

Art & Action
A Two-day Conference on Literary Authorship, Politics, and Celebrity Culture
20-21 March 2020

Seminar Room, Radcliffe Humanities Building, Woodstock Road, Oxford
<https://artandactionoxford.wordpress.com>

Abstracts & Bio Notes

Friday, 20 March 2020

Panel 1: Writers as Political Activists

Simon Morgan: “Disability, Authorship and Political Radicalism in the Life and Poetry of James Vernon of South Molton”

This paper explores the intersection between disability and literary political radicalism in early Victorian Britain through the life and work of disabled Chartist poet, James Vernon of South Molton. Studies of Chartist poetry and song have multiplied in recent years, while the role of poetic composition in the political careers of major Chartist leaders such as Ernest Jones and Thomas Cooper is now well appreciated. By contrast, Vernon was an obscure individual with little or no standing in the wider movement and certainly did not fit the profile of a rebel against the status quo. As a wheelchair user living in a small market town remote from the urban-industrial epicentres of Chartism, he was dependent on local patronage for his day-to-day survival. It is therefore remarkable that he risked his patrons’ displeasure by publishing 24 poems in the poetry columns of the Chartist *Northern Star* from 26 September 1840 to 29 January 1842, ten of which appeared in his only known collection of verse, *The Afflicted Muse* (1842). Although not strictly speaking a ‘celebrity’, Vernon arguably used his literary aspirations to increase his own ‘attention capital’ for various purposes: first within his immediate community in order to leverage patronage by performing the role of ‘deserving’ poverty; secondly in an effort to emancipate himself from this humiliating dependency by accessing a wider audience through the *Northern Star*. He is therefore an excellent case study for exploring the potentials and limitations of literary activism as a strategy for self-actualisation and empowerment.

Simon Morgan is Head of History at Leeds Beckett University. He is the author of *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), and the co-editor of the *Letters of Richard Cobden*, 4 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2006-2015). He has published widely on the histories of nineteenth-century public culture and radical politics, and is currently completing a monograph for Manchester University Press entitled: *Celebrities, Heroes and Champions: Popular Politicians in the Age of Reform, 1810-1867*.

Divya A: “The Art of Jeyamohan’s ‘Aram’ (2011): Ethics of Writers, Divinities, and Celebrity Narratives”

B. Jeyamohan’s “Aram” written in Tamil—the title can be translated as “virtue” or “ethics”—is a classic tale of justice meted out to a needy and deserving man of letters in a small town in Tamil Nadu, India, in the nineteen fifties. “Aram” is a crucial literary piece that traces the position and cultural function of the regional writer in this southern state since the Indian independence. My paper highlights migrations across domains such as literary celebrity, politics, and activism in relation to Indian author-

activists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Subramania Bharathi, and Arundhati Roy. I specifically probe the relation between Jeyamohan's fictional narrative "Aram" and the discourse surrounding his public persona to throw light on the relationship between his writing and the affirmation of the cultural status-quo that privileges the majority religion, the higher caste, and the male. I also illustrate how the field intersections of writing and cultural activism are inflected in problematic ways through the lens of caste and gender. Premised as a conversation between two writers— an older writer and the contemporary literary celebrity Jeyamohan—the purportedly biographical "Aram" performs the regressive ideological work of establishing the socio-cultural supremacy of the higher caste in the domain of letters. By affirming the righteousness of the writer in structural ways, Jeyamohan defends the figure as a triumphant cultural sign that reiterates the values of a largely feudal, caste-based, and gender-biased society. This regional trajectory thus remains distinct from transnational and international celebrity narratives that largely revolve around the cause of the truly marginalized.

Divya A is an Assistant Professor in English Literature in the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India. Her research interests primarily revolve around explorations in the fields of gender, domesticity, spatiality, urbanism, and the interplay between the visual and the textual in literature and culture. After obtaining her Master of Studies degree in Early Modern English Literature from the University of Oxford, Divya completed her PhD in Nineteenth-Century English Fiction at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. She has published articles on Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Her current research projects are on Anglo-Indians, colonial texts and illustrations, and regional Indian literatures in translation.

Odile Heynders: "Cultural Authority in the Democratic Public Sphere: Rethinking Literary Authors' Positions and Practices"

Today, many people experience the public spheres in Western societies as confusing, over-emotional and too much influenced by fake information and the spectacle of social media. Democracy is said to be in danger. Scholars have discussed "the crisis of liberal democracy" (Yasha Mounk 2018), the "against democracy" statement – ignorant people should not make fateful decisions on complex issues, which is why voting is not a good procedure (Jason Brennan 2016) – and even the "end of democracy" (Runciman 2018). We can watch one of the oldest European democracies crumbling to pieces, with the main actor promoting the "people against the Parliament" reasoning (*Financial Times*, 26 September 2019).

