

Authorship, Activism,
and Celebrity

Art and Action in Global Literature

EDITED BY
SANDRA MAYER
& RUTH SCOBIE



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Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Acknowledgements	xiii
Foreword <i>Meena Kandasamy</i>	xiv
1 Introduction: The Idea of the Author <i>Sandra Mayer and Ruth Scobie</i>	1
2 'Let's Deal with the People Oppressing All of Us': Benjamin Zephaniah in Conversation <i>Benjamin Zephaniah and Malachi McIntosh</i>	17
Part 1 Art as Activism	
3 Clearing a Space for Multiple, Marginal Voices: The Writers' Activism of PEN <i>Peter D. McDonald, Margie Orford, Rachel Potter, Carles Torner and Laetitia Zecchini</i>	31
4 Live at the Polari Salon: Literary Performance as Activism <i>Ellen Wiles</i>	45
5 'Bugger Universality': An Exchange with Antjie Krog <i>Antjie Krog and Peter D. McDonald</i>	57
Part 2 Activism and the Literary Industry	
6 Moving between Worlds: A Writer and a Publisher in Conversation <i>Kirsty Gunn and David Graham</i>	73
7 Resisting Stereotypes: Art, Activism and the Literature Industry <i>Elleke Boehmer, Alice Guthrie, Daniel Medin, Charlotte Ryland and Alan Taylor</i>	82
8 Fanny Fern and Nellie Bly: Unstable I's <i>Eva Sage Gordon</i>	94
Part 3 The Invention of the Public Intellectual	
9 The Critical Pedagogy of Fiction in Democratic Public Spheres <i>Odile Heynders</i>	111

10	A 'Passive Spectactress'? Frances Burney and the Eighteenth-Century Writer as Social Activist <i>Anna Paluchowska-Messing</i>	124
11	'The Indian Cobbett': Radicalism, Empire and Literary Celebrity in the Life of James Silk Buckingham (1786–1855) <i>Kieran Hazzard</i>	136
12	'Literary Criticism Only': Jeyamohan and the Author as Conservative Activist in 'Aram' (2011) <i>Divya A.</i>	150
Part 4 Writing Europe		
13	European Connections: Literary Networks, Political Authorship and the Future of Europe Debate <i>Benedict Schofield</i>	165
14	Vernon Lee: Transnational Activism and Protest Literature for Art and Peace <i>Elisa Bizzotto</i>	182
15	On Behalf of the Nation: Knut Hamsun and the Politics of Authorship <i>Tore Rem</i>	194
16	Looking On ... <i>Kirsty Gunn</i>	207
	Bibliography	211
	Index	236

Contributors

Elisa Bizzotto is Associate Professor of English Literature at Iuav University of Venice. Her research interests lie in the fields of *fin-de-siècle*, decadent and pre-Modernist literature and culture, and include transcultural perspectives. She has published books on the imaginary portrait genre, the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ* and Walter Pater, and has (co-)edited volumes on Pater, Vernon Lee, Arthur Symons and Mario Praz. Her Italian translations of G. B. Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* have recently been published with Bompiani. She is on the editorial boards of *English Literature*, *RSV. Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism* and *Volupté*.

Elleke Boehmer is Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Historical Society. She has authored and edited over twenty books, including *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995, 2005), *Stories of Women* (2005), *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915* (2015), *Postcolonial Poetics* (2018) and a biography of Nelson Mandela (2008). She is the award-winning author of five novels, including *Bloodlines* (2000) and *The Shouting in the Dark* (2015), and two collections of short stories. Boehmer is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing and principal investigator of Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds.

Divya A. is Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India. Her research interests are in the fields of gender and culture in literature and Tamil cinema. She has published on Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Anglo-Indians and Tamil cinema.

Eva Sage Gordon is a PhD Candidate in English at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Her work has appeared in journals including *The Louisville Review*, *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *New Plains Review*, *New Southerner* and *Life Writing*. She is co-author of *The Everything Guide to Writing Children's Books, Second Edition* and has a chapter in the recent Routledge essay collection *Life Writing and Celebrity: Exploring Intersections*. She has an essay forthcoming in a special issue of *Pedagogy* on teaching during Covid-19.

David Graham is Managing Director of illustrated book publisher BT Batsford Ltd. He has managed a number of independent publishing companies for over twenty years, including six years at Canongate Books and three at Granta and Portobello.

Kirsty Gunn writes novels, short stories and essays and is published by Faber & Faber and internationally. She is Research Professor at the University of Dundee and

Associate Member of Merton College, Oxford. With Gail Low she directs 'Imagined Spaces', a publishing and education venture dedicated to thinking about new ways of writing about literature, the arts and the world. More information on Gunn's work can be found at: www.kirsty-gunn.com.

Alice Guthrie is a translator, editor, researcher and curator specializing in contemporary Arabic writing. Her work has often focused on subaltern voices and queering (winning her the Jules Chametzky Translation Prize 2019). Her translation of the short stories of Moroccan gender activist Malika Moustadraf was published in 2022, and she is compiling the first ever anthology of LGBTQIA+ Arab(ic) literature, in parallel Arabic and English editions. Alice programmes the literary strand of London's Shubbak Festival and has curated Arab arts events for Edinburgh International Book Festival, Outburst International Arts Festival and Arts Canteen. She teaches Arabic-English translation at various universities.

Kieran Hazzard is Early Career Fellow at TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities) and a historian of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and India, specializing in British politics, the East India Company and material culture. Since completing his PhD on nineteenth-century British Radicalism at King's College London in 2018, his research projects have included Quill, a digital humanities project on the writing of the US Constitution at Pembroke College, Oxford. More recently, as Knowledge Exchange Fellow at the Ashmolean Museum, he worked with the National Trust to research the Clive Collection at Powis Castle.

Odile Heynders is Professor of Comparative Literature at the Department of Culture Studies at Tilburg University. She has published several books and many articles on European literature, authorship and strategies of reading, as well as on how literary fiction intervenes in democratic public spheres. Her book *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy* (2016) appeared with Palgrave Macmillan. Her current book project is *Fictions of Migration*, which focuses on how literary texts can offer knowledge within the interdisciplinary context of migration studies. Heynders is a member of the NWO (Dutch Research Council) Board: Social Sciences and Humanities.

Meena Kandasamy is an anti-caste activist, academic and writer. Her works include the poetry collection *Ms. Militancy* (2010); the novels *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), *When I Hit You: Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) and *Exquisite Cadavers* (2019); and the non-fiction *The Orders Were to Rape You: Tigresses in the Tamil Eelam Struggle* (2021). She has translated many Tamil political and literary works, and is widely published as a journalist and political commentator. In 2022 she was awarded the PEN Hermann Kesten Prize, given annually in recognition of 'outstanding efforts in support of persecuted writers'.

Antjie Krog is a poet, translator and Professor in the Arts at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. She has published fourteen volumes of poetry in

Afrikaans and her prose writings in English include *Country of My Skull* (1998) and *A Change of Tongue* (2003). She has won numerous prizes for poetry, prose, translation and journalism as well as the Stockholm Award from the Hiroshima Foundation for Peace and Culture and the Open Society Prize from the Central European University.

Sandra Mayer is a literary and cultural historian at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage (Austrian Academy of Sciences). Her research focuses on life writing, authorship and celebrity, transnational encounters and reception processes. She is the author of *Oscar Wilde in Vienna* (2018) and has (co-)edited books and special issues on 'Literary Celebrity and Politics' (2016), 'The Author in the Popular Imagination' (2018), *Life Writing and Celebrity* (2019) and 'Life Writing and the Transnational' (2022). In her current book project, she explores the intersections of literary celebrity and political activism in and through autobiographical narrative.

Peter D. McDonald is Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St Hugh's College. He writes on literature, the modern state and freedom of expression; the history of writing systems, cultural institutions and publishing; multilingualism, translation and interculturality; and on the promise of creative criticism. His publications include *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (2009, theliteraturepolice.com) and *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing* (2017, artefactsofwriting.com).

Malachi McIntosh was the editor and publishing director of *Wasafiri* magazine from 2019 to 2022. He is currently an Associate Professor of World Literature at the University of Oxford and Barbara Pym Tutorial Fellow at St. Hilda's College. His works include *Emigration and Caribbean Literature* (2015), *Beyond Calypso: Re-Reading Samuel Selvon* (2016) and the forthcoming short story collection *Parables, Fables, Nightmares* (2023).

Daniel Medin is an editor and a professor at the American University of Paris (AUP), where he teaches contemporary world literature and editorial practice. His research is concerned with modern fiction from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, with an emphasis on Franz Kafka. He is Associate Director of AUP's Center for Writers and Translators, and one of the editors of its *Cahiers Series*. He is also co-editor of *Music & Literature* magazine and advises *The White Review*, *Edit* and other journals on contemporary international fiction. He has judged leading translation prizes in the United States, the UK and Germany.

