

## *Originality of Authorship in Dean Koontz's CO LD FIRE*

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### *Introduction*

Dean Koontz (born 1945) is an author trying to interpret the cultural and social milieu of his country and his times. His university education drove him to the world of English and American Literature, inducing in him self-criticism and the criticism of any probable seemingly intellectual background. He is aware of today's political, spiritual, and philosophical issues. He has taken a keen interest in the curious. He is fond of the rear corridors of the sub-conscious. His works can be additionally meaningful to the well-informed, rational audience and enjoyable by the less critical mindset. According to Terry Eagleton's *MARXISM & LITERARY CRITICISM* (1976.Reprinted2002), the writer must appeal to various social levels:

Books are not just structures of meaning, they are also commodities produced by publishers and sold on the market at a profit...Writers are not just transposers of trans-individual mental structures, they are also workers hired by publishing houses to produce commodities which will sell.

(pp.55-56)

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Koontz makes significant connections with earlier texts, cultural, and sub cultural products, such as his allusions and borrowings indicate, in CF. Consequently, his narrative is founded upon real, documentable, traceable, older texts, whether narratives or otherwise. He even uses autobiographical details in writing CF. Obviously, honesty in giving the semblance of truth and credibility is his aim. Narrative art may tell the truth in various ways, and in defamiliarized manifestations of the familiar, to aid and inspire the process of critical thinking. Koontz invites the audience to contemplate his narrative, even after their reading of the text is done. Part of this is the effect and the hangover of the texts which he derives his discourse from.

This novel, at first sight, can hardly be seen as a narrative based on former, time-honored, long-standing texts, established writings, as well as pop-culture iconic figures, at the first reading. The reason may have to do with what Wilfred L. Guerin describes as "source study" because it deals with the origins of a work and its genesis: such as, Shakespeare's works and their indebtedness to Chaucer's *CANTERBURY TALES*, or Sir Thomas Malory's *MORTE D'ARTHUR* and his French, English, and European sources. This kind of study helps the researcher understand creativity as ordering, insertion, and organization of already existing material (See *A HANDBOOK OF CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LITERATURE*. Reprinted 2005. PP 46-48).

Thus, it would be more complicated to tackle the intricate narrative design that builds on layers of an invariable core. Koontz's matter and style, apparently, combine together. Then, they work in the reader's unconscious, while the consciousness is absorbed in the social and moral problems of the outward text and its wealth of pictures depicting defective human nature. The narrative goes on, but it needs concepts, ideas, prestigious referential cores and icons from the postmodern (sub) culture. As a result, the author works on the primordial matter which is called "Literary Heritage", or traditional sources. Koontz manages to give the impression that he is the originator of the text.

The Distinctive Features of Koontz' Text: Methods to Avoid Appearing Indebted to Earlier Authors: This is the point evident in the actual analysis of the textual selections. Koontz relies on a variety of means and methods that, on the one hand, give the impression that he is the originator of his books, and that prove Michel Foucault's theory that there is no longer anyone to be described as original author, on the other hand. Thus, from reading CF, we can regard these as noteworthy points:

1. Displacement of chronological and topographic code in the narrative. Thus, if the original source happened in Medieval China, or ancient Arabia, Koontz's text would shift that to Postmodern California. This also implies that the cultural code will have to be modified to suit the status-quo in the CF text world.

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2. Stemming from the above, there will be a duality, even multiplicity, of narrative patterning in the story outline. Most probably, he could be more comfortable as an organizer of old material than inventor of new subject-matter. Koontz was for a long time a teacher of English Literature. He knew the Shakespearean practice well enough to do something similar. The core of Shakespeare is Greek, Roman, Chaucerian, Danish, Italian, Scottish, and Welsh narratives recast in his own version. Koontz might be, in this sense, another torch-bearer in the path of the older master. This also precludes an ostensible change in the textual relations of the main characters.
3. The codification of narrative communication through a chain of associations and inner references.
4. The individual words or the lexical items of the utterances are covertly shared, repeated, and recycled from earlier text. However, they carry on with them in the new text a different chain of associations. This is due to the fact that the cast of the dramatis personae in the work are different.
5. Focus: The focal point of the borrowed elements, whether utterances or situations or any other item, receive emphasis that may not exactly be an echo to the back sources. Thus, focalization of interest alters the manner of articulation, setting the tone for the defamiliarization of the work. In this, the logic of the new work will acquire an identity of its

own. Thus, COLD FIRE will be an assimilated, organically-linked synthesis.

