

“We are the politicians of language”

David Avidan, *The Book of Possibilities*

“Words know about you more than you will ever know about them. But if you are even slightly stimulated to live a conscious-existence, you had better at least try, in your few, dwindling years, to close the gap.”

David Avidan, *Something for Somebody*

Author-ity*

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A. Introduction

The etymological relation between *author* and *authority* implies the hierarchical authority inherent in the texts' addressor. The authority of the writer of the text stems from his perception as the source of the text, similar to the perception of the signified in general as the source of the sign. Therefore I wish to capture in the concept of *Author-ity* a wider system of connections between the act of representation and its validity, a system that is manifest as authority within the social order, since the semiotic relations between the source and its copy include a necessary dimension of hierarchy, whether between addressor and addressee or between signifier and signified. The politics of literature, or of representation in general, are one aspect of *Author-ity* and the other aspect is literature or the representation that is in politics. The relationship between politics and its justification is a relationship of representation; the holder of authority claims it since the authority he uses represents a more elementary authority, whether it is the will of the people, the word of god or civil rights. Therefore politics will always require representation, whether by a member of parliament representing the sovereign citizen, or by a novel that structures the ideology that justifies the government.

In the following I will describe a course of liberation that liberates not only from the authority of the author (“the death of the author”) but also from the authority of the plot represented in literature, which enjoys a status of superiority, as it supposedly represents a loftier world (as in classic literature). I wish to go beyond the characteristic ethos of the liberal course in which pointing out authority necessarily means demanding release from it. I wish to understand *Author-ity* the same way Michel Foucault understands power, as an inherent, omnipresent component of human existence. Foucault wishes to describe power as a relationship that operates from all directions, not only as a power of repression¹ used

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by one person against another.² In any case the Foucauldian discussion makes it possible to speak of power in a discourse that is not a discourse of condemnation.³

Currently it is slightly difficult to speak of the validity of literature. Modern culture expects literature to be the individual's concern and to influence the social sphere only through the individual. A brief historical review and an examination of the Roman and Jewish cultures towards the end of classical antiquity reveals that in other periods of time texts had a different effect on life, which allows us to trace a short genealogy⁴ of *Author-ity*. The origin of the etymological connection between *author* and *authority* lies in the Roman term *auctor*, which I will discuss by way of the historical-etymological-political discussion of Hannah Arendt. Mikhail Bakhtin concentrates on the authority that is represented in the fictional world, although his work precedes the post-structuralist theme of "The Death of the Author". Following a critical examination of "The Death of the Author", I will attempt to propose an alternative to it by reviewing pre-modern discourse practices.

B. Etymology

Arendt mentions the etymological connection between author and authority when she looks to authority as the foundation of a hierarchy that is not based upon forceful or violent coercion, authority as described by Mommsen, whom Arendt quotes: "more than advice yet less than an order".⁵ Arendt is searching for such a foundation, since in her opinion the concept of authority accepted in traditional political philosophy – among liberals who reject it as well as among conservatives who embrace it – relies on the option of violent coercion. Lacking any other concept of authority, any human attempt to restrict spontaneous, so-called "natural" action is perforce illegitimate or violent (Arendt presents education as an example). Arendt arrives at the Roman world after recounting the models described by Plato and Aristotle for the justification of politics and searching for their metaphorical sources in Greek civilization (the craftsman, the master). Arendt shows that violence is inherent in all the metaphors presented by the Greek philosophers in their attempt to justify political authority. On the other hand, the concept of authority in the Roman Empire is founded on a structure in which time and identity have a more significant role than violence:

At the heart of Roman politics, from the beginning of the Republic until virtually the end of the imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundation, in the sense that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations. [...] It is in this context that the word and concept of authority originally appeared. [...] Those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate or the *patres*, who had obtained it by descent and by transmission (tradition) from those who had laid the foundations for all things to come, the ancestors [...].⁶

In such a system, authority (*auctoritas*) is always a representation of the past, of the founding fathers or gods. The realization of the founding authority involves representation: when a person in the present bears authority, it is due to his representing the previous generations. Hierarchy is essential to such a justification of authority as opposed to other structures, which reduce hierarchy to a utilitarian necessity or an imaginary social contract and in this manner conceal it as an essential structure. But here hierarchy is an inseparable part of the structure of the justification and it is impossible to conceal it.

Translating the structure of political authority into terms of representation and meaning, one can say that the holder of authority does so due to his representing his predecessors; he has inherited his authority and represents it, he inherits it by representing it. For Arendt, authority as representation enables political authority to be something other than the application or threat of force. This also is the structure that has provided the Christian community of faith its authoritative and hierarchical institutional form. In Arendt's opinion, the ecclesiastical patriarchal institution succeeded in maintaining a structure of authority even as the Roman Empire's system of violent coercion was crumbling, precisely because the Roman system of authority did not rely on its power of coercion.

As far as we are concerned here, this definition allows an understanding of the role of the addressor of the text. The *auctor* is the founder, the source of inspiration and hence his significance in a society in which political authority is founded on the tradition of the constituting moment. Arendt sees in the Roman patriarchal structure of authority the beginning of the tradition of the author of the text. The author is the source of constituting inspiration, the outset and therefore also the source of authority of the text. This is the system that had transmitted by tradition the Greek writers as *authors* and later on did the same for the Christian saints. Further on, the study of literature borrowed from the ecclesiastical tradition the tools for philological verification of the author's identity.⁷

C. The authority of the narrative

The Roman model of authority, *auctoritas*, is also the foundation of Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the epos along with all the other higher classical genres.⁸ The same hierarchical relationship between the source and its successors described above as the source of the authority of the author, is also the source of authority of the world represented in the literary text vis-à-vis the text's addressees. For Bakhtin, Author-ity lies in the unbridgeable gap between the absolutely perfect, exalted past described by the story, and the present in which it is being told. This is not a historical past but an absolute, heroic past, "a world of 'beginnings' [...] a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'".⁹ The authority of the author is derived here from the fact that in the world that he represents there is an absolute chasm between him and the present in which his story is told. This chasm between the absolute past and the imminent present creates a social and normative hierarchy. Bakhtin's description of the epos adds to Arendt's depiction of authority an epic or mythical ontology in which,

as in Plato's ontology and epistemology, real phenomena acquire their validity solely due to their representation of a higher form of existence, which is manifest in a mythical past. Contrary to Arendt, Bakhtin is unhappy with this commitment to the past. He describes the epic authoritative distance only to celebrate its demise with the appearance of the modern novel. Bakhtin applauds the novel as it eradicates the chasm between what is represented in the story and the reality in which it is read. According to him, the present as a central, artistic and normative orientation creates a revolution in modern creative consciousness and enables the eradication of the hierarchical chasm. The process undergone by the novel, as outlined by Bakhtin, is a process of liberation. The novel belongs to the present, describes the contemporary world of the reader and therefore also enjoys the same status as the reader. The novel also is not committed to textual and narrative traditions or to renowned heroes, idiomatically characterized by rigid conventions.

Nationality as an imagined peer group of equal subjects is created out of this very liberation. The literary existence of this society is built upon positioning all the possible characters on the same normative level. This notion of the modern novel is shared by Benedict Anderson, who describes the novel as a representation system that creates a structure of simultaneity,¹⁰ and therefore enables the society of equal subjects, which is the basis for nationality.¹¹ The political justification paralleling the modern novel creates the imagined community through the social contract or Rawls' veil of ignorance:¹² it is a reductive argument enabling us to imagine a hypothetical past in which all the members of a certain social group were equal, an argument in which we imagine them as equals although actually they are not. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's man who "is born free, and everywhere he is in chains"¹³ is imagined in the same way – actually man is born crying and terrifyingly dependent on his parents and social institutions. The nation arose as the plain on which this group of equal individuals exists; the level of representation exists within the present, within equality. The nation is not the only possible level for such an imagination, and as liberal history unravels we find alternative plains of existence that are nation-free, which are based upon this very imagining of the free man. These have a supra-national existence within the social class that identifies itself according to this supra-national ideology.¹⁴

For Bakhtin, however, *author-ity* appears in the normative power of fictional reality, and the attempt to reduce its power is embodied in the liberal argument of reducing the authoritative distance between the represented fiction and the reality in which the literal discourse takes place. Reducing this distance is linked to a liberal argument of the individual as he imagines himself. This liberation enables the existence of societies that imagine themselves as comprised of equal subjects. However, the fictional reality of literature is not the only author-ity that was reduced; the author has also been liberated from his author-ity.

