

“The Poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth”?

An analysis of editorial fiction

Is the editorial fiction a possible challenge to Sir Philip Sidney’s famous defence of the poets? Predicated on an assertion-based definition of lying, this paper discusses two historically consecutive versions of this phenomenon: A closer analysis of Gérard Genette’s category of the disavowing authentic authorial preface reveals that Genette’s arguments cannot defend editorial fictions written by ‘author-editors’ against accusations of lying. Rather, this first version of editorial fictions occasionally embodies lies for which the authors are to be held accountable. Editorial fictions written by ‘character-editors’, in contrast, do not meet the conditions of the assertion-based account of lying with the result that, in this case, neither the author nor the ‘character-editor’ can be accused of lying.

1. Sidney’s and Frege’s defences of the poets

In his attempt to refute Plato’s critique of the poets in the second book of *The Republic*, where they were accused of telling lies¹, Sir Philip Sidney stated in his well-known *Defense of Poesie*: “[T]he Poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie, is to affirme that to be true, which is false” (Sidney 1595, 52f.). Over 300 years later Gottlob Frege produced a similar argument in “The Thought”:

In poetry we have the case of thoughts being expressed without being actually put forward as true in spite of the form of the indicative sentence [...]. Therefore it must still always be asked, about what is presented in the form of an indicative sentence, whether it really contains an assertion. And this question must be answered in the negative if the requisite seriousness is lacking. (Frege 1918/19, 294f.)

Apparently, Frege’s and Sir Sidney’s defences rely on an assertion-based conception of lying. According to this view, the central aspect of a lie is not the intention of speaker *S* to deceive, but the speaker’s assertion of something he considers to be false.² This means that for *S* to be lying two conditions must be met:

S lies iff

- (1) *S* asserts that *p*.
- (2) *S* believes that *p* is false.³

Given this definition, it is obvious that Sir Sidney as well as Frege exculpate the poets from lying, because in their view condition (2) is met, but condition (1) is not: Poets and authors⁴ say a lot of things they consider to be false, but they

are not asserting them. Since novels (poetry, drama etc.) are written in fictional discourse, the “requisite seriousness is lacking” (to use Frege’s words again).

This argument sounds quite convincing as the characterization of a book as a ‘novel’ indeed seems to have a function similar to a wink: It usually indicates that the author was setting up a fictive, i.e. invented story with fictive characters and events, that he created a fictional text. And this is the reason why we feel entitled to treat the author of a novel in a different way from the author of a historiography when they say something wrong: Whereas the historian would be accused of lying, the author of the novel would not be. In contrast to historians, authors of fictional texts are not engaging in factual discourse, but in a conversational context in which they are not *expected* to say the truth. Therefore, they are not asserting the things they say – and accordingly they are not lying.

This exculpation seems to apply to all utterances in the whole realm of the fictional text: The author is neither to be blamed for telling a story that never happened, nor – of course – to be accused for false assertions by the narrator or by a fictive character. Consider, for example, Jurek Becker’s novel *Jacob the Liar* (1969): Jacob is trying to give hope to the Jews in the ghetto by providing news about the approach of the Red Army every day. But this news is not true, since the radio that Jacob pretends to possess does not exist. So Jacob – the character within the fictive world – is lying, since both condition (1) and (2) are met: He makes assertions concerning the approach of the Red Army and he believes these to be false. But although the author Becker is clearly the originator of every sentence in this novel (and therefore also of Jacob’s utterances), he himself is not lying. Just like anybody else who recounts somebody else’s lie, Becker himself is not telling a lie.

The same holds for the lies of a narrator: Since author and narrator are different entities (cf. Friedemann 1910; Kayser 1958), the author may not be accused for the false assertions or the unreliability of a narrator, as, for example, in Heinrich von Kleist’s *The Marquise of O.* (1808). Even in the case of an authorial narrator, the narrator is just as much part of the fiction and thus must not be identified with the author. So the narrator may or may not tell the truth (within the fiction) – the author is writing in fictional discourse anyway.

Up to this point, Sir Sidney and Frege’s argument that the poets do not lie because they do not assert anything seems to be very plausible. Nevertheless, I want to explore the boundaries of this approach by asking the question of whether this is equally true of all parts of a fictional text: Is Wolfgang Kayser right in saying that “an author *cannot* lie” (Kayser 1958, 91, my translation, my emphasis)? Or does a fictional text also contain non-fictional elements, which might lead to the assumption that an author at least *sometimes* asserts something – and therefore could at times be lying?

Certainly, there are several parts of a novel that can be taken as factual utterances and therefore as real assertions of the author.⁵ But I want to focus on one special phenomenon that could possibly be interpreted this way: ‘editorial fiction’.