Margie Orford is the author of the internationally acclaimed Clare Hart novels. She is a Fulbright scholar with an MA in Comparative Literature from the City University of New York and a PhD from the University of East Anglia. She is an honorary fellow at St Hugh's College, Oxford, was a judge for the AKO Caine Prize for African Literature, was president of PEN South Africa and on the board of PEN International, and is a

co-author of the PEN International Women's Manifesto. Her latest novel is *The Eye of the Beholder* (2022). You can find her on Twitter: @MargieOrford.

Anna Paluchowska-Messing teaches literature at the Institute of English Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, and specializes in eighteenth-century English literature. She is the author of *Frances Burney and Her Readers: The Negotiated Image* (2020) and co-editor (with Monika Coghen) of *Romantic Dialogues and Afterlives* (2020). Her most recent project traces intercultural transfers involving English literature of the long eighteenth century.

Rachel Potter is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of East Anglia. She writes on literature and censorship, free expression and writers' organizations, modernist literature and early twentieth-century culture. She has been exploring the early history of International PEN for a number of years. Her published books include *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900–1940* (2013), *The Edinburgh Guide to Modernist Literature* (2012) and *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900–1930* (2006). She has recently co-edited, with Christos Hadjiyiannis, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature & Politics* (2022).

Tore Rem is a professor of English literature at the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo, and director of UiO:Democracy, an interdisciplinary initiative. He has published extensively on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and Scandinavian literature, and his book *Knut Hamsun: Reisen til Hitler* (The Journey to Hitler, 2014) won the Norwegian Critics Prize for non-fiction. Rem is the general editor of the new Penguin Classics edition of Henrik Ibsen, and his most recent monograph in English is *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (2018), co-authored with Narve Fulsås.

Charlotte Ryland is Director of the Stephen Spender Trust and founding Director of The Queen's College Translation Exchange, an initiative based at the University of Oxford. Through both organizations she aims to engage people of all ages and backgrounds in literary translation, to promote language-learning and to bring creative translation activities into UK schools. Until 2019 she ran New Books in German, an international project promoting German-language literature, and was lecturer in German at The Queen's College, Oxford.

Benedict Schofield is Associate Professor in German at the University of Bristol. His research focuses on the transnational representation of German-speaking countries and Europe, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cultural Studies, German theatre/performance and German-US cultural relations. Publications include *Private Lives and Collective Destinies: Class, Nation and the Folk in the Works of Gustav Freytag*, and the co-edited volumes *The German Bestseller in the Late 19th Century*, *German in the World* and *Transnational German Studies*. He is series co-editor for *Transnational*

Approaches to Culture, Transnational Modern Languages and Studies in Modern German & Austrian Literature, and co-editor for *Modern Languages Open*.

Ruth Scobie has taught English literature at the universities of York, Sheffield and Oxford. She is the author of *Celebrity Culture and the Myth of Oceania in Britain 1770–1823* (2019). Her research traces the links between British culture and ideas of race and difference in the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century empire, most recently focusing on fictional representations of celebrity.

Alan Taylor has been editor and board member of the *Scottish Review of Books* since 2004. He was deputy and managing editor at *The Scotsman*, and Associate Editor of the *Sunday Herald*. A former Booker judge, he has edited several acclaimed anthologies, including *The Assassin's Cloak* (2011), *The Country Diaries* (2011) and *Glasgow: The Autobiography* (2016). His most recent book is *Appointment in Arezzo: A Friendship with Muriel Spark* (2017), and he is the editor of the centenary editions of the *Collected Novels of Muriel Spark*. Most recently, he has edited *Madly, Deeply: The Alan Rickman Diaries* (2022).

Eugenie Theuer is a film curator and scholar based in Glasgow. Her research and teaching have been concerned with self-reflexive forms of cinema, cinema in the wake of the digital revolution, Hollywood history and the representation of women in front of and behind the camera. She has co-edited a special issue on 'Women's Lives on Screen' published by the *European Journal of Life Writing* in 2021. As a film curator, she is trying to create a platform for marginalized voices and stories, working with various film festivals in Scotland, including Africa in Motion, IberoDocs and the Scottish Queer International Film Festival.

Carles Torner, a leading Catalan writer and human rights activist, was Executive Director of PEN International 2014–20 and director of the PEN Centenary in 2021. He has participated in several missions for imprisoned writers and has published essays and poems about PEN's defence of freedom of expression across the world. He was director of the Literature and Humanities Department at the Ramon Llull Institute, where he was in charge of the presence of Catalan literature at international book fairs. He holds a PhD from the University of Paris VIII and is a lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities of the Pompeu Fabra University.

Ellen Wiles is a novelist, anthropologist, curator, soundwalk maker and lecturer in Creative Writing at Exeter University. She previously worked as a human rights barrister and as a musician. She is the author of three books: *Saffron Shadows and Salvaged Scripts: Literary Life in Myanmar under Censorship and in Transition* (2015), *The Invisible Crowd* (2017) and *Live Literature: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals* (2021). She lives in Devon with her husband and small children. Her website is: www.ellenwiles.com.

Laetitia Zecchini is a senior research fellow at the CNRS in Paris. Her research interests focus on contemporary Indian poetry, postcolonial modernisms and print cultures, and the politics of literature. She is the author of *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India* (2014), has translated Kolatkar into French and has co-authored or co-edited eight other volumes, including the special issue 'The Locations of (World) Literature: Perspectives from Africa and South Asia' (2019) and *The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form: Cold War, Decolonization and Third World Print Cultures* (2022). She is currently working on a monograph on literary activism in India.

Benjamin Zephaniah is a poet, novelist, actor, musician and political activist. Born in Birmingham, UK, he was voted Britain's third favourite poet of all time in 2009. He was the first person to record with The Wailers after the death of Bob Marley, and his other musical collaborations include Tim Simenon, Sinéad O'Connor, Peter Gabriel and The Imagined Village. His 2020 TV poetry show *Life & Rhymes* won a BAFTA, and his autobiography, *The Life and Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah* (2018), was shortlisted for the Costa Biography Award. He is visiting professor at De Montfort University, Leicester, and Professor of Poetry at Brunel University, London.

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We planned to follow this event with 'Art & Action: Literary Authorship, Politics and Celebrity Culture', a two-day international conference that would extend our previous discussions beyond the Anglosphere and across global literatures. Scheduled for March 2020, and once more hosted by TORCH, the conference was cancelled when the Covid-19 pandemic stopped the world in its tracks. It was reborn as a series of live webinars, videos and blog entries, released online over the summer of 2020. We are grateful to TORCH and its fabulous team for offering us a virtual home base and for providing guidance and support while we were navigating this unfamiliar territory. At an impossible time, the unbroken enthusiasm of our speakers for this project and their readiness to come on board (once more) kept this project alive, allowed us to open our discussions virtually to a global audience, and eventually led to this volume.

Authorship, Activism and Celebrity has benefitted at various stages from stimulating exchanges with colleagues, friends and students, including Ros Ballaster, Elleke Boehmer, Charlotte Boyce, Philip Bullock, Ho Lung Chan, Ipsita Chakravarty, Sophie Coulombeau, Caroline Davis, Foteini Dimirouli, Olivier Driessens, Shantel Edwards, Stefano Evangelista, Pelagia Goulimari, Julia Lajta-Novak, Matthew Lecznar, Mary Luckhurst, Greg Jenner, Michelle Kelly, Hyei Jin Kim, Justine McConnell, Peter D. McDonald, Kate McLoughlin, Michèle Mendelssohn, Sylvia Mieszkowski, Tom Mole, Simon Morgan, Adam Perchard, Asha Rogers, Kate De Rycker, Margaret Scarborough, Anna Senkiw, Lyndsey Stonebridge, Barbara Straumann, Hannah Yelin and Lorraine York.

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Foreword

Meena Kandasamy

I started reading the many essays which make up this volume, *Authorship, Activism and Celebrity: Art and Action in Global Literature*, with a mixture of great trepidation and curious excitement. Initially hesitant that this would be a jargon-filled academic exercise, I was ashamed of my own prejudice after reading a single page. The questions that are taken up and discussed in these pages invite the reader to think deeply for themselves, and to gain a better appreciation of the world of arts, activism and celebrity. For a writer, however, this book is guaranteed to cause a churning within yourself. Even if you are the most self-aware artist, this book will make you feel the urgent need to reflect on your creative practice, reassess your celebrity status, look at the market and the political world as invasive structures into our work.

