

Call For Papers

International Conference 'Authors as Characters in Fiction, Film and Graphic Narratives'

Université de Lorraine, Nancy (France)
12-13 March 2026
Avenue de la Libération

Keynote Speakers:

- Stephanie Barron (author)
- Lucia Boldrini (Goldsmiths, University of London)
- Belén Vidal (King's College London)
- Xavier Giudicelli (Université Paris Nanterre)

The great paradox of the modern age appears to be that, since Roland Barthes announced the 'death of the Author', there has never been so much fascination with authorial figures, tangible in fiction, film and graphic narratives. The aim of this international and interdisciplinary conference is to understand the fetishisation of English-speaking canonical authors (such as William Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Henry James, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Sylvia Plath, Mary Shelley, D. H. Lawrence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway), the 'versioning' (Silver xvi) of their texts and images, the fabrication of myths which are 'endlessly repeated and woven into culture' (Miller xiii), the relationship between auctoriality and celebrity, and artistic and historiographic representations. Notable contributions to the field have been Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars's *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Writers in Western Literature* (1999), Hila Shachar's *Screening the Author: The Literary Biopic* (2019) and Bethany Layne's *Biofiction and Writers' Afterlives* (2020). However, much work remains to be done on literary biopics, especially the pre-postmodern productions of this type, including in the classic age of cinema. Despite notable exceptions such as Lucia Boldrini's 2024 symposium, the question of authors as characters in graphic narratives has not been sufficiently explored.

This conference will take place over two days and will explore three main generic perspectives:

Biofiction. According to Michael Lackey's widely accepted definition, biofiction is 'literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure' ('Locating' 3); it takes advantage of the writing techniques of the novel to present the 'evidence-based discourse of biography' (Lodge, *The Year of Henry James* 8). This genre 'has become a very fashionable form of literary fiction' (Lodge, *The Year of Henry James* 8) in the last decades, and in recent years has become the subject of Biofiction Studies, a dynamic scholarly discipline that has 'finally emancipated itself from both historical fiction and life writing and has chartered a narrative space uniquely its own' (Lackey, 'Narrative Space' 3). Critics have chiselled the features of the genre even more finely to suggest that it deals precisely with an author who becomes a character in fiction, leading to the notion of 'author fiction' (Fokkema, 'The Author' 39; Savu 9), or the genre of 'author as character' (Franssen and Hoenselaars 11). Contemporary biofictionalists reimagine writers at work, deploy the subjects-writers' own literary techniques and reproduce their

stylistic signature: literary biofiction is therefore an imaginative appropriation of the literature as well as of the life of a past iconic writer.

Biopics. According to Tom Brown and Belén Vidal, a biopic is ‘a fiction film that deals with a figure whose existence is documented in history, and whose claims to fame or notoriety warrant the uniqueness of his or her story’ (3). A biopic uses both historical facts and the screenwriter’s imagination to depict memorable scenes in the lives of famous historical figures. The biopic arguably mirrors today’s celebrity culture. The genesis and plot of the writer-character’s books are often woven into the cinematographic narratives of their lives. Biopics raise a specific challenge: how to translate the writer’s prose into moving images in a way that is entertaining to watch, to pay homage to the writer’s aesthetics? Scholarship on writers’ biopics (Buchanan, Frus, Henke, Jardonnet, and Wilson) has tended to examine the intermedial relationship between the author’s writing and the film narrative, as well as allusions to the writer’s life and oeuvre scattered throughout the biopic’s plot. Other scholars (e.g. Stetz) propose an altogether different approach by focusing not on the literariness but on the social and political status of the writer as a disruptive force, a critical commentator of the developments of their own era. Such scholars examine the biopic’s appropriation of the writer to make a transhistorical commentary on current contemporary issues.

Graphic biofiction. The convergence between the graphic medium and the genre of biography has been examined (McCloud, Kuhlman, and the 2024 online symposium organised by Lucia Boldrini). Other questions, however, remain unexplored, such as what, exactly, this new genre adds to biofiction, through its distinctive *combination* of textual information and visual representational strategies. Scholarly reflections must keep abreast of today’s rich production of ‘graphic biofictions’, a genre which encompasses a variety of art forms, branching out as far as Japanese manga. The graphic dimension may be anchored both in archival images and a pictorial tradition, and bears the specific stamp of the illustrator. The conference will seek to analyse the historical and geographical developments of the genre, besides the visual specificities of graphic narratives about writers. These art forms question the relationships between the factual and the fictional, the documentary and the imagined, and, notably, the textual and the visual. The graphic perspective of this conference will further our understanding of the complexity of the notion of authorship through the unique and subjective adaptations of writers’ lives to the visual medium.

