

Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century

Edited by

ANN R. HAWKINS and MAURA IVES



M5285—COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON—THE KENNY CO., N.Y.
FROM PORTRAIT, PAINTED BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

Margaret Porter, afterwards the Countess of Blessington, was born in Ireland. She was beautiful and cultivated—the author of many books. She became a leader of fashion and made Gait Harrow in London, a center of the most intellectual society of the early Victorian years.

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Edited by

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Texas Tech University, USA

and

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ASHGATE

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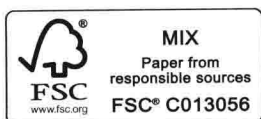
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LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY



M9262—COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON—THE KNAPP CO., N. Y.
(FROM PORTRAIT, PAINTED BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE)

Margaret Power, afterwards the Countess of Blessington, was born in Ireland. She was beautiful and cultivated—the author of many books. She became a leader of fashion and made Gore House, in London, a center of the most intellectual society of the early Victorian years.

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Thomas Lawrence's portrait of the Countess of Blessington, from a 1912 calendar.

Ann Hawkins: For my sister, Lynn Rushton, whose rich knowledge of art and artists has shaped my understanding of the ways that material and visual culture intersect and whose quick wit has enlivened every conversation; and for my husband, Miles A. Kimball, whose kindness and intelligence make every project better.

Maura Ives: I thank my husband Gary and my son John for their help and encouragement in this book (and in everything else).

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Introduction

Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity

Maura Ives

In 1788, the editors of the *Catalogue of Five Hundred Celebrated Authors of Great Britain, Now Living* “boldly” introduced a volume “so new in its design” that the editors claimed to be “the inventors of a new science”—the science of celebrity (iii). To justify their volume—which offered brief biographical notices of living literary authors—the editors pointed readers to the widespread interest in the private lives of authors: “we are no sooner interested by the writings of an author, than our curiosity is awakened for his history, his fortune, and his character” (v). Such biographical narratives would be made more interesting, the editors promised, by the inclusion of “occasional Strictures, and Anecdotes of [famous] Lives” (i). Unfortunately, the editors’ promises were not matched by their volume’s quality, offering, as the *Monthly Review* noted, “crude and imperfect” “information.” The *Monthly Review*, in fact, lamented the gap between its idea of “celebrity” and that of the editors, complaining that “many of the authors introduced into this work, are people whose names were scarcely ever before heard of” (Rev. of *Catalogue* 87). Regardless of the *Catalogue*’s success or failure to provide the materials its readers desired, its presence on the market (and the *Monthly Review*’s complaints about it) presume the existence of a particular kind of authorship, one that rests not only, or even primarily, upon the author’s works, but upon a particular kind of personal fame.

Celebrity has been widely discussed as a function of modernity, a media-driven phenomenon in which a celebrity’s personal life becomes as important (if not more so) than their achievement. Scholars of celebrity have found film, television, and other twentieth-century mass media, especially visual media, to be the prerequisites for the development of celebrity culture; Chris Rojek, for example, argues that celebrity culture “must be understood as a modern phenomenon, a phenomenon of mass circulation newspapers, TV, radio and film” (16). In keeping with the “standard view that the growth of celebrity is attached to the spread of the mass media (particularly the visual media)” (Turner 10), studies of celebrity have focused on contemporary figures and on the relationship between celebrity culture and the infrastructure of the entertainment industry, such as the development of public relations departments in film and television studios.¹ But

¹ See, for example, Joshua Gamson’s analysis of entertainment celebrity in his *Claims to Fame*. Although other scholars, notably Leo Braudy in *The Frenzy of Renown*, have

both the *Catalogue*, and the *Monthly Review*'s response to it, participate in a growing body of evidence challenging the assumption that celebrity *as we know it* is a twentieth-century phenomenon.² As Graeme Turner argues, public figures become celebrities at the moment when media attention shifts from "reporting on their public role [...] to investigating the details of their private lives" (8). If this is true, then the phenomenon of celebrity has existed longer than mass media scholars have generally acknowledged, given the *Monthly Review*'s use of the term in 1789.