As with all forewords, mine is also going to suffer from the obvious drawback – I will not be able to comment on every single essay or article in this volume. I wish to compensate for these lacunae by writing a *personal* introduction drawing attention not only to which works here have moved me, but why.

Reading the South African poet, writer and activist Antjie Krog in conversation with Peter McDonald, I am stunned when I come across her blunt refusal of any invitation to appear on television at a particular point in her career. She details her 'definite steps to resist becoming a celebrity' – efforts taken to 'preserve the core of who we are and what we stand for'. In some way, this resonated with me. I took a similar decision eight or nine years ago when I was being ferried from one television studio in my city to another because different channels wanted me to be a panel discussant; they wanted my sound bites. I was just entering my thirties then, and as much as the prime-time television audience in India is massive, I realized that I was sought after because I was spontaneous, fearless and articulate. Instead of revelling in the fame, I was deeply frightened. The biggest news anchors wanted me on their show because I could pack a punch into a thirty-second sound bite while being feminist, Tamil, rebellious, communist. My fear came from a place that was unfamiliar to me. I was afraid: how does this method of self-expression affect my thinking? What if I lose the ability to deliberate at length, to experiment with form, what if I lose all the legroom which a writer has to be herself? This talent would have been a great fit if I was the spokesperson of any left-leaning political party, but it did not feel like something I wanted to do with my own life. I was living the dream, but this was not for me. I wanted to learn, to think deeply, to engage with an audience not in those few climactic seconds, but at leisure, with a give-and-take. I retreated. In many ways, I had preserved myself from succumbing to constant exposure and (even greater) celebrity.

However, none of us could have foreseen the apocalypse that awaited the world of media in India. In 2014, the right-wing Hindu majoritarian BJP under Narendra Modi swept to power – and the clampdown on the media was ruthless. Indian television would never be the same again, and little did I realize when I quit that what I had enjoyed was the last oxygen left for the freedom of expression. There is a corollary: even if I had not quit of my own accord, I would have been kept out. After Modi's victories in 2014 and 2019, many voices critical of the regime were sidelined and banished from newsrooms. Nowadays, when the media calls upon me to make a television appearance, I go because dissident voices rarely get any space. And I want to share this experience because as much as I agree with Krog, I also believe that flexibility and recalibration are essential to our lives as writer-activists.

The second point I want to make unravels in another direction. When we look at the title of this volume, everyone is fine with authorship but a lot of writers show discomfort with the idea of activism. (Social justice warriors, they call us. Wokes, in shorthand.) Even more uncomfortable in the literary world is the idea of celebrity, especially because it is almost always invoked in a pejorative way among your own peers. For me, a celebrity is someone who is celebrated, someone who has a recall value outside their own circle, someone who has a platform. That is the idealist version of the word for me. But when I see that word used on me or on other women writers – the misogyny makes my skin crawl. Because the subtext to that word is a sexualization, an objectification, a slut-shaming. I have been told by jealous men that I am famous because I have a beautiful face, or that I am famous because of the 'packaging,' or because I display 'cleavage,' or because I 'pander to the west'. The last accusation is the most dangerous of them all because it sounds progressive and decolonial, but the political framing is only a smokescreen to justify why your own society wants to deny you the space to be a public intellectual, or cannot digest the fact that you are seen as one. I reject all these accusations – what has made me gain notoriety is precisely such a set of hostile stereotypes. These petty, reductionist, misogynist tropes forget that in order to get heard I have had to grow a spine and a sharp tongue. Nothing less, nothing more.

'Celebrity is a trap,' 'celebrity contaminates,' says Krog and calls it a combination of 'fame and numbers'. I agree as much as I vehemently disagree with this revulsion. When your friends are being sent to prison, and when you are required to urgently galvanize signatures for a protest petition, these numbers matter. The hashtags that quickly climb to Twitter trends matter. The social media following matters. Our quantification can sometimes be our strength if it can cause the smallest rattle against the oppressive state, against the status quo. If we reject celebrity completely, we become islands. This may have quaint, cosy tones in peacetime. Under state oppression, it is escapism. This is where I want to cite the engaging conversation between Benjamin Zephaniah and Malachi McIntosh in this book. Speaking about the Nicaraguan revolution, Zephaniah describes how in the end they installed a 'government of poets'. He says it is 'about finding the right gang' and in so many ways, even as our work is produced individually, the change that we can galvanize in society almost always remains a collective effort.

When culture becomes the site and foundation of mobilization, the writer's responsibility is amplified manifold. In Tore Rem's paper on Knut Hamsun, we are privy to the dangers of co-optation of a famous writer by fascist ideology, and the irreparable consequences that arise. That paper encloses heartbreak and tragedy, Rem's work providing the perfect foil to reading the rest of the essays.

Every single essay in this collection made me meditate on writing and activism and celebrity. Every essay pushed me to challenge my own assumptions. Kirsty Gunn's essay 'Looking On ...' captures the truth of what it means to make art under neoliberalism. She writes,

So in the last thirty years, just as with our economy, we have seen a sort of stripping process set in, to create a culture of winners and losers whereby the same kinds of books are read and praised, with the same kinds of authors appearing over and over again – the 'big hitters,' the 'big stories,' the 'big sales' ... This is the pattern of activity that seems to dominate our ideas now of literary publishing, of the novel. For the other kind of work, that isn't or doesn't want to be part of that culture, we must hunt hard now, and deep.

This task of looking beyond the noise and glitz of big prizes and bigger publicity is essential if we are to maintain any claims to integrity. Likewise, Odile Heynders' work on Valeria Luiselli, especially the transition between her political essay *Tell Me How It Ends* and her documentary novel *Lost Children Archive*, points us towards the necessity of being everything at once, creating art as assemblage and creating written works that embrace and combine fact and fiction.

I send my admiration, solidarity and love to Ruth and Sandra for envisioning such a project, and for putting this book out into the world.

Introduction: The Idea of the Author

Sandra Mayer and Ruth Scobie

A few days after her novel *This Mournable Body* was longlisted for the Booker Prize in the summer of 2020, the author and filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga stood with one other activist on a quiet road in Harare, holding a placard on which she had written the words ‘We want better/ Reform our institutions.’ She was almost immediately arrested, prompting a flurry of protests around the world: from individuals including Kazuo Ishiguro, Tom Stoppard, Eimear McBride and Thandiwe Newton, and from the global publishing industry and literary organizations. Since her arrest, Dangarembga has been given a PEN International Award for Freedom of Expression (2021), the PEN Pinter Prize (2021) and a £120,000 Windham-Campbell Prize for fiction. She has also, after a prolonged legal battle with the Zimbabwean state, been convicted of inciting public violence, a verdict that PEN International called ‘a travesty of justice.’¹

Dangarembga’s international literary stature did not prevent her arrest or prosecution. But her fame did encourage the world press – though briefly – to report on a wider political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe that it had previously largely ignored. Her trial, the opposition journalist Hopewell Chin’ono comments, ‘put a magnificent spotlight back on Zimbabwe, something Zimbabwe needed!’² Clearly, the intensity of this ‘magnificent spotlight’ is to some extent a function of Dangarembga’s artistic renown: her first novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), is a staple of the postcolonial feminist canon, her film *Neria* (1991) one of the most successful ever made in Zimbabwe. Yet, as Dangarembga told the *New York Times*, she had only found a publisher for *This Mournable Body* by sharing parts of the novel on social media to build up an interested readership.³ Dangarembga’s personal Twitter account, a platform she uses for sharing news and commentary, has around 99,000 followers

¹ ‘Zimbabwe: Conviction of Tsitsi Dangarembga a Mockery of Justice’, PEN International statement, 29 September 2022, pen-international.org/news/zimbabwe-conviction-of-tsitsi-dangarembga-a-mockery-of-justice.

² @daddyhope (Hopewell Chin’ono), ‘The conviction of Tsitsi Dangarembga @EfiZethu for holding a placard is one of the biggest blunders ever made by Mnangagwa’s repressive regime’, *Twitter*, 29 September 2022, 3.52 pm, twitter.com/daddyhope/status/1575498840576167938.

