##### William Lane’s Minerva Press and the Ever-Malleable Author Function

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##### Dozens of writers authored novels for William Lane’s Minerva Press, the publishing house that dominated the production of new fiction in England at the end of the eighteenth century. As has been amply discussed, contemporary reviewers were appalled by Lane’s formulaic fare and refused to treat it as the product of a genuine authorial act: “Over and over,” Ina Ferris writes in *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, "the ordinary novel is depicted as stamped out by machines, produced not by authors but by printing presses. It thus appears as a discourse outside the author-function identified by Foucault as fundamental to the category of the literary as it was developed by the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”

##### Joining a recent wave of studies on what Jennie Batchelor has called the “culture of unRomantic authorship,” my paper will look beyond the dismissive periodical discourse to other ways of assessing how much weight the idea of the author carried in relation to Minerva’s fiction. Rather than existing “outside” the author function, I will argue, Minerva novel-writing was a discursive site within which the concept of the author proved usefully malleable – especially for Lane himself. By looking at Lane’s advertisements and publicity pamphlets of the 1790s, the decade in which Minerva established itself as the leading force in the popular fiction market, I will show his variable use of his authors’ Foucauldian “function,” which Lane played up and down in accordance with his changing marketing strategies. By way of conclusion, I will consider some examples of how Minerva novelists negotiated their own uncertain author status, in dialogue with – and sometimes in covert opposition to – their publisher’s entrepreneurial efforts.

**A little bit of bio:** I am a senior lecturer in English literature at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. My first book, *Inventing the Gothic Corpse: The Thrill of Human Remains in the Eighteenth Century Novel*, was published in 2018. My current research focuses on forgotten Gothic fiction of the Romantic period, and I am writing a new book (contracted for the Cambridge UP Elements series) on biography and the popular Gothic author.

Thanks for considering my proposal!

Best

Yael