The main claim of this paper is that in fragmented public spheres in which there is more information available than ever before, we need public intellectuals as spokespersons, who are able to unentangle fake from real, obsession from observation, nostalgia from rationality, immediate reaction from retrospective thinking. In this paper, first Peter Pomerantsev's *This is not Propaganda* (2019) is discussed and related to the idea that institutions, media, and politicians should take care of the regulation of the public debate. This paper subsequently considers the specific role that public intellectuals could play in serving the people by explaining how political discussions get muddy and manipulative. The concept of 'cultural authority' will be reconsidered. Finally, this paper will discuss the work of literary author Valeria Luiselli and consider her interventions regarding issues of migration in the Trump era.

Odile Heynders is Professor of Comparative Literature and Head of the Department of Culture Studies at Tilburg University. She was a fellow at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Sciences (NIAS) in 1998/99 and 2004/05. She published books and articles on European literature and authorship. Her book *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy* (2016) appeared with Palgrave Macmillan. Her current book project is on experiences of migration in literature.

Keynote: Antjie Krog in Conversation with Peter D. McDonald

Antjie Krog is one of South Africa's foremost contemporary poets, writers, journalists, translators, and scholar-activists, writing both in Afrikaans and English. Her award-winning volumes of poetry include *Dogter van Jefta* (1970), *Mannin* (1974), *Otters in Bronslaaï* (1981), *Lady Anne* (1989), *Down to My Last Skin* (2000), *Met Woorde Soos Met Kerse* (2002), *Body Bereft* (2006), and *Skinned* (2013). She became editor of the Afrikaans current-affairs magazine *Die Suid-Afrikaan* and later worked as a radio journalist covering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, from which came the best known of her non-fiction books, *Country of my Skull* (1998), followed by *A Change of Tongue* (2004) and *Begging to be Black* (2009). Krog's works have been widely translated and she has been awarded some of the most prestigious international prizes available for poetry, non-fiction, journalism, and translation.

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 the freedom of expression; the history of writing systems, cultural institutions and publishing; multilingualism, translation and interculturality; and on the promise of creative criticism. His main publications include *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1888-1914* (CUP, 1997), *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences* (OUP, 2009, theliteraturepolice.com), and *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing* (OUP, 2017, artefactsofwriting.com).

Panel 2: Authorial Border-Crossings and Freedom of Speech

Kieran Hazzard: "James Silk Buckingham: Celebrity Anti-Colonial Campaigner"

James Silk Buckingham was by turns a traveller, adventurer, writer, newspaper editor, political activist, and MP. He shot to fame in 1823 after being banished from India by the East India Company. As a writer and editor in India he had constantly attacked the inequity and violence of Company rule, and, despite his property being seized and being sent into exile, refused to be silenced. On his return to Britain he was received as a Radical martyr, gaining friends and patrons from prominent Whigs and Radicals looking to reform not just British government but that of the British Empire.

My paper will show how Buckingham carefully cultivated his own newly found celebrity and connections, first to take on the Company in court, and then to found a new journal to savage them in print. Buckingham was also a serious networker and self-promoter, gaining many influential political and literary friends, whose works he would champion and publish, and who in return would support Buckingham's causes.

These causes were many, starting with the campaign against the East India Company, but soon encompassing advocacy of improved working conditions, electoral reform, education and temperance. Many of these he took on the road in speaking tours across Britain and then America. He would eventually become an MP for Sheffield to bring his campaigning to the centre of power. Despite, or perhaps because, of this, he faced an extremely hostile reception in Parliament and in the Tory press, with most his schemes being thwarted in his own lifetime.

Kieran Hazzard is a historian of Britain and India during the 18th and 19th centuries, specialising in British politics and the East India Company. He is Knowledge Exchange Fellow at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, working with the National Trust, researching the origins and significance of the Indian artefacts amassed by the Clive family, which are now on display in Powis Castle. Building on his research into the creation of the 1833 British Indian constitution, he joined the 'Quill Project' at Pembroke College, working on the records of the US Constitutional Convention of 1787. He is also interested in British Radicalism and its combative relationship with the East India Company.

