INTRODUCTION
Fame and Glory:
the Classic, the Canon and the Literary Pantheon

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We possess the Canon because we are mortal and also rather belated. […] We are in the pragmatic dilemma of excluding something else each time we read.[1]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Penguin Books released a highly commercialised, uniformly presented, box of *Banned Books* (2001). The collection brought together and rendered accessible an international selection of writers from the last century (with the exception of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which only precedes the twentieth century by a year) whose books, for reasons ranging from style to vocabulary, from religion to politics, had been removed from the shelves as an (often unsuccessful) attempt to prevent them from circulating. All twelve volumes included have since had their bans removed, and all are now considered classics; indeed, two of the authors have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (Steinbeck in 1962 and Solzhenitsyn in 1970). One might even argue that they have been absorbed into (and celebrated by) the canon precisely *because* of the controversy that led to their initial censorship.

This 'anti-canon', which finds its place in the mainstream via temporary ostracisation, provides a revealing starting point for our consideration of how this mainstream, as represented by the 'canon' and the 'classic', is constructed. As long as there has been literature, there has been censorship. In its many forms and inspired by a plethora of motives, the process of banning texts represents an important factor in the definition of society and its literary centre,[2] a mechanism explored in the Russian formalist context by Robert Daly later in this volume. Literature is deemed integral to social morale and morality, and is thus carefully monitored and regularly divested of bad seeds and deviant ideas, even if these ideas are later retrospectively (and sometimes belatedly) deemed 'advanced'. Defiance of censorship runs parallel to this banning and punishment often ensues, from the excommunication and outlawing of Martin Luther in the 1520s,

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[1] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: the Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York NY: Riverhead, 1994), p. 29

[2] G.W.R. Southern, 'Literary Censorship', *Australian Quarterly*, 2, 6 (1930), 110-115 (p.110).

through Diderot's 1749 imprisonment for his allegedly scandalous *Lettre sur les aveugles*, and the exiling of Victor Hugo and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in an effort to quiet their expression and publication of politically deviant views, to the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie for the perceived religious blasphemy in his work. It is clear from their on-going fame and continued readership that these philosophical ideas and literary works, rather than successfully being made to disappear, have, liked Penguin's banned books, flourished in the literary world, being celebrated or held up as moral standards for generations to come. The veneration and unsilenceable nature of deviant works shows the central role played by censorship, which becomes a form of canonisation in its own right.

The attempt to remove works from public circulation is a form of institutionalisation, for it allocates texts and authors an officially sanctioned position, albeit one of exclusion, rather than of veneration. At the opposite end of the scale lies overt classicisation: the desire to enshrine a work in the canon through its inclusion in literary prizes, school syllabi, theatre repertoires and bestseller lists. The task of enacting such positive institutionalisation has regularly been allocated to committees charged with creating and disseminating criteria to address Sainte-Beuve's 1850 question 'What is a classic?',[3] which in turn stems from the age-old philosophical qualm 'What is literature?'. It is the judging panels of literary prizes, the publishers of special collections, and the librarians of our national repositories that are the formal custodians of the official canon from moment to moment.

The collection, the library and the list hail texts as part of a lineage, and tend to fall into national categories, privileging the works of native languages and authors. Two notable examples are the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade and the Library of America (the creation of the latter inspired by the former). Both collections seek to impose a canon of classics, and importantly a canon whose endurance the publisher anticipates. This is made clear by the foregrounding of its aim to provide volumes that are made from high quality, durable materials: the books are not only meant to gain a permanent place on the purchaser's bookcase, but are designed to be re-read, thus both contributing to a reader's intellectual capital and moulding his outlook. The Pléiade collection in particular bears a striking resemblance to a small, traditional, hand-held bible, from its leather binding in

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[3] Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? suivi de deux autres textes* [1850], ed. U. Mönch (Heidelberg: Winter, 1946), or in English, 'What Is a Classic?', trans. by E. Lee, in *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14). For more recent evaluations of the topic, see Alain Viala, ed., *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?* (= *Littératures classiques*, 19 (1993)).

dark, muted tones, through its gold spine lettering, to the use of bible paper itself.[4] The Library of America's volumes use a similarly durable paper, but are bound in an authoritative black, with a patriotic tricolour stripe intersecting the cover.

