CELEBRITY AUTHORSHIP AND AFTERLIVES IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

EDITED BY
GASTON FRANSSEN & RICK HONINGS

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Editors

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Introduction: Starring the Author

Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings

Literary celebrity may, at first sight, seem an obvious component of contemporary culture. It is not hard to find examples of contemporary British or American authors who have undeniably acquired the status of international celebrity—complete with their own fan clubs, extensive merchandise industry and overwhelming media attention. Writers such as Bret Easton Ellis, Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith, for instance, have been styled today's literary celebrities.[1] Historical examples are equally in evidence since literary stardom is not confined to the present day. Among those writers who have often been associated with fame and celebrity are, for example, John Keats, Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway.[2] Yet even though extensive research has been conducted into these literary stars, literary celebrity *itself* remains a mysterious phenomenon. Take a closer look at these case studies, compare them, and one is soon faced with all kinds of complicated questions.

In the first place, there is the question whether the renown of a poet such as Keats is actually comparable with the 1930s media hype that surrounded an author like Stein. At the beginning of the nineteenth century,

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when the literary market did not as yet constitute an international multi-billion-euro business and the mediatization of society was still in its infancy, literary fame had a different meaning than it has in these times of professional marketing and social media. Keats was renowned in his day, that much is certain, yet it would be difficult to maintain that he was also a celebrity in the way that Stein was in her own time. Put differently, what is it, then, that makes an author a celebrity? What forms has fame taken through the ages and how have these evolved over time?

A second important question is whether we could actually speak of celebrities with respect to literary authors. A long-established tradition associates literary prestige with intellectual pleasures, cultural capital and elitist refinement, while celebrity is sooner linked up with popular entertainment, commerciality and mass production. Along these lines of argument, Dorothy Parker would more likely be called a celebrity than Jonathan Franzen.[3] Such a presumed dichotomy becomes the stronger as it resounds with widespread gender views: for instance, 'women's literature' is often associated with entertainment, commerce and a culture of hypes, whereas authentic literature is often alleged to be a male domain.[4] Such dichotomies have often been criticized, and rightly so, but the fact remains that, apparently, literary success takes different forms that cannot simply be lumped together. Are authors literary celebrities because of their sales figures and structural media attention, or, rather, because of the official recognition accorded by professional critics—and what about figures like J.D. Salinger, Hunter S. Thompson and J.K. Rowling who owe their status in part to a solid fan base? Is literary celebrity the product of a combination of compatible success factors or is it foremost an umbrella term for strongly divergent values, ranging from aesthetic and affective to economic and socio-cultural?

A third question that the phenomenon of the star author raises concerns the writer's authority—and authority over the writer. An author's stature is created within a variable tension field of power relations where different parties claim authority: writers themselves, obviously, but also their peers, critics, readers, fans, the media, literary agents, journalists, publishers, translators, theaters and film studios, and so on. All these parties have a share in—as well as interests in—determining the value and meaning of the work and the public image of its author. During their lifetime, authors are supposed to adopt a position within this tension field: in their endeavor to retain a certain measure of agency, some reject their success whereas others embrace their popularity and all the media attention. In brief, strategies to assume and retain authority can differ widely.

Norman Mailer's authorship, for instance, is characterized by an active and shrewd form of self-promotion, while, in contrast, a writer like Don DeLillo shies away from the celebrity industry in an attempt to retain and exert a form of control over his authorship.[5]

Yet, whichever position authors adopt, it is certain that they have anything but the last word. Readers, critics, admirers and other actors in the literary field appropriate the author's work and image. They already do so during the author's lifetime and even more so after their idol's death. When the oeuvre is complete and the author can no longer talk back, literary celebrity only exists by the grace of the author's afterlives—the posthumous image of the writer as created by readers, critics, editors, fans and adaptors. These individuals and groups reframe, reinterpret and revisualize the author's words, looks, body and life. In doing so, they ensure a prolonged afterlife for their idol, but at the same time they *re-author*, in a sense, the author's image and oeuvre. The question, then, becomes: who is the author of the author's life story, and how does that story evolve after the author's death, as his image takes on an afterlife of itself?

It is in particular this third question—about the interaction between, on the one hand, authorial self-presentation and, on the other, the public appropriation we encounter in the author's reception and afterlife—that we focus on in this volume. Since there is a wealth of articles and studies in the field of authorship, celebrity and afterlives, we have opted, for this Introduction, to precede the various contributions with a partly historical, partly conceptual framework, where we problematize the concept of literary celebrity authorship. For this purpose, we will draw upon existing research literature so as to provide our readers with reference points in the broad area of research at the interface of celebrity studies, literary studies and cultural history. The subject of this collection demands that we outline and interconnect three concepts in this Introduction: celebrity, authorship and afterlife. In the first section we examine the history of celebrity as well as the theories that have been developed around it. Then, focusing on authorship, the second section offers a further characterization of literary celebrity authorship as a function with several variables. The third section is devoted to a conceptualization of the notion of afterlife. Finally, in the fourth section we provide a preview of what is to follow in this volume, where our central thread remains the intriguing interplay between the self-representation of literary celebrities and the way in which their image is appropriated and transformed by readers, critics, fans or other actors. Celebrity authorship and its afterlives, it will transpire, are inextricably

interwoven, but their mutual relationship often proves, in practice, to take on the shape of a fierce struggle for authority over the writer's image.

Celebrity & co.

Opinions differ as to the origin of celebrity. Richard Schickel states firmly in *Intimate Strangers*: *The Culture of Celebrity* (1985) that 'there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the 20th century'.[6] In *The Image*: *A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1962) Daniel Boorstin argues that it is particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century that celebrity culture manifests itself.[7] Fred Inglis identifies an earlier starting point in *A Short History of Celebrity* (2010): the mid-eighteenth century, when, he argues, the development of urban culture and the theater as the art of performance *par excellence* were of crucial importance.[8] Robert van Krieken goes even further back in time in *Celebrity Society* (2012) as he points to the similarities between contemporary celebrity culture and the court culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the role of its 'economy of attention' in the construction of social identities.[9] Finally, if we take fame to be synonymous with celebrity, the roots of celebrity culture can be seen to reach as far back as classical antiquity: in *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986) Leo Braudy points to Alexander the Great as one of the first clear examples of one whose fame took unprecedented forms.[10] For some, then, celebrity culture is a recent phenomenon, for others it is something of all time.

It is not just the dating of celebrity but also the precise definition of the concept that has led to a multitude of viewpoints. Many researchers arrive at a taxonomy of fame, where they distinguish celebrity from other forms of renown. It is interesting to note that this taxonomy frequently implies a moral judgment. Reflections of a moral nature are found, for instance, in James Monaco, who in *Celebrity*: *The Media as Image Makers* (1978) distinguishes between heroes and celebrities, with the former category achieving fame because of a special accomplishment, while the latter category's fame is first and foremost a media construct.[11] Boorstin offers a similar contrast: he views fame as a form of heroism or natural greatness, while he associates celebrity with artificiality and superficiality. In modern times, Boorstin argues, renown has become a 'human pseudo-event', mass-produced by press agents and distributed through media channels.[12] It is this new type of well-knownness that Boorstin labels as 'celebrity' in his often-cited definition: 'The celebrity is a person who is

well-known for his well-knownness.'[13] In the same vein Braudy, in a reference to *The Frenzy of Renown*, links fame with 'reticence and the sanction of neglect', whereas celebrity is supposedly attention crazy. Fame, he reiterates, includes 'an element of turning away from us', whereas 'celebrity stares us straight in the face, flaunting its performance and trying desperately to keep our attention'.[14]

Here, however, we prefer a more pragmatic approach rather than these morally biased definitions of celebrity. With Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, compilers of *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (2006), we conclude that 'the terms fame, stardom and celebrity have a degree of liquidity'; the various forms of fame converge and do not, by definition, exclude each other.[15] A less biased approach is encountered in the work by researchers like Richard Dyer or P. David Marshall, who examine celebrity from a semiotic and sociological perspective.[16] They do not primarily concentrate on what celebrities are but, rather, on what they *do*—or, more accurately, what they enable us to do. The advantage of such an approach is that celebrity culture is perceived as a dynamic sociocultural framework within which opinions on personality, individuality and the boundary between the public and the private have, throughout the centuries, taken form. Within such a framework celebrities serve, Dyer argues, as 'star images', intertextual structures consisting of images of celebrities and statements made by them and about them, which are produced and consumed by a particular audience.[17] Such star texts, according to Dyer, dramatize 'what it is to be a human being in contemporary society'.[18] Celebrities, in other words, are (real or imaginary) individuals whose fame reaches such proportions that they start to function as 'discursive battlegrounds', as Marshall argues in line with Dyer, in which we shape and negotiate 'the norms of individuality and personality within a culture'.[19] The specific way in which celebrities fulfill this function depends on the societal (sub)domain in which they manifest themselves. A distinction can therefore be made between 'celebrity sectors' or 'domains', each with their own forms of renown and different scales, specific conventions and concomitant value judgments.[20]

This non-essentialist approach of celebrity does not alter the fact that it is possible to distinguish specific historical and social developments that have been indispensable for the establishment and dissemination of celebrity culture. Sundry classical studies on celebrity see the recurrence of three developments: the growing influence of the (mass) media, the increased attention to the personal and the individual, and the commodification of

public selves. We provide a number of examples of such studies, with the admission that our summaries do not do justice to the nuances and scope of the individual publications: our concern is to demonstrate that these three developments are indeed thought to be fundamental to the development of celebrity culture.

The rise of the mass media, the first development, plays an important role in the cultural critical analysis that Boorstin unfolds in *The Image*. Boorstin points to the influence of what he terms The Graphic Revolution, the dizzying growth of 'man's ability to make, preserve, transmit and disseminate precise images' due to the advent of the printing press, photography, film, radio and television, giving us 'the means of fabricating well-knownness'.[21] Renown, fame or prestige are forms of illustriousness that can still manifest themselves on a relatively small scale, within a particular domain or professional field, Boorstin argues, but celebrity moves far beyond this scale owing to the mass media. It is a line of reasoning that we also meet in David Giles, who states in his *Illusions of Immortality* (2000) that 'the ultimate modern celebrity is the member of the public who becomes famous solely through media involvement'.[22] However, being a media psychologist, Giles is fully aware of the importance of the media's effect on the audience. In his book he therefore also addresses the audience's need to identify with the idol and build up a personal relationship with it.

This is then the second development that is deemed to be of overriding importance for the rise of celebrity culture: a growing interest in the personal, the individual and the private. Graeme Turner, for one, points out that 'the private lives' of celebrities often 'attract greater public interest than their professional lives'.[23] Christine Geraghty similarly observes that the fame of celebrities 'rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work'.[24] The audience, then, does not admire celebrities solely for their athletic performance or their talent for singing or acting: the fascination also extends—and perhaps even more strongly—to their lifestyles, their preferences and tastes.

A third development concerns the commodification of the self. The idea here is that celebrities are selves turned into products. This is one of the points raised in *Claims to Fame*: *Celebrity in Contemporary America* (1994), Joshua Gamson's analysis of the 'celebrity industry' as 'a commercial industry much like other commodity-production systems'.[25] In *Celebrity Culture* (2006) Ellis Cashmore has a related point of departure: what is 'distinct about today's celebrity culture', he argues, is that

celebrities have become 'commodities in the sense that they've become articles of trade that can be bought and sold in a marketplace'.[26] Of course, the audience cannot literally 'buy' celebrities but by engaging with them—for which it willingly pays, be it in a direct and literal sense or in an indirect and symbolic sense—the audience can consume and enjoy their style, their attitude or charisma.

The three developments underpinning celebrity culture are neatly traced and defined as the 'moulding forces' of celebritization by Olivier Driessens in his article 'The Celebritization of Society and Culture'.[27] What he understands by celebritization is 'the societal and cultural changes implied by celebrity', as distinct from celebrification, which is 'the process by which ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities'.[28] The three developments discussed earlier recur in Driessens under the headings (1) 'mediatization', seen as the interrelation between media technological change and social-cultural practices as well as institutions, (2) 'personalization', seen as 'the (increasing) centrality of the disembedded individual over the collective', resulting in increasing attention to the personality and the private lives of celebrities, and (3) 'commodification', the process in which the celebrity becomes both the marketable product and the producer of labor.[29] These three forces constitute and shape celebrity culture but they do not always and everywhere do so in the same measure. The specific relation of the three forces in 'the matrix of (meta) processes and factors influencing the creation and importance of celebrity' determines the nature and function of fame in specific historical periods or socio-cultural domains. This also explains, then, the variety of opinions about the historical roots and definition of celebrity culture: if the emergence of the modern individual at the time of Humanism is made the focal point of an analysis, this will necessarily result in a different interpretation and an earlier dating of celebrity culture than if the media revolution is taken as a major point of departure.

It is the combination of these three developments—mediatization, personalization and commodification—that we also believe to be crucial to the rise of literary celebrity culture. From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, these forces begin to get a grip on the literary domain: they manifest themselves in the form of the magazine revolution and the rise of mass media (mediatization), the establishment of a 'regime of singularity', where the artist ranks as a unique personality (personalization), and the professionalization of the book trade (commercialization).[30] It is at that moment that literary celebrity culture develops. Yet the literary

author is not, by definition, in pursuit of fame, success and media attention: the conditions that apply to literary authorship sometimes prove to be at odds with the celebritization of culture.

The curious case of literary celebrity authorship

In *Illusions of Immortality* Giles raises the question whether William Shakespeare and Maureen Rees, the Welsh cleaner who became nationally famous through the BBC reality TV series *Driving School*, 'are destined to share the same pedestal in the public imagination'. 'Clearly not', is how he answers his question. Giles does not elaborate why he pits an early modern author against a contemporary television personality in his question, but his reasons are easy to guess: one is a historical figure, the other a present-day figure; the writer is male, the cleaner female; and, last but certainly not least, Shakespeare is a canonical author of high literature, whereas Rees is a television personality associated with mass media and popular culture. A famous literary author, the suggestion seems to be, is not just any celebrity. But what, then, makes literary celebrity authorship a special case?

Literary authorship is a relatively recent invention. At the time of the Middle Ages or the early-modern period, anonymity or joint writing practices were often still the rule: texts circulated in the public space and could be copied or adapted relatively easily. Various economic, technological and ideological developments in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created the breeding ground for a new notion of authorship: the disappearance of patronage as a source of income, the industrialization of the book printing process and the evolution of a world picture that centers around the individual forced the writer to present himself as an independent, unique individual with his own style.[31] This new and 'radical conceptualization of the creative process', write Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi in *The Construction of Authorship* (1994), 'culminated less than 200 years ago in the heroic self-presentation of Romantic poets'.[32]

The Romantics introduced a 'modern regime of authorship', where the writer ranked as a unique, exalted figure.[33] It is a presentation of the author wholly consistent with Dyer's idea that celebrities appear to be 'of a different order of being, a different "ontological category"'.[34] It is hardly surprising that this is the period when we encounter the first clear examples of literary celebrities, such as Byron.[35] This poet confirmed the idea that the true artist was superior to other people and should also distinguish

himself socially and culturally with an unusual lifestyle and a distinctive public image. 'By the end of the Romantic period', is the conclusion Tom Mole draws in his study of Byron as a celebrity, 'one could meaningfully speak of a celebrity or a star as a special kind of person with a distinct kind of public profile.'[36]

However, since the introduction of this modern regime of authorship, the self-presentation of the author has also taken very different forms—forms that are hard to reconcile with the character of celebrity culture. In the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, high-modernist authors defended viewpoints that were at odds with such processes as personalization and commodification.[37] T.S. Eliot, for instance, put forward his 'impersonal theory of poetry', stating that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'.[38] At the same time, high-modernist authors like Wallace Stevens or James Joyce rebelled against the commodification of culture. Modernism, as Fredric Jameson points out, 'conceives its formal vocation to be the resistance to commodity form, not to be a commodity'.[39] Half a century later, postmodern authors shape and interpret their authorship in ways that are equally hard to reconcile with the forces of celebritization, witness Paul Auster's subversion of the writer's authority or Don DeLillo's critical treatment of 'the press of publicity on privacy, the fetishization of celebrity, and the commodification of art'.[40]

Admittedly, some of these authors have been proved to have actually capitalized on the dynamics of the market and the media or to have played into the hands of the literary paparazzi with their reclusiveness.[41] However, the fact remains that they publicly promulgated a view in which authorship was at odds with market successes, media attention and the authority of the author. Furthermore, this reluctance to focus undue attention on the author is reinforced by an academic tradition that has structurally questioned the significance of the person 'behind the work'. For instance, 'the Author-God' got short shrift from Roland Barthes in his famous essay 'The Death of the Author' (1968), while poststructuralist critics like Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida exposed the author as a humanist illusion, a mask hiding the unlimited, ultimately inhuman semantic potential of language.[42]

In order to fully comprehend this complex interplay between celebrity and authorship, it is important to acknowledge that authorship, much like celebrity, is a socio-cultural construct. Authorship and celebrity are two different ways in which subjectivity can take form in modern, western cul-

ture, whereby they sometimes reinforce, sometimes repel each other. That authorship is a historically and culturally situated form of subjectivity was demonstrated by Michel Foucault in his 'What is an Author?' (1969), a text that still ranks as an important passage point in theoretical discussions on authorship. Foucault contends that the author is the product of an interdiscursive practice, whereby he understands discourse as a collection of statements and opinions structured according to connected ordering principles. Statements from the author himself, but also from critics, editors, journalists and readers delineate a corpus of 'legitimate' statements, which is subsequently ascribed to the author. The author, then, is the end result of these practices—of 'a complex operation that constructs a certain being of reason that we call "author"'. The individual that is earmarked with this title is, according to Foucault, 'a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations we force texts to undergo'.[43] In *The Order of Discourse* (1971) Foucault therefore defines the author as 'a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence'.[44] The author is, in other words, a function: a function that allows an orderly manner of talking about a collection of texts, statements, actions and judgments. This view on the 'author function' ties in with Dyer's and Marshall's take on celebrity as an intertextual, discursive construct: the writing (or idolized) subject is no longer the producer of texts or statements, but the product of various (legal, economic, or literary) discourses.

Literary celebrity is, then, the product of two telescoping discursive constructs: the author function and the 'celebrity function'.[45] These functions sometimes converge and confirm each other, as at the time of Romanticism or in our present-day 'meet the author' culture.[46] Then, again, they clash violently, seemingly irreconcilable, as in high modernism or in a poststructuralist view of literature. Literary celebrity authorship, in other words, is a function with several variables, and authors, critics, publishers as well as readers constantly redraw the lines between authorship and celebrity. Taking on board the considerations from the previous section, we are now in a position to specify these variables thus: literary celebrity authorship is a discursive construct of subjectivity whereby, in varying proportions, a major role is played by (1) information about the author's life and personality, (2) the technical, medial and commercial dissemination of the work and the authorial image, (3) views on the nature and properties of literary writing as they circulate in public discourse, and (4) the way in which the author lives on in his or her afterlife.

Afterlife and celebrity criticism

Whoever wants to chart the history of literary celebrity authorship, then, has to face the difficult task of mapping a shifting constellation of discursive battlegrounds, where a variety of forces, actors and interests meet and clash. In this volume we wish to do justice to these complex issues by not focusing solely on the author's self-presentation, or, for that matter, concentrating exclusively on the reception of his work and performances but, instead, by highlighting their interaction—and, moreover, by depicting the long lines of development of this interaction. Hence, we have included the author's afterlife as our fourth variable in the equation discussed earlier.

Afterlife, the English equivalent of German *Nachleben*, is a concept rooted in the mid-twentieth-century art theory of, among others, cultural scientist Aby Warburg; in the past decade, however, it has received a reappraisal in the discipline of cultural memory studies.[47] Such researchers as Astrid Erll and Aleida Assmann have shown that the afterlife of literary works can teach us a great deal about 'transcultural memory' and 'the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms and practices of memory, their continual "travels" and ongoing transformations through time and space'.[48] Rereading and rewriting canonical works, or, rather, books that have sunk into oblivion, contributes, according to Erll, to the 'continuation' and 'actualization' of their 'social life'. Research on this afterlife charts the function of these works diachronically: it offers insight into 'the continuing impact of literature, how it manages to "live on" and remain in use and meaningful to readers'.[49] Erll distinguishes three perspectives from which to tackle a work's afterlife: a 'social perspective', which 'emphasizes the active appropriations of a literary text by social actors'; a 'media culture-perspective', which directs attention to 'the intermedial networks'—translations, quotations, adaptations—'which maintain and sustain the continuing impact of certain stories'; and finally, a more 'text-centered perspective', which enquires whether 'there are certain properties of literary works which make them more "actualizable" than others, which effect that the works lend themselves to rereading, rewriting, remediating, and continued discussion'.[50] In her reflections on the concept of afterlife Assmann offers a reminder that there are two sides to it: an afterlife 'can be a matter of intentional, painstaking and costly human construction', but it may also be the result of unconscious, 'internal dynamics of an affective impact'.[51] A good example of such research

into afterlives, which also illustrates how Erll's three perspectives and Assmann's two sides are bound up, is Ann Rigney's study into the rich and changeable afterlife of author Walter Scott.[52]

The concept of afterlife as developed by Erll, Assmann and Rigney lends itself very well to being deployed in further research into literary celebrity, particularly so if we are, as in this volume, interested in the interaction between authorial self-presentation and afterlife. In order to deploy the concept to this end, however, two additional considerations must be taken account of. First, it is essential to acknowledge that in the case of literary celebrity it is not just the author's work but also his personality—the public image or authorial persona—that lives on in the afterlife. The 'star text' (Dyer) or 'celebrity sign' (Marshall) is also reread again and again and experienced differently each time. Then, boundaries between oeuvre and persona are soon found to blur, since authors often reflect in their work on their status as a public figure, while the audience attempts to interpret the authors' personalities with the help of statements from characters in their works. In short, work and author often prove to be inextricably intertwined.

As a second consideration, it needs to be taken into account that behind Assmann's clear division—afterlife as an intentional construction and as affective dynamics—there lies a multitude of intentions, actors and effects. The afterlife of the author may be a painstaking and costly construction by the author himself, but publishers, editors, heirs and fans too make strategic choices as they pronounce upon the author. In this way they also contribute to the way in which the authorial image will go down in history. At the same time, the affective dynamics of the afterlife is equally characterized by an interplay of different institutions and varying conditions. Without intending to, an author—or the image of that author, created by others—can appeal to the audience's emotions, interact with social developments, or be claimed for a political message by certain groups. And even the researcher examining this complex interplay takes part in the dynamics of the afterlife. The boundaries between intention and unconscious response, between past and present, and between production and reception likewise prove vague and changeable.

The work of Walter Benjamin, an early explorer of the relation between literature, afterlife and fame, offers leads for incorporating these adjustments. In his essay 'The Task of the Translator' (1921) Benjamin examines translation as a form of afterlife. According to Benjamin, translations should not be understood as attempts to achieve 'likeness to the original',

because, he argues, in its afterlife 'the original undergoes a change'. Over time, a translation is interpreted and experienced differently: words take on different meanings and connotations, style is appraised differently, the nature of social resonances changes. Moreover, it is not just the work itself that becomes 'different' but 'the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well'.[53] The translator should, therefore, not so much attempt to convey the original message but, rather, 'the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original'; the translator, then, does not translate the content, but 'the way of meaning' of the original. Ultimately, aspiring to such a translation constitutes an ideal rather than a realistic goal since, Benjamin argues, the 'ways of meaning' in the original and the translation will always be different: 'Whereas content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.'[54] Strictly speaking, a translation is even impossible, according to Benjamin: it will always be transformative and distortive. It is this process of transformative translation, a process that Paul de Man in his reading of Benjamin would later come to term 'destructive' and 'disarticulated', that constitutes the afterlife of the literary work.[55]

Although Benjamin focuses on translations of literary works here, his line of reasoning can be usefully brought to bear on the afterlife of such a cultural phenomenon as literary celebrity authorship. After all, the reinterpretations and reappraisals of an author's afterlife over the centuries can easily be understood as 'translations' of the authorial 'star text' or 'celebrity sign' in different contexts. Indeed, Benjamin posits: 'Where [the afterlife] manifests itself, it is called fame.'[56] The author's fame is detached from its historical and social context in order to be rewritten in a different language and time. As with the original work and its translation, the original 'way of meaning' of the authorial image will always differ from its afterlife. The cultural critic wishing to analyze fame is therefore faced with a task that is comparable to the translator's. Graeme Gilloch summarizes this task thus: 'Benjamin envisages and presents criticism as a process of destruction and (re)construction. The disintegration of the artwork and its liberation from traditional interpretations and contexts (afterlife) permit its relocation, reconfiguration and redemption as part of a wider pattern (as mosaic, as constellation).'[57] A criticism of celebrity, then, detaches the idol from its time and reconfigures it from a contemporary perspective. It is in this partly destructive, partly reconstructive analysis of fame

that 'historical understanding', according to Benjamin, finds its ground: 'Historical "understanding" is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood; and what has been recognized in the analysis of the "afterlife of works", in the analysis of "fame", is therefore to be considered the foundation of history in general.'[58]

Benjamin's reflections on afterlives hold an important lesson for the researcher wishing to examine the history of literary celebrity. Research into afterlives confronts us, as Marek Tamm reminds us, with 'the important hermeneutical lesson that historical thinking involves a dual reflection: the penetration of its objects from the past, and the recognition of the historian's own time and contingency.'[59] Criticism of literary celebrity should not, therefore, be fixated on retrieving the idol's creative intention or original personality; rather, the celebrity should be seen as a fragment, a part of a historically, socially and culturally situated configuration. It is the critic's task to lay bare how the discursive construction of literary stardom could come about, how it has evolved and what role the audience—which includes the critic himself—has played. Thus, the analysis of past celebrities inevitably also constitutes an act of self-analysis: it is analysis of the ways in which, and the reasons why, we as admirers and fans appropriate and (re)create the idolized individual after our own image. Critics of literary celebrity, in other words, investigate the work, the life, the personality and the performance of a particular author, but also reflect on those individuals that, according to Barthes's famous words, were born at the moment the Author-God died: ourselves, as readers in the present.[60]

Charting celebrity authorship

The authors in this volume have taken on the challenging task that Benjamin sets the cultural critic: they investigate the interaction between the original 'way of meaning' of literary celebrity, the social, political or commercial appropriations that characterize its afterlife, and the reconfiguration of authors' images in contemporary society. These dynamics constitute the lens with which they propose to examine the history of literary celebrity anew. In each of this volume's chapters, one author from the history of English or American literature is given a key role. The list of authors may not be exhaustive by any means but it is illustrative, and in this way we hope to do justice to the diversity of dimensions which characterizes literary celebrity.

The chapters on Keats and Smith, for example, feature the historical dimension of literary celebrity. Eric Eisner examines the construction of Keats's ongoing afterlife through actual friends and its connections to the formation of a general Romantic culture of reading, writing and commemoration through nineteenth-century 'ideas' of friendship and the love of literature. The relationship between literary authorship and contemporary celebrity culture takes center stage in the article by Odile Heynders, who uses the media's obsession with the commercial success and 'glamorous' looks of Smith as her starting point. Heynders shows how Smith counters the overwhelming media attention with a clever combination of public appearances, use of social media and critical reflections on fame and celebrity culture in her literary work. Read side by side, the two essays show how literary celebrity has evolved between the nineteenth century and our days.