D. Death of the Author

When Roland Barthes announced the Death of the Author¹⁵ his argument was a statement of principle, supporting the hermeneutics of suspicion¹⁶ by taking a further step in releasing the interpreter of the text from the authority of the author. Barthes also positions his argument in a wider political-cultural context as a liberal-revolutionary argument that affects relationships beyond those of the author and the text, since he sees in “The Death of the Author” a continuation of Nietzsche’s “Death of God”. As in the Latin term of *auctor*, Barthes too uses the temporal relationship to describe a hierarchical relationship of source and copy: he positions his viewpoint against the traditional concept that sees the author as the text’s past.¹⁷ Barthes dethrones the author and replaces the heroic moment of text creation with a complex, impersonal process of writing:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.¹⁸

Barthes replaces the distinguished author with the act of writing and thus eliminates the moment of the text’s creation as the source of its authority. The ideological motivation underlying this argument is a liberal one. Barthes describes the refusal to accept the author as “an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse a fixed meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.”¹⁹ However, the theoretical justification for this refusal is not related to liberation, in fact I believe it points to the opposite. The dismissal of the author is carried out in the name of a structuralist world view which turns expression into a function of language, instead of a function of the speaker. When Ferdinand De-Saussure depicts the arbitrariness of signs and the power that language exerts over its speakers he is quite aware of the implications of his words for political theory:

No individual is able, even if he wished, to modify in any way a choice already established in the language. Nor can the linguistic community exercise its authority to change even a single word. The community, as much as the individual, is bound to its language.

A language cannot therefore be treated as a form of contract, and the linguistic sign is a particularly interesting phenomenon to study for this reason. For if we wish to demonstrate that the rules a community accepts are imposed upon it and not freely agreed to, it is language which offers the most striking proof.²⁰

The lesson De-Saussure learns from mankind’s commitment to language is that the doctrine of the social contract, according to which the authority of the law and government depends upon the freedom of the individual and the mutual willingness to surrender it in order to constitute sovereignty – is implausible. This position is derived from examining

language as an actual social phenomenon: “In fact, no society has ever known its language to be anything other than something inherited from previous generations, which it has no choice but to accept.”²¹

De-Saussure sees language as being imposed upon its users in such a manner that it cannot be reduced to a sort of contract; language always appears prior to its use. If that is the case, what is the effect of “The Death of the Author”? It releases us from the existence of the author as an independent entity that is the final and complete source of the text while, on the other hand, it encumbers us with the act of writing as an assertion of authority. The author has disappeared but *Author-ity* remains intact since the text still is comprised of a “tissue of quotations”. *Author-ity* as a cultural tradition replaces the author as the source of authority, forever appearing as a past with no beginning, a hierarchical, authoritative, anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal dimension found deep within language, in speech as well as in writing.

The dissonance in Barthes thinking expresses the contradiction between the post-liberal theory that Barthes uses (the structuralist theory) and the modern-liberal-revolutionary ethos and sentiment that requires pointing to an essential entity from whom one desires liberation. This, therefore, always requires falling back on essentialist thought about something that, ultimately, is what we wish to be liberated from. This is the catch: liberal, anti-essentialist arguments always slide back to essentialism since always “something” needs to be liberated. If Barthes had remained consistent he would have attempted to conclude his essay with writing as an extra-personal process whose source of authority cannot be pointed out. However, Barthes chooses to conclude it with the reader as the source of authority: “[...] it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.”²²

Crowning the reader in lieu of the author is vital to the hermeneutics of suspicion, since in order to announce that consciousness is false one requires another authority that can point out the truth.²³ If so, who is Barthes’ reader? Barthes himself prefers to let him remain as quite the abstract identity:

A text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.²⁴

If we may allow ourselves to be suspicious towards hermeneutics of suspicion we can observe that the abstract figure of the reader constitutes an idealization and ideologicalization of the reader. In positing an abstract reader with no history, biography and psychology, Barthes neutralizes any possible discussion of the actual reader. Barthes reader is very similar to the homo-academicus as he appears in the ethos of the scientist: impartial, “without history, biography, psychology”. A suspicious reading of the hermeneutics of suspicion would describe “The Death of the Author” as an attempt by academics, impartial, “professional”

readers to claim exclusivity of interpretative authority. Barthes could have made use of a more concrete reader and thus one with a more extensive existence in human history, a reader who participates in the “multiplicity of writings”,²⁵ but Barthes prefers to remain in the confines of “high” literature. Within the discourse in which Barthes’ text operates, the “revolution” which he calls for cannot help but appear as a tempest in a teacup, a slight move from the authority of the literary author to that of the literary, professional academic critic. Even the figure of the reader as authority, which is depicted in the text, does not remove us from the liberal realm in which man is an abstract being who is “born free”, prior to language and the primary source of all meaning. Actually, the academic discourse is one of the most authoritative ones, and even the words written hereby cannot escape the commitment to the author’s logic, since even as I describe “The Death of the Author” I must add “Barthes 1968” in a footnote. Mentioning the author’s name and the moment of text creation, the *auctoritas*, allows me to acquire some of its authority.

The revolutionary act of reading proposed by Barthes remains in the realm of the professional reader, the scholar, since it deprives the reader of the essential moment in which he responds to the text’s authority, the moment in which the reader submits to this authority and allows it to guide him along the linear sequence of reading. The reading proposed by Barthes is suitable for the literary scholar who reads in order to write, who “holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted”, the very field which is designated to his own writing: a field of documentation, citation, taxonomy, a field in which the author resumes his position of footnote, a name between brackets in the reader’s text. A reading that requires such a field is a fluttering, exploiting, suspicious reading that does not allow itself the aesthetic and erotic pleasure of succumbing to a linear reading.

E. The Death of the Author and Différance

The author as an interpretative principle has been undermined in literary discourse ever since New-Criticism.²⁶ But while in New-Criticism the “ousting” of the author served an interpretative agenda that wished to avoid dealing with positivist interpretations related to biography and history, for structuralism and post-structuralism, “The Death of the Author” was an independent theoretical assertion and not only a way to justify a particular literary interpretive practice.²⁷

Jacques Derrida touches upon the possibility of the death of the author in his lecture “Signature, Event, Context”,²⁸ in which it is woven into one of the main themes of his philosophy: the distinction between speech and writing (*écriture*). When Derrida positions writing as an essentially different textuality than speech, he describes it as establishing a type of “machine” whose operation would not be disturbed by the disappearance of the addressee, whether such a disappearance concerned an actual person or the more abstract absence of the author’s intent.²⁹ In this way he demonstrates the fact that writing creates a text that depends not on the presence of its source but rather on its absence.

The author here represents speech; he is used as a source of the text the same way speech is the source of writing. According to the conventional stance, the original exists prior to the copy, to representation. Derrida challenges this position since copying, representation and repeating, although they all represent subsidiary actions – they are what is essential to the linguistic sign – not the original. Derrida speaks of writing as the paradigm for significance not because he claims for its originality but because not-being-the-original is the paradigm for sign, for representation, for significance: “[...] each signifying event is a substitution (for the signified as well as the ideal form of the signifier)”.³⁰ Sign is secondary because it always stands for something other than itself, and because it always appears as a performance of an already existing sign: “A sign is never an event [...] A sign which would take place but “once” would not be a sign”.³¹

Therefore, according to Derrida, eliminating the author is not only an attempt to liberate meaning from being locked into a single meaning but an attempt to understand the very nature of the text, since the text, or any sign, is always a substitute for something else, never the things itself: “A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game”.³² The original is gone, forever eliminated from the discourse and any attempt to place it within the discourse will be a reproduction, a copy, a substitute, a representation. Therefore, only such a representation – and writing is such a representation – can be considered a locus of meaning.

