

Gilbert Lecture
Thursday, February 9, 2012
6:00 pm, DeGolyer Library

Felicity Nussbaum

“Going Public: Autobiography and Celebrity from Boswell to the Blog”

How do our definitions about what should remain private shift over the course of time? From James Boswell’s great biography of Samuel Johnson (1791) to twenty-first century



blogs, auto/biographical writing undergoes changes that spur the creation of new genres in and on the margins. Focusing on the the turn into modernity, the lecture will show that an author’s anticipation of the public reception of private musings actually gives rise to differing subjectivities and transforms the forms in which they are conveyed. Going public with private life, I suggest, leads us toward the unique, the subversive, and the merely outrageous.

Felicity A. Nussbaum, Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles, has published widely on eighteenth-century British

literature. Her most recent book is *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the British Theatre, 1700-1780*, which traces the rise to prominence of the first English actresses.

Among her other publications is *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, co-winner of the Louis Gottschalk Award. She also co-edited *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*. Past president of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, she has held fellowships from the Stanford Humanities Center, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.