³ Wadzanai Mhute, ‘After a Writing Break, She Returned as a Booker Finalist’, *New York Times*, 15 November 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/11/15/books/tsitsi-dangarembga-this-mournable-body.html.

and is a major target for pro-government trolls. In October 2020, she commented on an article posted on Twitter by Chin'ono about the political power of celebrity in Africa. 'Zimbabwe,' she wrote, 'doesn't really have any celebrities.'⁴ In the discussion that followed, some posters suggested that Dangarembga herself should claim that status: 'We have celebrities in Zimbabwe ... one of them is Tsitsi Dangarembga!'⁵

Dangarembga's bemused resistance to this praise – shrugging 'Thank you, but we shall have to agree to differ' in further exchanges – epitomizes the historically uneasy relationship between literature, celebrity and politics which is the subject of this book. While the artist and activist rejects the negative implications of the label 'celebrity' (likely to include some combination of narcissism, commodification, triviality and artificiality), her fans invoke a more positive concept of stars as potential ethical guides or national voices. Literary celebrity, in particular, tends to be a source of unease to those to whom it is attributed. In their contributions to this volume, the writers Antjie Krog and Kirsty Gunn vigorously reject what they see as celebrity's commodification of the artist and their work as branded consumer goods. In a literary environment driven by commercial viability, political 'relevance' (or its absence) might become one more selling point or marketing weakness, subject to media demands and audience tastes, and often made visible in the prize and festival circuit.

Despite this perception of celebrity as compromising and disempowering, however, fame can also provide material conditions which amplify, protect and legitimize vulnerable political voices. Dangarembga's visibility on social media (moderate though it is compared to 'big names' like Stephen King, Rupi Kaur or Margaret Atwood), her receipt of prizes and her presence in the news media all help to promote her work. The economic and cultural capital thus generated can be especially important for writers with otherwise marginalized identities. Dangarembga notes that 'writing while black and female' has always restricted her 'access to publication opportunities, and ... avenues to reputable, professional publishing houses and lucrative contracts.'⁶ Her global name recognition may help to redress this, as well as proving a lightning rod for political attacks.

At the same time, the perception that a writer welcomes, promotes or even acknowledges their own celebrity can weaken their claims to artistic or political authenticity. Literary history is littered with accusations of authors selling out, limiting or contaminating their art and political commitments in search of money, adulation or institutional approval: from the 'Epic Renegade' Poet Laureate Robert Southey,⁷ to James Baldwin, whose 'voice as a writer was compromised,' for some readers, when he

⁴ @EfiZethu (Tsitsi Dangarembga), 'Zimbabwe doesn't really have any celebrities,' *Twitter*, 22 October 2020, 8.43 am, twitter.com/efie41209591/status/1319182678957096961.

⁵ @MakomboreroH (Makomborero Haruzivishe), 'We have celebrities in Zimbabwe ... one of them is Tsitsi Dangarembga!', *Twitter*, 22 October 2020, 9.24 am, twitter.com/MakomboreroH/status/1319192892934684672.

⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Black and Female* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 59.

⁷ George Gordon, Lord Byron, dedication to *Don Juan* (1819) in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 373–879, 373, l. 5.

became ‘the official voice of black America.’⁸ Historically, authors have responded to such criticism, real and anticipated, with everything from gleeful defiance to radical retreat from public life. Most often, they have negotiated between the potential costs and benefits of fame in complex and even self-contradictory ways, some of which are outlined in the biographical case studies in this book.

Some writers, on the other hand, are vocal about what they see as the artist’s obligation to harness her celebrity persona for public good. Bernardine Evaristo, for example, makes a point of embracing celebrity’s power to effect change and ‘uplift communities’ by way of its convertibility into other forms of influence. ‘Winning the Booker Prize has increased my cultural capital,’ she explains in *Manifesto* (2021), ‘so that when I have things to say, my audience is much more substantial.’ Celebrity opens doors, and may enable the ‘rebel without’ to become the ‘negotiator within’ – a position Evaristo has exploited in her campaign to increase the visibility of Black and Asian writers.⁹ Similarly, in his 2018 autobiography, which interweaves a deeply personal story with a larger account of the struggle for racial equality in Britain since the 1970s, poet-performer and activist Benjamin Zephaniah emphasizes the writer’s responsibility to wield celebrity as a weapon for political activism. His ‘bottom line,’ he declares, ‘is that you can’t just be a poet or writer and say your activism is simply writing about these things; you have to do something as well, especially if your public profile can be put to good use.’¹⁰ A fierce critic of the establishment, who famously refused an OBE in 2003, Zephaniah reiterates, in an interview in this volume, the role of the writer as a visible, politically engaged guide who helps his audience to think for themselves and see the world as it really is.

Zephaniah’s bold and programmatic statements underline the complex entanglements of celebrity, artistic integrity and political agency, three concepts which are historically and culturally contingent and unstable in their own right. Although the authors discussed in this volume span countries and periods, from eighteenth-century England to twenty-first-century Tamil Nadu, this diversity should not be taken as suggesting that the tensions between literary celebrity and political activism to which they are subject are timeless or universal. Our contention is, instead, that the broad ideas and systems which produce these tensions – essentially, a capitalist literary marketplace and a post-Romantic conception of literary authorship – are loosely common to the contexts in which all these authors write and publish, and so shape their careers in ways which can productively be compared.

Scholars broadly accept that Western literature has been, from at least the nineteenth century, shaped by the modern capitalist mechanisms and impulses which

⁸ Hilton Als, ‘The Enemy Within: The Making and Unmaking of James Baldwin,’ *The New Yorker*, 16 February 1998, www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/16/the-enemy-within-hilton-als.

⁹ Bernardine Evaristo, *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2021), 189, 176, 183. See Rachel Hall, ‘Bernardine Evaristo Fears Publishers May Lose Interest in Black Authors,’ *Guardian*, 4 June 2022, www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jun/04/bernardine-evaristo-fears-publishers-may-lose-interest-in-black-authors.

¹⁰ Benjamin Zephaniah, *The Life and Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 78–9.

generate celebrity.¹¹ Less unanimously echoed, but nevertheless well established, is Tom Mole's argument that the 'material and discursive conditions of possibility that produced a recognisably modern celebrity culture' first emerged in the late eighteenth-century British imperial metropolis, with the development of a commercialized culture industry, mass media technology and 'an intense fascination with a radically privatised subjectivity'. British culture in this period, Mole argues, saw a radical 'epistemic break, ... between earlier kinds of fame and modern celebrity culture'.¹² Always closely entwined with nascent colonialism,¹³ celebrity's 'material and discursive conditions' promptly circulated globally via the channels of empire as well as trade and cultural exchange, and established overlapping and interrelated forms of literary celebrity in different places and cultural contexts. At its most extreme, we might see this process culminating in the instant worldwide readerships generated by global corporate publishing, BookTok and the international literary prize and festival circuit. Yet, as Arjun Appadurai reminds us, 'globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization'.¹⁴ Although aspects of the relationship between celebrity and politics can be read across global literary cultures and time periods, its specific dynamics and outcomes are not identical in each case, but depend on specific cultural, political and personal circumstances. This volume explores a few of these points of commonality and difference.

First, though, this introduction will sketch the history of a broad Romantic idea of authorship as it relates to celebrity and political agency, in the context of British colonial expansion and the development of modern 'world literature'.

In his 1821 *Defence of Poetry*, the poet and radical activist Percy Bysshe Shelley reworked the axiom that 'no living poet ever arrived at the fullness of his fame ... belonging as he does to all time', to construct a new concept of authorship as radically autonomous. Art, Shelley wrote, transcends not just the petty external forces of manners and economics, but even the author's own life, personality and politics.¹⁵ That is, the author's living

¹¹ See Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Loren Glass, *Authors, Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880–1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Eric Eisner, *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (London: Palgrave, 2009); Alexis Easley, *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011); Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings, eds., *Celebrity Authorship and Afterlives in English and American Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹² Tom Mole, 'Introduction', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture 1750–1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–6.

¹³ See Ruth Scobie, *Celebrity Culture and the Myth of Oceania in Britain, 1770–1823* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019).

¹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 674–701, 680.

presence, in private or in the contemporary public sphere, is irrelevant to the value or meaning of their literary work. Furthermore, Shelley dismisses the overt political or moral message of a literary work as ephemeral compared to its fundamental power to initiate a revolution of the social unconscious over many generations. ‘That Virgil was a flatterer, that Horace was a coward, that Tasso was a madman, that Lord Bacon was a speculator, that Raphael was a libertine, that Spenser was a poet laureate’ – all these details are ‘dust in the balance’, in terms of the writer’s impact on the world.¹⁶

As such, Shelley, and Romanticism more widely, has offered to later writers an enduringly capacious model for engagement with politics. While the author in the abstract is canonized as an invisible ‘nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude’, the living human who embodied that ‘unseen musician’¹⁷ might write in obscurity like John Clare or a blaze of publicity like Byron, might carefully disavow politics like Mary Shelley, engage in radical activism like Percy himself, or turn to reactionary conservatism like William Wordsworth. A Romantic reader’s sense of the intrinsic political importance of these writers’ art qua art is, at least theoretically, unaltered by these particular personal quirks. Although Shelley’s conclusion, styling writers ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the World’;¹⁸ has been variously interpreted, and the phrase repudiated by modernists such as W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot, it has been embraced as a rallying cry by such politically engaged writers as Salman Rushdie, Kenneth Rexroth, Seamus Heaney, Christopher Hitchens, Adrienne Rich and Fred Moten.¹⁹ Zephaniah, in a recent radio documentary marking the bicentenary of Shelley’s death, traces the enduring influence of Shelley’s poetry and poetics on his own and other writers’ sense of the author as an inherently revolutionary agent.²⁰

This Romantic conception of literary authorship is, then, deeply rooted in global literary culture. In practice, the idea, often vaguely understood, can flatten writers’ agency into the banally ‘glamorous status which bourgeois society liberally grants its spiritual representatives (so long as they remain harmless)’, as Roland Barthes explains in ‘The Writer on Holiday’.²¹ But it can also grant them particularly explosive forms of

¹⁶ Shelley, ‘Defence of Poetry’, 699.

