), and he is compared to other writers such as Johnny Steinbeck. This shows that Johnny Marinville has become a brand name in this fictional literary industry and he is incredibly famous for his books. This first part already shows the complicated relation between privacy and fame. This novel seems to suggest that when one becomes a brand name, one’s life is laid bare for the whole public to witness. There is also already a connection established between Johnny’s addiction to alcohol and drugs, and his fame. His fame seems to enable him to obtain alcohol and drugs, and the pressure that is put on him by the public makes him want to numb the feelings of stress and fear by the use of alcohol and drugs. However, when magazines pick up on his substance abuse, they will write articles about it which will only increase the pressure that Johnny (or any other famous person) is feeling. This becomes a vicious circle that one cannot escape and it only becomes worse.

Another consequence of becoming a brand name is given when Johnny expresses the following: “He would be able to go on [publishing his work] as long as he remained capable of (a) putting words on paper and (b) sending them off to his agent. Once you’d been accepted as a bona fide literary lion, *someone* would be glad to go on publishing your words even after they had degenerated into self-parody or outright drivel.”⁹⁶ (Emphasis was added in the original text.) Here, the consequences of becoming a brand name are mentioned. Once you are as

⁹³ Stephen King, *Desperation* (Pocket Books, 1996), 66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

famous as Johnny, or any other brand name (such as Stephen King), it does not seem to matter what you write. It will be sold regardless, due to the fame attached to your name. This suggests that the person themselves is used as a marketing strategy or a promotional object. Therefore, this novel critiques the way the literary field engages with and writes about famous authors.

The boundary between fiction and reality

McGann, Hart and Ryan wrote on how representations of authorship often pay attention to the boundary between reality and fiction. Both McGann and Ryan argue that this boundary is blurred but Hart pays more attention to the way imagination can negatively impact one's life.⁹⁷ This is also the case for Johnny as his fears are enhanced by his imagination. The narrator says: "He was *terrified* of death, that was the truth, and as a result of spending his life honing his imagination, he could see it coming from at least four dozen different directions."⁹⁸ Johnny then tries to numb his fears with the use of alcohol and drugs which only enhances the negative consequences of his imagination.

The creative writing process

In the works he analysed, McGann found that representations of authorship partly focused on how creative writing is more about a natural-flowing force than it is a structure to be raised.⁹⁹ Similarly, in *Desperation*, Johnny expresses how his intuition is most important to his writing: "It was intuition, not planning, that had been responsible for his best work as a writer."¹⁰⁰ This shows that Johnny does not necessarily plan ahead or raise a structural plot when he writes. This is exemplified first when Johnny's ex-wife Terry gives him the idea of writing a nonfiction

⁹⁷ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

⁹⁸ King, *Desperation*, 71.

⁹⁹ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'.

¹⁰⁰ King, *Desperation*, 94.

book on riding his motorcycle through America. It reads: “He had always trusted his intuitions, and he hadn’t had one as strong as this in years.”¹⁰¹ Another important example is when Johnny thinks back on one of the essays he has written: “He had meant to focus on an entirely different aspect of millwork, but had changed course at once, and without a second thought.”¹⁰² This shows that he had planned ahead to write about a certain theme but he changed course during the writing because of his intuition. An example is given again when Johnny meets the cop who talks to a pack of coyotes. He sees the cop warning them off and immediately thinks: “*This goes in the book [...]. Rock solid. Rock goddam solid.*”¹⁰³ (Italics copied from the original.) This shows how his intuition works. Without pre-planning the exact moments or scenes of his new book, he just drives around, sees something happening and his intuition tells him that it should be in the book. This intuition is similar to how McGann shows that creative writing is about a natural free-flowing force. Creative writing is not done by carefully planning a plot beforehand, it is a more natural process.

Role of the editor and agent

Linzie, Donovan and Ryan have found that representations of authorship often contain some comments on the role of publishers, agents, editors, critics, and other figures of the literary field.¹⁰⁴ This is something that also comes back in *Desperation*. In the beginning of the book, it is revealed that Johnny is being followed by Steve Ames. What his job is, is not entirely clear until chapter 4 where a conversation is shown between Steve and Johnny’s agent Bill Harris and his editor Jack Appleton. Steve is employed by both these men to follow Johnny wherever he goes and keep an eye on him. During this conversation, Steve is given “The Five

¹⁰¹ King, *Desperation*, 82.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

Commandments,”¹⁰⁵ so called by the agent and editor themselves. This already seems to suggest that agents and editors feel that their task is more important than it may actually be. The commandments themselves are mostly focused around keeping Johnny in line: (1) Steve is not allowed to drink with Johnny as he is an alcoholic and prefers drinking in company, (2) Steve is not allowed to procure drugs for Johnny, (3) Steve is not allowed to procure women for Johnny, (4) Steve must immediately contact Johnny’s agent if he is using drugs or alcohol, and (5) Steve is not allowed to pick up hitchhikers in his truck, “especially not female.”¹⁰⁶ In this particular case, the agent and editor seem to have control over Johnny’s life. They even ask Steve if he believes Johnny can make the trip even though it was Johnny’s own decision to do it. This suggests that agents and editors can have too much control over an author’s life which can result in authors being limited in their freedom and authority. The nature of these commandments also suggests that Bill and Jack care more about the brand name status of Johnny, than about Johnny as a person. This is confirmed when Jack mentions that Johnny has been in the hospital three times due to drug overdose while he seems more concerned about the fact that the press has caught up on this. He also says that the third overdose could have been a suicide attempt, which is something the press has not picked up on yet. Jack seems more concerned about Johnny’s reputation in the media than his health. The same seems to be the case for Steve himself. When Johnny calls him because he has been attacked and wrongly arrested by a policeman, the connection suddenly breaks. Steve had picked up a hitchhiker earlier and she asks him: “You really worried about him or just worried about what might happen to you?” Steve replies: “I’m worried about both.”¹⁰⁷ This seems a reasonable answer but during the call, Steve expresses concern about what Johnny’s agent is going to do to him when he hears about the situation Johnny is in: “[...] *when I get back to New York his guys are*

¹⁰⁵ King, *Desperation*, 115.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

going to crucify me, if for no other reason than that they can't crucify him."¹⁰⁸ (Italics copied from original.) This shows that Steve worries about the consequences of Johnny's predicament instead of his health and safety. The same can be said about Jack and Bill because Steve seems to believe that the two would 'crucify' Johnny if they heard about the situation. This shows that Jack and Bill do not seem to care much about Johnny's health and safety. All three of these men seem to care more about Johnny's ability to produce and their own income, rather than his safety and health. Therefore, this novel seems to critique the power that editors and agents have over authors and the control they exercise over them.

Desperation also seems to suggest that publishers feel that they are the ones that create a brand name. To them, it is not the writer's talent that makes them famous but their own publishing skills. This is seen in the following sentence: "Johnny sometimes thought that the most terrible thing about the American literary establishment was how they let you swing in the wind, slowly strangling, while they all stood around at their asshole cocktail parties, congratulating themselves on how kind they were being to poor old what's-his-name."¹⁰⁹ Johnny feels that publishers see themselves as saviours who turn a nobody into a brand name while they do not actually care for the person, and only relish in their own wealth which they have gained off of the author's talent and work. This could potentially reflect King's own ideas but this does not necessarily have to be the case. This instance does reflect the possibility of the editor's and agent's control and power, and it emphasises how (unnecessarily) large their role in an author's life is.

