



Life Writing through Texts and Images – Picture books by Celebrities

Lena Hoffmann

Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main

Abstract

In the last 15 to 20 years a lot of celebrities have published novels and or picture books for children and adolescents. This article will contextualise this international phenomenon within a theoretical framework of celebrity studies and research on life writing and intermediality. As will be shown, these literary texts for young people by celebrities represent an intermedial life writing that combines texts, illustrations, photographs and forms of online and offline self-curating as well. It is especially the picture book that seems to carry an archival function with respect to the authors' lives. Here, the celebrities tell about themselves in words and images, they stage themselves as private and authentic persons. Understanding children's and adolescents' literature as part of intergenerational communication, these literary texts show different kinds of strategies to prolong the knowledge of a public person in societies' collective memories.

Keywords: Celebrity Studies, Life Writing, picture books, collective memory

Zusammenfassung

In den letzten 15 bis 20 Jahren haben viele Celebrities Romane und/oder Bilderbücher für Kinder und Jugendliche veröffentlicht. Der vorliegende Beitrag kontextualisiert dieses internationale Phänomen in theoretisch-methodische Studien der Celebrity Studies sowie der Life Writing- und Intermedialitäts-Forschung. Es wird gezeigt, dass diese Texte von Celebrities für ein junges Publikum ein intermediales Life Writing

repräsentieren, das Text, Illustrationen, Photographien, aber auch Verfahren der online und offline Selbstkuratierung kombiniert. Es ist insbesondere das Bilderbuch, das (auch) einer archivarischen Funktion zu dienen scheint. In Bilderbüchern erzählen die Celebrities von sich selbst in Text und Bildern, hier inszenieren sie sich als private und authentische Personen. Versteht man Kinder- und Jugendliteratur als Teil der intergenerationalen Kommunikation, dann offenbaren sich in diesen Texten verschiedene Strategien, um das Wissen um eine Person des öffentlichen Interesses in der kollektiven Erinnerung der Gesellschaften zu verlängern.

Stichwörter: Celebrity Studies, Life Writing, Bilderbücher, Kollektivgedächtnis

Madonna, Emma Thompson, Whoopie Goldberg, Laura Bush, Ringo Starr, Prince Charles, Paul McCartney – and many, many more. These people share at least two commonalities: Firstly, they are all figures of public interest, working in different public sectors. And secondly, they have all published picture books and/or novels for children and adolescents within the last 15 to 20 years. This article will look at the phenomenon of celebrities publishing literature for young people and will contextualise this phenomenon within a frame of life writing, of narratives about the various selves and of the different media forms which are interlinked when people of public interest stage themselves as authors of children's literature. It is important to note that not all of the publications for children by celebrities tell stories about the celebrities' lives or feature the celebrities as characters in the narratives. However, the article will show that through paratextual strategies, all of these texts include information about the celebrity authors and link their professional with their personal lives. Additionally, the article will show that by advertising their literary texts for children through social media, celebrities integrate their authorship of children's literature in their digital self-representation. The article will demonstrate these various connections of children's literature by celebrities and medial self-staging with different examples.

Celebrities and Celebrity Studies

Celebrity Studies is a vastly growing research field especially in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and the Netherlands. Scholars of cultural and literary studies, media studies, historians and sociologists discuss the various functions and meanings of celebrities within different nations and different times. Since 2010 the

homonymous journal *Celebrity Studies* publishes these kinds of insights. Why is it important to analyse structures of celebrity culture? Because, quoting the editors of the journal: ‘Celebrity is key to the way the social world organises and commodifies its representations, discourses and ideologies, sensations, impressions and fantasies.’¹ In my opinion, this also includes discourses and ideologies regarding childhood, children’s literature and life writing. According to Edward Saunders, ‘the study of celebrity is naturally linked to the study of life stories, narratives and myths because biography is also a form that ‘celebritizes’².

The term *celebrity* though is in itself a complex one. For a long time, academic research has been focused on the term *star*³ and the ideas of *stardom* it entails. Celebrity Studies clearly are interlinked with Star Studies, differentiations and parallels of the respective terminologies are widely discussed. For this article however the term celebrity and the various methodologies of Celebrity Studies are more suitable because of two reasons. Firstly, Celebrity Studies take into account a wider range of public personalities than Star Studies. It’s not only famous actors and musicians who are analysed, the scholars also refer to politicians and also to public figures from YouTube or Instagram – which is relevant especially in relation to youth cultures. And secondly, as Alrun Seifert explains, the medial staging of celebrities is concentrated on their respective personalities and their respective – private – lives.⁴ Regarding celebrities, the public interest seems to be more focused on the (alleged) private than on their professional achievements. From this perspective, research on celebrities can also deal with public persons who can be described as stars, when directing the research focus on medial staging of more private matters. Later in this article, I will demonstrate that children’s literature by celebrities is often shaped by a staging of alleged privacy and intimacy. The lives that are told here are private lives with private relationships. Children’s and adolescents’ literature seem to be linked to a notion of privacy and intimacy, one could say to an idea of the often discussed and highly constructed authenticity, which I will discuss later in my analysis. When talking about authenticity throughout this article, I refer to the poststructural idea that authenticity is not something that reveals the true essence of a self, but rather something that is an effect of a performative act. In regard to literature and social media, authenticity should be understood, as Smith and Watson explain brilliantly, as “manufactured”⁵.