¹⁷ Shelley, ‘Defence of Poetry’, 680.

¹⁸ Shelley, ‘Defence of Poetry’, 701.

¹⁹ See Salman Rushdie, ‘The Pen and the Sword: The International PEN Congress of 1986’, in *Languages of Truth: Essays 2003–2020* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021), 220–4, 223; Kenneth Rexroth, ‘Unacknowledged Legislators and Art Pour Art’, in *Bird in the Bush: Obvious Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1959), 3–18; Seamus Heaney, ‘The Unacknowledged Legislator’s Dream’, in *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975); Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 2000); Adrienne Rich, *Poetry and Commitment: An Essay* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Fred Moten, ‘Barbara Lee’, in *B Jenkins* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 84–7.

²⁰ Benjamin Zephaniah, *Percy Shelley, Radical and Reformer*, BBC Radio 4, July 2022.

²¹ Roland Barthes, ‘The Writer on Holiday’, in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (1957; London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 29–32, 29.

political and ethical authority, fostering readers' faith in an author's ultimate ability, however distracted he might be by momentary trivia, to communicate essential truths. As Wenche Ommundsen outlines, literary celebrity is a 'distinct brand of fame' often understood as a kind of anti-celebrity, 'unsullied by the manipulations of commercial or popular culture.'²² Gisèle Sapiro has shown in her work on politics and authorship in the French literary field that the image of the writer as a kind of sage or prophet became gradually more prominent in the nineteenth century with the increasing liberalization and secularization of society.²³

The author's cultural capital today continues to derive, in part, from the idea that their 'political prophesying' transcends temporary delusions.²⁴ Writers thus occupy a privileged position in a discourse of celebrity which is, in Nahuel Ribke's terms, 'hierarchically structured according to the prestige of the genres with which they are associated'. As such, their 'field migrations' from literature to politics can be smoothed.²⁵ British playwright and outspoken social commentator David Hare observes that 'because I'm a writer it's assumed I'm speaking the truth.'²⁶ Yet this role of literary truth-teller is itself a textual and extra-textual pose: Hare performs the authorial self of the inspired creator-genius and artist-propagandist.²⁷ Like other authors, he draws on, and thus continues, a cultural repertoire of what Jérôme Meizoz calls 'postures',²⁸ including that of the Shelleyan poet-legislator – allowing him to claim allegiance with a model of authorship which both valorizes his political interventions and insists that the specifics of these interventions cannot undermine his status as a sage 'belonging to all time'.

Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of this authorial posture of 'anti-celebrity' and timelessness is its historical entanglement with commodification and the marketing of personality. At the turn of the nineteenth century, a traceably modern concept of literary celebrity originated in Britain as a product of the widespread commercialization of literature. This developed from earlier changes to the dynamics and perception of fame, which cultural historians have traced back to the seventeenth-century lapsing of

²² Wenche Ommundsen, 'From the Altar to the Market-Place and Back Again: Understanding Literary Celebrity', in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 244–55, 245.

²³ Gisèle Sapiro, 'Forms of Politicization in the French Literary Field', *Theory and Society* 32, no. 5/6 (2003): 633–52.

²⁴ Sapiro, 'Forms of Politicization in the French Literary Field', 638.

²⁵ Nahuel Ribke, *A Genre Approach to Celebrity Politics: Global Patterns of Passage from Media to Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 172.

²⁶ Quoted in Kate Kellaway, 'State of Play: David Hare and James Graham Talk Drama and Politics', *Observer*, 6 May 2018, www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/may/06/david-hare-james-graham-drama-politics-labour-party.

²⁷ See Chris Megson and Dan Rebellato, "'Theatre and Anti-Theatre": David Hare and Public Speaking', in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hare*, ed. Richard Boon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 236–49; Sandra Mayer, 'Making Mischief: David Hare and the Celebrity Playwright's Political Persona', *Persona Studies* 5, no. 2 (2019): 38–52.

²⁸ See Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur* (Geneva: Slatkine Érudition, 2007).

print censorship and the post-Restoration reform of London theatres.²⁹ The gradual expansion of the consumer reading public which accompanied (among other things) the expansion of British global trade, including colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, prompted the growth of a competitive, inventive and largely unregulated print marketplace, especially after a surge in literacy rates from the 1790s.³⁰ Critics have discussed in some detail this marketplace's reshaping of authorship, with particular reference to innovations in intellectual property rights, literary reviews and the professionalization of criticism, and the development of literary periodicals, as well as to the careers of individual authors, most prominently Byron and Walter Scott.³¹

Recent scholarship has turned its attention to the channels by which this peculiar combination of commercialization and Romantic authorship reached and cross-pollinated with, or was imposed upon, other cultural and public spheres. Of course, British Romanticism emerged and was defined in active interrelation with European Romanticism more broadly;³² the work of Antoine Lilti and others has also begun to explore the ways in which the 'epistemic break' of celebrity took place concurrently in different ways and at different times across Europe.³³ Beyond Europe, colonialism and economic globalization have, over two centuries, circulated both celebrity and the Romantic author worldwide. The printing press carried by the 'First Fleet' of convict-settlers travelling to New South Wales may have been used primarily for bureaucracy, but its symbolism was unmistakable in a settlement which saw itself as an exiled outpost of Britain, and where British books – especially by Scott and Byron – were valuable

²⁹ See Emrys D. Jones and Victoria Joule, eds., *Intimacy and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture: Public Interiors* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018); Scobie, *Celebrity Culture and the Myth of Oceania*, 1–26; Cheryl Wanko, 'Celebrity Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century: An Interdisciplinary Overview', *Literature Compass* 8, no. 6 (2011): 351–62.

³⁰ See Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³¹ See Michael Gamer, *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1996); David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005); Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Robert Mayer, *Walter Scott and Fame: Authors and Readers in the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Matthew Sangster gives a more detailed account of the long and complex life of post-Romantic ideas of authorship, and particularly 'the conflicted twin developments of Romantic ideologies and technologies of mass production and circulation' in the preface to *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2021), 1–12, 10.

³² For a brief overview, see Patrick Vincent, 'British Romantics Abroad', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 707–22, 717–20. See also Steve Clark and Tristanne Connolly, eds., *British Romanticism in European Perspective: Into the Eurozone* (Basingstoke: Palgrave: 2015).

³³ Mole, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*, 3. See Antoine Lilti, *The Invention of Celebrity 1750–1850 [Figures publiques. L'invention de la célébrité. 1750–1850]*, trans. Lynn Jeffress (Cambridge: Polity, 2017); Anais Pédrón and Clare Siviter, eds., *Celebrity across the Channel, 1750–1850* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2021).

and in high demand.³⁴ Robert Mayer points out that Scott's enormous correspondence includes letters from readers in France, Germany and America, but also British writers with colonial roles in South Africa and India – one of whom enthuses that Scott's books 'have spread the renown of the "author of Waverley" from the dreary Forests of Canada to the burning Jungles of the Bhirmese frontier'.³⁵

As Manu Samriti Chander shows, the 'Romantic figure of the poet as legislator took root throughout the British Empire in the nineteenth century, in cultural arenas as diverse as Calcutta, Georgetown, and Sydney'.³⁶ Since, Chander explains, 'for writers across the empire, ... Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley provided paradigms of literariness itself', later colonial poets 'struggled to achieve the status of legislators in their own right in order to challenge the dominance of English poets, mobilizing Romanticism against Romanticism'.³⁷ The tensions of this double-edged dynamic were sharpened by anti-colonial and postcolonial drives to assert local authors as national voices and leaders in the Romantic mode, even as Western markets and cultural institutions retained power. One result is the apparent paradox by which the activist writer, in many cultural contexts, has been exceptionally authoritative and prominent as the ambassador and mediator of a specific cultural or national identity, but also exceptionally vulnerable to accusations of deculturation or selling out. Even the contemporary postcolonial literary field, Graham Huggan points out, tends to 'privilege a handful of famous writers (Achebe, Naipaul, Rushdie)' in its 'spiralling commodification of cultural difference'.³⁸ Viewed another way, literary celebrity carries both the political force and the political risks of both the local and the cosmopolitan, of particular lived experience and the apparently universal.