¹⁰⁸ King, *Desperation*, 128.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

Relationship between author and reader

Donovan, Hart and Ryan highlight how representations of authorship focus partly on the relationship between authors and readers. They have mostly found that readers often identify personally with fictional characters which in turn makes them feel as if they know the author intimately.¹¹⁰ In *Desperation* this identification is not seen, even though there are some comments on the relationship between author and reader. The cop that Johnny meets first seems to be a fan of Johnny's work as he says: "You are one of my favorite writers!"¹¹¹ And the cop even says that Johnny is a "national resource"¹¹². This behaviour, however, quickly changes after the cop violently attacks Johnny and leaves his nose broken. He suddenly calls Johnny's work "pinko-liberal"¹¹³, the new novel he just praised is now "a stupid concept"¹¹⁴, he says to Johnny that John Steinbeck is "a writer whose shoes you aren't fit to lick"¹¹⁵, and he calls Johnny "a sorry excuse for a writer"¹¹⁶. This drastic change in behaviour can suggest that readers in general can be quick to change their opinion on an author and their work. The fact that Johnny is physically attacked can also hint towards the damage hate messages or aggressive critiques can have. It is through this violated character that the novel seems to explore the vulnerability of an author.

Private identity and performative identity

Jones writes in her article that representations of authorship can contain the distinction between an author's private identity and their performative identity. According to Jones, authors often

¹¹⁰ Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹¹¹ King, *Desperation*, 86.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

act differently when they are in the public's eye.¹¹⁷ In *Desperation*, this is also seen when the narrator says: "In many interviews he had identified himself as a man outraged by death, but that was pretty much the same old big-balls crap he'd been selling throughout his career."¹¹⁸ This shows that specifically in front of interviewers he puts up a façade and does not tell them the truth about himself. Why he decides to lie to interviewers is not further elaborated upon.

Later, it is revealed that Johnny does not show his true self in front of readers either because when he speaks to a fan he is said to be "speaking in the modest tones he reserved for these occasions (and these occasions only, as a rule)."¹¹⁹ This incident shows that he reserves a specific identity especially for when he meets fans.

Death of the author

Ryan has found, in some of the works she analysed, that representations of authorship can contain some symbolism referring to Barthes's death of the author theory.¹²⁰ In *Desperation*, this is less clear and direct than in the works Ryan analysed, but at the end of the novel it is revealed that Johnny sacrificed himself to save everyone else. He also left behind a note for the child, David, that survived. It reads: "David – Stay ahead of the mummy. I John 4/8. Remember!"¹²¹ (I John 4/8 refers to a line in the Bible that reads 'God is love.')

Here, it seems as if Johnny left this last piece of writing with his readers for them to interpret and use however way they wish. This could be seen as similar to what Ryan found. It could potentially be a way of symbolising Barthes's death of the author theory.

¹¹⁷ Jones, 'Knowing the Dancer: Modernism, Choreography, and the Question of Authority'.

¹¹⁸ King, *Desperation*, 71.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²⁰ Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹²¹ King, *Desperation*, 692.

Chapter conclusion

In general, King's *Desperation* contains eight of the thirteen elements that I have found in other works that focused on the representation of authorship. We have looked at how the boundary between reality and fiction is used in this novel, there was a focus on the creative writing process, the novel paid some attention to the relationship between reader and author, there was a distinction between the author's private and performative identity, and there could be a small symbolic reference to the death of the author theory.

The most prominent and clear features are the critique on the literary field and the comments on the role of editors and agents. These two features are already seen in the beginning of the novel when the reader first reads about Johnny. He is immediately introduced as a writer who has become a brand name in the literary field. This fame has led him to lose his privacy and become addicted to alcohol and drugs, while the quality of his writing has only deteriorated. In general, this author is at the top of his fame and wealth while at the same time, he is controlled by his editor and agent to prevent the public from knowing about his bad state of (mental) health. This novel seems to suggest that editors and agents can be too controlling and sometimes do not care enough about the author they work for. There is also a clear link between authorship and alcohol and drug use that is not reflected in the academic research I have read.

Therefore, authors in general are represented in this novel as suffering under their fame and their editors and agents, which can lead to drug and alcohol abuse and addiction.

Chapter 4 – *Bag of Bones*

The next novel I will be discussing is *Bag of Bones*, published in 1998. This novel is about Michael Noonan, an author of thrillers who often shows up in the *New York Times* bestsellers lists and publishes one novel per year. In the beginning of the novel, the reader learns that his wife, Jo Noonan, passed away due to a stroke. Michael stops writing after her death as every time he goes to sit behind his computer, he feels anxiety creeping up. He often starts feeling as if he is choking and can barely even think of writing without sweating profusely. He therefore stops writing entirely but continues publishing as he has kept a few manuscripts hidden from everyone around him, including his agent, publisher, and Jo. After four years, Michael decides to move to the vacation home he shared with Jo, which is called Sara Laughs. He soon starts experiencing paranormal occurrences. For example, the magnets on the fridge keep rearranging themselves, there is a moose's head hung above the fireplace whose bell often rings mysteriously, and he starts hearing voices around the house. Eventually he comes across Mattie Devore, a young woman who has a toddler Kyra. Michael befriends them and learns that Mattie's father-in-law (Kyra's grandfather, Max) wants to take custody over Kyra. Max is a millionaire and the whole town seems to be afraid of him. Eventually, Michael learns that Kyra is a victim of a curse that lies upon the town. This curse is also the reason that he is able to hear voices, including his wife's. He eventually manages to break the curse while and adopts Kyra, as both Mattie and Max have passed away.

Criticism on the literary field

McGann and Donovan found that representations of authorship often contained some form of criticism on or response to authorship or the literary field.¹²² Donovan specifically found

¹²² McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'; Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'.

criticism on the media's treatment of authors and other celebrities. In *Bag of Bones*, there is also some form of response on media. Firstly, Michael considers the attention of the press "sometimes whimsical, sometimes hateful."¹²³ This shows that Michael is not necessarily critiquing the press, merely making an observation. He says: "America has turned the people who entertain it into weird high-class whores, and the media jeers at any 'celeb' who dares complain about his or her treatment."¹²⁴ He explains this further when he says that the media create revenue for the artist, not necessarily so they can continue to do their chosen artform but only so the media can laud them for doing it well or gratifyingly take them down for doing it badly.

Michael also brings attention to how the press often infiltrate a celebrity's privacy: "They can print pictures of you with your shirt off and say you're running to fat, they can talk about how much you drink or how many pills you take or snicker about the night you pulled some starlet on to your lap."¹²⁵ So, although Michael seems to say in the beginning that he is not necessarily bringing criticism down upon the media, his tone seems to suggest otherwise. Clearly, this passage highlights the hateful side of media.

Boundary between fiction and reality

McGann, Hart and Ryan found that within representations of authorship, there is often a focus on the boundary between fiction and non-fiction.¹²⁶ Many times, this boundary is blurred or crossed, while Hart argues that the blurring of this boundary, usually by way of imagination, often carries negative consequences within these representations. This is very similar to what Michael says: "When an imaginative person gets into mental trouble, the line between seeming

¹²³ Stephen King, *Bag of Bones* (Hodder, 1998), 380.

¹²⁴ King, 380.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 380.

¹²⁶ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

and being has a way of disappearing.”¹²⁷ In this particular representation, an imaginative person can encounter negative consequences due to their imagination. This is exemplified more clearly on the same page, where Michael starts hearing voices in the woods around him. At the time, he is also heavily under the influence of alcohol which seems to suggest some connection between imagination and alcohol-use as well.

Several pages later, there is another comment on the relation between reality and fiction: “It was a sense that reality was thin. I think it *is* thin, you know, thin as lake ice after a thaw. [...] You feel this mystery in every breath, you see it in every shadow, you expect to plunge into it at every turn of a step.”¹²⁸ (Italics copied from source.) This passage seems to enforce the idea that Michael is able to see or feel this ‘thinness’ because of his imagination, which in turn suggests that authors often have to deal with the boundary between fiction and reality. This boundary is often blurred for them due to their imagination. This is confirmed again when Michael hears a crying baby in Sara Laughs, even though there’s nobody else in the house. He says: “I realized that the line between what I knew was real and what I knew was only my imagination had pretty much disappeared.”¹²⁹ This shows that Michael starts losing his own sense of reality and cannot distinguish between fiction and reality anymore.

