

Freshman Seminar: Literary Celebrity

Prof. Rebecca Wiseman

At a London launch party for Jonathan Franzen's 2010 novel *Freedom*, a man snatched Franzen's glasses from his face, running off and leaving behind a note demanding \$100,000 for their return. Party guests and police alike sprang into action. A magazine editor on hand described the scene in a Tweet: "Helicopter above Kensington Gardens, trying to find #Franzen glasses. Apparently miscreants jumped into Serpentine to escape." "Glassesgate," as the incident became known, was quickly resolved – police chased down the culprit, who had not jumped into the river after all, and retrieved the stolen eyewear – yet the episode attracted worldwide attention. Franzen, whose new book was already being hailed as one of the decade's best, was a celebrity in high demand – and so were his glasses.

In this course, we will explore the relationship between authorship and celebrity, tracing the historical roots of our modern notion of the celebrity author. Examining the evolution of the author's role from Plato to the twenty-first century, we will think and write about a number of core topics: the rise of the "bestseller"; the notion of literary ownership and intellectual property; the relationship between originality and adaptation; and the strategies authors and critics use to create, satisfy, defer, and manipulate their readers' expectations. Taking Foucault's seminal essay "What is an Author?" as a jumping-off point, we will read critical essays, poems, speeches, diaries, and novels, looking closely at the ways in which authorship has been reinvented again and again, from ancient Greece all the way up to our age of Franzen.

Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"

Plato, *Ion*

Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Beniamin Ionson*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

Eric Eisner, "Systems of Literary Lionism," from *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks*

Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?"

T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* and "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*

Ezra Pound, *Cantos* and selected radio speeches

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*

Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom*