Scholars of *literary* celebrity in Britain and North America understand celebrity culture to have had a longer history, rooted in earlier media technologies, primarily the technology of print as it developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and perhaps even earlier. Tom Mole's collection *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850* aims "to show that there were celebrities in the Romantic period" and "to trace the emergence of a recognisably modern celebrity culture," a culture "made possible," as Mole argued in *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, by the industrialization of printing technology (2; 29). Scholars of American literary celebrity, including David Haven Blake and Bonnie Carr O'Neill, also recognize the central role of print technology in the development of American literary celebrity in the early nineteenth century, with O'Neill arguing that in the United States, "the fundamental infrastructure of the mass print marketplace, in place by the 1840s, facilitated the intense personalization of literary figures and others that is the hallmark of celebrity" (747).

This volume traces the experience of women writers within a celebrity culture that was intimately connected to the expansion of print technology, visual and material culture in the nineteenth century. The various examinations of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary celebrity included here generally share Mole's understanding of celebrity as a "cultural apparatus, consisting of the relations between an individual, an industry and an audience, that took shape in response to the industrialized print culture of the late eighteenth century" and beyond (*Byron's* xi). Faster, cheaper printing, along with the commercialization of photography, played a crucial role in creating and sustaining the audience for celebrity. Printing, photography, and related industries combined to produce a wide variety of visual and material expressions, the "artifacts of celebrity" referenced in this collection's title. To understand women's participation within early celebrity culture, then, it is necessary to examine the printed and visual artifacts—the design of a book's cover, the circulation of a portrait or photograph, or the appearance of a celebrity's name, image, or text upon or within any number of mass-produced consumer goods—through which women's literary celebrity was manifested.

taken a broader historical perspective, most work in the field acknowledges the heightened focus on celebrity via mass media in contemporary culture.

² Tom Mole points to early nineteenth-century uses of the term "celebrity" as a noun to describe "something you were" rather than "something you had" in *Byron's Romantic Celebrity* 7, xi–xii, as well as the introduction to *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850*. Other scholars, such as Ghislaine McDayter and Frances Wilson, have also found Byron's celebrity a particularly fruitful means to examine the rise of celebrity culture in England.

How did gender function within the technological and cultural apparatus of celebrity? A look back to the 1788 *Catalogue* is instructive: only 32 of its 500 “celebrated authors” were women. It is not surprising that a small number of living female celebrities were included in the *Catalogue*, given our general perception that women were marginal participants in the literary marketplace. And yet, as Stephanie Eckroth’s essay in this volume demonstrates, “the Romantic period [...] was both in reality and in perception dominated by women writers” (13), so much so that the strong sales of women’s novels may have prompted male writers to adopt female pseudonyms. Other contributors to this volume take up various aspects of the question of how gender, as well as print culture and media technology, shaped and was shaped by women writers’ participation in celebrity culture. How did women negotiate the pressures of publicity, including the increasing demands for public revelation of the private self? How, and in what ways, did women writers benefit from celebrity status? Although recent studies of women’s literary celebrity, notably Faye Hammill’s *Women, Celebrity and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (2007), have begun to address these questions, the celebrity of earlier women writers has yet to receive much scrutiny: to quote Hammill’s blunt summary of work in the field of literary celebrity, “[t]he history of literary celebrity has been rendered in strikingly male terms” (13).³

In addressing these issues, our contributors examine the various modes of print and visual culture within which women’s celebrity was established. The book is central to literary celebrity for obvious reasons: “[t]he literary celebrity is at least partly produced by their own writing,” as Turner explains (18). Leo Braudy’s *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), arguably the most important work on the history of celebrity, identified the book as the “prime new place of fame” as early as the late seventeenth century, and authorship features prominently in Braudy’s depiction of an emerging “international European fame culture,” in which “the development of a market culture allowed ambitious individuals to press themselves into the cultural void created by the decline of the traditional sources of power and influence—the church, the monarchy, and the aristocracy” (361, 371). In the

³ Although there are various studies of women writers and the literary marketplace, notably Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin’s important *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change* (1989), studies of women’s literary celebrity per se are still scarce. Recent monographs that treat women’s literary celebrity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include single-author studies such as Annette R. Federico’s *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* (2000), and broader surveys such as Alexis Easley’s *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830–70* (2004) and Linda H. Peterson’s *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2009). Hammill’s list of “very valuable” studies of literary celebrity that “pay only limited attention to famous women” includes Braudy’s *The Frenzy of Renown*, as well as recent work including Aaron Jaffe’s *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), Loren Glass’s *Authors Inc., Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States* (2004), and Joe Moran’s *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000).