The extent to which writers actively contribute to—or fiercely oppose—the mediatization and personalization inherent in celebrity culture is another major dimension, particularly so, perhaps, in the chapters on Stein and Salinger. The authorial, public and personal identity of Stein, Rod Rosenquist argues, was strangely 'doubled' by a series of imitations and cartoons that constantly reproduced her style and picture. According to Rosenquist, this posed a very real and disturbing problem to Stein, which she tried to resolve by thematizing her celebrity in texts like 'Identity A Poem' (1935) or *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), texts in which she embraces and questions her fame at the same time. Salinger's unwillingness to become a literary celebrity even reached legendary proportions, as Gaston Franssen's article demonstrates: Salinger categorically refused to be photographed or interviewed and consequently soon became known as 'a literary recluse'. However, it was precisely Salinger's silence, says Franssen, that was to occasion a rich afterlife fueled by wild rumors, gossipy biographies and fictional appropriations.

A third recurrent dimension concerns the role played by visual culture in the representation of authorship. With the mediatization of modern culture, in the form of such technological innovations as lithography, photography, film and, later, the Internet, the author has morphed from a faceless scribe into a public personality whose portrait circulates freely in the public space. This is convincingly demonstrated in the chapters on Herman Melville and Eliza Cook. A kind of Salinger *avant-la-lettre*, Melville did not want his portrait to divert attention from his work. In his article, Kevin Hayes describes how Melville's face became the focus of his readers' curiosity, while the author himself harshly judged this obsession

for the author's 'mug', which, according to him, resulted from the introduction of new printing techniques such as the daguerreotype. That a portrait can indeed fundamentally affect the image of the author is clear from the reception Cook met with, which is the focus of Alexis Easley's article. Cook was an early example of a media-savvy author who combined radically conventional poetry with experimental performances of sex and gender. This is evidenced, according to Easley, by the way in which Cook was portrayed over the years: the unconventional image that the author created for herself was reflected in illustrations that emphasize Cook's masculine appearance, stressing her deviation from the feminine norm.

The creative and at times even radical appropriation that is part and parcel of the author's afterlife constitutes the fourth and last dimension of literary celebrity to be discussed in the various chapters. Appropriated and adapted by others, the authorial persona often takes on a life of its own after the author's demise, as is shown in the chapters on Edgar Allan Poe and Wilde. Evert Jan van Leeuwen describes Poe as a poet who went to great pains to capture the attention of public opinion. Poe published much-talked-about hoaxes, gruesome stories and haunting poetry, and presented himself as a captivating performer. In his afterlife, Van Leeuwen shows, it was foremost the gothic aspects of Poe's authorial image that were to dominate his reception. His biography was subsequently colored in with literary themes from his work, whilst in numerous films and series, which sometimes bear very little relation to either his oeuvre or his life, Poe lives on as a commercial product—a marketable gothic caricature, modeled after his own stories. Last, Sandra Mayer maps the protean afterlife of Wilde: she sketches how the inexhaustible potential of Wilde's star image has resulted in a wide array of contemporary films, festivals, theater plays, biofiction novels and merchandise products. A variety of parties have appropriated the writer: one time Wilde is the Irish author, sometimes a proto-postmodernist, another time he is a gay icon. Focusing on how Wilde is represented in contemporary drama, Mayer comes to the conclusion that the pull of the celebrity author, despite the neo-Victorian agenda of turning the spotlight on the 'supporting cast' in the familiar Wilde narrative, is as strong as ever.

Obviously, the various chapters in this volume accent different issues. Some chapters highlight the self-fashioning of the author; other chapters accentuate the immediate reception, or, rather, give center stage to the posthumous afterlife of authors. But without exception, each and every one of them sheds light on the mechanisms of literary celebrity culture.

The contributors explore the author's celebrity sign and analyze its role in the construction of different forms of authorship; they reveal how author and work are appropriated by social actors and become part of intermedial networks; and finally, they investigate the function of particular works or specific personality traits in the overall process of authorial celebrification. This process turns out to entail a constant shift in authority: different parties demand a say in the determination of the value and meaning of literary authorship. Writerly authority, and authority over the writer emerge as the power over which writers, publishers, readers and fans do battle in the arena of literary celebrity culture.

Notes

1. See Baelo-Allué 2011; York 2013; Ommundsen 2009; English and Frow 2006.
2. Eisner 2009, pp. 48–67; Goldman 2011, pp. 19–54; Galow 2011, pp. 53–79; Braudy 1997, pp. 19–28
3. See Hammill 2009, pp. 27–54; York 2016.
4. Huyssen 1986, pp. 44–62; Glass 2004; Easley 2011.
5. Glass 2004, pp. 175–196 Moran 2000, pp. 116–132.
6. Quoted in Van Krieken 2012, p. 11.
7. Boorstin 2012, p. 13.
8. Inglis 2010, p. 5.
9. Van Krieken 2012, p. 16.
10. Braudy 1997, pp. 29–51.
11. Monaco 1978, pp. 5–14.
12. Boorstin 2012, p. 45.
13. Boorstin 2012, p. 57.
14. Braudy 1997, pp. 390–449; Braudy 2011, p. 1072.
15. Holmes and Redmond 2006, p. 10.
16. Dyer 1998; Marshall 1997.
17. Dyer 1998, p. 60.
18. Dyer 1986, p. 7.
19. Marshall 1997, p. 65.
20. Van Krieken 2012, p. 50; Marshall 1997, p. x.
21. Boorstin 2012, pp. 13, 47.
22. Giles 2000, p. 25.
23. Turner 2004, p. 3.
24. Quoted in Holmes and Redmond 2006, p. 99.
25. Gamson 1994, p. 58.
26. Cashmore 2006, p. 3.

27. Driessens 2013, p. 649.
28. Driessens 2013, p. 643.
29. Driessens 2013, pp. 650–651.
30. Donoghue 1996; Heinich 1995 (also see Danko 2008); Mole 2007.
31. Bennett 2005, pp. 44–54.
32. Woodmansee and Jaszi 1994, p. 3.
33. Woodmansee and Jaszi 1994, p. 2.
34. Dyer 1998, p. 43.
35. McDayter 2009; Eisner 2009.
36. Mole 2007, p. xii.
37. Huyssen 1986; Glass 2004.
38. Eliot 1921, p. 47.
39. Jameson 1979, pp. 134–135.
40. Martin 2008; Osteen 1999, p. 643.
41. Rainey 1998; Moran 2000; Jaffe 2005; Conroy 2004; Rosenquist 2009.
42. Barthes 1977, pp. 142–148; Burke 1998.
43. Foucault 1998, p. 213
44. Foucault 1981, p. 58.
45. Marshall 1997, p. 245
46. Todd 1996, p. 9; English and Frow 2006, p. 51.
47. Tamm 2015, p. 9.
48. Erll 2011a, p. 11.
49. Erll 2011b, p. 4.
50. Erll 2011b, pp. 3–4.
51. Assmann 2015, p. 82.
52. Rigney 2004; Rigney 2012.
53. Benjamin 2002a, p. 256
54. Benjamin 2002a, p. 258.
55. Paul de Man 1986, p. 84.
56. Benjamin 2002a, p. 255.
57. Gilloch 2013, p. 86.
58. Benjamin 2002b, p. 460.
59. Tamm 2015, p. 7.
60. Barthes 1977, p. 148.

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2

A Friendly Return of the Author: John Keats (1795–1821)

Eric Eisner

The story of John Keats's last days in Rome—the dying poet patiently nursed by his friend the painter Joseph Severn—has sparked the imagination of writers and artists, starting with Severn's own drawings and journal-letters from the spot.[1] In her poem 'The Brooch' (1996), however, the American poet Mary Ruefle comes at the story slant, focusing not directly on the death of the poet but, rather, on the friend left at loose ends in its immediate aftermath:

> After Keats's death, Severn wanted to have made
> a gold brooch in the shape of a lyre
> with strands of John's hair for the strings.
> In Oceania this doesn't amount to a thing.
> The Hawaiian king stood resplendent
> in his cape of feathers.
> Ninety thousand birds were captured and killed
> for their orange and yellow wings.
> It took a century to complete, a century
> for a man to become a bird.

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> Keats took a few minutes one afternoon
> while writing a letter.
> Still, there is no pin:
> in all of Rome, Severn could not find a goldsmith
> who could crimp the hair-strings in.[2]

At the heart of the poem are acts of extraordinary creativity and wondrous transformation. The poem reiterates the apparent effortlessness of his genius—a core element of the myth of Keats—and recuperates his death through the idea of transcendence: becoming a bird is a form of willed leave-taking that precedes, and in the poem seems to override, Keats's actual death. The cape of feathers and the desired hair-string brooch are arresting, quasi-magical objects, things that speak of both death and life. However, the poem lingers longest on Severn's more mundane acts of commemoration and mourning, his frustrated, incomplete, second-hand artistry. His desire is not for magical transformation but simply to hold onto a connection to his friend. The poem nicely suggests some of the open-endedness of mourning, as it deals with a problem of literal closure, and at the same time draws our attention to the quandary of those who survive the poet.

In her book *Loving Dr. Johnson* (2005), Helen Deutsch comments on the lasting cultural fascination with Samuel Johnson's lung, preserved after autopsy:

> The image of Johnson's lung […] is a talisman or relic, unattainable but repeatedly reproduced, that initiates us into the mysteries of another's grief, another's fear […] at the prospect of death, an other who is an author who has written to reassure us in grief and fear, in whom we try without fully succeeding to see ourselves, whom we, in short, love.[3]

Although the brooch as it operates in Ruefle's poem is not so much a relic of Keats as it is a talisman of Severn's devotion to Keats, Deutsch's comment on Johnson's lung helps explain why so many are drawn to revisit Keats's last days in such detail. Severn's unfinished brooch in Ruefle's poem connects to some of the larger questions posed to us by the whole story of Keats's dying: what do we do with the authors we love? How do we handle what their deaths show us of death?[4] And how do we confront the presence of others in the scene? Part of the ambiguity of the story of Keats's celebrity death is after all the way it hovers uncomfortably between public and private, as it is almost unbearably intimate and at the same time

always existing for an audience. As the end approaches both Keats and Severn are conscious of multiple audiences (friends, loved ones, the public) back home. Severn's witness is at once a version of our own witness and its negation, because Severn's actual presence is also a reminder of our exclusion from a scene we imagine as somehow including us.

As it happened, Severn eventually did get a gold brooch in the shape of a lyre made from the lock of Keats's hair. Intending it at first for Keats's lover Fanny Brawne, he instead held onto it and presented it to his daughter on her wedding; the brooch resides now at the Keats House in Hampstead.[5] Grant Scott and Andrew Bennett have analyzed Severn's multiple acts of commemoration, which extended over a lifetime and ranged from his role in stage-managing Keats's burial and the erection of a gravestone (featuring the image of a lyre with broken strings), to his memoirs and essays recalling the author's life and death, to his many paintings of Keatsian subjects or of Keats himself.[6] Severn traded relentlessly on stories he could tell of Keats. He also distributed fragments of the poet's verse, clipping stanzas from manuscripts to send to friends as souvenirs.[7] In a way, he even made his closeness to Keats permanent, because he is buried near the poet in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, where his own epitaph describes him as the 'Devoted friend and death-bed companion of John Keats.'[8] Severn's activity on Keats's behalf exemplifies the special role of Keats's friends in guarding and shaping the poet's reputation. This kind of custodial relationship to the poet, however, is one adopted by many of the poet's later readers as well. Severn's repeated and at times clumsy or self-interested acts of commemoration, his wish to preserve and transmit something of Keats, and the intense connection to his lost friend—all these are expressions of friendship that anticipate the responses of so many readers who characterize their relationship to the poet not only in terms of love or devotion, but also in terms of responsibility or care.

Severn is only one of a group of 'fiercely loyal' friends who played a crucial role in fostering Keats's posthumous celebrity.[9] Jack Stillinger reminds us that, although several of these friends proposed biographies immediately following Keats's death, published recollections were notoriously slow to appear, due in no small part to 'a prolonged squabble among the surviving friends' over control of Keats's legacy.[10] Still, recognizing Keats's genius and anticipating his future fame, these friends acted with posterity in mind even while Keats was still living, mixing protectiveness towards him with ambition for their own role in the story. The poet, journalist and editor Leigh Hunt promoted Keats early and often. The young

lawyer Richard Woodhouse, a literary advisor for Keats's publishers Taylor and Hessey, was so convinced of Keats's greatness that, even while Keats was living, he set out to do for Keats what 'people regret they could not do for Shakespeare', that is to say, diligently gathering documentation of the day-to-day circumstances of Keats's life.[11] The poet's housemate and travelling companion Charles Armitage Brown transcribed poems, compiled materials for a projected biography and kept careful watch over Keats's reputation. Charles Cowden Clarke, who introduced Keats to Spenser and introduced Hunt to Keats, wrote reminiscences of the poet decades later that significantly shape our sense of him.[12] The tombstone of another Keats collaborator and correspondent, the writer and lawyer John Hamilton Reynolds, who died in 1852, bears the inscription 'the friend of Keats' and a matching inscription appears on the stone erected over Brown's grave in 1921.[13]

The devotion of Keats's inner circle finds its echo in the intimate emotional response he has inspired from readers in the almost two centuries since his death. In 1854, the influential American poet and critic James Russell Lowell described reading Keats as a type of bodily and spiritual exchange, a transfer of life and energy from poet to reader: 'Every one of Keats's poems was a sacrifice of vitality; a virtue went away from him into every one of them; even yet, as we turn the leaves, they seem to warm and thrill our fingers with the flush of his fine senses, and the flutter of his electrical nerves.'[14] Many have understood the experience of reading Keats in similar terms of intimate contact. In the late nineteenth century, as Ann Rowland notes, the especially besotted American Keats devotees F. Holland Day and Louise Guiney acted out their devotion with bizarre, quasi-religious extravagance, with ritualistic celebrations of Keats's birthday and the anniversary of his death in which they would mark the years since 'we lost Johnny'.[15] Even in the more staid context of an introduction to a 2011 edition of Keats's poetry and letters, the poet Edward Hirsch writes extravagantly that Keats 'is a spirit to breathe in, to live up to', his words 'like a bell […] leading us to our deepest, most imaginative selves'.[16]

In his poetry Keats explores the ability of aesthetic objects, like the Grecian urn, to function as a 'friend to man'.[17] Generations of readers have responded with a deeply felt, sometimes unnervingly personal sense of 'Keats'—some imagined compound of the poet and his poetry—as beloved friend, object of desire, alter ego or possible best self.[18] What does it mean for a reader to think of a dead or distant author as a 'friend'? To answer that question, this chapter explores how Keats's public identity

depends on relationships of friendship, and how ideas of friendship and of reading color each other in his reception. What role do Keats's friends play in the shaping of his reception? How does a shared feeling for Keats unite (or divide) communities of his readers? How have later readers with no direct relation to Keats understood themselves as 'friends' or 'lovers' of the poet? Another, closely related question is how for Keats himself, as an author aspiring to fame but also wary of celebrity, the dynamics of friendship often intersect with the more general problem of the boundaries between privacy and publicity, and between personal and public identity. In his letters on friendship, reading, writing and fame, Keats's suggestive ruminations tease out, and sometimes test these boundaries.

Friendly circles

The language of friendship for an author is hardly exclusive to Keats's case, of course. John Brewer observes that already in the eighteenth century, 'the ubiquity of books and their central place in understanding the world, especially that beyond one's immediate experience, led to an intimate anthropomorphism' through which 'books became familiar "companions" and "friends"'.[19] The culture of literary celebrity that emerged in the late eighteenth century made authorial personality the object of widespread curiosity. By consuming biographies, collecting memorabilia, or touring the 'homes and haunts' of writers, readers sought contact with the 'spirit' of authors they loved.[20] In the late nineteenth century, relationships to books and authors were institutionalized in the form of literary societies dedicated to poets such as Browning and Shelley. As Mary Ann O'Farrell suggests in an essay on the idea of Jane Austen as 'friend', talk about authors as friends could be equally at home in pop-cultural manifestations of fandom or in the supposedly more dignified realms of the study, literary club or drawing room.[21] Such talk is useful and troubling at the same time, as the relation it names often moves so easily between these supposedly distinct realms.

In his essay 'Keats and Friendship' Ronald Sharp observes that 'Keats's was a life densely crowded and textured with friendships and resonant with friends' voices'.[22] As readers of Keats, our sense of his personality comes from his poems and from anecdotes about him, but especially from his extraordinary letters to these friends and family members. Those letters display friendship as a core principle to be honored, even if friendship was also frequently a problem that had to be hashed out. The central-

ity of friendship to Keats's life is a biographical and psychological fact, but at the same time, a fact to be understood in ideological terms. As recent scholarship on Keats has emphasized, friendship is a political and aesthetic ideal in the 'Cockney' circle of writers and artists in which the poet moved. Jeffrey Cox shows how this circle—including Hunt, Percy and Mary Shelley, B.R. Haydon, Reynolds and Clarke, among others—self-consciously made sociality into a credo guiding their daily lives and their aesthetic production. As Cox argues, this was 'a social group for whom sociability itself was a key value', for whom friendship could be idealized as a means of 'reforming a society divided by war, "money-getting", and religious sectarianism'.[23] Hunt's circle lived out the intertwining of writing and friendship through its characteristic rituals such as gathering to eat, drink, talk and debate, staging sonnet-writing contests, exchanging books and manuscripts, contributing to each other's commonplace books and 'friendship albums', and by collaborating on poems and plays.[24] As Cox emphasizes, Keats's first volume of poetry, dedicated to Hunt, is thoroughly enmeshed in this world of friendship and social exchange. With titles like 'To Some Ladies', 'On Receiving a Curious Shell, and a Copy of Verses, from the Same Ladies', 'To a Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses', 'On Leaving Some Friends at an Early Hour', nearly all the poems address friends or relatives or arise from social exchanges, culminating in the closing poem of vocational election, 'Sleep and Poetry', written from Hunt's study, where Keats spent the night on the couch.[25]

One of Cox's most important insights into Cockney cultural production is his identification of a tension in the group's practices between print publication and coterie circulation.[26] Cox points out that much of the group's writing goes on in circumstances echoing older forms of manuscript culture, where the audience is restricted to friends and family.[27] Keats often falls into verse in the course of writing a letter, and sometimes fires off verse epistles to friends (such as 'Dear Reynolds'), or scribbles poems in the margins of friends' books and in albums. While many of these poems have subsequently become part of the Keats canon, they were not necessarily written with the thought of publication. Yet at the same time, as Cox demonstrates, this network of friendship was also a mechanism for reaching—and building—an audience.[28] As editor of the journal *The Examiner*, for example, Hunt was in the position to advertise and promote 'finds' like Keats, as he does in his 1816 article 'Young Poets' and in later reviews.[29] He not only publishes Keats's poems in his newspapers but also quotes from them in his editorial prose. Writing for various

periodicals, members of the group could give each other warm reviews (as Reynolds reviews Keats in *The Champion*), and their poetry itself often took the form of direct encomium (as in Keats's poems to Hunt).[30]

In his letters, Keats frequently frames problems of audience and address in terms of friendship. Often, he presents an audience of friends as a kind of ideal in opposition to the untrustworthy, unfriendly 'public'. Thus, in April 1818, conferring via letter with Reynolds on how to word his preface to *Endymion*—and assuaging Reynolds's anxiety that the first draft smacks too much of Hunt—Keats contrasts his feeling of obligation towards his friends with his independence from 'the Public' which he 'cannot help looking upon as an Enemy':

> I [would] be subdued before my friends, and thank them for subduing me—but among Multitudes of Men—I have no fear of stooping … I could not live without the love of my friends—I would jump down Aetna for any great Public good—but I hate a Mawkish Popularity.[31]

Or again, in a letter from 1819 to his friend Benjamin Bailey, Keats announces the scale of his ambition to revolutionize literature, then casts his friends as the ones ultimately to celebrate his feats:

> One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting—another to upset the drawling of the blue stocking literary world—if in the course of a few years I do these two things I ought to die content—and my friends should drink a dozen of Claret on my Tomb.[32]

Such pronouncements, however, also mask significant complications, especially because the ideally generous, egalitarian relationship of friendship so frequently turns out to be anything but. This is also true for the Hunt circle with tiffs constantly breaking out and friends that can be vain, petty, bullying, deceitful, intrusive and exhausting. On a larger level, there is the obvious gap between an audience of one's friends and the horizon of 'revolutionary' cultural impact, not to mention the impossibility, given Keats's limited means, of sustaining a career without finding readers beyond one's immediate acquaintance to purchase one's books. In a February 1818 letter to his brothers George and Tom, Keats describes with a combination of excitement and wry humor his life in London's literary circles. He spends his days reading friends' manuscripts, attending Hazlitt's lectures, going to the theater, to balls and dinners, receiving calls

from literary figures and hearing word of his spreading reputation. All this is then ironized as follows:

> Honors rush so thickly upon me that I shall not be able to bear up against them. What think you, am I to be crowned in the Capitol, am I to be made a Mandarin—No! I am to be invited, Mrs. Hunt tells me, to a party at [the publisher] Ollier's to keep Shakespeares birthday—Shakespeare would stare to see me there.[33]

Surely this is partly Keats shrugging things off so as not to be putting on airs, but his letter also contains a serious message. Keats is well aware of the fact that, although success depends on managing his literary friendships, an audience merely of friends can feel small indeed.

Famously, the Hunt circle's radical politics, their style of poetry, and their lifestyle of friendly exchange and collaborative production provoked savage attacks in the powerful, conservative journals *Blackwood's* and *The Quarterly Review*, with Keats's class origins attracting particular abuse. In his letters Keats argues that these reviews only served to bring him more 'into notice', and makes the case that the virulence of the attack is a recognition of the strength of the threat the cultural power of Hunt's group is perceived to pose.[34] Yet the reviews also brought home a persistent worry of Keats's that he would be considered as no more than an 'élève' of Hunt, implying a misrecognition of friendship as dependence or discipleship, of group character as lack of individuality.[35] 'Who would wish to be among the commonplace crowd of the little-famous—who are each individually lost in a throng made up of themselfes?' Keats wonders in a caustic 1819 letter about the denizens of the 'literary world'.[36]

A test of one's love

The myth-making apparatus that kicks in after Keats's death separates the figure of the poet from these social contexts. The obituary notice in Baldwin's *London Magazine* by Barry Cornwall (Bryan Waller Procter) sets the terms of the legend. Cornwall moved in the Hunt circle and had access to Severn's letters, from which he quotes Keats's death-bed wish for an epitaph: '*Here lies the body of one whose name was writ in water!*'[37] Yet he cues the pathos of the scene by emphasizing Keats's isolation, the poet's dying 'solitary and in sorrow, in a foreign land'. He merges the poet and the poetry by blending the story of Keats's 'fading' from life with lines from

'Ode to a Nightingale': 'His sad and beautiful wish is now accomplished: it was that he might "drink of the warm south", and "leave the world unseen".'[38] Keats's 'exile' allows his fading from life to represent a kind of translation into another world, an 'elsewhere' of art, an effect reinforced by the pastoral imagery of Shelley's legend-sealing elegy for Keats, *Adonais* (1821).[39] As Alan Bewell points out, the meaning of Keats's disease gets transformed through these aestheticizing representations of his death: consumption, earlier a disease associated with poverty and close quarters, now becomes, as William Henry Marquess comments, paraphrasing Susan Sontag, a disease which 'spiritualizes, refining the gross body'.[40] Where the conservative reviews played on metaphors of disease in representing Keats as prey to the contaminating influence of his friends, the sympathetic myth of Keats represents him as isolated from a loving circle.[41]

Cornwall's obituary presents Keats as the object not only of our admiration but also of our affection. 'It is all times difficult, if not impossible, to argue others into a love of poets and poetry', Cornwall insists, but he draws on the eminent critic Francis Jeffrey still to try: 'It was well observed by the Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, that there was no other Author whatever, whose writings would form so good a test by which to try the love which any one professed to bear towards poetry.'[42] Jeffrey did say something like this in a highly equivocal 1820 review of Keats's poetry, but the difference between what Jeffrey actually wrote and what Cornwall tells us he wrote is instructive. What Jeffrey really said was that, despite the many faults he thought it displayed, *Endymion* (1818) could serve to test 'whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm'.[43] What for Jeffrey had been a matter of taste in poetry ('relish', 'sensibility') becomes in Cornwall's obituary a deeper, more emotionally charged form of response ('love') for the poet as well the poetry.

Deidre Lynch's recent *Loving Literature*: *A Cultural History* (2015) shows that it is precisely in this period that 'love' came to be a dominant way of understanding how one should feel towards the literature one values. Cornwall's revision of Jeffrey acts out in miniature the transition Lynch identifies, as the 'tasteful language of approbation or admiration' gives way to the 'stickier, subjectivity-saturated language of affection and involvement' in culturally privileged accounts of response to literary works.[44] According to Lynch, this new 'personalization' of literature can be seen as a response to the growing abstraction of the print market in general, and, in particular, to the flood of cheap reprints of classic works encouraged by changes in copyright law and in printing technology in the late eighteenth century.

We now see a 'love for poets and poetry' as a commonplace expression of how canonical works and writers move us, but Lynch explains these were feelings 'individuals needed to *learn* to develop and to legitimate'.[45] For Keats to be 'among the English Poets' after his death—a phrase that could refer precisely to reprint sets of classic 'English poets'—he needs to play the role the obituary casts for him as the object of the reader's love.[46] Conversely, in nineteenth-century culture, an ardent love for Keats became a sign of one's identity as a 'lover of poetry' in general, a way to display one's allegiance to the world of art defined in opposition to the merely worldly.

The volume that truly made Keats available as a 'friend' to a wide nineteenth-century readership was Richard Monckton Milnes's *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848), the first full biography of the poet.[47] Milnes, a member of the Cambridge 'Apostles', a group of university friends, including Tennyson, and enamored of Keats and Shelley, had been just a boy when Keats died, but he knew Keats's friends, including Brown, who entrusted Milnes with his Keats-related papers on the eve of his emigration to New Zealand.[48] Milnes inscribes both his subject and his own project within networks of friendship. His preface begins with his meeting Brown, 'the generous protector and devoted friend of the Poet Keats', at 'the villa of my distinguished friend Mr. Landor, on the beautiful hill-side of Fiesole', then recounts how he had already learned much about Keats from time spent with Severn in Rome.[49] He goes on to detail the debt he owes to a whole crew of Keats's friends—notably, all male—who came forward with documents and anecdotes. (The letters to Fanny Brawne were discreetly left unpublished until much later in the century.) The 'affectionate care' with which Milnes says Brown treated the textual 'remains' of Keats models Milnes's own sense of responsibility towards his subject.[50] The list of friends with which Milnes commences the volume vouches for the authority of his information at the same time that Milnes's correspondents are called up as so many character witnesses for Keats. There may be a class dimension to this list of proper male friendships, as it seems intended in part to defuse lingering questions about the 'respectability' of Keats's origins, even as it positions Milnes's project as above all a gentlemanly endeavor.