Elisa Bizzotto: “Vernon Lee: Female Celebrity Activism across Cultures”

As a well-known English writer living in Italy, though cosmopolitan by education, Vernon Lee (1856-1935) enjoyed a transnational celebrity status that enabled her to participate in many contemporary discourses. Brilliant and assertive, she became well-connected within European circles of artists and intellectuals and was perceived as exceptional, especially from the perspective of turn-of-the-century Italian culture, in which women seldom made their voices publicly heard. In Italy in particular, she stood out not only for her international affiliations, but also as an eccentric blue-stocking who discussed current topics of debate with important establishment figures. Lee exploited the public recognition she enjoyed for the purpose of campaigning against, or in favour of, certain issues. In 1897, for instance, she wrote letters to newspapers to lament the planned demolition of the medieval centre of Florence. Although familiar to Lee’s culture of origin since the eighteenth century, the ‘letter to the editor’ was an unusual form of protest in Italy which she successfully adapted to local needs and circumstances. This social activism firmly established her as a voice of protest and placed her in the limelight in her chosen country of residence. During and after WW1, when she left Italy for England, Lee employed analogous forms of literary activism to support global pacifist campaigns. My paper will consider how and how effectively these later texts took up Lee’s previous strategies of socio-political commitment, empowered through her celebrity status, and spread them beyond Italy.

Elisa Bizzotto is Associate Professor of English Literature at Luav University of Venice. Her research interests mainly lie in Victorian, late-Victorian and pre-Modernist literature and culture. She has published books on the imaginary portrait genre (2001), the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ* (2012, co-authored) and Walter Pater (2018) and has edited or co-edited volumes on Walter Pater (1996), Vernon Lee (2006, 2014), Arthur Symons (2018) and Mario Praz (2019). She is currently translating and editing two of Bernard Shaw's plays into Italian and writing on the influence of Italian oral literature in Vernon Lee. She is a member of the Council of the Doctoral School in History of the Arts of Ca' Foscari University and one of the founding members of the Italian Oscar Wilde Society. She is the Conference Secretary of the International Walter Pater Society and part of the editorial board of the journal *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism*.

Hyei Jin Kim: “Authorial Rights as Human Rights: Negotiating the Idea of the Writer between PEN International and UNESCO”

This paper explores the complex relations between PEN International, its long-time, multistate partner UNESCO, and the figure of writer in literary activism. While PEN does use the cultural capital of celebrity writers when defending free expression, the organisation, as this paper shows, also promotes an idea of the writer as a human rights icon, particularly when engaging with UNESCO. As PEN gradually prioritised the defence of the imprisoned writers in 1960s, it depicted the writer as a symbol of struggle against the state, focusing on making free expression and linguistic diversity central to its activist endeavours. I locate this figure of the writer in its ‘Declaration of the Rights of the Writer’ (1977), a lesser known statement which PEN imagined as a ‘complement’ to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It attempted to persuade the UN and UNESCO to adopt it as well but without success. This failure, I argue, not only reveals the difference between non-governmental and multistate organisations but also forms a telling contrast to the ‘Poets Behind Bars’ section in PEN International, PEN’s official magazine funded by UNESCO. From 1982, the section regularly featured writings by imprisoned writers from around the world, enabling PEN to promote its activism to its Centres, to a wider readership, and to UNESCO. By examining these cases, the paper overall highlights the role cultural institutions play in shaping public ideas of ‘the writer’.

Hyei Jin Kim is currently a DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford. Her thesis investigates how UNESCO and PEN International, two closely interlinked organisations, have shaped the international literary field.

Keynote: Benjamin Zephaniah in Conversation with Elleke Boehmer and Malachi McIntosh

Benjamin Zephaniah is one of Britain's most eminent contemporary poets, best known for his compelling spoken-word and recorded performances. An award-winning playwright, novelist, children's author, and musician, he is also a committed political activist and outspoken campaigner for human and animal rights. He appears regularly on radio and TV, literary festivals, and has also taken part in plays and films. He continues to record and perform with his reggae band, recently releasing the album *Revolutionary Minds*. His autobiography, *The Life and Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah* (2018), was shortlisted for the Costa Biography Award.

Elleke Boehmer is Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She is the author and editor of over twenty books, including *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995, 2005), *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial: Resistance in Interaction* (2002), *Stories of Women* (2005), *Indian Arrivals 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire* (2015), *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st-Century Critical Readings* (2018), and a widely translated biography of Nelson Mandela (2008). She is the award-winning author of five novels, including *Bloodlines* (2000), *Nile Baby* (2008), and *The Shouting in the Dark* (2015), and two collections of short stories, most recently *To the Volcano, and Other Stories* (2019). Boehmer is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Life Writing and principal investigator of Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds.

