

## AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

For most of my life, I have been subject to some sort of authority. At first it was the authority of my parents and teachers. Then, at the age of eighteen, I had to do National Service. Now there's a real age test – do you remember National Service? Do you even know what it was? For my younger readers, I should explain that over the period 1948 to 1963, all healthy young men had to undergo military training (women and conscientious objectors were exempt). At first the training period was eighteen months, but I was unlucky enough to qualify for service in 1951, when the period had just been increased to two years. So I learned to appreciate military discipline, which was harsher and stricter than any I had had before. I also glimpsed something of the chain of authority. The corporals who shouted at me were in turn shouted at by sergeants, who were shouted at by the SWO (Station Warrant Officer), a fearsome figure. And so it went on. Even at university I was under the authority of my tutor and the other lecturers. Then I was out in the world of work, and the authority figure now was my manager.

In today's world, authority is not always a popular word, and is something to be resisted rather than accepted. That brings me back again to my time in National Service. A sergeant (another authority figure) was giving us a lecture on authority. "What you lot need," he said, "is discipline." I think we all inwardly groaned. For us, discipline meant "Do what I tell you and don't argue back." But then he added, "And you know what discipline is, don't you? It's the attitude of a disciple." At once the word took on an entirely new meaning for me. A disciple, as I see it, is someone who readily places themselves under the authority of a person they consider greater and more worthy than themselves. It's not something to be done lightly, but it is done willingly and even joyfully. An actor will respect the authority of a director of whom he approves. An artist may respect the authority of a painter who has greater skills and insight and is eager to share them. A scholar, however learned they may consider themselves, will gladly put themselves under the authority of someone who knows more about the subject. All this is true, provided that the person in authority can win the respect of their 'disciples'. Otherwise they may find it hard to accept their authority.

It's a strange word, authority, isn't it? Embedded in it is the word 'author'. But do authors have authority? Admittedly Shelley said that, and I quote: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," but I think he was being a wee bit presumptuous there. But what about authors? As an author myself, I certainly have authority over my characters. One of the joys of writing novels is that you can organise the lives of the people you create. Even there though, the characters can sometimes rebel and do unexpected things. Still puzzled, I checked my dictionary, to find that the word 'author' derives from a Latin word meaning 'to increase or originate'. The actual noun can be translated as, 'founder, master, leader.' One definition says, "An author is the creator or originator of any written work... More broadly defined, an author is the person who originated or gave existence to anything". So in that sense, since God created the world and everything in it, he is an author, (the ultimate author), and has the ultimate authority. I'm happy to place myself under his authority and be his disciple. Seems logical, doesn't it? What do you think?

***Paul Scott***