Milnes aims to present Keats as the kind of person you would want for a friend. For Milnes, the letters, and the poetry read in the context of these letters, provide 'undeniable documentary evidence of his inmost life' and attest to the character of what Lionel Trilling would later describe as the 'poet as hero', or in Milnes's words, his 'strong will, passionate temperament, indomitable courage' and 'the brave front he opposed to poverty

and pain'.[51] Milnes understands his volumes as making an argument not only for the 'health' of Keats's poetry, but moreover, for the strength and consistency of Keats's character. As Susan Wolfson notes, this is an argument pitched against the feminized view of Keats's 'delicate' character promoted both by his Tory detractors and by his liberal defenders, such as Hunt and Shelley.[52] Milnes's emphasis on male friendship helps shore up the picture of Keats as a 'manly' poet.[53] At the same time, by placing love for Keats securely within the framework of homosocial bonds of friendship, Milnes normalizes the affection Keats is supposed to inspire (which is interesting given Milnes's own fascination with sexual practices well outside the Victorian mainstream).[54]

Milnes's volume did not settle the question of Keats's 'character', which remained a topic of intense debate throughout the nineteenth century, and one given new impetus late in the century by the publication of the love letters. In the way it frames Keats's poetry through his letters, however, Milnes's edition encourages readers to participate in Keats's story as they read, and to read the story of Keats's life and his poetry as a story of continuous development and growth.[55] Keats's story becomes available for the reader's imaginative appropriation not simply because the letters are foregrounded, though this is important, but also because the volume works to present a coherent Keats. Jonah Siegel emphasizes how even if what we have is a Keats in parts—scattered letters, poems, anecdotes—Milnes thinks the parts can be shown to add up to, in Milnes's phrase, 'a substantive whole'.[56] As Sarah Wooton points out, this is a pattern throughout the history of Keats's reception: out of the shifting variety of voices we hear in the letters, readers seek some knowable, stable truth of the poet as he really was. What we have instead are the endlessly proliferating versions of 'Keats' constructed collaboratively by his readers, beginning with his critics and his friends during his lifetime.[57]

Conclusion: our minds towards each other

Instead of offering an overview of those Keatsian traces, the remainder of this chapter will turn back to one of the questions with which it began: what does it mean for a reader to welcome an author as friend? When Keats hangs a print of Shakespeare's head over his books and fancies him his 'Presider', Shakespeare's influence is 'genial', at once 'sympathetically cheerful, jovial, kindly' and 'generative' or 'conducive to growth'.[58] Similarly, in the American poet Galway Kinnell's 'Oatmeal' (1990)—a

witty turn on Browning's 'What porridge had John Keats?'—Keats appears for genial breakfast-table conversation with Kinnell about poetry, and speaks of his own chats over porridge with Spenser and Milton.[59] In works by other modern and contemporary poets, sympathetic encounters with Keats involve markedly passionate forms of identification. Published in 2003, Jennifer Grotz's 'Arrival in Rome', a poem built out of formal and verbal echoes of 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819), addresses Keats as a lost lover (or calls to a lost lover as to Keats): 'Oh, to arrive in Rome! Where you go to die / And I to find you.'[60] Amy Clampitt's 1985 collection *Voyages* is representative of a whole raft of poems vicariously inhabiting Keats's point of view, seeking to get inside his experience.[61] In a telling section of Philip Levine's 'Belief' from 1981, the poet is linked to Keats even more intimately, through shared breath and shared gestures:

> No one believes
> that the lost breath of a man
> who died in 1821 is my breath
> and that I will live until
> I no longer want to, and then
> I will write my name
> in water, as he did, and pass
> this breath to anyone who can
> believe that life comes back
> again and again without end.[62]

Merging ideas of influence, sympathetic identification and intimate contact, these poems engage what Virginia Jackson suggests has become a dominant mode of reading Keats, in which the ideal reading involves putting ourselves in the poet's place.[63] Such effects are encouraged, of course, by Keats's own interest in vicarious experience, what Walter Jackson Bate nicely termed his 'adhesive' sympathetic power.[64] One might think here of Keats's famous definition of the 'poetical character' as 'camelion'-like, having in itself 'no Identity' but 'continually infor—and filling some other Body', or his claim that 'if a Sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel'.[65] The liminal states and fantasy identifications of such poems as 'Ode to a Nightingale' similarly explore the going out of the self into 'some other Body'.

Keats's epistolary discussions of friendship, however, suggest complications to this fantasy of intersubjectivity for which 'Keats' has become in a way both a symbol and a staging-ground. On one level, obviously,

there is simply the difference between poetry and life: poems allow us to imagine such powerful forms of intersubjective relationship precisely because they are imagined, because the 'other' is (or at least, can be) a fantasy projection. In real life, however, there is the meddlesome problem of the actuality of other people coexisting with our fantasy. In the letters Keats is sharply perceptive about the limits of sympathetic identification, the degree to which others remain an insoluble puzzle, and he is painfully cognizant of the ways in which, in a social 'world' governed by 'social codes' he cannot always master, he is misrecognized even by his friends: 'Th[i]nk of my Pleasure in Solitude, in comparison of my commerce with the world […] there they do not know me not even my most intimate acquaintance.'[66] Keats is often fiercely protective of his privacy against the intrusions of friends, even trusted friends. Frequently, too, he describes the claims of other identities as a weight or 'pressure' on his own freedom or independence of imagination: 'When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to [*for* so] to press upon me that, I am in a very little time an[ni]hilated.'[67] Yet his letters testify both to the intensity of the forms of sympathetic exchange Keats can associate with friendship and familiarity and to Keats's recurrent thinking about reading as the crucial medium for such exchange.[68]

In a beautiful passage from a September 1819 letter to George and Georgina, his brother and sister-in-law in America, Keats muses on connection, communication, distance and change:

> From the time you left me, our friends say I have altered completely—am not the same person—perhaps in this letter I am for in a letter one takes up one's existence from the time we last met.—I dare say you have altered also—every man does—Our bodies every seven years are completely fresh-materiald […] This is the reason why men who had been bosom friends, on being separated for any number of years, afterwards meet coldly, neither of them knowing why—The fact is they are both altered—Men who live together have a silent moulding and influencing power over each other—They interassimulate [*sic*]. 'Tis an uneasy thought that in seven years the same hands cannot greet each other again. All this may be obviated by a willful and dramatic exercise of our Minds towards each other.[69]

Close friendship is here described as a merging of personalities involving a very physical sense of the action and interchange of bodies, with the

corporeality of the metaphor set up by the way Keats discusses an alteration of personality in terms of the alteration of our physical substance. Notions of contagion must also be active in this context—reading this, it is hard not to think of Keats nursing his brother through his consumption and Keats's now infected lungs—but the passage suggests ideas of literary 'influence' as well. While the passage on the one hand stresses a growing together that closes the gap between self and other, it on the other hand insists selves are always composed of (or in an eerie way, composed or 'moulded' *by*) others, and always altering in time, so that a kind of distance is inevitable not only from friends who are not in our constant company but also from ourselves as we were, though this existence can be 'taken up' again in writing. Here it is important to underline the almost too-blithe assurance Keats offers that 'all this can be obviated' by the exercise of the imagination: not thinking *of* each other but *towards* each other. The odd preposition 'towards', intensifying intentionality, preserves at once the sense of distance and the sense of activity in time.

In an earlier letter, from December 1818, addressed to George and Georgiana, Keats specifies reading in simultaneity as the best mode for this 'exercise of our Minds towards each other':

> Now the reason why I do not feel at the present moment so far from you is that I remember your Ways and Manners and actions; I [know] your manner of thinking, you[r] manner of feeling: I know what shape your joy or your sorrow would take, I know the manner of you walking, standing, sauntering, sitting down, laughing, punning, and every action so truly that you seem near to me. You will remember me in the same manner—and the more when I tell you that I shall read a passage of Shakespeare every Sunday at ten o Clock—you read one at the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room.[70]

Shakespeare appears again in a passage in a different letter to George and Georgiana taking up the same theme of communication across distances. Keats has been reading his friend Hazlitt's *Letter to William Gifford*, a pugnacious attack on the establishment critic. After quoting a long series of extracts from Hazlitt's spirited prose, Keats turns to describe the scene as he writes:

> The fire is at its last click—I am sitting with my back to it with one foot rather askew upon the rug and the other with the heel a little elevated from the carpet—I am writing this on the Maid's tragedy which I have read since

> tea with Great pleasure— […] I require nothing so much of you as that you will give me a like description of yourselves, however it may be when you are writing to me—Could I see the same thing done of any great Man long since dead it would be a great delight: as to know in what position Shakespeare sat when he began 'To be or not to be'.[71]

Sliding imaginatively into Hazlitt's voice as he copies out his prose, Keats circles round to imagine how he himself looks as he writes, and so 'to shake into vividness' an image of himself as an author.[72] This effort leads sneakily to the thought of his presiding model for authority—Shakespeare, specifically in the act of imagining a character.

These passages demonstrate how reading, writing, and friendship are tightly and complexly interlinked for Keats. Even in solitude, Christopher Ricks notes in a discussion of these two last-cited passages to which the analysis here is indebted, reading and writing have a social dimension; they have a bodily dimension too. According to Ricks, to picture someone writing or reading, as Keats does here, can 'release reading and writing from the inevitable anxieties of solitude—narcissism, solipsism, lonely indulgent fantasizing'.[73] If in one sense reading or writing absorb us inward, away from friends or family, in other sense reading or writing involve the same engagement with alterity Keats finds in friendship. Shakespeare recurs in these passages because he figures the imaginative capacity Keats draws on as a reader, a writer and a friend, the 'dramatic exercise of Mind' required of all three identities. This is not to equate reading with 'real' friendship, or obligations to texts with obligations to real persons, but Keats is attuned, as Ricks shows, to the ways friendship and reading both involve dimensions of fiction as well as reality.[74] In an important way, then, Keats's letters might be understood to comment on the shape of his own reception. In reading as in friendship, sorting out what is 'self' and what is 'other' becomes tricky because those entities at once differ, potentially 'interassimulate', and refuse to stay still. Keats's letters take on such difficulties of reading and friendship even as they explore their creative potential.

Notes

1. The title of this chapter alludes to a comment made by Roland Barthes (quoted in Gallop 2011, p. 5): 'The pleasure of the Text also includes a friendly return of the author.'
2. Ruefle 1996, p. 50.
3. Deutsch 2005, pp. 39–40.

4. Grant Scott (2003, p. 3) comments of the story of Keats's last days that 'in our time this has become a story about the etiquette of dying well'.
5. *City of London* 2015.
6. Scott 2003; Bennett 2008.
7. Stillinger 1974, p. 182.
8. Bennett 2008, p. 39.
9. Stillinger 2006, p. 115.
10. Stillinger 2006, p. 115.
11. Quoted in Stillinger 1974, p. 27.
12. Clarke 1861, pp. 86–100.
13. White 2004; Isle of Wight 2015.
14. Matthews 1971, p. 361.
15. Rowland 2013, p. 6.
16. Hirsch 2001, pp. xxxvii, xv.
17. Keats 1978, p. 283.
18. See Najarian 2002 and Robinson 1998.
19. Brewer 2013, p. 158.
20. Eisner 2009, p. 1; Booth 2007.
21. O'Farrell 2000, pp. 45–48.
22. Sharp 1998, p. 66.
23. Cox 1998, p. 87.
24. Cox 1998, p. 66.
25. Keats 1978, pp. 487–488.
26. Cox 1998, pp. 62–81.
27. Cox 1998, p. 63.
28. Cox 1998, pp. 79–81.
29. Matthews 1971, pp. 41–42.
30. Cox 1998, p. 62; Matthews 1971, pp. 45–49; Keats 1978, p. 6.
31. Keats 1970, p. 85.
32. Keats 1970, pp. 276–277.
33. Keats 1970, p. 63.
34. Keats 1970, p. 161.
35. Keats 1970, p. 27.
36. Keats 1970, pp. 280–281.
37. Matthews 1971, p. 242.
38. Eisner 2009, pp. 48–49; Matthews 1971, p. 242.
39. Matthews 2004, p. 114.
40. Bewell 1999, p. 188; Marquess 1985, p. 63.
41. Swann 1998, p. 280.
42. Matthews 1971, p. 242.
43. Matthews 1971, p. 204.
44. Lynch 2015, p. 34.

45. Lynch 2015, p. 12.
46. Keats 1970, p. 161; Bonnell 2008, p. 267.
47. Marquess 1985, pp. 33–35. Scattered biographical sketches of Keats had appeared earlier, including reminiscences by Hunt and a notice in Galignani's *Poetical Works of Coleridge*, *Shelley and Keats* from 1829.
48. Marquess 1985, p. 35.
49. Milnes 1848, p. ix.
50. Milnes 1848, p. x.
51. Milnes 1848, p. xvii; Trilling 2009; Milnes 1848, p. xviii.
52. Wolfson 2006, p. 254.
53. On 'manliness' in Milnes's portrait of Keats, see Marquess 1985, p. 56.
54. Marquess 1985, p. 56; Kimberly 2005, para. 25.
55. Siegel 2000, p. 131.
56. Siegel 2000, p. 131; Milnes quoted in Siegel 2000, p. 131.
57. Wootton 2006, p. 2; Stillinger 2006, p. 119.
58. Keats 1970, p. 12; *OED* 2015.
59. Kinnell 1990, pp. 37–38; Browning 1970, pp. 752–754.
60. Grotz 2003, p. 31.
61. Clampitt 1985.
62. Levine 1981, p. 333.
63. Jackson 2008, pp. 208–209.
64. Bate 1963, p. 33.
65. Keats 1970, pp. 157, 38.
66. Levinson 1988, p. 8; Keats 1970, p. 171.
67. Keats 1970, p. 158.
68. Barnard 2001, pp. 120–134.
69. Keats 1970, p. 322.
70. Keats 1970, p. 176.
71. Keats 1970, p. 223.
72. Bate 1963, p. 569.
73. Ricks 1974, pp. 195–196; see Barnard 2001, pp. 131–132.
74. Ricks 1974, p. 185; see Gallop 2011, pp. 29–54.

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3

Hero of Horror: Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

Evert Jan van Leeuwen

In the fall of 1849, Edgar Allan Poe was buried in a Baltimore cemetery in relative obscurity. Today his popularity is hard to overestimate. In fact, he has been described as the only dead poet with a 'stranglehold on popular culture' and 'one of the great American exports'.[1] His reputation in contemporary culture is that of 'the master of horror'. To understand how the once struggling poet and critic was posthumously branded as a horror writer *pur-sang*, it is necessary to investigate Poe's public status as a man of letters during his brief career. Since he became a celebrity long after his death, it is also important to acknowledge how the obituaries, early memoirs and some later biographies shaped Poe's celebrity persona. Finally, it is essential to take into account how Poe's posthumous identity as master of horror was enhanced by the film industry, which appropriated the most sensational events in Poe's life and amalgamated these with carefully selected images and narratives derived from his gothic writings. The result of this long process is an instantly recognizable and easily digestible brand of horror culture, which has trapped the historical Poe in the darkest corner of his own imagination.

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Fifteen months of fame

Even though Poe's satirical sketch 'Lionizing', according to Anne Rioux, suggests 'that he viewed literary celebrity as a fickle and vain affair',[2] Poe's many biographers have pointed out that the poet and magazine writer actively 'sought popular success during his lifetime'.[3] From the outset of his career, he entered stories and poems in competitions run by popular magazines, winning several prizes. As editor of the well-respected *Southern Literary Messenger*, *Burton's* and *Graham's Magazine*, Poe became a well-known, albeit less-respected, figure within antebellum America's literary culture. Yet the 'high public visibility and recognition', essential to developing celebrity status, eluded him.[4]

For a moment, Poe's star seemed to rise when his story 'The Gold-Bug' (1843) won a $100 prize. The story was often reprinted 'to meet a continuous demand' and the playwright Silas Steele adapted the story into a three-act play, performed on the same night as his own *Clandare*.[5] Apparently, Poe's name and reputation were becoming selling-points in the eyes of cultural entrepreneurs. In 1844, Poe 'boasted' that '300,000 copies [of the story] had been circulated', which reveals that he valued high circulation as well as literary quality.[6] The fact that, as Silverman points out, 'hundreds were unable to gain admission to his first lecture in Philadelphia' clearly indicates that Poe's star was on the rise.[7]

Encouraged by the success of 'The Gold-Bug', Poe, in search of greater public recognition, moved to New York, where he became assistant-editor of Nathaniel Parker Willis's *Evening Mirror*. Although the job offered him some financial stability, the position did little to bolster his chances of becoming a literary celebrity. Poe did find a large readership, however, with an article about a transatlantic balloon flight, published anonymously—the story was a hoax—in the New York newspaper *The Sun* on April 13, 1844. As to be expected, it caused great excitement and Poe enjoyed overhearing people discussing the event.[8] After the article, nowadays known as the 'Balloon Hoax', was retracted on April 15, Poe was quick to acknowledge his authorship, suggesting that he desired a share of the public attention that his work had received.[9]

In the fall of 1844, in another attempt to claim his spot in the limelight, Poe composed 'The Raven'. He afterwards explained to a friend that the poem was designed for mass appeal and immediate sensational impact: 'I wrote it for the express purpose of running—just as I did "The Gold-Bug" ... The bird beat the bug, though, all hollow.'[10] 'The Raven' was published

in January 1845 and had the desired effect. According to Silverman, the reception of the poem can be 'compared to that of some uproariously successful hit song today'.[11] The immortal refrain of this 'catchy poem', 'Nevermore', was designed to stick in the mind of everyone who read or heard the poem being performed.[12] In a letter to Joseph Field, Poe highlights the poem's transatlantic success and, loosely quoting Elizabeth Barrett Browning, he states that '"The Raven" has produced a sensation—a "fit horror"—here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the [fear] of it and some by the music—but all are taken'.[13]

Today the speaking raven and his 'nevermore' are an intrinsic aspect of Poe's celebrity identity as master of horror. The carrion bird is Poe's logo, so to speak, and 'nevermore' has become his catchphrase. Although 'The Raven' brought Poe the fame and public adulation he had sought, a closer look at the poet's fortunes in the months after the poem's publication suggests that he was actually a one-hit wonder rather than a lasting literary celebrity.

Poe's persona was an object of interest in New York for the greater part of 1845. The poet was in demand and he frequently appeared as a 'literary lion in fashionable salons', where he would 'terrify and bewitch his audience' as the voice of 'The Raven'.[14] According to Eliza Richards, Poe presented himself as 'a mesmeric poet' and, being a spell-binding orator,[15] he had that 'magical aura' that, as Cooper Lawrence points out, is crucial to developing celebrity status.[16] The fact that 'many readers identified poet and poem', as Silverman notes,[17] shows that Poe was also fostering the 'intense connection' with his audience that Lawrence recognizes as typical for the fan-celebrity relationship.[18] This image of Poe was bolstered by 'Mesmeric Revelation' (August 1844), which Poe had published not long before 'The Raven' appeared: an essayistic tale that was popular as well as much-discussed for its pseudo-scientific theories. The links to the theme of mesmerism enhanced the public perception of Poe as a literary enchanter. There was 'something uncanny about him', one commentator remarked, 'the strangest stories are told, what is more, believed, about his mesmeric experiences'.[19] The conflation of Poe's persona with his work suggests that, at least, for a brief period during his career Poe was indeed considered a literary celebrity.

Richard Salmon points out that nineteenth-century lions, much like today's pop culture celebrities, were 'either somebody or nobody, living or dead'.[20] Therefore, Poe had to make every effort to sustain his new-found status as New York's wizard poet. However, instead of further developing

this persona, for example by producing a sequel to 'The Raven', or more stories filled with melancholy moods, Poe alienated his 'fans' by becoming involved in minor social scandals and affairs with admiring women poets, and by fashioning himself as the sole arbiter of literary quality in the United States.[21]

In the spring of 1845, he caused a new scandal that tainted his popularity: he accused the nation's most popular poet, the Harvard professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, of plagiarism.[22] This accusation culminated in a heated literary feud, fought out openly in magazines in which Poe's contributions reveal a bitter and vindictive side to his character. To make things worse, Poe started in May 1846 a series of unflattering portraits of New York's literati in *Godey's*, one of the most popular magazines of the day. In a letter to George Eveleth, Poe confessed that 'the unexpected circulation of the series [...] suggested to me that it might make a hit and some profit, as well as proper fame'.[23] The articles did not have the effect Poe desired, on the contrary, New York's literati struck back. Hiram Fuller claimed that Poe's 'infirmities of mind and body, his petty jealousies, his necessities even, which allow him neither time nor serenity for such work, his limited information on local subjects, his unfortunate habits, his quarrels and jealousies, all unfit him for the performance of such a duty'.[24] Thomas Dunn English, another of Poe's victims, responded by describing Poe as 'thoroughly unprincipled, base and depraved, but silly, vain and ignorant, not alone an assassin in morals, but a quack in literature'.[25] English dared Poe to sue him and the latter was all too willing to take up the challenge.[26] Although Poe won the lawsuit, he lost his status as a literary lion and left New York soon afterwards. That he had become an object of ridicule by January 1849 is demonstrated by Felix Octavius Carr Darley, the caricaturist of *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, who drew Poe as the 'Tomahawk Man' and added a poem to the caricature with the opening lines: 'With tomahawk upraised for deadly blow, / Behold our literary Mohawk, Poe!'[27] The poet's literary practice was now associated with violence and fear (see Fig. 3.1).

Whether in the guise of prizewinning short story writer, magazine editor or wizard poet, Poe's authorial persona always lacked the level of 'ordinariness' that allows for easy audience identification, and which is so important to developing true celebrity status.[28] Poe spent his final years in the literary margins, struggling and quarreling, as a lonely hack. He had briefly tasted fame, but had not been able to convert the public attention and temporary adulation he received into the social and economic capital

Fig. 3.1 Poe as 'literary Mohawk'. Illustration by Felix Octavius Carr Darley, *Holden's Dollar Magazine* 3, no. 2 (January 1849), p. 22 (The scissors shadow is shining through from an illustration on the opposite page)

he needed to further develop his authorial persona into that of America's most beloved poet.

Late September 1849, having left his hometown of Richmond, during a 'fundraising' tour for yet another prospective magazine, Poe disappeared. When he resurfaced in the gutter of a Baltimore street, a week later, he was delirious and died soon afterwards. No one has ever been able to solve the mystery of Poe's sudden disappearance and demise. As the circumstances surrounding Poe's death were strange, mysterious and somewhat disturbing, his earliest biographers, and many since, were lured to his gothic horror writings (which, in fact, make up a minority in his oeuvre) as a possible source of knowledge and understanding. As a consequence, these biographers conflated (their fantasy of) Poe's life with the

dominant themes of some of his darkest tales: claustrophobia, dreamlike settings, mental and physical illness, fear of death, melancholy longing, and despair over lost love and beauty. It is in the fantastic biographical narratives constructed by Poe's earliest biographers that the Poe brand of horror was born.

Constructing the posthumous Poe legend

According to Neimeyer, Poe has become 'the archetype of the mad genius or the tortured Romantic artist, the *poèt*[*e*] *maudit* crushed by a crass and insensitive world'.[29] Although Poe craved recognition, he himself never aspired to this particular public persona in his lifetime. This image, many scholars have shown, is a construction of the popular media, but its foundations were laid by Poe's early biographers who developed what Kyle Dawson Edwards calls a 'Poe discourse', in which 'the biographical and literary discourses, representations of the public and private identities of Poe, entwine and become indistinguishable'.[30] Edwards concisely outlines how the early biographies 'collapsed the distinction between biography and literature, fiction and reality and the public and private Poe'.[31] A closer examination of the rhetoric and imagery of some influential biographical sketches will reveal the extent to which Poe's star was posthumously rising high into the dark night of modern horror culture.

Poe's former boss Willis wrote: 'An awful warning comes up from the grave of this unhappy, self-ruined man […]. Think of Poe's miserable end, and then resolve to touch not, taste not the cup that poisoned him.'[32] The atmosphere of Poe's stories clearly set the tone for his posthumous reception. As the analysis of *The Raven* (2012) later in this chapter will show, Willis's final metaphor concerning Poe's fate would be literalized and incorporated into Poe's biography by film director James McTeigue.

Another example of an early admirer who stressed Poe's darker side was the poet Henry Beck Hirst. According to Hirst, Poe, like the narrator of his story 'Ligeia', passed his hours 'in studies which were only pursued in chambers litten with sepulchral lamps'.[33] Hirst admired Poe and romanticized his life by claiming that 'adversity hung like a lean and hungry bloodhound on [Poe's] trail, and he yielded'. Hirst even borrowed imagery from Poe's poetry to describe his death: 'He succumbed to the destroying angel, and descended into charnel, there to become a prey to the "Conqueror Worm".' Moreover, even though Virginia Poe had died in 1847 and Poe had explained that his 1845 hit 'The Raven'

had been designed for popular appeal, Hirst still identified the melancholy bird as 'the personification of his own despair at the loss of his wife'.[34] Willis's and Hirst's conflations of Poe's life and work set in motion the process through which Poe would become a horror brand. From October 1849 onwards, death, madness, poverty, alcoholism and decay would be inextricably associated with the man and his work.

Even less positive reflections on Poe's posthumous image conform to this pattern. Rufus Griswold, for example, with whom Poe had an antagonistic relationship, emphasized that 'nearly all that [Poe] wrote in the last two or three years—including much of his best poetry—was in some sense biographical'.[35] In his obituary and memoir, Griswold conflated Poe's life and work in colorful rhetoric. The poet was a disturbed and eccentric genius, according to Griswold, whose productions worked like a narcotic on the reader: 'The strange and solemn and fascinating beauty which informs his style and invests the circumstances of ["The Fall of the House of Usher" and "Ligeia"], drugs the mind, and makes us forget the improbabilities of their general design.'[36] Griswold seems to praise Poe for developing 'a singular harmony between his personal and his literary qualities'. Yet on closer inspection, this remark functions only to highlight Griswold's sarcastic wit, for he defines this harmony as follows: 'Poe exhibits scarcely any virtue in either his life or his writings.'[37] In both the man and his work there is only 'touching melancholy' and 'the most extreme and terrible despair'. The bottom line, according to Griswold, is that Poe existed 'on the shadowy confines of human experience, among the abodes of crime, gloom [and] horror'.