Telling about celebrities’ lives is usually something that is covered by the tabloid press. Nowadays, social media, websites and weblogs give celebrities the opportunity to tell their everyday life stories themselves, to keep users, followers, fans updated about what’s new, to share pictures of private and professional events with them. If there are literary (printed) texts involved, they most likely are (auto)biographies

addressed to adults. This leads to the central questions: What kinds of semiotic information do children's or adolescents' books carry, which narrative modes do they offer that aren't already covered by the various other media at play? What do these texts tell us about discursive evaluations of media for a young audience?

Self-representation between offline and online

The respective texts are very heterogenous, they tell different kinds of stories, show different kinds of genres. Many of them tell about the celebrities' lives, about being and becoming a public figure. However, as mentioned before, not all of them do so. The picture books by the German singer Maite Kelly for example are serial narratives that tell various adventures of the bumblebee "Hummel Bommel"; Madonna's picture book *The English Roses* portrays a group of girls that build a friendship while overcoming prejudices and Ricky Gervais has published various books on the "flaninals", fantastical creatures that inhabit our oceans and jungles. Children's literature by celebrities is so varied, one simply cannot identify common themes or modes of storytelling. However, before I give more detailed analysis of picture books that can in fact be classified as forms of biographical or autobiographical narratives, I want to show that the commonalities of all of these texts by celebrities lie in the paratextual staging of the authors as public figures and in the representation of the celebrities' authorship via social media. By advertising their literary texts for children on for example Instagram, celebrities include their being authors of literary texts for children in their digital self-representation. Although photographs of celebrities presenting their books for children on social media may not be readable as narratives, they are in fact "kinds of identity presentation"⁶, as Anna Poletti and Julie Rak put it. The representation of a self on social media most often means a representation of self through multimedial texts.⁷ We therefore have to understand such photographical representations not only as means of advertising but also as means through which the celebrities seem to declare: I do not want to be seen only as a singer, an actress, a politician, I'm also an author. An author for children. Life writing in a way then does not only entail the literary texts that talk about the celebrities' lives, but also the public announcement of all of these texts on various social media platforms.



Illustration 1: German celebrities promoting their books for children on Instagram

Regarding children's books by celebrities we have to discuss forms of life writing and digital curating of life⁸ on different levels. As we will see, some of these texts tell about other peoples' lives, some display life writing by telling about the celebrities' lives. All of these literary texts by celebrities though, despite the stories these texts tell, are integrated in digital self-curating by photographical representation on social media. These photographs declare authorship. It is important to take these interconnections of print and digital media into regard, especially because they make discursive notions and evaluations of the medium children's book visible. Celebrity culture, which is dominantly represented through tabloid and social media, therefore shines a light on modes of telling and discursively constructed evaluations linked to children's literature, which seems to play a different role in self-representation than social media do or can do.

Children's literature and cultural memory

Regarding the literary texts, obviously, children today do not necessarily know people like Paul McCartney or Keith Richards. Many of these texts – again: not all of them – are first and foremost addressed to parents and grandparents. Being part of the intergenerational communication, of one generation passing their (cultural) knowledge on to another, of different generations reading the same text at the same time, children's literature seems to be suitable to anchor the knowledge of a public person in a society's collective memory. In her book *Second-Generation Memory and Contemporary Children's Literature*, Anastasia Ulanowicz writes: 'children's fiction is

particularly invested in the transmission and reproduction of cultural memory'. 'Furthermore', she continues, 'by virtue of the audience it addresses, children's literature is committed to bearing the vestigial traces of the past into an uncertain and potentially volatile present.'⁹ Of course, in her book, Ulanowicz focuses on the memory of the holocaust. Nonetheless she underlines the profoundly intergenerational nature of all children's literature, a nature which therefore seems to promise a prolonging of knowledge from one generation onto the next one. Aleida Assmann explains the dynamics of cultural memory with strategies of canonisation.¹⁰ There are inventories of knowledge that societies regard as being too important to forget. Through canonisation, societies form collective memories, as Assmann writes: "Eine Gruppe schafft sich auf diese Weise ein gemeinsames Gedächtnis, das das kollektive Selbstbild in der Vergangenheit verankert und Orientierung für die Zukunft ermöglicht."¹¹ [In this way a group forms a collective memory that links the collective self-perception to the past and allows orientation for the future. Translation by L. H.] While there are established institutions at play, for example schools and universities, museums et cetera, scholars of literature for children and adolescents have discussed that cultural memory also works by modes of popular canonisation. As Emer O'Sullivan explains, texts for children and adolescents are often canonised because of their popularity rather than because of their ascribed importance and they are not mainly canonised by institutions like universities, but more so by the literary market.¹² With regard to texts by celebrities for young people we have to keep two things in mind: public persons like Whoopie Goldberg or Thomas Müller are not remembered by institutionalised canonisation but by a popular (and in some cases international) canon. And secondly concerning children's books, cultural and therefore collective memory is part of everyday life when one generation hands a children's book to the next and so on.

This therefore archival function of the medium children's book seems to be a little outdated, when understanding that there is no doubt that the 'cultural archive of the present'¹³ is the internet. Why would celebrities decide to publish books for children, when they are already more than publicly visible and active on social media, as shown before? Anyhow, the idea of intergenerational communication, of intergenerational memory is much more linked to children's literature. But it is not only the idea of intergenerational communication that differentiates the structures of memory in children's literature and the online archive. In regard to the World Wide Web, the idea of an archive as a spatial conservation of cultural artefacts no longer holds.¹⁴ Additionally, the World Wide Web is an opportunity for everyone to produce an online self. The print publication sets the public person aside and declares that he or she is something different than 'Joe Public'. And, most importantly, the nature of social

media is one that is essentially based on interaction, people like, comment, retweet content of other people. As Silvia Schultermandl puts it: ‘While the content is self-selected and designed to represent individual identities, the networked nature of SNSs (Social Networking Sites, L. H.) highlights the collective context rather than the position of the individual.’¹⁵ Their literary texts for children and/or adolescents seem to enable the celebrities to decide themselves not only how they want their lives to be told but also how they want to be remembered.

