

Chapter 1

The Performance of Celebrity

This is a history book. Insofar as it offers a theory of itself, it is a theory of historical sedimentation, transformation, re-creation. It is the theory that we live, wittingly and involuntarily, the assorted versions of our selves and our society which history has deposited within us. Nothing much to say about that except that history is not a vast undifferentiated force coming at us with a capital H, but an irresistible series of tiny, invisible infiltrations which sidle along our bloodstream and oscillate in our thoughts and feelings.

Insofar as we become conscious of these invasions, we do so by way of shaping them into narratives grand or small, but even the grandest are made up and made out of the bits and pieces of the many disjointed experiences and unintelligible events of the past, rearranged and re-created for a different present.

The usefulness of fame for the purposes of this simple historical lesson is that the concept serves to pick out those lives and ways of life which shaped themselves into the significant constellations of the past and provided quite a lot of people with stars to steer by. When we add to that the general scholarly agreement that modernity may usefully be taken as picking up speed from round about the middle of the eighteenth century, then a history of the fairly new concept of celebrity may tell us plenty about what is to be cherished and built upon as well as what is to be despised and ought to be destroyed in the subsequent invention of modern society.

My most pointed moral is that the business of renown and celebrity has been in the making for two and a half centuries. It was not thought up by the hellhounds of publicity a decade ago. Consequently, if we load its discussion and evaluation down with the mass of time, we might be able to lend some gravity to the shallow and violent lightness of being attributed to fame in our day. What follows is full of such historical *examples*, of individual life stories which neither constitute a sample nor provide epitomes.

They are instances of something, cases in point. Examples instruct; they do not prove.

II

Celebrity is everywhere acknowledged but never understood. It is on everybody's lips a few times every week; it is the staple of innumerable magazines on either side of the Atlantic, whether in the glossy and worshipful guise of *Hello!* and *Glamour* or the downright fairytale telling and mendacity of the *National Enquirer* and *Sunday Sport*; it fills a strip cartoon in (where else?) *Private Eye* and provides *all* the dailies, whether tabloid or broadsheet, with the contents of news, op-ed, gossip, and, not infrequently, contributed columns.

Celebrity is also one of the adhesives which, at a time when the realms of public politics, civil society, and private domestic life are increasingly fractured and enclosed in separate enclaves, serves to pull those separate entities together and to do its bit towards maintaining social cohesion and common values. Nonetheless, in societies like ours priding themselves on having reduced the aura of deference; on having opened their élites to popular talent; on their mingling of high old art and new low popular culture with a fine egalitarian hand, it is something of a surprise to find quite so many people in thrall to the power of that same celebrity, and to those who, involuntarily or otherwise, carry it along with their lives. One way to catch hold of this change will be to notice how celebrity has largely replaced the archaic concept of renown.

Renown, we shall say, was once assigned to men of high accomplishment in a handful of prominent and clearly defined roles. A sixteenth-century jurist, cleric, senior mercenary, or scholar was renowned for bringing honour to the office he occupied. He might be acclaimed in the street, but the recognition was of his accomplishment—his learning (in the case of John Donne, for instance), his victories (as Othello is acclaimed in the play), his implacable power (in the case of Cardinal Wolsey). Renown brought honour to the office not the individual, and public recognition was not so much of the man himself as of the significance of his actions for the society.

This historical difference is readily studied by way of the fame of one of the very few women of historical renown in the period before celebrity became a feature of the individualisation of fame. We have a detailed record of the Royal Progresses of Elizabeth I, and these bring out their ceremonial meaning as *pledging* monarch to people, and vice versa. What is publicly affirmed by her attire and adornments, and by her words, on the one hand, and by the people's witness of themselves and their self-display (masques, banners, cheering, children's presenting of posies to the queen), on the other hand, is nothing less than the mutual duties of each to the other.

This picturesque prologue serves to mark off honour and renown from glamour and celebrity. The rise of urban democracy, the two-hundred-year expansion of its media of communication, together with the radical individualisation of the modern sensibility made fame a much more transitory reward and changed public acclaim from an expression of devotion into one of celebrity.