Malachi McIntosh is editor and publishing director of *Wasafiri*. He previously co-led the Runnymede Trust's award-winning Our Migration Story project and spent four years as a lecturer in postcolonial literature at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Emigration and Caribbean Literature* (2015) and the editor of *Beyond Calypso: Re-Reading Samuel Selvon* (2016). His fiction and non-fiction have been published widely, including in the *Caribbean Review of Books*, *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, *The Guardian*, *The Journal of Romance Studies*, *Research in African Literatures*, and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature*.

Saturday, 21 March 2020

Panel 3: Literary-Political Networks and Organisations

Asha Rogers: “A City Visible but Unseen’: Rushdie in Camden”

In his memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012), Salman Rushdie credited the relatively unknown Camden Committee for Community Relations with introducing him to ‘a city he had previously known little about, the immigrant London of deprivation and prejudice’ – a world he would fictionalise in *The Satanic Verses* (1988), as ‘Ellowen Deeowen’, a ‘city visible but unseen’. This paper recuperates Rushdie’s involvement with the Camden Committee, a voluntary organisation founded as part of the community relations movement, as vital context for the novel’s London sections. From the hapless Brickhall CRC, rife with its own internal conflicts, to Saladin’s dubious lodgings in the Shaandaar B&B, these materials originated in non-literary, lived experiences of racism in the north London borough. The Camden experience also figured more expansively in Rushdie’s oeuvre. The novel’s critique of the common life Thatcher’s Britain afforded its citizens was emblematic of Rushdie’s authorial position-taking on issues of institutional racism as a feted cultural figure after 1981. If this neglected context illuminates Rushdie’s several migrations from the field of literature to that of politics, his struggle to articulate evenly a political as well as literary language underscores the difficulties attending such manoeuvres.

Asha Rogers is a Lecturer at the School of English, Drama & Creative Studies at the University of Birmingham. Her first book, *State Sponsored Literature: Britain and Cultural Diversity after 1945* (OUP 2020), considers the motivations and effects of the British state’s role as a guardian of literary autonomy in the postcolonial world.

Ellen Wiles: “Live at the Polari Salon: Literary Performance as LGBT Activism”

Live literature events, such as festivals and salons, have become central to literary culture in the digitalizing 21st Century. While often regarded as peripheral publicity exercises, my research reveals that live literature events have deeper resonances for literary culture than is often assumed, including as forms of literary activism. In this paper, I will present an overview of my live literature research, focusing on my experiential literary ethnography of the Polari Salon. I will outline the ways in which the Polari Salon deploys literary performance as a fruitful means of strengthening LGBT community bonds and as a form of activism. I will make a case for literary-anthropological approaches to researching contemporary literary culture, particularly those that engage with participant experience at events, and discuss the ways in which such approaches can reveal new insights into reader-audience reception of texts and their authors, and literature’s cultural value.

Ellen Wiles is a novelist, literary anthropologist, and Lecturer in Creative Writing at Exeter University. She is the author of *Saffron Shadows and Salvaged Scripts: Literary Life in Myanmar Under Censorship and in Transition* (Columbia University Press, 2015) and *The Invisible Crowd* (HarperCollins, 2017), a polyphonic novel exploring asylum and immigration in the UK, which was awarded a Victor Turner Prize. After reading Music at Oxford, she gained a Masters degree in Human Rights Law from UCL, and spent seven years practicing as a barrister at a London Chambers, punctuated by human rights legal projects in Thailand, Myanmar and Botswana. She gained a Masters in Creative Writing from Royal Holloway on the side, and then ceased practicing law and began a PhD at the University of Stirling, funded by the AHRC, exploring contemporary live literature events through experiential literary ethnography. Her thesis will be published as a book titled: *Live Literature: The Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals* (Palgrave, 2020). She practises live literature curation and performance, as the founder of Ark, an experimental live literature performance project, which was funded by Arts Council England. Her second novel is due for publication in 2021.