Children’s literature by celebrities is, in this idea, detached from the various stories it tells, a symbol for one particular message: The author is a person worthy to remember, the celebrity’s life is a life worthy to be told.¹⁶ It therefore follows a more traditional, one could say: more established understanding of an archive that still, taking the internet as the central cultural archive of the present aside, seems to be of importance in public discourse.

Obama as a private person: *Of Thee I Sing. A Letter to My Daughters*

Many of these publications by celebrities are picture books. In fact, while dealing with the diverse children’s and adolescents’ literature by celebrities, one notices that, among these texts, it is especially the picture book, in which the celebrities tell about themselves and their lives’ stories. Only some examples of this are Billy Crystal’s *I Already Know I Love You* (2004), Kylie Minogue’s *Kylie. The Showgirl Princess* (2006) and Julianne Moore’s *Freckleface Strawberry* (a series of picture books that is ongoing today). By analysing some examples I will show that within picture books by celebrities forms of biographical and autobiographical writing often overlap, which makes these texts fruitful objects of research with regard to questions of life writing.

In *Of Thee I Sing. A Letter to My Daughters* (published 2010) Barack Obama introduces thirteen public figures who have played an important role in North America’s history and have shaped the US’s national identity.

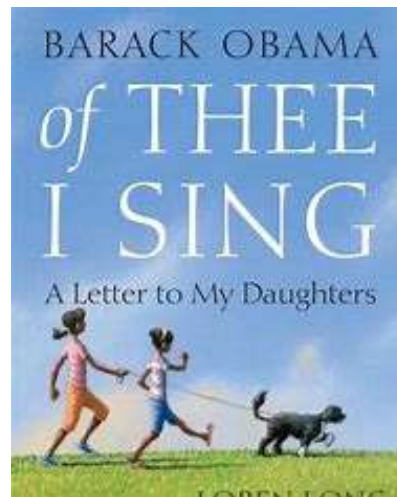


Illustration 2: Of Thee I Sing © Alfred A. Knopf

The book is illustrated by Loren Long, who had previously illustrated one of Madonna's picture books. On the basis of introducing people such as Billie Holiday, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King Jr. and Neil Armstrong the book discusses virtues like creativity, courage and compassion. The picture book's story can therefore be classified as biographical. However, when declaring the picture book to be a biography, one has to notice and describe the different structures of biography and autobiography within both the narrative text and the pictures.

As the subtitle 'A Letter to My Daughters' already indicates, Obama links writing about other people's lives with telling about his own family. His daughters, directly addressed in a recurring 'Have I told you that...?'¹⁷, are meant to represent all of America's children. Without really telling about his own life's achievements, Obama therefore combines modes of biographical and autobiographical writing by directly addressing the text to his daughters. The portrayal of his love to and relationship with the two girls frames and structures the narration, the enumeration of important persons of North America's history is combined with an enumeration of virtues that both Obama's children and all the children in the United States are said to possess. The picture book's pictures as well contextualise this telling about Martin Luther King Jr., Georgia O'Keeffe, Sitting Bull and others with telling about Obama's family and therefore private life. The book cover shows his two daughters together with the family's dog – a kind of trademark established by the media that ensures that readers know well enough whom they see depicted. Being the first thing that people notice about the book, the cover gives a fair indication of who are in fact this text's protagonists. The story is framed by illustrations of Barack Obama himself.

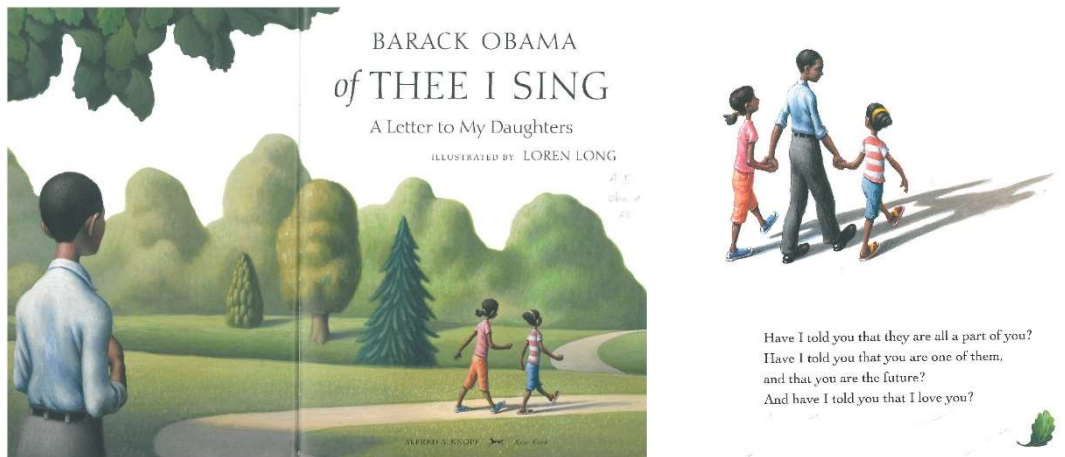


Illustration 3: *Of Thee I Sing*, pp. 4–5 and 36.

