

## Ghostwriting and its Contradictions, Or: Meet the Trumps

Carsten Junker and Marie-Luise Löffler

*If a president has a ghostwriter, who's the president?*

Dennis Kucinich (qtd. in Meadows 2004, p. 12) (Dennis Kucinich is a U.S. politician who was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for U.S. President in the 2004 and 2008 elections)

**Abstract:** This contribution explores ghostwriting as a cultural practice marked by contradictions. It takes as its example the case of Donald J. Trump's ghostwritten memoir titled *Trump: The Art of the Deal* from 1987. Following Trump's announcement to run for the U.S. presidency in 2016, the ghostwriter of his memoir, Tony Schwartz, publicly announced that the book had not been written by Trump but by him instead, thus contradicting Trump's claim to the authorship of the book. The debate around this disclosure points to one aspect of contradictions discussed in the chapter: the ghostwriter's act of contradicting the pact between author and ghostwriter according to which the latter remain in the background. The chapter further highlights how the book itself delineates and mobilizes various dialectical contradictions, arguing that the text straddles various contradictory fault lines concerning the relationship between fact and fiction, the in/authenticity of the content of the book, the in/

visibility of its ghostwriter, and the power/lessness of both author and ghostwriter in the cultural field. Hence it is argued that the practice of ghostwriting is a paradigmatic case of deploying contradictions as a constitutive element of (American) literature and cultures and their theorization.

**Keywords:** Ghostwriter/Ghostwriting · Authority, cultural · authenticity · Power · Literature

## 1. Introduction: Contradicting Trumpism

Donald J. Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States on November 8, 2016. Before the U.S. presidential campaign ended, ushering in a new era of Trumpism, most of his adversaries had confidently envisioned they would eventually be able to shelve him as a disputatious but failed businessman-gone-politician who would stumble over his reputation, dented among other things by his negative image as a “serial sexual predator” (Cassidy 2016). His supporters, in contrast, celebrated his victory perhaps precisely because they came to appreciate him as a successful self-made man, an image not least shaped by his bestselling autobiography *Trump: The Art of the Deal* (1987).<sup>1</sup> Conceivably more than ever before, the 2016 election campaign created a climate in which both candidates’ integrity and credibility were fiercely debated and contested. Although to no avail, many of Trump’s opponents came out publicly to contradict him and undermine his trustworthiness: “I wrote the *Art of the Deal*. Donald Trump read it” (Schwartz 2016). What was at stake? We might expect an autobiography to be written (and not just read) by its autobiographer, that is, Donald Trump himself, so for someone else to claim that they wrote it might seem counter-intuitively wrong. Yet, what this scenario points to are the multilayered contradictions that arise when someone else enters the game: Tony Schwartz, the ghostwriter of that very book. It was he who made the claim.

In an interview for the renowned magazine *The New Yorker* in July 2016, Schwartz went public for the first time, openly declaring that he, by writing *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, had helped shape Trump’s public image of a skillful dealmaker,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to Mayer (2016)), the book sold “more than a million copies, generating several million dollars in royalties.”

<sup>2</sup> Cesar Chelala notes in a 2016 article *CounterPunch* titles “The Real Donald Trump” that the memoir is “a book that [...] catapulted Trump’s fame among the general public.”

“a winner with a golden touch” (Rappeport 2016). It is this image which allowed Trump to eventually announce he would be running for president of the United States and which was continuously fostered during his campaign.<sup>3</sup> When Trump began to promote himself as future president, capitalizing on his image in *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, Schwartz (a progressive liberal) found himself in a position that was ethically hard for him to bear. He “wanted to set the record straight,” as he felt that ghostwriting Trump’s book was “almost like I created a monster” (Breslow 2016). Thus, when Trump boasted that “[w]e need a leader that wrote ‘The Art of the Deal,’” Schwartz in turn tweeted: “Many thanks Donald Trump for suggesting I run for President, based on the fact that I wrote ‘The Art of the Deal’” (Mayer 2016).<sup>4</sup> This public exchange not only highlights how ghostwriting can shape the image of a public persona, it also prompts an interrogation of the dynamics at play in the phenomenon of ghostwriting, which constitutes a specific kind of authorship, pulling back the curtain on some of the central contradictions surrounding a rather nebulous figure in literary history: the ghostwriter. In the following, we claim that the ghostwriter and the practice of ghostwriting serve as sites of inquiry par excellence to shed light on a number of specific contradictions—and to highlight questions central to Contradiction Studies—regarding authorial visibility, authenticity, and original voice. We take Schwarz’s act of contradicting Trump as a point of departure to throw into relief the dialectical contradictions operative in the production and consumption of cultural texts. These contradictions concern the visibility and invisibility of the text’s ghostwriter, the authenticity and inauthenticity of the content of the book, including the precarious relationship between fact and fiction, as well as the power and powerlessness of both authors and ghostwriters in the cultural field. What we suggest is at stake here is a general concern at the heart of literary and cultural theory: the question of cultural authority yielded from the symbolic value of authorship. As our discussion of ghostwriting shows, contradictions do not have to be disambiguated; instead the figure of the ghostwriter helps to consider (American) literature and culture as always already conflicted, ambiguous, paradoxical, and struggled over by contradictory forces.

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<sup>3</sup> “Donald J. Trump has regularly boasted about ‘The Art of the Deal,’ his best-selling auto- biography, as a business bible that demonstrates the sharp negotiating prowess he would bring to the presidency” (Rappeport 2016).

<sup>4</sup> This exchange echoes Dennis Kucinich’s statement “If a president has a ghostwriter, who’s the president?” (qtd. in Meadows 2004, p. 12), in which Kucinich boasted that he, in contrast to other candidates, had written his own campaign book during the Democratic nomination for presidency in 2013 (Brandt 2007, p. 549).

## 2. The Ghostwriter in (American) Literature

The phenomenon of ghostwriting has not only come to the surface in American biographies of politicians—among them John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Hillary Rodham Clinton (cf. Farhi 2014)—or celebrities—Public Enemy, Keith Richards, Victoria Beckham (McCrum 2014)—but is, as John Sutherland has noted, as old as literature itself (Sutherland 2011, p. 188) and can also be “directly connected to the origins of rhetoric” (Brown and Riley 1996, p. 711). From scribes in Ancient Egypt, an anonymous monk transcribing the orally passed down story of *Beowulf* in the tenth century (cf. Sutherland 2011, p. 188), and the controversy surrounding the authenticity of Shakespeare’s works,<sup>5</sup> to Sir Walter Scott’s son-in-law, J.G. Lockhart, finishing his *Count Robert of Paris* in 1832 (Sutherland 2011, p. 188), and Alexandre Dumas’s assistant, Auguste Maquet, largely composing *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Christo* (1846) (Sutherland 2011, p. 189),<sup>6</sup> the ghostwriter has long existed in the shadows of the most renowned authors and works of world literature.

The pervasiveness of ghostwriting can also be traced throughout American literature in particular. In fact, the term *ghostwriting* itself goes back to the 1920s and was coined by the American Christy Walsh, a baseball agent, who created a highly successful syndicate for ghostwriters, Christy Walsh Syndicate, which specialized in memoirs of baseball stars at the time (Sutherland 2011, p. 189). But one might also think of eighteenth-century love letters “on demand,”<sup>7</sup> Walt Whitman’s helping hand in William Swinton’s *Rambles Among Words* (1859) (cf. Warren 1984), Mark Twain’s supposed ghosting of Ulysses S. Grant’s memoir (cf. Hitt 1997), William Faulkner’s public acceptance speeches, partially

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<sup>5</sup> In 2009, the Supreme Court of the United States held a mock trial over the authorship of Shakespeare’s works, conducting hearings over the question whether the works ascribed to Shakespeare were actually composed by Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. For further discussion, see Garber 2010, p. xiv. The hearings can be accessed under: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?618-1/shakespeare-author-pseudonym>.