### ***Theoretical Foundaton***

In his discussion of the emergence of the novel as a genre in *STUDYING THE NOVEL* (Edward Arnold Press.London.1989), Jeremy Hawthorn stresses four points, some of which are applicable to CF, regarding authorship therein. These are: the rise of literacy, the rise of the printing press business, the market economy, and the rise of individualism (pp.7-8). Likewise, when Suman Gupta, in *CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: THE BASICS* (Rutledge, 2012) discusses authorship, he deals with it from the purely legal point of view. The author is no longer the first and foremost originator of the text. He or she is the “legally recognized person” who has the intellectual property called the text. Gupta carries on: “We seldom think of literary texts as legal documents when reading them, but they are covered now as the intellectual property of authors and their inheritors” (p.58). This understanding reflects the awareness, belief, reflection, or the concept that authorship is no longer the signifier of exhaustive, struggling creative composition, which confirms Michel Foucault’s thesis in his 1969 essay entitled “What is an author?” It also confirms Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (1968).

Likewise, Wellek and Warren in their discussion of the nature and mode of narrative fiction in *THEORY OF LITERATURE* (1949.Reprinted 1978), state the following: “The novel as an art form is, as one can say in German, a form

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of Dichtung: is, indeed, in its high form, the modern descendant of the epic” (P.212). They point out” the widespread association of the novel with entertainment, amusement, and escape, rather than serious art” (P.212). They also describe this attitude as the “lingering American popular view, disseminated by pedagogues” (p.212). This is because novels are books made with a narrow aim at the market” (P.212). Wellek and Warren reaffirm that the motivation and composition of novels come from the author’s experience as well as his reading: “..the ‘raw materials’ of fiction[are]the author’s experience, reading, etc.” (P.218).

What is relevant here is how the above conforms with Ronald Barthes’ view in his 1968 essay “The Death of the Author”. He views the author there as the one who has the power to mix writings together to come up with the new text. The author is someone who puts together a text: “a text ...made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation...” (Lodge, P.150). Barthes also argues earlier that the literary “text is not a line of words...but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” (Lodge.P.149). Moreover, the birth of the reader, which is the chief purpose of writing, “must be at the cost of the Author” (P.150).

### ***Samples Chosen from COLD FIRE for Analysis***

There are some samples that embody the theme of this research. They include deeper meanings which are an invisible

and an inaudible part of what is meant by the speakers when they make an utterance in their minds, but not part of what they actually say in their consciousness. They may communicate it inadvertently. The distinction is seldom clear to the inexperienced or uninitiated audience. Here is one of the effective extracts in the novel. It is our first sample: Jim Ironheart arrived at the church in the desert:

1. The words OUR LADY OF THE DESERT were on a brass plaque beside the double doors. He had been a Catholic once. In a part of his heart, he still was a Catholic. He had been many things –Methodist, Jew, Buddhist, Baptist, Moslem, Hindu, Taoist, more-and although he was no longer any of them in practice, he was still all of them in experience.

(P.63)

Koontz is showing us in a few words that there is a failure in being mono-cultural, because it is a meaningless myth, irrelevant and unrewarding in the Postmodern world. The Postmodern man is in need of various support systems, especially, in his spiritual life.

2. She said,” That is an interesting name you have.”  
 “Jim?”  
 “Ironheart,” she said.”Sounds like an American Indian name.”  
 “Wouldn’t mind having a little Chippewa or Apache blood, make me less dull, a little exotic, mysterious. But it’s just the Anglicized version of the family’s original German name-Eisenhertz.”