Benedict Schofield: “From ‘Engaged Authors’ to ‘Engaged Citizens’? Transnational Literary-Political Networks and the Future of Europe Debate (A.L. Kennedy, Robert Menasse, Katrin Röggla, and Ali Smith)”

What happens to our understanding of authorship – in theory, and as an actual practice – when literary writers engage with politics? How do authors develop a political voice both within their fiction, but also beyond it in their public self-fashioning as authors, and in the transnational literary-political networks they form to sustain their political activism? My paper addresses these questions with reference to the Scottish authors A.L. Kennedy and Ali Smith, and the Austrian authors Katrin Röggla and Robert Menasse. I argue that for these writers, the fracture of Europe not only prompts a literary reflection of the European crisis, but active interventions into political discourse. This increasingly public performance of engaged authorship, however, also requires authors to adopt roles beyond those of the purely “literary”: Röggla as Vice President of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, creating a network of pro-European artistic institutions, and increasingly leading on street protests; Smith’s public engagement with charities and politicians; Menasse in his self-stylisation as the “moral conscience of Europe”; and Kennedy in her already multifaceted “performance” of authorship across literary works, stand-up, and journalism. My paper assesses how these authors reflect explicitly on these shifts in their authorial role and responsibility, and how these intersect across borders: in Kennedy and Röggla’s exchange of letters on European political authorship; in the reflections on authorial co-creation in Smith’s Brexit-inspired *Seasonal Quartet*; and in Menasse’s attempt to fashion a new form of “engaged” European authorship as both an existential commitment, and a dynamic political activity.

Benedict Schofield is Reader in German and Director of the Centre for Modern Literature and Culture at King’s College London. His research focusses on German Studies, Transnational Studies, and Comparative Cultural Studies, with central concerns including the representation of the German-speaking countries and “Germanness” in cultural texts across world-literary systems; 19th Century Cultural Studies, with a specific focus on authorship; German theatre and performance, especially German engagement with Shakespeare; and contemporary German-US and German-Japanese cultural relations. Publications include *Private Lives and Collective Destinies. Class, Nation and the Folk in the Works of Gustav Freytag*, and the edited volumes *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century* (co-edited with Charlotte Woodford), *German in the World* (co-edited with James Hodgkinson) and *Transnational German Studies* (co-edited with Rebecca Braun).

Panel 4: Female Authorship and Activism

Anna Paluchowska-Messing: “No ‘mere passive spectactress’: Frances Burney and the Engagement of the Eighteenth-Century Writer in Politics”

In 1793, Frances Burney, then already an acclaimed novelist, published a pamphlet entitled *Brief Reflections Relative to The Emigrant French Clergy*, the purpose of which was to raise funds for the French Catholic émigrés to Britain in the aftermath of the Revolution and the Reign of Terror.

Slim though the *Reflections* are, their publication marked for Burney a bold step out of her usual comfort zone of prescribed femininity. By openly engaging in activism, she was acknowledging her own celebrity status, the authority it generated, and her willingness to use it if required. None of these, of course, harmonized too well with the model of retired respectability she generally assumed in public. In order to preserve the image of a proper lady therefore, Burney performed in the pamphlet and its preface a considerable feat of rhetorical acrobatics. In the process, she redefined both the acceptable boundaries of feminine interest in public matters and the very concept of politics, and that without seemingly questioning either. As a result, the women she envisaged in the *Reflections* were no “mere passive spectactresses of the moral as well as of the political oeconomy of human life” and yet they retained their female delicacy intact.

This paper explores the *Reflections* and other passages in Burney's texts where her struggle with such dilemmas is most visible. Though it is often apparent that she saw her writing as a means of entering socio-political debates, it is also clear that she understood well that by deploying her reputational capital beyond the sphere of literature she risked damaging or forfeiting it entirely.

Anna Paluchowska-Messing is a faculty member in the Institute of English Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where she holds the position of a Research Fellow and Lecturer in British Literature and Culture. Her book *Frances Burney and Her Readers: The Negotiated Image* is soon to be published by Peter Lang. Her research interests circle round the relationships between the novel and drama in the long eighteenth century, and on authorial representations and self-presentations in the period.

Eva Sage Gordon: "Nellie Bly and Fanny Fern: Fame in the Gendered 19th Century"

To be a woman and to write for publication in nineteenth-century America was a high wire act of gender subversion and self-protection few could manage. Aside from the difficulty of breaking into a male-controlled industry, the very notion of existing as a public figure went against expectations of feminine life in the nineteenth century—expectations involving marriage, motherhood, domesticity, and a quiet existence in the private sphere. Yet the public label of "celebrity" afforded some select women a path through which to transgress social boundaries of feminine acceptability and enter the world through their writing.

Focusing on Nellie Bly and Fanny Fern, New York City-based female journalists who achieved considerable fame writing under pseudonyms and delicately balanced their reputations in private with their public notoriety, this paper looks at two nineteenth-century progressions in the United States — the rise of celebrity culture, and the rise of female journalists — to explore ways in which the cloak of celebrity status affected gender norms in the period.