Biofictionalists employ various narrative techniques and have different aesthetic or political aims. One such method is appropriating a writer’s oeuvre, tropes and style along with their life. This calls for a redefinition of intertextuality (Kristeva), recycling (Latham et al.) and appropriation and adaptation (Sanders) in different textual, cinematographic and graphic contexts. Many biofictions include paratextual addenda and thought-provoking metabiofictional comments on the ethics of the genre, which are worth examining as creative authors express arguments in favour of their creative endeavours. Of particular interest are biofictions about writers whose stories are obliquely told by minor or peripheral characters who share their lives – spouses, lovers, friends, or servants – and shed a specific light on well-known events. These particular strategies confer the genre with endless flexibility, originality and opportunities to renew itself, and enable contemporary writers and artists to create new forms of art celebrating the past lives of canonical authors.

Participants are welcome to consider particular case studies and can address the following general questions:

- Why are some authors depicted more frequently than others in biofictions, biopics and graphic narratives, and how are these authorial figures represented, remembered and commemorated today?
- How is the life of an author represented? Is it romanticised, dramatised, or Hollywood-ised? What specific moments of their life are selected and why? Which well-known events and (sometimes) stereotyped images are used by contemporary authors to portray their characters? What versions or interpretations of these authors survive and are ingrained in our cultural memory? How do these representations contribute to reinforcing an author's iconic status, cultural image and literary reputation?
- Which features (of the author and their work) are consumed by the general public, and filter through into popular culture? Are these 'popular' texts and visual representations a convenient entry-point into highbrow literature?
- How are the original writing styles of the canonical authors transposed?
- How does ideology influence the adaptation and appropriation of a canonical author's life and oeuvre? How do the portraits of authors in fiction reflect both scholarly receptions and societal developments?
- To take the example of biopics, these have existed in fact since the very beginnings of cinema itself. In what way has the genre evolved over time and to what extent is there (or not) a privileged relationship between postmodernism and the biopic? Can the same question be raised concerning (graphic) biofiction?

The interdisciplinary conference will foster a dialogue between different fields: literary studies, cultural studies, film studies, intermedial studies and visual culture studies. We would like papers to address the topic of authors as characters in fiction, film and graphic narratives from the perspectives of production and reception. Lucasta Miller has defined 'afterlife studies' as 'a form of critical enquiry which can interrogate the intersection between real lives and their cultural construction, both within the lifetime of the subject and posthumously' (263). The current abundance of author-as-character productions provides an opportunity to redefine the emerging critical concept of 'literary afterlives' as past authorial figures continue to be transposed to new literary, visual and cultural contexts, and their past oeuvres are repurposed to be consumed by new audiences. The continuous reinvention of authors as characters in fiction, film and graphic narratives reinforces their canonical literary status, rejuvenates critical interpretations and augments their cultural capital in the twenty-first century.

Submission guidelines: We invite proposals for individual papers or panels. Please submit paper proposals (which should include the title of the paper, author(s), a 250-300-word abstract, institutional affiliation, contact information and a short bio-bibliography) **before 1st September 2025**, to the following address: idea-authors-as-characters-contact@univ-lorraine.fr. A selection of articles will be published in 2027.

Acceptance will be notified by **1st October 2025**.

Conference venue: Université de Lorraine, Nancy, France.

Organising committee:

- Antonella Braida-Laplace (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- Nathalie Collé (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- Monica Latham (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- William McKenzie (CHUS, Université Catholique de l'Ouest)
- Barbara Muller (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- Doriane Nemes (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- Armelle Parey (ERIBIA, Université de Caen Normandie)
- Matthew Smith (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)

Advisory board:

- Lucia Boldrini (Goldsmiths, University of London)
- Tom Brown (King's College London)
- Laura Cernat (KU Leuven)
- Xavier Giudicelli (CREA, Université Paris Nanterre)
- Michael Lackey (University of Minnesota)
- Bethany Layne (De Montfort University)
- Jean-Marie Lecomte (IDEA, Université de Lorraine)
- Nancy Pedri (Memorial University of Newfoundland)
- Belén Vidal (King's College London)

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