Contrary to Barthes, Derrida does not kill the author in order to dethrone him in a popular revolution and substitute him with the reader. Derrida’s wields a kinder guillotine; he does not embrace such an oedipal attitude towards the author. When Derrida describes his work he uses the same metaphor of inheritance utilized by De Saussure to describe the relationship between speakers and language (cited above). Derrida describes the hermeneutic position as the position of the inheritor towards the tradition that has been transmitted to him, an inheritance that he belongs to and cannot reject and on the other hand – cannot leave as it is.³³

Despite the deeper structure, the rhetoric of deconstruction does not manage to escape the trap of anti-essentialist arguments motivated by a liberal ethos. In a deconstructionist argument concerning Derrida’s attitude towards “the author”, Sean Burke shows how the practice of deconstruction forces Derrida to return to the author: even though Derrida’s position supports “The Death of the Author” and objects to understanding texts through the author’s intentions, he is forced by the practice of deconstruction to construct the persona of an author, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, and concentrate on his intentions in order to point out the gap between what Rousseau meant to say and what the text actually “says”.³⁴ In this manner Derrida creates a father that can be murdered.

The notion of *différance* created by Derrida³⁵ allows us to examine his position in temporal terms and compare it to the structure of the *auctoritas* which we described above as the superiority of the past. Derrida locates himself within the Saussurean tradition and positions *différance* in the synchronic differences which constitute language, the

differences that create meaning. However, alongside these synchronic differences he also positions *différance* in the diachronic gap between signifier and signified: the signifier repeats the signified and replaces it, compensating for its absence. Thus a temporal chain of relations is created between signifier and signified: the signified is absent, not present, left in the past replaced by the signifier, but the signifier only has a temporary role until a future representation arrives to replace it.³⁶ While *auctoritas* is based on the eternal past that allows for stable representation, *différance* is based upon awareness of the absence of the past from the present.

Derrida's *différance* can also be used as a political model, parallel to the structure of *auctoritas*, since the political agent is a sign, representing his constituents.³⁷ From Derrida's comment mentioning political representation as a sign, I wish to generalize to the possibility of viewing political justification as an act of signification. The origin of justification is absent from the exercise of authority just as the signifier is absent and replaced by the signified. This is the act of signification that underlies every use of authority, even if the holder of authority does not explicitly express it, as in the overused phrase "stop in the name of the law".

That said, Derrida's model is quite dissimilar to that of the structure of *auctoritas*, which always preserves the patriarchal hierarchy and the superiority of the past, inherent in the epic distance between the absolute past and its contemporary representations. The author remains the composition's sovereign and the foundation of the city is still the basis of the political justification used by the elders: the signified is always inferior to the signifier, the substitute inferior to the original. In Derrida's *différance* the order changes as we have seen and therefore the relations between signified and signifier, substitute and inferior cannot constitute a hierarchical relationship in which every present is but a faint reflection of an exalted, stable and unchanging past. In Saussurean terms, Derrida would describe the signified as a derivative of the differences between signifiers³⁸ and as such it cannot be described as an entity. This also precludes the possibility that *différance* be used to exert authority.³⁹

F. The folktale

Before I demonstrate a possible political application of *différance* I wish to point to a literary genre which is ignored by Barthes' "Death of the Author": the folktale. Eli Yassif pointed out that the folktale, like the concept of *Author-ity* raised here, is a hybrid term, part textual category – "tale" and part socio-political category "folk".⁴⁰ The folktale is one of the possibilities manifest in Barthes' discussion of the text as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."⁴¹ Barthes himself does not implement this option and prefers the reader as the source of meaning. When Barthes looks for the "Death of the Author" he does not refer to folktales but rather mentions

Mallarmé as the first to perform the act of patricide⁴² or, in Sean Burke's witty words: "establishing Mallarmé as the *author*, as it were, of the author's disappearance – a founding father of the death of the father."⁴³

Despite his neglect, the history of folklore research follows quite the same path as does the "Death of the Author", one similar also to Derrida's opposition to phono-centrism (the centrality of speech). During the 19th century, folklore was studied as an expression of original authenticity since it is not a cultural accomplishment and therefore not a forgery.⁴⁴ The stories were seen as authenticity in its original form – oral.⁴⁵ These studies identified the folktale with groups of peasants living far from cultural centers. But researchers have been questioning the orality of folktales as an essential characteristic since the 1930s, pointing instead to the central place of writing in folklore.⁴⁶ Alan Dundes diverted the field's attention from concentration on "natural" groups, stating that "the concept of "folk" can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common characteristic."⁴⁷ In his book about urban folklore of the office world ("Paperwork Empire") Dundes questioned orality as the defining characteristic of folklore and replaced it with the notion of "multiple existence", meaning the existence of different versions, none of which are a primary, authoritative source.⁴⁸ While in Belle Lettres the author never really died – he is still the object of literary studies as well present in the literary market as an institution that is impossible to ignore,⁴⁹ it seems that in folklore the author had never been conceived, or perhaps he has died and arises from the dead every time the story is retold. The folktale is described by its scholars as a story that does not have a final, authoritative text, assuming its character through its addressees who, in turn, become addressors. Here Barthes "reader" exists, albeit this reader has a biography, history and psychology. In the 1920s Roman Jakobson and Peter Bugatyrev had already attempted to discern the unique characteristics of the folktale, concluding that the readers of these tales have a quasi-censorship role, since the story whose addressees do not wish to retell it, is destined to disappear.⁵⁰ Contrary to Barthes' reader – whose reading constitutes the text in a manner that remains obscure – Jakobson and Bugatyrev's reader constitutes the story in the most real way imaginable: he breathes life into it and saves it from oblivion.

The existence of numerous versions of a story eliminates the authority of the single, identifiable author, but it does not eliminate the very existence of Author-ity but rather, changes it. The reader is not the authoritative source of the folktale; he tells it by repeating the story he has heard. The storyteller who repeats such a text does not see himself as the original author but rather as its interpreter or performer, since he is retelling an existing story that he has heard in the past. The storyteller is not the source of authority but he accepts it and thereby exercises it again, he does not kill the author, he inherits and replaces him.

Defining the folktale by the notion of "multiple existence" enables us to see the implications of "The Death of the Author" for the literary landscape as it actually exists, as a decentralization of *author-ity*. Writing the author's name on the binding of the book

fixes *author-ity* of the book on one single identifiable author. Contrary to handwritten manuscripts, the printing of a book and its mass distribution forces the medium to point to its context: author, title and publishing house.⁵¹ The romantic notion of the folktale substitutes the author and year of publication with an image of anonymous, country-style simplicity, while leaving the authenticity of the text intact as a stable entity that functions as the source of *author-ity*.

G. How did time begin? Etiology

The folktale genre that demonstrates Bakhtin's epic distance is etiology – the story legitimizes the everyday reality of the present by relating it to an archaic past. I wish to point out two possible etiological models and examine them in the Bible and post-biblical Jewish literature. One model will parallel the exercise of authority by *auctoritas* as depicted by Bakhtin and Arendt. The second model will point out a different *author-ity* which is expressed in two biblical stories which I will present here in brief.⁵²

The etiological rationale of the first model is that of the priestly chapter that opens the Book of Genesis and explains the structure of the week: The primeval beginning is the ideal reality, and therefore the present reality should obey it by reflecting it. According to this model, relationships between the primeval past and the present are relations of reflection, and the present receives its cultural reality and legitimate status from being a reflection of the primeval past. The second rationale is that reflected in the story of the Garden of Eden, in which a primeval complex occurred, causing the archaic epoch, the Garden of Eden, to become inaccessible. The present is not an attempt to replicate the archaic past or reflect it, but rather, an attempt to deal with the complicating event, react to it, and atone for it.