III

The distinction can only be made historically. As I suggested, Royal Progresses provide a simple instance of the way in which fame and power express and confirm themselves by way of spectacle. The adjective "spectacular" as applying to something eye-filling, imposing, dramatic, and ambitious makes its *Oxford English Dictionary* appearance only in 1901 and has since been vaguely enlarged to take in *any* event or accomplishment of impressive consequence or display ("she's a spectacular pianist"), visible or not.

In 1967, as the extraordinary year of unprecedented spectacle which succeeded it was about to open, a Parisian leftist published a striking and prophetic little book of *pensées* which, a few months later, became the primer for analysts of the "May events." In *Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord took it upon himself to announce the advent of a quite new dimension to the idea of the political spectacle and the power it dramatised.

[T]he principle of commodity fetishism [taken from Marx's *Capital*], the domination of society by intangible as well as tangible

things ... reaches its absolute fulfillment in the spectacle where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible *par excellence*.

The world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived.¹

Debord proposes a spectacle of quite different significance to the Elizabethan Progresses describing which will, I hope, provide a little more purchase on the image of celebrity first adumbrated in 1770s London and brought to its extraordinary compulsion by the infinite reproducibility of all contemporary imagery. The display of Queen Elizabeth I was certainly spectacular, whether or not the adjective existed then, but the meaning the spectacle dramatized was not celebrity but renown. Elizabeth is renowned as being the monarch; her fame is conferred by her people on behalf of God and England; the enacted theory of her rule partakes equally of her pious receptiveness and her subjects' supplication and approval.

She set out on January 14, 1559, the day before her coronation, seated in an open carriage, followed and preceded by a thousand horsemen, her whole attire stiff with glittering jewels and flashing gold leaf, the innate radiance of which was still believed to possess mysterious magic. "As she moved, a vast didactic pageant unfolded, stage by stage, settling her into the moral landscape of the resilient capital."² In Fenchurch Street, a child was appointed to present her with gifts of tongues to praise and hearts to serve her; at Cornhill, another child on a throne was supported by four citizens representing the cardinal virtues; they in turn were provided with their moment of fame in a little cameo during which they trod underfoot four other citizens attired as the contrary vices. On to Cheapside, where Elizabeth passed down a thoroughfare lined with great poster paintings of the English monarchs culminating in herself, paused (in Little Conduit) at two large stage mountains, one bare and barren (bad government), one green and flowering ("a flourishing commonweal"), met Father Time, who gave her a copy of the *Book of Truth*, listened to a Latin oration in minatory praise of herself by a schoolboy of St. Paul's, to another schoolboy oration at Christ's Hospital, and wound up at Temple Bar to read tablets carried

by the giants Gog and Magog summarising all the honour and admonition offered to her.

It makes a sumptuous story and marks a very wide space between the political imagination of the Elizabethans and our own. Theirs was allegorical, specific, and plain as day. The queen stood for clear moral absolutes, a whole medley of them: "Chastity, Wisdom, Peace, Beauty, and Religion" is Geertz's list. But the point of the progress was for her royalty to be instructed by her people in its duty and significance towards them, hence the presence of so many children. She in her turn knew her place and took the lessons to heart, promising on Cheapside "that for the safetie and quietness of you all, I will not spare, if nede be, to spend my blood."³

Exotic, indeed, and a long way from the Notting Hill carnival. Yet not so *very* far. Elizabeth's Progress was a confection of charisma, where that slippery concept connotes the public location of authority and its benefits, of fame and its supernatural aura. Charisma, first made much of by Max Weber,⁴ is at once the personal radiance and gravity of a publicly recognized figure and the symbolic halo of value and meaning lent to that figure by those rituals which declare and create centrality and importance.

In Elizabeth's case, the worshipful rituals at once claimed and ratified her. They connected her reciprocally to her people. So, too, with presidents and prime ministers, monarchs and dictators, and in a quite intelligibly scaled diminuendo, with the carefully shaded circles of significance which surround them: ministers and secretaries of state; solemn figures of lasting achievement, businessmen, clerics, admirals, marshalls, artists, scientists; leading figures of more or less democratic communication without which we would all be lost in the world, television commentators, announcers, journalists, opinionators; and out beyond these circles which surround the very centre, the obviously whirling and transitory porters of fame created by the cultural industries and the huge happiness and misery brought by the industrialisation of leisure: the stars of film, sport, rock, kitchen, soap, and a dozen other pastimes.