As another product of post-Romantic commercialization and globalization, modern literary studies has also inherited a complex set of assumptions about authorship. On the one hand, academic theorizations of the real-world function of literature – its potential to *legislate* – have tended, with Shelley, to bracket questions of the author's extratextual persona (let alone their celebrity brand) as reductive or worse. Martin Puchner's recent lecture-manifesto on literature's capacity to fight climate change, for

³⁴ See Elizabeth Webby, 'The Beginnings of Literature in Colonial America', in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed., Peter Pierce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34–51.

³⁵ Mayer, *Walter Scott and Fame*, 5. Anonymous to Walter Scott (1827), quoted in Mayer, *Walter Scott and Fame*, 144.

³⁶ Manu Samriti Chander, *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), 2. See also Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989; New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Caroline Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); Alex Watson and Laurence Williams, eds., *British Romanticism in Asia: The Reception, Translation, and Transformation of Romantic Literature in India and East Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019); Suh-Reen Han, 'Keats via Kim Yeong-Nang, or How the Romantics Have Never Been Western', *European Romantic Review* 31 (2020): 301–11; Olivia Loksing Moy and Marco Ramirez Rojas, eds., *Latin American Afterlives of the British Romantics* (Romantic Circles Praxis Series, 2020), romantic-circles.org/praxis/latinam; Mark Sandy, *Transatlantic Transformations of Romanticism: Aesthetics, Subjectivity and the Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

³⁷ Chander, *Brown Romantics*, 7, 3.

³⁸ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 30, 76.

example, concluded with a call for scholars ‘to get away from another figure that has held a lot of thinking about literature in its thrall: the individual author’.³⁹ On the other hand, scholars interested in analysing authorial personae are often influenced by a social science-inflected characterization of celebrity as a form of agency which, almost by definition, circumvents political participation traditionally understood. ‘Celebrities are not powerful in any overt political sense’, P. David Marshall asserts, and so ‘to understand the power of the celebrity requires a different set of tools and a different sense of how power is organised in society’.⁴⁰ In other words, scholars of literary politics have in general disavowed the subject of celebrity, while scholars of literary celebrity (while often politically informed) have rarely addressed the subject of political agency. This has tended to limit attention to the links between the two, and to promote an unspoken, often unhelpful, sense of literary celebrity and ‘authentic’ political action as somehow mutually exclusive. Literary biographers and critics are left with a set of mythologized templates – the committed activist who sacrifices personal publicity and commercial success; the solitary genius who is both apolitical and anti-celebrity; the literary sell-out who abandons politics for the pursuit of fame – inadequate to the complexities either of individual literary careers or of the interconnected workings of literature and the world. ‘The celebrity author’, as Lorraine York notes, is frequently assumed to be incapable of taking any stand outside the globalized marketplace with which they are complicit, and thus incapable of genuinely provoking or endorsing change, at most producing elaborate assertions endlessly decoded by the critic as being ‘in full or even hypocritical denial of his or her role in commodity capitalism’.⁴¹

Some recent literary scholarship, perhaps stimulated by a post-Trump focus in other disciplines on the relationship between political institutions and celebrity,⁴² especially an emerging sense of the importance of celebrity in political history,⁴³ has begun to answer York’s challenge to go beyond this false dilemma and construct ‘a new model of the modern and contemporary author’ – not least York’s own work on Marlene NourbeSe Philip.⁴⁴ Other author-focused studies have begun to unpick the ways in which celebrity has been productively, as well as paradoxically, mobilized in the

³⁹ Martin Puchner, *Literature for a Changing Planet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 105.

⁴⁰ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xlvii.

⁴¹ Lorraine York, *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 38.

⁴² See, for example, Heather E. Yates and Timothy G. Hill, eds., *The Hollywood Connection: The Influence of Fictional Media and Celebrity Politics on American Public Opinion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018); David Zeglen and Neil Ewen, eds., ‘National Populists: Right-Wing Celebrity Politicians in Contemporary Europe’, special issue of *Celebrity Studies* 11, no. 3 (2020); Samantha Majic, Daniel O’Neill and Michael Bernhard, eds., ‘Celebrity and Politics’, special issue of *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 1 (2020).

⁴³ See David Higgins, ‘Celebrity, Politics and the Rhetoric of Genius’, in Mole, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*, 41–59; Simon Morgan, *Celebrities, Heroes and Champions: Popular Politicians in the Age of Reform, 1810–67* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

⁴⁴ York, *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity*, 38. York, ‘“Unembedded, Disappeared”: Marlene NourbeSe Philip’s Hyper/In/Visible Literary Celebrity’, *Authorship* 10, no. 1 (2021).

service of political action by writers such as Wole Soyinka, Arundhati Roy and Warsan Shire.⁴⁵ Arthur Rose, for instance, offers a detailed reading of Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett and J. M. Coetzee's textual struggles with their own literary fame.⁴⁶ In her work on the contemporary European public intellectual, Odile Heynders reports – without lamenting – that 'strategies of celebrity behaviour and the subsequent responses of the public are transforming the traditions and modes of intellectual thinking and writing',⁴⁷ while Shola Adenekan recognizes a comparably 'monumental paradigm shift' in the emergence of a cosmopolitan digital elite of African writers, whose 'crossover appeal enables [them] to perform the role of agenda-setters, with the power to frame and determine their society's cultural values'.⁴⁸

Modern celebrity authorship's political agency has also been historicized, although as yet partially and unevenly. Bonnie Carr O'Neill, for example, charts the interconnections between the nineteenth-century democratization of the American public sphere and the celebrity of literary figures including Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁴⁹ New scholarly perspectives on Victorian statesman and novelist Benjamin Disraeli, such as the work of Sandra Mayer, have emphasized the close interrelations in his life and work between literature and politics.⁵⁰ Taking a longer view, a 2017 special issue of the 'Forum' section of *Celebrity Studies* on 'Authorship, Politics and Celebrity', edited by Mayer, explores the long history of writers traversing the spheres of literature and political engagement via vignettes spanning from sixteenth-century political pamphlets to Harriet Beecher Stowe to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.⁵¹ This followed a previous issue of the same journal on literary celebrity more generally, in which the editors, Rebecca Braun and Emily Spiers, suggested that analysing literary celebrity 'permits the study of literature to go beyond itself and to ask how ideas of literary value intersect with other predominant notions of social and economic value'.⁵² The contributors to this volume make a point, with Braun and Spiers, of 'think[ing] literature back into the

⁴⁵ See Karin Berkman, 'Literary Celebrity and Political Activism: Wole Soyinka's Nobel Prize Lecture and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle', *Critical Arts* 34, no. 1 (2020): 73–86; Pramod K. Nayar, 'Mobility and Insurgent Celebrityhood: The Case of Arundhati Roy', *Open Cultural Studies* (2017): 46–54; Devleena Ghosh, 'Arundhati Roy versus the State of India: The Politics of Celebrity Philanthropy', in *Celebrity Philanthropy*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys and Paul Allatson (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2015); Elisa Ronzheimer, 'The Poem as Meme? Pop Video Poetry in the Digital Age (Warsan Shire/ Beyoncé)', *Word & Image* 37, no. 2 (2021): 152–9.

⁴⁶ Arthur Rose, *Literary Cynics: Borges, Beckett, Coetzee* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

⁴⁷ Odile Heynders, *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 2.

⁴⁸ Shola Adenekan, *African Literature in the Digital Age: Class and Sexual Politics in New Writing from Nigeria and Kenya* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021), 5–6.

⁴⁹ Bonnie Carr O'Neill, *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Sandra Mayer, 'Portraits of the Artist as Politician, the Politician as Artist: Commemorating the Disraeli Phenomenon', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21, no. 3 (2016): 281–300.

⁵¹ Sandra Mayer, ed., 'Authorship, Politics and Celebrity', special 'Forum' issue of *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 1 (2017).