Griswold's Poe is a grotesque character, the product of a clever, imaginative, but also vindictive mind. In a remarkable rhetorical move, Griswold quoted Edward Bulwer Lytton's character sketch of the over-ambitious and arrogant Francis Vivian in *The Caxtons* (1849) to describe Poe. Scott Peeples points out that Griswold later dropped the quotation marks in reprints of his 'Memoir' and concludes that 'Griswold was undoubtedly malicious'.[38] Rather than striving for truthful depiction, he aimed at sensational effect and, according to Quinn, not without far-reaching consequences: 'The damage this article did to Poe's reputation is incalculable.'[39] Like Quinn, Neimeyer and Edwards consider Griswold's memoir to be the most important document in the history of the posthumous Poe legend, as it conflated Poe's life and work to such an extent that from then on 'the man behind the legend', to borrow the misleading subtitle of Wagenknecht's biography, has eluded most biographers.[40]

Edwards explains that the psychoanalytical biographies of Poe produced in the 1920s and 1930s 'bound the biography with the meaning of Poe's works in a new way—scientific rationalism—that would seem more difficult to dispute for its apparent objectivity and institutional authority'.[41] Despite the fact that these biographies are considered to be outdated within Poe scholarship, they have, like Griswold's, Willis's and Hirst's obituaries, greatly influenced Poe's later biographers.

As early as 1926, Hervey Allen confused Poe fans and scholars by asserting that his book *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* 'for the first time' tells 'the complete story of the man, from birth to death, and makes reasonably clear the mystery which hitherto surrounded the first half of his life and the formative processes of youth'.[42] Such a grand claim foreshadows the sensational rhetoric of much of today's celebrity journalism. In the preface to the second edition, Allen states in similar tabloid style that he had incorporated 'minor new facts' that had come to light since the publication of the first edition.[43] While he addresses scholars' demands to 'tone down' his assertion that Poe secretly married his cousin Virginia in Baltimore, before the official marriage in Richmond, he defends his book against accusations that he had written a biographical fantasy rather than a biography. Allen insists that he is telling 'Poe's life story in proper sequence and truthful relationship' and with attention to detail.[44] Too much detail, actually, for Allen goes so far as to imagine what went through Poe's 'ruined brain' in his final moments: 'It was the scenes of Arthur Gordon Pym that rose in his imagination.'[45] Poe's final moments of consciousness, according to Allen, were infused with his own terrifying fictions.

In 1941, Arthur Quinn, Professor of English Literature and Drama at the University of Pennsylvania, published the first scholarly biography of Poe, which, however, does not differ from earlier biographies in the sense that the poet's life is grasped in terms of his writings. Contemplating Poe's mysterious death, Quinn imagines that 'perhaps to his dim and tortured brain, [Poe] seemed to be on the brink of a great descending circle sweeping down like the phantom ship in the "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" into "darkness and the distance"'.[46] Not only this 1833 story, but also 'Hop-Frog' (1849), Poe's final tale about a dwarfish court jester's diabolical revenge on an abusive master, is interpreted in a biographical vein, as Quinn considers the story to be an expression of Poe's own desires for revenge on the false friends who had supposedly let him down.

Even in 1992, half a century after Quinn's biography, Jeffrey Meyers follows in his footsteps and those of his predecessors, Griswold, the psychoanalytical biographers and Allen, by exploring Poe's fiction for 'fascinating parallels with Poe's life'.[47] He claims, for instance, that 'The Cask of Amontillado' (a 1846 story in which the narrator walls up his adversary alive in an act of revenge) may have expressed the poet's 'own desire for revenge against the troublesome enemies who had also insulted and injured him'.[48]

By consistently constructing Poe's life story on the basis of a very similar selection of his gothic horror stories, Poe's biographers laid the foundation for the author's posthumous celebrity status as America's master of horror. However, it was not until Hollywood started appropriating key themes, motifs and characters from the same tales and poems ('The Raven', 'Usher', 'Amontillado', 'The Black Cat', 'Masque of the Red Death', 'The Pit and the Pendulum' and 'The Premature Burial') that the name Poe came to stand for a specific brand of modern horror.

Hollywood's Poe pastiche

It should not come as a surprise that the Poe legend created by his early biographers inspired moviemakers and TV producers from the outset. However, instead of loyally adapting Poe for the screen, TV and film companies appropriated only specific elements from the above-mentioned selection of gothic horror stories and Poe biographies to construct new narratives. As early as 1909, D.W. Griffith created *Edgar Allen* [*sic*] *Poe*, which in its handling of the Poe legend follows the biographers by conflating the poet's biography with his work, in this case the plot of 'The Raven'. A stuffed raven on top of a bust above a door in Poe's chambers inspires the poet to write a poem. He tries to sell it to various magazines in order to buy the bare necessities for his ill wife. When he returns with groceries and a blanket, Poe finds that Virginia has died during his absence, leaving him in a melodramatic pose expressive of his emotional and physical distress.

Universal Studios produced the first Poe-inspired cycle of horror films in the 1930s.[49] Evaluating this cycle, Edwards shows that 'a vague but palpable mood […] had become attached to the author and his literary works and was circulating throughout popular culture in the 1930s'. Not interested in fidelity to the source material, Edwards points out, Universal created entertaining improvisations on the usual 'set of themes—depravity, melancholy, psychological trauma, and sadism'.[50] In his analyses Edwards

focuses specifically on what John Frow calls a film's internal genre cues: adaptations and transformations of plots, characters and, of course, the biographical Poe legend.[51] He shows convincingly that these elements were distilled by Universal into a single overriding horror theme: 'diseased intelligence', showing the film industry's readiness to exploit complex 'cultural discourses' for commercial success.[52] In the wake of the successful *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* adaptations, Edwards argues, Universal transformed the 'Poe discourse' into a monster tale in which 'the monster was Poe himself'.[53]

Although Edwards is right in concluding that Universal's 'violent reformulation of [Poe's] work and personality' had a profound and lasting effect on the Poe legend, Hollywood's Poe does not have to be understood as monster *per se*.[54] From Universal's Poe cycle onwards, Hollywood developed Poe into a brand of horror, rather than a horror monster in the vein of Dracula or the Wolfman. His name came to be associated with a specific aesthetic experience rather than an embodied identity. In many ways Universal's advertising strategy for the Poe pictures foreshadowed the branding theory of marketing strategist Stephen King (not to be confused with the bestselling horror author). According to King, a successful brand relies on 'a clear personality', because consumers choose their brands as they do their friends. A brand, then, has 'values beyond the physical and functional ones'[55]. Some of the world's most successful brands, like Coca Cola, have managed to dominate their market because they have been able to sell a feeling, an identity and a lifestyle along with their product. King's idea of developing brands as personalities has been elaborated further after the discovery that pop culture celebrities can be successfully put to use as part of a marketing strategy.[56] Marketing research conducted over the past decades has revealed how important it is to foster congruence between a celebrity persona selling a product and the identity of the product he or she is selling.[57] In the case of Poe, Universal succeeded in capitalizing on this congruence: the popular understanding of this author as a disturbed and distraught eccentric with a dark imagination allowed the company to brand their films as horror. Just like 'Ben and Jerry's', the possessive 'Edgar Allan Poe's', when prefixed to a film title, signals a distinctive creative vision behind the product, even if the person who once established this vision is no longer personally involved in the production process.[58]

The marketing of Poe would reach a new high point in the 1960s, when director Roger Corman, working for American International Pictures, fully exploited Poe's status as an A-list horror brand. With *Edgar*

Allan Poe's House of Usher (1960), an atmospheric, colorful, if somewhat loose adaptation of the well-known gothic masterpiece, AIP followed Universal's marketing strategy by taking a basic 'premise' from Poe to tell an otherwise original story, prefixing Poe's name to the title and displaying it prominently on the film poster.[59] Yoking 'Poe's' and 'Usher's house' together in the film title not only added literary flavor to the film, but also enhanced the cultural agency of the posthumous Poe legend, because author and work were fused. Joan Ormrod points out that in the days of AIP's Poe adaptations the historical Poe featured often in popular magazines such as *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Horror Monsters*, 'as much for his life story as his literary output'.[60] Unsurprisingly, Vincent Price's portrayal of Roderick Usher has much in common with the melancholy, paranoid genius portrayed by Griswold and Allen. Price, who would become America's greatest horror celebrity in the wake of AIPs Poe pictures, explained that he, Corman and scriptwriter Richard Matheson shared a vision of how to present Poe to the audience. Like Universal, rather than adapting Poe's stories they decided to infuse their films with what Price called 'the spirit', 'the essence' of Poe.[61]

Corman followed *Usher* with *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), based on the same key elements that make up the short story—the spirit of a dead woman seeking revenge for being prematurely entombed while suffering from a mysterious illness—but ending with a twist: it all turns out to be a trick on the lord of the manor. His supposedly dead wife is in fact an adulteress who seeks to drive her husband mad so she can run off with her lover. The pit and the pendulum, the torture device the film title refers to, appears only in the final ten minutes of the film. As the film series progressed the relation to the source material became increasingly vague. *The Raven* (1963), for example, is a slapstick comedy about feuding magicians and *The Haunted Palace* (1963) is a loose adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' (1941). Nevertheless, whenever the poet's name featured clearly in promotional material, and as long as the films contained a familiar motif from the Poe legend, the audience would recognize Corman's 'Poe formula'.[62] Viewers could then settle in for an enjoyable horror experience.[63]

In popular genre films, as Frow points out, opening sequences are crucial for audience-product identification, which may be illustrated by the third film in Corman's Poe cycle, *The Premature Burial* (1962).[64] Although the film borrows only the basic motif of live burial from Poe's text, the film poster features direct quotations and prominently displays

the poet's name. The opening sequences are near perfect copies of the openings of *Usher* and *Pit*: during the opening credits a young woman is seen arriving on a foggy day at a large mysterious-looking mansion in a landscape spotted with dying trees and tombstones. The visitor rings the bell and upon entering she announces to the butler that she would like to have a meeting with the master of the house, after which the actual drama starts. The film plot itself deviates fundamentally from the original narrative, but the first scenes ensure that the characters clearly reside in what Matheson dubbed 'the World of Poe'.[65] The last film of Corman's Poe cycle, *Tomb of Ligeia* (1964), again appropriates only a basic motif from Poe—a woman is magically reborn—to spin an original horror yarn about witchcraft. The possessive prefix to the title, the presence of actor Vincent Price, a black cat and a closing quotation from a Poe story brand the film as a Poe picture.[66]

With the commercial and critical success of Corman's cycle, the market value of the Poe brand rose and more spin-offs followed: Michael Reeves's *Witchfinder General* (1968), for example, about the seventeenth-century witch-hunter Matthew Hopkins, was marketed in America by AIP as *Edgar Allan Poe's Conqueror Worm*. Then, to cash in on the success of Reeves's film, Gordon Hessler directed *The Oblong Box* (1969) and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1971) for AIP. None of these films have a close connection to the stories their titles refer to, but they all are recognizable as 'Poe pictures'.

Perhaps the most extreme example of a cinematic appropriation of Poe's work and authorial persona is Mohy Quandour's low-budget film *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974), an outrageous conflation of the author's life and work. In the prologue, an old friend of Poe tells the audience that the film will finally reveal the true events in the deceased poet's life that led to the composition of 'The Raven' and several melancholy poems of lost love. The Lenore of 'The Raven' is presented as Poe's first true love, who suffers from a mysterious mental condition and is institutionalized in an asylum run by Dr. Grimaldi. With the help of a fiendish assistant, Grimaldi conducts experiments in brain surgery in order to find a cure for Poe's wife. Having brought Lenore to the asylum, Poe reveals his own mental instability and alcoholism. Unable to sleep, and drunk to boot, the poet turns detective and, like the unwitting narrator of his own 'Dr Tarr and Professor Feather', slowly learns that the real madmen are Grimaldi and his assistant, who are planning to use Lenore as a guinea pig.

From an aesthetic point of view, *Spectre* may be a terrible film, but it is an important stepping stone in Poe's posthumous rise to celebrity status. Even if the action and characterization are bizarre, the film's frame narrative shows how obsessed American popular culture had become with explaining the mysteries of Poe's life through his writings. Stripped of its graphic horror scenes, the film is essentially a biographical fantasy, in the tradition of Griswold or Allen, that represents the author's art as a direct projection of his personality. This method is followed by more cinematographers, for example, by Stuart Gordon, who also took Quandour's approach when he directed *The Black Cat* for the cable TV series Masters of Horror (2007). He adapted Poe's story into a one-hour long episode, in which Poe and his beloved Virginia are the protagonists. Gordon's Poe, played by actor Jeffrey Combs, is characterized by the same paranoid, nightmare-plagued and drunken persona as Robert Walker's Poe in *Spectre*. The examples of Quandour and Gordon, then, demonstrate that Poe, as a protagonist in film, has become a fixed stereotype.

The most recent biographical fantasy of Poe is James McTeigue's *The Raven* (2012), starring John Cusack. It is a film that merits closer analysis, since it self-consciously reflects on the phenomenon of literary celebrity. Initially, Cusack's Poe is the same stereotypical heavy drinking trouble maker, at odds with his employers and frustrated at the literary establishment. Consistent with the by now familiar conventions, the film opens with an epigraph on the mysterious death of Poe, followed by an extremely high angled shot that reveals first a raven in a tree before shifting focus to a park bench below on which a man (Poe) is resting. The epigraph and opening shots underscore the film's status as a biopic; the words 'death' and 'mystery' emphasize that this biopic is also a thriller. The first dramatic scene of the film is borrowed from 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', which confirms the film's hybrid nature as a Poesque thriller and life story.

After the official title sequence, a shadow of a man in a heavy cloak appears out of the thick fog on a dark street. Ravens are shown feeding on carrion. The shadow is Poe, who drinks a quart of whisky and examines the animal corpse before resuming his nightly wanderings. This sequence not only yokes the poet and the ravens together, it also echoes Griswold's conception of Poe as the inhabitant of 'the shadowy confines of human experience', dwelling 'among the abodes of crime, gloom [and] horror'. Subsequently, Poe is shown scandalizing himself in a public house, before pursuing a secret romance with the voluptuous daughter of a local oligarch. In contrast to Quandour's Poe, however, who is hopelessly intoxicated and

woebegone, McTeigue's main character is wily, witty and has worldly and sociable qualities during the day. As Baltimore's answer to Lord Byron, he performs 'The Raven' to a salon full of enchanted female fans.

Significantly, by suggesting a connection between Poe's brief period of fame and his mysterious death the film reflects critically on celebrity, specifically its darker sides. While Poe entertains the ladies, an obsessed fan (in fact the typesetter of a newspaper Poe works for) is murdering individuals according to the *Grand Guignol* set-pieces inspired by the usual selection of his stories: 'Rue Morgue', 'Pendulum', 'Marie Roget', 'Red Death' and 'Amontillado'. The author and his fan, so it turns out, have more in common: while Poe is disgruntled at the literary mainstream's lack of interest in his work, the serial killer is discontented with Poe's recent lack of output. Therefore, the fan has decided to force Poe to write and publish a new story. To this end he kidnaps Poe's beloved, Emily, and challenges him to a game of wits: the author has to use 'ratiocination'—Poe's coinage referring to a combination of creative imagination and intelligence—to catch the killer. In addition to this, Poe is forced to put his experiences to paper. Not only does he have to report on the killer's actions in a serial for the newspaper, he is also challenged to write the final instalment, to imagine the climax of the horrors in which he has found himself embroiled. The last chapter Poe writes for the newspaper will save Emily. As it turns out, it will lead to Poe's demise.

The film self-consciously mixes fact and fiction and uses allusions to Poe's work to create moments of dramatic irony. In response to the killer's challenge, Poe remarks: 'I feel as if I've gone from author to character in one of my stories. I'm as trapped and bedevilled as any of the hapless bastards I ever created.' On the one hand, Poe's remark is an expression of his frustration at his situation within the film, but on the other hand, for fans, this remark foreshadows the film's development. They can already imagine exactly what kind of crime scenes their idol will be encountering. The fun, for a Poe fan, is to anticipate how McTeigue will dramatize these classic gothic set-pieces. McTeigue also allows his main character to experience the poetic justice he was denied in his lifetime: early on in the film, Rufus Griswold becomes one of the killer's first victims. When the police and Poe arrive on the crime scene, the poet is shocked to find Griswold killed by a lethal prop from his own story. His fans, by contrast, may experience a moment of quiet joy when they see Poe's nemesis finally slain.

Despite its playful and self-conscious referencing and mixing of fact and fiction, *The Raven* is not a postmodern art house picture. Its intertextual

ironies are overshadowed by the blockbuster plot that pushes Poe into the role of superhero. On top of this, Cusack has played a string of action hero and tough guy roles in the past five years, for example in *2012*, *The Factory*, *The Numbers Station*, *Drive Hard* or *The Frozen Ground*. It is to be expected, then, that Cusack's Poe, while more quirky and eccentric than many of the actor's recent roles, does not crumble under pressure like Walker's Poe in *Spectre*. In fact, in *The Raven* Poe turns out to be an author with agency. As detective Fields gives him a gun, the poet tells the policeman forcefully: 'I will gladly give my life for [Emily's].' This phrase foreshadows Poe's transformation into a true Hollywood hero, sacrificing himself for a greater cause.

The Raven clearly reimagines Poe for contemporary mainstream film audiences. As a poet, he is hardly poetic, he rather expresses himself in fits of rage and engages in bouts of loud-mouthed male posturing, more befitting the hero of a contemporary action film. When detective Fields is accidentally (but in fact, of course, conventionally) side-lined, Poe becomes the headhunter and steps into the role with fervor. Instead of being trapped in his tales, as was to be suspected, Poe becomes the world's first literary superhero, with his dark imagination as his superpower. As the film reaches its climax, Poe can be seen leaping through the air and speeding across the country, his black cloak trailing in the wind like a cape (Fig. 3.2). The poster alludes to Poe's rise to superhero stardom by depicting the

Fig. 3.2 Poe as action hero. John Cusack stars as Edgar Allan Poe in *The Raven*, dir. J. McTeigue (Relativity Media, 2012)

protagonist with a gun and a bright red, wing-shaped aura surrounding his dark figure: an angel of vengeance.

Ironically, Poe's success as superhero implies the death of the poet. Reynolds, the villain typesetter, has buried Emily alive and will only divulge the location if Poe follows the script he has written in his final serial entry: exchanging his life for hers by drinking a slow acting poison. The 'convergence of fact and fiction' that Reynolds addressed in his written challenge to Poe is now a fact, for Poe has plotted his own demise.[67] By implying that the poet's literary success turned against him and eventually killed him, the film again reflects critically on the effects celebrity status can have on the relation between author and work, and the biographical sensationalism it can foster on the side of the media.

In the final scenes of the film, Poe saves Emily and the police arrive. The hero himself disappears in the tumult and is shown sitting on a park bench as the autumn snow falls. By returning to the atmospheric opening scene, McTeigue not only solves the riddle that this scene at first presented, he also solves the mystery surrounding Poe's death: he was poisoned by a deranged fan. Intriguingly, this ending resonates with Cusack's 2013 performance of another struggling poet, Rat Billinger, in the independent film *Adult World*. As Rat, he continues to reflect on the trappings of literary success, warning an aspiring young poet that 'fame doesn't mean everything'.

Poe's failure as a source of inspiration

Ironically, Poe's failure to achieve the mainstream recognition he desired during his lifetime as well as the conflation of his life and work in biographies and popular culture productions after his death have made it possible for this author to be branded as a gothic misfit, a personality with immense commercial and symbolic value in today's popular culture industry. Francis Ford Coppola's *Twixt* (2011) illustrates how the Poe legend can also be used to reflect critically on the effects of public notoriety and commercial exploitation and how it can serve as a source of inspiration for creative minds working in the margins of the mainstream.

Twixt tells the story of a 'third-string' horror writer named Hall Baltimore, whose last name obviously refers to Poe's final resting place. Baltimore is introduced as a failing horror writer who is struggling with alcoholism and constantly fighting with his wife and his editor. Such a characterization immediately signals to a fan that the Poe legend will be an

essential ingredient of this film. Like Poe, Baltimore produced one literary hit, but he finds himself stranded in a one-horse town during a book-signing tour to promote yet another sequel to a decreasingly popular series of witch-hunting stories. The small town's claim to fame, however, is that Poe once stayed at the local inn. The story goes that the famous poet was inspired by the local clock tower to write 'The Devil in the Belfry' (which ironically is a satire, not a horror story). The event is commemorated by a plaque on the wall of a decrepit hotel and exploited by the residents to foster tourism. Encouraged by the eccentric local sheriff, Bobby LaGrange, who happens to be a Baltimore fan and an amateur horror writer as well, the stranded author is inspired to collaborate on a story surrounding the mysterious deaths that have recently taken place in Swann Valley.

Throughout the film Coppola uses the Poe legend effectively to create a two-world structure. There is the mundane, workaday world in which Baltimore is 'the bargain basement Stephen King', stuck in the corner of a hardware store trying to sign and sell copies of a novel no one wants. However, at night, after drinking himself into a stupor, Baltimore enters a mysterious dream version of Swann Valley, peopled with, amongst others, a priest with dark secrets, a mysterious gothic commune leader and a possible vampire named Flamingo, the ghost of Poe, and finally the ghost of 'V' (for Virginia and Vampira), a gothic girl who, when alive, was excluded by her community and who was also a Baltimore fan. The dream world sequences reveal themselves as psychodramas that Baltimore plays out in his sleep, in an attempt to overcome a depression and the feelings of guilt he has suffered from since his daughter drowned in a boating accident.

The specter of Poe first appears in his dream when Baltimore is reeling on a rope bridge and about to fall into a river. Baltimore begs Poe to 'show me the way'. The latter holds a bright lantern in the otherwise pitch-black night of the dream world and leads Baltimore back to reality, straight into a confrontation with his wife Denise over their finances. This confrontation scene is of great symbolic importance, since it foregrounds how cultural and economic value are inextricably intertwined in today's literary industry. To pay the bills, Denise threatens to sell Baltimore's copy of the first edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), an originally self-published curiosity that has become an extremely valuable cultural artefact. Baltimore breaks down at the idea of losing it, because to him the book's symbolic value is far greater than its financial value. Urged by this financial crisis, Baltimore tries to find inspiration to write a new novel. After hearing out

LaGrange's idea to turn the town's murder mystery into a vampire story, he contacts his publisher to ask for another advance.

In the next dream sequence Poe appears as Baltimore's muse in the shape of a face that is reflected in the full moon. Poe's moonlit face guides Baltimore through his dark night of the soul and his presence is a source of inspiration that will allow Baltimore to overcome his writer's block. During his conversations with Poe about the techniques of writing fiction and solving the Swann Valley mystery, certain camera angles establish Baltimore's perspective and in these shots Poe seems to be actually present. However, seen from other camera angles that display the scene more objectively, it becomes clear that Baltimore is conversing with himself: the specter turns out to be a projection of Baltimore's mind (Fig. 3.3).

In the remainder of the film, as the dream scenes become increasingly difficult to distinguish from the ones depicting 'reality', Poe and V turn out to be Baltimore's deputies in attempting to solve the Swann Valley murder mystery and ultimately his muses. Inspired to tell the tragic story of V, and to write a happy ending for her, Baltimore produces a new novel, based on LaGrange's original idea. The new book saves his career, his marriage and his copy of *Leaves of Grass*. At the close of the

Fig. 3.3 Poe and Baltimore talk shop. Ben Chaplin as the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe and Val Kilmer as Hall Baltimore in *Twixt*, dir. F. Ford Coppola (American Zoetrope, 2011)

film, the screen goes black and an epilogue appears: 'Hall Baltimore's *The Vampire Executioners* sold 30,000 copies, which is okay business.' This low-key celebration of Baltimore's success incites viewers to reflect on the tensions between ethics, art and commercial value in a popular culture industry pressed for profit margins. The viewer has seen how Swann Valley exploited Poe's night in the village for over 150 years and how Baltimore exploited LaGrange's idea for financial gain. The viewer has also witnessed how a down-on-his luck author managed to climb out of his slough of despond, not by means of his creative genius, but inspired by the ghost of Poe and a gothic girl and how he achieved personal fulfillment at last, not as a bestselling celebrity author, but as a writer doing 'okay business'.

The fact that throughout *Twixt* Poe is associated with creative figures who have opted out, or have been cast out of mainstream American culture—Baltimore, V, Flamingo's gothic commune at the lake—dovetails with the film's status as an eccentric low-budget 'indie'. Rather than sensationalizing Poe, as McTeigue does, Coppola uses Poe to tell a story about the tension between artistic integrity and commercial success. The identity the film creates for Baltimore and Poe—alcoholic writers of horror stories, struggling in the margins of mainstream culture—is shown, on the one hand, as a carefully constructed public image, consciously developed for material gain; on the other hand, it is an identity that may inspire the production of new works that apparently run against the commercial grain, like *Twixt* itself.

Conclusion: the Poe industry

In today's highly competitive culture industry being an artist is similar to running a business. 'Successful artists', according to brand culture scholar Jonathan E. Schroeder, 'can be thought of as brand managers, actively engaged in developing, nurturing, and promoting themselves as recognizable "products"'.[68] Whereas Poe did not manage his career very well, the modern popular culture industry has done a wonderful job in selling the posthumous Poe legend to the masses. Even though his heir to the horror throne, Stephen King, sells many more books, the long-dead Poe has more presence as a pop cultural phenomenon. Poe's visage is endlessly reproduced on mugs, plasters, stationary, clothing and other forms of merchandising. The author and his work have been absorbed in all facets of American culture. The Baltimore Ravens are named after Poe,

and Neimeyer rightly points out that 'the fact that [American] football and Poe have nothing to do with each other only highlights the extent to which this nineteenth-century American author has remained not only present, but much appreciated in the minds of the general public throughout the world'.[69] Fans can also buy Raven beer, unsurprisingly, and Bell's Whisky, a Scottish firm established in 1825, has used Poe's 'The Bells' to advertise its brand. Death, ravens and alcohol have made Poe a star. Like a true celebrity he has appeared on TV, as himself, in an educational broadcast about the universe, directed by Frank Capra, and recently in the opening credits to a *Simpsons* Halloween special and in *South Park*.[70] Like many pop culture celebrities, Poe is even available as an action figure. If the plastic doll of the living Poe is not enough for the fans, they can also purchase a dead, glow-in-the-dark Poe. And finally, great celebrities appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, but some of the greatest appear on the cover of the Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). Poe stands in the top row, in the middle, between Carl Jung and Fred Astaire.

Notes

1. Horne 2012.
2. Rioux 2013, p. 129.
3. Neimeyer 2002, p. 207.
4. Van Krieken 2012, p. 5.
5. Quinn 1998, p. 392.
6. Meyers 1992, p. 136.
7. Silverman 1992, p. 218.
8. Quinn 1998, p. 410.
9. See the editor's introduction to the story in Poe 2000b, vol. 2, p. 1068.
10. Ostrom 1948, vol. 1, p. 287.
11. Silverman 1992, p. 237.
12. Silverman 1992, p. 238.
13. Ostrom 1948, vol. 2, p. 319.
14. Meyers 1992, pp. 164–165.
15. Quoted in Rioux 2013, p. 131.
16. Lawrence 2009, p. 4.
17. Silverman 1992, p. 238.
18. Lawrence 2009, p. 14.
19. Quoted in Silverman 1992, p. 279.
20. Salmon 2009, p. 63.
21. Rioux 2013, pp. 133–134.
22. Quinn 1998, p. 455.