<sup>6</sup> Dumas himself started out his writing career as a ghostwriter, copying and writing texts for the Duc d’Orléans as an employé surnuméraire (untrained employee) (Mielke 1995, p. 111).

<sup>7</sup> In the footnote of a broadside published in 1795 by Jonathan Plummer (1761–1816) titled “Dying Confession of Pomp,” Plummer advertises his services in “various branches of trifling business,” offering to write “Love-letters in prose and verse furnished on the shortest notice.” Plummer was “one of the first authors to try to earn a living with his pen in the years following the American Revolution” (Hutchins 2004).

written by Joseph L. Blotner (Brodsky 2013, pp. 196–199), W.E.B. Du Bois’s hiring of Truman Capote for his autobiography (Dyson 2015),<sup>8</sup> Theodore Sorensen’s alleged creation of John F. Kennedy’s Pulitzer Prize awarded *Profiles in Courage* (1956) (cf. Hitt 1997), Alex Haley’s work on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, David Ritz’s co-writing of Cornel West’s *Brother West: Living or Loving out Loud, A Memoir* (cf. Hitt 1997), or Tom Clancy’s staff of ghostwriters—among them Jerome Preisler (Stein 2013)—to meet the high demand for his books and their tight publication deadlines,<sup>9</sup> to name only a few further instances of literary ghostwriting in U.S. history.<sup>10</sup>

The pervasiveness of ghostwriting in the contemporary United States—and the extent to which its publishing industry relies on ghostwriting services—becomes particularly apparent in a *New York Times* article by sought-after ghostwriter Jack Hitt, who, after being hired as what he refers to as a “book doctor” for a “multi-million-dollar nonfiction book by a famous person,” had to first sign “three different, hysterically phrased nondisclosure agreements” (Hitt 1997). As Hitt later found out, he would not only never talk to the actual client but would work on a manuscript by a journalist who received the ideas for the celebrity’s autobiography from a third person—“a ghost-thinker” (Hitt 1997). As he notes, “I took a breath at the shore one afternoon, reflected on the vast zagging distance between me and the celebrity author—and realized that I was, to be honest, a ghost-ghost-ghostwriter” (Hitt 1997). As he concludes, “the writing of a book is no longer the most important part of authoring one” (Hitt 1997). Obviously, claiming the authorship of a book does not necessarily entail the capacity to write it.

<sup>8</sup> While Dyson does not specify to which of Du Bois’s three autobiographies he refers, it is most likely Du Bois’s third autobiographical text, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (1968). At the time of its publication, Capote had established himself as a well-known writer; his writing career had not yet set off in 1940, the year that saw the publication of Du Bois’s second autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*. If Dyson is correct, *The Autobiography* would constitute a case of fully covert ghostwriting: Du Bois makes no mention of Capote as co-author or ghostwriter.

<sup>9</sup> John Sutherland refers to Tom Clancy’s novels as products of the “Clancy factory”: Tom Clancy “pastes his name happily on works by a platoon of writers as invisible to the reader’s eye as his *Ghost Recon* force is to the enemy they invariably defeat. As Clancy’s publisher unblushingly puts it: ‘Tom Clancy creates the ideas for these series, and the writers execute Clancy’s ideas’” (2011, p. 190).

<sup>10</sup> McCrum notes, interestingly, that most ghostwritten books fall into the genre of “misery memoir,” life stories containing episodes of a tragic childhood, followed by celebrity auto- biographies and “true-crime memoirs” (2014).

### 3. Ghost/Writing Contradictions

As literary scholar Deborah Brandt notes, “we might define ghostwriting as taking on substantial parts of a composing process for which someone else, not you, will be credited—whether by byline, signature, institutional title, oral delivery, or some other way” (2007, p. 549). More specifically, ghostwriting is a kind of authorship in which a more or less covert writing position is linked by commercial contract to an overt authorial position.<sup>11</sup> Such a commercial relationship that links (partially) covert writing and overt authorship positions includes a relational exchange between a ghostwriter who is largely socially invisible and an author who is highly socially visible or seeks to achieve such visibility. In contrast to the overt authorial position occupied by an author whose name is publicized, the ghostwriter can inhabit a covert position that remains anonymous. Numerous contradictions can emerge from such a relationship, resulting from the precarious discretion of such an exchange and relating to concomitant assumptions, among others, about the veracity of authorship on the part of the readers of a ghostwritten text.

The contractual relationship entails the ghostwriter trading his or her writing skills for a conceptual idea or a story that the other party provides. The ghostwriter then channels the ideas of those for whom he or she acts as an agent in the process of writing for them, delivering a text to fulfill the contract. A central component of successful ghostwriting involves collecting existing materials, detailed interviews, and extensive research into the client’s life or a subject area (in case of non-autobiographical writing). The ghostwriter thus, as Robert McCrum notes, “starts out as a hybrid of therapist, muse and friend” in order to not only “tak[e] on another’s voice and character” (2014) but to “ascertain their client’s or employer’s *thoughts* or *ways of thinking* so these can serve as the origin of writing” (Brandt 2007, p. 555, original emphasis). By minutely and patiently studying how the

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<sup>11</sup> Ghostwriting in the U.S. falls under the so-called “Works for Hire” section of copyright law, which states that “If a work is made for hire, an employer is considered the author even if an employee actually created the work. The employer can be a firm, an organization, or an individual” (United States Copyright Office 2012). As Deborah Brandt explains, “[o]n the one hand, this provision underscores the indivisibility between writers and their work (one can give for hire only that which one controls). On the other hand, the law makes authorship, at least as a legal status, thoroughly severable from actual composing. You may be considered the author without having written a word. This is what allows a public personality to put his or her byline on the cover of a commissioned book while often relegating the name of the ghostwriter to a smaller font or to the acknowledgement page, or, in some cases, to oblivion” (2007, p. 553).

mind of the client works and then seeking to imitate the client's tone and diction in convincing ways, the ghost, paradoxically, may be able to give the impression that it is the client who has written the text herself or himself. However, the process of ghostwriting does not necessarily follow this logic of mimicking a client's original voice; the writer can also simulate a copy without there being an original, creating a public voice which the client can then strive to appropriate as his or her own.

The role of the ghostwriter—and the process of ghostwriting—seems, then, at least at first glance, rather straightforward and easy to grasp. At its center usually stands a business transaction between a client (who either does not have the time or skills to write a text) and a ghostwriter who delivers both—albeit some ghosting is also based on friendship or collaboration.<sup>12</sup> We except from our definition of ghostwriting here practices of writing that are performed within institutionalized work environments, for instance, the writing of letters or speeches for superiors in the context of administrative or corporate communications, or the production of user guides for customers of a particular product within a company. Ghostwriters are not just contracted by a “principal” (Goffman 1979, 17) for writing books,<sup>13</sup> but also for crafting speeches,<sup>14</sup> public relations articles, blogs, love letters, or personal correspondence, mainstream science articles—and, maneuvering in a legal gray area—even academic work. As Daniela Lukaßen notes, “Wherever words are

<sup>12</sup> The monetary compensation of a ghostwriter often entails intense negotiations and can vary widely, as different sources indicate. As Paul Farhi explains for a large New York-based ghostwriting company, fees for books written for professionals (businessmen, doctors, etc.) may start at \$15,000 per book but can go up to \$500,000 and higher for a celebrity bestseller (2014). Robert McCrum sets the conventional price at 33% of the advance (plus royalties), yet indicates that it can go as low as 10% (2014). Prices are either negotiated per page or project; in Germany, this can vary between 50 and 300 Euros per page (Lukaßen 2016, p. iv).