Through these illustrations the former president joins in in this portrayal of important personalities and is therefore staged as being of the same importance to represent values like courage and curiosity in western societies as Martin Luther King Jr. and Albert Einstein. At the same time, these illustrations of the former president of the United States reveal another layer of biographical ‘writing’ in this picture book. By illustrating Barack Obama and his family, the illustrator Loren Long in a way is the second biographer in “*Of Thee I Sing*”. One has to note nonetheless that we cannot know how much of the illustrations derived from cooperative work between Obama and Long – which then would again combine the biographical with the autobiographical. Through the combinations of texts and images, picture books can be seen as a very interesting research field for the study of life writing, because cooperative work between authors and illustrators take into question the strict differentiation of biographical and autobiographical story telling.

This specific portrayal of Barack Obama and his family can be seen as directly linked to research perspectives of Celebrity Studies. Already the book’s subtitle ‘A Letter to My Daughters’ indicates the alleged private frame which builds the organising structure of the enumeration of important persons of the US’s history. It’s not marked as a story but as a letter to the author’s daughters, a text form that signals a much more intimate communication between members of a family. Paratextual information stresses this character of the picture book, which is advertised as a ‘tender, beautiful letter to his (Barack Obamas, L. H.) daughters’, a ‘moving tribute to thirteen groundbreaking Americans’.¹⁸ Emphasis here lies on the emotional, not the informational character of the text.¹⁹ Also his wife Michelle Obama is included in this family portrayal through a dedication before the main text: ‘To Michelle – whose fierce love and daily good sense have nourished such wonderful daughters – B. O.’²⁰

Following the concept of Celebrity Studies, which differentiate celebrities from stars by an alleged interest of the public in the respective personalities and private lives, Obama's picture book can be seen as (one of several) means to underline the former president's status not only as a private, a family man, but also as a celebrity. Sean Redmond points out that in nowadays' celebrity culture, people of public interest have to present themselves as 'ordinary, authentic or real', because the audience, in Redmond's opinion, wants to see their 'willingness to be just like us, even if this warts-and-all authenticity is a strategy to propel them to greater celebrification, far, far away from such ordinariness.'²¹ What Obama and other celebrities want to state through their texts for children is that they live family lives just like their audience while at the same time maintaining their special positions in the respective societies.

The first and the last page of the main text remain exclusively within this narrative of communication between father and daughters: 'Have I told you lately how wonderful you are? How the sound of your feet running from afar brings dancing rhythms to my day? How you laugh and sunshine spills into the room?'²²; 'Have I told you that they are all part of you? Have I told you that you are one of them, and that you are the future? And have I told you that I love you?'²³

The main text however never even mentions Obama's name. In celebrity picture books, it is the paratext which contains information about the authors' personalities. In the case of Obama, the picture book stresses his own upbringing, his being a father of two daughters and being the owner of dog Bo, who is, conveniently, illustrated below this information. The paratexts of children's literature by celebrities function as a kind of archive. These books enable us to form an actual library, which registers persons who have been of importance for a certain society in a certain time. Again, the 'rhizomatic'²⁴ nature of the internet is not replaced but complemented by an archival practice that might seem more stable and surely is based more on tradition and experience than the World Wide Web as cultural archive of the present.

This publishing for young people expresses a traditional and quasi nostalgic idea of the book as an object which will endure and keep people alive in the collective memory.

The main text of Obama's story does not mention him, the illustrations however do. Illustrations in this context seem to carry several functions. Pictures have always been of mnemonic use.²⁵ There are pictures which are part of collective memories across all borders – thinking for example of Marilyn Monroe standing on the funnel. When we think of picture dictionaries it is obvious that pictures support memory. Picture books by celebrities use a combination of texts and images to prolong the significance of a public person into the following generations. In case of Obama's picture book, this

function of the book as an archival object mirrors the content of the plot which prolongs the significance of 13 American people from the father's to the daughters' generations.

In fact, in some picture books and novels for children and/or adolescents by celebrities, the paratexts only show photographs and abstain from any other information (for example in John Travolta's *Propeller One-Way Night Coach. A Fable for All Ages* (1992), Jeff Foxworthy's *Hide!!!* (2010) and Al Yankovic's *When I Grow Up* (2011)).



Illustration 4: Instead of a blurb: John Travolta's Propeller One-Way Night Coach



Illustration 5: Instead of a blurb: Jeff Foxworthy's Hide!!!



Illustration 6: Instead of a blurb: Al Yankovic's When I Grow Up

Publishers here seem to completely rely on the celebrities' well-knownness through their photographs, these picture books and novels seem to be in no need of further advertisement. At the same time, photographs here carry the whole archival potential of children's literature.

Along discursively shaped ideas of timelessness, of privacy and authenticity, texts for young people by celebrities also highlight the different and discursively assigned functions of photographs and illustrations, which I will discuss in another example.

Illustrations and photographs in *Gus & Me*

The multitude of picture books among these publications for young people by celebrities seems a little surprising at first. From a closer look however, this proves not to be all that surprising, considering the importance of pictures for both celebrity culture and social media (which is so inherent to celebrity culture, as shown before). The combination of different semiotic codes, the narration via a combination of texts and images (as Michael Staiger explains it in his article *Erzählen mit Bild-Schrifttext-Kombinationen*) is something that is inherent to both social media and celebrity culture. Celebrity and star photography have always played a seminal role in the dissemination of images.²⁶ Portraying themselves and being portrayed via a combination of pictures and texts thus seems to be the most common way of persons of public interest to portray themselves and be portrayed by others. Analysing the phenomenon of celebrities publishing literature for children and/or adolescents, questions of intermediality are not only central because of the interconnections of print media and social media, but also in regard of life writing in picture books. According to Gabriele Rippl, autobiography and life writing studies have recently undergone an

intermedial²⁷ turn.²⁸ The analysis of the next example will shine a light on interconnections and discursive evaluations of photographs and illustrations.