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(P.33)

The name, in this case” Ironheart” stands as a living example as to how a piece of knowledge, an utterance, a text, or even a single lexical item, produced in the past, in a particular region (here, Germany or the Native Amerindian Homelands) and in a particular substratum language from the said region, can acquire an additional or hegemonic prestige. The result is that Jim, in a sense, turns into a special version of the Man of Steel, the Last Son of Krypton, a myth created in 1938 by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Jim in this conversation is the Man of Steel, because his name is based on this heritage. His powerful character, consequently, is a borrowed identity. The author used this method to facilitate the process of characterization. The name “Ironheart” will do the trick and make the right associations for those who are initiated in the globalized allusions.

3. *“It was a world that bred monsters, and this beast might be hydra-headed”.*

(P.52)

The context of this key-utterance is the rise of psychopathic and sociopathic criminals in the postmodern world. However, the author is making use of the Greek myth of the undead cobra. Every time its head is removed, two fresh heads replace the severed one. Again, borrowing this allusion from the Classics saves Koontz the effort of writing additional



pages to explain the multiplication of breaches against the law in the Postmodern times.

4. *“He was like Batman without the funny clothes”*  
(P.87)

This reference is to the popular culture of the DC Comic Books and Warner Brothers movies. The creator of Batman was Bob Kane (1915 –1998). The opening caption that old readers remember of the debut of Batman, in Detective Comics number 27, dated May 1939 reads as follows: “The Bat-man :a mysterious and adventurous figure fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong doer in his lone battle against the evil forces of society- his identity remains unknown!” (Quoted by Grant Morrison,p.20). Grant Morrison connects the Batman to the dualism of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with a personality split into a handsome half and a vampiric, demonic, sinister second half. The crime-fighter’s outfit suggests the scary, Gothic look of the hero. The said outfit “often appeared to have been carved from solid mahogany” (Morrison p.18). Thus, Jim’s characterization in the novel is indirectly explained via reference to personalities created by other writers of different genres in assorted media.

5. “At last he said, ‘So you want to be my Lois Lane.’ For a moment she had no idea what he was talking about. Then she remembered: Metropolis, the Daily Planet, Perry White, Lois Lane, Clark Kent...”  
(p.196)

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Once more, Koontz wants to stress the point that his hero, Jim, is a figure larger than life, like the Man of Steel, the Last Son of Krypton. He also wants to emphasize that his girl friend Holly Thorne is a reincarnation of Lois Lane, who is Clark Kent's colleague at the Daily Planet Newspaper. This is common knowledge to everyone familiar with the writings of Siegel and Shuster. The point is that Koontz seems to tell the reader indirectly that Jim is invincible. Nobody can defeat him. The only one he really has to fear is himself, his own powers, his own ego. In a large sense, the chaos he combats is caused by himself. As Dick Hebdige argues in "Subculture: the Meaning of Style" regarding the presence of elements from pop-culture and subculture in literary works; "...contrary to the popular myth which presents subcultures as lawless forms, the internal structure of any particular subculture is characterized by an extreme orderliness: each part is organically related to the other parts..." (Rivkin& Ryan, P.1070).

6. "You ever read the Bible?"

"Sure."

"Says in there that God wiped out the evil people in Sodom and Gomorrah with volcanoes, earthquakes, rains of fire. Flooded the whole world once, didn't he? Made the Red Sea wash over the pharaoh's soldiers, drowned them all."

(P.200)

The author is invoking the story in Genesis: 19. Apart from this, the reference seems to put the blame on God

Almighty for the errors of mankind. Koontz shows us that there are people who get the wrong message even from the Scriptures. The point in Genesis is the wages of sinning against God, not the cruelty of the Creator. In effect, the author is revealing to us the mentality of the interlocutors in the novel. This helps him much in setting the tone of the narrative.