The novel also expresses the public’s opinion that this blurring is often associated with authors. Mattie for example tells Michael: “You need a vacation from your own thoughts. [...] I bet most writers do from time to time.”¹³⁰ Michael answers that it is likely true. This shows that an author’s thoughts and imaginations can be so harmful to themselves that they sometimes seem to need a break from them.

Later in the novel, there is a more direct way of associating negative consequences of imagination to authorship. Michael says: “Write enough stories and every shadow on the floor

¹²⁷ King, *Bag of Bones*, 79.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 528.

looks like a footprint, every line in the dirt like a secret message.”¹³¹ He also expresses the difficulty in “deciding what was really peculiar at Sara Laughs and what was peculiar only because my *mind* was peculiar.”¹³² (Italics in original source.) This shows that Michael’s sanity or anxiety is directly influenced (negatively) by his occupation as an author.

Other than strengthening scary thoughts, *Bag of Bones* also brings up the idea that authorship leads to pulling away from one’s real life. Michael says: “When I was really driving on a book I more or less fell out of the world; other than a quick scan of the sports pages, I didn’t even read the newspaper.”¹³³ Here, Michael goes on by explaining how his wife could have told him things that he would never have remembered because he was so lost in his fictional world. This is seen more clearly when Jo’s brother tells Michael that she had told him: “I need his whole attention. I can’t get that while he’s working.”¹³⁴ Similarly, when Michael is working on his new novel, he says that his “real life that week had mostly to do with Andy Drake, John Shackelford, and a shadowy figure standing in the deep background.”¹³⁵ These two names and the shadowy figure are characters in his new novel. He also says: “I forgot about Max Devore, Mattie Devore, Kyra Devore. I forgot about Jo Noonan and Sara Tidwell. I forgot about myself.”¹³⁶ Another similar comment reads: “I’d been zoning, tranced out, writing one of my stupid little books. I’d been hypnotized by the fantasies going on in my head, and a hypnotized man is easy to lead.”¹³⁷ These examples clearly shows that Michael is barely involved in his real life when he is so active in his fictional world.

In these instances, it is not necessarily seen as a directly negative effect. However, when Michael is interrupted from his writing by a phone call, a more negative effect can be seen. He

¹³¹ King, *Bag of Bones*, 158.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹³⁷ King, *Bag of Bones*, 440.

says: “If undisturbed, I might have gone on writing until I simply melted into a sweaty pile of goo on the deck.”¹³⁸ This comment is obviously more of a humorous take on the matter but it does suggest that Michael has no way of returning himself to the real world when he is lost in his writing. It is as if he stops feeling things like hunger, thirst, exhaustion, or heat and so he would continue writing until someone else pulls him from his fictional world. A similar comment is made later when Michael is writing: “I was lost, only faintly aware of thunder someplace over the lake, only faintly aware of Bunter’s bell shivering from time to time.”¹³⁹ Even when he goes to the fridge for a drink, he barely notices how the magnets on the fridge have moved of their own accord. This shows he is barely aware of any of his own surroundings, which can be a danger to himself.

Alternatively, there is also a comment on how imagination can be beneficial. Michael is walking through the woods when he hears sounds and becomes scared of what is lurking in the dark around him. But then he starts “making up a story and then embellishing it, doing it in my head instead of on paper this time but going down all the same well-known paths.”¹⁴⁰ Here, Michael explains how he is getting lost within his own imagination while walking through the woods. According to Hart this is a negative consequence because he is losing sense of the reality around him.¹⁴¹ However, in this case, Michael says: “I had gotten so involved that I had neglected to be afraid.”¹⁴² He goes on describing how his imagination calmed him down and this calmed down state of his mind, in turn, made him realise that the strange sounds he had heard in Sara Laughs at night could simply be caused by old faulty pipes. This instance shows that there are also positive effects of the use of imagination. In this case, it helped Michael calm down enough in order to think rationally.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 408.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 443.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴¹ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

¹⁴² King, *Bag of Bones*, 111.

Another positive effect about imagination that is seen in this novel is the idea of escapism. Michael explains that writing “[takes] away all the weight of the world for awhile.”¹⁴³ This shows that writing and imagination can help one to forget about negative feelings or difficult experiences, and experience some happiness and relief.

However, this escapism also seems to carry a negative consequence. Michael says: “For years I had fled the problems of the real world, escaping into various Narnias of my imagination. Now the real world had filled up with bewildering thickets, there were things with teeth in some of them, and the wardrobe was locked against me.”¹⁴⁴ Here, the novel seems to suggest that one can use imagination and writing as a form of escapism but no one is able to escape from their problems forever, and eventually one will have to return to the real world to face their difficulties.

Another negative effect related to escapism is how Michael seems to feel that his imagination is some form of drug: “Work had always been my drug of choice, even better than booze or the Mellaril I still kept in the bathroom medicine cabinet.”¹⁴⁵ Here, Michael reflects on how his work functions as a drug but he quickly changes his opinion: “Or maybe work was only the delivery system, the hypo with all the dreamy dreams inside it. Maybe the real drug was the zone. Being in the zone.”¹⁴⁶ Here, Michael seems to come to the decision that it is not necessarily the work that brings him this addicting feeling, instead it is the way his work brings him in ‘the zone’. The space where he creates all his stories, his imagination. This is a rather interesting comparison to make, as drugs are addictive and can be harmful to one’s health. This comparison seems to suggest that one’s imagination can also have addictive qualities and can also be dangerous when used too often.

¹⁴³ King, *Bag of Bones*, 345.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 475.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 475.

Goal of writing

McGann, Donovan, and Hart all found that, in representations of authorship, there was some idea of what the goal of writing is.¹⁴⁷ Donovan specifically found the goal of escapism, while McGann mostly found an insistence on the truth-function of writing. Michael seems to feel that the goal of writing should be to portray some sense of truth, while knowing that this goal is unobtainable. He says: “The aspiring novelist should understand from the outset that fiction’s goals were forever beyond his reach, that the job was an exercise in futility.”¹⁴⁸

Later, we see that Michael’s inspirations for stories do often come from reality. He explains how the idea of one of his novels came to him. He had seen two people walk underneath a ladder on top of which a window-cleaner was working. One of the people walking underneath the ladder was so tall, he almost hit the ladder. He says: “I imagined a collision instead of a near-miss. Everything else followed from there.”¹⁴⁹ Here, his inspiration came through reality and he did not necessarily truthfully recount what happened but he did give a fictionalised account on what could have happened if the man had hit the ladder. Another similar instance occurs when Michael is in the bathroom of Mattie’s trailer and sees a rubber whale: “I remember thinking that it probably blew bubbles out of its spout-hole, and I even remember having a momentary glimmer of an idea – a children’s story about a spouting whale.”¹⁵⁰ Here, he is also using an item he saw in real life to create something fictional. So perhaps *Bag of Bones* is suggesting that truth should not necessarily be the end-goal of a novel but it could be a starting point.

¹⁴⁷ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

¹⁴⁸ King, *Bag of Bones*, 41.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 540–41.

There is another possible goal of writing that is more centred around the author, that comes forth in King's novel. Michael reflects on how he has spent "empty years"¹⁵¹ without his wife Jo, without any friends, and without creative writing. In this passage, it seems as if he is not only grieving for his late wife but also for the creative writing he has not been able to do since her death. Now that he has finally started writing again, he "cried in gratitude because those workless years seemed to be over."¹⁵² This shows that a possible goal of writing is simply for an author to have a purpose in life. Throughout this novel, Michael's writing is closely linked to Jo. Jo was always present when he finished a work, Jo supported his work continually, and when she died, his creative writing seemed to die as well. Whenever he even thought of writing, he would often become locked up through anxiety. At Sara Laughs, he seems to feel Jo's presence and ultimately starts writing again. Eventually, when Mike defeats the curse that lies upon Sara Laughs, and Jo's ghost disappears because of this, he says he gives up writing for good. This link seems to suggest that creative writing is as important in the life of an author as their partner. Therefore, the goal of writing is suggested to be more centred around the author than what it brings to a potential reader.