The story I wish to read here is an etiological story from the Talmud which retells the biblical story of the creation of the heavenly luminaries, highlighting the discussion about the distinction between the large luminary (the sun) and the small (the moon) for the purpose of justifying hierarchical relationships:

R. Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction [between verses]. One verse says: *And God made the two great lights*, and immediately the verse continues: *the great light... and the lesser light* (Gen. 1:16). The moon said to the Holy One blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the universe! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown? He answered: 'Go and make yourself smaller'. 'Sovereign of the universe!' Cried the moon, 'Because I have suggested that which is proper must I make myself smaller?' He replied 'Go and thou wilt rule by day and by night.' 'But what is the value of this' cried the moon; 'Of what use is a lamp in broad daylight?' He replied 'Go. Israel shall reckon by thee the days and the years'. 'But it is impossible' said the moon 'to do without the sun for the reckoning of

the seasons, as it is written, *and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.*' (ibid 14) 'Go. The righteous shall be named after thee, as we find, Jacob the small (Amos 7:2), Samuel the small, David the small (I Sam 17:14).' On seeing that it would not be consoled the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Bring an atonement for me for making the moon smaller'.

This is what was meant by R. Simon b. Lakish when he declared, 'Why is it that the he-goat offered at the new moon is distinguished in that it is written concerning it *unto the Lord?* (Num 28:15) Because the Holy One, blessed be He, said, Let this he-goat be an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller.' (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Hulin* 60b, Epstein addition p. 331)

The story uses material from the first chapter of Genesis, which regulates time according to the first etiological model, and reads it according to the second model: the beginning is complicated due to the injustice done to the moon, which although unjustified, is presented as necessary, even according to the moon itself ("Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown?"). The story ends with interpreting the present ritual not as a reflection of the ideal, archaic past but as an attempt to resolve a primeval complex by atoning for it.

As a story justifying authority, it does not go into much detail about the character of the "larger" luminary in this hierarchy: the sun is but a minor character. The lead character is the self-effacing moon who does so not because it deserves belittling but due to the necessity of authority and political difference. God's own superiority also appears as paradoxical: in order to restore order he must placate the moon. The moon's evaluation as minor in the story is not evidence of a negative evaluation: if we learn anything about the moon's value from the story it is the exact opposite: it speaks reasonably and is seen as an entity that god himself must appease. The moon is not merely the rounded character in the story, but also the character upon which the story's resolution depends. The story preserves the hierarchy between the sun and the moon but turns it from a cosmic hierarchy into a local constraint: the hierarchical/political order is not a reflection of the order of justice expressed in the story but its very opposite (1) – the story does not wish to justify the diminution of the moon but rather, to compensate it for doing so without justification.

Justification of political hierarchy is not carried out by comparing it to "higher" hierarchies. We cannot find here what is found in Plato's politics: the ruler must rule because he is good and wise. The entity that expresses the "proper" thing in this case will not be the one to rule, yet the story will not conclude until the injustice created is remedied. Here the "larger" is not the "just", quite the opposite. Instead of relationships reflecting different hierarchies we find inverse relationships creating stressful and paradoxical hierarchies.

Among the consolations God offers the moon, we find a symbolic connection between the moon and the righteous and the people of Israel. In the Midrash there is a similar connection, which expresses the status of Israel as an autonomous, ethnic-religious group lacking sovereignty: "Esau [symbolizes the Roman Empire – A.A.] is counting [time] by

the sun, which is large, and Jacob [symbolizes Israel – A.A.] by the moon which is small”. (Midrash Genesis Rabbah, 6:3 Epstein addition p 43). Such connections may explain some of the concrete meanings of the myth. If the moon is identified with Israel, the paradoxical conclusion is that the people of Israel make a sacrifice to the Creator in order to atone for a sin that He has committed against them, thereby reaffirming their acceptance of this diminution, their status as a politically powerless people under Roman rule.

H. From etiology of time to justification of political authority

We move from myth to practice of political justification. The priestly etiological model, which parallels the Roman *auctoritas*, can be demonstrated by the *author-ity* in the Book of Jubilees. The Book of Jubilees bases its authority on the written word and on the exclusivity of literacy. According to the Jubilees narrative, literacy was God’s gift to Noah, which was then bequeathed from father to son, through Abraham and his great-grandson Levi, onto the Priests. In this manner the priests gain their *auctoritas*, which was originally given to the primeval figures; the priestly authority is embedded in a knowledge-technique that legitimizes their ability to reflect the ancient and divine knowledge. Writing establishes the priests’ ability to copy what is written in ‘the heavenly tablets’ unto a book, and in this fashion to establish an eternal, divine representation.⁵³ The main interest of the Jubilees is to anchor all Jewish ritual in the universal, primeval past described in the Bible. According to the Book of Jubilees, ritual is intended to be a reflection of this primeval past.

In the Book of Jubilees, the connection between the primeval past and the concrete present is the combination of the cyclical calendar system of time and historic time: the year begins with the Flood and the primeval events create a binding calendar that reflects the primeval events. These two systems of time are built on a rigid, unchanging numerical cycle. The stability of the numeric system and the firm equivalence between the two time-systems are used as a kind of battle against the flow of time, enabling the present to be used as a frozen copy of the primeval past, which is the source of authority, and of the *author-ity* of writing as a preservation of the origin.

In opposition to this model of *author-ity*, which, like *auctoritas*, suggests an orderly hierarchical system, I wish to read a model of rabbinical *author-ity* in a story from the Mishna, which better suits a different etiology. The background to the story is the rabbinical practice of the sanctification of the moon and in the far background lies the controversy concerning the calendar. Priestly sects, such as the one responsible for the Book of Jubilees, supported a fixed solar calendar based on a complex number system and creating a year of fixed length. The rabbinical position attempted to coordinate the calendar with the natural phenomena of the seasons and the moon cycle. Such a calendar is based on matching the solar cycle with the lunar cycle. The following story deals with the ritual that determines the length of the month. The ritual is a kind of legal procedure in which witnesses come forth and testify that they have seen the new moon. In the

beginning of the chapter, the Mishna reviews the attempts of various sects to subvert this practice by using false witnesses. The Mishna emphasizes the importance of encouraging laymen to come and testify, even at the expense of violating the Sabbath. Thus it is implied that the practice is surrounded by controversy “on the part of outsiders”, and it seems the Mishna desires to emphasize its preference for determining the length of the month over counting the days of the week, which is the foundation of the opposing position.

The following story concerns a controversy in the rabbinical court and similar to the story of the moon’s diminution, it justifies the authority of the ruler by dramatizing the protagonist who diminishes himself.

It once happened that two came and said, “We saw it in the East in the morning and in the West in the evening.” R. Yohanan ben Nuri said, “They are false witnesses!” . But when they arrived at Yabneh, Rabban Gamliel accepted them.

And on another occasion two came and said, “We saw it at its proper time, but on the following ‘added’ night it could not be seen”; yet Rabban Gamliel accepted them. R. Dosa ben Hyrcanus said. “They are false witnesses; how can people testify about a woman that she has delivered if the following day her belly is between her teeth?” R. Jhoshua said to him, I agree with thee.

Rabban Gamliel sent to him: “I order thee to come before me, with thy staff and thy money, on the day that the Day of Atonement will fall according to thy calculation.” [which is considered a profanation of the holy day – A.A.]

R. Akiba went and found him troubled; He said to him, “I have to prove that whatever Rabban Gamliel has done is decisive, for it is said, “*These are the appointed seasons of the eternal holy convocation, which you shall proclaim*” (Lev 23:4), whether at their proper time, or whether not at their right time, I have no appointed festivals other than these. He came to R. Dosa ben Harkinas, who said to him, “If we desire to argue against the Court of Rabban Gamliel, we must argue against every Court that has arisen from the days of Moses until now”; as it is said, “Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” (Ex. 24:9). Why were not the names of the elders expressly mentioned? Just to teach us that any three persons who have risen up as a Court over Israel are like to the Court of Moses.

He took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Jabneh to Rabban Gamliel on the day that the Day of Atonement fell in accordance with his reckoning. Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head, and said to him, “Come in peace my master and my disciple! My master in wisdom, and my disciple because thou hast accepted my words!”

