**Celebiography:**

**Celebrity and Life-Writing in Dialogue**

One-day workshop convened by Sandra Mayer,

in collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing (OCLW)

**Saturday, 19 November 2016**

(Leonard Wolfson Auditorium, Wolfson College, Linton Road, Oxford OX2 6UD, Oxford)

**Abstracts and Bio Notes**

**Will Brooker**

**“*Being Bowie*: A Documentary of the Unique Research Process behind the David Bowie study *Forever Stardust“***

*Being Bowie: Act One* is the first half of a documentary that follows Will Brooker's unique research approach to David Bowie. Edited by Rebecca Bryant, the film combines a mosaic of styles, media and methods, including Super-8, family photographs, VHS, performance footage, phone camera and broadcast interviews. It explores Brooker's relationship with Bowie and with his own history and identity, from the start of the research process in June 2015 to Bowie's unexpected death in January 2016: a portrait of fandom, of immersion and experimentation.

**Will Brooker** is Professor of Film and Cultural Studies at Kingston University. He is the first British editor of *Cinema Journal* and the author of many books and articles on popular culture and its audiences, including *Batman Unmasked, Using the Force, Alice's Adventures, Hunting the Dark Knight* and the BFI volume on *Star Wars*. His forthcoming monograph, *Forever Stardust: David Bowie Across the Universe*, involved an immersive research approach that attracted international media attention.

**Tobias Heinrich**

**“Celebrity, Biography, and the Enlightenment: Friedrich Schlichtegroll’s *Nekrolog*”**

Although nowadays virtually unknown to a broader public, Friedrich Schlichtegroll (1765-1822) can arguably be called Germany's most influential biographer in the Age of Enlightenment. A teacher at the grammar school in Gotha, he began to publish a series of obituaries on contemporaries that had passed away in the previous year. Under a number of different titles, ultimately known as *Nekrolog der Teutschen*, Schlichtegroll was able to establish this series as an annual collection from 1791 until 1806. Alongside the first biographical account on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the first German biography of Benjamin Franklin, Schlichtegroll’s obituaries regularly feature distinguished women and at times even commoners outside the intellectual elite, like carpenters and peasants. His biographical endeavour demonstrates how the genre experiences a dynamic transformation around 1800, not only in terms of class and gender, but also regarding the question who might act as biographer. Much more than an author, Schlichtegroll saw himself as a mere editor of biographical accounts, actively inviting his readership to submit contributions to his collection. Thus, the *Nekrolog* reflects the contemporary discussions on whose lives are worth remembering, but also gives voice to an emerging celebrity culture, relying on the active participation of the public in shaping its subjects.

**Tobias Heinrich** is Austrian Lektor at New College, University of Oxford, currently working on a project on eighteenth-century letter writing as social media. A former Deputy Director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography in Vienna, he has published on the theories of biography in the German Enlightenment, the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and the authors Johann Gottfried Herder and Alexander Kluge.

**Julia Lajta-Novak,**

**“From Celebrity 'Whore' to Romantic Heroine: Images of Nell Gwyn in Restoration Satire and Contemporary Biofiction”**

Nell Gwyn (1650–1687), one of the very early star actresses on the Restoration stage and long-term mistress to King Charles II, has today become a popular cultural icon. The subject of numerous biographies, films, and several recent biographical novels, her name now evokes a particular brand of female wit and good-naturedness. By contrast, though, the image of Gwyn that emerges from Restoration verse satires, providing the source material for these recent treatments, is considerably more critical of the king’s actress-mistress. Through the figure of Gwyn, this paper juxtaposes Restoration verse satire and 21st-century biofiction as two forms of life-writing that shed light on the transformation of Gwyn’s notoriety during her life-time into her posthumous celebrity.

**Julia Lajta-Novak** is a Marie Andessner Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Life-Writing Research, King’s College London, and a lecturer at the University of Salzburg’s English Department. She is currently working on a book project on biographical novels about historical women artists. [www.julianovak.at](http://www.julianovak.at)

**Emma Smith**

**“Shakespeare, Biblio-Biography, and the Life of the Celebrity Book”**

Whereas life-writing has tended towards the exceptional individual, object biography has tended to anatomise the generic or ordinary: from the humble coins so beloved of junior school composition (usually ending up heroically stopping a bullet), to histories of cod, or money, or dust. How, then, to write the biography of a celebrity object? My paper approaches this question by thinking about the 1623 collected edition of Shakespeare’s plays, the First Folio, and its journey from ordinary print commodity to secular relic. What are the opportunities, methodologies, and difficulties in thinking about the book as celebrity?

**Emma Smith** is Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Hertford College, University of Oxford, and the author of *Shakespeare’s First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book* (2016), *The Making of Shakespeare’s First Folio* (2015), and *The Cambridge Guide to Shakespeare* (2012). She has published widely on Shakespeare and his contemporaries, on book history, theories of reception, and theatrical production.

**Ginette Vincendeau**

**“Brigitte Bardot and the French New Wave: Life-Writing On and Off Screen”**

In the early 1960s Brigitte Bardot’s unprecedented mass-media celebrity attracted the attention of two New Wave film auteurs. Louis Malle’s *Vie privée/A Very Private Affair* (1962) and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Mépris/Contempt* (1963) in different ways both reflect on and construct Bardot’s persona. This paper contrasts the films with a range of contemporary media discourse (including Jacques Rozier’s 1963 documentary *Paparazzi*) and Bardot’s 1996 autobiography to explore the elaboration of the star’s celebrity.

**Ginette Vincendeau** is Professor of Film Studies at King’s College London and a regular contributor to *Sight and Sound*. She has written widely on popular French cinema and stardom and recently published two books on Brigitte Bardot.

**Roundtable “Celebrity and Life-Writing: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives”**

**Philip Ross Bullock** is Professor of Russian Literature and Music at the University of Oxford and Fellow and Tutor in Russian at Wadham College. He has written extensively on various aspects of Russian culture from the eighteenth century to the present day, and his most recent publication is a short critical life of Tchaikovsky for Reaktion. A winner of a Philip Leverhulme Prize in Modern Languages and the Philip Brett Award of the American Musicological Society (both in 2009), he is spending 2016/17 as a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study in Paris.

Professor Dame **Hermione Lee** is President of Wolfson College and Director of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing. A renowned critic, academic, and biographer, her publications include critical studies of Elizabeth Bowen and Philip Roth, a collection of essays on biography and autobiography, *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (2005), and award-winning biographies of Willa Cather, Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, and Penelope Fitzgerald. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a Fellow of the British Academy and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Sandra Mayer** is a Lecturer in English Literature and Culture at the University of Vienna and a Visiting Scholar at the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing. She is currently working on a monograph that focuses on the intersections of authorship, literary celebrity, and politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain. [www.sandramayer.org](http://www.sandramayer.org)

**Ruth Scobie** is a Teaching Associate in English Literature at the University of Sheffield, and a Research Associate at the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH). She is currently completing a monograph interpreting eighteenth-century texts about the South Pacific as meditations on the problem of fame, and also runs the Oxford Celebrity Research Network.

**Lindsay Shapero** is an award-winning international screenwriter and executive producer of film and TV. Some of her credits include the *Enid* biopic starring Helena Bonham-Carter and *Royal Wives at War* for the BBC, plus *When Boris Met Dave* for Channel 4, *The Head Hunter* for Discovery ID and *Barbarians Rising* for The History Channel.  Coming from a journalistic background, she moved through‎ factual television into full drama. Her documentary experience has led her to frequently write dramas about real-life people or events.