This is not to pretend that our world view, like that of the Elizabethans, conceives society as a great chain of being stretching from thrones, principalities, and powers down through the wretched of the earth and culminating in a similar chain in the animal world. It is to say that the centres of

value and meaning in the societies of the wealthy nations have indeed their own decided order, contested and opposed no doubt but intelligible and upheld quite securely. It is also to say that the not-very-old phenomenon of celebrity, borrowing assiduously from past spectacles and rituals (there being nowhere else to find them) generates by its dramas the structure and the strength with which to hold things in their proper place.

IV

This book offers an explanation of this no more than 250-year-old phenomenon. It finds the reasons for the persistence, the vigour, and the apparently limitless energy of the new spectacle and its peculiar allegory in its history. Mid-eighteenth-century London is our starting point, half a century after the capital replaced the court as the centre of social dynamics. Spontaneously, the city bred its version of a new social figure, famous for his and her urban accomplishments: Dr. Johnson and his self-appointed circle of public opinion-makers in literary journalism; Wilkes and his raffish radicals; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the lead she took as a solitary woman tourist (getting into the Sofia mosque disguised as a man), as philanthropic proselytiser for the new science of immunisation (herself disfigured by smallpox), as friend of poets (Alexander Pope) and audaciously free-loving free-liver; the amazing Joshua Reynolds, all were treated as first, authentic celebrities. Above all, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provide the earliest opportunity to study the way in which the *theatre*, distorting and magnifying mirror of its society, assumes the significance it never loses as providing the leading ladies and men of the cast of celebrities. Sarah Siddons, David Garrick, and Kean anticipate Bernhardt, Ellen Terry, and Irving and point forward to Hollywood.

In the new urban culture of London and the passionate competitiveness of its new and old rich, the theatre takes a special place as the occasion both to be seen moving in the best society and to see that society mirrored, magnified, parodied, and satirised onstage. Sheridan's great play *The School for Scandal* is a brilliant seizing of the significance of *gossip* in this unprecedented sort of society, for gossip is only the means of preserving one's own respectability and that of one's own little class by counting other

people out of it. Actors then act out in public, both onstage and off it, the delicious contents of this scandal. Their reward, paid in kind for well over two centuries, for losing their respectability is to be celebrated for scandalousness. As you would expect, actors learned to live up to this reputation as long as they were paid enough. Jane Austen provides a mordant insight into the process in her treatment of the scandalous play *Lovers' Vows* staged in *Mansfield Park* while the master of the house, Sir Thomas Bertram, is away from home. In doing so, she captures the sexual thrill still at the heart of theatre celebrity.

These throngs of biography, vastly magnified by the fat figure of the Prince Regent, gradually effected the institutionalisation of the underlying forces which composed celebrity: first, the new consumerism of eighteenth-century London; second, the invention of the fashion industry with department stores to match in mid-nineteenth-century Paris; third, the coming of the mass circulation newspaper, its gossip columns, and its thrilled, racy transformation of city life in New York and Chicago into the glitter of publicity.

These three new social formations provide a simple dynamic for the advent of the industrialisation of celebrity. London's consumer society invented with astonishing speed the forms and content of the new urban leisure. Not just the theatre, but the pleasure gardens, the coffee houses, the novels and journalism, the sudden expansion of those making the Tour, and of the holiday industry to take in Bath and Brighton, Weymouth and Scarborough, define certain conventions of sociable life which still hold. The leisure timetable of the London *haute bourgeoisie* of 1820 is immediately familiar to us today. It was given direction and excitement by being punctuated by glimpses of the famous. Gainsborough's painting of fashionable young women dressed to the nines eyeing each other's fashions in St. James's Park is a gleeful instance of this. The scandalous life of the Prince Regent in the Brighton Pavilion marks the passage of the royal heir from sanctity to celebrity.