<sup>13</sup> The meaning of the term “principal” as we use it here corresponds to that of the same term in Erving Goffman's elaborations on “footing”: “someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who has committed himself to what the words say” (1979, p. 17).

<sup>14</sup> As Lois J. Einhorn comments, “[a]lmost every statement spoken today by major political, business, and academic leaders was written by someone else” (1991, p. 115), a notion that is particularly prevalent (and well known) for American presidents, as extensive research by numerous scholars has shown. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson note, “virtually all presidents had collaborators in creating their rhetoric” (1990, p. 10). Indeed, as William N. Brigance showed as early as 1956, ghostwriting can be traced back to the beginnings of the American presidency.

put in print, you will find the so-called ghostwriter. It is impossible to imagine the guild of writers without this group” (our translation 2016, p. iv).<sup>15</sup> Thus, as Robert McCrum sums it up, “[y]ou may not know it, but literary ghosts are everywhere.” They may leave more or less explicit marks in a text, thus haunting and impacting the perceptions of its readers and those readers’ assumptions of its author.

### 3.1 In/Visibility

The degree of the involvement of a ghostwriter can vary widely—sometimes it entails help in merely structuring the client’s thoughts, or writing a few passages, but it can also comprise editorial tasks such as shaping an existent narrative into a more reader-appealing format, or—most frequently—composing an entire book. The actual impact of a ghostwriter on a text can be difficult to define as this trans- action rests on a crucial foundation: the ghostwriter’s work is not to be known and seen, only rarely does his or her name appear on the final literary product. The more the production of a work relies on ghostwriting, the more contradictory it seems not to give it credit, as much as the ghostwriter’s covertness is a fundamental aspect of the practice. This is not so much an ethical question of giving the ghostwriter his or her due (we may assume the contract arranges for their payment) as it is a question of steering, structuring, or even manipulating the expectations of audiences who may want to know whose words they are hearing or reading. As Paul Farhi has noted of contemporary ghostwriting for politicians:

Since most ghostwriters sign nondisclosure agreements that prohibit them from revealing the extent of their involvement or their remuneration, it’s hard to know whether the putative author had assistance or even did any work. Given such secrecy, the author credits on many books are rarely a guide to who did the actual work. That is, you can’t judge a book by its cover.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [‘Überall dort, wo Wörter zu Papier gebracht werden, finden sich auch sogenannte Ghostwriter. Längst schon ist diese Gruppe aus der schreibenden Zunft nicht mehr wegzudenken’] (Lukaßen 2016, p. iv); also see Stockman and Mureithi 2019.

<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Robert McCrum of the *Guardian* has noted: “To a degree that might astonish the reading public, a significant percentage of any current bestseller list will not have been written by the authors whose names appear on the jackets.” As Jack Hitt specifies for the U.S., “[o]n any given week, up to a half of any nonfiction best-seller list is written by someone other than the name on the book. Add those authors who feel enough latent uneasiness to bury the writer’s name in the acknowledgements and the percentage [...] reaches as high as 80.”



It is this very secrecy that has given the phenomenon of ghostwriting its name—and given life to its shadowy existence. Thus, ghostwriting may well be regarded as a ghostly presence that haunts principals, raising questions about their actual authorship, if not provoking unease that stems from the insecurity of whose words we actually get to read. The ghostwriter takes on the role of a ghost that is hidden, clandestine, and invisible but—paradoxically—whose apparition, at times, can become very manifest. This ghostliness, the ghostwriter’s simultaneous absence and presence, seems to present us with a predicament: a ghostwriter can hardly be visible and invisible at the same time.<sup>17</sup> Yet, what may appear as a contradiction here can be captured and analyzed, we suggest, when considering ghostwriting as a practice situated on an axis between two poles of invisibility and visibility. We thus distinguish different degrees of ghostwriting visibility on a scale spanning a) fully covert, b) partially covert, and c) uncovert–covert ghostwriting:

- a) Fully covert ghostwriting may not be acknowledged by the overt, official author of a text; secrecy and invisibility are a constitutive part of the contractual relationship here. We may assume that this indicates a desire on the part of the overt author to project a sense of full authorial agency in the public arena. Ghostwriting seems worthy of concealment; for principals to admit that they relied on the expertise of ghostwriter can certainly undermine their authority as authors. For ghostwriters, doing their work may be considered inferior to the pursuit of public, ‘original’ authorship. However, ghostwriters have rejected such a disdainful attitude toward their work. Barbara Feinman-Todd, the ghostwriter of Hillary Clinton’s 1996 *It Takes a Village*, was not credited for her work on the book, about which she expressed open dismay (cf. Farhi 2014). She went public on *National Public Radio* noting about her principals that “it shouldn’t bother me when, come book tour time, they pretend I don’t exist. But it does. I remember how annoyed I got when one publisher called

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<sup>17</sup> We are reminded here of Toni Morrison’s call in the late 1980s to consider and question the representational absence of a nonetheless constitutive and ubiquitous presence of African American culture in the literary canon and in much ‘white’ canonical literature—her plea for examining the “‘unspeakable things unspoken’; for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature,” her plea, in short, for “search[ing for] the ghost in the machine” (1989, p. 11). Without intending to dereferentialize Morrison’s agenda, we regard her invocation of the logic of an absent presence as a useful conceptual lens through which to grasp the tensions among which the figure of the ghostwriter moves.

ghostwriters basically typists” (Feinman-Todd 2006).<sup>18</sup> Had Feinman-Todd only served as a typist, Clinton could surely have hired someone else to do the job. To other ghostwriters, secrecy does not pose a problem. They may “see no ethical issue in permitting a client to take credit for work produced anonymously by someone else” (Farhi 2014).