2. Editorial fiction

Editorial fiction was particularly well-established in the 18th century but is still (albeit rarely) to be found in contemporary novels. At the zenith of its popularity, it was a common way to introduce⁶ autobiographies as well as epistolary, diary, and archive novels (cf. e.g. Ansorge 1969, 96ff.). In the majority of cases, the editor basically reports how he discovered or was provided with the authentic documents that follow. Sometimes he also gives an account of how he arranged the detected documents, translated them from a foreign language or corrected them in some way or other (cf. Genette 1997, 186f.). In rare cases there can even be an accumulation of these manners of use, as for example in the preface of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*:

On sober reflection, I find new reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-Gothic French version of a seventeenth-century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century. (Eco 1980, 4)⁷

Despite its widespread use editorial fiction has only infrequently been a primary object of literary research. Some narratologists deal with it in the context of their research about the epistolary novel (cf. e.g. Picard 1971, Versini 1979, Moravetz 1990, Beebe 1999.), about the preface, the beginnings of novels, or the paratext in general (cf. e.g. Ehrenzeller 1955, Miller 1965, Miller 1968, Ansorge 1969, Jørgensen 1976, Genette 1997, Erlebach 1990.), or when they give an interpretation of a text containing an editorial fiction.⁸ But extensive analyses are still rare.⁹

Furthermore, there seems to be no uniform interpretation of the meaning of the concept 'fiction' in the notion of 'editorial fiction'. Narratological and literary research shows a slew of specifications of this phrase that are obviously not synonymous: The concepts of the "fictional" (Stanzel 1979, 290; Beebe 1999, 81; Takeda 2008, 15) or "fictive editor" (Vogt 1972, 80; Moravetz 1990, 3; Mommertz 2003, 13, 33) are being used as well as the notions of the "feigned editor" (Vogt 1972, 230) and the "alleged editor" (Moravetz 1990, 177).¹⁰ Sometimes several different concepts are even collocated within one single article without sufficient explanation: Picard (1971), for example, refers to the editor as "fictive", as "alleged", as "feigned" and as "editor'-author", whereas Miller (1965 and 1968) uses the expressions "author-editor", "fictive narrator", "feigned editor" and "narrating editor".¹¹ As Ansorge already criticised with reference to Picard, these notions seem to imply an unintelligible "equation of [...] author, editor and narrator" (Ansorge 1969, 90f.).

Indeed, not only Picard's and Miller's but all the listed concepts point in two different directions: Whereas the notions of a 'feigned', 'alleged' or 'author-editor' seem to imply that the utterances made in an editorial fiction should be attributed to the author, the notions of a 'fictional', 'fictive' or 'narrating editor' suggest that the person talking is an invented character – and therefore not the author. Referring to this inconsistency, Takeda and Wirth both argued in their simultaneously published studies (2008) that editorial fic-

tions written by an ‘author-editor’ and editorial fictions written by a ‘character-editor’ are two different, historically subsequent phenomena. Hence, whether it is the author who pretends to be an editor or whether it is a fictive character that recounts how he became the editor of the following documents is not decided on the basis of clarified concepts, a better narratological argument, or the more plausible point of view. It is a historical development that is part of the genesis of modern authorship in the 17th and 18th century (cf. Wirth 2008, 38; Takeda 2008, 100).¹² In other words: The narratological transition from the feigned (pseudo)authorial editor to the fictive editor-character paved the way for the transition from the author himself being responsible for the narration and the truthfulness of the story to a fictive narrator being in charge (cf. Wirth 2008, 187).¹³

Takeda’s and Wirth’s insights are built on several preliminary studies, especially by Ansorge and Weber.¹⁴ Ansorge already seminally asserted the transition from the feigned editor-role to the fictive editor-character (cf. Ansorge 1969, 53, 75),¹⁵ and Weber distinguished between two different kinds of prefaces in a way that is essential to the analysis of the editorial fiction as well: Prefaces can either be autonomous entities preceding the novel or be more integrated into the fictive story of the novel (cf. Weber 1974, 20). As Wirth already pointed out, the central question relevant to the editorial fiction is, accordingly, “whether the preface is really put in front of the book – *hors livre* – or whether it is to be regarded as a part of the opus” (Wirth 2008, 88, my translation; cf. also Mommertz 2003, 7). Taking Weber’s differentiation into account Wirth discovers a “line of development from the ‘autonomous preface’ to the ‘integrated preface’” (Wirth 2008, 92, my translation) in the 18th century: The editorial fiction increasingly becomes part of the fictional text itself (cf. also Ansorge 1969, 33; Takeda 2008, 81).

It should be clear by now that the editorial fiction written by an ‘author-editor’ and the editorial fiction written by a ‘character-editor’ are two disparate phenomena in many respects. Therefore I will analyse separately whether either of these editorial fictions might serve as a counterexample to Sir Sidney’s claim that the poets never lie, because they never assert anything – a question that becomes even more important considering Takeda’s description of the 18th century in Europe as a period “in which authors lie more and more brazenly to readers and readers allow themselves to be lied to by authors more and more enthusiastically” (Takeda 2008, 9, my translation). And indeed even one of the most famous editorial fictions seems to confirm this assessment. In the “Second Preface” of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761) “N” and “R” themselves are establishing the context of lying and the authorship of the text:

- N. When I ask you whether you are the author of these Letters,
 why then do you elude my question?
- R. For the very reason that I do not wish to tell a lie.
- N. But you also refuse to tell the truth?
- R. To declare that one wishes to keep truth unspoken is still to
 honor it. You would have an easier time with a man who was
 willing to lie. (Rousseau 1761, 20)