Engaging with recent work on nineteenth-century literary celebrity by Bonnie Carr O'Neill and Loren Glass and periodical studies by Karen Roggenkamp and David Haven Blake, this paper explores the centrality of perceived intimacy and a collaborative identity construction between the celebrity and the viewing (or reading) audience. Noting several contributions to early celebrity culture, including technological advancements, the role of professional authorship, and the rise in daily penny newspapers, this paper specifically examines the possibilities embedded in celebrity culture for transgressive gender performances by female writers.

Eva Sage Gordon holds an MFA in Fiction Writing, an MA in English, and is currently a Ph.D. student in English at The Graduate Center, CUNY in New York City. Her research interests include life writing, celebrity studies, American culture, and women's history.

Gaston Franssen: "The Politics of the Postfeminist Confessional: the Self-Made Celebrity Authorship of Heleen van Royen"

Characterized by Rita Felski (1989) as a type of autobiographical writing that forges an activist bond between 'female author and female reader' by presenting the latter with 'the most personal and intimate details of the author's life', the 'feminist confessional' can be situated squarely at the intersection of life-writing, social politics, and celebrity culture. Here, one can think of famous examples such as Audre Lorde in the US, Annie Ernaux in France, or Anja Meulenbelt in the Netherlands, who can all be considered literary icons of second-wave feminism. Many contemporary, often commercially quite successful, female authors, such as Suzanne Portnoy (US), Charlotte Roche (GER), or Heleen van Royen (NL), seem to step into the footsteps of these authors.

Considered within the context of a post-feminist sensibility (Gill 2007), however, these more recent confessional narratives also highlight the contradictory aspects of feminist writing and contemporary bestseller authorship: does the postfeminist confessional fuel a truly progressive

feminist politics, or is it part and parcel of a contained form of ‘commodity feminism’ (Goldman et al. 1991)?

In this contribution, I will approach these questions through a case study analysis of the work, self-presentation and reception of Dutch bestseller author Heleen van Royen. Since making her literary debut in 2000, Van Royen has consistently addressed feminist issues, such as ‘the feminine mystique’ (Friedan 1963) in *The Happy Housewife* (*De gelukkige huisvrouw*, 2000), abortion in *Goddess of the Hunt* (*De godin van de jacht*, 2003), or female sexual assertiveness in *Naughty* (Stout, 2007). In interviews and public performances, Van Royen has explicitly presented herself as adhering to a feminist politics. At the same time, Van Royen has been repeatedly accused of writing gender stereotypical romance stories, of stimulating female self-objectification, and of a whole-sale ‘pornification’ of feminist themes. In my presentation, I will focus on the tensions between Van Royen’s seemingly confessional mode of writing, her neoliberal authorial self-presentation, and the deeply misogynist patterns in her public reception. It is in the interplay between these aspects, I will argue, that Van Royen’s feminist politics manifests themselves.

Gaston Franssen is assistant professor of Literary Culture at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He co-edited the volumes *Celebrity Authorship and Afterlives in English and American Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan; and *Idolizing the Author: Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the Present*, Amsterdam University Press. Recently, he has published on celebrity and authenticity (*Celebrity Studies*, 2019), celebrity health narratives (*European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2019); and celebrity politics (*Celebrity Studies*, forthcoming 2020).

Keynote Panel: The Writers’ Activism of PEN

Carles Torner, a leading Catalan writer and human rights activist, is currently Executive Director of PEN International. He has participated in several missions for imprisoned writers and has published essays and poems about PEN’s defense of freedom of expression across the world. Before joining PEN as Executive Director, 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 as guest of honour at the Frankfurt book fair and the Guadalajara International book fair. He holds a PhD from the university of Paris VIII and was a lecturer in Communication and International Relations at Blanquerna, Universitat Ramon Llull, in Barcelona.

Margie Orford is an internationally acclaimed novelist and journalist. Her Clare Hart novels – a literary crime fiction series that explores violence and its effects in South Africa – are published in the USA and the UK and have been widely translated. Apart from her fiction, she writes regularly about crime, gender violence, politics and freedom of expression, and literature. She has written a number of children’s books and several works of non-fiction on subjects ranging from climate change to rural development. Formerly President of PEN South Africa, she was also a member of the executive board of PEN International until 2019.

Rachel Potter is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of East Anglia. She writes on literature and censorship, free expression and writers organisations, modernist literature and early twentieth-century culture. She has been exploring the early history of International PEN for a number of years, research which is central to her forthcoming book, *Literary Activism: Writers’ Organisations and Free Expression*. Her published books include *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900-1940* (OUP, 2013), *The Edinburgh Guide to Modernist Literature* (EUP, 2012), and *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930* (OUP, 2006). She is co-editing *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature & Politics* (with Christos Hadjiyiannis, forthcoming 2021).