Gus & Me. The Story of My Granddad and My First Guitar, text by Keith Richards (and co-authors) and illustrations by his daughter Theodora Richards, again links biographic and autobiographic writing through text and illustrations.

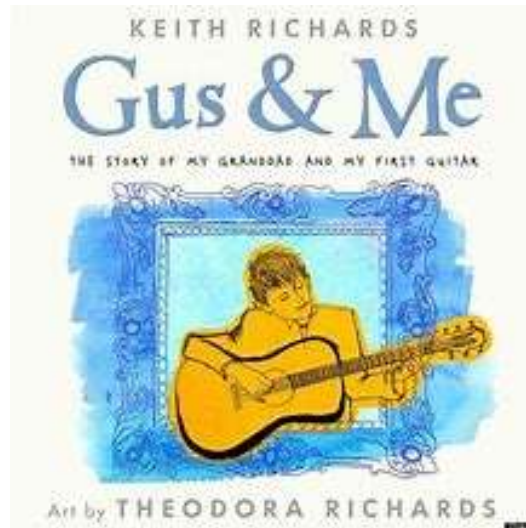


Illustration 7: Gus & Me © Mindless Records

Keith Richards tells about his grandfather but mainly about himself and the starting point of his career as a musician. His relationship with his grandfather, so we are told, led him to his first guitar. The narrative text therefore already combines structures of the biographical and autobiographical. Richards' daughter enriches these memories with her own: more than photographs would have done, her illustrations suggest her intimate perspective on father and great-grandfather and make her the second biographer in this collaborative work.

The book cover shows young Keith Richards in a picture frame which one could read as a symbol for remembering. Richards juts out of the frame, which is meant to indicate that in this picture book he is brought closer to the audience than photographs or other biographies and autobiographies always have before.

Photography, as mentioned before, has always played an important role in shaping the image of a public person. However, as Adrienne Lai describes, the more informed the public becomes regarding technical possibilities and 'the numerous levels of trickery and fiction involved in the creation of the images it consumes'²⁹, the more it can become sceptical towards the photographic depiction of a celebrity. Photography more and more seems to lose its status as medium with direct reference to 'reality'. It is more and more understood as a medium that can at best produce 'reality effects',³⁰

that stages authenticity. Recent research contributions within the Celebrity Studies underline the importance, even the necessity of ‘cultivating the qualities of familiarity, proximity, intimacy and trust’³¹ when building and distributing the image of a public person. Photographs showing perfect faces, perfect bodies and perfect lives seem to be put under general suspicion. The illustration however does not even pretend to be a realistic description and within this disclosed subjectivity seems to lie a potential of intimacy and authenticity that is rare in a time when stars and celebrities seem to be as ‘manufactured, media-produced and simulated’³² as never before. Illustrations, the depiction in a children’s book and also the publication of a children’s book might indicate a form of privacy and authenticity that other media aren’t able to provide.

Paratextual information in *Gus & Me* again focus on Richards’ own upbringing, his children and grandchildren. Additionally, the paratext includes information about the making of the book.



Illustration 8: *Gus & ich*, p. 43.³³

The story goes that his daughter Theodora Richards, as model and artist a celebrity herself, went to England to visit the places her father lived to research for her illustrations. A photograph of young Keith is set right next to Theodora’s adaptation.

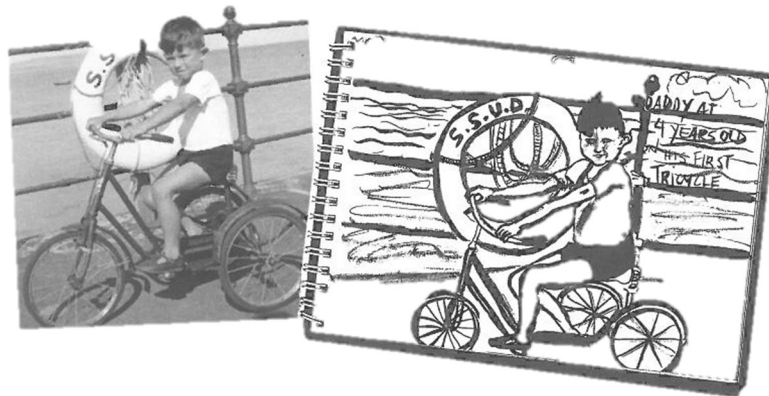


Illustration 9: Gus & ich, photograph and illustration, p. 43.

Of course, this photograph serves as a proof of authenticity for the drawings, meaning they bear witness that Richards in fact looked like that in a specific point in time. At the same time however it is shown how Theodora Richards overwrites the photograph with her own imagination of her father. This staged intimacy is underlined by the illustration's title and especially the 'Daddy' in 'Daddy at four years old'. Below we find a drawing by Keith Richards, showing the music store where he bought his first guitar, which then serves as a point of reference for his daughter's drawings.



Illustration 10: Gus & ich, illustration by Keith Richards, p. 43.

Gus & Me draws attention to the overlay of memories and imaginations throughout different generations of one family. This idea of sharing memories between different generations mirrors my idea of children's literature by celebrities in general.

Telling about different lives through texts and images, *Gus & Me* offers a new perspective on the function of illustrations; the idea of a more subjective picture,

offering a personal perspective on a public person and a perceived high degree of authenticity.

