

Gaston Franssen, Rick Honings (eds.), *Idolizing Authorship: Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the Present*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2017, 282 pp. € 89.

While the editors' previous collaboration, *Celebrity Authorship and Afterlives in English and American Literature* (2016), was Anglocentric in its scope, in this volume they have extended their investigation of literary markets and included a variety of European authors. Though the temporal scope—from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century—of the two collections is similar, the geographical areas covered differ as *Idolizing Authorship* encompasses Germany, Denmark, Russia, Finland, Japan, France, Norway and the Netherlands. In their analysis of the changes in the social position of the author, the editors designated the year 1800 as the starting point of their investigations into the area of literary celebrities since this is the time when the author starts to be recognized as a “public figure with a specific personality” (19). As such, the author enters the public arena that opens up the possibility to partake and engage in the game of celebrity culture. The diversity of national literatures in combination with the diachronic perspective on celebrity authors offers the possibility for the reader to discover the shifts and changes in authorship throughout time and cultures. However, what emerges as more prominent are not the differences but the similarities in authorial self-presentation and public perception of authors throughout time and place. Though the media tools available for the authors to carve out their celebrity authorial persona, and for the audiences to form their reactions have undergone major changes, the dynamics of the three key players—the writer, the audience and the literary field—remain analogues driven by the same aim: the creation of a unique authorial image, a literary celebrity.

All the essays in *Idolizing Authorship* follow a similar template as they construct their analyses. They first present the modes of authorial self-fashioning followed by the evaluation of the audience's reaction to this image. Furthermore, they also include interpretations of textual self-image and/or analysis of media performances such as TV or newspaper interviews. In all cases the medium of self-fashioning constitutes an important element of becoming a literary celebrity as it defines the possibilities

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available for the author to form his/her artistic persona. For example, as Silke Hoffmann illustrates, the image of Johann Wolfgang Goethe as a mythological persona was supported by several busts of the author representing him as Apollo or Zeus/Jupiter. This classicist imagery also dominated his house “triggering obvious associations with Mount Olympus” (35). Besides using sculptures, architecture and interior design to support his Olympian self-fashioning, Goethe also posed as an ancient god. As many of the articles in this collection confirm, the author's appearance and posture, the “non-discursive clues such as ‘clothes, hairstyle, certain gestures’” (39) in conjunction with textual self-image are an important part of authorial self-fashioning. Nicolaas Beets, the Dutch Byron, not only imitated Byron's work, but performed the melancholy pose and “did indeed adjust his appearance to resemble that of Byron's” (Honings, 68). This self-fashioning, however, can have a negative effect when it overshadows the author's work completely. For example, Henk van der Liet argues that the Danish poet's, Holger Drachmann's image “as the modern bohemian poet of his time (...) outlived the author, and today fully overshadows his literary legacy” (113). The audience of Louis Couperus' public readings were mesmerized not only by his performance but also by “his smart garments, his elegant socks up to his lace-fringed handkerchief” (Kemperink, 137). In his discussion on Couperus' career as a literary celebrity, Mary Kemperink observes that self-fashioning is formed by two elements. On the one hand it conforms to social norms as it tries to comply to the “demands [of] a specific fashioning” (137). For example, Couperus performed the role of the dandy. On the other hand, one's public self is formed by an “inner urge” (137) to be unique. Thus, self-fashioning in the service of celebrity status oscillates between complying to social norms but at the same time creating one's individuality. However, some authors decide to go completely against the grain. The Finnish author, Sofi Oksanen is especially known for her eccentric style. In her article on Oksanen's celebrity status, Sanna Lehtonen describes the writer as a “stylish feminine Gothic intellectual” (261) who dismantles the mainstream image of the Finnish public persona with her “sub- and multicultural authenticity” (261). The media's obsession with her subcultural and “heavily gendered and sexualized public appearance” (263), however, can have negative effects as it “pull[s] attention from her work” (262) and it is used to undermine her credibility as a public persona.

By the 21st century, the strategies of creating an authorial image rely on online platforms making way for literary e-self-fashioning. This media brings forth the issue of sincerity and authenticity as demonstrated by Ellen Rutten's analyses of the Russian poet's, Dmitrii Vodennikov's, online persona. It also creates new ways of interaction between author and audience. Vodennikov's fans have the opportunity to follow him, his performance on Facebook, his proclamations on Twitter, his personal website and weblog. However, Lehtonen's analysis of Oksanen's fame shows the darker side of online presence. Lehtonen considers the violent and abusive comments of anonymous critics on social media. These comments attached to newspaper articles and interviews with Oksanen discussing domestic violence and nationalism question the author's credibility and authenticity. Lehtonen demonstrates how these online attacks are fuelled by Oksanen's gender, ethnicity and subcultural identity. However, the author also has a huge group of online followers throughout the whole world. Since in the 21st century authors are almost compelled to have an online presence, Lehtonen highlights the importance of researching these new media environments as they give access for the researcher to a more diverse public sphere and to "audiences that were less visible before" (269).

