



Outside the Book

The Author

Josie Long:

What is an author? Must be that solemn looking genius on the book's jacket, right? Well not according to Michel Foucault, for whom nothing is ever that simple.

For a start, not all texts even have an author. Stories like the Iliad have been handed down like a sturdy pullover, becoming increasingly stained by every user.

Furthermore, authors aren't necessarily *real people*. The Bell Brothers and George Eliot are just pseudonyms the Brontes and Mary Ann Evans used to bypass the sexism of their era.

And what about translations? When you read great foreign prose, helpfully deciphered by an out of work poet, are you really reading 'the author'?

Then there's the 'celebrity author', which doesn't mean footballers peddling life stories in supermarkets. It's big names like Byron and Shelley. Their authorship depends on biographical ideas about them produced by portraits, letters and BBC dramas.

The point is there's far more to the author than just the writer.

The author is a way of interpreting and classifying works. It's a literary stamp of approval that makes even the note on Shakespeare's fridge (*hammy voice*) a *work of profound genius*.