- b) In contrast, much ghostwriting practice is only partially covert. Black Power leader Malcolm X’s autobiography, for instance, features the phrase “As Told To” on its cover. Journalist Alex Haley is known to have collaborated with Malcolm X on the project. His ghostwriting authorship included researching, structuring, and writing the book (Farhi 2014). Another marker of partially covert ghostwriting is a phrase like “edited by” (McCrum 2014). Many books give names of ghostwriters in their acknowledgements. In such cases, as McCrum notes, the “discreet, sometimes grudging, nod [is made] to the invisible man or woman who quarried the angel from the marble.” Thus, while ghostwriting is generally performed in the background and not necessarily to be known, it is often acknowledged in some form. This is a code of conduct within the trade of ghostwriting that still lingers from Christy Walsh’s times in the 1920s, who went by the following rule: “Don’t insult the intelligence of the public by claiming these men [in this case, baseball stars] write their own stuff” (McCrum 2014).
- c) In yet other cases, book covers feature both, the name of a public person and the ghostwriter’s name. Here, the connector *with* may indicate an oxymoronic type of uncovert–covert ghostwriting: [principal] with [ghostwriter]. In such cases, readers can witness ghostwriting as a matter-of-fact profession of which the principal makes no secret. The names of both author and ghostwriter on the cover of a book may even erase the contractual client–ghostwriter relation to present itself as co-authorship—which it may well be. Hitt corroborates this when he suggests that the ghostwriter personifies a conspicuously old-fashioned concept: “the word is now pure anachronism. Most ghosts are out of the attic and prefer names like ‘collaborator’ or ‘co-author.’ They routinely command big-dollar advances and get their names on the book jacket.” A number of ghostwriters have gained celebrity status themselves (which also contradicts the idea of the ghostwriter being merely the “typist,” as well as contradicting the assumption of the ghost as a presence that haunts the ghostwritten text and its principal in a potentially ghastly manner): an example is the bestselling

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<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Robert McCrum (2014) sardonically remarks, “the ghost is advised never to forget that, at the end of the day, he or she ranks somewhere between a valet and a cleaner.”

ghostwriter Andrew Crofts who has written over 80 books and sold millions of copies. He wrote “Ghostwriting,” a ghostwriting manual, which was a huge success. He is now the “ghost’s ghost, the go-to spook” (McCrum 2014) for celebrities all over the world. In fact, Crofts has a higher income than most professional writers in the UK (McCrum 2014). Like Crofts’s statements in *The Guardian*, numerous ghostwriters have gone public in interviews: Schwartz (in numerous big newspapers) and Clinton’s ghostwriter Feinman-Todd are merely selected instances among many others. So while ghostwriters may linger in the background, we do in numerous cases know who wrote a book, especially for celebrities and politicians. Considering these different types of ghostwriting, there is no necessary contradiction in the phenomenon of a present absence of ghostwriting; rather, ghostwriting appears on a scale of different degrees of in/visibility.

The Trump/Schwartz book is a particularly ambivalent case: while the line “Donald J. Trump with Tony Schwartz” is featured on the bottom of its cover, letting readers assume that it is the product of a collaborative effort, its full title, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, printed in larger, glaringly golden boldface on the top of the cover, stresses Trump’s authorship. The uncovert ghostwriter is relegated to a secondary, covert position in the acknowledgment section of the book as well, featuring Trump in first-person internal focalization before shifting to a paragraph that opens with a sentence focalized through Schwartz in third-person. This transition installs Trump as the book’s speaking subject and Schwartz as its spoken-for object—an inversion that contradicts the writing process, if we are to believe Schwartz’s declaration that he wrote the book and Trump merely read it. In going public, Schwartz violated the contract between Trump and himself which demanded that he remain silent and thus bear the awkward tension of his uncovered–covered ghostwriting position. Trump commented on Schwartz’s decision to publicly declare his ghost-writing in the following: “I could have sued you, but I didn’t” (qtd. in Mayer 2016). Such a scenario not only meddles with and inverts assumptions about underlying notions of visibility and invisibility when it comes to ghostwriting but also, closely intertwined, raises the issue of our expectations of authorship and authenticity, a notion that becomes even more complex with respect to uncovert–covert ghostwriting, as we may end up asking: how much of a ghost remains in the ghostwriter then?

### 3.2 In/Authenticity

The phenomenon of ghostwriting in its various instantiations determines the underlying framework of its writing process and structures readers' expectations. Unless the ghostwriter is given his or her visible due, most readers, when picking up a book by a certain author, would expect to read those very author's words. They may not necessarily share a critical awareness of scholars trained in post-modern literary criticism—that the author's signature alone does not count as a credible source of authentication and authorization.<sup>19</sup> A ghostwriter therefore, generally, needs to emulate and create a supposedly authentic author's voice or, put differently and inversely, a writer is required to embody the author's ghost. The central question that comes to the forefront here—one that highlights one of the core contradictions emanating from and circling around the figure of the ghostwriter—has been captured by Barbara Feinman-Todd: "How can a writer construct something authentic in an inauthentic voice?" This question is central to Contradiction Studies; it points to a fundamental set of cultural assumptions that go along with concepts of authorship, writing, and authenticity which are continuously evoked and subverted in the ghosting of texts. While the span of this essay does not allow for an in-depth discussion of literary conceptions of authorship,<sup>20</sup> we stress that Feinman-Todd's question points to an issue which has been prevalent particularly with regard to the relationship between authors and their readership and its underlying expectations. As Brandt argues, this relationship largely relies on the conception of "the cult of individual authorship" (2007, p. 553) or "the author as originator" (2007, p. 569); that is, a "direct and reliable connection" (2007, p. 549) between the authoring and writing of a text located in one and the same person. The instability of this assumed need for (and trust in) "authentic" representation encapsulated in such normative constructions of authorship, the absolute certainty about who tells the story (or as Brandt also refers to it, the meaningfulness of "the presence of the writer" (2007, p. 550)), is highlighted by ghostwriting.

A literary ghost not only subverts such certainty in an original locus of creation (cf. Garber 2010, p. 21) but even more so entangles the reader (unbeknownst) in a complex web of referentialities: who can be referenced as the

<sup>19</sup> We refer to Roland Barthes here, who formulated his skepticism about an author's autonomy and intentionality perhaps more poignantly than others in his famous essay "The Death of the Author" (2001/1967).

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent overview of theoretical debates on authorship, see Bennett (2005).

“true” author, who as the original, who as the copy? As Marjorie Garber notes, a ghost is always simultaneously “a copy, somehow both nominally identical to and numinously different from a vanished or unavailable original” (2010, p. 21). The figure of the ghost thus embodies the crucial contradiction between copy and original itself. And in it lie further contradictions: the ghost can be fleeting yet abiding, evasive yet insisting, elusive yet effective, unpredictable yet calculating, comforting yet fear-inducing. The ghost, in other words, may well be one of the most contradictory figures ever brought forth by cultural history. And although there is no essential nexus between the figure of the ghost and the practice of ghostwriting (the practice does not inevitably rely on the ghost; it could also be called shadow-writing, for instance), the compound opens up an imaginary realm which places the pact between author and writer in a sphere of ambiguities brought forth by such ghostly contradictions. Thus, the term “ghost” is by no means just happenstance.

While the transaction underlying ghostwriting encompasses a clear separation between the author and the actual work of writing done by the ghostwriter, authorship and writing are simultaneously very closely linked through voice: it is essential that the voice of the ghostwriter disappears—that s/he takes on a voice entirely different of his/her own—and becomes a “second I” (Mielke 1995, p. 183) in order to “locat[e] the status of authorship in the mind or person of the client/employer” (Brandt 2007, p. 555). As Brandt explains further, “[t]hrough the sharing of thoughts or revealing of systems of thought, clients lend their status or position to the ghostwriter. This is the site of authorization which serves both practical and ethical functions for the ghostwriter” (Brandt 2007, p. 556). At the same time, however, the ghostwriter, in lending services where skill, structure, ideas, and time are lacking, allows the client to become an author in the first place; the ghostwriter often quite literally “bring[s] the author into being” (Brandt 2007, p. 555). As such a surrogate, a ghostwriter frequently feels “authorial responsibility,” as Schwartz’s example shows, although it is the very disavowal of such responsibility that can underlie the publication of the final piece of writing (Brandt 2007, p. 557).