23. Ostrom 1948, vol. 2, p. 332.
24. Fuller 1846.
25. Quoted in Quinn 1998, p. 504.
26. Quinn 1998, p. 505.
27. Darley 1849, p. 22.
28. Van Krieken 2012, p. 10.
29. Neimeyer 2002, p. 209.
30. Edwards 2010, pp. 119–120.
31. Edwards 2010, p. 121.
32. Quoted in Clarke 1991, p. 78.
33. Quoted in Clarke 1991, p. 85.
34. Quoted in Clarke 1991, p. 87.
35. Quoted in Clarke 1991, p. 74.
36. Quoted in Clarke 1991, pp. 101–102.
37. Quoted in Clarke 1991, p. 103.
38. Peeples 2007, p. 5.
39. Quinn 1998, p. 647.
40. Wagenknecht 1963. In April 1858, *The Edinburgh Review* opened its review of Griswold's edition of Poe's Works with (Bandy 1977, p. 27): 'Edgar Allan Poe was incontestibly [*sic*] one of the most worthless persons of whom we have any record in the world of letters.'
41. Edwards 2010, pp. 121–122.
42. Allen 1934, p. ix.
43. Allen 1934, p. vii.
44. Allen 1934, p. viii.
45. Allen 1934, p. 674.
46. Quinn 1998, p. 640.
47. Meyers 1992, p. 137.
48. Meyers 1992, p. 201.
49. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), *The Black Cat* (1934), *The Raven* (1935) and *The Black Cat* (1941), followed by the biographical fantasy *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* (1942).
50. Edwards 2010, p. 123.
51. Edwards 2010, p. 109.
52. Edwards 2010, pp. 124, 119.
53. Edwards 2010, p. 119.
54. Edwards 2010, p. 132.
55. King 2007.
56. Keel and Nataraajan 2012.
57. Mishra and Beatty 1990.
58. By contrast, the names Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley do not feature on the Universal posters for Dracula and Frankenstein, the two films that

made the studio world famous for producing horror movies. This may be due to the fact that Shelley and Stoker had long since been devoured by the monsters they created.

59. Naha 1982, p. 28.
60. Omrod 2012, p. 147.
61. Price 1999, p. 211.
62. Naha 1982, p. 35.
63. In *On Writing*, the bestselling horror writer Stephen King explains that as a teenager he was lured back to the cinema by the 'hallucinatory eeriness' of Corman's Poe pictures (King 2000, p. 28). They had a formative influence on his development as a horror writer.
64. Frow 2006, pp. 103–104.
65. Naha 1982, p. 29.
66. The Poe quotation at the end of *Tomb of Ligeia* reads: 'The boundaries which divide life from death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends and where the other begins?' and is taken from 'The Premature Burial' (1844).
67. *The Raven* 2012, 39:02.
68. Schroeder 2005, p. 1292.
69. Neimeyer 2002, p. 205.
70. See *The Strange Case of the Cosmic Rays*. CBS, 1957, *The Simpsons*: 'Treehouse of Horror XXIV' (2013) and *South Park*: 'Goth-Kids 3: Dawn of the Posers' (2013), in which Poe's ghost is invoked—this time satirically—as a role model for a youth subculture.

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4

Victorian Iconoclast: Eliza Cook (1812–1889)

Alexis Easley

In his tribute to Alexander Smith, 'A Forgotten Poet', published in *Argosy* in 1900, Scottish author J. Cuthbert Hadden reflects on the fickleness of fame:

> How quickly does oblivion scatter the poppies! Fifty years ago Tennyson and Alexander Smith were being coupled together as the poetic geniuses of the time; to-day Smith is known only to the select few, and the conjunction of names seems almost as strange as if Browning and Eliza Cook were to be mentioned in the same breath.[1]

In his retrospective introduction, Hadden sets up a series of oppositions—Tennyson to Smith, Browning to Cook—and thus establishes a hierarchy of genius that reflects an emerging canon of Victorian authors. Mentioned only briefly in Hadden's introduction to Smith's poetry, Eliza Cook is defined as something lower than a minor poet, only useful as a marker of the low ebb of literary taste during the Victorian era. With the rise of the New Criticism in the early twentieth century, Cook's reputation fell even lower. In 1930, her poems were selected for inclusion in *The Stuffed Owl*:

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An Anthology of Bad Verse, which characterized her as a 'rather soft and silly spinster lady' whose work 'appealed very strongly to the middle classes'.[2]

Yet in the 1840s and 1850s, Eliza Cook was one of the most celebrated poets of her day. As a reviewer for the *London Journal* put it in 1845: 'The name of Eliza Cook is as familiar, in every part of the world where the English language is spoken, as that of any poet or poetess whose lucubrations have enriched our national literature.'[3] *Reynolds's Miscellany* counted her two years later 'amongst the most eminent female writers of the age'.[4] The source of this praise is significant: the *London Journal* (1845–1928) and *Reynolds's Miscellany* (1846–1869) were cheap periodicals aimed at a mass audience rather than an elite readership. It was within the pages of wide-circulation magazines and newspapers that the so-called 'poetry of the people' grew to become a ubiquitous feature of everyday domestic life. Cook's poetry and songs were popular because they reflected familiar sentiments: feelings of grief, love and democratic patriotism that resonated in both Britain and America. As Moseley points out, Cook's work was particularly appealing because it 'emphasized the security of the fireside, the warmth of maternal love, and the tranquility of "old" times when life was, it seemed, less complicated'.[5] Cook's poetry appeared not only in popular newspapers and periodicals but also in book collections, musical adaptations and her own *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849–1854). At the same time, portraits and biographical sketches of Cook proliferated in print culture, making her a popular icon and a household name.

At first glance, Cook seems like an unlikely candidate for such widespread celebrity. Writing at a time when women poets were depicted as beautiful songstresses whose sentimental poetry graced the pages of annuals and gift books, Cook was homely, stout and outspoken. She was a child of the working classes, not a daughter of genius. Even more provocatively, she was known for her masculine dress and her romantic partnerships with women. Cook's rise to fame was thus premised on her iconoclasm—her deviation from the 'poetess' norm. Celebrity 'often involves transgressing ordinary moral rules', as Chris Rojek has noted, and in this sense it resembles notoriety.[6] The slippage between fame and social deviance was at mid-century marked by the proliferation of photographic shops that sold portraits of celebrities, both famous and infamous. As *All the Year Round* put it in 1869: 'Does an individual achieve celebrity? He or she is to be seen photographed all over town within a week. Notoriety? Same result. Infamy? Same result.'[7] Cook's success was premised her ability to trade upon this notion of social transgression, advertising her own deviation

from 'proper' sexuality and femininity. Yet she maintained respectability by posing as an iconoclastic 'friend' to the masses, whose sentimental poetry and kitchen wisdom provided a counterweight to her radical performances and beliefs. Cook was thus an early example of a woman who knew how to manipulate mass media to her own advantage, combining radically conventional poetry with radically experimental performances of sex and gender. This led to spectacular success both at home and abroad.

As a writer and an editor, Cook played a remarkably active role in her own self-fashioning. This chapter will explore Cook's literary career from 1836 to 1854, demonstrating how she worked within the conventions of new media, developing an iconoclastic public image that made her one of the most admired poets of her day. This was, of course, a process she could only partly control. Her iconoclasm was to some degree shaped by the literary marketplace, which depicted her as an interesting personality whose image could be used to sell literary commodities. As the radical 1840s gave way to mid-century conservatism, Cook's work and resonant public image fell subject to harsh and patronizing criticism, which ultimately led to her marginalization and disappearance within popular print culture. Although she continued to publish Christmas gift books and collections of verse after 1854, she soon came to be defined as a poet of the past whose work was conventional and ultimately forgettable. An examination of the early years of Cook's career thus restores her radical contribution to the history of women's writing, demonstrating how iconoclasm—expressed as a disruption of conventional gender and sexuality—could be used to attain widespread celebrity.

Rise to fame

Cook was born in Southwark, London, the eleventh child of a brass craftsman. When she was nine, her father relocated the family to a farm in Sussex. Cook's experiences in this rural setting and the emotional aftermath of her mother's death in 1827 served as catalysts for her poetic career. Largely self-taught, Cook published her first book, *Lays of a Wild Harp* (1835), when she was just twenty-three. It was not until she began publishing her poems anonymously in newspapers and periodicals, however, that her work garnered significant attention. In 1836, she published her first poem in the *Weekly Dispatch* (1795–1961), which was at the time one of the most popular Sunday papers in Britain with a circulation of 60,000. Affordably priced at six pence, it catered largely to an artisan and

lower-middle-class audience, offering an engaging mix of crime reportage, foreign correspondence, reviews and radical political commentary. It also published a regular 'facts and scraps' column that included original material and extracts from other publications such as anecdotes, jokes and kitchen wisdom. Significantly, it also included poetry on entertaining and edifying topics written by male and female poets representing a broad range of class positions.[8]

Cook's first poem in the *Weekly Dispatch*, 'The Christmas Holly', was signed only with the initial 'C'. Many other poems soon followed, appearing under the expanded signature 'E.C.' Impressed with Cook's verse, James Harmer, the paper's chief proprietor, initiated a search for the elusive poet. Once she was 'discovered' in September 1837, Cook regularly published her work in the 'facts and scraps' column, now signed with her full name in capital letters. Initially, she received no remuneration for the publication of her poems in the *Weekly Dispatch*, which suggests that she viewed the paper as a vehicle for popularizing her poetry and promoting the sale of her books.[9] This approach seems to have been wildly successful. She republished her *Weekly Dispatch* poems in *Melaia and Other Poems* (1838), which was reprinted in five American and British editions between 1840 and 1845. This collection was followed in 1845 *Poems*, *Second Series* as well as two American editions, *The Poetical Works of Eliza Cook* and *Poems of Eliza Cook*.

One of the reasons Cook was able to successfully market her books abroad was the frequent reprinting of her poems in American newspapers and periodicals. Linda Hughes points out that poems 'first published in periodicals were not protected by copyright' and consequently an 'inestimable number of re-printings occurred in Great Britain, North America, and throughout the British Empire'.[10] Cook seemed to encourage such literary piracy, noting in an 1844 letter to the American poet Fanny Osgood that publishers were 'heartily welcome to any use of my works, and the more my poems are promulgated among them, the better I am pleased'.[11] She also mentions to Osgood how delighted she was that Rufus Griswold had chosen to include her verse in a forthcoming American anthology, *Poets and Poetry of England* (1845). She no doubt realized that Griswold's volume would generate publicity for American editions of her work.

Tracing the publication history of Cook's iconic poem 'The Old Arm-Chair' in American and British periodicals during the 1840s demonstrates how widely her work was circulated, pirated and re-appropriated.

The poem was first published in the *Weekly Dispatch* in May 1837 with Cook's initials. Its subsequent popularity can perhaps be attributed to its engaging rhythm and sentimental treatment of grief. The first stanza reads:

> I love it, I love it; and who shall dare
> To chide me for loving that old arm-chair?
> I've treasured it long as a sainted prize;
> I've bedew'd it with tears, and embalmed it with sighs;
> 'Tis bound by a thousand bands to my heart;
> Not a tie will break, not a link will start.
> Would ye learn the spell? a mother sat there,
> And a sacred thing is that old arm-chair.[12]

The poem clearly resonated with American newspaper publishers, who copied it into their own poetry columns. For example, in the fall of 1837, it appeared without attribution in the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier* and the *Dover Gazette and Strafford Advertiser*. After the poem was republished in Cook's *Melaia, and Other Poems* (1838), it once again began to appear in newspapers such as the British *Bristol Mercury* (August 1839). Indeed, when a new illustrated edition of *Melaia, and Other Poems* was published during the 1839–1840 Christmas season, it included a frontispiece portrait of Cook standing before an old arm chair, with handwritten lines from the poem and her signature reproduced in facsimile (Fig. 4.1). The title page includes a quotation from Burns—'My muse, though hamely in attire, / May touch the heart'—referencing William Jerdan's much-noted comparison of Cook and Burns in the *Literary Gazette*.[13] The first few pages of the book thus gesture outside the text—to other markers of Cook's celebrity in the popular press. In a January 1840 letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Barrett Browning satirized Cook's efforts at self-promotion:

> The modesty of the introduction, illustrated by the frontispiece […] a full length of the lady in mourning à la mode & hair à la Brute & a determination of countenance 'to be poetical' whatever nature might say to it—are my provocatives!—to say nothing of the facsimile of her handwriting obligingly appended, to show how great geniuses dot their i[']s like vulgar clay.[14]

As much as Barrett Browning found Cook's self-promotion efforts rather laughable, she nevertheless acknowledged that Cook had '*courage* enough to match with Zenobia's regality!'[15]

Fig. 4.1 Frontispiece portrait, E. Cook, *Melaia*, *and Other Poems* (London: Tilt 1840)

Timed to coincide with the Christmas market and with the growing popularity of 'The Old Arm-Chair', the illustrated edition of Cook's *Melaia*, *and Other Poems* clearly succeeded in bringing her work and persona into the public eye. Indeed, the poem reached its greatest popularity in 1840 when it was set to music with a score by British baritone Henry Russell. Russell performed the song during his American tour that year, thus cementing his own celebrity and making a fortune in the process.[16] According to historian Douglas Miller, 'The Old Arm-Chair' soon became the 'most popular song' in America.[17] This led to several re-printings of the poem in American periodicals and broadsides (Fig. 4.2). The poem and song became so ubiquitous in popular culture that it inspired several

Old Arm Chair

I love it, I love it, and who shall dare
To chide me for loving that old arm chair;
I've treasured it long as a sainted prize,
I've bedewed it with tears, I've embalmed it with sighs,
'Tis bound with a thousand bonds to my heart,
Not a tie will break, or a link will start,
When you know the spell— a Mother sat there!
And a sacred thing is that old arm chair.

In childhood's hours, I've lingered near.
The hallowed seat with listning ear;
And gentle words that mother would give,
To fit me to die, and teach me to live:
She told me that shame would never betide,
With truth for my creed, and God for my guide:
She taught me to lisp my earliest prayer,
As I knelt beside that old arm chair.

I sat and watched her many a day,
When her eyes grew dim and her locks were gray,
And I almost worshiped her when she smiled
And turned from her bible to bless her child.
Years rolled on but the last one sped—
My idol was shattered, my earth star-fled!
I learned how much the heart can bear,
When I saw her die in her old arm chair.

'Tis past! 'tis past! and I gaze on it now,
With quivering breath, and with quivering brow;
'Twas there she mus'd, 'twas there she died,
And memory flows with lava tide.
Say it is folly, and deem me weak,
Whilst scalding drops start dawn my cheek,
But I love it, I love it, and cannot tear,
My heart away from that old arm chair.

THOMAS G. DOYLE,
BOOKSELLER, STATIONER, SONG & HYMN PUBLISHER
No. 297 GAY STREET, BALTIMORE, MD.

Fig. 4.2 Broadside print of Eliza Cook's 'Old Arm Chair', by T. Doyle, ca. 1850–70 (Reproduced with permission of the Kenneth S. Goldstein Collection of American Song Broadsides, Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University)

parodies in American periodicals. Albert Noyes's 1846 poem, for example, opens with the following lines: 'I love her, I love her, and who shall dare / To chide me for loving my little black mare?', and a year later Obed Cramp apostrophizes his 'old gray cat'.[18]

While Cook encouraged the frequent reprinting of her poetry in British and American periodicals, she demanded remuneration when her poems were set to music and sold as sheet music. In a letter to mentor William Jerdan, she notes that she was given a 'fair price' for musical adaptations of her poems from the *Weekly Dispatch*.[19] Early on, she developed a partnership with N.J. Sporle, who provided her with royalties, but this financial arrangement was threatened by rival music publishers who viewed her poetry as being in the public domain.[20] Clearly unaware of the immense popularity of 'The Old Arm-Chair' in America, Cook sold her copyright to the poem in 1841 to British music publisher Charles Jeffreys for two pounds two shillings; he subsequently sold nearly half a million copies of the sheet music.[21] Meanwhile, in America Russell sold his copyright, which was eventually purchased by George Reed, who later won a suit against rival music publisher Samuel Crusi.[22] Cook seems to have had no legal standing to sue for the immense proceeds derived from sale of the sheet music either in Britain or America. It is likely that the adaptation of other songs into sheet music published in American periodicals such as *Graham's Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book* also came without remuneration. The popularity of her songs nevertheless greatly enhanced her visibility as a literary celebrity and provided new opportunities to market her books both at home and abroad.

The wide dissemination of Cook's poetry and songs during the 1840s led to a number of biographical articles focused on her life and work. During this period, profiles of popular poets were a ubiquitous feature of periodicals and newspapers aimed at women and the lower classes. They were defined as exemplary men and women who served as models of social progress and embodied the spirit of the age. After 1840, many popular periodicals and newspapers incorporated features on Cook aimed at revealing the person behind the popular songs and poems. *The Farthing Journal*, in its 1841 'Distinguished Personages' column, introduced her as a young woman 'about twenty-three years of age', even though she was twenty-nine at the time.[23] The frequent underestimation of Cook's age contributed to the construction of her identity as a youthful yet precocious poet of the people. Her youthfulness was often linked to her presumed sexual purity. As the *Farthing Journal* put it, her eyes added a 'living lightening

to a countenance, over which modesty reigns in chaste supremacy'.[24] She also assumed the role of the home-spun genius, whose membership in the respectable working classes—'above the chance of bare poverty' but 'by no means beyond the necessity of active industry'—reflected the class position occupied by readers of the *Farthing Journal*, which, as suggested by its name and subtitle ('a pearl of small price but a great literary curiosity'), was accessible to a broad spectrum of British readers.[25]

In a second notice of Cook's work, the journal offered further praise, remarking that 'throughout the present century no poet has given birth to thoughts, except Byron, that promises fairer immortality than Eliza Cook', but noting that her legacy was threatened by her desire for fame, which led her to repeat the same ideas and write 'heavy' books that, like the works of Wordsworth and Hemans, 'doomed themselves to the musty libraries'.[26] The pairing of Cook with literary heavyweights testifies to her growing reputation. But this comment is even more remarkable for its emphasis on the importance of both high quality and accessibility as components of poetic greatness. Instead of pursuing 'heavy' high-culture book publication, the truly great poet must speak directly to the people. Later in the century, such a definition of poetic greatness would of course be reversed—instead insisting on high-culture exclusivity as a prerequisite to lasting fame. However, in the 1840s, Cook's popularity and accessibility seemed to foretell literary 'immortality'.[27] Indeed, her fame was premised on the idea that she spoke to an emergent mass reading public. In her preface to the 1845 edition of *Poems*, she criticizes 'narrow-minded grumblers' who believe she writes 'too boldly' for a woman, addressing common topics that are unsuitable for poetry. In response, she writes:

> In accordance with the wishes of some I attempted to write a Sonnet on the Prince of Wales's christening robe. I managed two or three lines eulogizing the embroidery pretty well, but felt rather indisposed as I proceeded to embody the Brussels lace; my illness increased, and the last stanza, trimmed with magnificent white satin bows, caused the exhibition of emetical symptoms to a most alarming degree.[28]

Refusing to write about conventional 'feminine' subject matter (the minutiae of lace and embroidery) or about upper-class topics (princes and royal christenings), she makes space for writers who speak to the 'million' rather than to the select few.

Poetic icon(oclast)

Cook achieved fame in the 1840s not only because she fit the stereotype of the home-spun genius and harnessed popular sentiment that resonated with a broad readership; she also became a celebrity due to her iconoclasm. Unlike many popular women poets of the period, she was by no means beautiful. As Osgood put it in 1839, Cook was a 'frank, generous, brave and warm-hearted girl, about twenty years of age; rather stout and sturdy looking, with a face not handsome but very intelligent'.[29] Resisting what Susan Brown has called the 'aestheticization' of the woman poet, Cook alluded to her own homeliness in her poetry.[30] For example, her poem 'Song of the Ugly Maiden' proclaims: 'I know full well I have nought of grace / That maketh woman "divine"; / The wooer's praise and doting gaze / Have never yet been mine.'[31] Her lack of conventional beauty was also referenced in many portraits published in popular periodicals or as frontispieces to her poetry collections. In 1845, Cook sat for a portrait by T. Smart that was engraved by Henry Adlard for *Poems, Second Series* (1845). With her simple hairstyle and open collar, Cook resembles a young man; only her corseted waist reveals her feminine sex (Fig. 4.3). When this image was reproduced in the *London Journal* in 1845, her bust and chiseled waist were omitted from the portrait, making her appear even less feminine (Fig. 4.4). The edited version of Adlard's engraving is repeated in a portrait published in *Reynolds's Miscellany* in 1847 (Fig. 4.5). This illustration, created by Arthur Miles, further emphasizes Cook's masculine appearance by placing her in a group portrait with fellow poets Lady Blessington and Caroline Norton. Her loose curls are contrasted to Norton's carefully arranged coiffure, and her simple dress, here interpreted in even more masculine terms, seems all the more iconoclastic when juxtaposed with the frilly gowns of her fellow women poets. Such representations emphasize Cook's deviation from the feminine norm, yet in both cases the accompanying text offers no criticism or judgment of Cook's masculine appearance. Quite on the contrary, the *London Journal* emphasizes her 'undying reputation', and *Reynolds's* praises her as '*par excellence* our national poetess'.[32]

Cook sat for a portrait by Wilhelm Trautschold in 1847, which was reproduced as an engraving by Adlard (Fig. 4.6). *The Weekly Dispatch* offered the portrait as a free gift to subscribers of the journal along with a decorative frame 'interspersed with medallions illustrative of Miss Cook's Works' for an additional 20 shillings.[33] The advert also notes that Cook's

Fig. 4.3 Frontispiece portrait, E. Cook, *Poems*, *Second Series* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co. 1845)

poems regularly appear in the paper, further reinforcing the importance of her work and image to its overall marketing strategy. Yet her plain features, masculine hairstyle, tailored jacket and broad shoulders hardly fit the mold of the beautiful poetess. Clearly, it was not only the sentimentality of her poetry that was appealing to readers but also her iconoclastic image, which was distributed to 'fifty or sixty thousand readers' and was displayed in homes throughout the paper's territory: London and its 250-mile radius.[34] As the *Anglo American* journal put it: 'Thousands are receiving with delight, and treasuring with care, the excellent engraving which makes her

Fig. 4.4 Portrait illustration of Eliza Cook, 'The Poems of Eliza Cook', *London Journal* 1, no. 24 (July 12, 1845), p. 315

at home in their dwellings.'[35] Her image was so pervasive that readers had to be reminded to make her work 'at home also in their minds and memories, and to read her works not only for the enjoyment of particular songs and passages, but so as to realize the intellectual and moral companionship of the writer, and understand and appreciate her character'.[36] Cook's portrait, work and character were all part of her celebrity identity—the 'writer to be at home with, and to make at home with ourselves'.[37]

Fig. 4.5 Group portrait, 'Lady Blessington, Miss Eliza Cook, and the Hon. Mrs. Norton', illustration by Arthur Miles, *Reynolds's Miscellany* 1, no. 15 (February 13, 1847), p. 233 (Reproduced with permission from an image produced by ProQuest LLC for *British Periodicals*)

Transgressive cross-marketing

The iconoclasm of Cook as an androgynous writer was supported by her unconventional private life. At the same time that she was sitting for Trautschold's portrait, she was romantically involved with American actress Charlotte Cushman. The two women had met in 1845 when Cushman

Fig. 4.6 Portrait of Eliza Cook, by Henry Adlard (after a stipple engraving by Wilhelm Trautschold), 1847 (Reproduced with permission of the National Portrait Gallery)

was starring as Bianca in a London production of *Fazio*. As I have noted elsewhere, the two women soon engaged in a sophisticated campaign of mutual self-marketing.[38] One of the most significant emblems of this partnership was Trautschold's portrait of Cushman, which was completed about the same time as his portrait of Cook for the *Weekly Dispatch* (Fig. 4.7).

Fig. 4.7 Portrait of Charlotte Cushman by Wilhelm Trautschold, ca. 1847 (Reproduced with permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library)

In the painting, Cushman holds a copy of *Poems by Eliza Cook* (1845), but her thumb covers the last few letters of Cook's name. Cushman thus markets her own image and promotes Cook's recently published volume while at the same time hinting at their intimate relationship. Yet she does so in a way that requires viewers to read between the lines, supplying the final letters of Cook's name and guessing the true nature of their partnership. Meanwhile, Cook was publishing thinly disguised

romantic poems to Cushman in the *Weekly Dispatch*, including 'Stanzas Addressed to C*** C***' (June 1846), which alluded to their 'friendship' but declared: 'I love thee with a free-born will that no rude force can break—/ Thou lovest me—I know thou dost—and for my own poor sake.'[39] In this way, both Cushman and Cook publicly alluded to, but never fully revealed, their romantic bond. Likewise, in literary and theatrical circles, their intimate relationship was an open secret. Cook and Cushman made frequent appearances as a couple which seemed to advertise their deviation from the heterosexual norm. For example, in *Autobiography* (1889), Mary Howitt, in recounting of literary gossip of the period, refers to the 'intimate' friendship between the two women, noting Cook's 'very masculine style [of dress], which was considered strange at that time', as well as Cushman's 'strongly-built, heroic figure'.[40] Actor John Coleman likewise refers to Cushman as his 'eccentric friend' who swaggered around 'without reticence or restraint' in men's clothes and 'Wellington boots', startling the 'spinsters of the company, and provok[ing] satirical comment', ultimately leading to 'indecorous' speculations.[41] These social performances were reinforced by Cushman's work on the stage, where she performed breeches roles to great critical acclaim.[42]

Trautschold's portrait of Cook—especially when paired with his contemporaneous portrait of Cushman and when viewed in light of Cook's social and poetic performances—constructs the idea of Eliza Cook as a distinctly unconventional and androgynous 'household friend' for the masses. Rather than hiding her difference, Cook seemed to encourage the blending of sexual signifiers. This was also true of her poetry, which incorporated the voices of male and female speakers as well as conventionally feminine and masculine subject matter. Cook was just as likely to write sentimental poems about love and loss as she was liable to write poems about Chartism and the ragged schools.[43] As Frederic Rowton put it in 1856, Cook had 'no respect for conventionalism' and was thus 'frank and fearless and honest' in her tone and choice of subject matter. He goes on to explain that this may be considered as evidence that there is 'no sexuality in soul' as is shown in her 'man's sense of freedom' and her women's sense of 'ardent, sensitive affectionateness'.[44] Just as her public image combined 'masculine' and 'feminine' signifiers, her poetry could easily be ascribed to male or female poetic traditions. Cook clearly understood the resonance and power of this androgyny, espe-

cially when cross-marketed with Cushman's gender-bending theatrical performances.