3. The ‘author-editor’

I will proceed chronologically and start with the historically antecedent editorial fiction in which it is the ‘author-editor’, i.e. not a fictive character, but the author himself who is uttering the sentences in his role as editor.¹⁶ In my discussion, I will concentrate on Gérard Genette’s analysis in *Paratexts* (1987). In this book Genette distinguishes ten different types of prefaces regarding the “preface-writer’s role in relation to the text” (Genette 1997, 179) and his “regime with respect to [...] ‘truth’” (ibid.):¹⁷

Regime \ Role	Authorial		Allographic	Actorial
Authentic	A ¹ (ass.)	A ² (dis.)	B	C
Fictive	D		E	F
Apocryphal	G		H	I

What matters most with reference to the editorial fiction is the dissection of cell A: According to Genette, A¹ represents the *assumptive* authentic authorial preface and A² represents the *disavowing* authentic authorial preface (cf. ibid., 184f.). Although in both kinds of prefaces “the real author of the text claims responsibility” (ibid., 183) for the preface – be it implicitly or explicitly by signing with his name or initials –, it is only in the assumptive authentic authorial prefaces (cell A¹) that he also admits to being the author of the text which follows. In the disavowing authentic authorial preface (cell A²), in contrast, the author “denies his authorship [...] of the text it introduces” (ibid., 185).

When exemplifying this second type of authentic authorial preface, Genette enumerates cases in which the author presents himself “as just the ‘editor’ of a homodiegetic narrative” (ibid., 186), variants in which he takes on “the role of editor with regard to an epistolary novel” (ibid.), and examples in which he attributes “the text to an anonymous writer” (ibid.) or “to a foreigner whose translator he claims to be” (ibid., 187). In view of these variants, it becomes obvious what Genette had in mind when he introduced the disavowing authentic authorial preface:¹⁸ the editorial fiction.

What are the most important aspects of Genette’s classification of editorial fiction into cell A²? In my view two issues are essential: First, the editorial fiction is, according to Genette, not part of the (fictional) text, but part of the *paratext*, and second, he obviously considers *the author himself* to be the one the utterances in the editorial fiction must be attributed to.¹⁹ Cell A² not only identifies the editorial fiction as *authentic* (which means that it is to be attributed to a real person), but also as *authorial* (which means that this real person is the empirical author).²⁰ These specifications as well as the classification as an autonomous preface – *hors texte* – clearly indicate that the editorial fiction Genette is

dealing with in A² is the version of the ‘author-editor’ – and this variant is supposed to comprise all those cases in which it is either unmistakably the empirical author who is talking (e.g. because he is explicitly mentioned by his name, his initials or in a headline like “preface of the author”) or in which the anonymous or pseudonymous writer of the preface “is provided with no biographical feature [...] that would allow him to be definitely distinguished from the (real) author of the text and therefore to be definitely considered fictive allographic” (ibid., 192).²¹

Now Genette’s conceptual analysis helps to clarify what ‘editorial fiction’ means in the version of the ‘author-editor’: It does not signify that the editor is invented as regards his *existence*, but his *function*. He is not a fictive character (for he is identical to the empirical author), but his function is feigned (for the author is denying the authorship of the fictional text and pretending merely to be the editor of authentic documents).

Relying on these insights, it is possible to make a first attempt at answering the central question of whether the editorial fiction has to be considered a lie. Based on Genette’s specifications, both of the conditions of lying stated in the beginning seem to be met:

- 1) The author is *asserting* that he is (only) the editor of the text.
- 2) The author *believes* – or even knows – that this assertion is false.

Ergo: The author is lying.²²

Probably this result is not very surprising. What is, however, surprising is that Genette would *not* agree to this argumentation: Although he decidedly assigned the editorial fiction to the *authentic* authorial prefaces (cell A) and not to the *fictive* prefaces (cells D-F), he repeatedly emphasizes “how much the disavowing preface, albeit authentic, inclines toward fiction (with its fictional disavowal of the text) and also toward the allographic, which it simulates by its (just as fictional) claim not to have been written by the author of the text” (Genette 1997, 187).²³ Therefore Genette would of course challenge the claim that the first condition is met: By assigning the editorial fiction to the realm of fictionality, he lifted the burden of truthfulness from the author. Writers who engage in fictional discourse are neither expected to say the truth nor do they assert the things they say. Ergo: According to Genette the editorial fiction in the version of the ‘author-editor’ does not contain a lie.

However, those curious to see Genette’s explanation for his decision to count the disavowing authentic authorial preface (and therefore the editorial fiction) among the ‘fictional prefaces’ will be disappointed. He only comments that the editorial fiction “is not serious in its discourse, for its author claims not to be the author of the text – although he will later admit he is, and it is almost always obvious that he is” (ibid., 278). So in his view, prefaces of the disavowing authentic authorial kind are “fictional [...] in the sense that they [...] offer a manifestly false attribution of the text” (ibid.). Though these explanatory statements are quite scarce, Genette’s rationale seems to run as follows: The author who is uttering the sentences containing the editorial fiction

is not speaking seriously but fictionally, because his assertion that he is only the editor of the text is obviously wrong.