Stage two of the process takes us to Paris after the return of the Bourbons. London's invention of spectacular leisure is there vastly extended, and the city's lead in making the celebrity-conscious consumer society overhauled. When Baron Haussmann pulled down great swathes of old Paris to make his *grands boulevards*, he may have intended to ease the pas-

sage of the riot police on their way to put down insurgent *citoyens*, but he certainly arranged things for the benefit of the fashionable crowd out in its finery to see and be seen. He also made things easy, as Walter Benjamin was the first to notice, for the new invention of plateglass to be installed all the way down the Rue de Rivoli and up the Boulevard Malesherbes in order to show off the goods of *haute couture* and the new department stores.

After 1851 Paris swiftly becomes *the* city of the urban spectacle, and thereafter the astonishing new painters who picture this development—Manet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec—provide us with a sumptuous album of the dress, the poses and posiness, the delights and agonies of living city life in public.

Paris is the first place to put sheer *appearance*—good looks, smart clothes, swank and show—at the centre of celebrity. New York, in its turn, customises gossip and glamourises money. Money mattered in London and Paris, for sure, but the New York and Chicago of the gilded age, in the absence of a settled ruling class and in the presence of a polyglot throng of immigrants offering to fill the bill, lent the prodigious sums of new money cascading into their banks an unprecedented magnetism. The people who possessed it were magnetised along with the money, and Pulitzer's mass-circulation presses assigned them whole columns of gossip in which goggle-eyed admiration mingled with trifling and malice (veins of mixed feelings richly exploited over the next century, as gossip columnists themselves won celebrity).

London, Paris, New York: the leisure timetable, window-shopping and *haute couture*, money and the gossip column—the mechanisms of celebrity take on their modern outline from these forces. They are then given mass and energy by two dramatic phenomena created by world war, its consequent technology, and its fabulous reorganisation of society.

The First World War ended with governments confidently directing and unconsciously directed by their new instruments of propaganda; over the same years the momentous invention of Hollywood brought to birth the sacred infant of the century, the star. Celebrity, it is a commonplace to say, is the product of culture and technology. The new media of film and radio worked each in their different way to restore immediacy and intimacy to human narrative at just the moment when mass modernity made every-

thing in city life seem so anonymous and fragmentary. In the cinema, for instance, the audience could see the stars in colossal close-up, could watch their gigantic lips meet and touch, but could only do so sitting in the dark, more or less solitary, and eerily without any physical propinquity to these intimacies. No wonder then that the stars became imbued with such magical emanations, especially at a time when people in their masses were struggling to find a politics and ethics capable of expressing this strange modern world. Cinema stars, like the political leaders who made themselves into similar stars, offered the reassurance of individual recognisability at a time when that was proving increasingly hard to find. Hence, whether you were a politician in 1919 or merely a millionaire investor in movies, you could have no doubt that these dazzling new media would do everything for your power or your pocket.

The tale of the twenties and thirties is first of all, therefore, a story of how the great dictators and indeed the everyday victors of electoral politics—Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, along with Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George—made themselves into stars on the world stage of politics and corralled the public spectacles of celebratory propaganda—the rally, the armaments parade, the Olympic Games, the Cup Final, the ticker-tape drive through Manhattan, the state openings, the royal weddings, the Mayday march—which then became essential adjuncts of power. All such occasions lent themselves, with the help of newsreels and hugely amplified martial music and megaphone rhetoric, to the public dramatisation of power. The mass political spectacle, no less sumptuously orchestrated at the 1937 coronation of King George VI than at Nuremberg—marching men, drums, banners, horses, and the mute power of the crowd—is *the* feature of political life between the wars. It affirms for each society some of the most important of the social values and traditions and makes the small public figures at the centre of such vast attention uniquely recognisable and still sacredly remote.