Of course not all readers of the period were comfortable with such iconoclasm. In 1849, the *Monthly Belle Assemblée* claimed to be 'confounded by the caricature' distributed by the *Weekly Dispatch*.[45] It preferred the 'faithful and characteristic' lithograph created by Henry Brittan Willis, which was based on a painting by J. Watkins (Fig. 4.8).[46] This portrait depicts Cook at the seaside with her dog, along with an accompanying stanza: 'My Ocean altar, here my heart once more / Yields the rapt worship that it did of old; / Again I dream upon thy lonely shore, / With spirit-joy all wordless and untold / And he beside

Fig. 4.8 Lithograph portrait of Eliza Cook, by Henry Brittan Willis (after a painting by J. Watkins), 1849 (Reproduced with permission of the National Portrait Gallery)

me, gentle, brave, and true, / Ready to breast thy billow, loves thee too.' The lines of the poem, like the tartan shawl and hunting dog, suggest her connection with the natural world and its rural pastimes. Yet her discarded bonnet and simply dressed hair suggest freedom from convention. While this portrait might have been designed to emphasize Cook's femininity, it nonetheless drew attention to her unconventionality, albeit in less transgressive terms.

In 1849, Cook capitalized on her growing fame by founding her own weekly periodical, *Eliza Cook's Journal*. Priced at one-and-a-half pence, it was designed to appeal to the same artisan and lower-middle-class audience that read the *Weekly Dispatch*. Emblazoning her name on the title page of each issue and frequently addressing readers in editorial notices and poems, she built upon her own familiar yet unconventional image, further establishing her own celebrity status. In her opening address to readers, she emphasizes her unconventionality and her personality, writing: 'While venturing this step in the universal march of periodicals, let it be understood that I am not playing with Fortune at "pitch and toss" in a desperate or calculating mood of literary gambling, nor am I anxious to declare myself a mental Joan of Arc, bearing special mission to save the people in their noble war against Ignorance and Wrong.' That is, rather than positioning herself above her readers, she depicts herself as a friend who relies on her 'auld acquaintance' to give a 'gracious and familiar welcome'.[47] Such a familiar 'friend' need not stand on formality any more than she need stand on convention.

Due to Cook's strong sense of the popular literature market and her shrewd self-marketing, the journal was an immediate success, achieving a circulation of 50,000–60,000 in 1849, surpassing Dickens's *Household Words* in popularity. Employing a characteristic blend of sentiment and humor, she celebrates the success of her journal in a poem to her readers:

> Ye have frankly stood forth, ye have praised, ye have cheered,
> Ye have made me triumphantly vain;
> For though sympathy's links had allied and endeared,
> Ye seem now to have fastened the chain.[48]

Certainly Cook herself played an important role in fastening the chain that bound readers to her journal. Offering a steady supply of short articles, stories, editorials, aphorisms ('diamond dust') and poetry, she provided a range of material that was both useful and entertaining. 'Light

literature', she noted in the first volume of the journal, 'has become the order of the day'.[49] She also used the journal as a means of promoting her own work—by including advertisements for new editions of her collected verse and by republishing poems that would otherwise be inaccessible to working-class readers.

Cook regularly published articles and editorials that encouraged women to follow in her footsteps, defining themselves outside of narrow conceptions of femininity.[50] In 'Advice to the Ladies' (May 1850), she notes: 'Do not be afraid, in prosecuting this scheme of action [pursuing work], of having it charged upon you that you are a "masculine" woman. Better a thousand times be a masculine than a weak one. Brave the stigma *manfully*.'[51] Later in the month, she published 'The Vocations of Women', which once again claimed 'masculinity' as a feminine ideal. When critics call a woman writer 'masculine', she argues, they 'apply wrong terms of commendation to the productions of her pen':

> It is said that this history is written 'with masculine vigour', and that story with the power of a man's pen. This is absurd. Nothing is more energetic and more vigorous than a woman. To apply the epithets to her is not an imputation at her delicacy of expression, or her feminine gentleness, or the general soft tone of her nature. The Madonna, the most gentle of women, was full of determination and strength of mind.[52]

Strength, activity and vigor, she emphasizes, are not essentially 'masculine' traits. Rather, they are moral virtues that can be enacted and valued by either sex. This blurring of lines between the sexes was supported and reinforced by Cook's public persona, which similarly blurred the lines between 'masculine' and 'feminine' signifiers.

During the period of her editorship of *Eliza Cook's Journal*, Cook became even more defiant in her iconoclastic self-representations and her representations of her relationship with Cushman, which she publicized more overtly than ever before. She published five poems to Cushman in a new edition of her collected verse in 1851, including a dedicatory poem that highlighted their intimacy[53]:

> We were good, earnest friends at first, and now
> Where is the hand by which could be unbound
> The mingled threads of Feeling's fairest hues,
> That hold us captive in Affection's thrall?[54]

She also republished the amorous 'Stanzas Addressed to C*** C***' in the 1849 edition of *Poems*, which she now retitled to include Cushman's full name. This love poem later appeared in the February 1853 issue of *Eliza Cook's Journal*, thus making its evocation of same-sex desire accessible to a much wider public audience.

Conclusion: 'A diluted Mrs. Hemans'

The public declarations of love to Cushman did not go unnoticed by Cook's detractors. While she had never been able to avoid what she called the 'fierce malignancy of the envious few', she endured much greater censure in the 1850s, when the radical press was in decline and more conservative viewpoints increasingly dominated popular print culture.[55] In 1852, John Ross Dix published scathing portraits of Cook in two anonymously published collections: *Pen and Ink Sketches of Authors and Authoresses* and *Lions*: *Living and Dead*. In the first of these works, Dix was disparaging in his assessment of Cook's talent, noting that her poetry was 'highly popular amongst a certain class of readers, who do not care for "high art" in poetry, but are content to have commonplace subjects dished up for their not over fastidious palates, in pretty smooth rhyme'.[56] His second profile of Cook in *Lions*: *Living and Dead* attacked her in a more personal way. Here Dix recalls seeing Cook for the first time at a popular music performance in February 1846, noting that she was a 'hybrid-looking individual', who 'looked essentially man-ish, and but for an amplitude of petticoat' seemed to be 'one of the Lords of the Creation'.[57] He next describes seeing her portrait 'framed and glazed' in the window of the *Weekly Dispatch* offices on Fleet Street. Her dress in the photo was the same as she had worn at the music hall: it appeared 'much like a waistcoat as could be—a manish position, and a masculine air altogether'. In addition to being advertised in a newspaper office window, he notes, Cook's portrait is displayed in nearly every 'bar-parlour in London'.[58] Given her un-ladylike 'appearance' on Fleet Street and in London pubs, Dix presumes that she, like her image, would be unwelcome in homes where 'Loudon, Baillie, Browning, Hemans, Norton, or Sigourney are received pictorially with delight'.[59]

If for earlier critics Cook's unconventionality made her a 'friend' who would be welcome in any home, for Dix it is a breach of decorum that locates her outside the boundaries of respectability, both as a woman and as a poet. Dix also describes later meeting Cook at a publisher's dinner party, where she wore an 'inflammatory' red plaid dress, which matched

her 'red-hot radical' political beliefs. He then looks on with disgust as she copies verses from 'The Old Armchair' ('that hackneyed lyric') for autograph hunters in attendance. On yet another occasion, he meets up with her during a visit to a working-class poet at Pentonville, where she 'flung herself into a chair—planted her feet on the fender, threw herself back and exclaimed, "give us a glass of beer"'.[60] Cook's familiarity, popularity and freedom from convention, he suggests, make her and her work uncomfortable 'guests' in any home environment. In 1854, the *Knickerbocker* likewise takes her to task for claiming that American authors are derivative, calling her a 'strong-minded woman'. It demands that she explain her judgments of American authors 'as *a man*', which, the article notes, should not be difficult, given the 'breadth and strength of her intellectual organs' revealed in her portrait 'painted by an English artist' (presumably Trautschold).[61]

Such harsh representations of Cook demonstrate how easily iconoclastic celebrity could be converted into notoriety. By constructing a complex persona and body of work—one which incorporated signifiers of masculinity and femininity, conventionality and unconventionality, familiar friendship and radical difference, self-satire and earnestness—Cook made herself vulnerable to criticism that was both personal and defamatory. This may have been a factor in her decision to suspend publication of *Eliza Cook's Journal* in 1854. While she claimed that ill health was the chief reason for her retirement, she no doubt also felt the need to retreat from the limelight, to publish her work without as much personal exposure to the gaze of the increasingly conservative critical establishment. During this period, she continued to publish, issuing her *Poetical Works* in a four-volume cheap edition (1859) and selected periodical essays in *Jottings from my Journal* (1860). The next year, she produced an illustrated Christmas edition, *Poems: Selected and Edited by the Author*, followed by *New Echoes and Other Poems* (1864) and a collection of aphorisms, *Diamond Dust* (1865). Retrospectives of life and work were published from time to time, but these accounts tended to read as memorials—depicting her as a poet of yesteryear whose work was inoffensive and domestic. In 1860, the *Saturday Review* referred to her as a 'diluted Mrs. Hemans' whose poetry was 'likely enough to attract many drawing-room readers'.[62] The feminization of Cook's work also extended to her public image. For example, an 1865 profile in *Bow Bells* objected to existing 'masculine' portraits of Cook, insisting that her appearance was 'unusually feminine; with a face of quiet and refined intelligence, and altogether exhibiting those traits of

womanly delicacy which cause those who look on her to express amazement at the inveterate exaggeration of the likenesses given'.[63] While new portraits of Cook were published in periodicals and were available for purchase at stationary stores, they no longer seemed to convey a sense of sexual indeterminacy. In fact, her motherly image seemed to support the prevailing view that her poetry was conventionally feminine, domestic and rather passé. Her profile in an 1875 issue of the *Young Englishwoman*, for example, is accompanied by a rather matronly, melancholy portrait, and the accompanying narrative, though largely positive, emphasizes her 'feminine' qualities and notes that her talent has 'rusted' with time (Fig. 4.9).[64]

In her self-memorializing writings of the period, Cook seemed to reinforce her own obsolescence. In 1871, she published 'In the Churchyard, Old Wimbledon' in the *St. James's Magazine*, where she depicts herself

ELIZA COOK.

Fig. 4.9 Portrait illustration of Eliza Cook, in *The Young Englishwoman* 6 (new series), no. 11 (November 1875), p. 615

gazing longingly at gravestones, imagining a 'dreamless sleep' wherein 'no sculptured pomp above me / Shall extol with praise and fame, / But where those will come who love me, / Just to sigh and breathe my name'.[65] The poem evokes Cook's celebrity—as well as her Wimbledon home location—in a very public way, yet it simultaneously claims to turn away from such publicity, alluding to her declining fame and health.

It perhaps came as no surprise when in November of 1873 Eliza Cook's death was announced in several newspapers. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, two thousand people attended the funeral, where a group of mourners was seen 'breaking open the doors of the church and pressing forward to touch the shroud'.[66] However, it soon became clear that the person whose death had prompted such public grief was not the great poetess but another woman by the same name. The real Eliza Cook, it turns out, was alive and well in Wimbledon. Consequently, the news of her actual death on September 26, 1889, seemed rather redundant—not only because her shrinking audience had already had a chance to mourn but also because she had fallen into even deeper obscurity. *The Times* noted that for most readers it would be a 'surprise that she was alive but yesterday'. 'Thirty years ago', it further notes, 'her name was a household word', but 'since then she has published little or nothing, and her reputation has faded away even among the classes who at one time were her greatest admirers'.[67]

Of course, Cook's poetry did have an afterlife. In *The Stuffed Owl* (1930) and *Very Bad Poetry* (1997) she became a reference point for defining the worst kind of bathos of the Victorian era. Disconnected from Cook's early iconoclasm—her radical performances of sex and gender, both on and off the page—the poems lost the cultural reference points that had made them so resonant during the radical 1840s and early 1850s, when for a time it was possible for a woman author to celebrate deviation from the sexual norm and attain unprecedented celebrity as an iconoclastic poet of the people in an emergent mass media.

Notes

1. Hadden 1900, p. 196.
2. Lewis and Lee 1930, pp. 199–200.
3. Anon. 1845b.
4. Anon. 1847a.
5. Moseley 1981, p. 179. See also Ledbetter (2009) and Janzen Kooistra (2011), who draw attention to Cook's engagement with visual and print culture as a poet of domestic life.

6. Rojek 2001, p. 31.
7. Anon. 1869, p. 42.
8. In the 1840s, this included poets Charles Swain, Robert Nicoll, Caroline Norton, Richard Howitt, Frances Brown, Felicia Hemans and Charles Mackay.
9. In a letter to Jerdan, she makes it clear that she receives 'no remuneration from the "Dispatch" proprietors' (quoted in Jerdan 1853, p. 319). After being appointed editor of the column, she seems to have received £200 per annum for her editorial work (Dix 1854, p. 53).
10. Hughes, forthcoming.
11. Quoted in Griswold 1898, p. 157.
12. Cook 1840, p. 55.
13. Jerdan (1837, p. 580) famously noted that her contributions had the 'nature and sweetness of Burns'.
14. Quoted in Kelley and Hudson 1986, pp. 214–215.
15. Quoted in Kelley and Hudson 1986, p. 215.
16. Moseley 1981, p. 178.
17. Miller 1972, p. 77.
18. Noyes 1846, p. 1; Cramp 1847, p. 2.
19. Jerdan 1853, p. 319.
20. Jerdan 1853, p. 319.
21. Anon. 1859.
22. McCormick 2005, pp. 3–6.
23. Anon. 1841, p. 4.
24. Anon. 1841, p. 4.
25. Anon. 1841, p. 4.
26. Anon. 1841, p. 8.
27. Anon. 1841, p. 8.
28. Cook 1845, p. vii.
29. Quoted in Hale 1855, p. 630.
30. Brown 2000, p. 189.
31. Cook 1845, p. 228.
32. Anon. 1845a, 1845b; Anon. 1847c.
33. Anon. 1847b.
34. Anon. 1847b.
35. Anon. 1847c, p. 342.
36. Anon. 1847c, p. 342.
37. Anon. 1847c, p. 343.
38. Easley, forthcoming; see also Merrill 1999, pp. 141–150.
39. Cook 1846, p. 8.
40. Howitt 1889, vol. 2, p. 37.
41. Coleman 1904, vol. 2, pp. 361–362.

42. Merrill 1999, pp. 110–137.
43. For discussion of Cook's political poetry, see Robinson 2001.
44. Rowton 1856, p. 480.
45. Anon. 1849.
46. Anon. 1849.
47. Cook 1849c, p. 1.
48. Cook 1849b, p. 209.
49. Cook 1849a, p. 222.
50. Gleadle 1995, p. 96; Smith 2005, p. 58; Fraser et al. 2003, p. 97.
51. Cook 1850a, p. 11.
52. Cook 1850b, p. 61.
53. The 1851 volume cited here is the fifth edition. It is likely that Cook's dedicatory poem to Cushman was first published in 1848. However, I have been unable to locate this earlier edition.
54. Cook 1851, p. iii.
55. Cook 1840, p. vi.
56. Dix 1852, p. 184.
57. Dix 1854, pp. 42–43.
58. Dix 1854, p. 47.
59. Dix 1854, pp. 47–48.
60. Dix 1854, pp. 52–54. This anecdote was also recounted in an article published in the *New York Daily Times* on September 30, 1851.
61. Anon. 1854, p. 435.
62. Anon. 1860, p. 702.
63. Anon. 1865.
64. Anon. 1875, p. 618.
65. Cook 1871, p. 78.
66. Anon. 1872.
67. Anon. 1889.

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5

The Daguerreotype Devil: Herman Melville (1819–1891)

Kevin J. Hayes

When Evert Duyckinck and his brother George took over the editorship of *Holden's Dollar Magazine* in 1851, they hoped to enhance its prestige by publishing a series of articles about current authors illustrated with steel-engraved portraiture. As the brothers planned the series, Evert Duyckinck wrote Herman Melville, then living at Arrowhead, his farm in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He asked Melville if he would be willing to write an article for the magazine. However, Duyckinck did not want just any article. Rather, he wanted Melville to write what he was famous for, a story of the sea or, as Duyckinck quaintly put it, 'a dash of salt spray'. He also asked Melville to send a daguerreotype of himself, which would serve as the basis for an engraved portrait to accompany the article.[1]

'Where am I to get salt spray here in inland Pittsfield?' Melville asked in response. Nowhere, his rhetorical question implies. He refused, hardly offering an explanation for his unwillingness: 'I can not write the thing you want. I am in the humor to lend a hand to a friend, if I can;—but I am not in the humor to write the kind of thing you need.' Melville, in fact, had good reasons why he could not, nay, would not write the

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article, but he did not reveal them at this point. Instead, he simply stated that Duyckinck 'must be content to believe that I *have* reasons, or else I would not refuse so small a thing'.[2] In light of where Melville was in his literary career, it may not be too difficult to discern his reasons for refusing Duyckinck. Though he had established a reputation as a sailor-author, Melville disliked being pigeonholed as such. With *Moby-Dick* (1851) looming on the horizon, Melville knew he was much more than an author of adventure stories on the high seas. He knew quite well that he had the literary skills to elevate an intrepid tale of adventuresome travel to the level of a metaphysical treatise. Melville longed for recognition as an author of serious, intellectually challenging literature. He wanted to advance his art, not let it stagnate.

Not only did he refuse to write the article, Melville also refused to have a daguerreotype of himself taken. A terrible speller, Melville had fits with the word 'daguerreotype', but the cultural ramifications of this early form of photography upset him more than the unspellability of 'daguerreotype'. Though its technology had only been around for a dozen years, the daguerreotype, the first commercially viable photographic medium, was already responsible for creating a cult of celebrity.[3] To Melville's horror, daguerreotype photographs or, to be precise, the sharp-edged steel engravings derived from them, encouraged people to judge authors and other public figures according to their personal image.[4] Though quite handsome, Melville did not want his physical appearance to affect his literary reputation. He wanted to be judged by his books, not his looks. Melville told Duyckinck as much when he refused his request:

> The fact is, almost everybody is having his 'mug' engraved nowadays; so that this test of distinction is getting to be reversed; and therefore, to see one's 'mug' in a magazine, is presumptive evidence that he's a nobody. So being as vain a man as ever lived; and believing that my illustrious name is famous throughout the world—I respectfully decline being *oblivionated* by a Daguerretype (what a devel of an unspellable word!).[5]

Melville's remarks offer an opportunity to explore his attitude toward the relationship between writing, visual media and the emerging celebrity culture. Read in isolation, his letter to Duyckinck seems belligerent, but his belligerence makes more sense within the context of his literary career, which began five years earlier with the publication of *Typee* (1846), the book that made him a literary celebrity in the first place.

Upon returning from the South Pacific, Melville, with the encouragement of friends and family, decided to write a book about his adventures. The result was *Typee*: *A Peep at Polynesian Life*. The high quality of its writing, especially notable for a first-time author and a man who had sailed 'before the mast', that is, as a common sailor, made *Typee* a literary sensation. The story of his desertion with a shipmate named Toby was filled with excitement, and the intimate relationship between Tommo—the name he chose for his alter ego in the book—and a Marquesan beauty named Fayaway made Melville a personal sensation, what one biographer has called 'the first American literary sex symbol'.[6] In *Typee*, Melville titillates his readers with suggestive comments about Fayaway's voluptuous appearance. His portrayal of her swimming greatly aroused his readers and her behavior out of the water was no less thrilling. As Fayaway stoops, her long, dark brown tresses cover 'her lovely bosom'.[7] When she is not stooping, which is most of the time Melville cleverly implies, then nothing hides her lovely bosom from view. In one scene, as Tommo and Fayaway cross the water together in a canoe, she utters an exclamation of delight, stands erect, slips the mantle from her shoulders, extends her arms, and spreads her garment like a sail, her lithe, naked body forming the mast. Readers loved to picture Fayaway in all her natural. A British poet, for instance, imagined an idyllic land:

> Where maids of beauty, beaming like the day,
> Or Hermann Melville's pretty Fayaway,
> *Au naturelle* disport upon the green,
> Devoid of corset, skirts, or crinoline.[8]

Portraying intimate moments between Tommo and Fayaway, Melville supplied the kind of information the nascent celebrity culture demanded.[9] With the growth of cities and the depersonalization and alienation concomitant of modern urban life, people lost the traditional bonds that linked them together. For many people, the extended family and a network of close friends often disappeared. Deprived of such personal contacts, they searched for surrogates to replace what they had lost. The bond that began forming between artists—actors, singers, writers—and their audiences provided the basis for what would become one such surrogate, the celebrity–fan relationship.[10] This relationship fostered curiosity about the private lives of the celebrities that fans admired. In Melville's case, what he told his readers about his time with Fayaway was just what they

wanted to hear.[11] Readers could hardly get enough of her: they wondered what had happened to Fayaway once Melville left the Marquesas and imagined her lonely and broken-hearted in his absence. Many people grew curious to see Melville in person, not necessarily to meet a great writer but to see the man who had charmed the winsome Fayaway. Sometimes they used her character to understand him. Recording her first impressions of Melville, Sophia Hawthorne, for example, wrote to her sister: 'Mr Typee is interesting in his aspect—quite—I see Fayaway in his face.'[12]

Melville's face became the focus of his readers' curiosity. Ellen Astor Oxenham, an English woman living in New York who was acquainted with Herman's sister Augusta, expressed a desire to meet her brother, whom she calls both 'Tommo' and 'Typee' in her correspondence. Oxenham could hardly mask her desire. In a letter to Augusta—an early example of fan mail—she wrote: 'Why don't you live in New York and then I could see your bright eyes, and mayhap a small ray of Typeeian felicity might fall on me from Tommo's.' Before her letter is through, she reiterates her request, switching from addressing Augusta to directly addressing her brother: 'Typee, you dear creature, I want to see you so amazingly.'[13]

The desire for people to catch a glimpse of Melville became so great that it affected his personal life. Once he and Elizabeth Shaw got engaged, she hoped to be married in a church, but they ultimately decided on a more private ceremony. She explained to a correspondent why they decided against a church wedding: 'We all thought if it were to get about previously that "Typee" was to be seen on such a day, a great crowd might rush out of mere curiosity to see "the author".'[14] Once word of Melville's marriage did get out, wits and wags considered how Fayaway might take the news. A contributor to the Honolulu *Polynesian* even suggested that Fayaway should sue Melville for breach of promise, implying that she would surely win. Furthermore, this journalist confessed an inability to understand Melville's marital decision: 'We are at a loss to account for the apparent inconsistency of exchanging his delightful fairy for one who has been nurtured amid the odious distinctions of civilization.'[15]

Mr. Omoo's daguerreotype fidelity

Beyond the content of *Typee*, the literary style Melville evinces in this book and its sequel, *Omoo* (1847), contributed to a sense of intimacy that fostered the celebrity–fan relationship. As early as in 1851, in *Hurry-Graphs*; *or*, *Sketches of Scenery*, *Celebrities*, *and Society*, Nathaniel P. Willis observed:

> Conversational literature, or books written as agreeable people talk, is the present fashion with authors and passion with readers. Herman Melville, with his cigar and his Spanish eyes, *talks Typee* and *Omoo*, just as you find the flow of his delightful mind on paper. Those who have only read his books know the man—those who have only seen the man have a fair idea of his books.[16]

Willis may not have met 'the man' yet when he made this statement, for 'spanish eyes' meant dark brown eyes—but Melville's eyes were blue. Willis, it seems, read *Typee* and *Omoo* and devised a mental image of its author's face, a dark and romantic image.

Though many readers accepted *Typee* as truth, some had trouble accepting what its author said. When 'Toby', that is, Richard Tobias Greene showed up in Buffalo, New York alive and well and ready to confirm what Melville wrote, he created a new sensation that fueled Melville's celebrity. Greene published his own story in the newspapers. After visiting Greene in July 1846, Melville reported the trip to John Murray, his publisher in England, who had originally accepted Melville's manuscript for publication on the assumption that it was the truth but was beginning to have his doubts. Melville wrote: 'I have seen Toby, have his darguerreotype—a lock of those ebon curls.'[17] Clearly, he was already having problems spelling the word 'daguerreotype', but he exhibits a different attitude toward photography in his letter to Murray than he would in his letter to Evert Duyckinck five years later. Though Melville would write up a version of Greene's story himself, he did not obtain the daguerreotype to use as the basis for an engraved portrait to be published with 'The Story of Toby'. That Melville simultaneously obtained a lock of Greene's hair suggests that the daguerreotype functioned similarly, that is, as a memento of a friend. A contemporary poet remarked that a lock of hair could 'bring past years and moments up anew; / When all was bright, and innocent, and fair, / Inspiring hope and courage ever new.'[18] Apparently, so could a daguerreotype.

The fact that Melville came away from their meeting with a daguerreotype of Greene suggests that Melville also allowed the daguerreotypist to take his picture as a memento for Greene. Most likely, the two went to the daguerreotype studio together and had their pictures taken one after the other. The episode shows that Melville was not averse to using daguerreotype portraits for personal reasons. In 1849, shortly before he sailed for London hoping to find a British publisher for *White-Jacket* (1850), his new novel, Melville had his daguerreotype taken for his wife to use as a

memento, and she had one taken of herself with Malcolm, their first child, which her husband could take with him to London. Before Duyckinck's letter of request, then, the Melville family had already begun using daguerreotypes, which makes Melville's belligerent reply all the more exceptional. While accepting the use of the daguerreotype as a memento, he objected to its use for the purposes of publicity.

Averse to using his personal image to fuel his growing celebrity, Melville was not against taking advantage of his celebrity once *Typee* proved to be a sensation. Few writers in his day could make a living solely with their pens, but literary fame could contribute to success in other ways. After publishing *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), Richard Henry Dana, Jr., for example, parlayed his fame into professional success. The book's critical and popular acclaim attracted many new clients to his law practice. Authorship was often a stepping-stone to preferment in antebellum America. With the success of *Typee*, Melville apparently tried to use his burgeoning literary fame to obtain a position with the US Treasury Department. To that end, he visited Washington in February 1847, where he introduced himself to Senator John A. Dix and his wife Catherine. Eager to meet the author of *Typee*, she reacted to their meeting in much the same way as Sophia Hawthorne—the Melville admirer previously quoted. Afterwards, Catherine Dix informed a correspondent: 'Mr. [Allan] Melville interested me very much, from his connections with Typee [i.e., Herman Melville], and the lovely Fayaway.'[19] Even though meeting Melville had intrigued Mrs. Dix, it was her husband who could help him get the Treasury job. Senator Dix's impressions of Melville have gone unrecorded, but suffice it to say that Melville did not get the job.

Despite the fact that he did not receive the government appointment he sought, Melville did use the popularity of *Typee* to extend his literary career, soon publishing a sequel, entitled *Omoo*: *A Narrative of Adventure in the South Seas*. The title page of *Omoo* capitalizes on the popularity of Melville's first book, identifying him as the author of *Typee*. *Omoo* lacks a beautiful heroine like Fayaway, yet many contemporary reviewers agreed that it possessed literary qualities equal or superior to *Typee*. Remarkably, the 'daguerreotype' was repeatedly referred to in the reception of Melville's second book. The word had already entered the critical discourse to form a comparison to the written word, as one review indicates:

> It is not altogether the truthfulness of these sketches, however, that constitutes their great charm—a daguerreotype could be merely accurate; it is

> the warmth, the tropical luxuriance, the genial flow of humor and good-nature—the happy enthusiasm, gushing like a stream of mellow sunshine from the author's heart—all these, and a thousand nameless beauties of tone and sentiment, are the captivating ingredients of *Omoo*.[20]

These remarks indicate that the daguerreotype had become a symbol of realism. With the comparison, this reviewer expresses some dissatisfaction toward photographic realism. A camera can accurately record the appearance of something or someone, but the written word can capture more: charm, romance and sentiment. Melville's frustration with the daguerreotype may have something to do with its process of mechanically reproducing reality. The imagination could create a much more vivid world than the photograph.