In my opinion, there are at least two crucial aspects of this argumentation that are worth discussing: Should an utterance of something *wrong* truly be regarded as *fictional*? And is the author's claim to be the editor really *obviously* wrong because he *later admits* to the authorship?

First I will address the aspect of fictionality in terms of the question of whether the falsehood of the things stated in an editorial fiction is plausible evidence for the assessment that the author is engaging in fictional discourse. Taking a look at the latest research in fictionality theories, it becomes obvious that Genette's identification of fictionality and falsehood is mistaken:²⁴ It is neither true that every false utterance is fictional nor that every fictional utterance is false. Suppose for example someone asserted that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) at the age of twelve: It is evident that this assertion is not fictional (at least if it is not part of a fairy tale or something like that), though it is certainly false. And similarly, the assertion that Goethe wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther* at the age of 24 could be contained in a fictional text, though it is certainly true.

Genette's dubious use of the concept of 'fictionality' can be illustrated by means of his preface-diagram as well. The following diagram depicts his assertion that "cells (A², D, E, F and [...] G, H, and I) merge, except for some slight differences, to constitute the [...] *fictional prefaces*" (Genette 1997, 196) by highlighting in grey colour what Genette calls fictional discourse:

Role Regime	Authorial		Allographic	Actorial
Authentic	A ¹ (ass.)	A ² (dis.)	B	C
Fictive	D		E	F
Apocryphal	G		H	I

It seems odd that in the whole row of 'authenticity' one small parcel displays fictional, non-assertive discourse, whereas all the other types of authentic prefaces are written in factual discourse. Why is the reader supposed to take seriously the utterances made in all authentic prefaces (A¹, B and C) except for the disavowing authentic authorial type (A²)? Why is one authentic preface characterized by a "fictional or, if you prefer, playful regime (here the notions of fictional and playful seem to me more or less equivalent) – fictional in the sense that the reader is not really, or at least not permanently, expected to take the alleged status of their [the prefaces'] sender seriously" (ibid., 278)? The fact that in A¹ the author's assertions are true whereas in A² the author's assertions are false is not sufficient reason to claim that the discourses in A¹ and A² are not equally factual and assertive.

However, another argument may be extracted from Genette's remarks on the editorial fiction as well. Commenting on the disavowing authentic authorial preface using the example of Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Genette explains that "this type of preface already participates in the novelistic fiction, furnishing the textual fiction with a kind of frame narrative" (ibid., 282). If this is true, it resolves the problem in question: If the editorial fiction is *part of the fiction*, it is plausibly as fictional as the whole fiction itself.

But unfortunately by solving the problem of fictionality this argument generates two other serious problems: First, if the editorial fiction is supposed to be part of the fiction, how can it still be 'authentic', i.e. uttered by a *real* person? And second, in what way is the editorial fiction still *para-text*, if it "participates in the novelistic fiction" (ibid., 282; cf. Mommertz 2003, 32)? Since these questions are not only disregarded by Genette, but also can surely not be resolved easily, I want to propose that we should abandon the thesis that the editorial fiction (in the version of the 'author-editor') is part of the fiction as well as the thesis that it is written in fictional discourse. In my view, in all of the authentic prefaces the discourse is *equally factual* – irrespective of whether the assertions made in it are true or false.

So far, condition (1) seems to be met just as well as condition (2) so that the editorial fiction in the version of the 'author-editor' seems to consist of lies. But maybe the second crucial aspect of Genette's argument against the editorial fiction being factual discourse – and therefore against condition (1) – is more convincing: Is it true that the author, although he claims not to be the author of the text, "will later admit he is, and it is almost always obvious that he is" (ibid., 278)?²⁵ In other words: Do editorial fictions contain a hint by the 'author-editor' (like a wink) that he is not talking seriously but saying something obviously wrong?

It is clear that there is at least no *explicit* hint. Since most of the books including editorial fictions don't even name the real author on the front page, it would be quite surprising to see the authors clearing matters up in the text itself. Therefore the only way the author can explicitly admit to the authorship of the text appears to be through the use of the public epitext, i.e. by participating in debates, by giving interviews or by doing auto-commentaries. Explicit hints within the text are usually not to be found.²⁶

But maybe the 'author-editor' indicates the lacking seriousness by an *implicit* hint. One could argue that the reader knows very well that the 'author-editor' is not just the originator of the editorial fiction, but also of the following text itself – even if he is pretending not to be – for the reader is familiar with the phenomenon of editorial fiction and therefore knows that the real author is just 'hiding' behind the editor. According to this interpretation, though he does not explicitly indicate his actual role, the author is nevertheless entitled to count on the reader's knowledge and his (repeated) experience with editorial fictions. Thus the use of an editorial fiction might count as a signpost of fictionality itself.

Indeed it seems to be true that most contemporary readers see through the pretence of editorial fiction. We all know of this long-standing tradition and we are therefore aware that the author is not the editor of authentic documents, but that his authorship ranges over the complete text (cf. e.g. Nickel-Bacon et al. 2000, 297f.; Mommertz 2003, 105). But even if no competent reader of today questions that Samuel Richardson was the author of *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748), it is not certain that all of Richardson's contemporary readers were used to the phenomenon of editorial fiction in the same way.