This is confirmed more clearly later when Michael says: "The writing had burned off all thoughts of the real world, at least temporarily. I think that, in the end, that's what it's for. Good or bad, it passes the time."¹⁵³ This shows that *Bag of Bones* seems to suggest that there is no grand function or goal to writing. It is simply a way to pass the time and Michael seems to be okay with that.

However, close to the end of the novel, Michael finally finds out what the elusive message ('19 down', and '92 down') means. At this point, he had tried to look at page 19 and 92 of the telephone book, and he has also searched through his crossword puzzles. He realises,

¹⁵¹ King, *Bag of Bones*, 298.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 443.

however, that it refers to the pages of his newly written manuscript. When he goes to page 19 of his manuscript and reads the first letters of each line from the top to the bottom, it gives him the solution to defeat the curse of Sara Laughs. The same solution is found on page 92.¹⁵⁴ He looks through the rest of his manuscript and finds small elusive hints to the solution everywhere. In character names, in particular words he seemed to use more often than others, and in important locations in the story.¹⁵⁵ This all seems to suggest that Michael's own writing somehow saves him and helps him in breaking the curse that lies upon Sara Laughs. This seems to suggest that an author's writing can somehow save or help them. This might mean that the goal of writing is for an author to realise something about their current situation or about their life, in order to help them continue and better themselves.

Creative writing process

McGann has found that representations of authorship often contain some description of the creative writing process. McGann mostly found the idea that creative writing is not a rigid structure but more of a free-flowing force.¹⁵⁶ This can be seen in *Bag of Bones*, as well, when Michael describes the process of writing as if "it had come out as naturally as a breath."¹⁵⁷ This comment clearly signifies the natural element of the creative writing process. Similarly, Michael calls writing: "That old magic, so strange and wonderful."¹⁵⁸ He also explains that "writing never really felt like work to me."¹⁵⁹ Michael describes the creative writing process as a "half-hypnotized state"¹⁶⁰ and a way of being "tranced out."¹⁶¹ For Michael, writing is, just as McGann found, not a rigid structure that he raises but an organic free-flowing force.

¹⁵⁴ King, *Bag of Bones*, 572.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 575.

¹⁵⁶ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'.

¹⁵⁷ King, *Bag of Bones*, 296.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁶⁰ King, *Bag of Bones*, 387.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 440.

The question of authorship

Linzie and Ryan both found that representations of authorship often raise the question of authorship. Who the real author of a certain piece is, is often obscured or consciously hidden.¹⁶² This comes back in *Bag of Bones* as well. At the end of the novel, Michael finds out that his manuscript contains hidden clues that help him break the curse that lies on Sara Laughs. In an instant, he realises that he had not really written the manuscript himself. Jo, or at least her spirit, had helped him considerably, in order to give Michael these clues. He compares this to how his first-grade teacher had helped every time his handwriting began to waver: “She would put her large competent hand over yours and help you. So had Jo helped me.”¹⁶³ He even explains how he had been so happy to dissolve the writer’s block that had stumped him for so long but “*Jo* had dissolved it. *Jo* had beaten it.”¹⁶⁴ (Italics copied from original source.) Here, Michael himself seems to believe that he had not written the manuscript at all, that it was all Jo’s doing. This clearly poses the question of authorship. Was it Jo that wrote the entire manuscript or did she only guide his hand to add a few clues? This could suggest that authors are often influenced by their surroundings. Their environments are continually producing ideas and sending it to the author which can heavily influence the way an author writes or what they write about.

The role of publishers, agents, and editors

Linzie, Donovan and Ryan all discussed that representations of authorship often contain some way of addressing the role of the publishers, agents, and editors.¹⁶⁵ This is also seen in King’s novel, for example when Michael explains: “What the publishers want in return, especially

¹⁶² Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹⁶³ King, *Bag of Bones*, 576.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 575.

¹⁶⁵ Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

from an author who can be counted on to sell 500,000 or so copies of each novel in hardcover and a million more in paperback, is perfectly simple: a book a year. That, the wallahs in New York have determined, is the optimum.”¹⁶⁶ Michael then explains that if you publish less than one novel a year, “you’re screwing up the publisher’s investment in you.”¹⁶⁷ He also says that readers will start to lose interest in an author. On the other hand, Michael explains that if an author publishes more than one novel a year, readers might get bored with your work because they are seeing too much of it. In this way, readers and publishers are partly dictating the amount of an author’s creative output.

In *Bag of Bones*, this feature is exemplified more clearly when Michael’s agent Harold calls. He says that there are a few unexpected fiction releases around the time Michael has planned his own next release. This means that Michael’s novel might not hit the *Times* list which is what his publisher was counting on. Aside from this, Michael’s contract with his current publisher has run out and Harold argues that if Michael were to agree to a multiple-book contract with the assurance that the first book would be ready for publishing before his rivals would start publishing, he would find a more agreeable publisher. Michael clearly seems agitated by the change of plans but agrees to publish quicker in exchange for extra profit coming his way. This shows how not only publishers and agents can exert influence over authors but authors also seem to have some control over each other as well. This is something I have not seen clearly in the theory on the representation of authorship.

Relationship between authors and readers

Donovan, Hart and Ryan found that representations of authorship often contained some comments on the relationship between the author and reader.¹⁶⁸ In *Bag of Bones* this is not

¹⁶⁶ King, *Bag of Bones*, 33.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

really seen but we do see some opinions that the public has on authorship. After Michael hears a baby crying in the house, he is scared and contemplates going back home. He thinks about telling his caretaker about what he heard and imagines the reaction of the rest of the town as follows: “Not surprised. Wrote too many books, probably. Work like that has got to soften a man’s head. Now he’s scared of his own shadow. Occupational hazard.”¹⁶⁹ He says that this opinion is “one a lot of folks seem to have about people who live by their imagination.”¹⁷⁰ Here, the book seems to suggest that the public often believes that writers are so involved in their imagination that it tends to overwhelm them, which can cause them to see or hear things that are not there.

Performative identity and private identity

Susan Jones related authorship to dancing, and a significant feature that she found to be similar in both professions, is the separation between private and performative identities.¹⁷¹ In *Bag of Bones*, this separation is clearly seen as well. In the beginning of the novel, Michael reveals that, although he has published one novel every year, he has actually often written two novels per year, in order to keep the second one hidden away. The first four years after Jo’s death, Michael finds himself in a writing block, unable to sit in front of his computer without feeling as if he is choking. Even though, he has not written a single word in those four years he is still able to publish a novel each year because of the stash he kept hidden. None of the readers knew that some of his work during those four years was already years old. Nor did his publisher, editor, or agent know. He had not even told Jo that he had saved some manuscripts. This shows a clear discrepancy between his private identity and his identity as an author.

¹⁶⁹ King, *Bag of Bones*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷¹ Jones, ‘Knowing the Dancer: Modernism, Choreography, and the Question of Authority’.

Chapter conclusion

The clearest element that has come forth in *Bag of Bones*, is the boundary between fiction and reality. There are many scenes in the novel where Michael seems to either get lost in his imagination during writing or he uses his imagination as a form of escapism. Although Hart found mostly negative consequences to the blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality, *Bag of Bones* also seems to highlight the positive sides. Escaping into one's imagination can help reduce stress and anxiety but at the same time, the novel shows that one cannot always run away from one's problems.