This is the powerful contradiction at the heart of our phenomenon. It combines knowability with distance. Political leader and cinema star are intensely familiar (one of the family) by way of the cinema screen, and (at first) by way of their voices on the living room radio, but physically and in terms of how we all need to feel the directness of experience, they have the remoteness of the supernatural. This is the compound which makes for

the sacredness of celebrity and may suggest the reason why people both worship *and* vilify the famous. The invention of stardom and the instantaneous mass publicity it released by way of the new media from 1919 onwards twined together in a strong rope of meaning some of the strongest and strangest passions of modern society. The irresistible shine of money was added to the new emphasis given by the advertising industry to physical desirability and youthfulness. The industrialisation of leisure offered new locations in which to display its conspicuous consumption—holiday attire, seaside games, expansive freedom, informal intimacy all as watched by the envious and their hired eavesdroppers, the gossip columnists and photographers.

All these ingredients come together in the compulsion of the new value, *glamour*. Our nineteenth-century history prepares the ground, and the twin forces of propaganda and stardom join in completing the manufacture of celebrity as it will be constituted from the 1920s to the present. The early forms of celebrity life were lived in the public gaze but in the pretence of privacy. Conspicuous leisure enjoyment became the public action of the damned and beautiful people. Mind you, the leisure of the very wealthy which boiled over onto the beaches of the Riviera at this date was staffed by a very mixed bag: the politically unemployed (the Windsors), the big names in literature and art (the Fitzgeralds, the Lawrences, the Hemingways, Picasso, Segovia), the international sporting set (the Murphys, the Donald Camerons, the Richthofens), the latest thing in *haute couture* (Coco Chanel), and of course the film stars (too many to choose from just now). So it is that a brief history of the Cote d'Azur in the 1930s discovers the shape and meaning of the weird new value it will find on the beaches, in the bedroom, at the baccarat tables, the logic of its composition and the way in which such an odd assortment of candidates concentrated the attention of the publicity industry and, in its turn, held such fascination for its vast audiences.

V

The essential foundations of the Halls of Fame are completed by the second bout of world warfare, which brought renown to the soldiery and

black-and-white news photography to a world desperate to know what was happening to sons and husbands, wives and daughters, in mortal danger and torn apart by flight, combat, starvation, high explosives, and High Command. *Picture Post*, *Life*, *Paris Match*, ten dozen imitators and the newsreel lent unprecedented size, reproducibility, and immediacy to the representative features of leaders and ordinary people and set the pace and tone for this new industry which would turn the vividness and intimacy of ordinary humanity into the remoteness of glamour. As it did so, one unacknowledged consequence of its industrial muscle was that it defined a new and universal content for what counts as supreme success in life in the postwar world. If, however, that supreme success is what celebrity defines for society, it is no surprise if the uncelebrated multitudes want to blow a raspberry at it.

It is important, however, to emphasise that this book will not be a long and lofty malediction spoken over the celebrity cult. Certainly there are bleak judgements to be made about people's being *quite* so entranced with very small numbers of unevenly gifted and frequently unattractive individuals. Just as surely, the stars have looked down at the adoring faces looking up and brought home to them the blessing of unrealisable fantasy, the respite of escape from harsh lives, the glimpse of possibility of a better future, of a decent home, of a just world. Hence, the biographies of a handful of stars on either side of the Atlantic, each of whom assumed a special place in international affections, may be said to have taught by example an imitable way of being in the world. People model themselves in part on the lives of those they admire; it has long been a routine jeremiad from older people to say that private morality has been corrupted by Hollywood. Very well, let us ask ourselves what has been the contribution to public ethics of the lives and careers of some of the stars. This is the moment to oppose the jeremiahs by celebrating the celebrity of a generation of film stars who held out the promise of happiness to millions, and who indeed provided a respite from harsh lives as well as a rousing image of a better society, a decent home, a just world. Cary Grant, for instance, was held all his life in such a *personal* affection, almost as if it could dissolve the star's remoteness and he become ordinarily likeable. He combined dazzling charm (and dazzle is inextricable from glamour) with blithe ruthlessness—one thinks of *His Girl Friday* or *Indiscreet*—but always brought the

well-dressed raffishness of this mixture safely home to tenderness and the marriage bed, and all the time he remains somehow untouchable by moral contamination. James Stewart's exemplary career as a bomber-pilot (1,800 hours of combat flying) throws into relief his unique gift to register moral hesitation, self-uncertainty, the silent loss of a gift for kindness and then its doubtful recovery. Marilyn Monroe, of course, figures for *her* heart-melting genius for the projection of schoolgirlish sexuality and a settled, mature sadness whether on-screen or off it. Gratitude for such brief lives as these cuts down any intellectual hauteur or mere snobbery.