7. *“Aren’t we back to your being God now?”*

(P.283)

This is an indirect reference to the Classical concept of the Hero’s being the son of Zeus, or Jupiter, or being himself divine because he is the offspring of divinity. Such a statement reminds the reader of the Postmodern Savior who is larger than life. Again, the tone of organic unity will be unified thus.

In the analytic process of the samples above, Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel” provides working tools. In the said essay, he writes: “The novel can be defined as a variety of social speech types, sometimes even... a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (Rivkin and Ryan, p.33). The point to notice here is that the variety which is organized artistically operates as “an expressive system, that is, in the forms that carry its meanings (P.34). Nevertheless, despite the variety of the voice sources, the polyphony, and the diversity of register,” the very language of the writer (the poet or the novelist) can be taken as a professional jargon on a par with professional jargons” (p.34). This means that, despite the alien source of the utterance, it is the property of the author who artistically uses it. It, moreover, turns into his own

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trademark jargon, or typical stylistic feature. As we have seen, the textual sources vary from the Scriptures to literary, cultural, and sub cultural products. However, the final output is legally the property of the author, who, according to Barthes and Foucault, no longer exists in the traditional meaning.

### ***Conclusion***

The selected utterances in *COLD FIRE* point out to the following results:

1. Koontz is the author of the text in the postmodern sense: he is the legal author of a text made up of various and assorted elements. The literary utterances are a polyphonic linguistic entity selected from multiple origins.
2. What is meant, by the characters or Koontz himself, is reflected on the chain of associations which the characters invoke in the reader, rather than what they say or do. What is said, per se, has limited existence in itself, because it is derived from earlier texts. However, the context is modified to suit the narrative requirements of the resultant text.
3. Consequently, there is an independent meaning in the text other than the words of the sources actually used. What is meant is communicated in a manner that makes it significant by contextual modes.
4. Dean Koontz offers an interestingly new meaning and purpose for authorship. It is, in its own way, highly impersonal.
5. The real author is implicit throughout the novel. It is the author's culture, subculture, and intellectual leanings, which the actual consciousness that composed the book in that fashion.

6. It is likely that this approach to writing that makes his narratives rank among the best-known in American novels of today.
7. This work proves that in dealing with postmodern novels, the traditional meaning of originality, authorship, and creativity are hardly at work. The idea of authorship is a legal concept, but the composition itself is the impersonal, collective (un) consciousness at work in the writer's mindset and zeitgeist.
8. It is obvious that Koontz has derived his thoughts and concepts from sources related to all aspects of reality in the real world. Starting with sources connected to religion to others related to popular literature.

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## أصالة التأليف في رواية دين كونتز الموسومة (بالنار الباردة)

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### المستخلص

يستقصي البحث الأصالة في الفن الروائي فاحصاً هذا المفهوم في رواية النار الباردة (١٩٩١) للروائي الأمريكي دين كونتز، بتحليل انموذجات و تعبيرات ذات دلالات وإشارات تحيل إلى نصوص مبكرة، بعضها تراثية، و بعضها الآخر نتاج الثقافة الشعبية المتداولة. وينجم عن توظيف كونتز لهذه الاقتباسات و التضمينات، سرد روائي تكون مليكته القانونية و الفكرية حقاً من حقوق المؤلف، مع أن جذور هذا السرد وتوجهه الفكري نتاج رهط كبير من المبدعين القداماء. ويتضح من النتائج أن إبداع ما بعد الحداثة أمر نسبي لأنه قابل للظهور حصرياً بفضل ارتباطه مع تأليفات أقدم تقع خارج عالمه الذاتي، فيستقي منها كونتز المفردات الأساسية لخطابه، بعد إخضاع مصادره لسلسلة من التحويلات تطال الشكل الخارجي، لقطع صلتها الأولية مع إطارها المرجعي الماضي وتطويعها لسياقها المستحدث، موحياً بان المتولد هو ابتكار أصيل جاء بمجمله من طرفه .