Another interesting topic that relates to the boundary between fiction and reality is the way *Bag of Bones* relates addiction and drug-use to imagination. So even though imagination has some positive effects, over-use can be dangerous and addictive, similar to drug-use. This link is something that has not been found in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The goal of writing is also an element that seems to be a much-discussed element in this novel. Although it is not often addressed directly, the novel clearly questions what the goal of writing is. It seems to play with the truth-function for a while, as other (real-life) authors are quoted saying something about how truth is the goal of writing. But the novel also highlights how this truth is an unattainable goal. Authors might start out with an idea that has emerged from truth and real life but the end result of a literary work is barely completely settled within truth. The novel then shows that the goal of writing is more centred around the author and that it is often considered to be a way to simply pass the time. However, the end of the novel shows seems to suggest that writing is integral to an author's existence. Not only because it is his work and his way of providing livelihood but also because their own life can seem purposeless or useless without it. *Bag of Bones* suggests that writing is as important to an author's life as their partner. This is something that does not come back in the theoretical framework.

Overall, *Bag of Bones* represents authors as walking the line between fiction and reality, often becoming lost within their own imagination, not begin connected to their real life and finding their life's purpose in writing.

Chapter 5 – “Rat” and *Billy Summers*

The short story “Rat” was published in the collection *If It Bleeds* in 2020. The story is about Drew Larson, an author who predominantly writes short stories because he can never seem to finish an entire novel. During the short story, he has an idea for a novel and attempts to write it. He travels to his family’s cabin in the woods in order to start the novel in solitude. He gets ill, a storm hits the area surrounding the cabin, and Drew strikes a bargain with a rat in order to finish his story. The rat demands the death of one person close to Drew, namely his ex-colleague Al Stamper. Drew agrees because Al is already suffering from a terminal disease and does not have long left. In the end, Drew finishes his novel, and Al and his wife die in a car crash. Drew returns to the cabin to talk to the rat because he feels betrayed as the rat had said that Al had to die, without mentioning his wife. The rat says that Al’s wife was not part of the deal, as much as she was not part of the deal, and Drew returns to his life with guilt.

Billy Summers was published in 2021 and it tells the story of a hired assassin called Billy Summers. Billy is contemplating retirement but accepts one last job offer from mobster Nick Majarian. The target is another hired assassin, Joel Allen, who is facing a possible death penalty. Nick is tying up a loose end for wealthy media mogul, Roger Klerke, who is afraid that Allen will incriminate him in order to lessen his sentence. The part that I will focus on mostly is Billy’s cover. In order to avoid suspicion, he moves to the area a month before Allen is supposed to appear in court, and he pretends to be an author which is secretly a dream of his. Eventually, he finds out that he was set up and he goes back to Roger and Nick to take back his money and then kill them. He dies in the process.

I will use the aspects from the theoretical framework to analyse the representation of authorship in King’s short story “Rat” and his novel *Billy Summers*, and I will note any comparisons between the aspects that others have found in different works and the ones that I

will find. Because “Rat” is a short story, I have decided to combine these two in one single chapter.

Criticism on the literary field

The first element that features in “Rat” is one that McGann and Donovan found, namely criticism embedded in a story.¹⁷² In this case there is critique on something a specific author has said on the process of writing: “Even the clearest part of what was in your mind gets lost in translation, Franzen had said. Drew remembered thinking that it was rather self-centered of the guy to assume that his experience was the general case.”¹⁷³ This shows that “Rat” is trying to promote a certain view on authorship and Franzen’s idea does not seem to fit this.

The boundary between fiction and reality

McGann, Hart, and Ryan have written on how the boundary between fiction and reality is often blurred in representations of authorship.¹⁷⁴ Hart specifically found that the works she analysed focused on the negative impact of imagination.¹⁷⁵ In those works, an author’s active imagination leads to heavy consequences. In “Rat” Drew’s imagination seems to run wild and often cause problems. In the beginning, the reader learns that Drew only writes short stories. About novels it says: “The first two efforts at long-form fiction had given him problems. The last try had caused *serious* problems. He had burned the manuscript, and had come close to burning the house, as well.”¹⁷⁶ This already suggests that Drew’s imagination has some

¹⁷² McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’.

¹⁷³ Stephen King, ‘Rat’, in *If It Bleeds* (Scribner, 2020), 365.

¹⁷⁴ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹⁷⁵ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

¹⁷⁶ King, ‘Rat’, 346.

destructive qualities. This is confirmed on the same page when Drew gets an idea for a novel when he is on his way to a grocery store:

He was halfway to Speck's, waiting at the corner of Main and Spring for the light to change, when the engine arrived. The engine was an image, one as brilliant as reality. Drew stood transfixed and staring at it through the sky. A student gave him a nudge. "Sign says you can walk, man."

Drew ignored him. The student threw him an odd look and crossed the street. Drew continued to stand on the curb as WALK became DON'T WALK and then WALK again.¹⁷⁷

This passage is followed by a vivid and very detailed description of the steam engine Drew sees in front of him. Here, the fiction quite literally imposes upon the reality of Drew. As seen in the quote above, "the engine was an image, one as brilliant as reality."¹⁷⁸ Similarly, on the first page, the narrator explains that Drew always gets his ideas for stories through real life.¹⁷⁹ These two taken together show that art and reality share a very close relation and this short story might even suggest a blurring of the boundaries between art and reality.

Looking back at the block quote above, it seems to suggest a direct danger in imagination as well. In this specific instance, Drew is standing on the pavement but his ignorance of the world around him begs the question: What if he would be standing in the middle of the road? What if he was driving a car when he saw the train? This is closely related to the feature that Hart found. In Keller's work, she has found that imagination often leads to trouble. Keller's works seem to argue that imagination can lead to a person not being able to function properly in society,¹⁸⁰ which is something that is clearly happening in this quote from "Rat" as well. Drew stops being mindful of his surroundings and clearly ignores another

¹⁷⁷ King, 'Rat', 346.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 346.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 345.

¹⁸⁰ Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

person's attempt at communication. This absence from socialisation is something that comes back when Drew explains to his wife, Lucy, that he wants to write a novel at his father's cabin. She expresses her concerns but he does not seem to care about them. After that, Drew goes to talk to his old department head at the school he works at. Al Stamper had abruptly retired due to health issues but Drew remained in contact with him. They meet each other because Drew wants to talk about his idea to go up to his father's cabin, in order to start the novel there. He explains that Lucy is worried about him going to the cabin by himself and Al seems to agree with Lucy's opinion but Drew completely ignores him: "Drew said nothing. He thought about the saloon. He thought about the sheriff."¹⁸¹ Here, Drew is again absent from the conversation which confirms that his imagination seems to obstruct his ability to socialise. He starts dreaming about it, and when he leaves for the cabin, the narrator says: "Drew felt a lightening. His real life [...] was behind him. [...] What was ahead of him was another life, one he would live in his imagination. [...] His body might be sitting in your basic no-frills cabin in the Maine woods, but the rest of him would be in the town of Bitter River, Wyoming."¹⁸² (Bitter River, Wyoming, is the town where his novel takes place.) This again confirms that his imagination is beginning to take over his entire life.

Just before he arrives at the cabin, Drew stops at a gas station which is also the closest general store to the cabin. The cashier at this store is the son of the repairman that would usually do repairs at the cabin. He tells Drew that the caretaker who used to take care of the cabin, committed suicide in his car in front of the cabin. Drew did not know this and appears shocked but at the same time his imagination is taking over again. He finds a way to incorporate the story he just heard into his novel which again clearly shows that his mind can barely think of anything else than the novel. But this is also related to the relation between art and reality. This

¹⁸¹ King, 'Rat', 350.

¹⁸² Ibid., 356.

shows that he takes inspiration from real life to use in his work which is in line with points that McGann, Hart, and Ryan have also found.¹⁸³

This element also returns in *Billy Summers*. Because the story that Billy is writing is both an autobiography and a novel, it blurs the line between what is real and what is not. This happens too when Billy meets Dave's neighbours: "No need of the *dumb self* here; in Midwood he can be a more regular self."¹⁸⁴ As Dave, Billy seems to be able to be himself more than when he is portraying his dumb self. This is another way in which reality is blurring with fiction. Similarly, references to real world aspects are made constantly. Billy himself is often thinking of novels that have recently come out, he is watching a Netflix show that is very popular currently, and comments about Donald Trump are often made. In this way, the novel might be trying to embed the story in the real world more solidly, which also results in a mixing of fiction and reality. This line between fiction and reality becomes even more blurred later in the story when Billy starts getting to know his neighbours and the other people that work in the office building. Eventually, he starts liking them and caring for them which results in his Dave fiction mixing with his reality. He realises this is dangerous because of what he set out to do but he cannot seem to help it. This seems to highlight the dangers of letting reality blend with fiction.