But despite this clear attempt at longevity, like the negative institutionalisation of censorship, the identification of certain texts as belonging to the canon is not necessarily enduring. Whilst some works that have been venerated in the past maintain a central place on the (Western-) world bookshelf, others have since faded. Yet others experience public esteem for them expressed in a somewhat contradictory fashion, through censorship-via-editing: the texts are canonised for the parts that society wishes to praise, with undesirable elements removed.[5] And a fourth group of texts find themselves or their characters re-appropriated, decades or centuries after their composition, to serve new arguments or represent new philosophies, like the modern Italian Penelope investigated by Serena Alessi in this volume.

This failure of both censorship and overt classicisation to 'fix' a universal and eternal canon underlines that in fact, the received notion of the canon as 'a body of literary works [...] considered to be established as being of the highest quality and most enduring value'[6] is somewhat flawed. The motivation to hail texts as classics is by no means neutral, and it is necessary to unpick not only cultural context but also society's fluctuating views on the work and its author in order to explicate this complex relationship.[7] The volumes included in the Penguin *Banned Books* are classics in the early twenty-first century because the ideas expressed therein are now, if not acceptable in the fullest sense, deemed instructive in raising discussion and interrogating discourses. It is notable that these books are chosen to exemplify the reasons for which they were banned, a reflection of a society's former moral boundaries and their inherent contrast with those of the contemporary reader. The falling in and out of favour of texts is subjective and situational, and though some texts remain on our various lists as 'must-reads', their inclusion is not necessarily

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[4] It is notable that the notion of canonisation also stems from religious origins: see Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 19.

[5] Cf. the attempts of Anne Frank's cousin, Buddy Elias, to 'un-canonize' her by publishing the uncensored version of her diary in 1997. Marianne MacDonald, 'The things Anne was really frank about', in *The Independent*, 22 October 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-things-that-anne-was-really-frank-about-1359567.html> [accessed 11 Nov. 2013].

[6] art. 'canon', OED Online, draft additions July 2002, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27148?rskey=jbIl1m&result=21&isAdvanced=true#eid10097715> [accessed 11 Nov. 2013].

[7] It is instructive in this context to consider the 'canon debate' regarding literature syllabi in American universities. The debate is outlined in John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and E. Dean Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2001).

guaranteed in perpetuity. The canon is inevitably plural, being defined in different ways according to varying situations: national, temporal, and intellectual criteria can lead to a wide and vastly differing range of priorities.

This contextual view of the canon is present in another reflection by Sainte-Beuve, this time on the words 'literary tradition'. He describes – and Bourdieu later theorises in more depth – a series of texts that have become part of our cultural consciousness, not necessarily by inclusion in lists or collections, but by being read, adapted, discussed and internalised by the population as a whole.[8] The image of a canon imposed by the custodians of cultural heritage is, in this model, inverted: classic status comes from the people, and these list-makers, themselves a product of a specific cultural milieu, merely capture a single moment of an eternally-shifting continuum of veneration and obscurity. Thus any such list is destined from its inception to become out-dated: the institutionalised canon is a mere illusion of fixity, separate from the reality of subjectivity and continual exchange that, for Sainte-Beuve at least, constitutes a more spontaneous process of tradition-forming or classicisation.

This more flexible approach to understanding the mechanisms for raising text to exemplar status encourages us to ask what precisely is being celebrated at any given point by any single form of institutionalisation, a reflection that in turn raises questions about the relationship between an author and his work. The banned books described above are arguably venerated as works, collections of ideas, generating originality through their content and through inventiveness in style. But whilst we may initially see collections such as the Pléiade and the Library of America as providers of texts that match up to invisible, set criteria for the national classic, they are inevitably processed by author: indeed the Pléiade contains a vast array of *œuvres complètes*, relying on the idea that these works encapsulate the thought of a single *individual*, and thus moving towards a veneration of the writer.

