

– Call for Papers –

‘F FOR FAKE’

Falsified Provenances in Literature and Literary Studies

International conference

German Literature Archive Marbach

21–22 September 2023

The acquisition decisions of institutions collecting cultural assets, such as libraries, literary archives, and museums, are usually based on the principle of provenance: manuscripts, individual books, and entire book collections are acquired or exhibited due to the cultural and historical relevance attributed to them, based on their history of ownership, for example because they used to belong to Goethe’s private library or Stefan Zweig’s autograph collection. Such attributions have a long tradition in the German-speaking world, reaching back to the discourse around genius, authorship, and aesthetic experience in the eighteenth century as well as notions of originality, which were then codified, for instance, in copyright law.

But what if the history of a literary object turns out to have been manipulated? When manuscripts, codices, or entire books are forged and their origin is deliberately concealed, for example, through fictitious narratives of how they were discovered? Literary forgeries unsettle Benjaminian notions prevalent in the humanities of concepts such as authenticity, aura, or authority. However, prominent historic as well as recent examples from literary and media history demonstrate how forgeries fascinate us at the same time: Heinrich von Gerstenbergk’s forgery of Schiller manuscripts in the nineteenth century, for example, or the *Stern* scandal surrounding the forged Hitler diaries in the 1980s. Cases like these fascinate not only because of the criminal energy involved, but also because of the productive potential of the act of manipulation. Forged provenances produce forms of knowledge and practice that would otherwise not exist: forgers have to appropriate and perfect the style or genre specifications of the original. Auction houses, dealers, insurance companies, private and institutional collectors in turn depend on the value of the original and consequently on their skills to verify it as such. All provenance research therefore relies on sharing expert knowledge through interdisciplinary collaboration. In the case of forged provenances, this spectrum is even

broader, encompassing also legal and forensic fields and, in an age of advancing digitalisation, also the digital humanities and material-based digital collection research.

Forgeries can also be productive aesthetically and creatively, and may even be considered as an art form in its own right. Our fascination with them shows itself in numerous literary texts. Forger characters populate the prose of many epochs, for instance in Ludwig Tieck's *The Legacy* (1821) as well as in Daniel Kehlmann's *F* (2013), and John Irving's *The Water-Method Man* (1972). Moreover, there are literary texts that are themselves the product of a forgery. We encounter this phenomenon in connection with texts and pseudo-authorship in Classical Antiquity, but also in Johann Wilhelm Pustkuchen's anonymous sequel to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1821), and entirely forged volumes of the *Harry Potter* series in China. Furthermore, seen purely from a literary and aesthetic perspective, we may also ask whether certain genres may prove to be particularly 'prone' to forgery and which role the paratextual elements of literature, for instance the author's name, may play as (supposed) factors of authenticity.

Based on these considerations, the organisers invite proposals (in German or English) for the following panels:

- **Towards a theory of false provenance:** What makes provenance traces and chains authentic in literary contexts? What could a theory of literary forgery beyond prominent individual cases look like? How can discourses of authenticity since Benjamin be made fruitful for this topic? In what ways do fake provenances shape and unsettle our understanding of authorship, authority, and originality?
- **Practices of forged provenance:** What practical knowledge, which methods and procedures have been established so far in dealing with forged object biographies? How and why are provenances forged? How do literary archives, museums, and libraries deal with unexplained or dubious transfer histories within their collections and what (monetary) damages do these cause? How do they (in co-operation with others) determine provenance and its value?
- **Imagining forged provenance:** How is the subject dealt with in literary texts? Are there certain narrative patterns, for example in the depiction of forger figures or origin stories? Does something like an aesthetic of forged provenance exist?

- **Forged provenance in the age of digitalisation:** How does the continuous development of digital tools, applications, and methods affect this field? What possibilities do they offer to further refine forging processes, but also to better detect fake provenances? What potentials, what limits can be identified here? And how do practices of digital reading and writing change our concepts of authorship and originality and thus challenge and redefine traditional notions of provenance?

Please submit abstracts (approx. 200–300 words) and short biographies by uploading them to this [portal](#) by 31 January 2023. Travel and accommodation expenses will be reimbursed. The conference languages are German and English.

Concept

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