Hart's findings on the danger of imagination comes back more clearly as well. Billy seems to be using his story as a way to reflect back on his past but the consequence is that he is losing sight of the job at hand. An important marker for this is when Billy is standing at the window of his office, looking towards the courthouse where his target will have to be shot. A different criminal is brought up and this situation could have brought him much intel on how the criminal is handled, how many policemen are around and which entrance is used. Instead of looking at and assessing the situation, Billy is thinking of his story.¹⁸⁵ This shows that his

¹⁸³ McGann, 'Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry'; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹⁸⁴ Stephen King, *Billy Summers* (Scribner, 2021), 32.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

imagination is partly obstructing the task he has to complete. Later, on the next page, the narrator says: “Billy begins to tap the keys, slowly at first, then picking up speed. The summer rolls on around him.”¹⁸⁶ This, too, shows that Billy is incredibly invested in his story without giving much thought to the outside world. This happens again on the day of the job. Billy is getting ready for his task and suddenly, his mind wanders to his story, and distracts him from his task. And even just before he takes the shot that ends Joe Allen’s life, Billy thinks of his fictional self, Dave Lockridge, spending time with his neighbours. Here, the novel seems to suggest that imagination can make one lose sight of everything else around them and it can obstruct people from doing important tasks.

Function of writing

McGann, Donovan and Hart have found that representations of authorship often focus on what the function and the goal of writing is. In the works that Donovan and Hart analysed, the function was mainly to escape from reality.¹⁸⁷ In McGann’s case, however, the truth-function of writing was more important.¹⁸⁸ In “Rat”, we can see both of these features. Under the last heading, I explained how “Rat” often focuses on the distinction between reality and fiction and how Drew loses himself within his fiction. This can be seen as his writing functioning as an escape from reality.

The truth-function of writing is also clearly present, as Drew strives to write truthfully. He takes inspiration from real life and every time he is not certain about the correctness of something, he makes a mental note to do research on it later.

However, *Billy Summers* does not necessarily agree but it also does not disagree. Billy often leaves things out of his story because it is too close to the truth but he also wants to avoid

¹⁸⁶ King, *Billy Summers*, 114.

¹⁸⁷ Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Hart, *Readers and Their Fictions in the Novels and Novellas of Gottfried Keller*.

¹⁸⁸ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’.

fictionalising the story too much. So, this novel seems to leave the question of truth-writing in the middle.

Billy Summers does address a different possible function of writing, one that does not really line up with any of the elements other researchers have analysed, but it should be dealt with nevertheless. The narrator says: “Now [Billy] understands – he never did before, never even considered it – that any writer who goes public with his work is courting danger. It’s part of the allure. *Look at me. I’m showing you what I am. My clothes are off. I’m exposing myself.*”¹⁸⁹ (Italics copied from the original text.) Here, authorship is represented as exposing yourself to the public and it seems to be considered as a necessary function of literature.

The creative writing process

Another element that comes back in the story a few times is one McGann found: how creative writing is a naturally flowing process, and not a structure to be raised.¹⁹⁰ This is already seen in the beginning where it describes story ideas as “dribbles of water drawn from a well that was almost dry.”¹⁹¹ Later in the story, this is confirmed when it says: “In *The Paris Review* some writer – he couldn’t remember who – had said, “When you’re writing, the book is the boss,” and it was true. If you slowed down the story began to fade, as dreams did on waking.”¹⁹² The narrator also says that Drew sees writing as a sort of hypnosis. This suggests that writing has more to do with natural forces than consciously building structures.

¹⁸⁹ King, *Billy Summers*, 90.

¹⁹⁰ McGann, ‘Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry’.

¹⁹¹ King, ‘Rat’, 345.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 375.

The question of authorship

Linzie and Ryan have found that representations of authorship often raise the question of who the exact author is of a certain piece of (fictional) text.¹⁹³ In “Rat”, this question is also raised as the rat explains that he wrote Drew’s book. Drew could not finish it, the rat did it for him, and therefore, the rat claims that he is the author. This makes the reader question whether the rat is right or not. Was it the rat who finished the book? Or did the rat merely help Drew in finishing it?

In *Billy Summers*, this question also comes back as the end of the book that Billy has written about himself is written by Alice. The fact that she was able to finish Billy’s book means that she also could have written the rest. The reader does not know the truth but it could have been either Billy or Alice who wrote it.

In both cases, these questions are deliberately not answered. These works could be showing that authors can be influenced by their surroundings but they could also be suggesting that editors can be seen as co-authors, or that a reader can never be sure who the actual author of a certain piece of literature is.

The role of editors and publishers

Linzie, Donovan, and Ryan have found in the works they analysed that representations of authorship often contain comments on the roles that editors and publishers have.¹⁹⁴ In the beginning of *Billy Summers*, there are quite some references to the roles of editors and publishers, when Nick and his colleague Giorgio explain Billy’s cover: “You look for agents. You send out letters saying you’re working on this book. Most of the agents say no, because they stick with the proven earners like James Patterson and the Harry Potter babe. I read a blog

¹⁹³ Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

¹⁹⁴ Linzie, ‘Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas’; Donovan, ‘In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment’; Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

that said it's a catch-22: you need an agent to get published, but until you're published you can't get an agent."¹⁹⁵ This seems to be some sort of critique on how publishers will only opt for the 'proven earners' and not give much attention to newcomers.

On the next page, another comment on publishers is made: "I have certain conditions. For your own good. You have to leave lobsterland and all your hard-drinking, coke-snorting friends. You have to go somewhere far away from them, to some little shitpot of a town or city where there's nothing to do and no one to do it with even if there was."¹⁹⁶ This is again part of Billy's cover but it highlights how publishers sometimes take control over an author's life in order to make sure they can generate profit.

Economic struggles

Both Linzie and Donovan found that having economic struggles can be a source of motivation for authors to publish their work and this is often represented in work on authorship.¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, "Rat" takes an entirely different turn. Lucy asks Drew why he feels that he needs to write this novel. She asks if it is about money and explains that they are doing well financially. Drew says that it's not about the money for him "since there's no guarantee it would be published at all. And if it ended up in a desk drawer, like bad novels all over this round world of ours, I'd be okay with that."¹⁹⁸ So Drew has no economic motivation, he does not even necessarily want to get published. He explains his main drive behind wanting to write a novel by comparing it to when their son had gotten a tomato stuck in his throat during a picknick. He says: "This is like that. [...] Only stuck in my brain instead of my throat. I'm not choking, exactly, but I'm not getting enough air, either. *I need to finish*."¹⁹⁹ Apparently, Drew feels such

¹⁹⁵ King, *Billy Summers*, 22.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

¹⁹⁷ Linzie, 'Between Two Covers with Somebody Else: Authority, Authorship, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas'; Donovan, 'In the Papers: Hardy, Joyce, and the Modernist Moment'.

¹⁹⁸ King, 'Rat', 352.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

a drastic need to finish a novel that he compares it to choking, an act of dying. This differs drastically from the theory because in “Rat” there is no economic drive, as the theory suggests, but instead there is a more inherent characteristic in the author that needs to write.