Beneath the blurb, we see again a picture frame, within it a photography of Keith and Theodora Richards.

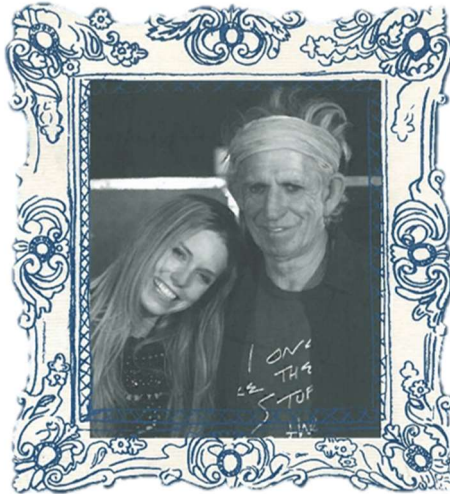


Illustration 11: Gus & ich, blurb.

Front- and back-cover of the picture book show picture frames, illustrations and photographs together – the paratext indicates – can offer a glimpse on several public persons' private lives and their becoming celebrities. The book's idea, as shown by the symbol of the picture frame, is to show Richards as a family man and to underline his worthiness of being remembered.

A short outlook: more examples

Of Thee I Sing. A Letter to My Daughters and *Gus & Me. The Story of My Granddad and My First Guitar* show life writing through texts and images, which they use as a means to cross boundaries between biographical and autobiographical writing. These narratives about a famous person's life serve as a medium of remembrance, because they have the potential to keep this person alive in a society's collective memory.

Picture books by celebrities are very diverse, as explained before. However, within these texts there are a lot examples which show similar kinds of strategies to Obama's and Richards' texts. Within the many picture books by celebrities it is possible to form a corpus that seems to follow the same idea of exploring the boundaries between biographical and autobiographical writing and exploring different functions of texts and images and also photographs and illustrations. I will shortly introduce some

picture books that show recurring elements and strategies and therefore argue that the idea of the picture book as a medium of remembrance can be supported by several examples. There is for example John Lennon's *Real Love. The Drawings for Sean*, edited and published by Yoko Ono.

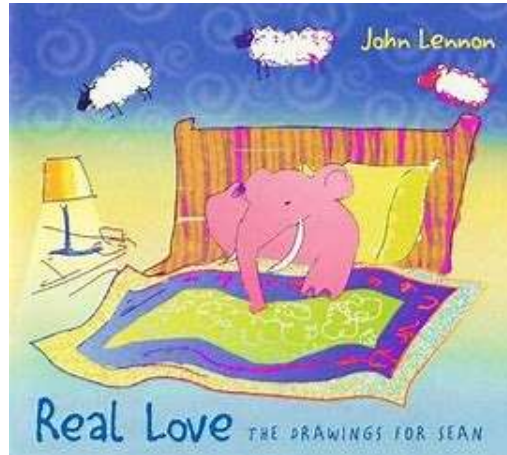


Illustration 12: *Real Love* © Insight Editions

Again, various paratextual elements show picture frames with either photographs or illustrations of the Lennon-Ono-family. In this case, the illustrations are by John Lennon in cooperation with his son Sean.

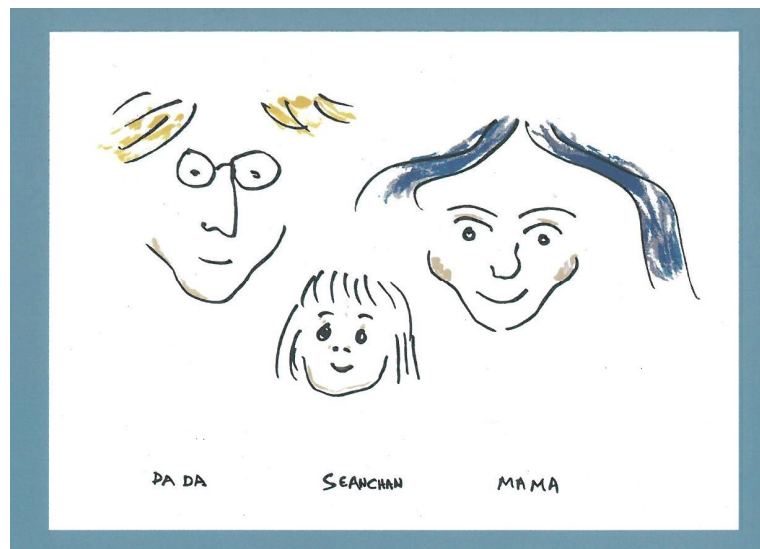


Illustration 13: *The Lennon-Ono family*, illustrated by John Lennon © Insight Editions, blurb.³⁴



Illustration 14 The Lennon-Ono family, picture frame illustrated by John Lennon © Insight Editions, 10.

Illustrations therefore seem to be of biographical nature, the edition and additional information given by Yoko Ono again contextualise these autobiographical illustrations within a biographical book project. The blurb underlines the book's idea of offering an authentic perspective on John Lennon as a private person, especially as a family man: 'These heartwarming illustrations offer an intimate glimpse into their (John Lennon's and his son's, L. H.) relationship and serve as a record of their playful and creative collaborations'³⁵. The blurb therefore also declares the picture book to have an archival function. The private as the center of medial construction of a celebrity in *Real Love. The Drawings for Sean and Gus & Me. The Story of my Granddad and my First Guitar* is mirrored by a combination of biographical and autobiographical structures by members of the celebrities' families.