However, it is not only Genette who believes that it is – and has been – obvious to the readers that the documents are not authentic and that the ‘author-editor’ is in fact the author of the whole invented story: Most of the research on editorial fiction confirms this analysis (cf. e.g. Miller 1965, 65, 88; Miller 1968, 101; Ansorge 1969, 46, 76f., 94; Picard 1971, 72, 91). Even Takeda and Wirth, who emphasize the historical development of the editorial fiction, agree with the estimation that “the reader of an epistolary novel knows at his heart [...] that he is not dealing with real, but with feigned letters” (Takeda 2008, 74, my translation; cf. *ibid.*, 32): “It is the naivety [to create an illusion of authenticity; E.K.] in particular that indicates that the attempt to deceive is not to be taken seriously” (Wirth 2008, 125, my translation).

I nevertheless want to cast doubt on these theses. Under the impression of the insights of several studies on the novel in the 18th century it does not seem evident to me that the readers at that time naturally figured out that the ‘author-editor’ in editorial fiction only pretended to be the editor of authentic documents – and that the authors could therefore count on this ability. There are a few aspects that support this doubt: Of course, the concept of fictionality was neither as developed nor as familiar as it is today (cf. Weber 1974, 72; Jørgensen 1976; Damerau 2003, chapt. I). Consequently, “according to the yet naïve perception of that time the fictive reality of novels and the reality experienced in life corresponded directly” (Weber 1974, 35, my translation) – a perception that was effective at least until the middle of the 18th century (cf. *ibid.*, 118). Furthermore, the novel was not a well-established genre yet (cf. Jørgensen 1976, 8), and last, as Weber and especially Wirth emphasised, the distinction between author and narrator was only slowly beginning to emerge (cf. Weber 1974, 53; Wirth 2008, 13).

In consideration of these facts it does not seem plausible to assume that the readers of the 17th and 18th century were definitely used to seeing through the pretence of the ‘author-editor’ in the editorial fiction. Rather, this argument put forward by Genette (and other researchers) appears to be anachronistic, as it judges the editorial fiction from a modern narratological perspective. Even if this must remain speculative to some extent, to me it seems more natural to believe that the fictivity or authenticity of the presented documents and their true originator were not obvious – at least not in any case: As Mommertz pointed out, some of the authors in the early 18th century “consciously accepted that (or possibly even tried to achieve that) part of the readership would

take their texts at face value” (Mommertz 2003, 106, my translation; cf. also Weber 1974, 68ff.) – and therefore voluntarily practiced a fraud on the readers.²⁷

What does this mean concerning the question of whether editorial fiction in the version of the ‘author-editor’ constitutes a lie? In the light of the considerations above I want to argue that the author was lying whenever he did not ensure the feasibility of the reader’s figuring out the deceit,²⁸ e.g. by giving contradictory signals of authenticity and invention or by explicitly expounding the problems of truth and fiction (as e.g. Rousseau did in his *Julie, or the New Heloise* [1761] or Johann Gottfried Schnabel in his *Insel Felsenburg* [1731-1743]).²⁹ Whenever these hints were missing, the author was lying because both of the conditions of the assertion-based account of lying were met: The author asserted that he was only the editor of the text and the author knew that this assertion was false.³⁰

4. The ‘character-editor’

Compared to the variant of the ‘author-editor’, the editorial fiction in the version of the ‘character-editor’ is easier to judge, especially because we are still used to this type today. Though there are a number of narratologists who only consider this variant of editorial fiction,³¹ Wirth and Takeda convincingly pointed out that the editorial fiction progressively merges with the fictional text – and therefore that the ‘author-editor’ more and more becomes a ‘character-editor’, a fictive person (cf. Takeda 2008, 34f., 81, 100; Wirth 2008, 92, 147ff.). This shift is particularly obvious in Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which the fictive editor of the preface has to take over the function of a narrator in the end because of the death of the character who wrote the ‘published’ letters. This, of course, must not be interpreted as there being an ‘author-editor’ at the beginning who switches over to being a fictive allographic ‘character-editor’ in the end. Instead, the fictive editor must be considered part of the fictive story right from the beginning.³²

Other blatant examples are editorial fictions presented by editors whose names or biographies clearly diverge from the empirical author’s, as for example in the editorial fiction of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* signed by “A. G. Pym. New York, July, 1838” (Poe 1838, 6). After pointing out that he was constantly urged by some gentlemen to publish a report of his extraordinary series of adventures in the South Seas, the editor A. G. Pym adds that

[a]mong those gentlemen [...] was Mr. Poe, lately editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, a monthly magazine [...]. He afterward proposed (finding that I would not stir in the matter) that I should allow him to draw up, in his own words, a narrative of the earlier portion of my adventures, from facts afforded by myself, publishing it in the Southern Messenger *under the garb of fiction*. To this, perceiving no objection, I consented, stipulating only that my real name should be retained. Two numbers of the pretended fiction appeared, consequently, in

the Messenger for January and February (1837),³³ and, in order that it might certainly be regarded as fiction, the name of Mr. Poe was affixed to the articles in the table of contents of the magazine.