This tension between the writer and their work, as well as their place in society, is instructively exemplified by the Nobel Prize. This quintessential awarding institution is notable for its celebration of pan-academic achievement, spanning disciplines from science

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[8] 'This tradition does not just consist of the group of works worthy of being remembered; those which we assemble in our library and study in school: it has to a large extent passed into our laws, into our institutions, into our morals, into our inherited and unconscious education, into our habits and into all our origins.' Sainte-Beuve, 'De la tradition en littérature et dans quel sens il la faut entendre', in *Causeries de lundi*, 15 vols (Paris: Garnier-Frères, 1857-62), XV, pp. 356-82 (p. 358), our translation, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), pp. 298-384. See also Alain Viala, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* (1992:1), 6-15.

to peace, literature to economic sciences. In addition to its wide-ranging subject matter, the Prize has always had an international aim, unlike the various national libraries of the world. In his notably ambiguous will, Alfred Nobel instructed that prizes be given to those who 'shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind'.[9] Against what criteria, in a literary context, are we to measure those individuals who have produced work that is beneficial to mankind, especially so as to provide a hierarchy of value? And how can a suitable balance be struck between a single, highly influential work, and a lifetime of well-received contributions?[10] Moreover, whilst we may simply see the process as a fundamentally positive celebration of talented and inspirational authors against which to measure the body of international literature, the Prize's status as proffered by an external committee is surprisingly forceful: should a candidate refuse their nomination, they still enter into the award's system as the laureate for that year, immortalised in spite of themselves. A famous example of this refusal is Jean-Paul Sartre, who turned down both the money and status conferred by the prize in 1964, notably prompted by his fear of institutionalisation. He thus attempted to counter the threat to his status as 'outside of' the institution by placing himself on the hinge of the canon and its opposite, simultaneously existing within and without the system.

This problematic relationship between producer and product also invites us to consider to what extent the two must necessarily follow the same pathway to recognition. If 'classic' and 'the canon' most frequently refer to specific texts, the terms 'fame' and 'glory' are more likely to be applied to their individual writers.[11] The relationship between author and work is symbiotic: a single, well-received text can endow its author with the title of 'great author', just as association with a well-known name can ensure the success of a lesser text. But the concepts are not indissociable, for both famous text and famous name can live on autonomously. The text continues to exist after its author's death through its reading and interpretation by the cultural community, but can also surpass its original context, particularly through adaptation into different media, where the narrative content takes precedence over its form. The author's autonomous existence instead comes out of his transformation into what we might refer to today as a 'celebrity':[12] a figure who is

9 'The Will', *Nobelprize.org*, <http://www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/> [accessed 4 Nov. 2013].

10 Cf. Rebecca Braun, 'Fetishizing Intellectual Achievement: The Nobel Prize and European Literary Celebrity', in *Celebrity Studies*, 2, 3 (2011-11), pp. 320-34.

11 A simple broad-based Internet and dictionary search of these terms reveals that results for the former two are largely defined in relation to works and the latter two to individuals.

12 See Simon Morgan, 'Celebrity: Academic 'Pseudo-Event' or a Useful Concept for Historians?', *Cultural & Social History*, 8/1 (March 2011), pp. 95-114 and Ulinka Rublack, 'Celebrity as Concept: An Early Modern Perspective', *Cultural & Social History*, 8/3 (Sept 2011), pp. 399-403.

recognised or has meaning beyond the confines of their writing, like the Cavafy described by Foteini Dimirouli later in this volume.

That the producer of a work should be named, and of interest to its audience, seems self-evident to the modern reader, making it easy to forget that it was not always so. In the oral culture of the Middle Ages it was predominantly the story itself, and not the originator or transmitter of a precise form of that story, that was of greater interest.[13] The classical authors of great epic existed only as headings under which to group sets of texts, whilst many later producers of literary texts felt no need to proclaim their identity.[14] This is a model that began to see widespread change with the accessibility of publication.[15] As the reception of storytelling transformed from a collective to a private experience, so the production of these stories became more individualised; it became a conversation between an author and a reader, and consequently the reader felt a greater need for familiarity with his interlocutor.