Private and performative identity

Jones’s element features in this short story as well. In the works that she analysed, she found that those representations of authorship included a double identity as author. They would have a private identity and a public performative identity.²⁰⁰ This comes back in “Rat” but it only starts showing up after Drew comes with the idea to write a novel. He starts hiding things from his wife and his old colleague. He says he wants to stay in the cabin for two weeks but is actually planning for three weeks, he lies to his old colleague about why he wants to write a novel, he does not tell Lucy that the old caretaker committed suicide right outside the cabin, and when Lucy asks him if he has seen any wildlife, he says he has not, even though he had just encountered a moose and her calf. This shows that he is separating his performative identity from his private person but instead of this performative identity being public, like Jones suggests, it is towards his family and friends, while his private person is truly private and only visible to himself.

This element is also seen in *Billy Summers*. Billy is a well-read, quite intelligent guy but towards Nick and all the other people he comes across because of his work, he pretends to be quite dim, a personage he calls his ‘dumb self’. Then, when he accepts the hitman job from Nick, his cover is Dave Lockridge, a writer, who goes to an office building every weekday to write his book. Before the job starts, Billy decides that he might actually write during those hours he is supposed to be at work in the office building: “Why not a novel that’s actually an autobiography, one written not by the Billy Summers who reads Zola and Hardy and even

²⁰⁰ Jones, ‘Knowing the Dancer: Modernism, Choreography, and the Question of Authority’.

plowed his way through *Infinite Jest*, but one written by the other Billy Summers? The alter ego he calls his *dumb self*?²⁰¹ So Billy's idea here is to pretend to be his dumb self, who is pretending to be Dave Lockridge, and he wants to write a novel that is pretending to be an autobiography about his dumb self personality but is actually partly an autobiography about his actual life but more fictionalised. A significant amount of separation from identities is happening here and this is similar to how Susan Jones found that an author's personal identity could be separated from their performative identity.

Death of the author

Ryan has found works where Barthes's theory is made explicit by a literal death of an author character. There was also one work where Ryan noticed that Barthes's theory was worked out even further by adding a reader who somehow continues the author's story. Barthes argued that the death of the author is simultaneously the birth of the reader.²⁰² At the end of *Billy Summers*, Billy dies. At this point, he has written all of his story, up until the day where he dies. He meant to continue the story after he got back from a dangerous breaking and entering but this led to his demise. At this point, there is only one person who ever read Billy's story and that is Alice, a girl he meets when he is hiding after assassinating Joe Allen. He has let this girl in his life and she ultimately reads his story and at the very end she finishes the story for him. She writes it as if Billy himself survived the breaking and entering and went on to finish his story himself. However, it was Alice who wrote it. This is very similar to Ryan's findings and it could point to a symbolisation of Barthes's theory.

²⁰¹ King, *Billy Summers*, 27.

²⁰² Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*.

Chapter conclusion

Overall, the representations of authorship in both “Rat” and *Billy Summers* contain quite a few elements that other researchers have also found.

The most prominent elements that featured in “Rat” were the boundary between fiction and reality, and the function and goal of writing and the imagination. “Rat” shows that authors (and other people who engage profoundly with their imagination) have to be careful with their imagination as it can cause them to lose sight of their own life and the people around them. Similarly, the most prominent elements in *Billy Summers* are the separation between private and performative identity and the boundary between fiction and reality. This novel also shows, like “Rat”, that authors can lose themselves in their imagination, and that their fiction and reality can become blurred as a result. At the same time, this novel highlights the control and power that editors and agents can have over an author’s life. Even though Billy’s author’s life is fictional, and so is the control his fake agent has over him, this novel still shows that authors can be put under great pressure by their editors and agents.

Therefore, “Rat” represents authors as people who can easily lose themselves within their imagination, and this can have dangerous effects for themselves and the people around them. *Billy Summers* also represents authors as being able to get lost in their imagination but also represents authors as having multiple identities, private ones and public ones.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to answer the research question: How does the representation of authorship in Stephen King's works compare to the representation of authorship in other works and the literary developments within the theory of authorship from Barthes' theory onwards? In order to answer this question completely, I will quickly recapitulate which features have appeared where and what form they have taken. This will help in comparing the works to each other and comparing King's works to other representations of authorship. I will continue by relating my findings to the history of authorship theory I have relayed in the introduction in order to fully answer my research question. I will end my conclusion by reflecting upon my work and my sources, as well as give suggestions for further research.

Criticism of the literary field

Criticism on authorship or the literary field is one that featured in all works except *Misery*. In *The Shining* this criticism is mostly towards literary agents, in *Desperation* it is aimed towards tabloids and the marketisation of authors, in *Bag of Bones* it is mostly an observation on how the press brings attention to authors, in "Rat" the critique is specifically aimed towards the statements of a specific author, and in *Billy Summers* it is towards literary agents and editors.

In the theoretical framework, Donovan specifically found critique of the media and its influence, and this is something that is also seen *Desperation* and *Bag of Bones*. Otherwise, the targets of the criticism in *The Shining* and *Billy Summers*, are similar to each other as well.

Boundary between fiction and reality

All works seemed to feature some reflection on the boundary between fiction and reality. Although in *The Shining*, this did not directly relate to authorship which is why I have left this out of the thesis. In *Misery*, this boundary seems to be blurring in the beginning of the novel

but at the end the distinction between reality and fiction is fervently protected by the fictional author. In *Desperation*, “Rat” and *Billy Summers*, the blurring of this boundary through imagination has negative impact on the authors, while *Bag of Bones* shows that there are both negative and positive effects of imagination. This is an interesting comparison as it seems to suggest a development in King’s works. Whereas his works barely focused on the boundary between reality and fiction in the beginning, they more heavily revolved around this boundary towards the current state of his career.

This finding is very closely related to how Hart found that representations of authorship often show how imagination can have negative consequences. Although *Bag of Bones* also highlighted positive effects, *Desperation*, “Rat” and *Billy Summers* all showed how imagination can become a burden to the author.

The function of writing

The function and the goal of writing also featured in all works except *Desperation*. *The Shining*, *Misery* and “Rat” show that authors take inspiration from real life and believe that art imitates life. *Billy Summers*, however, seems to leave the question of truth-writing in the middle but suggests that the function of writing is exposing oneself to the public. This is an interesting contrast as three works focus on truth-writing but the newest one seems to turn back on this question. *Bag of Bones*, however, takes an even more different turn. It does also show an author that takes inspiration from real life but the function of writing in this novel seems more centred around writing giving an author purpose in life rather than truth-writing being an end-goal for literature.

Creative writing process

All works except *Billy Summers* focus on how creative writing is a natural free-flowing force that an author can barely control instead of a carefully planned plot that the author consciously creates. It is interesting to see how all representations of authorship, except for the newest one, seem to agree on this. These four works are also in line with what McGann found in the works she analysed.

Low- and high-quality literature

The distinction between popular ‘low’ quality art and ‘high’ quality art that does not sell very well, and the ignorance of readers on the topic of literary structures and techniques only feature in *Misery* while none of the other works comment on these elements. This is interesting because within the theoretical framework, Linzie, Donovan, and Hart saw this quite often.

The question of authorship

The Shining, *Bag of Bones*, “Rat”, and *Billy Summers* make the reader question who the author of the fictional works inside the works is. In *The Shining*, *Bag of Bones* and “Rat”, it seems as if a supernatural entity has taken over the author’s writing hand. In *Billy Summers*, a friend of the author finishes his book as the author has passed away.

Both Linzie and Ryan have also found this element and similarly to their cases, these works could be suggesting that readers can never be sure of who the author is of a piece they are reading.

Role of editors, agents, and publishers

The role of editors, agents, publishers, and other figures in the literary field features in *Misery*, *Desperation*, *Bag of Bones* and *Billy Summers*. All four of these novels seem to argue that these

figures in the literary field have too much power and control over authors and that it often restricts them from taking authority over their life and creative work. This is most clearly seen in *Misery*.

Linzie, Donovan, and Ryan have also found similar comments in the works they have analysed. Here, the theoretical framework seems to be in-line with my own findings.