While we may assume that the assumption of an “authentic” voice rests on an author’s original ideas and creative use of imagination, ghostwriting may also be considered a craft that stages authenticity, which highlights authenticity as an effect that can be created by formulaic scripts and the distinctive styles of authors’ voices. In that sense, original and formulaic writing are less of a contradiction than we might assume. Trump’s success story in *Trump: The Art of the*

*Deal* may seem so “authentic” precisely because it follows templates, utilizing narrative scripts that seem “truly,” authentically American—in this case borrowing and activating from a succinctly national myth of the American self-made man. Indeed, it is this universally known myth that became the springboard for creating Trump’s image as the “charmingly brash entrepreneur with an unflinching knack for business” (Mayer 2016) which he eventually capitalized on again and again during his campaign. Such an employment of Trump’s story into the frame of a nationally recognizable rags-to-riches tale had two effects: it not only assured readers’ attention because it invited them to read Trump’s narrative as part of recognizable life story, the patterns of which are familiar to many readers; it also invited them to assume Trump’s narrative as a self-made man was plausible.

The myth of the self-made man can be considered part of a well-known mythology that is foundational for the United States. Heike Paul notes that the idea of expressive individualism is closely tied to constructing a shared national U.S. exceptionalism: “the providential success of the self-made man was identified with the success of the national project, and expressive individualism was thus regarded not only as the basis for individual but also for collective success” (2014, p. 368). This broad acceptance of the myth of the self-made man may partly explain why Trump’s narrative script of success met with such widespread public approval, measured by its high sales figures;<sup>21</sup> it was yet another piece in a puzzle that confirmed the validity of the collectively shared tale, according to which one can make it if one only tries hard enough. In the myth of the self-made man resonates the contradictory logic of a European early eighteenth-century economic discourse that locked private vices and public benefits in a mutually constitutive rhetorical figure. Mandeville’s paradox (1724) sought to neutralize the contradiction between individual gain and collective success.<sup>22</sup> It seems ironic that this paradox, claimed as a collectively shared foundational myth of the imagined American nation, lends itself in flexible ways to individualized adaptations; but it is because of its adaptability that it is so enduring.

To turn what Trump biographer Timothy L. O’Brien calls the “glittering fable” (qtd. in Mayer 2016) of Trump’s rise as a hardworking American self-made man into a highly individualized story featuring a “Horatio Alger figure” from rags to

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<sup>21</sup> The number of “more than a million copies” sold (Mayer 2016) presumably increased after Trump’s successful election.

<sup>22</sup> See Mandeville 1989.

riches,<sup>23</sup> Schwartz had to first capture—and, even more so, “mak[e] palatable,” i.e., skillfully adapt—Trump’s original voice in order to bring this narrative script to life (Mayer). That is, Schwartz had not only to mimic Trump’s peculiar rhetoric, his “blunt, staccato, no apologies delivery” (Mayer), but to make it more appealing to readers in order to, as Schwartz notes, “create a character far more winning than Trump actually is” (qtd. in Mayer). One such example is given by Schwartz to illustrate the process of constructing his voice as “authentic” and appealing by giving it an eloquent twist. Mimicking Trump’s parlance, Schwartz wrote at the very beginning of *Trump: The Art of the Deal*: “I don’t do it for the money. I’ve got enough, much more than I’ll ever need. I do it to do it. Deals are my art form. Other people paint beautifully on canvas or write beautiful poetry. I like making deals, preferably big deals. That’s how I get my kicks.” (Trump and Schwartz 2015, p. 1). As Schwartz notes in his interview with Jane Mayer: “*Of course* he’s in it for the money [...]. One of the most deep and basic needs he has is to prove that ‘I’m richer than you,’” noting about its poetic language that “[h]e was incapable of saying something like that—it wouldn’t even be in his vocabulary” (Mayer 2016, original emphasis).

An expression of how convincingly “authentic” such an approach to framing Trump’s voice can be is Joe Queenan’s *New York Times* article on the role of ghostwriting in the American publishing industry, “Ghost in the Machine,” which appeared in 2005. While Queenan scathingly writes about the reliance of politicians (such as Newt Gingrich and Hillary Clinton) on ghostwriters—exclaiming that “ghostwriters perform a valuable function by shielding the public from the authentically dimwitted voices of those they channel”—he takes the example of Donald Trump’s (ghostwritten) works as being consistently “authentic” (Queenan 2005). As he notes: “One of the few ‘authors’ who have succeeded in avoiding the pitfalls that increasingly ensnare ghostwrittees is Donald Trump,” as Queenan sees the latter’s books to be characterized by a “stylistic seamlessness.” He cites *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, its “clipped, staccato, tough-guy style” (Queenan 2005), as a prime example of successful and convincing ghostwriting that manages to perform authenticity through the recognizable style of Trump’s invented voice.

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<sup>23</sup> The fictitiousness of the fable is corroborated, for example, in Wayne Barrett’s book *Trump: The Deals and the Downfall* (1992) as well as in Timothy L. O’Brien’s *TrumpNation* (2005). Trump’s father, in fact, had a major impact on the success of Trump’s dealmaking, both in terms of monetary support and networking. As Barrett says in an interview with Jane Mayer: “The notion that he’s [Trump is] a self-made man is a joke. But I guess they couldn’t call the book ‘The Art of My Father’s Deal’” (Mayer 2016).

By ghostwriting *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, then, authenticity is created in mediating steps in a process of what can be called “vicarious writing,” of writing for someone else. In a memoir like Trump’s, one mediating step can be seen in the movement away from an “authentic” representation by the primary author toward a narrativization of his perspective through a ghostwriter. We might say that the author keeps on speaking while it is the in/visible hand of the ghostwriter that takes on/over the narration in an act of writing: the overt author speaks, the (partially) covert ghostwriter sees, writes, and creates a palpable narrative. Thus, authenticity becomes a minutely crafted effect that lingers in a field of tension or, put differently, that results from a contradiction between catering to the reader’s assumption of an original voice (based on the ghostwriter’s mastery of imitation thereof) and the construction of a story based on formulaic narrative scripts, a highly idealized version of the nonexistent original. Authenticity is thus effectuated through a skillfully crafted simulacrum text.

Yet, these examples from Schwartz’s writing process of *Trump: The Art of the Deal* not only point to notions of authenticity with respect to narrative scripts and voice but also—closely intertwined—to the issue of truth (i.e., “facts”) and the manufacturing thereof (fiction) in order to lend a story its plausibility. By trans- forming “facts” into narrative, or rather, imitating or even inventing an original story and giving it narrative shape, the narrative may come across as original, plausible, and truthful, precisely because it becomes an idealized version of a (putative) original. This is a further mediating step: transforming assumed facts into narrative to authorize their telling. In Trump/Schwartz’s case, the ghostwriter presents “facts,” or rather embellishes and even invents them, utilizing them in order to construct a story which fits into a recognizable script found in the myth of the American self-made man.