(Mishnah, tractate *Rosh HaShana* 2:8-9, Blackman edition, pp. 392-394)

The structure of the story is similar: two characters, one of which challenges authority and then is required to declare his own inferiority. After a scholarly discussion, the character acquiesces and the story concludes with an evaluation containing paradoxical hierarchies. This is a drama that justifies the rules yet does not have as its protagonist a ruler who overcomes a dragon. Rabban Gamliel, the Head of the Sanhedrin, is a minor character while the main and rounded character is Rabbi Yehoshua, who diminishes himself. The ruler is not the focal point of the story, the subject is.

From the beginning of the controversy, the political issue and the question of authority are presented as central to the story. The discussion of political authority does not concentrate on the ruler's unique qualities (such as Rabban Gamliel's wealth, wisdom or pedigree) but rather, examines the acceptance of authority by Rabbi Yehoshua. The two speakers who convince Rabbi Yehoshua to submit, separate the fact of political authority from the internal traits and value of the ruler. The authenticity of contemporary authority in relation to an ancient source of authority is not examined and furthermore, the exercise of authority is not at issue here but rather, the acceptance of authority and submission to it.

This is what Dosa Ben Harkinas, whose position began the whole controversy, does. From the fact that the names of the Elders in the desert are not named he concludes that their identity is not the source of authority of the rabbinical court. Rabbi Akiva expresses an even more radical position: in his opinion it is not only the identity of the authoritative person that does not matter but even God himself detaches the authority to determine the calendar from any hypothetic heavenly calendar: "whether at their proper time, or not at their proper time, I [says the Lord – A.A.] have no appointed seasons but these". In the Book of Jubilees the calendar is a copy of what is written in the heavenly tablets, in the *Mishna's* calendar the very superiority of heavenly status as an origin of a copying representation is questioned. The calendar in the Book of the Jubilees is a copy of the calendar written in the heavens; the Mishna calendar questions the authority of the heavens as a source from which to copy.

The practice of sanctifying the new moon also expresses a similar relation between ruler and subject. Contrary to the solar calendar, which is fixed beforehand, calculated by the priests and represents the heavens, the court here is represented as a dialog between reality as attested to by laymen and the decision made by the court's authority, the elite. In the chapter preceding this story, Rabban Gamliel is described as encouraging laymen to come and testify as to the birth of the new moon. In place of the biblical sanctification declaration: "holy, holy, holy" (also customary in priestly sources as *hekhalot*) we find this dialogic ritual: "The head of the court said, 'it is hallowed!' and all the people answered after him 'it is hallowed! it is hallowed!'" (*Mishnah*, tractate *Rosh HaShana* 2:7, Blackman addition, p. 391).

In the conflict between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua, divine authority is not in the possession of he who reflects a clear, distinct and unchanging divine truth. The relation between representing divine knowledge and authority is not straightforward and is not

appropriated through reflection. It seems that between knowledge and authority there is an inverse relationship. The story affirms R. Gamliel's authority only after he receives it from his subjects and not after he proves to be deserving of it on his own merit. When R. Yehoshua arrives at last at R. Gamliel's house, he receives a warm welcome as 'my master and my disciple! My master in wisdom, and my disciple because you accepted my words!'. R. Gamliel's political status does not reflect his inner worth but actually, stands contrary to it.⁵⁴

The story allows us to observe the representation of justification and the justification of representation, which are not founded on a model of reflection but of compensation. This paradoxical model is expressed in a clearer manner in the story of the diminution of the moon which we have read above. The story presents this paradoxical, inverse relationship as a relationship of compensation. The real world does not reflect the ancient, ideal, superior world but rather compensates for its absence or for the injustice inherent in the descent from that primeval world. The value of the moon that is identified with the people of Israel is not an expression of the moon's unique, deep, superior quality but rather an attempt to atone for the moon's diminution. The political hierarchy is the inverse of the hierarchy of justification, not its reflection.⁵⁵

The *author-ity* in the first chapter in Genesis and in the Book of Jubilees is the *author-ity* of reflection: the seasons reflect the year of the flood; the ritual practice reflects the heavens; the authority of the priests reflects (in the sense of copying) the superior knowledge given to them; the real world reflects the ideal, primeval world; man obeys God. The *author-ity* of the Roman *auctoritas* is also a reflecting one. The rabbinic stories hereby read describe another kind of *author-ity*: God remains superior, but the story of the relationship of the one who commands and those who obey starts from the act of obeying; in Barthes' terms – the reader. But unlike Barthes' thesis, the reader does not become a supreme authority, he remains a reader, but the order of the story and the order of hierarchy are reversed.

H. Oral Torah

The appearance of this model of *author-ity* in the aforementioned stories is not coincidental in rabbinical literature. Rabbinical literature is an enormous and varied corpus, created throughout hundreds of years, in which one can find the poetics of "the death of the author"⁵⁶ and paradoxical semiotics alongside the semiotic structures more suitable to the Roman *auctoritas*. However, the appearance of this unique structure is also related to textual practices such as repetition, which is the literal meaning of the word "Mishna", which is the name of the main rabbinical corpus, as well as being related to the unique hermeneutics of the Midrash, which are described in rabbinical self-consciousness as "Oral Torah".⁵⁷

The relationship between the written and the Oral Torah has a similar structure – though

it is the exact opposite – to Derrida's description of writing (*écriture*) as opposed to orality. Derrida believed that speech represents a claim about the authentic presence of a source, while writing actually represents the disappearance of the source. Derrida tends to see in phono-centrism a necessary expression of logocentrism. As a phenomenologist he tries to observe concrete phenomena, but here he generalizes and sees in the *différance* of writing an omnipresent phenomenon.⁵⁸

In the Western tradition in which Derrida is acting, speech is related to the Greek notion of nature (*physis*) or to the romantic one, and therefore is perceived as a primal existence. This is the structure that Derrida wishes to overturn, a structure in which speech precedes writing since it is the source. The description I am offering here acts within a culture in which the biblical text, the Lord's greatest representation, is seen as the source and therefore speech concerning it is considered secondary.⁵⁹ "Oral Torah", therefore, stands parallel to Derrida's notion of writing, since it is the secondary text. The justifications we presented above appear within a discourse whose ideology is "Oral Torah", a dynamic which is a result of being secondary. Self-perception of a textual practice being secondary contradicts the fixed solar calendar which appears in the Book of Jubilees, whose proponents see in their book a copy of the heavens and therefore precedes the written Torah. The authority of the Book of Jubilees is confirmed, as mentioned above, by the privilege of literacy held by the priests and given to them by way of ancient tradition. On the other hand "Oral Torah" posits a calendar justified by the *author-ity* existing within the complex relations between source and copy.

Similar to the rabbinical myth, Derrida's writing reacts to the myth of the sun and the moon. A reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* brings Derrida to a part where Plato refers to the Egyptian myth concerning the invention of writing. Derrida traces the origins of the Egyptian myth through French Egyptology and describes the mythical characters:⁶⁰ the sun god Amon (which Plato calls Tamus, after the Asian sun god) and the moon god Ibis, his junior and substitute, who is also responsible for coordinating the solar year with the moon year by intercalation.⁶¹ Derrida quotes part of the following Platonic myth:

I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of the ancient gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis, and the name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters. Now the king of all Egypt at that time was the god Thamus, [...] To him came Theuth to show him inventions, saying that they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians. But Thamus asked what use there was in each, and as Theuth enumerated their uses, expressed praise or blame, according as he approved or disapproved. The story goes that Thamus said many things to Theuth in praise or in blame of the various arts, which it will take too long to repeat but when they came to letters, "This invention, O king" said Theuth, "will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of memory and wisdom

that I have discovered.” But Thamus replied: “Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge their usefulness of harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are not part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom [...]”⁶²

In Jewish culture at the end of the period of the Second Temple, which is overshadowed by the canonical text of the bible, speech is not “the original”, writing is. In order to understand how “Oral Torah” functions as an ideological position, one must reexamine its naïve conception of orality and canonization, according to which prophecy ceased with the destruction of the Temple (70 CE; as the *Talmud* says: “Since the day the temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from prophets” Babylonian Talmud, tractate Baba Bathra 12a, Epstein addition p. 59) or perhaps even in the beginning of the period of the Second Temple: (sixth century BCE; as the *Tosefta* says: “when the latter prophets died, that is Hagai Zechariah and Malachi, then the holy spirit came to an end in Israel” Sotah 13:3 Neusner edition, p. 201). The cessation of prophecy required interpretation of the only texts that had prophetic authority.