Dolly Parton's *Coat of Many Colors* (2016) is not based on a cooperation with members of her family.

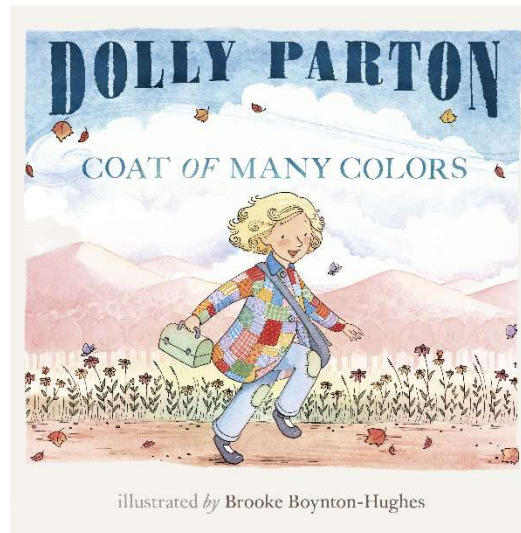


Illustration 15: Coat of Many Colors © Penguin Books

It does however not only transform Parton's famous song into a picture book and can therefore be understood as a way to prolong the memory of this song to the next generations, but also stages the story as being private and authentic by framing it with an illustrated photo album. Parton's family here, although not cooperating in the book project, is nonetheless portrayed as the starting point of Parton's career as a musician.



Illustration 16: Coat of Many Colors, photo album, pp. 8-9

Kamala Harris' *Superheroes Are Everywhere* (2019) shows a lot of analogies to Barack Obama's picture book.

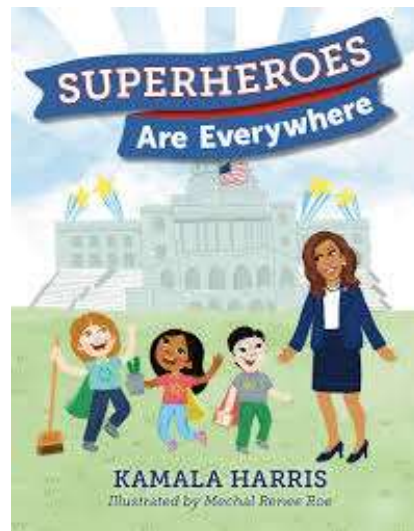


Illustration 17: *Superheroes Are Everywhere* © Philomel Books

By telling about people from her life, Harris portrays herself as one of the “[h]eroes [that] make a difference”³⁶. In addition to the many illustrations of her person throughout the text, the paratext not only shows a timeline of her life³⁷, but also a lot of photos of her and her family in picture frames:



Illustration 18: *Superheroes Are Everywhere*, picture frames, 2-3

There are a lot more examples, like Billy Crystal’s *I already Know I Love You* (2004), Jill Biden’s *Joey. The Story of Joe Biden* (2020) or Max von Thun’s *Der Sternenmann* (2018). The recurring picture frame in *Gus & me* is featured in a number of picture books by celebrities and can therefore be identified as a quasi generic symbol for remembering. Among the picture book by celebrities occurs a group of texts that declare themselves

to be life writing and media of remembrance and therefore shine a light on the picture book's potential to tell a life through texts and images.

Conclusion: Celebrity Studies and children's literature

Literature for children by celebrities is linked to life writing on two different levels. Firstly, all of these texts are embedded in a self-presentation and especially digital self-curating of the celebrities who declare their authorship publicly. These announcements of being authors for children show that celebrities want to integrate the medium children's book in their public images. Children's books, whatever stories they tell, seem to represent a number of values. Simultaneously the understanding of children's books in the light of authenticity and worthiness of being remembered is reinforced when more and more celebrities present themselves as authors for children. All children's literature is part of intergenerational communication, therefore every text for children by celebrities carries the potential to prolong the memory of the specific public person into the next generation. And secondly, among these texts, the medium picture book is the one in which celebrities tell about themselves and their lives' stories. Life writing here consists of a combination of texts and images.

Interestingly enough, these life writing picture books form the one group within these many and diverse texts by celebrities for children or adolescents that really show similar elements and literary strategies. Through the combinations of texts and images, authors often cross the boundaries between biographical and autobiographical writing.

The methodological approach of combining celebrity studies and research on children's and adolescents' literature proves to be a fruitful one. Not only does it highlight the importance of intergenerational communication when trying to understand the dynamics within the field of literature for children and adolescents, as we have seen regarding this specific dynamic of canonisation and collective memory. It also enables us to compare and identify strategies of multimodality in life writing because celebrity culture, like picture books, is made of combinations of texts and images.

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About the Author

Dr. Lena Hoffmann is a postdoc researcher at the Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Department for Children's and Young Adult Literature Research. She holds a PhD from the University of Münster, Germany. In her thesis she analysed the phenomenon of crossover literature from the late 19th century until the present. Her postdoc project focuses on the interconnections of celebrity culture, children's literature and authorship.

Notes

¹ Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond, 'A journal in Celebrity Studies', in: *Celebrity Studies* 1 (2010), 1–10 (10).

² Saunders, Edward, ‘Biography and Celebrity Studies’, In: Hemecker, Wilhelm and Edward Saunders (eds.), *Biography in Theory. Key Texts with Commentaries*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017, 269–275 (269).

³ Groundbreaking for the research on *stardom* was and still is Richard Dyer’s monography *Stars*.

⁴ See Seifert, Alrun, ‘Celebrity – Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung’, in: Robertson-von Trotha, Caroline Y. (ed.), *Celebrity Culture. Stars in der Mediengesellschaft*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013, 25–38 (31).