The manner in which this *ruse* was received has induced me at length to undertake a regular compilation and publication of the adventures in question. (Poe 1838, 5)³⁴

Clearly, the most important difference between an ‘author-editor’ and a ‘character-editor’ (apart from the one that another entity is speaking) is that in the latter variant the editorial fiction becomes part of the fiction itself. Instead of being extra-fictional paratext, this kind of editorial fiction is similar to a fictive frame story that supplies the background for the basic text or documents.³⁵ Accordingly, the fiction does not start *after* the editorial fiction, but *with* it: The editorial fiction partakes in fictional discourse, but not because it is obviously false (as Genette argued with respect to the utterances of an ‘author-editor’), but because the ‘character-editor’ is part of the fictive world.³⁶

Therefore it can be concluded that the notion of ‘editorial fiction’ that applies in the case of a ‘character-editor’ is exactly the reverse of the one in the case of an ‘author-editor’: Regarding the latter, ‘editorial fiction’ means that the editor *is not a fictive character*, but that his *function is feigned*, whereas regarding the former it means that the editor *is a fictive character* and that his *function is not feigned*. Accordingly, the fictive ‘character-editor’ is not lying:

- 1) The fictive editor is *asserting* that he is the editor of the following documents.
- 2) The fictive editor (usually) *does not believe* that this assertion is false.

Ergo: The fictive editor is not lying.³⁷

This analysis explicitly contradicts the view of some narratologists who would question that condition (2) of the assertion-based account of lying is not met. Hans Rudolf Picard, for example, states that the “fictive editor [i.e. the ‘character-editor’] [...] is commenting on how he *allegedly* came into possession of the letters, that he does not want to withhold them from the public, and is *pretending* not to be responsible for their content” (Picard 1971, 15f., my translation, my emphasis; cf. also *ibid.*, 12; Stanzel 1955, 38). But this assertion would only be right for the ‘author-editor’, because the ‘character-editor’ did not ostensibly, but *really* provide the letters (within the fiction). And similarly he is not merely pretending that he is not responsible for the content of the letters, he *really* is not – at least in the prevailing case in which he is not contradicted by another fictive character. Within the fiction, he is in fact the editor of the following documents – and therefore he is rightly convinced of what he is saying and does not believe that his assertion is false. Ergo: He is not lying.

The same is true of the author as well, but for opposite reasons: Whereas regarding the ‘character-editor’ condition (1) is met, but condition (2) is not, regarding the author condition (2) is met, but condition (1) is not. The author believes (or rather knows) that it is *not true* that the letters (etc.) presented in the novel are authentic documents published by some editor. But in this kind of

editorial fiction he does not in fact *assert* that they are, but engages in fictional discourse instead – in the main text as well as in the editorial ‘frame story’.

To finally put it all in a nutshell, the variant of editorial fiction written by a ‘character-editor’ completely confirms Sir Sidney’s claim that “[t]he poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth” (Sidney 1595, 52f.) – and neither does the fictive editor – whereas an ‘author-editor’ in the preceding version of the editorial fiction can not be exculpated from lying throughout.³⁸

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¹ Cf. Plato 377d: “In the past, it’s always been the poets who’ve composed untrue stories to tell people, and it’s no different nowadays.”

“Which stories?” he [Adeimantus] asked. ‘And what’s their defect, in your view?’

“There is no defect which one ought to condemn more quickly and more thoroughly,” I replied, ‘especially if the lies have no redeeming feature.’”

² There is a long tradition of philosophers from Saint Augustine (c 395b) to Harry G. Frankfurt (2005, 7f.) who define lying as a speaker saying something he believes to be false with the intention to deceive. Lately, this view has been challenged by several counter-examples that Sorensen calls “bald-faced lies [that] are not deceptive” (Sorensen 2007, 252). Cf. also Carson (2006) and Fallis (2009).

³ Some people like Carson consider it to be a necessary additional condition of lying that “S makes a false statement” (Carson 2006, 298). I don’t want to enter into the discussion whether this falsehood condition is really necessary since it won’t make any difference to the following considerations. Whoever regards the definition as being insufficient might add condition (3) *p* is false (and will arrive at the same conclusions). Additionally, there is an ongoing discussion about the question what “to assert that *p*” in condition (1) is supposed to mean (cf. e.g. Fallis 2009; Stokke 2013; for an extensive overview of the concept of ‘assertion’ in general see Brown / Cappelen 2011). I can not take a firm stand concerning this difficult topic here. For my purpose it will suffice to determine that condition (1) implies that *S* believes himself to be in a conversational context in which he is expected to say the truth as well as that *S* does not give any hints that he is not being serious and e.g. just talking ironically (as for example by winking).

⁴ I do not want to draw a distinction here. The following considerations apply to any writer of a fictional text, be they poets, authors, playwrights, etc.

⁵ For a definition and discussion of “compositionism”, i.e. the theory of fictionality maintaining that a fictional text may contain factual statements, see Konrad (2014).

⁶ The editorial fiction is not necessarily employed (only) in the preface, although this is the prevalent method I will focus on in the following. Generally, it can be used in footnotes, mot-tos, epilogues etc. as well (cf. Mommertz 2003, chapt. 3.2).

⁷ In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) the editor reports on a similarly complicated process of discovery, translation, and publication.