A number of contradictions can be identified in the process: while Schwartz was supposed to write down “facts” and base his narrative on them, he had to manufacture them as Trump was not willing to disclose information to Schwartz in interviews. Indeed, as Schwartz claims, his original intention when starting out the ghosting of Trump’s book was to follow a well-established path: conducting extensive interviews in order to collect in-depth material about Trump’s life. Yet, apparently, he soon gave up on this endeavor, as Trump seemed unable to extendedly reflect on his life (as Schwartz notes, “it’s impossible to keep him [Trump] focused on any topic, other than his own self-aggrandizement, for more than a few minutes” (qtd. in Mayer 2016)). Schwartz, thus, could not merely appropriate Trump’s life story. Rather, he had to create it in the first place. Moreover, he also realized that writing down the details of Trump’s business deals and his way of making business (“Trump’s loose relationship with the truth” (Mayer 2016))



would not make for a successful book. Jane Mayer explains the process: “Rhetorically, Schwartz’s aim in ‘The Art of the Deal’ was to present Trump as the hero of every chapter, but, after looking into some of his supposedly brilliant deals, Schwartz concluded that there were cases in which there was no way to make Trump look good. So he sidestepped unflattering incidents and details.” She thus argues that Schwartz, as Trump’s ghostwriter, began to “put an acceptable face on Trump” by substituting the attractive myth of Trump as a faultless dealmaker for the much less flattering but more plausible version of Trump as a notoriously cunning businessman who failed in numerous businesses but was brilliant at make-believe. Schwartz thus created what Timothy L. O’Brien has referred to as a “nonfiction work of fiction” (qtd. in Mayer 2016), which literally presents us, by definition, with a contradiction in terms. The contradiction consists of spinning manufactured facts into a popular storyline that would not only catch the reader’s attention but would also reference, authenticate, and ultimately authorize Trump’s “real”-life story.

While, in so doing, much of Trump/Schwartz’s book was able to reaffirm the myth of the American self-made man, it is exactly this fictionalization of facts which has provided a platform on which Trump’s adversaries have recently contradicted his political endeavors in an attempt to set the record “straight”: As Mayer notes, Trump is less of a self-made man than he is his father’s protégé: “his origins were hardly humble.” Further, critics have noted that the book’s mythical ideals and its business fairy tales prepared the ground for creating an image of Trump as a “dealmaker nonpareil who could always get the best out of every situation—and who can now deliver America from its malaise” (qtd. in Mayer 2016). If it were not for the notoriety of Trump’s public persona, his ghostwritten business book might be relegated to the business-advice section of secondhand bookstores. But the book’s mythologizing provided a basis for Trump’s later media successes—continued through the “mythmaking on steroids” of Trump’s TV show *The Apprentice*—which paved the way for the 2016 presidential campaign (Mayer 2016). It is precisely the “bypassing [of] the manifold discrepancies between mythic text and lived reality” that is the “ideological function of myth and the ongoing cultural work it performs,” Paul notes (2014, p. 407). Trump’s critics, who have foreseen the bleak future of an authoritarian era of Trumpism on the horizon, can consider Trump’s memoir a prime example of mythical storytelling which hides its internal contradictions.

Exposing these ghostwritten contradictions of Trump’s panegyric—contradicting Trump’s mythologizing—may well be considered an urgent act of cultural critique in so far as it holds Trump as author and politician accountable for a rhetoric that begs the trust of a broad public, or of his constituency at least—unless

caring about a firm belief in a president's reliability is not necessarily opportune these days. An exposure of *Trump: The Art of the Deal* as a piece of ghostwriting in its uncovert-covert form undermines Trump's trustworthiness because, in effect, ghostwriting constitutes a violation of one of the central maxims of conversation as elaborated by pragmatist Paul Grice: the maxim of quality. According to pragmatists, the "category of Quality" is governed by the supermaxim: "Try to make your contribution one that is true" (Grice 1991, p. 27; Grandy and Warner 2005). Failing to do so entails the violation of trustworthiness. When authors disclose that their stories are those of ghostwriters, they can (re)gain the trust of their audiences. When, in the case of Trump, it is the ghostwriter himself who discloses such a fact—moving from writing for his principal to speaking out against him, contradicting him in public—the power of Trump's mythmaking of the self-made man turns out to be little more than yet another fabricated deal, however artfully crafted.

And it may be the inventiveness of its writer to which Trump's book owes its success. If we assume that mythmaking enjoys widespread recognition precisely because myths are acknowledged as invention, we may also assume that readers do not necessarily rely on Trump's text to be authentic. They may, in contrast, enjoy it as a fabrication. In that case, it would be the readers' willing suspension of disbelief in the authenticity of Trump's narrative that allows them to authorize it in the first place.

### 3.3 Power/Lessness

As the example of Trump/Schwartz shows, much is at stake, not least because the image fabricated through the ghostwritten memoir has helped shape the ascendancy of Trump to the U.S. presidency. Much is also at stake in the contractual relation between Trump (as author, ghostwritee, Schwartz's principal, employer, and/or client) and Schwartz (as ghostwriter, Trump's employee, and/or seller of his writing skills). As Brandt notes, "ghostwriting [...] highlights power exchanges" (2007, p. 549). The author as "a person with currency, social importance, celebrity, or notoriety [...] brings status to the writing" (Brandt 2007, p. 550), potentially compromising and controlling the contracted ghostwriter's work and subjecting him or her to what Brandt considers a "coercive literacy practice [which] can force alignment with ways of thinking that are not one's own" (2007, p. 568). At the same time, the author's status is prone to increase due to the social prestige of having a book out, which depends on writing. It is the

ghostwriter who is the one who creates, endowing the author with the prestige of writing, which is “associated with creativity, talent, intellect, sensibility, knowledge—in a word, authority” (Brandt 2007, p. 550). It thus comes as no surprise that Trump, after Tony Schwartz went public, contradicted Schwartz’s contradiction in turn, claiming: “He [Schwartz] didn’t write the book [...]. I wrote the book. I wrote the book. It was my book” (Mayer 2016, original emphasis).<sup>24</sup> This contractual relationship is marked, then, by a paradox: while the author is in a position of power and the ghostwriter at his or her mercy, it is also the ghostwriter who is in a position of power and the author at his or her mercy.

In what is called an Aristotelian “logical contradiction,” both assumptions would cancel each other out irreconcilably (Junker and Warnke 2015). But we may instead take into consideration the complexity inherent in the positions of both ghostwriter and author and assume that both positions in the exchange are endowed with power and powerlessness. We thus bring into view a “dialectical contradiction that makes visible a contradictory tension between two statements without one statement showing the other as true or false” (Junker and Warnke 2015). We may in fact assume that both statements are true: the author is both powerful and powerless, and the ghostwriter is equally powerful and powerless. While Trump’s name was a requirement that facilitated landing a book contract with a publisher, he was in need of someone able to meet his publisher’s expectations; the book required a famous name but at the same time, it was the book that helped to create the name that became the brand name *Trump* to begin with. At the same time, Schwartz was entirely dependent on Trump, at the mercy of his principal, who had to disclose personal facts; yet Schwartz was also the one who possessed the skills that allowed him to invent and give credibility to the persona which Trump later appropriated for himself to build his career. Judging from the appearance Trump made in June 2016 to declare his candidacy for the presidency, Schwartz could not help but note that “Trump appeared to have convinced himself that he had written the book[, ...] thinking, ‘If he could lie about that on Day One—when it was so easily refuted he is likely to lie about anything’” (qtd. in Mayer 2016). This “lie” is based precisely on the myth of Trump’s full, singular authorship that conceals the contradiction between contracting a ghostwriter and later denying this fact, claiming both its writing and its authorship.

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<sup>24</sup> As Mayer writes in response: “Howard Kaminsky, the former Random House head, laughed and said, ‘Trump didn’t write a postcard for us!’”