However, at the end of the period of the Second Temple there still were those that claimed the ability to prophesize,⁶³ and alongside the comprehensive canonization of the Bible one can find a flowering of pseudo-epigraphic texts, claiming their authority from authentic speech of ancient figures: they speak in the name of Noah, Hanoah or Reuben, demanding the primal *author-ity* of the Bible itself. Some of these texts clearly overdo their effort to assert their own authenticity (as we have seen in the case of the Book of the Jubilees) and in this manner they stretch to the limit the *auctoritas* model – the claim to originality and authenticity, which already existed to a certain extent in the Bible. I wish to argue that the Midrash and the Mishna as textual practices posit an *author-ity* that accepts its subsidiary position in relation to an absent source – as opposed to pseudo-epigraphic literature that present a claim to authority in the name of authentically representing a primal source. These rabbinic textual practices take the very fact that they are a substitute to be a part of the very practice of signification. Contrary to the Bible and the pseudo-epigraphic literature, the Midrash presents itself as an interpretation, thereby positioning itself as secondary and inauthentic. But this is not an interpretation that wishes to understand the author’s meaning, to recreate the authentic, primal source. In fact, many Midrashic texts are a sort of musical variation on a theme, taking the biblical text out of context through quotations, puns and scholastic games. As an example I present here a short discussion in the Midrash, dealing with one word which concerns the very practice of Midrash:

In a similar manner R Judah interpreted the verse *And he [Pharaoh - A.A.] made him [Joseph - A.A.] to ride in the second chariot that he had. And they cried before him "Abrech" (Gen 41:43)*. This refers to Joseph, who was a father (ʿab) in wisdom and young (rak) in years. R. Jose ben Dormaskit said to him: Judah son of Rabbi, why do you distort Scripture for us? I call heaven and earth to witness for me that *Abrech* means: "I will make them bend their knees (*birkayim*)", for everyone had to come and go under his authority [...].⁶⁴

R. Jose ben Dormaskit opposes a common and acceptable midrashic practice. *The Midrash* appropriates Joseph's majestic manners, in which the Egyptians marching in front of him go down to their knees. The biblical word is stolen from its context and receives a new one. The applause to Joseph assumes the form of applause awarded to a young scholar, not to an Egyptian leader. Speech is stolen by the *midrash*, just as it is in Roland Barthes' earlier description (before 'The Death of the Author') where Barthes is upset by the "stealing of speech" from its original context, by myth, viewing it as a bourgeois crime.⁶⁵ But the existence of speech out of its context enables rabbinical positions to be more lenient towards the abduction of speech as we will see hereinafter.

Like the Midrash, the Mishna also presents a complex author-ity. Mishna is the name of the text but it also means "to repeat", a textual practice common in the Mishna and in other rabbinical texts throughout the years.⁶⁶ The word "Mishna" is opposed in rabbinical texts to the word "Mikra" which means "the Bible" but also "that which is to be read (aloud)". The practice of repeating texts turns the textual corpus into an accumulation of different versions of formulae of which the Mishna is but a single one of them.⁶⁷

Supposedly, it can be argued that, at times, the Bible also represents divine speech and therefore is a representation or substitute for that speech. However, if we follow Derrida, every representation is part of a never ending chain of representations.⁶⁸ The difference is between a textual practice in which the addressee faces a stable source, and textual practices in which the source is absent and is recreated in every performance. In the cultural context where speech is the origin, Derrida suggests writing as a self-conscious substitutability; in the culture we are dealing with we can suggest a different phenomenology of the oral and the written: the practice used while reading the Bible involves a physical embodiment of the origin; an oral repeating (*mishnah*) in which the addressee re-creates the text by re-presenting an absent origin that has already disappeared. The practice of oral repeating causes so many version changes that it is difficult to determine whether we are dealing with versions of the same text or different texts.⁶⁹ The best way to understand such a situation is through perceiving this textual tradition as creating a "text" that does not exist outside of its various performances.⁷⁰ Therefore we cannot speak of one "text" and its realizations but of a textual tradition in which authority is not possessed by one distinct addressor of a definitive text but in which there is a relationship between addressor and addressee and every performance of the text is not a simple act of obedience to existing authority but a complex act of acceptance and constitution.

The textual practice of repetition creates a different textuality than that of reading. When reading a written text the source is constantly present in front of the eyes of the reader, it has a physical embodiment, but whoever repeats the chapter is recreating a source that has disappeared into the past and therefore every realization of the text is different: “but he that has repeated his chapter a hundred times is not to be compared with he who has repeated it a hundred and one times.”⁷¹ Every reading is inherently different than the previous one since the latter has disappeared into the past. Repetition creates *author-ity* in which accepting the authority of the text enables its alteration. This essential difference does not necessarily need to be expressed in alterations of wording but can be expressed in the simple fact that whoever repeats a text does so without the physical presence of the text itself. Eventually the version of the Mishna became fixed and therefore the Mishna, to us, is a name of a text, not a textual practice.⁷² But the canonization of the Mishna does not signify the removal of repetition from the cultural horizon. Similar to the Mishna before its canonization, Talmudic discussions were transmitted orally for hundreds of years and had several versions,⁷³ which could all exist without either one of them being incorrect.⁷⁴

Similar to the “stolen language” of the Midrash, the practice of repetition also contains theft, sometimes explicitly. When the text is not embodied in an object such as a book and when – as in Derrida’s writing – the author is absent from the discourse,⁷⁵ the *author-ity* that is created can upset the hierarchy of ownership and turn theft of speech into a respectable act. The Tosefta counts ten different kinds of theft and the theft of speech receives a special honor:

But someone who sneaks away from his fellow, going along and repeating his lesson, even though he is deemed a thief, sees himself as guiltless [...] In the end he will be appointed public supervisor of charity [*parnas* – leader, the origins in economic responsibility but uses for leadership in general – A.A] and with merit gives back to the community whatever he has [...] (Tosefta tractate Nezikin, Baba Qamma, 7:13, Neusner addition p. 40).

The Tosefta emphasizes the futility of trying to determine ownership of speech. Stolen speech inevitably finds its way back to the public sphere since it was stolen not in order to lock it up but in order to be used and returned to the public, thus the thief can be a leader and pay speech as charity back to the community. The discussion of speech as an object that can be stolen ridicules the idea of ownership of speech and positions speech as a good that is always in circulation, of which the thief is but a part. Avoiding discussion of ownership in relation to speech is connected to the establishment of a complex *author-ity* in which the content of speech is not exercised upon another in a one-sided hierarchical act. The thief demonstrates the reversal of the hierarchical act since he describes speech as a multi-directional relationship.⁷⁶

The Midrash and the Mishna are, therefore, textual practices that conduct a religious discourse that claims authority but relinquishes the claim to authentic divine speech:

A prophet and an elder – to what are they comparable? To a king who sent two senators of his to a certain province. Concerning one of them he wrote, ‘if he does not show you my seal and signet, do not believe him.’ But concerning the other one he wrote, ‘even though he does not show you my seal and signet, believe him.’ So it is the case of the prophet, he had to write, ‘If a prophet arises among you... and gives you a sign or a wonder...’ (Deut 13:1). But here [with regard to an elder:] ‘...according to the instructions which they give you...’ (Deut 17:11) [without a sign or wonder]. (The Talmud of the Land of Israel, tractate *Abodah Zarah* 2:7, Neusner addition p. 91).

What we have described above as a characteristic of two textual practices is understood here as a characteristic of rabbinic discourse in general. The authority of the Elder’s teachings does not rely on the authentic representation of the divinity, even though their authority is anchored in the Bible.