Laetitia Zecchini is a research fellow at the CNRS in Paris and visiting scholar at Boston University. She writes on contemporary Indian poetry, on postcolonial modernisms, and the politics of literature. She is the author of a monograph on the poet Arun Kolatkar, whom she has translated into French, and has recently co-edited “The Worlds of Bombay Poetry” (*Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2017)

and “The Locations of (World) Literature: Perspectives from Africa and South Asia” (*Journal of World Literature*, 2019). She is co-investigator of the AHRC-funded project “Writers and Free Expression”, is currently researching the history of the PEN All-India Center, and working on a book around issues of cultural / literary freedom and the poetics and politics of modernism in Cold War India.

Panel 5: Authorship and Authority

Tore Rem: “On Behalf of the Nation: Knut Hamsun and the Politics of Authorship”

‘He was a warrior, a warrior for humanity and a preacher of the gospel of justice for all nations.’ These words appeared in an obituary of Adolf Hitler, published on the front page of the biggest Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten*, on 7 May 1945, and they were written by Knut Hamsun (1859-1952). How did Hamsun, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature and European celebrity, end up here?

In this paper, I will be looking at the peculiarly national conditions for Hamsun’s authorial role. At the end of the nineteenth century, as Hamsun came into his own as a writer, Norway, and Scandinavia more generally, were experiencing a moment in which its national literatures entered world literature. The status of writers was exceptional. At the same time, Norwegian society mobilised its writers in the struggle for national independence.

Initially, Hamsun responded with satire at what he considered the false and inflated authority of writers in his own nation. I will examine why, as well as when and how, Hamsun’s attitudes changed. I will also sketch the significance of Hamsun’s growing celebrity for his understanding of his own role, including the Nobel prize and his enormous success in Germany. Finally, I will briefly look at how Hamsun tried to renegotiate his authorial role, as well as his political past, in his memoir *On Overgrown Paths* (1949).

Tore Rem is Director of UiO:Nordic, an interdisciplinary research initiative at the University of Oslo, and Professor of English-language literature. He has published on Dickens, Ibsen, book history, life writing, and world literature, and is the author of several biographies of Norwegian writers. His most recent book, co-written with Narve Fulsås, is *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (Cambridge UP, 2018). He is also general editor of the new Penguin Classics Ibsen edition (2015-19).

Foteini Dimirouli: “Can Dead Poets Speak Back?: C.P. Cavafy in Cold War Propaganda”

C.P. Cavafy has enjoyed widespread acclaim in the West for his anti-establishment poetics. From the early-twentieth century to the present day, authors, intellectuals and journalists broadly affiliated with the Left have at once produced his canonical status and set his work to the service of their own ideas. However, the Greek-Alexandrian poet’s longstanding reputation as a voice for the marginalized or powerless has obscured his parallel appropriation by the Right, both in Greece and abroad, especially during the time of the Greek Dictatorship. Unlike the Greek poet and Nobel Laureate George Seferis, who publicly spoke out against the Junta on the BBC, Cavafy had been dead for thirty years by the time army colonels seized power in 1967. Free from a potential intervention by its author, Cavafy’s poetry entered the arena of Cold-War politics in unpredictable ways, appearing in the Colonel’s official propaganda, as well as in anti-communist publications overseas.

The ways in which both pro- and anti-establishment agents converted Cavafy into a cipher for ideological warfare in the late 60s and early 70s offset this paper’s exploration of the autonomy of art and its ability to resist certain forms of cooption. Drawing on sources as varied as the left-leaning *The New York Review of Books* and the Greek dictatorship’s official defense of its reactionary doctrine, *The Ideology of the Revolution*, this paper embarks from Cavafy’s celebrity status to raise questions about the cooption of literary authority for political ends—questions that come into clearer focus when the artist is no longer able to speak on behalf of the art.

Foteini Dimirouli is Outreach Fellow and Career Development Fellow in English at Keble College, Oxford. She works on English and Modern Greek literature, often in comparison. Dimirouli’s key topics

of interest include transnational literary dialogue, the workings of the cultural field, and the process of canon formation. Her monograph *Authorising the Other: C.P. Cavafy in the English and American Literary Scene* (under contract with OUP, 2020) examines writings by influential Anglophone authors who were pivotal to the Greek-Alexandrian poet C.P. Cavafy's rising international acclaim over the twentieth century. In her work Dimirouli also takes a keen interest in: E M Forster's work relating to interwar Alexandria; Anglophone cultural journalism and its political function from the twentieth century to the present day; the constitution of the cultural field under authoritarianism; the politics of literary translation.