Stardom once offered *such* solace; its consolation and rapturous reassurance remain embedded in our faith in fame, even though so much has happened to us and to them since its cinematic peak in the 1950s. One way of grasping the history of celebrity since then is to see how admiration has become twisted by spite, gossip by vindictiveness, and how the careless envy with which teenagers once adored the Beatles turned into the purposeful malignance with which Princess Diana was pursued to her death.

VI

The film stars are, in a way, easy to talk about. There is a copious literature, and their faces are still so familiar from remaining on television and in Blockbuster Video stores. But what may be thought of as the most serene decades of the history of celebrity—roughly 1945 to 1975—are also the period when television comes to command all media. The victory over fascism not only brought to fame wartime heroes and heroines who became moral examples of the day, but the poets of this metamorphosis, journalists and radio reporters, themselves became starring storytellers of war, new and necessary presences just to one side of otherwise vast and unintelligible events. Celebrity is a natural award to such men as Walter Cronkite and Ed Murrow, Richard Dimbleby and William Hardcastle, and the invention of the mature, benign, intelligent broadcaster ordering celebrity by telling us the news of the world, and in doing so helping us ride out its dizzy whirl, is one best part of our history.

The hinge of our epoch turns with the coming of mass television; the story of celebrity turns with it. Lit by the bright noon of the Pax Americana, the era of mass politics is gradually dissipated and replaced by a different kind of intimacy between the unknown lives of mass audiences watching in solitude and the individual but personally unknowable celebrities doing *their* living only in the windless spaces on the other side of the television screen.

Television is by now so inextricably part of all our domestic lives that it resists analysis. But the truth of what I say is surely borne out by the enthusiasm with which people rush to glimpse the physical actuality of celebrities they think they know well from their screen lives. The stars from the soaps will always pull a crowd, but their stardom depends on still keeping their distance. "A woman is not a duchess a hundred yards from a carriage" goes the old saying, and the conservation of celebrity (it is very precious; it is quickly lost) depends on the peculiar conventions of performance.

The first and most obvious way to follow this making of celebrity by television is to tell the tale of politicians as they perform the dance of power between 1960 and the present day. John F. Kennedy was the first president imaginatively to grasp the momentousness of television, and his remains the most gripping moral fable of celebrity politics. His thousand-day creation of a television president and his combination of exhilarating and energetic charm, flagrant sexual allure, fixity of will, and the delighted possession of absolute political power is a fearful object lesson. Later politicians have to be judged by his lights. So Ronald Reagan, first *professional* actor in the White House, teaches much about the importance of craggy charm, unpretentious likeability, and easygoing disengagement from the urgency of world history, as attributes commending themselves to a citizenry gradually turning away from politics. Bill Clinton shows us much in his strange compound of dazzling intelligence and cretinous behaviour (and the issues each of these factors raises in general for the celebrity) but also reveals more about the place of *scandal* as well as popularity in our ruminations. These star figures may be set off by comparative asides on the parallel careers of, say, Charles de Gaulle, Willy Brandt, Nelson Mandela (all of whom in different ways may be said to be *renowned* for their moral strength). Margaret Thatcher adorns a different moral. In each case, the

moral point is to grasp how a powerful man or woman dramatises and enacts, *both for himself or herself and for us*, values essential to the self-image and self-esteem of his, her, and our society.