⁵ Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, ‘Virtually Me. A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation’, in: Poletti, Anna and Julie Rak (eds.), *Identity Technologies. Constructing the Self Online*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, 70-97 (75).

⁶ Poletti, Anna and Julie Rak, ‘Introduction. Digital Dialogues’, in: Poletti, Anna and Julie Rak (eds.), *Identity Technologies. Constructing the Self Online*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, 3-22 (7).

⁷ See idem, 6.

⁸ See Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, ‘Virtually Me. A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation’, in: Poletti, Anna and Julie Rak (eds.), *Identity Technologies. Constructing the Self Online*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, 70-97 (73).

⁹ Ulanowicz, Anastasia, *Second-Generation Memory and Contemporary Children’s Literature. Ghost Images*, New York: Routledge, 2013, 6.

¹⁰ See Assmann, Aleida. *Formen des Vergessens*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018, 36–49.

¹¹ Idem, 37.

¹² See O’Sullivan, Emer, ‘Klassiker und Kanon. Versuch einer Differenzierung nach Funktionszusammenhängen’, *JuLit* 26 (2000), 16–27 (18).

¹³ Schultermandl, Silvia 2018, 191.

¹⁴ See Gunkel, Katja and Birgit Richard, ‘“Feiern bis das Bild kommt.”Methodische Ansätze zur Erforschung jugendkultureller Konsumästhetiken am Beispiel der Technoevents Mayday 2014 und 2015’, in: Baßler, Moritz and Heinz Drügh (eds.), *Konsumästhetik. Umgang mit käuflichen Gegenständen*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2010, 115–133 (122).

¹⁵ idem, 195.

¹⁶ In German the term ‘Biographiewürdigkeit’ (being worthy of being remembered, L. H.) is an important term within the study of life writing, which can be seen in Schweiger, Hannes, ‘Biographiewürdigkeit’, in: Klein, Christian (ed.), *Handbuch Biografie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2009, 32–36.

¹⁷ Obama, Barack, *Of Thee I Sing. A Letter to My Daughters*. Illustrated by Loren Long. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 32, 34. The pages of this picture book are not paginated. Whenever quoting, I use my own pagination (starting with the cover of the book).

¹⁸ Idem, 2.

¹⁹ In comparison with another picture book by a public person, Chelsea Clinton’s *She Persisted. 13 American Women Who Changed the World* (2017), the importance of this staged privacy in Obama’s book becomes very clear. Clinton’s publishing of a picture book as well can be understood as a more performative part of her own life writing, her picture book as well is part of the intergenerational communication that might keep the former president’s daughter in society’s collective memory. Anyhow, Clinton herself or members of her family are not included in this enumeration of 13 women, there is no trace of her as a person in main text or pictures. In contrast to Obama’s picture book, Clinton’s book is committed to a biographical concept.

²⁰ Obama, Barack 2010, 3.

²¹ Redmond, Sean, ‘Intimate fame everywhere’, in: Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond (eds.), *Framing celebrity. New directions in celebrity culture*, New York: Routledge, 2006, 27–43 (28).

²² Idem, 7.

²³ Idem, 34.

²⁴ Schultermandl, Silvia 2018, 192.

²⁵ See, for example, Hülsen-Esch, Andrea von, 'Die Bichmalerei als Medium der Erinnerung', in: Hülsen-Esch, Andrea von (ed.), *Medien der Erinnerung in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2009, 83-11 (83).

²⁶ See Lai, Adrienne, 'Glitter and grain. Aura and authenticity in the celebrity photographs of Juergen Teller', in: Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond (eds.), *Framing celebrity. New directions in celebrity culture*, New York: Routledge, 2006, 215–230 (215).

²⁷ Intermediality in general seems to be inherent to the term and concept of life writing, which can be seen as a kind of umbrella term which covers a wide range of 'genres such as letters, journals [...] biographies, blogs and other evolving forms of self-representation in social media.' (Rippl, Gabriele, 'Ekphrastic Encounters and Word-Photography Configurations in Contemporary Transcultural American Life Writing', in: Balestrini, Nassim Winnie and Ina Bergmann (eds.), *Intermediality, Life Writing and American Studies. Interdisciplinary perspectives*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018, 147–165 (147).)

²⁸ See Rippl, Gabriele, 'Ekphrastic Encounters and Word-Photography Configurations in Contemporary Transcultural American Life Writing', in: Balestrini, Nassim Winnie and Ina Bergmann (eds.), *Intermediality, Life Writing and American Studies. Interdisciplinary perspectives*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018, 147–165 (147).

²⁹ Lai, Adrienne 2006, 215.

³⁰ Rippl, Gabriele 2018, 149.

³¹ Lai, Adrienne 2006, 226.

³² Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond, 'Fame Simulation – Introduction' in: Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond (eds.), *Framing celebrity. New directions in celebrity culture*, New York: Routledge, 2006, 209–214 (209).

³³ Again, the pages of this picture book are not paginated. Whenever quoting, I use my own pagination (starting with the cover of the book).

³⁴ Again, the pages of this picture book are not paginated. Whenever quoting, I use my own pagination (starting with the cover of the book).

³⁵ Lennon, John, *Real Love. The Drawings for Sean*. Introduction by Yoko Ono, San Rafael: Insight Editions, 2011, blurb.

³⁶ Harris, Kamala, *Superheroes Are Everywhere*. Illustrated by Mechal Renee Roe, New York: Philomel Books, 2019, 29.

³⁷ See idem, 34-35.