To focus on the power/lessness of the ghostwriter: in Trump's case, it seems obvious that Schwartz's "words are made significant not by having been written but by the status of the official issuer" (Brandt 2007, p. 550). The ghostwriter apparently was in a financially unstable situation when Trump offered him the contract. Schwartz himself considered it a "Faustian bargain," knowing that "if he took Trump's money and adopted Trump's voice his journalism career would be badly damaged" (Mayer 2016). Such a compromise points to the principal keeping the upper hand in the transaction. An article about British ghostwriter Andrew Crofts addresses the ghostwriter's potential difficulties in the process of researching and writing for someone else. This process may create a "world of private pain: tearful interviews, angry confrontations, threats of violence, shocking revelations and interminable waiting, waiting, waiting" (McCrum 2014).

The author of the article goes on to refer to French, where the terminology used to describe ghostwriting encapsulates this dependency with recourse to a metaphorization that strikes us as problematically colonialist: "ghosts are known as *nègres*, and there is a kind of slavery implicit in this transaction" (McCrum 2014, emphasis in original). From a perspective informed by anti-racist theorizing, the metaphor cannot but be noted for its epistemologically violent implications. Such a figurative description of the ghostwriter may also divert attention from the ghostwriter's financial gain accruing from the contract as well as from the agency and prestige involved in ghostwriting. Brandt thus notes:

In general, writing is a desirable skill, a somewhat scarce skill, respected for its difficulty and the achievement it represents, particularly when it results in publication. Writing benefits most of all from the cultural prestige of reading. Because many forms of reading over time have been marked with high cultural value, this value has come to extend to those who can write in those forms. In this climate, then, writing may bequeath its high status to an individual person who engages in it. One can "make a name" through writing. Writing also is its own verifiable record of a powerful engagement with literacy and all of its goodness—including, often, the human growth that is presumed to be entailed in a writing experience. This achievement of the writing per se certifies the writer and warrants the reading. Writing then can be an independent source of social value and power and, with some exceptions, enhances the stature of anyone who claims authorship. (2007, p. 550)

The high social prestige attached to reading and thus writing may be one reason why a publishing company sought to offer Trump a book contract initially—and

why, by extension, Trump offered a contract to Schwartz.<sup>25</sup> The high value of having a book out, of claiming authorship, as well as the publicity, the recognition, and the opportunity to fashion oneself all point to the high regard for writing that Brandt highlights. Schwartz helped Trump to create a product that helped the latter to acquire “cultural legitimacy” in a “market of symbolic goods” in which the publication of a book allows the official author to receive “consecration” (Bourdieu 1985, pp. 13–14, 24); Trump could strive toward a secularized form of deification by capitalizing on authorship as a symbolic good of high social value. Brandt underscores the consecrating effects that the publication of ghostwritten books has for their authors when she notes that “typically, subordinates write not *for* higher-ups but *as if they are* higher-ups and deliberately for the aggrandizement of higher-ups” (2007, p. 552, original emphasis). By ghostwriting Trump’s first book, Schwartz gave him cultural legitimacy and invested his (Schwartz’s) own position in their relationship with power. Ghostwriters may thus exchange a subordinate position for a superior one.

#### 4. Coda: Trumpist Ghostwriting Turned on Its Head

On July 18, 2016, Melania Trump gave her first speech at the Republican National Convention in front of a TV audience of 23 million Americans, which soon after garnered national attention and went viral on social media worldwide (Haberman and Barbaro 2016). Not, however, for its brilliance or eloquent style, as Trump campaign officials might have hoped, but for what was later called an “innocent mistake” by Donald Trump, and a case of “disastrous plagiarism” by the *New York Times* (Horowitz 2016). What became a Facebook and Twitter sensation involved not only M. Trump but also the former First Lady, Michelle Obama, since key points from her speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2008 had been inserted into M. Trump’s later speech—as well as the central scapegoat of this political charade: the ghostwriter of M. Trump’s speech,

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<sup>25</sup> Mayer relates an anecdote that led to the signing of the book contract. A representative of Random House apparently pursued Trump, wrapping a “thick Russian novel in a dummy cover that featured a photograph of Trump looking like a conquering hero; [...] Trump was pleased by the mockup, but had one suggestion: ‘Please make my name much bigger.’” Not only is the book contract thus based on a fake, but what is even more noteworthy here is the implicit assumption that the prestige of canonized Russian novels might rub off on Trump’s to-be-ghostwritten memoir so that the producers and author might capitalize on the project.

Meredith McIver. It is this instance of ghostwriting (allegedly) gone wrong that sheds yet more light on the contradictions that arise within this literary practice, albeit in a different way than one might expect at first glance.

The official story is quickly told: as the *New York Times* reports, the first draft of the speech was written by two experienced Republican speechwriters and ghosts, Matthew Scully and John McConnell, after having been commissioned by Jared Kushner, one of Donald Trump's senior advisors and son-in-law (Horowitz 2016). Yet, when M. Trump received the speech, she supposedly tore it up and refused to use it (Horowitz 2016) and instead turned to McIver, a long time employee of the Trump clan, to help her write a different speech. In McIver's official statement issued on July 20 (which was soon taken off D. Trump's website),<sup>26</sup> she notes that M. Trump had "read me some passages from Mrs. Obama's speech [whom she admires] as examples. I wrote them down and later included some of the phrasing in the draft that ultimately became the final speech" (qtd. in Diamond 2016). As a consequence of the plagiarism, according to McIver, she turned in her resignation, which Mr. Trump, however, turned down by telling her that mistakes are made and "we learn and grow from these experiences" (Diamond 2016). Another explanation was put forth by the author Joshua Cohen in an interview in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who, in contrast, claims that the speech was used to strategically distract from M. Trump's Slovenian origins. As Cohen notes, the Trump family wanted to avoid potential headlines such as "'How can you trust this woman from a former communist country?,'" and explains, "To most Americans, she [M. Trump] comes across as a rich ex-model from ex-Yugoslavia who has nothing in common with them" (Wiele 2016, p. 16, our translation).<sup>27</sup> It seems plausible that the Trumps were likely to capitalize on Obama's popularity by appropriating her words to their own advantage. Such a reading is not as easy to dismiss as one might think, particularly when considering that McIver had extensive experience working as a ghostwriter for the Trump family before she was supposedly approached by M. Trump. Among the numerous books McIver has written for or with Donald Trump are, for example, *How to Get Rich* (2004), *Trump: Think Like a Billionaire* (2004), *Trump*

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<sup>26</sup> See <https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/MeredithStatement.pdf>. The former link now merely reads "Thank you for your support." For her full statement, see Diamond (2016).

<sup>27</sup> ["Was halten Sie vom Plagiat in der Rede von Trumps Frau Melania? Ich glaube, dass man für ihre Rede bewusst bei Michelle Obama plagierte hat. Wäre dem nicht so gewesen, hätte später die Überschrift vielleicht gelautet: 'Wie kann man dieser Frau aus einem ehemals kommunistischen Land vertrauen?' So, wie sie rüberkommt, ist sie für viele Amerikaner ein reiches Ex-Model aus Ex-Jugoslawien, das nichts mit ihnen gemein hat. Davon hat diese Geschichte abgelenkt. Es war ein klassischer Internet-Coup." ] (Wiele 2016, p. 16).

