

Idolizing Authorship: Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the Present. Ed. by Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings: Review

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Idolizing Authorship: Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the Present. Ed. by Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 282 pp. €89.00. ISBN 978-90-8964-963-8.

This volume, edited by Dutch scholars Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings, accomplishes an important task: presenting eleven chapters, each examining one case study, it takes the studies of literary celebrity and identity out of their comfort zone of Anglo-American literary history. This edited volume includes chapters on German, Dutch, Norwegian, French, Danish, Russian and Finnish literary celebrities, as well as one exploring Ezra Pound's transnational fame as a poet and an inspiration for contemporary neo-fascist movements. In a comprehensive introduction the editors offer an overview of the current state of the field of celebrity studies and discuss its three 'tension fields', as they put it: 'the difference between modern forms of renown and more traditional forms of fame', the contrast between the 'high culture' literary fame and 'low brow' celebrity culture, and, finally, the issue of 'self-fashioning and public perception' (p.16-17). Part 1, 'The Rise of Literary Celebrity', discusses the case studies of Goethe's self-fashioning as an 'Olympian writer', 'Dutch Byron' Nicolaas Beets' self-conscious construction of Romantic identity, and the marketing strategies behind Henrik Ibsen's success in the 1880-90s. Part 2, 'The Golden Age of Literary Celebrity', examines Danish poet's Holger Drachmann's progression from a national bard to a brand name for popular garden benches, Dutch poet Louis Couperus's coming to terms with his own celebrity, Proust's musings on the nature of literary fame, and Pound's posthumous reputation. Finally, Part 3, 'The Popularization of Literary Celebrity' looks at the four contemporary case studies of Dutch writer Harry Mulish, Japanese best-selling author Haruki Murakami, Finnish 'intellectual Goth' Sofi Oksanen and celebrated Russian poet Dmitrii Vodennikov. Despite its temporal breadth (1800 to present day), the collection as a whole is coherent and accessible to scholars of literary celebrity and identity no matter what literary tradition they specialize in. As such, this volume is an important contribution to the field of celebrity studies, expanding its 'sphere of influence' outside its conventional geography.