His second book kept Melville's name in the public eye. Much as he had been called 'Typee' after his first book, he was called 'Mr. Omoo' after his second.[21] Melville's social calendar provides another indication of his growing renown. When *Typee* appeared in 1846, New York literary society desperately needed a new author to lionize. After Edgar Allan Poe had published 'The Raven' the previous year, he had become the darling of the city's literary circles. Doyen and dilettante Anne Lynch would often host parties at her home on Waverly Place, inviting the city's leading literary men and women to hobnob. Poe, now nicknamed 'Raven', often attended, playing the role of lion beautifully. He would recite verse and flirt with many of the ladies present. Some of New York's younger literary women found themselves falling for Poe. The fact that he had a wife at home did not discourage them. Yet with one slip of the tongue—a salacious innuendo impugning one of the city's most prominent female authors—Poe was ostracized from New York's prestigious literary circles. His wife Virginia was sick and tired of the New York literary scene and urged her husband that they leave the city and move to a more outlying area. Poe agreed. His experience proved to be a lesson in the fickleness of fame.[22]

Lynch hoped Mr. Omoo would take the place of Raven, but, needless to say, Melville was not Poe. Melville balked at the thought of making chitchat and only seldom did he attend the soirées at Waverly Place. In 1848, he did attend Lynch's Valentine's Day party, which had been the highlight of New York's social calendar for years. Having honed his storytelling skills in the forecastle, Melville was an excellent conversationalist when he wanted to be. He enjoyed telling stories to like-minded friends.

Once he and Melville finally met, Nathaniel Parker Willis spoke of the 'extraordinary charm of his narrative powers in conversation'.[23] The literary soirée, however, was not an ideal forum for Melville, as he was not interested in the small talk that took place at Lynch's home. A natural-born actor, Poe could flirt and gossip to his heart's content, but Melville had no tolerance for such behavior. Lynch, it seems, quietly stopped inviting him to Waverly Place.

Given his druthers, Melville preferred to stay home writing rather than to go out and rub elbows with the hoi polloi of New York literary society. He would sooner spend time fostering his intellectual and creative abilities than cultivating his newfound celebrity. *Mardi* (1849), the ambitious novel he undertook after *Omoo*, marked a new departure for him. Beginning as a travelogue, it gradually becomes a social, political and philosophical commentary. In the knowledge that *Mardi* differed considerably from his first two books, Melville made a remarkable request to his English publisher: 'Unless you should deem it *very* desirable do not put me down on the title page as "the author of *Typee* and *Omoo*". I wish to separate *Mardi* as much as possible from those books.'[24] Melville clearly wanted to distance himself from the reputation he had already established, to exchange the sailor-author persona for that of a serious author, one capable of deep, thoughtful, provocative writing. He was not interested in celebrity, but would be satisfied with recognition from a small circle of like-minded souls. As he wrote fellow sailor-author Richard Henry Dana, Jr.: 'I almost think, I should hereafter—in the case of a sea book—get my M.S.S. neatly and legibly copied by a scrivener—send you one copy—and deem such a procedure the best publication.'[25]

Mardi proved to be a dismal commercial failure, so Melville, faced with growing responsibilities as a husband and father, reverted to quasi-autobiographical sailor stories for his next two books, *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850). He wrote the two very quickly and both received positive reviews. One London reader applauded the 'daguerreotype fidelity and freshness' of *Redburn*, and another found *White-Jacket* 'elaborated with such daguerreotype exactitude and finish, so swarming with the finest and minutest details, and so studded with little points never to be imagined, that you are irresistibly impelled to the conclusion that, from the first word to the last, every syllable is literal, down-right truth'.[26] Melville left no reaction to these reviews, but their comparisons with daguerreotype photography may have confirmed his low opinion of both books. The earlier mentioned reviewer had elevated *Omoo* above photographic realism;

the reviewers of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* equated their contents with photographic realism. Melville knew his imagination could do much more than what sunlight and a photographic plate could do.

Moby-Dick and the mug shot

Melville knew that *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* both represented a backward step in his intellectual development, but he understood that, in practical terms, he could not justify writing another book like *Mardi*.[27] Dissatisfied with the direction his career was headed, he looked about for a new way of writing, a method that would appeal to a readership wide enough to turn a profit from his writing but also one that would let him cultivate his growing intellectual and creative abilities. Settling on the idea for *Moby-Dick*, Melville realized it would require considerable intellectual work. Duyckinck's desire for both a light, breezy sailor story—with 'a dash of salt spray'—and an accompanying daguerreotype came just as Melville was, as he himself put it, wrestling with the angel Art. Receiving Duyckinck's request at the moment that his work on *Moby-Dick* reached a fevered pitch, Melville was understandably upset. Just when he was trying to advance his mind and his art, Duyckinck wanted to hold him back by asking him to write the same kind of sailor stories that had made him a literary celebrity in the first place and by making an attempt to use Melville's personal image to cultivate his literary reputation. However, as we have seen, Melville would have none of it.

Duyckinck was not the only contemporary editor who hoped to publish an engraved portrait of Melville to enhance his magazine's aesthetic appearance and encourage its sale. The same year Duyckinck asked Melville to send him a daguerreotype, Rufus Wilmot Griswold, then editor of the *International Magazine*, advertised that his magazine would contain engraved portraits of many of the day's leading authors. In an essay he wrote for the magazine, which was also published separately in an advertisement to promote the magazine in the *American Phrenological Journal*, Griswold informed readers that the *International Magazine* would soon include 'admirable portraits' of Melville and other authors, 'accompanied as frequently as may be with views of their residence, and sketches of their literary and personal character'.[28] Griswold's intention to include pictures of authors' homes emphasizes the significance of their personal life to their fans. The fact that Griswold linked literary quality and personal character reinforces how important an author's life was for interpreting his or her

works. By advertising Melville's portrait, Griswold was jumping the gun. He had yet to ask Melville for a daguerreotype that he could use as the basis for an engraving. Since Melville refused his friend Duyckinck, there was no way he would grant a similar request from Griswold, a blatant opportunist.

Though the comments Melville makes in the letter to Duyckinck refusing to have his daguerreotype taken are facetious, they nonetheless reveal much about his attitude toward photography and visual culture and their relationship to celebrity. When Melville says that 'almost everybody is having his "mug" engraved nowadays', he indicates the proliferation of engraved portraiture in the current magazines. Associating the word 'mug' with portraits derived from daguerreotypes, he anticipates the use of the 1950s term 'mugshot', the photographs used to record, identify and track criminals. Eventually, Melville implies, everyone will have their photograph taken. With so much mass-produced portraiture, the only way for a person to distinguish themselves is to avoid being photographed, hence, he respectfully declines 'being *oblivionated* by a Daguerretype'.

Once *Moby-Dick* appeared in 1851, many readers critiqued the book, which they found too daring for their tastes. Some objected to its bold experimentation; others found its challenges to conventional morality objectionable. In places, the book seemed downright blasphemous. Duyckinck, a devout Episcopalian, could not let Melville's blasphemous passages go unnoticed, and he critiqued the book in the pages of the *Literary World*, the influential magazine he and his brother George co-edited.[29] Duyckinck's critique wounded Melville deeply. The more Melville thought about it, the angrier he got. He took revenge in his next novel, *Pierre*: *or*, *The Ambiguities* (1852). As he revised and expanded *Pierre*, Melville added a fictionalized version of the daguerreotype episode to the novel.

After Pierre Glendinning, the title character, establishes himself as a renowned author in the novel, the editor of a literary magazine asks him to have a daguerreotype photograph taken, which will form the basis for an engraved portrait to appear in the magazine. Like Melville had in real life, Pierre flatly refuses the editor's request, exclaiming: 'To the devil with you and your Daguerreotype!' The event leads Pierre to contemplation. Articulating the character's thoughts, the narrator explains:

> This incident, suggestive as it was at the time, in the sequel had a surprising effect upon Pierre. For he considered with what infinite readiness now, the most faithful portrait of any one could be taken by the Daguerreotype,

> whereas in former times a faithful portrait was only within the power of the moneyed, or mental aristocrats of the earth. How natural then the inference, that instead of, as in old times, immortalizing a genius, a portrait now only *dayalized* a dunce. Besides, when every body has his portrait published, true distinction lies in not having yours published at all. For if you are published along with Tom, Dick, and Harry, and wear a coat of their cut, how then are you distinct from Tom, Dick, and Harry?[30]

The ideas expressed in *Pierre* are remarkably similar to those Melville had articulated in his letter to Duyckinck, but the fictional episode adds a further nuance absent from Melville's letter: it introduces the subject of portrait painting. Explicating the passage from *Pierre*, Susan Sontag argues that Melville found that portrait paintings and photographs both compromised their subjects. Where the photograph demeaned its subject, the painting made its subject unjustifiably grandiose.[31] Yet Sontag is only partly correct. By reducing Melville's ideas to an opposition between painting and photography, she oversimplifies her source. In *Pierre*, Melville does not posit a binary opposition, but a three-tiered hierarchy: painting, photography, engraving.[32] Melville did not have a problem with engravings until the daguerreotype was invented. Formerly, an engraved portrait could not be made until someone had a portrait painted. Pierre finds fault with the daguerreotype only insofar as it facilitates the publication of engraved portraiture in magazines.

Conclusion: a cold mist between the reader and the author

As the use of daguerreotypes in the Melville family indicates, Melville was not necessarily against daguerreotype photography *per se*; he was against the dangers it presented in terms of publication. With the easy publication and dissemination of portraiture, an author's merit would soon be determined not by his work but by his face. Melville shrewdly foresaw that photography was helping to foster a cult of celebrity, which would honor people solely by the images of them that appeared in the magazines.

The invention of the daguerreotype, combined with the possibilities it created for engraved portraiture, reinforced an impulse that continues to the present. As Melville feared, the visual image of a person now plays a significant part in determining his or her popular and professional reputation. The beginnings of photography, in Roland Barthes's words, marked

'the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly'.[33] A fairly private man, Melville balked at the new demands the image-hungry public was making. Melville's reluctance to publicize himself hindered the sale of his novels in his own time and may have prevented many of the day's readers from becoming interested in his work.

Melville was not the only author of his time to recognize what the invention of photography meant to literary celebrity, but others, instead of taking offense, embraced the possibilities photography offered. Like Melville, Poe saw the impact daguerreotype photography and engraved portraiture could have. Unlike Melville, Poe understood how a published portrait could shape an author's professional reputation. He also recognized how he could exercise control over the daguerreotype images on which the engravings were based. Poe even manipulated his personal image for the camera. Achieving fame when phrenology was in vogue, Poe knew that people often judged others by the shape of their head. Daguerreotype and engraved portraiture gave people the chance to phrenologize by proxy, and Poe took advantage of the situation. Aware that a high forehead, phrenologically speaking, was a sign of poetic ability, Poe deliberately posed himself to emphasize his prominent forehead for the camera.[34] More than any American author before Mark Twain, Poe understood how to manipulate his personal image for the camera. Other contemporary authors similarly saw the daguerreotype's potential: Frederick Douglass, to name another, also sought to exert control over his personal image. Douglass took great pains to control how his daguerreotypes turned out. Like Poe, Douglass recognized that the personal image he projected reinforced ideas he articulated in his writings.[35]

Together daguerreotype photography and steel-engraved portraiture provided a visual medium that allowed authors to advertise their personal image and themselves to promote their writings. Combined with the curiosity of his readers—those who wanted to see what Fayaway saw—Melville's handsomeness gave him an ideal way to make use of his personal image to capitalize on his literary fame and sell more books, but time and again he refused to do so. He would continue to fight against the publication of his personal image. Melville's other brushes with the public put him in similar situations. He often encountered people who were more interested in seeing what he looked like than what he thought or wrote. Unable to make a living solely with his pen, Melville went on the lecture

circuit. Starting in the late 1850s, he lectured for three successive winters, but found the experience disappointing. A dozen years had passed since *Typee* was first published, yet people best remembered him as its author and wanted to see him in that role. Melville staunchly refused to give audiences what they wanted. Instead of talking about Fayaway, he tried to talk about more intellectual subjects, but they cared little for what he said. In 1859, a college student named Titus Munson Coan, for example, made a literary pilgrimage to Arrowhead and subsequently told his mother: 'He would not repeat the experiences of which I had been reading with rapture in his books. In vain I sought to hear of Typee and those Paradise islands, but he preferred to put forth his philosophy and his theories of life. The shade of Aristotle arose like a cold mist between myself and Fayaway.'[36]

Ultimately, Melville found work as a US customs officer in New York. When he assembled two brief volumes of poetry at the end of his life, he had them privately printed in press runs of only twenty-five copies each, which he could distribute to friends and family. He was done seeking literary celebrity. Without the help of his photographic image, Melville's writing slowly managed to achieve for him lasting recognition after his death. In the late nineteenth century a few kindred souls found inspiration in his writings. The world-famous author Jack London, known for his adventure novels, for one, became a passionate Melville enthusiast, but London accepted that achieving literary fame required more than literature. Unlike Melville, London took advantage of the photographic technology of his day, both photographic portraiture and motion pictures, to promote himself.[37] Writers of the following generations accepted the publicity that photography made possible as part of the business of authorship. Melville, however, writing shortly after the invention of photography, still bristled at the demands it made.

Notes

1. Melville 1993, p. 179.
2. Melville 1993, pp. 179–180.
3. Dasgupta 2013, p. 320.
4. Hayes 2002.
5. Melville 1993, p. 180.
6. Parker 2012, p. 330.
7. Melville 1968, p. 86.
8. Eurymachus 1859, p. 68.

9. Nayar 2009, p. 62.
10. Drucker and Cathcart 1994, p. 269.
11. Evelev 2006, p. 41.
12. Quoted in Metcalf 1953, p. 86.
13. Quoted in Parker 1996, p. 464.
14. Quoted in Parker 1996, p. 541.
15. Anon. 1848, p. 174.
16. Willis 1851, p. 224.
17. Melville 1993, p. 65.
18. White 1846, p. 152.
19. Leyda 1969, vol. 1, p. 234.
20. Higgins and Parker 1995, p. 109.
21. Hawthorne 1992.
22. Hayes 2009, pp. 148–151. Also see Van Leeuwen in this volume.
23. Quoted in Leyda 1969, vol. 1, p. 328.
24. Melville 1993, pp. 114–115.
25. Melville 1993, p. 160.
26. Higgins and Parker 1995, pp. 259, 403.
27. Hayes 2007, p. 7.
28. Griswold 1851.
29. Duyckinck 1974, pp. 267–268.
30. Melville 1971, p. 254.
31. Sontag 1977, p. 166.
32. Hayes 2002, p. 482.
33. Barthes 1981, p. 98.
34. Hayes 2002.
35. Westerbeck 1999, p. 155.
36. Leyda 1969, vol. 2, p. 605.
37. Labor 1986, p. 101.

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6

The Art of Creating a Great Sensation: Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

Sandra Mayer

The concluding sentence in 'The Remarkable Rocket' (1888), one of Oscar Wilde's best-known tales, contains what could be read as a sly piece of Wildean self-parody: '"I knew I should create a great sensation", gasped the Rocket, and he went out.'[1] However, whereas the one fleeting moment of explosive magnificence so eagerly anticipated by Wilde's vainglorious rocket eventually goes entirely unnoticed by the world, it would be quite safe to claim that the author has been spared a similar anti-climactic fate of short-lived fame. With the advent of what Richard A. Kaye has aptly identified as the 'Wilde Moment' of the 1990s and early 2000s, the combined efforts of literary criticism, modern theater practice, heritage industry and popular culture have successfully reclaimed the author as 'Our Contemporary'.[2] Not a fleeting moment of fame, indeed, as it has marked Wilde's refashioning into a conveniently adaptable icon of postmodern culture and mercilessly commodified carrier of English-language literary heritage.[3]

Rivaled only by the likes of Shakespeare, Dickens and Austen, the Oscar Wilde brand has conquered the domain of consumer culture, and sells a

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range of literary memorabilia products as diverse as mugs, T-shirts, mouse pads, stationery, luxury fountain pens, toys and cocktails.[4] Moreover, Wilde's drawn-out *decennium mirabile* has given rise to a string of star-studded West End revivals, filmic remakes and musical adaptations of the author's works, and has seen Wilde as the subject of major academic conferences, literary festivals and Brian Gilbert's acclaimed (if not uncontroversial) 1997 biopic *Wilde*.[5] Crucially, it has resulted in a veritable surge of literary memorial culture, including the opening of centenary exhibitions and the unveiling of honorary plaques and public monuments.

In 1995, Wilde experienced what may be seen as a posthumous rehabilitation by the pillars of the English establishment with the dedication of a stained-glass window at Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner, followed, two years later, by his readmission 'into the pantheon of the acceptable' on his Irish home ground with the unveiling of Danny Osborne's Guinness-sponsored Wilde statue in Dublin's Merrion Square Park.[6] Similarly, Maggi Hambling's bronze and granite sculpture 'A Conversation with Oscar Wilde', whose symbolism appeals to the fantasy of Wilde triumphing over death, duly restored the writer to the heartland of his former fame and glory in London's West End. The illustrious line-up of political dignitaries and literary and acting celebrities at the official unveiling ceremony in November 1998 appeared indicative of the fact that the 'resurrection of Oscar Wilde [had been] consolidated'.[7] Notably, Wilde's iconic appeal to posterity has found its most striking and, at the same time, most destructive manifestation in the author's lipstick-encrusted tomb at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Since November 2011, after an extensive Irish state-funded restoration project, Jacob Epstein's stone monument has been encased in a protective glass screen, which has, however, failed to curb such intensely physical expressions of literary hero worship, or to deter those who, in line with Wilde's 'Ballad of Reading Gaol', risk killing the thing they love with a kiss.[8]

Wilde's steadily advancing cultural iconicity and celebrity appeal are both fed and attested to by the author's prolific afterlives in contemporary biofiction, a genre whose popularity distinctly relies on the reputational capital and star potential of literary brand names in an increasingly commodified literary marketplace.[9] Ostensibly providing a glimpse into the famous individual's private life, it caters to the voyeuristic gaze of the public and their obsession with recovering the (historical) author's 'true' and 'authentic' self behind the mask of his/her renowned public persona.[10] Such fictional resurrections of historical authors have been shown to be

both expressions of, and revisionist commentaries on, the cultural impact of canonical writers and their work; they contribute to the posthumous reputation of their subjects, consolidating and, at the same time, setting out to revise (and thus preserve) their position within cultural memory.[11]

This chapter focuses on selected Wildean afterlives in contemporary drama that shape, reflect and are influenced by their subject's celebrity status, which, as will be shown in the following, emerged from a complex dynamic between person and process, performance and appropriation, public and private worlds. It specifically considers Thomas Kilroy's Wilde-themed bioplays *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde* (1997) and *My Scandalous Life* (2004), whose genesis and production history reveal that, despite the plays' Neo-Victorian agenda of turning the spotlight on the 'supporting cast' in the familiar Wilde narrative and exploring their neglected or marginalized perspectives, there is no way of escaping the irresistible pull of the celebrity author.[12]

Wildean (after)lives: performing and appropriating celebrity

Wilde's thorough and continued absorption into contemporary literary celebrity culture feeds a veritable 'Oscar industry' of films, biofictional treatments and other, more commercially viable, Wildean paraphernalia. His celebrity status is clearly determined by a whole number of factors, not least the author's own genius for self-commodification, his ready embrace of consumerist aesthetics, and his uncompromising preparedness to '[turn] himself into a brand'.[13] As Wilde 'made himself available for reproduction', his early 1880s public performance act—a self-declared 'apostle' of the Aesthetic Movement, self-styled arbiter of taste, and eccentrically dressed, quick-witted conversationalist—turned him into a universally recognized public figure and welcome subject of popular satire and caricature.[14] Even more importantly, it effectively rendered him 'one of the most important aestheticist and decadent artefacts of his era, performing its shift from the productivist ethos that characterised the industrial revolution to a consumptionist one in which the display of taste and ownership became a key marker of identity'.[15]

Remarkably adept at exploiting the mechanisms and economic parameters of late-nineteenth-century culture industry to his own advantage, Wilde actively co-authored his public image as a celebrity in the dawning age of mass media culture long before he achieved fame as a writer.

The fact that 'fame would *launch* Wilde's career, not cap it', as David M. Friedman argues in his book *Wilde in America* (2014),[16] fosters an understanding of Wilde as a prototypical modern celebrity, described in Daniel Boorstin's memorable (if questionable) phrase as a 'person who is known for his well-knownness': a representative of a new type of renown detached from traditional markers of genius, merit and achievement, and primarily based on the cultivation of a specific public persona whose identity is founded upon notoriety.[17] In fact, the public furore surrounding Wilde's 1882 American lecture tour—instigated by theater impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte as a publicity stunt to promote the New York City production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Patience*—has been treated as a historical landmark in what Friedman, in the subtitle of his book mentioned above, fulsomely calls the *Invention of Modern Celebrity*. Similarly, Jonathan Goldman, in his study of literary Modernism and its ties with celebrity culture, emphasizes the significance of Wilde's exercise in self-promotion and manufacturing media visibility as a 'formative moment in modern celebrity: on tour, Wilde was in effect playing himself, not as a person, but as a personification of aesthetic style come to life'.[18]

The skillfully operated vehicle of popularizing and commodifying his theories on Aestheticist art, dress and interior design was the 'elephantine Barnum power of his celebrity'.[19] By Wilde's own account, he was 'torn in bits by Society',[20] feted by literary coteries and political grandees and besieged by journalists and admirers, just like Dickens during his own spectacularly successful United States lecture tours in 1842 and 1867.[21] While the enormous scale of public attention received by the flamboyant aesthete hardly rested upon his reputation as a giant of English literature, Wilde certainly matched Dickens's remarkable aptitude for carefully choreographed public performance and diligently managed publicity. With his shrewd sense for product placement and branding, he scrupulously constructed and marketed his public persona, which soon became the subject of cartoons, satires, popular songs and 'aesthetic advertisements' deploying Wilde's image and Aestheticist emblems to sell anything from cigars and corsets to 'bosom beautifiers'.[22]

Wilde's ambitious desire for social and professional recognition rendered him complicit with the commodification of his public image, which only increased his visibility and consequently fed back into the amount of 'celebrity capital' he could claim.[23] A characteristically playful letter to Norman Forbes-Robertson from May 1882 reveals Wilde's crucial awareness that, in an emerging mass media society, such a prized, since multiply

convertible, form of capital could be made and unmade by the forces of commercialization and the extent of media circulation:

> I am now six feet high (my name on the placards), printed it is true in those primary colours against which I pass my life protesting, but still it is fame, and anything is better than virtuous obscurity, even one's own name in alternate colours of Albert blue and magenta and six feet high.[24]

The celebrity capital accumulated by Wilde was no doubt rooted in performance, self-display, commodification and the construction and cultivation of his public persona, but it also resided in his calculated negotiations between elitism and populism, art and fashion, public and private worlds, which is strikingly reflected in his works and their potential of multiple signification and interpretability. It has been shown by Josephine Guy and Ian Small in *Oscar Wilde's Profession* (2000), their compelling analysis of the structural and material parameters of Wilde's writing career, that the author, in his pursuit of literary celebrity, '[was] more conformist than rebel, much more complicit with, than critical of the commercial interests of late nineteenth-century British literary and theatrical culture'.[25]

Essentially, his craving for recognition and commercial success as a dramatist demanded a certain degree of accommodation to market dynamics and rendered him susceptible to artistic compromise, in order to placate the conservative tastes of late-Victorian upper and upper-middle class theatergoers. Wilde's popularity as a dramatist in the 1890s was thus firmly based on the author's versatility and chameleon-like ability to adapt; he masterfully understood not only how to please by taking the edge off the rebellious anti-philistinism propagated in his critical essays, but also how to tease by way of subtle subversion of social gesture and convention. After *Salome* (1891), Wilde's society comedies and their surface image of conforming—and thus appealing—to mainstream audience tastes provided him with a welcome stage of self-representation, which allowed him to bathe in the spotlight of public acclaim, and even endowed him with a modicum of middle-class respectability.

It could be argued that Wilde's conscious appeal to a broad public, based on his profound understanding of the dynamic interplay of celebrity authorship, literary artefact, medium, marketplace and audience, lies at the heart of the continued popularity of his society comedies as easily marketable theatrical commodities and classics of comic theater. Wilde's 'form of controlled innovation, […] falling somewhere between bafflement and

boredom', that is to say, his skillful maneuvering between conformism and subversion, conventionality and innovation, has proved amenable to combining audience appeal with critical acclaim and scholarly debate.[26] Moreover, it has lent itself to what might be labeled the 'muted eccentricity' of an interpretive approach that teams up a semi-conventional directorial concept with a sound (celebrity) acting performance in an attempt to steer a commercially viable middle course between the reassuringly familiar and the radically new.

However, the cultural iconicity and afterlives claimed by Wilde and his works are by no means exclusively informed by the author's dexterous self-advertising and astute literary pragmatism. Indeed, Wilde's case points towards the tension between individual agency and framework, active authorial self-fashioning and audience appropriation, which is inherent to the production and consumption of literary celebrity. What has ultimately sealed his celebrity status and conspicuous idolization by contemporary literary and popular culture is a seemingly inextricable interdependence of life and work, a tangled web of art, biography and politics, which feeds a perpetual cycle of critical, scholarly and artistic reassessment and resignification. According to Matthew Sweet's ingeniously graphic simile, Wilde's public persona displays an eerie resemblance to 'those bendy chaps in the Karma [*sic*] Sutra', acrobatically twisted and turned into a most obliging signifier of a whole range of postmodern intellectual, socio-cultural and ideological concerns.[27] 'Precarious, unstable, double-edged',[28] prone to eternal flux and redefinition, the perpetually mask-switching author has, by now, performed a successful transition from public figure to 'the public itself',[29] which is both cause and symptom of his reincarnation as a focus of postmodern preoccupation.