⁵² Rebecca Braun and Emily Spiers, 'Introduction: Re-viewing Literary Celebrity', *Celebrity Studies* 7, no. 4 (2016): 449–56, 449.

bigger picture of society.⁵³ They present the author as a powerful agent in the public sphere, whose political interventions are vital in the creation of authorial identities. At the same time, they draw attention to the manifold ways in which this agency is 'situated' and 'operates alongside and even within structural forces and constraints,' as celebrity theorists such as Joe Moran and Lorraine York have argued.⁵⁴

The first part of the volume, 'Art as Activism,' asks how the author's activities outside the literary text relate to, and might reinforce or undermine, the political potential of the creative act. The section opens with a discussion between five renowned scholars and writer-activists (including internationally acclaimed crime writer and former president of PEN South Africa Margie Orford, and Catalan poet Carles Torner, then Executive Director of PEN International) on the work of PEN International, the first worldwide non-governmental writers' organization. Focusing on a series of historical documents, this panel offers insights into this influential organization and its advocacy of human rights, freedom of expression and linguistic diversity, as well as its role in shaping public ideas of the writer's responsibilities and privileges. Next, the activist potential of literary networks and organizations on a smaller-scale community level is explored by Ellen Wiles in her chapter on the London-based LGBTQ+ literary salon Polari, which describes how the experience of literary performance shapes not only participants' literary tastes and values, but also their sense of identity and community.

A sharp reconceptualization of art *and* action as art *as*, or *in*, action, is at the heart of an email exchange between South African poet, translator and scholar-activist Antjie Krog and academic Peter D. McDonald. In this correspondence, Krog violently rejects the idea of literary celebrity, pushing instead for a concept of 'publicness,' a term which 'maintains the notion of being public, but keeps the space open for risk, failure and disgrace.'⁵⁵ Covering episodes from Krog's own literary and activist career before and after the end of apartheid, the conversation offers a reminder of the ideological power of language, the importance of translation as a form of activism and thus the deeply political relationship between literature, medium, location and audience.

The concerns raised by Krog about the celebratization of the writer form part of a lively debate in the next part, on 'Activism and the Literary Industry.' This begins with two conversations between writers, publishers, critics, editors, translators and literary prize judges on the often fraught relationship, drawn out influentially by Amit Chaudhuri, between 'market activism' and 'literary activism.'⁵⁶ First, award-winning novelist and essayist Kirsty Gunn and publisher David Graham engage in a candid exchange of viewpoints on literature and its place within the wider economic and political world. Drawing on their personal experience of working with major independent publishers, Gunn and Graham describe the problems arising from the growing importance of the author's marketability and celebrity profile, and the

⁵³ Braun and Spiers, 'Introduction,' 449.

⁵⁴ Moran, *Star Authors*, 10; Lorraine York, 'Star Turn: The Challenges of Theorizing Celebrity Agency,' *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 6 (2013): 1330–47, 1339.

⁵⁵ Antjie Krog, "'Bugger Universality": An Exchange with Antjie Krog' in this volume, 59.

⁵⁶ See Amit Chaudhuri, ed., *Literary Activism: A Symposium* (Norwich: Boiler House Press, 2016).

increasingly blurred lines between creator and promoter. In ‘Resisting Stereotypes: Art, Activism and the Literature Industry’, scholars, translators and editors consider how their work might be conceived of as a form of political activism, and how this is affected by the promise and pitfalls of digital media, literary prize and festival culture and the economics of selling books. Finally in this section, Eva Sage Gordon provides a case study of two nineteenth-century American writers, Fanny Fern and Nellie Bly, who balanced their textual activism – both explicit support for causes such as asylum reform, and more-or-less covert feminism – with strategies to maintain their commercial appeal to a new mass market of readers.

The work of Odile Heynders provides the pivotal concept as well as the opening chapter for our third part, ‘The Invention of the Public Intellectual’. In her game-changing book *Writers as Public Intellectuals*, Heynders identifies modern public intellectuals as figures ‘with a certain artistic prestige and writing career, who by self-fashioning try to convince an audience and in so doing intentionally appear on various media platforms a specific style and voice.’⁵⁷ In her chapter for this volume, Heynders turns to writers’ textual explorations of knowledge, perception and reality, arguing that the practitioners of literary fiction are uniquely equipped to guide readers through a ‘post-truth’ political world in which – in the words of an essay by Peter Pomerantsev which Heynders examines – ‘nothing is true and everything is possible’. Readers and writers of fiction have a particular power, she suggests, to defend not just the practice but the epistemic foundations of democracy.

The noun ‘intellectual’ as a concrete category or profession, like the same use of the noun ‘celebrity’, is a product of the early nineteenth century. In one of the earliest instances listed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Lord Byron uses the word ‘intellectuals’ in his journal to describe a group of critics, scholars and satirists with whom he had been invited to dine in 1813.⁵⁸ In the same journal entry, Byron laments that a different group of Romantic ‘rhymers’, including Scott and Thomas Moore, have neglected social and political activism for professional authorship, and now, though they ‘might all have been agents and leaders, [are] now mere spectators.’⁵⁹ In contrast, Byron’s ‘intellectuals’ remain active and influential in politics – indeed one of them, George Canning, would later become British prime minister. In a period of growing specialization and professionalization, then, the emergence of both the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘celebrity’ as distinguishable identities is of a piece with the development of a new sense of the author as (at least potentially) cloistered from the world of politics and commerce. ‘Intellectuals’, for Byron, are writers who do not resist the real-world agency offered by their literary status but ‘negotiat[e]’, as Heynders writes of their twenty-first-century counterparts, ‘a visible outspokenness.’⁶⁰ Chapters in this part

⁵⁷ Heynders, *Writers as Public Intellectuals*, 15.

⁵⁸ ‘Intellectual’, *Oxford English Dictionary* online (September 2022); for the word ‘celebrity’, see Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*, xi–xii.

⁵⁹ George Gordon, Lord Byron (23 November 1813) in *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1830), 2, 447.

⁶⁰ Heynders, *Writers as Public Intellectuals*, 15.

by Anna Paluchowska-Messing and Kieran Hazzard on Frances Burney and James Silk Buckingham, both contemporaries of Byron, provide contrasting examples of the role of 'public intellectual' at this early, transitional stage in its history.

Burney, as Paluchowska-Messing outlines in her chapter, was only reluctantly persuaded to use the moral authority generated by her novels in order to appeal in print for a single, precisely defined cause: clergy fleeing the French Revolution in the early 1790s. As Paluchowska-Messing demonstrates, Burney's anxiety about the possible backlash to a middle-class woman claiming the status of 'public intellectual' manifests in her careful self-presentation as a modest, domestic and conservative activist, even as her novel *The Wanderer* makes a more radical, though less overt, call for sympathy towards refugees. Buckingham's celebrity, on the other hand, was characterized by reckless extravagance, both in his prolific, multi-genre, sensational and often dubious writing career, and in a radical political activism which embraced an abundance of ambitious global causes and included large-scale meetings and lecture tours, provocative public stunts and occasional moments of physical and legal danger. The striking contrasts between these two figures suggest that the restrictive gender norms emerging in this period did not merely inflect the perception of individual 'public intellectuals', but were fundamental to the origination of 'public intellectualism' itself. A final perspective on literature's gendered role in the public sphere is presented by Divya A. Her subject, the prolific contemporary Tamil author B. Jeyamohan, might be seen, in Heynders' terms, as a quintessential writer-as-public-intellectual: the autofictions of his short-story collection *Aram* intervene in current political debates, paralleling the more direct – and controversial – statements of his blog. Yet as the chapter shows, Jeyamohan weaponizes fictionalization to dramatize and defend a concept of literary authority as exclusively the property of higher-caste men, embodied in the protagonist of the collection's title story.

The three chapters in our final part, 'Writing Europe', examine the role of public intellectuals in the textual construction of Europe. Benedict Schofield opens by discussing the responses to Brexit of several contemporary authors, particularly A. L. Kennedy and Kathrin Röggla, within literary-political networks. These networks, Schofield demonstrates, are manifest in anthologies, institutions and live events, and sustain, disseminate and protect literary-political voices, while providing space for reflections on the authority and responsibilities of writers. Comparable questions about literature as a force shaping ideas of modern Europe recur in the two historical case studies which follow, recounting the very different transnational interventions of Vernon Lee and Knut Hamsun into struggles over national identity, heritage and government. Lee's cosmopolitan celebrity allowed her to participate in *fin-de-siècle* public debates on urban planning and conservation in her adopted country, Italy, as Elisa Bizzotto shows. Tore Rem's chapter narrates the process by which Hamsun's early disavowal of the Scandinavian 'poetocracy' gave way to his notorious support for National Socialism before, during and after the German occupation of Norway. Despite the obvious differences between Lee and Hamsun, in both instances a reputation built on literary achievement was deployed to amplify a political message across national boundaries. Additionally, in both instances later literary works (Lee's radically pacifist

Satan the Waster and Hamsun's memoir *On Overgrown Paths*) were shaped in form as well as content by their authors' defiant responses to the ensuing political controversy.