*101: The Way to Success* (2006), *Why We Want You to Be Rich* (2006), *Trump: Never Give Up* (2008). She has been repeatedly described as being valued for her “precision” and her “generally meticulous attention to detail” (Horowitz 2016). In addition, as the *New York Times* discusses in detail, such a strategic scenario also becomes plausible when keeping in mind that political speeches, especially such crucial ones as that of M. Trump, have to undergo a rigorous review process to avoid such an “entirely preventable blunder” (Haberma and Barbaro 2016), including plagiarism software and numerous rounds of editorship. Most importantly, McIver, by openly including Obama’s words in numerous phrases, would have naively broken with the central code of conduct in the business: “avoiding the slightest hint of oratorical theft” (Haberma and Barbaro 2016). As Matt Latimer, one of George W. Bush’s speechwriters, points out, “[t]he most cardinal rule of any speech-writing operation is that you cannot plagiarize” (qtd. in Haberman and Barbaro 2016).

What is striking about this potential instance of strategic deception is not necessarily that Donald Trump might have used such a media stunt (albeit a major one) to distract from his wife’s origins—as Tony Schwartz makes clear in his interview with Jane Mayer, Donald Trump has repeatedly fabricated stories with journalists or gotten in touch with news outlets under a pseudonym to do so (Mayer 2016)—but much rather what light it sheds on the role of the ghostwriter—in this case, importantly so, a female one—in this political battle emanating from Trump Tower. This becomes particularly noteworthy when one returns to the issue of power/lessness. While it is not uncommon for ghostwriters to be relegated to an invisible position of non-acknowledgment, with (contractual and financial) pressure being used to relegate them to the background, Tony Schwartz, in fact, also managed to gain substantial power in the process of writing *Trump: The Art of the Deal*. Not only did he receive \$250,000 of the book’s advance and half of its royalties—which, given that it was a “phenomenal success, spending forty-eight weeks on the *Times* best-seller list” (Mayer 2016) and selling millions of copies, amounted to millions of dollars for him. In fact, the book helped him build his second career as the founder of the consulting firm The Energy Project (2003) and triggered his work as an author and co-author of various books.<sup>28</sup> When he went public in July 2016 in order to caution voters about

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<sup>28</sup> Schwartz wrote *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America* (1995) as a reaction to his work as a ghostwriter of *Trump: The Art of the Deal*. He has also co-authored books with Michael Eisner (*Risking Failure, Surviving Success*, 1998), Jim Loehr (*The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy Not Time*, 2003), and Jean Gomes and Catherine McCarthy (*The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working: Fueling the Four Needs that Energize Performance*, 2010).

Trump, Schwartz thus did so from a financially comfortable and independent position. While McIver has also published various books as Trump's ghostwriter, and, similar to Schwartz, has close access to his innermost circles and information channels,<sup>29</sup> she nevertheless seems to be in the position of almost complete, and passive, dependence. As her public statement highlights, not only is she at Trump's mercy in terms of keeping her job and her financial stability as his full-time employee, but—much more so—she is constructed as the original perpetrator, taking the blame for a scheme always already out of her hands. As such, she could be cast as the perfect scapegoat: a 65-year-old pleasant former ballerina who, after having to leave her dancing career, began writing and “dreamed [that] her name [would] appear on the covers of books” (Horowitz 2016). It was as Donald and Melania Trump's ghostwriter that this dream would come true. As such, McIver has delivered (life) stories that would make her unimpeachable and sympathetic enough to allow for an “innocent mistake” and thus ultimately allow her to continue to exist, and disappear again, in the Trump universe.

Contrasting Schwartz and McIver as two opposite cases of ghostwriting points to yet another contradiction: while he was supposed to stay in the background but went public, she was pressured to go public but, with the Trumps officially accepting her apology, was again relegated to the veiled background of ghostwriting inconspicuousness. As this contradictory dynamic highlights, the phenomenon of ghostwriting is located in a force field in which a number of tensions are negotiated, if not staged: the tension between visibility and invisibility, a ghostwriter's dis/investment with power at the hands of an author, the continuing cultural authority and social prestige of authorship, and repeated claims to authenticity among the reading public despite the implication that ghostwriting undermines such authenticity. As McIver's example once again shows, there is nothing authentic about “Melania's speech” despite or because of the fact that giving the speech was supposed to lend credibility and authenticity to her husband's image as a caring family man and national leader.

In both cases, ghostwriting the Trumps has sought to contribute to creating a mythical narrative of a successful and charismatic businessman as well as that of a genuine husband and father who would successfully extend his role as a paterfamilias in private to the leadership of a nation. Ghostwriting here glosses over narrative contradictions between fact and fiction and the social contradictions inherent in the conflict between the U.S. nation-based myth that you

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<sup>29</sup> As Jason Horowitz notes: “Ms. McIver is considered part of the extended Trump family. ‘She is terrific, she’s a terrific woman,’ Trump said [...], ‘She’s been with us a long time.’”



can make it if only you try hard enough and the overwhelming difficulty if not impossibility of making this myth come true. As our discussion of ghostwriting has shown, however, the production and reception of texts like Donald Trump's memoir or Melania Trump's speech are invested in straddling various contradictory fault lines which concern the presences and absences of its ghostwriters, the plausibility of the textual material including the precarious relationship between fact and fiction, as well as the power/lessness and status of both authors and ghostwriters in the cultural field.

We consider ghostwriting an excellent phenomenon to highlight the contradictory dynamics at work in such a cultural practice—and our examination of ghostwriting the Trumps has shown these dynamics in symptomatic fashion. But our discussion of ghostwriting the Trumps has not sought to solve and dis-ambiguate contradictions. Instead, a consideration of ghostwriting and an analysis of different figures of the ghostwriter in cultural history facilitate an inquiry into (American) literature and culture at large that assumes they are and have always been composite, contested, and contradictory. This assumption will also be imperative for Contradiction Studies as an emerging field. The practice of ghostwriting reminds us that unresolvable contradictions are a constitutive element of literature and cultures and their theorization.

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**Carsten Junker** is Professor of American Studies with a Focus on Diversity Studies at TU Dresden. His research interests include North American literatures and cultures including Canada and the Caribbean from the seventeenth century to the present, structural violence, genre theory, and theories of authorship. He is author of *Patterns of Positioning: On the Poetics of Early Abolition*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2016; *Frames of Friction: Black Genealogies, White Hegemony, and the Essay as Critical Intervention*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2010; and, with Ingo H. Warnke, Marguerite Stix and the Shell—Notes on Disciplinarity and Contradiction. *Quaderna* no. 3, 2015.

**Marie-Luise Löffler** currently works at the Equal Opportunity Office of the City of Heidelberg, implementing diversity management with a particular focus on women at the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity and disability. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the department of Languages and Literatures (English-Speaking Cultures) at the University of Bremen. Her research interests include African American literature, women's literature and speculative fiction. She is the author of 'She Would Be No Man's Property Ever Again: Vampirism, Slavery, and Black Female Heroism in Contemporary African American Women's Fiction. *Images of the Modern Vampire*. Ed. Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan. 99–113. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013; 'Why white people feel they got to mark us?:' Bodily Inscription, Healing, and Maternal 'Plots of Power' in Jewelle Gomez's 'Louisiana 1850.' *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and the Speculative*. Ed. Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman. 146–166. New York: Peter Lang, 2011; 'All We Remember Is Their Scars:' African American Speculative Fiction's Dismantling of the Foundations of Home. *Constructions of Home: Interdisciplinary Studies in Architecture, Law, and Literature*. Ed. Klaus Stierstorfer. 339–359. New York: AMS Press, 2010.