Economic struggles

The focus on economic struggles only features in “Rat” while it explicitly goes against the theory. Donovan has found that representations of authorship often comment on the financial issues an author struggles with. Instead of economic struggles being a motivational drive for the author (as the theory argues), it is explicitly mentioned not to be part of the author’s motivations in “Rat”.

Relationship between author and reader

The relationship between author and reader features only in *The Shining*, *Misery*, *Desperation*, and *Bag of Bones*. In *The Shining* and *Desperation*, there is quite little attention paid to this relationship as they describe both positive and negative views that readers can have. Similarly, in *Bag of Bones*, there is only small comments on the opinions that the public can have about authorship as a way of primary income. In *Misery*, however, this relationship is one of the most prominent features of the novel. It shows how readers can have incredible control over an author and it seems to tell authors to break free from this control. It seems as if this relationship was more important to King’s works in the beginning of his career than it is now as it does not feature in the two most recent works.

Focus on classism and sexism

This element does not feature at all in the works that I have analysed. It would be interesting to see if this rings true for more of King's works or if these are outliers. Within the theoretical framework, only Donovan found comments on classism and sexism within the literary field during the Modernist movement. Therefore, it could also be the case that classism and sexism was more prominent during that time which is why it does not feature as much anymore in current literary works.

Private and performative identity

The separation between private and performative identity is an element that features in *Desperation*, *Bag of Bones*, "Rat" and *Billy Summers*, which are the four most recent works I have discussed. This might suggest that the separation between these identities has become more important to King's works and his representation of authorship in the last few years, whereas it was not as important during the beginning of his career.

Interestingly, only Jones had found this separation which she discussed in an article comparing authorship to dance performance. Therefore, I had not expected to see this element so much but it has proven to be quite important in the works that I have analysed.

Reader's ignorance

Only Ryan had found in some works that there were comments on how readers are often ignorant about the processes and work that go into creative writing. This element has only been seen in *Misery* which shows that though readers seem to have much control over authors, they actually seem to have little knowledge on how to write a novel.

Literal death of the author

A literal death of the author featured in *Misery*, *Desperation* and *Billy Summers*. In *Billy Summers* however the relation between the death of the fictional author and Barthes's theory seems to be the clearest. Still, this does not necessarily mean that King is somehow agreeing or disagreeing with Barthes's ideas (or is even aware of Barthes' theory), this novel might simply be a symbolisation of the theory. It is interesting to see that three out of five works contain a literal death of an author.

Drug and alcohol abuse

One thing that has become clear from all of the works that I have analysed is the connection between authorship and drug and alcohol addiction. In *The Shining*, Jack struggles with alcohol addiction and he directly compares this feeling to the feeling when he is writing. In *Misery*, Paul's alcohol abuse causes him to crash his car and end up captured by Annie, who in turn gives him so many pain killers, he becomes addicted to them. In *Desperation*, Johnny is a recovering addict and his editor and agent make sure that he stays away from alcohol and drugs, not because they are worried about his health but because they are worried about his reputation and their own income. In *Bag of Bones*, Michael sometimes remarks how he drinks too much, how he keeps drugs he used to be addicted to in his medicine cabinet, and he compares writing to a drug addiction. In "Rat", Drew starts taking cold medicine, which he later realises contains alcohol, and faces a mental breakdown due to it. Finally, in *Billy Summers*, Billy's cover is an author who is addicted to alcohol and drugs, and is put on a sabbatical by his agent because of it. Each work clearly contains a link between authorship and addiction, and I do not believe that this is a coincidence. However, none of the research articles and books that I have read on the topic of authorship mention the relation to addiction or alcohol and drugs. Therefore, it would be interesting for further research to delve deeper into this topic of addiction. Maybe it

is an element that is specific to Stephen King's works, in which case this could be connected to King's own past addiction. Or maybe, this connection can be found in other works on the representation on authorship as well.

Overall, the representations of authorship in Stephen King's works that I have analysed, differ in many ways from each other. From a best-selling brand name author who is captured by his number-one fan to an assassin who uses authorship as a cover for his operation, these representations still seem to have a few key common features. Criticism on the literary field, a blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality which can result in a dangerous overindulgence in the imagination, comments on the function of writing, and the idea that creative writing is a natural flowing force that mostly happens unconsciously.

Authorship theory

During the twentieth century, there was heightened attention towards literary critics within literary theory and authorship theory. Within King's works, I have not seen any particular attention to critics but more so other agents of the literary field such as editors, agents, and publishers.

Proust, who was an inspiration for Barthes' theory, believed that authors often had two identities; a personal self and the author figure. This is very similar to Jones' theory that an author has a private identity and a performative identity. This was clearly featured in King's *Desperation*, *Bag of Bones*, "Rat", and *Billy Summers*. Here, it seems that popular fiction's representation of authorship is in line with literary theory, although only the four most recent works of King contain this element.

As previously mentioned, the literal deaths of the authors in some of King's works can be linked to Barthes' theory on the death of the author. Barthes was obviously not referring to a literal death. He mostly meant to say that an author's intention and life should be seen

separately from their work. When an author finishes their work, it will live on through the reader and not necessarily through the author. This is something that could be symbolised by the literal death of the author in King's works. In *Billy Summers*, this symbolisation is more clear because the only reader of the author's work literally continues his work after the author's death. This does not mean that King intended to respond to or reflect on Barthes theory, it mostly means that a link can be made between King's works and Barthes' theory.

Barthes also touches upon the Surrealist movement which put forth the idea of "automatic writing". This concept relies on an author not being aware of what they write. This is something that is also seen in King's works, as *The Shining*, *Bag of Bones* and "Rat" contain some supernatural entity that seems to take over the author's hand when writing. In these cases, the text seems to be writing itself through the author.

Michel Foucault's text also seems to argue that an author has two identities but Foucault also holds into account that editors, agents and publishers are also part of a text's origin and creation. This can be seen in King's works as well, as *Misery*, *Desperation*, *Bag of Bones*, and *Billy Summers* focus on what the role of editors, agents and publishers is within authorship. Most of these works seem to criticise the fact that these figures seem to take significant control over an author's life.

Adriaan van der Weel has written on authorship theory in the digital age. He argues that literature and authors have had to adapt to the digitalisation, which creates more opportunities for authors to self-publish their work, it changes the way authors and readers can interact, and it increases the availability of literature which in turn leads to a decrease of quality, according to Van der Weel. This has not come forwards very clearly in King's works. Of course, the first novels feature authors that write on a typewriter while the last works feature the use of laptops and hard drives. But otherwise, it does not seem as if King's works respond to any added difficulty or significant change other than the material an author works with.

Overall, King's works seem to be in line – although not necessarily chronologically – with author theory from Barthes' theory in 1967 onwards. The only theory that is not clearly seen is the most recent one focusing on the digitalisation of literature. King's works seem not to respond as heavily to these developments as the theory seems to do.

Critical reflection

My sources have been very helpful, although it would have probably been better to have more. I would also have preferred to analyse even more of King's novels but this would not have been feasible within the allotted time.

An interesting detail about my sources, as previously mentioned, is that none of them discussed an element that I did very clearly find in King's works. All of the works that I analysed contained some relation between authorship and drug and alcohol use or addiction. This is not at all reflected within my theoretical framework or within authorship theory. This could either mean that this element is only relevant to King's works, or maybe this element has not been researched sufficiently enough.

Some of my sources also focused on Modernist texts or non-fictional texts, which I thought could become a problem but fortunately this did not raise issues as I was still able to compare King's works to it in a fair manner.

Future research

A significant topic of further research could be specifically focused on the digitalisation. This is something that I have not seen very clearly in King's works which is why it would be interesting to research if other popular fictional representations of authorship are more in line with current authorship theory.

Future research could also focus on if alcohol relates to authorship in other works as clearly as it does in King's work. The fact that this element was not mentioned in the theory shows that this has not been researched quite enough and it would be interesting to find out if this is an element specific to King or if other representations of authorship also contain this element.

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