⁸ Cf. Langford’s criticism on the usually neglected editorial fiction in Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722): “It is surprising how little attention the preface to *Moll Flanders* has received. When critics mention it at all, they usually do so in a rather dismissive manner, often characterizing it as a critical apparatus which Defoe uses to make clear his intentions and, as the novel’s moral conscience, to affirm the attitudes of a now repentant Moll. But why should we read the preface in this manner?” (Langford 1992, 165; also cited in Mommertz 2003, 12). A paradigmatic form of this disregard is to be found in Schmidt-Henkel 1965 (cf. esp. 107).

⁹ Only during the last decade has editorial fiction repeatedly become the main topic of some studies (cf. e.g. Mommertz 2003, Takeda 2008 and Wirth 2008).

¹⁰ The corresponding German notions used in the cited studies are “fiktional”, “fiktiv”, “vor-geblich” and “angeblich”.

¹¹ In the German original Picard (1971) mentions “fiktiver Herausgeber” (13, 60), “angeblicher Herausgeber” (18), “fingierter Herausgeber” (34, 91) and “‘éditeur’-Autor” (75); Miller mentions “Autor-Herausgeber” (1965, 58; 1968, 176, fn. 42), “fiktiver Herausgeber” (1965, 67), “fingierter Redakteur” (1965, 59) and “erzählender Herausgeber” (1968, 164).

¹² The genesis of modern authorship in general is outlined in several articles in Detering 2002.

¹³ According to Takeda, the editorial fiction stands in the tradition of the “feigned letters” of political and theological satires and pamphlets during the Enlightenment as well as in the tradition of the common attempt to compensate the deficit in truthfulness and factuality specific to the fictional genre by attesting the authenticity of the story or the presented documents (cf. Takeda 2008, 29ff.). Here one can easily see the genealogy of the editorial fiction as arising from an area between fact and fiction. Cf. also Beebe 1999 with respect to the epistolary novel as a genre between fact and fiction in general.

¹⁴ Of course, both Takeda and Wirth also received Genette’s elaborate analysis of the paratext (1987). Since I will extensively discuss Genette’s approach in the following, I will leave out his results at this point.

¹⁵ Surprisingly, Takeda does not even mention Ansorge in her bibliography, whereas Wirth explicitly refers to him (cf. Wirth 2008, esp. 123ff. and 148).

¹⁶ There are a few studies that *only* consider the ‘author-editor’ external to the fictive story and completely neglect the other option of a ‘character-editor’ internal to the fictive story (cf. e.g. Ehrenzeller 1955, 130; Stocker 2003, 215; Erlebach 1990, 163).

¹⁷ Genette defines the notions in the horizontal line as follows: “The alleged author of a preface may be the author [...] of the text: this very common situation we will call the *authorial*, or *autographic*, preface. Or the alleged author of a preface may be one of the characters in the action, when there are characters and action: this is the *actorial* preface. Or the alleged author of a preface may be a wholly different (third) person: the *allographic* preface.” (Genette 1997, 178f.) As to the concepts in the vertical line, Genette specifies: “A preface may be attributed to a real person or to a fictive person. If the attribution to a real person is confirmed by some other (if possible, by *every* other) paratextual sign, we will call the preface *authentic*. If the attribution to a real person is invalidated by some paratextual sign, we will call the preface *apocryphal*. And if the person to whom the preface is attributed is fictive, we will call the attribution, and therefore the preface, *fictive*” (ibid., 179).

¹⁸ Genette adds that this type of preface (A²) “could no doubt equally well be called *crypto-authorial*, for the author uses it to conceal (or deny) his authorship; it could also be called *pseudo-allographic*, for the author uses it to present himself as an allographic preface-writer, claiming responsibility only for the preface, not for any other part of the work” (ibid., 185).

¹⁹ Genette also enumerates four different functions of disavowing authentic authorial prefaces: to explain “the circumstances in which the pseudo-editor acquired possession of this text” (ibid., 280), to indicate “the corrections made, or not made, in the text” (ibid., 282), “to provide a brief biography of the alleged author” (ibid.), and to provide “a more or less value-enhancing commentary on the text” (ibid., 283). As Mommertz showed in his elaborated analysis, this is only a small extract of the possible functions of editorial fictions (cf. Mommertz 2003, 101ff.).

²⁰ Cf. Genette 1997, 185, where Genette claims that the disavowing authentic authorial preface is “authentic in its status of attribution in that its declared author is indeed the real author of the text”. Cf. also ibid., 278.

²¹ Cf. also Genette 1997, 193: “[I]t is only the methodological principle of economy that will lead us to resolve this question [whether the preface-writer is the author or a fictive allographic writer] in favor of the disavowing authorial, that is, in favor of the least costly hypothesis – the one that spares us an unnecessary agent.” In my opinion by proceeding like this Genette acts contrary to his own “narratological principle: to attribute (in fiction, of course) to the author only what it is physically impossible to attribute to the narrator” (ibid., 154) – or to a fictive editor.

²² For those who wanted to add falsehood-condition (3): This condition is met as well. The assertion is *false*.

²³ Cf. also Oura who describes the editorial fiction fabricated by an “author-editor” as “semi-fiction” (Oura 1987, 5).