J. The (anti) theological horizon

Roland Barthes links “The Death of the Author” to the Nietzschean tradition of “The Death of God”. Here I wish to point out the (anti) theological horizon of *author-ity* which belongs uniquely to the folktale and “Oral Torah” (with its textual practices and consequent political justifications). Reading the two stories above, we observed a religious discourse in which the voice of God is not called forth by a claim for absolute and final authenticity; a discourse in which representation occurs not through reaffirming the authenticity of the bearer of authority in relation to the source of authority, but rather by refuting such a relation and pointing out the contrary relations between authority and its source. The author that Barthes wishes to depose is the author that points to himself as the author, who refers to himself as the authentic source: the divinity associated with this author is the *auctor* who is revealed as logos: “In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1). Being revealed as logos creates a theology that is a supra-temporal structure, an ontological structure that is oblivious to the issue of time. This is the god that the Church inserted into the Roman structure of *auctoritas*, whose authority is created out of a stable presence of an absolute primal source in its each and every representation. The necessity of a constant presence of the original source creates a static structure of authority which allows for only one possibility of semiotic change: dethroning the original and establishing a different one in its place.

Derrida’s *différance* differs from Barthes’ “Death of the Author” precisely in not requiring the dismissal of the original source. Derrida’s asks that we do not regard *différance* as a word or concept and thus prevents the coronation of a new source, such as Barthes’ “reader”. Derrida describes *différance* as a crossroads, a temporal interval that is inserted into various theoretical structures such as those of Nietzsche, De Saussure, Freud or Levinas.⁷⁷ Derrida, for his part, refuses to see in *différance* a negative theology and even finds it difficult to

write about since beginning to write means interpretation which requires a primal truth (arche): It is a question of strategy because no transcendent truth present outside the sphere of writing can theoretically command the totality of this field".⁷⁸ Derrida says that *différance* is expressed in Levinas' concept of *trace*, which describes the impossibility of understanding one's fellow man since he is a past that cannot be compared to the present. Following Levinas, Derrida describes *différance* as a past that has never been present.⁷⁹ When Levinas speaks of the past that has never been present as a genesis that cannot be represented⁸⁰ he does so as part of a project that wishes to establish an anti-theological religious discourse in which God is beyond existence and is revealed in the Other's countenance.⁸¹ Levinas restricts this past that has never been present to the ethical realm, but in the literary realm the concept appears as a definition of myth.⁸² Myth is "a past that has never been present" due to the epic distance that Bakhtin speaks of: Greek mythology represents an exalted past which is separated from the present by an unbridgeable, hierarchical chasm. I have proposed here a myth that creates a different type of representation of authority, a myth that indeed attributes a hierarchical superiority to the archaic past, but does not represent it as an eternity that lends its value to its inferior reflection – the present. It is a myth that represents the past as requiring a response from the present.

The God that is revealed in such a mythology creates an anti-theological structure, since God is revealed as an absence, a trace, a *différance*, as long gone, and not as being, not as present. A religious discourse in which, as Levinas puts it, "I believe in God" is not the first time the word God is used"⁸³ is a religious discourse in which God appears as a trace and not as an axiom, as a "transcendental truth lying outside the sphere of writing" as Derrida puts it, referring to the theological god.⁸⁴

Therefore, despite Derrida's objections, I let myself see rabbinical God, which is semiotic rather than theological, as *différance*.⁸⁵ The name of the god is due to an inherent semiotic instability, which stems from the religious awareness of the magnetic problematic of representation: representation as a ritual stemming from the urge to represent, alongside the prohibition to represent, an awareness of the criminal and arrogant futility of representation. This semiotic tension creates chains of signifiers and is accompanied by an awareness of the act of representation and its substitutionality.⁸⁶ Contemporary Jews even call God HaShem (literally: "the Name"); as in Derrida's use of *différance*, the inability to signify turns into a sign in itself. I describe ritual as a substitute for theology due to its unique political semiotics: while the theological relates to God as an object, the ritual sign is a substitute for a god that cannot be represented as an object. Therefore the image of the god represented is a negative, a picture representing the inability to respond.

K. Epilogue

By using the term *author-ity*, I wish to move the locus of the discussion about text-created authority from the super-figure of the author or, in Barthes: the reader – to the existence

of the authority of the text as a relationship. It is possible to point to a link between the author's authority and the source of the authority of representation in general, thereby seeing the authority of the author as a model of hierarchical relationships that are always present in any act of representation. The *author-ity* exercised by the rabbis demonstrates an *author-ity* that is not held by a person or a group and directed towards others, an *author-ity* in which the text's addressee not only obeys the text – his very acquiescence establishes it. In this example I showed how *author-ity* is not only a form of action of texts but rather a structure that is effective everywhere cultural meaning is being made.

Understanding the relationship between the text's addressor and addressee as a relationship of authority teaches us not only the "politics" of poetics but also the "poetics" of politics: understanding the exercise of authority as a textual practice, an act of representation; one exercises authority because he represents authority. And from politics back to poetics: just as *author-ity* acts among people it acts within the text, between signifier and signified.

Understanding authority as a relationship allows us to understand the action of authority not only as the application of force or violence but as a more bilateral, dialectic game. In such a game many different semiotic relationships exist, which consist of inversion as well as reflection or obedience, thereby making authority and its justification work in a paradoxical manner. Such a paradoxical *author-ity* is possible when the source of authority is not dismissed with an oedipal guillotine, but rather, disappears, knowing that it cannot be represented, thereby creating a system of authority that is aware of the problematic nature of representation. The revolutionary dismissal of the author behind the almighty reader leaves us with a readingless reader, a reader whose reading is an oedipal act, lacking the gesture of acquiescence and devotion manifest in reading.

Beyond enriching the theoretical language by introducing the term "*author-ity*" I would also like to suggest a methodological use of the term. The liberal ethos which operates beyond distinctly liberal frameworks (such as the Marxist tradition of thought that works for class liberation, or the hermeneutics of suspicion that work to liberate consciousness from naiveté) constantly compels us to liberate from the evil coercive force of aggressive ideologies thereby establishing, without notice, the next aggressive ideology. *Author-ity* confronts us with the authority inherent in every speech and every meaning and as such confronts us with the inability of being liberated from such speech, because even when the speaker retreats from speech into a beginning beyond being, *author-ity* is still intact. Even if the name of the author is unknown, the text (and meaning in general) always carries with it the burden of authority. Therefore *author-ity* questions the very possibility of liberal projects as cultural projects (although they are still possible as political projects) since culture as a system of representations carries with it the stamp of authority, so that the desire to be liberated from authority is no less than the desire to be liberated from culture.

Roland Barthes' suggestion to hand the reader the interpretative authority goes beyond literary theory. It is an offer extended to the theoretician, the critic, the academic to use his

power to resist the force of culture. The hermeneutics of suspicion wish to resist literature and grant the addressee/observer/interpreter superiority: turning the text into an object of observation and examination makes the addressor a guilty party (he is being investigated) and liberates the reader from him. This way theoretical writing as Reading-Writing is formed, which by concealing its act of writing receives the privilege that Barthes wished to grant it: protection of sorts in the battlefield. This writing-that-conceals is a writing that presents the writing persona as a reading persona, acquiring in this manner a privileged status. The reader (hiding behind the academic writer) is protected like an SUV driving through the battle zone with a big “TV” sign in the window, declaring: I am not a political force, I am just observing, reading. The logic of the creation of such theoretical speech hides behind the *différance* between permission to speak and the license created by such speech. The permission to speak is the permission of the writer as reader, as interpreter, and it provides him with the license, the platform to speak from.

The fact that *author-ity* is inescapably present in every act of speech actually allows for an alternative proposal to that offered by Barthes. Barthes’ call for a revolutionary reader aims at liberating the reader from the political burden of the author, but this attempt at liberation does not release the reader from the political dimension of *author-ity*, it only allows him to take it over and change its direction. The term *author-ity* is based on the assumption that one cannot liberate oneself from the very political and therefore the mutual relationship between authority and representation, between the poetic and political, must be examined without ruling out the possibility of submitting to authority, without turning suspicious reading into the only kind of reading possible.