Besides self-fashioning and reception, textual self-image is also another important element in the construction of literary celebrities. Sjef Houppermans combines the presentation of Marcel Proust's literary career, the reception of his work and its influence upon future generations of writers with a close textual analysis of the relationship between art and celebrityhood developed by Proust in his novel *Recherche*. Thus, according to Proust, the oeuvre should be the true source of fame as "[r]eal celebrity belongs to the oeuvre and not to the man" (Houppermans, 156). Similarly to Houppermans article, Gaston Franssen also includes an extensive textual analysis of the representation of literary authorship in Haruki Murakami's novel, *1Q84*. Franssen considers the novel to be a valuable source to examine Murakami's authorship because it provides not only a view on his "reflection on literary authorship in general" (229) but it also functions "as an act of self-presentation by the author himself" (229) since he assimilates elements from his own literary career into the novel. This literary career, according to Franssen, is an amalgam of contradictions. As argued by the editors in their introduction, when analysing literary celebrity, one is "confronted with a number of

complex tension fields” (Franssen and Honings, 16), created by the impossibility to reconcile contradictory concepts within the literary field. For example, one of these fields of tension is created by the dichotomy between celebrity status and literary value. Whereas celebrity culture is associated with mass culture, literary prestige belongs to the sphere of high culture. Franssen and Honings argue that though this harsh division has been extensively criticized, “the fact remains that with literary fame, different forms of success frequently intermingle” (17). In Franssen's view Murakami's literary career is full of these kinds of antinomies: he is a media star but portrayed as a media-shy recluse; his global success is criticized in his home country, Japan, as he is accused of tailoring his writing to the taste of readers abroad; and he oscillates between regarding writing as a daily job or “as a gift from the heavens” (218).

Tensions and contradictions of authorial self-fashioning and celebrity status are at the core of Sander Bax's article on “one of the most famous Dutch literary celebrities” (193), Harry Mulisch. Bax demonstrates how the writer Mulisch “combine(s) and reconcile(s) his economic success with his artistic integrity” (194) even as he succeeds in satisfying both the traditional literary field and the public media. His media image gains mythical proportions as he is depicted as “an icon of Dutch authorship” (194) and “a literary Olympian” (195). At the same time, in a manner akin to Roland Barthes' concept of “the death of the author,” Mulisch advocates the concept of the “absent author.” Bax argues that “this paradoxical picture of Mulisch's authorship” (212)—the way he manages “to function in two different discourses” (212)—illustrates the theoretical problem of studying literary celebrity. However, it should be noted that this paradox is accentuated by a particular concept of authorship characteristic of post-structuralist literary theory that aimed at substituting the importance of the author with that of the reader. Nevertheless, tensions can be created not only by literary theoretical concepts undermining media performances of authorship, but also by political tensions. Suze van der Poll's analysis of Henrik Ibsen's success illustrates how literature “proved to be Ibsen's route to prestige” (101) as he became the hero of the nation. In case of Ezra Pound, Peter Liebrechts demonstrates how the author's work survived his “public image as an American traitor” (175), his anti-Semitism and racism. The tension here is between the author's political views, his public image and his astonishing contribution to poetry, his role in supporting several important Modernist authors. Pound, “a spider

in the Modernist web” (182), besides advancing the career of T.S Eliot and James Joyce, firmly believed in the importance of self-promotion since “[p]oets are not born fully fledged, but must make or fashion themselves” (Liebregts, 179).

The collection incorporates articles that bring to light the functioning of literary celebrity in a variety of different temporal and geographical contexts. Focusing on non-English literary fields, the editors make an important contribution to the study of literary celebrities that should be, as indicated by Anders Ohlsson, Torbjörn Forslid and Ann Steiner (2014), reconsidered from three major perspectives. They argue for a geographical and diachronic differentiation to which this collection subscribes. Furthermore, they also suggest a change in what they see as a tendency in literary celebrity studies to focus mainly on illustrious and influential authors and neglect “authors of trade fiction” (32). The literary celebrity authors present in this collection, Goethe, Beets, Ibsen, Drachmann, Couperus, Proust, Pound, Mulisch, Murakami, Vodennikov and Oksanen, they all belong to the “prestigious areas of literary field” (32). However, by directing our attention to the celebrity functions performed by these canonical authors, the tension fields of literary celebrity studies become apparent throughout the whole collection. Combining the analysis of the author’s self-fashioning with its reception and complementing them with the interpretations of textual self-image, the articles uncover the tensions, contradictions, paradoxes and antinomies at the core of literary celebrity. The collection thus contributes to this field not only by a careful consideration of geographical and diachronic differentiations, but also by a thorough examination of the concept of ‘literary celebrity’.

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