²⁴ For assertive refusal see e.g. Gabriel 1975, 27; Walton 1990, 79; Gertken / Köppe 2009, 232. Nevertheless, the identification of fictionality and falsehood – usually referring to Russell 1956 – is not completely extinct, cf. e.g. Korch et al. 1972, esp. 111.

²⁵ Cf. also Genette 1997, 185: “In this preface [the disavowing authentic authorial preface] the real author claims – *here again without really inviting us to believe him* – not to be the author of the text” (my emphasis).

²⁶ Editorial fictions that ironically address the problem of authorship in the editorial fiction itself (as e.g. Rousseau in his *Julie, or the New Heloise*) constitute an exception.

²⁷ Cf. Schreier 2009, 319: “How is it [...] that readers know in which communication system to operate, that operations of fictionalization, not factualization, are called for in the reception process? It is probably first and foremost paratextual information that functions as an orienting signal”. Thus it is evident that deceptive paratextual information is especially effective in misdirecting the reader.

²⁸ Note that for condition (1) not to be met it is only important that the author clearly indicates that he is not asserting what he is saying. It is irrelevant whether the reader actually figures out the deceit.

²⁹ Cf. Romberg 1962, 72ff.; Miller 1965, 63ff.; Picard 1971, 71ff.; Weber 1974, 69f.; Jørgensen 1976; Genette 1997, 324; Moravetz 1990, 204ff.; Takeda 2008, 34ff.; Wirth 2008, 133ff.

³⁰ I am aware of the fact that it might even be considered anachronistic to ask the question of truth and lie in this context. Of course, if we assumed that the authors themselves weren’t aware of the deceptive nature of the editorial fiction either (e.g. because of the lack of clear-cut boundaries between history and fiction, between verisimilitude and truth etc.), they would be exculpated from lying throughout.

³¹ Cf. e.g. Romberg, who – though he at first differentiates editorial fictions in which “the author pretends to be nothing more than the editor” (Romberg 1962, 68) and cases in which it is “impossible for us to identify the editor with the author” (ibid., 70) – finally concludes: “The editor must be considered as a part of the fiction, whether the author makes of him an autonomous person equipped with fictitious civic rights and status and a fictitious past, or else himself appears in his person and lends him his name” (ibid., 76f.). Cf. also Stanzel, who stresses the “seediness of his existence” (Stanzel 1955, 55; my translation) at first, but considers the fictional editor to be a variant of the first-person narrator – and therefore a ‘character-editor’ – in the end (cf. Stanzel 1982, 258ff.). Cf. also Mommertz, who defines the editorial fiction as a (fictive) frame story presented by a fictive editor (Mommertz 2003, e.g. 11). Cf. also Oura 1987, 17; Jäggi 1994, 74; Moennighoff 1996, 351; Moennighoff 2003, 810.

³² Genette also differentiates between the editorial fiction of an ‘author-editor’ (as the disavowing authentic authorial preface in cell A²) and the editorial fiction of a ‘character-editor’ (as fictional preface in cells D-F) by appeal to the decisive question of whether the writer of the editorial fiction “is provided with no biographical feature [...] that would allow him to be definitely distinguished from the (real) author of the text and therefore to be definitely considered fictive allographic” (Genette 1997, 192). Of course, this basis for decision-making, which neglects the historical development of the editorial fiction, leads Genette astray in several of his assessments (for example, he ascribes the prefaces of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* to cell A²).

³³ This is what in fact happened.

³⁴ Additionally, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* contains a turn similar to Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*: In a “note” at the end of the book another fictive ‘character-editor’ complains about the loss of the last chapters of Arthur Gordon Pym’s story because of the “late and distressing death of Mr. Pym” (Poe 1838, 125). Thus the anonymous allographic ‘character-editor’ in this note frames the story of the actorial ‘character-editor’ Arthur Gordon Pym. This complex example of an editorial fiction is discussed at length in Eco 1994, esp. 29ff.

³⁵ In fact, there is a quite obvious structural resemblance between the editorial fiction in the version of the ‘character-editor’ and a narrator who is a chronicler or who tells a story that he himself has been told, as for example in Theodor Storm’s *The Rider on the White Horse* (1888). For an elaborate comparison between editorial fictions and frame stories see Wirth 2008, esp. 162ff. Cf. also Vogt 1972, 81; Jäggi 1994, 73ff.; Nickel-Bacon et al. 2000, 297; Moennighoff 2003, 810; Mommertz 2003, esp. 39ff.; Fludernik 2006, 71f.; Takeda 2008, 76.

³⁶ As e.g. Romberg 1962, 76f., Ansorge 1969, 68, and Mommertz 2003, 97, pointed out, the ‘character-editor’ may sometimes even bear the name of the author. In cases like this, the ‘character-editor’ is a fictive counterpart of the author. This might sound a little peculiar at first, but in fact it is not even unusual for an author to appear as a fictionalized character in his own story: Michel Houellebecq even gets killed in his novel *The Map and the Territory* (2010).

³⁷ Again, for those who wanted to add falsehood-condition (3): This condition is not met either: The fictive editor’s assertion is (usually) *not false* within the fiction.

³⁸ I am deeply grateful to Hans Rott and Verena Wagner for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to Anneli Jefferson for careful proofreading.