Any temptation to idealize what Schofield calls literature's power to 'establish ... consensus'⁶¹ may be disturbed by Lee's complacent self-appointment as a civilizer of Italian society, and, more dramatically, by Hamsun's fascism. The story of the Nobel Prize-winning Hamsun tests the limits of the Romantic idea of literature as an autonomous and transcendent form of legislation. If the post-Romantic readers of global literature believe, with Shelley, that the particular facts 'that Raphael was a libertine, that Spenser was a poet laureate' do not affect the ultimate political outcome of their work, do they also believe in the irrelevance of the fact that Hamsun was a supporter of Nazism? Rem's account of the attempts to whitewash Hamsun's reputation – and the continuing tussles over it – suggests that, on the contrary, many readers may feel equal instinctive sympathy with George Orwell's view (expressed in a 1943 note on W. B. Yeats' fascist sympathies) that 'a writer's political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away, but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest detail of his work.'⁶²

The volume begins and ends with the voice of the writer. In 'Looking On ...', Kirsty Gunn reflects on what it means to be a novelist in contemporary literary culture and how her work relates to lived, day-to-day experience. Gunn's essay makes a forceful claim for authorial autonomy, but also an important statement about the political power of form and genre. Gunn's conclusion – 'Art becomes political, then, when we so engage' – draws together some of the volume's central themes and concerns and, once more, points towards the richness of its debates on literature's power to change the world.

When Salman Rushdie was stabbed onstage at a New York State literary festival in August 2022, thirty-three years after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's declaration of a fatwa in retaliation for the novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the power and danger of the author's splintered persona were made instantly and insistently visible. He is known as a major literary celebrity, as a minor show-business celebrity ('Padma Lakshmi's Ex-Husband', as *Hollywoodlife.com* explained⁶³) and as a canonical postcolonial writer, but also – despite his attempts to step out of the shadow of 'the Rushdie affair' – as an icon of free speech and secularism, and, in much of the Muslim world, as a sinister archenemy of Islam. 'I'm not a geopolitical entity', he said in a 2021 interview, 'I'm

⁶¹ Benedict Schofield, 'European Connections: Literary Networks, Political Authorship and the Future of Europe Debate' in this volume, 172.

⁶² George Orwell, review of *The Development of William Butler Yeats* by V. K. Narayana Menon, *Horizon*, January 1943. In Orwell, *Keeping Our Little Corner Clean: 1942–1943*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 2001), 279–83, 283.

⁶³ Jason Brow, 'Padma Lakshmi's Ex-Husband: Everything to Know about Salman Rushdie after Stabbing Attack', *Hollywood Life*, 12 August 2022, hollywoodlife.com/feature/padma-lakshmi-husband-4471282/.

someone writing in a room.⁶⁴ A scroll through the hashtag #salmanrushdie on social media in the days after the attack demonstrated that the two could not be separated: reverently anxious and outraged reactions from writers (King, Atwood, Roy), world leaders (Joe Biden, Ursula von der Leyen, Emmanuel Macron) and celebrities (including the talkshow host Bill Maher and the Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut) were brutally interspersed with Islamic extremist celebrations and white supremacist calls for retribution against Muslims.

More subtly, the early reports which accompanied photographs and videos of the writer receiving emergency treatment tended to emphasize the setting of the attack, suggesting that the spectacle of political violence was intensified by its incongruity with the scene of a self-consciously ‘civilized’ Romantic literary culture in which horrors and oppressions become transcendent words and performance: ostensibly apolitical, embattled, but ultimately world-changing. The lecture which Rushdie was due to give, journalists noted, was on threats to writers around the world. In line with his long-standing commitment to the work of PEN International and PEN America, he has persistently declared his belief in writers’ status as ‘unacknowledged legislators’ – defining the phrase explicitly in relation to his faith in ‘literary art as the proper counterweight to power, and ... literature as a lofty, transnational, transcultural force.’⁶⁵ Appropriately, then, his friend Bernard-Henri Lévy’s tribute to ‘the immortal Salman Rushdie’, written just a few days later, alluded to John Keats in its labelling of the attack as ‘an outrage’ not just against ‘someone writing in a room’ but ‘against truth and beauty themselves.’⁶⁶ Other commentators, less poetically, insisted that Rushdie’s more controversial personal opinions – his support for the American invasion of Iraq, criticism of Indira Gandhi, perceived dismissiveness towards Indian writing not in English – should be ranked with other aspects of his ‘tawdry celebrity’, as irrelevant to the significance of the violence against him, which was ‘the institutionalisation of hatred and the complete negation of the idea of freedom of expression.’⁶⁷ Rushdie, then, was made to represent most perfectly the abstract authority of great literature at the precise moment which most glaringly drew attention to his vulnerable embodiment as a human individual.

Rushdie’s celebrity and self-fashioning have long been the subject of academic analysis, especially after the 2012 publication of his memoir, *Joseph Anton*, which in its adulation of writerly authority clearly represents an attempt to regain control of his

⁶⁴ Quoted in Hadley Freeman, ‘Salman Rushdie: “I Am Stupidly Optimistic – It Got Me through Those Bad Years”’, *Guardian*, 15 May 2021, www.theguardian.com/books/2021/may/15/salman-rushdie-i-am-stupidly-optimistic-it-got-me-through-those-bad-years.

⁶⁵ Rushdie, ‘The Pen and the Sword’, 223.

⁶⁶ Bernard-Henri Lévy, ‘The Immortal Salman Rushdie’, *Atlantic*, 17 August 2022, www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/08/salman-rushdie-the-satanic-verses-legacy/671149/.

⁶⁷ Kapil Komireddi, ‘Salman Rushdie Trapped by Alliance of Implacably Regressive and Insufferably Progressive’, *ThePrint India*, 14 August 2022, theprint.in/opinion/salman-rushdie-trapped-by-alliance-of-implacably-regressive-and-insufferably-progressive/1082087/; Rajesh Ramachandran, ‘Haunting Silence on Rushdie’, *Tribune*, 20 August 2022, www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/haunting-silence-on-rushdie-423361.

authorial persona. The best scholarly work has illuminated both his published fiction and the dynamics of contemporary postcolonial literary celebrity.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, accounts of Rushdie and his work have to some extent reproduced the schisms by which the authorial self is split into conflicting realities. At their most extreme, political accounts of the ‘Rushdie Affair’ dismiss as trivia his celebrity and the specifics of his fiction; literary criticism reflexively treats his extratextual personae as irrelevant, and analyses of Rushdie’s celebrity reduce both literary and political stakes to rhetorical devices in an ‘ongoing articulation of an ostensibly subversive authorial persona within the competitive multinational literary market.’⁶⁹ For Carey Mickalites, for example, Rushdie’s political statements and actions are ‘self-promotional’, marking him only as ‘a global celebrity posing as a subversive writer.’⁷⁰ To be sure, notoriety and controversy, self-fashioned or imposed, have always been among the most powerful catalysts of celebrity and its wider economic ramifications: in a cynical twist, the attempt on Rushdie’s life immediately fuelled sales of *The Satanic Verses*.⁷¹

Yet, as this and the case studies in this book show, neither literature nor celebrity is a game played outside the real world, untouched by its increasingly all-invasive threats and horrors or its increasingly urgent calls to action. Opening up the conversation to include scholars, writer-activists and industry stakeholders, this volume interprets literature as a social and cultural practice fusing politics and economics, art and entertainment, lofty ideals of genius and shrewd self-publicity. In this way, it illustrates the complexity of literature’s historically and culturally situated relationship with the world outside the book, and shows that concepts of celebrity and political agency can help give a clearer answer to long-fought questions about whether, and how, literature makes anything happen.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Ana Cristina Mendes, *Salman Rushdie in the Cultural Marketplace* (London: Routledge, 2013); Tawnya Ravy, ‘“The Man Who Would Be Popular”: An Analysis of Salman Rushdie’s Twitter Feed’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 52, no. 3 (2017): 551–62; Jaclyn Partyka, ‘Joseph Anton’s Digital Doppelgänger: Salman Rushdie and the Rhetoric of Self-Fashioning’, *Contemporary Literature* 58, no. 2 (2017): 204–32.

⁶⁹ Carey Mickalites, *Contemporary Fiction, Celebrity Culture, and the Market for Modernism: Fictions of Celebrity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 81–2.

⁷⁰ Mickalites, *Fictions of Celebrity*, 100.

⁷¹ See, for example, ‘Salman Rushdie’s “Satanische Verse” wieder lieferbar’ (Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* Available Again), *Stern*, 30 August 2022, www.stern.de/kultur/schriftsteller-salman-rushdie-satanische-verse-wieder-lieferbar-32677098.htm.

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