Author-ity embodies the reader’s ability to use subversive resistance (since such resistance will always be responsive to another authority) as well as act with awareness to the authority being exercised, an eternally inescapable authority. As Avidan noted, in the words quoted above: “Words know about you more than you will ever know about them.” Actually, Avidan recommends that instead of being frustrated writers who insist on undermining the authority of the author, we become, simply, readers. Reading here is understood not solely as a literary matter; it is proposed here that political activity may be seen too as an acquiescence and the examination of authority as an activity of one who accepts it and not only wishes to exercise it.

Endnotes

1. Michel Foucault, *The History of sexuality – Volume I: an Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 17-49.
2. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 29-33.
3. Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.33-39; Hubert Dreyfus, “Foreword

- to the California Edition”, in Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. xviii-xl.
4. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 11.
 5. Ibid., p.123 .
 6. Ibid., pp. 122-120.
 7. Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 127-129.
 8. Michail Michailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-41.
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 10. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), pp. 6-7.
 11. Ibid., pp. 68-53.
 12. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971).
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 14. Barry Bruce-Briggs, “An Introduction to the Idea of the New Class”, in *The New Class?* edited by Barry Bruce-Briggs (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1979).
 15. Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang 1988), pp. 142-148.
 16. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 3-56.
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 18. Ibid., p. 146.
 19. Ibid., p. 147.
 20. Ferdinand De Saussure, *Cours in General Linguistics*, translated by Roy Harris, (Open Court: Illinois, 1983), p. 71.
 21. Ibid., p. 72.
 22. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 148.
 23. Hubert Dreyfus, “Foreword to the California Edition”, in Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*.
 24. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 148, italics in the original.
 25. Ibid., p. 147.
 26. Monroe C. Beardsley and William K. Wimsatt, “The Interntional Fallacy”, *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946), pp. 468-488.
 27. Burke Seán, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* second edition, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 15.
 28. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

29. Ibid., p. 316.
30. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated by David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 50.
31. Ibid.
32. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 63.
33. Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow: a Dialogue*, translated by Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University press, 2004), pp. 3-6.
34. Burke Seán, *The Death and Return of the Author*, pp. 138-149.
35. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 129-160.
36. Ibid., pp. 138-139.
37. Ibid., p. 138.
38. Ibid., p. 140.
39. Ibid., p. 153.
40. Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History Genre Meaning* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Publishing, 1994), p. 3.
41. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 146.
42. Ibid., pp. 143-144.
43. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, p. 9.
44. Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: the Formation of Folklore Studies* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1997), pp. 27-67.
45. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, pp. 564-565, note 5.
46. Emma Emily Kiefer, *Albert Wesselski and Recent Folktale Theories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1947), p. 56.
47. Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 2.
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49. Clara Benedetti, *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author*, translated by William J. Hatrley (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 1-4.
50. Roman Jakobson and Peter Bugatyrev, "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity", in *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929-1946*, edited by Peter Steiner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 3-31.
51. Beal, in Andrew Bennet, *The Author* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.41.
52. Amit Assis, "Two Kings, One Crown, and Raban Gamliel's Court: between strategies of justifying authority and signification of time" [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* XXIII (2009), pp. 53-75.
53. Florentino Garcia Martinez, "The Heavenly Tables in the Book of Jubilees", in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, edited by Albani, Frey and Lange (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 243-260; Hindy Najman, "Interpretation as Primordial Writing: Jubilees and its Authority Conferring Strategies", *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 30 (4) (1999), pp. 379-410.

54. For further discussion on the concepts of 'realism' in Tannaitic Halacha (Daniel R. Schwartz (1992), "Law and truth: on Qumran-Sadducean and rabbinic views of law", in: Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (eds.): *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*. Leiden: E. J. Brill and Jerusalem: Magnes Press, pp. 229-240) see the Hebrew version of this essay in this periodical that contains some additional details of reference to studies in Talmud.
55. This inverse argument is similar to the one in which Nietzsche describes the formation of what he terms "the Judeo-Christian" morality. See: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated and edited by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1996).
56. Inbar Raveh, *Fragments of Being – Stories of the Sages: Literary Structures and World-View* [in Hebrew] (Or Yehuda and Beer Sheva: Dvir, 2008).
57. Although it is possible, as Martin Jaffee suggests, that the creation of the repetition practices described here preceded the ideology of "Oral Torah". See: Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE - 400CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Jaffee's argument is interesting since it presents the ideological genealogy of "Oral Torah" as the inverse rhetoric to that which I suggest here, as a rhetoric of *auctoritas* that attempts to link the texts to an event located in primeval time, when Moses received the Torah.
58. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, pp. 132-137.
59. It should be noted that a considerable amount of the Biblical text does not consider itself as representing divine speech. Such a status is ascribed to it by Rabbinic discourse.
60. Derrida goes into a wide-spreading and torturous verbal argument so as not to consider this Egyptological aspect of the Egyptian myth a search after the "original source" of the Platonic anecdote.
61. Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 84-94.
62. Plato, *Phaedrus*, stIII274c-275a, Fowler's translation, Loeb addition 1914, pp 561-563.
- 63v Ephraim E. Urbach, *The World of the Sages: Collected Studies* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Magnes press, 2002), pp. 9-20.
64. Sifre on Deuteronomy 1, Hammer addition, p. 27.
65. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 131-145.
66. Yaakov Sussmann, "Oral Torah' – Literally – The Power of the Edge of the Letter Yod" [in Hebrew], *Talmudic Studies* III/1 (2005), pp. 190-384; pp. 246-265.
67. Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 35-76.
68. Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 109-110.
69. Rosenthal, in Sussmann 'Oral Torah', p. 311.
70. Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah*.
71. Here I read this saying differently than the Babylonian Talmud and the conventional, traditional exegesis, according to which the difference between the hundredth time and the one hundredth and one time is a critical, quantifiable difference related to the quality of learning, meaning that every

repetition of what has been learned may be what makes the qualitative difference in fixing the studied material in memory. I read a qualitative difference from one reading to the next which seems to me a more fitting interpretation, since it does not require the possibility that the one hundredth and one reading is the one making the difference but rather, sees something different in the person every time he changes.

72. Since the canonization of the Mishna the version has been kept precisely and religiously, causing many researchers to think that it had been written down (see Zusman, “Oral *Torah*”, pp. 232-236; 304). The existence of one version of the text out of many created by the Tanaaim may be explained as an intentional and authoritative act of canonization carried out by the addressor, an authoritative editor (see: Saul Lieberman, *Greek and Greekness in the Land of Israel: Studies in the Lifestyles in the Land of Israel in the Era of the Mishna and Talmud* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik institute and Ben Zvi Institute, 1963), pp. 224-213) or as a result of the text being accepted by its repeaters-addressees (see: Alexander, *the Formative Influence of the Oral Torah*, pp. 77-116). Even in the Talmud, where the Mishna is seen as one text, it is still a text which may be frequently changed (Zusman, “the Dot on the Iota”, pp. 265-279).

73. Robert (*Yerahmiel*) Brody, “Gaonic Literature an Talmudic Text” [in Hebrew], *Talmudic Studies* I (1990), pp. 237-303.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 238–240. It is interesting to note that these oral practices do not exist in “marginal” societies that are far from the centers of authority. On the contrary, they existed in the center of Jewish authority in Babylon up to the period of the Geonim, while written copies were sent to the Diaspora in Europe.

75. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 316.

76. Compare: Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 29-30.

77. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 130.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

80. Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 184.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-169.

82. Tadeusz S. Zieliński, in: Azriel Ukhmani, *Contents and Forms: Dictionary of Literary Terms*, vol II [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1978) p. 54.

83. Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, p. 184.

84. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 135.

85. The Hebrew word *hashem* literally ‘the name’ is common among religious Jews as an attribute of God.

86. The Talmud brings here Rabbi Abina’s opinion concerning the deficient spelling of the verse in which God says, “This is my name forever” (Exodus, 3:15): “G-d said ‘I am not read as I am written: I am written with the letters J and H but read with an A and D’” (Pesachim Tractate, 50: 71).