But if the increased accessibility of works and more widespread literacy marked the start of this process of authorial recognition, it was later changes in the social status of the author that would cement it. In the French context, Alain Viala describes the 'birth of the author' as taking place in the seventeenth century, with the formation of literary institutions like academies and the growth of royal patronage serving to ennoble a certain class of writer, and to create literary circles in which their social status as 'author' was recognised and reinforced.[16] This was compounded by the eighteenth-century introduction of copyright laws – in 1710 in the United Kingdom, and across Europe (under slightly different guises) from mid-century onwards. Such laws not only solidified the link between the individual and the work from a legal and financial standpoint, thus making authorship more financially viable, but also guaranteed an author's ability to shape his reputation and social standing through writing. Rather than a writer accumulating renown through

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[13] Cf. Virginia Woolf, '"Anon" AND "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', ed. Brenda R. Silver, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25, 3/4, Virginia Woolf Issue (Autumn/Winter 1979), 356-441.

[14] On different forms of anonymity see Kate E. Tunstall, '"You're Either Anonymous or You're Not!": Variations on Anonymity in Modern and Early-Modern Culture', *MLN*, 126, 4 (Sept. 2011), 671-88.

[15] Cf. how collaboration in Renaissance drama was often 'flattened' for simplicity when plays were printed. See Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), p. 199.

[16] Alain Viala, *Le Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985). Barthes had proclaimed the death of the author in 1967 in direct opposition to the status of the author as a point of interest and/or importance in relation to the text, and the work of Viala and others seeks to salvage the authorial existence. See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148.

association with an aristocratic patron, an author's glory, and the meaning of his name for contemporary and future audiences, were in his own hands.[17]

If the recognition of the author as the agent of a piece of literature is enshrined in the awarding criteria for the Nobel Prize for literature, the celebration of the glorious literary dead among the *grands hommes* in the Panthéon in Paris, and in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, also indicates how the human figure as producer of texts is considered worthy of something akin to worship. And of course, in the examples of censorship described above, it is the author as undisputed enunciator of the ideas contained within his work who becomes the target of disapprobation: from Luther to Rushdie, is it the individual that must suffer the infamy from which their work can profit.

Indeed, the potentially positive effect of scandal on a work's popularity, reinforcing the hackneyed adage of there being 'no such thing as bad publicity', underlines the extent to which the acquisition of fame by literary producers frequently and increasingly spreads beyond the boundaries of a body of work and its (positive or negative) reception. But such a sprawling concept of reputation is difficult to control. On the one hand, there are authors who court fame. Dante, in Julia Hartley's article, is an anomalously early example of an author consciously writing with one eye on personal glory, but his sense of glory is still bound up with the quality of his text; to the twenty-first century author, the lifestyle interview or appearance at a celebrity event provide the means to achieve a different sort of fame, disconnected from its literary birthplace. On the other hand, we find authors who avoid (or feign to avoid) fame, from the Sartre who refused the Nobel prize, to that 'notorious recluse', J.D. Salinger, to the agoraphobic Elfriede Jelinek, who expressed her mixture of happiness and despair at winning the Nobel Prize, which she accepted via video message. And yet, these extra-literary actions have the same effect as any overt courting of the press: just as the Sartre myth still benefits from the presence of his name on the list of Nobel laureates, Salinger's oft-cited epithet too has turned him into a recognisable, commodifiable character.[18] There are even those whose cultural currency, whether or not it is initially sought, spreads far beyond the locus of its inception in literary production, turning them into extra-literary symbols: whether as representatives of their country, of a political movement, or a particular historical moment (from Manzoni creating modern Italian in his *I promessi sposi*, 1827, to Beauvoir's portrayal of the Resistance in *Le Sang des autres*, 1945), or through the avatars of their most famous characters, who themselves

[17] Martha Woodmansee, 'The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and legal conditions of the emergence of the "Author"', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17 (1984), pp. 425-26.

[18] <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/> [accessed 28 Oct. 2013]

echo the experiences of a particular generation (such as Evelyn Waugh's bright young things in *Vile Bodies*, 1930).