Margaret Scarborough: "Socrates Goes to the Moon: the Late, Democratic Pasolini"

By the time of his murder in 1975, Italian poet, filmmaker, and intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini had been a notorious and prominent figure in Italy for decades. Immensely successful, the celebrity director of internationally acclaimed films was also a repeat target of censorship and anti-homosexual discrimination in Italy. My paper examines Pasolini's development from the 1960s onwards as a vocal political theorist and activist. I discuss the ways he propounds and practices, in diverse media, a distinct vision of direct participatory democracy, and problematizes the nexus of authority and authorship in his own person and work.

I begin by examining Pasolini's journalist writings, his turn to theatre in 1965, and his engagement with artistic prizes as small-scale experiences of democracy, honing in on his desire to become a modern Socrates. With his "theatre of the word," for instance, Pasolini tries to restore theatre as an experience of Athenian democracy, a venue to represent and debate prevalent social issues. Similarly, in his newspaper columns and participation in roundtables, he makes the personal political, commenting on current events, dialoguing with readers, and offering private meditations. Then, I discuss late work where Pasolini thematizes a poetic return to, and abandonment of, his prior authorial identities, painting himself as a Socratic fool modeled on Greek poet Constantine Cavafy, to argue that while he clings to art, he envisions it as a therapeutic practice of cultivating a "democracy of the self." I explore the recuperation of this final self-image in Abel Ferrara's 2014 film *Pasolini*.

Margaret Scarborough is a PhD candidate in Italian and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, New York. She holds a BA in European and Middle Eastern Languages from the University of Oxford, in Italian and Arabic, and a Masters, also from Oxford, in Medieval Studies. This academic year, she is a visiting student at the Scuola Normale, Pisa and the Peter Szondi-Institut for Comparative Literature, Berlin. Her dissertation, "Beyond Dis/Possession: The Critical Subjects of Postwar Italian Ethics," is a selective conceptual history of possession in the modern period that focuses on Italian critiques from 1945 to the present. Working with texts drawn from different genres, including screenplays, feminist manifestos, and treatises of political philosophy, she draws attention to writing's ethical potential as a tool of non-possessive selfhood.

Closing Roundtable: Literary Celebrity, Activism, and the 'Industry'

Kirsty Gunn is an internationally award-winning author and Professor of Writing Practice and Study at the University of Dundee. Her novels and short story collections include *Rain* (1994), *The Keepsake* (1997), *Featherstone* (2002), *The Boy and the Sea* (2006), *The Big Music* (2012), *Infidelities* (2014) and, most recently, *Caroline's Bikini* (2018), which have been widely translated, broadcast, and adapted into film and dance theatre. She also regularly writes for various newspapers and magazines, contributing penetrating opinion pieces on contemporary culture and politics.

David Graham is managing director of Pavilion Books. Prior to joining Pavilion, he managed several independent publishers, including six years at Canongate Books and three at Granta and Portobello. He spent time as a consultant to Enhanced Editions before becoming managing director of the Aurum group in 2011 and overseeing the integration of several publishers there.

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*, *The Country Diaries* (Canongate), and *Glasgow: The Autobiography* (Birlinn). His most recent book is *Appointment in Arezzo: A Friendship with Muriel Spark* (Polygon, 2017), and he is the editor of the centenary editions of the *Collected Novels of Muriel Spark* (Polygon).

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 principally concerned with modern fiction from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, with an emphasis on the work and global reception of 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* (Germany), and other journals on contemporary international fiction. He has judged leading translation prizes in the USA (Best Translated Book Award, 2014-2015) and the UK (Man Booker International Prize, 2016), and is now on the jury of their German equivalent (HKW Internationaler Literaturpreis, 2018-2020).

Alice Guthrie is an independent translator and editor specialising in contemporary Arabic literary, academic and media content. Her translations have been appearing in a broad range of international venues and publications since 2008, recognised with various grants and honours — most recently the Jules Chametzky Translation Prize 2019. Among her ongoing projects is the translation of Moroccan feminist Malika Moustadraf's complete works, a work of 'literary recovery' involving painstaking research into the writer's persecuted life and controversial early death. As a commissioning editor she is currently compiling the first ever anthology of queer Arabic writing, set to appear in parallel Arabic and English editions in 2021. She also programmes the literary strand of London's biennale Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture, and teaches on the Translation Studies MA at Exeter University. She is also an Associate of the Stephen Spender Trust.