VII

Outside the big political story, as you would expect, are smaller narratives. But if we pursue the gradual transformation of sporting heroes from local figures familiar to those they passed in the street of their hometowns to world-famous, personally unknowable multimillionaires with no closer ties binding them to their sporting attachments than a signature on a contract, there is a common theme. Take the contrastive stories in footballing Britain of Stanley Matthews and David Beckham: Stanley Matthews, first footballer to be knighted, belonged to the local people of Stoke, the smallish capital of the five pottery towns, and kept a small hotel in Blackpool when he retired from first-class football at fifty-one. Beckham, the partial subject of a box-office movie (*Bend It like Beckham*, 2002), husband of an equally famous pop singer, owner of a huge country house-home, and an undoubtedly wonderful athlete, is a very different kind of man, embodies very different virtues, from Matthews. So, too, in the parallel contrast between Bobby Jones, courteous southern gentleman and amateur golfer, and Tiger Woods, first black champion golfer, fabulously rich, rigidly quiet and self-contained with it. These few instances may be used to elaborate what celebrity *does to* people, whether grandly world-historical people or limitedly gifted ones, and how—as it was put a moment ago—personal character adapts itself to the demands of celebrity and, insofar as it is successful, alters the demands to suit itself. (A useful paradox is provided by George Best, whose career as a drunk has been as celebrated as his career as a footballer.)

Throughout this third, more or less contemporary, part of the book, particular stories bring out that strange combination of cruelty, sentimentality, touching affection, and downright superstition with which the famous are treated, and in terms of which they have to respond. We know how the photographers hurtled after Princess Diana on motorbikes, and

how the massed displays of flowers down the Mall reproached them and pitied her. If one follows one or two celebrity victims through the demented pages of the fanzines and takes time to consider them as a meaty part of the general theme, one notes not only their proliferation over the past few years but also the hardening of their viciousness, their increased disregard for mere truth, and their fierce circulation rivalry, itself no doubt a strong component in the business of celebrity manufacture.

Against such a grisly excursus, we may nonetheless pit examples of celebrity biography in which the hero remains in sufficient possession of him- or herself, lives a worthy life, and grows gracefully old in the public gaze. A few dignified politicians manage this; a durable story such as that provided by Paul McCartney, who has sustained so calm an advance to present respect and affection; or Paul Newman, who refused public celebrity and committed a private fortune from his salad dressing company to relieving the wretchedness of mortally ill children and to supporting the overdraft of the radical journal *The Nation*.

Meanwhile, of course, new social roles and characters are added to the register of those eligible for celebrity treatment—the chat show hostess, the chef, and the gardener have all been recently recruited—and many of those who fill them are conspicuously unequipped by either intelligence or formation to carry things off with any success. Indeed, the whole notion of what constitutes success in consumer and celebrity society becomes a crux in the book, as do, inevitably, the prodigious rewards and expenditures of both cash and character in the whole amazing cavalcade. So it is that understanding celebrity turns more or less obtrusively into an inquiry into the best and worst values of contemporary Western society. These public lives embody key meanings of the day: success and wealth first, perhaps; then niceness, generosity, honesty, integrity, spontaneity, sympathy (on the good side); and arrogance, insolence, cruelty, narcissism, irresponsibility, greed (on the bad).

Any such bit of moralizing will find these debits and credits on *both* sides of the barriers: for it is a commonplace of celebrity that its figures are transformed into what they are by the compulsions and fantasies of those who throng to see them. The domestic passions and civil affections of the historical present are compressed into and dramatised for us by the public

lives of private and ordinary people suddenly awarded fame. Our celebrities are made to carry in public the values and contradictions of private muddle.

The category itself is disorientingly large. Think of the saintly figures of our time—men and women of the stature of Aung San Suu Kyi, Dorothy Hodgkin, Andrei Sakharov; in what way are they comparable to a bunch of chefs or the desperate boringness of the people hanging out in the unrealities of reality television? It is expected of public intellectuals and moral commentators that they sufficiently match their status to their convictions and their moral practice; how can such a balancing act be placed in the same sentence as the self-mutilations of Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Freddie Mercury? If Oprah Winfrey is, as I believe, an admirably steady, morally capacious, chat show counselor, what sort of creature is Jerry Springer? If it is a cliché to say that modern identity is made by the form of consumer society, the question is then, what are we worth to ourselves if we pay such attention to celebrities?

And then one asks, what may celebrities do for us in return? To tackle these blunt and disobliging matters, we need an even shorter history than this book embodies. It is a history of how we learn to feel, and feel differently from our ancestors, as well as how we contrive to match our moral beliefs to those veering passions.