In all of these examples – fame sought, shunned, or transfigured – the relationship between subject and audience in the construction of the authorial image is incredibly complex. Discourse analysts describe the 'posture' of the author as resulting from the interplay between the 'ethos' created by a text and the authorial image created by external factors and the interpretations of the reader.[19] But the balance between these different elements does not remain constant, for not only can the impact of external factors (whether intentional or otherwise) change with the availability of different means for disseminating works and images, but across the career trajectory of an individual author, the relative importance of text and authorial image is liable to shift with changing circumstances: the author's control over how he is viewed is rarely consistent.

Most notable, perhaps, is the moment of an author's death, which ostensibly removes all further extra-textual agency from the author, handing his image over entirely to the future reading public. But if in one sense this encloses the author and his reputation firmly in the work as a vehicle of transmission to posterity, in another sense, sustained literary glory can, over time, overspill this vehicle, with the fact of fame itself becoming enough to perpetuate it, irrespective of the shifting fate of an author's texts. Shakespeare exists as a cultural reference that by far surpasses our knowledge of his texts; moreover, his place on every school syllabus is in part a result of the virtuous circle of renown, which dictates the necessity of studying the authors that have become well known through study. The adjective 'Kafkaesque' is frequently applied to anything that might display a hint of existential poignancy, and understood – at least to an extent – by audiences to whom *Der Process* and *Das Schloss* are completely unknown. The existence of handbooks that optimistically offer lessons in 'how to be well-versed in' a particular literature, poetry, or drama,[20] yet dedicate just a few lines to each author, is an indication of how name-dropping often suffices: these authors, like the 'classic texts' described above, are part of a general cultural sensibility in which their names no longer signify the producers of texts, but instead represent the knowledge and culture of those who speak them.

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[19] Jérome Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur* (Geneva: Slatkine Érudition, 2007); Dominique Maingueneau, 'Auteur et image d'auteur en analyse du discours', in *Ethos discursive et image d'auteur*, ed. Kahan & Amossy, <http://aad.revues.org/660> [accessed 24 Feb. 2013].
[20] Cf. E.O. Parrott, *How to Become Ridiculously Well-Read in One Evening* (London: Penguin, 1986).

We began with the anti-canon, a series of books barred from recognition in their time, but canonised by later generations precisely because of this initial exclusion. We end on another image in negative, this time of the Pantheon, the only word from our title not yet addressed. The word Pantheon, a temple dedicated to the Greek gods, has been appropriated as a description for those secular gods, whose renown in a particular field is considered unrivalled. But just as the concept of a fixed canon masks a shifting process of contextually motivated classicisation, so the monumental solidity implied by the image of a temple is also illusory. The inhabitants of the literary pantheon are to some extent subject to the same shifts of opinion that push their works in and out of favour. Moreover, they can frequently become separated from their writings, and sit in the temple of literature as mere holograms of authorship, the subject of myriad worried lists of 'books we should have read but have not', and no less famous for it. [21]

This issue of *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities* does not claim to conduct a full investigation of the processes for creating the classic, canon, fame and glory tentatively outlined above. Such an analysis would require, among other things, a discussion of the various related terminologies (reputation, celebrity, heroism), and of how the process might differ outside of the Western context. However, the issue's consideration of four aspects of these mechanisms – metaphors for hierarchizing genres in Robert Daly's article on Iurii Tynianov, the author striving to reconcile his desire for glory with his religious context in Julia Hartley's piece on Dante, the pathway to broader cultural recognition in Foteini Dimirouli's discussion of Cavafy, and the fate of a classic text in the hands of new authors in Serena Alessi's analysis of the Penelope figure in modern Italy – is nonetheless instructive. It provides insight into how approaching texts and authors in the framework of their status as (at least temporarily) venerated literary artefacts can be productive; how writers' own consciousness of their present and future image motivates their intra- and extra-literary actions; and how the posthumous fate of work and creator is, ultimately, conditioned almost entirely by the contexts in which they are read and re-appropriated by future generations.

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[21] In just one example, a Guardian survey in 2013 revealed a 'top ten' list of books that people believe they should have read, but have not. See 'Open thread: have you ever lied about reading a book?', *The Guardian*, 9 Sept. 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/09/have-you-ever-lied-about-a-book> [accessed 13 Nov. 2013]. The survey found that half of the 2000 readers polled displayed unread books on their shelves, implying that the mere fact of possessing classic texts has some cultural value.