

## Author-Functions in Literary Theory and Interpretive Practice. A Comparison

The debate about the ›return of the author‹ (Jannidis et al.) or the return of the author as an author-function (Spoerhase), which has become increasingly nuanced over the last ten years, is in a sense analogous to the efforts to give a scientific foundation to literary studies in the 1970s. Both have to face the reproach that their anticipations about research have not (yet) been realized. The early calls for an increased scientific element (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) in interpretive argumentation in literary studies must in retrospect be treated as having failed completely. It seems, however – not least according to a study by Winko (2002) – that the re-theorization of the author cannot be confined to propositions within theory but finds its real legitimation in the practices of interpretation that are specific to literary studies. Building on this, a corpus of forty interpretations of Lenz's drama *Die Soldaten* (›The Soldiers‹) was analysed with reference to the functionalizations of the author-concept in the argumentation through which meaning is ascribed. These functions identified in practice are compared with the author-functions previously postulated by the theories in question. It is intended that this comparison should result not in a tirade that exposes misguided interpretations or criticizes theoretical positions, but rather in a productive praxeology that could make the way in which interpretation functions in practice relevant to the formation of theories.

An introduction to the problematic field at stake, defined by theoretical debates on authorship and the relationship between theory and practice, is followed by necessary remarks on the definition of concepts that are familiar from the debate and the distinctions between them. ›Author-construct‹ is a term grounded in theory and describes – as does the synonymously used ›author-concept‹ – the totality of the interpretive operations with which the author can be functionalized on the basis of particular theoretical premises. ›Author‹ here does not mean the historical individual but always takes into account the fact that in interpretive arguments it is only the mental construction of the historical individual, as performed by the interpreter, that can be meant. Taking this further, ›author-function‹, as a shorthand for ›author-concept function‹, stands for the functions that the author-concept acquires in interpretations. The term therefore, because it always describes functions that are ascribed by the interpreter, necessarily refers not to the real author but to the author-concept of that interpreter. The theoretically postulated author-concept/-construct is in turn to be distinguished from the author-figuration. Whereas the former describes the sum of the functions that can be legitimately used in a

theory, the latter consists of the author-functions that are actually employed in the interpretive practice of that theory. Both are composed of the particular relationship between individual functions in which the author is employed in the argumentation that ascribes meanings to texts.

This terminological clarification is, granted, somewhat laborious, but it is unavoidable. It is followed by a description of the method of analysis employed. Two analyses of author-functions from the corpus are reviewed in detail as models; in the process, the arguments of their interpretations are examined and their ascriptions of meaning through the author-figuration are reconstructed. The author-functions identified in this way form function-clusters specific to each individual interpretation – bundles of functionalizations that are combined in interpretation and are compared subsequently with concisely reconstructed clusters from other analyses in the corpus. The analysis of an interpretation grounded in social history and discourse analysis is paired with an interpretation in which Lenz's poetological and literary works are examined by means of, on the one hand, a concept of genius based on authorial intention, and, on the other, an approach drawn from systems and action theory. Finally, in addition to an attempt to categorize the types of functionalization and a presentation of their problems, which follow at least in part from inconsistently designed theories, a hypothesis regarding the relationship between theory and practice is formulated. The hypothesis results from the finding obtained, which is that interpretive practice has seen the development of conventionalized standards of author-related argumentation that have to date been considered only insufficiently in the theoretical discussion with its normative character, but whose practical concept of authorship supports the theoretical legitimacy of author-related approaches.

## Interpretationsbeispiele

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