Characterized by 'self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement',[30] postmodern thought and culture have enthusiastically embraced Wilde as 'the proto-dandy, the proto-individual, the proto-homosexual, the proto-camp, the proto-outcast, the proto-victim, the proto-socialist', all of which neatly adds up to his reinvention as a 'proto-postmodern'.[31] It is precisely Wilde's transgressions of the divides between high and popular culture, the instability and malleability of his reputation that connect him with twenty-first-century concerns and sensitivities. As Neil Sammells suggests:

> Wilde seems close to us partly because he grapples with contradictions we have yet to resolve. While proclaiming the importance of individualism, he

> nevertheless recognizes it as problematic and indeterminate. He champions self-fashioning while undermining the sense of self. These contradictions can be seen as reflective of his historical moment, as symptomatic of an emergent Modernism seeking to extinguish a fading Romanticism. But they are also inherent to Postmodernism.[32]

Founded upon contradiction and elusiveness, Wilde's pliable public image lends itself to the creation of a 'reusable' cultural icon, which invites refashioning and strategic contextual appropriation as the main currencies of canonical survival.[33] In his specific case, the myth-making impact of tragedy, victimization, social ostracism and early death is exacerbated by the intimate link between the author's disastrous fall from grace and the issue of sexual revelation, which holds the promise of authenticity, of excavating an individual's 'true' and stable self behind the mask of public performance.[34] This quest for the 'real' Wilde must thus be located in the larger context of Western society's fascination with the ritualistic dimension of confession, which is where, according to Foucauldian analysis, 'truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret'.[35] Such contemporary Wildean resurrection projects undertaken by academia, literature, political pressure groups and popular culture have invariably led to his vigorous reappropriation as a high-profile standard-bearer by previously marginalized groups in an attempt to heal what Julia Wood has called 'the wound of lost community': through an iconic figure of dissent who has come to represent the collective plight of outcast identities, a sense of belonging and affirmation within a wider cultural and political context is recovered.[36] Work in the field of memory studies has shown how these communities have been engaged in forging a 'counter-memory', based on previously lost or hidden histories, and challenging dominant representations of the past.[37]

Thus, the 'New Importance of Being Oscar' that has gained momentum in the course of his busy cultural afterlives over the last two decades, has sparked a vivid debate over the author's cultural legacy. Hinting, in mock exasperation, at the frantic cultural reclamation business that experienced its first peak in 1995—'Oscar's year of respectability'—Peter Millar comments: 'It seems the gods will spare poor Oscar nothing. Activists from distinguished thespians to militant gay rights campaigners and Irish nationalists are struggling over the corpse in an effort to rehabilitate him to their own purposes on the centenary of his disgrace.'[38] Indeed, both the 'Gay Wilde' and the 'Irish Wilde' continue to dominate posthumous

cultural interpretations of Wilde, as distinctly politicized master narratives have been called on to explain the antinomian and subversive quality of his writing in terms of his sexual and national dissidence. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the English actor Rupert Everett should have taken advantage of the publicity generated by his attendance at the Père Lachaise reopening ceremony of Wilde's tomb to emphasize Wilde's significance as a gay martyr and 'patron saint of anyone who feels a bit outcast. […] What you know about Wilde is about injustice and being brought down'.[39] The event itself in fact was a remarkable instance of Wilde's 'Irishing', as the restoration project had been financed by the Irish government in what Brian Hayes, Irish Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Fine Gael politician, at the time grandly proclaimed to be 'a responsibility to the great Irish writers, no matter where they are in the world'.[40]

Just as institutions, individuals and events all have the capacity of assuming the roles and functions of 'agenda-setters of cultural remembrance',[41] literary texts powerfully participate in 'the important work of shaping and producing cultural memory'.[42] Biofictional representations of historical figures in particular have been shown to be influential tools of resurrection, posthumous image-making and resignification, 'engag[ing] in a double conversation with their subject's life, times, and works, on the one hand, and [their] own cultural moment, on the other'.[43] The past thirty years have seen a proliferation of biographical author fictions and this ongoing fascination with authorship plausibly suggests that the author's fiercely proclaimed demise in literary theory 'has been greatly exaggerated, or, conversely, that the threat has breathed new life into the idea of the author'.[44] Defying poststructuralist skepticism towards the authorial voice in literary criticism, audiences' obsession with the author as a figure 'who can be ritually resuscitated, murdered, mourned and praised' seems to be rooted in the fact that, as Cora Kaplan observes, they 'do require an extra-textual, embodied subject, a life that can represent a kind of prequel or sequel to the work, something, anyhow, supplementary to it'.[45] Similarly, Wenche Ommundsen, in her discussion of literary celebrity, argues that the personality cult surrounding the author hinges on readers' perennial desire for both identification and possession, and their preoccupation with the 'paradoxical relationship between the mundane reality of the living (or once living) writer and her/his ghostly (but no less real) reality' as an 'appendage to a body of writing'.[46]

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that in today's increasingly 'star-centred economy',[47] which has given rise to a '"meet-the-author"

culture' of literary festivals, prize ceremonies and bestseller lists, the author has metamorphosed into an ever more busily marketed and fetishized object of commodification.[48] Writers of biofiction thus both contribute to and regularly take advantage of the 'star appeal' and 'promotional capital' of widely circulating literary brand names.[49] Their choice of subject may be conditioned by economic factors and the assumed guarantee of audience interest in a widely known historical author figure, but it also takes into account the fact that the extent of the subject's fame enables the recipient's active participation in the biographical process: 'It is only from this common ground that the voyeuristic dimension can be opened up—in the sense of showing the respective artist-figure in a "new" or "different" light.'[50] As Marie-Luise Kohlke has demonstrated in her attempt at categorizing Neo-Victorian life-writing, such 'celebrity biofictions' frequently offer alternative 'versions of individuals' lives to those represented in mainstream biographical and/or literary histories'; they aim at recovering the unrecorded histories, intimate desires and injuries of their well-known subjects, who, in the process get '"Othered", complicated or re-interpreted from latter-day perspectives', such as queer theory, feminism, Marxism or postcolonial theory.[51]

As a 'sexual and social signifier of infinitely deferred meanings', and therefore a multiply appropriable cultural icon, Wilde undoubtedly constitutes an ideal subject of fictional biography.[52] The tragic rise-and-fall pattern of a life where, as in the case of Byron, '*bios* without the artistic element already represents a (mostly) sensational story of its own',[53] speaks to the voyeuristic potential of the genre that crucially relies on the subject's celebrity factor as a canonical author and notoriously scandal-ridden public and private persona.[54]

The long shadow of the celebrity author: Thomas Kilroy's Wildean bioplays

The bulk of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century biofictional resurrections of Wilde, comprehensively investigated in several studies,[55] neatly corresponds to the agenda of Neo-Victorian fictional biography, which 'highlights tensions and discrepancies between public and private personas, with transgressive desires providing a frequent focal or fissure point'.[56] Credited with 'exposing past iniquities' and raising 'important questions of social justice',[57] Neo-Victorian reassessments of nineteenth-century subjects conspicuously reflect the concerns of the

late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century 'political moment', affected, more often than not, by the 'social movements around gender, race and sexuality'.[58] Unsurprisingly, then, the renewed surge of interest in Wilde's life and work in the discipline of literary studies from the early 1980s onwards, variously triggering queer, postcolonial or materialist critical re-evaluations, went hand in hand with a string of biodramatic takes on the author, many of them clearly building on the momentum of the Wildean centenary commemorations in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Plays such as Terry Eagleton's *Saint Oscar* (1989), Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* (1997), David Hare's *The Judas Kiss* (1998) and Moisés Kaufman's *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1998) all reflect a general tendency of postmodern author fictions to dethrone and humanize their artist subjects and to present them as private human beings with all their strengths, faults and weaknesses.[59] They construct and culturally solidify Wilde's image as a homosexual icon, a victim of social convention, blind fatalism and a severely lop-sided relationship, or as a sacrificial scapegoat for playfully mocking the English colonizers from within their own ranks.

Lindsay Adamson Livingston argues, in her exploration of the possibilities for biographical representation in Wildean bioplays, that the genre is particularly suitable for the treatment of a mercurial figure like Wilde, as the specificities of the theatrical medium allow for the 'interplay of multiple narratives, identities, and sites of subjectivity'.[60] The 'liveness' of physical performance, immediacy and fragmentation facilitate the breaking up of narrative linearity and thus avail of a greater freedom to represent a 'certain facet of the historical Wilde, one shard of his fragmented identity', eventually resulting in the 'interrogation of biography, history, image, and textuality through the deconstruction of received notions of Oscar Wilde and his history'.[61]

Particularly radical forms of questioning and filling in the gaps in the traditional narratives of the subject's well-researched life can be found in those Wildean bioplays that ostensibly deflect the audience focus from Wilde himself and aim to redirect it to a set of previously silenced or neglected characters. Kilroy's *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde* (1997) and *My Scandalous Life* (2004) both depart from the majority of biodramatic treatments of Wilde by illuminating the lesser-known perspectives of Constance Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas respectively, and by exploring the 'family privacies behind the very public Wilde story'.[62] Therefore, they participate in what Marie-Luise Kohlke has identified as one of the dominant Neo-Victorian sub-genres, the 'biofiction of marginalised subjects',

which is frequently characterized by a pronounced ideological commitment to the mission of recovering 'lost' voices and to reinstating their historical relevance.[63] Kilroy emphasizes in 'The Wildean Triangle', his essay on the genesis and stage realization of *The Secret Fall*, that he, in his approach to writing historical biofiction, is repeatedly drawn towards the 'gaps in the historical record', which open up 'ways of intervening in the story, where you're free to imagine what actually happened. It's a kind of restoration of what has been lost, not through the research of a biographer or historian but through imaginative reconstruction.'[64]

This revisionist agenda neatly applies to Kilroy's portrayal of Constance Wilde, which is essentially guided by his attempt to lend substance to 'a shadow in the familiar story of [Wilde's] brilliant career as a wit and dramatist, a forgotten presence behind his collapse and imprisonment'.[65] Kilroy's project of redressing the balance by refashioning received historical representations of Constance Wilde involves the central character's vehement rejection of her invention as the 'good woman' and the revelation of her own secret, which turns out to be her traumatic experience of childhood abuse at the hands of her father. It is suggested that her marriage to Oscar Wilde is rooted in some unconscious, fatal gravitation towards the evil and transgressive, while her husband has pedestalized her as an epitome of purity and perfection, a 'sister' and soulmate not 'contaminated by life' who embodies his craving for innocence restored.[66]

Yet, despite the play's objective of dragging Constance Wilde from out of her famous husband's shadow and reshaping her image as a passive victim, it seems that it cannot evade the towering and all-pervasive iconic appeal of Oscar Wilde. Effectively, it is his character who remains an all-domineering, ubiquitous presence throughout the play, and it is only through him that Constance manages to reveal her secret and confront the uncomfortable truth about herself and her attraction to her husband.[67] In fact, it has been argued that the text reinscribes Constance Wilde's marginal position by 'condemn[ing] [her] to the role of [Oscar Wilde's] Other', a 'fixed and stunted being' firmly anchored in realism, while Wilde remains the creative genius and liberated, free-thinking hedonist.[68] Kilroy's play reflects a tendency to 'produce a binary opposition between (male) creativity and (female) reality, (male) invention and (female) responsibility',[69] which hints at a complex paradox inherent to biofictions of marginalized subjects, one that is especially poignant when the genre overlaps with the tenets and agendas of celebrity biofiction. In those cases, the focus is placed on the alternative perspectives offered by 'ex-centric

figures' on the lives of the famous individuals 'they serve to throw into relief'.[70] According to Kohlke, 'this produces a sort of centripetal instead of the desired centrifugal reaction', resulting in a rediscrimination of marginalized lives, now reduced to mere fig leaves of latter-day socio-political and cultural agendas.[71]

Kilroy's Constance Wilde essentially retains her 'wife-of-a-celebrity-voice',[72] just as she remains the 'Wife to Mr. Wilde', as the title of an early draft of the play, marked 'November 95', revealingly suggests.[73] The uncertainty about the character's ambivalent role and position within the dramatic structure also becomes strikingly obvious in a letter to the playwright by Judy Friel, then artistic director of the Abbey Theater in Dublin, in which she raised some pertinent questions about the play's double-edged strategy: 'Is Constance on stage because of what she might illuminate for us about her brilliant husband? Is she a new mirror for Wilde?'[74] In spite of Kilroy's well-intentioned recovery mission, the central character to her seemed passive, undeveloping, essentially undramatic: '[I]t is clear who Oscar (and, indeed, Bosie) would like her to be, but I'm not sure who she is. Or, should that, too, be explored? How can she bloody exist without Oscar?!'[75]

Irrespective of Kilroy's own agendas and the potentially limited degree of their successful implementation, Friel's reservations might be understood from the vantage point of a theater manager who was trying to run a viable business venture and whose programming policy would therefore not be immune from commercial considerations. In fact, Kilroy's play had been commissioned by the Abbey Theater with the idea to get its own share of publicity and audience interest amidst the wave of theatrical tributes commemorating the 1997 centenary of Wilde's release from prison. With Wilde's martyrdom and victimization once more entering a glaring public limelight, it seems hardly surprising that even though *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde* set out to 'deny Wilde the one-man show he so often sought to represent his life as',[76] a fair amount of the critical and audience attention it received relied on Wilde's literary celebrity status. John Peter's comment in the *Sunday Times* indicates as much, when, following the play's première during the Dublin Theater Festival in October 1997, he elaborated on Wilde's astonishing transformation into a cultural myth:

> Thomas Kilroy's new play at the Abbey […] confirms that Oscar Wilde has become more than what cultural gossip columnists call an icon: he is now a figure of mythology. Icons are for worship, or at least for uncritical

> admiration: they are answers to a direct need. Icons are one-dimensional. Mythological figures are much more complex. They are characters in stories which can be told, retold, reshaped, reimagined. Being implicated in the lives of others and being multi-dimensional in themselves, they have shadowy areas, multiple motivations, secrets. All mythologies are, in one sense, about secrets.[77]

What the genesis, production history and reception of Kilroy's Wildean bioplays most strikingly reveal are the complex dynamics between celebrity biofiction, a larger agenda of cultural commemoration and reassessment, and the more mundane, commercial objectives of the theatrical marketplace. *My Scandalous Life* was, just like *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde*, specially commissioned, this time by the Oscar Wilde Centre for Irish Writing at Trinity College Dublin, to mark the anniversary of Wilde's death. In this case, Kilroy opted for an even more radical departure from the familiar structural and thematic patterns of Wildean biodrama by writing a monologic one-act chamber piece that turns the spotlight on Wilde's *amour fou*, Lord Alfred Douglas. Old, fragile and embittered, his rant forever veers between fits of dawning recognition and defiant self-deceit, his life tragically haunted by Oscar Wilde, who features as a monumentally looming presence by absence.

Without doubt, the play's unusual theme and format made it a difficult one to sell in the theatrical marketplace, but it seems that its fortunes primarily suffered from a veritable overkill of Wilde's celebrity presence on stage, an 'over-saturation' that had occurred during what had effectively turned into 'the year of Wilde, both in terms of his public profile and his commercial value'.[78] Revealingly, Kilroy's agent Tom Erhardt, writing to him in October 2000, was doubtful about the play's chances of stage production without making a conscious attempt to fall back upon the genre's in-built predisposition to function as a 'star vehicle':

> I hate to sound negative, but I think there's just too much Wilde at the moment. I think your best bet is to get a name actor interested, as that might help encourage someone to do it here. […] [M]aybe the critics are just tired of plays on the subject. *Judas Kiss* didn't get great reviews either but they had Liam Neeson, which helped.[79]

Ironically, the fact that the Irish actor Liam Neeson played the leading part in David Hare's *The Judas Kiss* at the Almeida Theater in 1998 triggered many of the production's unfavorable reviews, precisely because of the

illusion-breaking potential of celebrity acting. As Michael L. Quinn has argued, 'celebrities come equipped with an intertext that includes several levels, only the most obvious of which is the conjunction of art and life in a particular role'.[80] The audience's familiarity with Neeson as a heterosexual star actor, mostly type-cast for playing staunchly masculine characters, meant that, in their perception, his interpretation of Wilde was invariably 'ghosted' by his previous acting record,[81] resulting in a 'slippage between source and presentation'.[82] Despite the obvious dangers and pitfalls inherent to celebrity acting in biofictional works, Kilroy apparently did not feel he could bend the rules of a star-system-run theater industry and tried—unsuccessfully, though—to get such illustrious thespian legends as Simon Callow, Michael York or Fiona Shaw interested in the project.[83] Writing four years after the rehearsed reading of the initial two-act version of the play at the Abbey Peacock Theater in December 2000, Patrick Mason thought that the commercial viability of *My Scandalous Life* crucially relied on 'the casting of a really star player as Bosie. […] What you may need to do is to interest your star (don't we all!), and then get the interest of a small theater like Hampstead or the Almeida.'[84]

Thomas Kilroy's second biofictional engagement with the hidden histories behind the well-publicized facts of Wilde's life may have been aimed at undermining the perennial predominance of the star author by breaking out of the spectrum of biofictional resurrections, invariably located between the two poles of hagiography and dethroning. Its (mis) fortunes in the theatrical marketplace,[85] however, strikingly expose the irresistible audience appeal of the famous individual, but also the danger of over-familiarization and weariness that sets in with what Pierre Bourdieu has described as the 'routinization of production', which is directly related to the frequency, intensity and duration of the public circulation of an author, work, theme or image.[86] In the face of Wilde's ubiquity on the Anglophone stage in the wake of his *fin-de-millénaire* centenary celebrations, it seemed that the allure of literary celebrity required the additional marketing strength of the celebrity actor.

Conclusion: a fruitful co-authorship

Vacillating between merciless self-castigation and the eager wish to salvage the remaining dregs of self-respect from the ruins of a shattered existence, Wilde wrote in *De Profundis*: 'I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me.'[87] In an age when

demographic, social, economic and technological transformations contributed towards a more democratic accessibility of fame, no longer exclusively dependent on social status, merit or wealth but on mass-mediated visibility and public display, Wilde lost no time in artfully constructing and promoting his celebrity persona. Thus, the notorious dandy-aesthete and would-be poet prominently features at the very heart of London's artistic coteries in William Powell Frith's 1881 painting *The Private View at the Royal Academy*, which might be read as a satirical comment on late-Victorian celebrity culture. Surrounded by a rapt audience of (largely female) star-struck admirers and suspiciously eyed by the respectable doyens of the Victorian cultural establishment, Wilde performs an act of blatant self-display, but at the same time readily makes himself available for objectification and commodification as he becomes 'as much an object for viewing as the pictures on the wall'.[88]

In the face of Wilde's unbroken cultural prevalence, it seems that the author appeals to the imagination and myth-making tendencies of our century as much as his own, since he resists fixity and finite interpretation and perpetually invites the audience to become co-authors in the ongoing process of adapting and reinventing his mercurial public image. From its very beginning, Wilde's career was based on mask-switching, performance and the collapsing boundaries between reality and fiction, sincerity and artificiality. As Shelton Waldrep has shown in his book-length study of Wilde's impact on forms of twentieth-century celebrity self-fashioning, his 'trajectory was not toward some ultimate being—some essential or irreducible self—but the beginning in earnest of a system of becoming, of transformations of self that left any belief that there could be a natural, stable Oscar Wilde in doubt'.[89]

Wilde's celebrity undoubtedly rested upon his unique ability to 'deliberately construct […] himself as a surface onto which his contemporaries could project their ideas', but, as he was to experience painfully, he was by no means the sole author of his reputation.[90] In the project of controlling his public persona, his individual agency got hopelessly embroiled in the tangled forces of ideology, social convention, sexual politics and cultural myth-making, drawing attention to the highly porous dividing lines between celebrity, notoriety and infamy. After his death he has gradually been transformed into a singularly pliable icon that readily lends itself to a wide range of critical, historical, political and aesthetic appropriations. Indeed, biofictional (re)interpretations of Wilde's life and work profoundly capitalize on their subject's celebrity status and appeal, but they

also present a vital factor in fueling posterity's Oscar Wilde resurrection project, which has been in full swing ever since it was memorably charged with religious symbolism in the final chorus of Terry Eagleton's *Saint Oscar*: 'His tomb it lies in Paris, if you visit it one day / Sure you'll find the place is empty and the stone is rolled away.'[91]

Notes

1. Wilde 1994b, p. 301.
2. Kaye 2002, p. 347.
3. Lucia Krämer's (2005, p. 365) article offers a discussion of Wilde's appropriation as an English heritage object in the wake of the centenary commemorations of his trials and death. Krämer argues that, despite charges of blatant commercialisation, reductionism and the perpetuation of cliché, heritage representations of the author mirror the mercurial public persona cultivated by Wilde during his own lifetime and can be related to his playful negotiations of the elitist and the middle-brow.
4. Kettner's, the iconic London bar and restaurant, prides itself on a cocktail menu 'inspired by the characters of Kettner's scandalous past' and pays tribute to one of its most notorious former patrons with its 'signature "High and Wilde" bellini' (Kettner 2015).
5. Filmic treatments of Wilde's works include Oliver Parker's *An Ideal Husband* (1999), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2009); Mike Barker's film adaptation of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Good Woman* (2004); and, most recently, *Wilde Salomé*, Al Pacino's experimental documentary on his long-standing fascination, both as an actor and a director, with Wilde's symbolist tragedy, which was presented at the 2011 Venice International Film Festival and released in the UK in September 2014. Gerald Barry's operatic version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* experienced its UK stage première in June 2013 at the Royal Opera House.
6. Walshe 2011, p. 86.
7. Wood 2007, p. 91.
8. For a discussion of Wilde in the context of contemporary literary memorial culture, see Mayer 2014.
9. See Kingston (2007, p. 228) for a list of more than eighty novels and short stories, published between 1900 and 2006, which feature some kind of Wildean fictional appearance and thus strikingly document the author's 'cultural permanence'.
10. Marshall 2006, p. 320.
11. See Savu 2010, pp. 13, 31.

12. This article draws on archival research undertaken at the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway, which was kindly supported by The Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies at National University of Ireland, Galway. For permission to quote from the Thomas Kilroy Archive, I wish to acknowledge the James Hardiman Library.
13. Brandreth 2008.
14. Sloan 2003, p. 169.
15. Denisoff 2007, p. 39.
16. Friedman 2014, p. 31. In this context, see also Fomichenko 2013, p. 4.
17. Boorstin 1992, p. 57.
18. Goldman 2011, p. 23.
19. Mendelssohn 2013, p. 139.
20. Wilde 2000, p. 127.
21. See for instance John 2010, pp. 133–142; and Moran 2000, pp. 16–18.
22. Friedman 2014, p. 97; Litvack 2013, p. 41.
23. See Driessens (2013, p. 552), for a definition of 'celebrity capital' as 'recognizability, or as accumulated media visibility that results from recurrent media representations'.
24. Wilde 2000, p. 168.
25. Guy and Small 2000, p. 12.
26. Gillespie 1996, p. 85.
27. Sweet 2007.
28. Eagleton 2004, p. 61.
29. Stokes 1994, p. 173.
30. Hutcheon 1995, p. 1.
31. Middeke 2002, p. 210.
32. Sammells 2000, p. 127.
33. Dougal 2012, p. 11.
34. Wood 2007, p. 15.
35. Foucault 1990, p. 61.
36. Wood 2007, p. 25.
37. Rigney 2005, p. 13.
38. Millar 1995.
39. Quoted in Alberge 2011.
40. Quoted in MacCormaic 2011.
41. Erll and Rigney 2009, p. 2.
42. Mitchell 2010, p. 178.
43. Savu 2010, p. 13.
44. Kaplan 2007, pp. 70–71.
45. Kaplan 2007, pp. 79, 77–78.
46. Ommundsen 2004, p. 56.
47. English 2005, p. 56.

48. Todd 1996, p. 100.
49. Wernick 1993, p. 93.
50. Huber and Middeke 1995, p. 135.
51. Kohlke 2013, pp. 7, 8.
52. Schiavi 2004, p. 400.
53. Huber 1999, p. 93.
54. Krämer 2003, p. 34.
55. For comprehensive studies of Wilde's treatment in twentieth-century biofictional writing, see Krämer 2003; Haase 2004. Offering a 'prequel' to Krämer's and Haase's research, Angela Kingston's work on *Oscar Wilde as a Character in Victorian Fiction* (2007) is based on over thirty literary appropriations by Wilde's contemporaries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
56. Kohlke 2013, p. 7.
57. Kohlke 2008, pp. 5, 10.
58. Kaplan 2007, pp. 86, 45.
59. See for example Franssen and Hoenselaars 1999, p. 12; Middeke 1999, p. 10; Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2005, p. 57.
60. Adamson Livingston 2009, p. 30.
61. Adamson Livingston 2009, pp. 28, 29.
62. Kilroy Archive P103/255 (2), Thomas Kilroy, undated statement.
63. Kohlke 2013, pp. 9–11.
64. Kilroy Archive, P103/247 (2), p. 2.
65. Kilroy Archive, P103/247 (2), p. 2.
66. Kilroy 1997, p. 22. See also Lanters 2010, p. 274.
67. McMullan 2002, p. 133.
68. Robinson 2011, pp. 40, 39.
69. McMullan 2002, p. 136.
70. Kohlke 2013, p. 11.
71. Kohlke 2013, p. 11.
72. Kilroy 1997, p. 30.
73. Kilroy Archive, P103/236 (1).
74. Kilroy Archive, P103/240 (15).
75. Kilroy Archive, P103/240 (15).
76. Roche 1998, p. 14.
77. Peter 1997.
78. Krämer 2005, p. 360.
79. Kilroy Archive, P103/255 (14).
80. Quinn 1990, p. 158.
81. See Carlson 2003.
82. Adamson Livingston 2009, p. 21.
83. Kilroy Archive, P103/255 (11) (Fax Simon Callow to Thomas Kilroy, 28 June 2000); Kilroy Archive P103/264 (3) (Letter Michael York to Alan Brodie, 5 July 2001); Kilroy Archive P103/264 (5) (Letter Fiona Shaw to

Thomas Kilroy, 11 December 2001). While all three actors expressed their interest in playing Douglas, they variously voiced doubts about type-casting and cross-dressing projects or suggested that the play might be better suited as a radio drama.

84. Kilroy Archive P103/264 (6).
85. *My Scandalous Life* experienced its only full-scale production to date by the Irish Repertory Theater in New York City in 2011, albeit with the part of Eileen, Douglas's wife's Irish maid, turned into another speaking part.
86. Bourdieu 1996, p. 253.
87. Wilde 1994a, p. 1016.
88. Shires 1995, p. 201.
89. Waldrep 2004, p. xi.
90. Krämer 2005, p. 365.
91. Eagleton 2004, p. 55.

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7

Production and Reproduction: Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)

Rod Rosenquist

The identity of Gertrude Stein—high-modernist author, Paris salon-hostess and American celebrity—was the subject of much speculation throughout her career, especially in the wake of her bestselling volume *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). While numerous mass-media journalists quoted her and speculated about her writing or her personality, and while her publisher would label her 'the publicity hound of the world', Stein herself would retreat inward, suggesting that as others increasingly recognized her, 'Well you see I did not know myself […] So many people knowing me I was I no longer.'[1] This tension between the private Stein and the public Stein—that 'there are two Steins', as a photograph she was sent would lead her to observe—provides the focus for a number of studies of her role in modernist culture both as author and celebrity.[2] Bryce Conrad (1995), Steven Watson (1998), Kirk Curnutt (2000), Alyson Tischler (2003), Loren Glass (2004), Karen Leick (2009), Deborah M. Mix (2010), Jonathan Goldman (2011), Timothy Galow (2011) and others have written about Stein's self-staging, her persona as author or as central figure of modernism, or about her engagements with

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popular culture, mass audiences and the marketplace. That Stein was a major celebrity as well as an author of some of the most provocative aesthetic writings of the early twentieth century is clearly established in critical studies. But Stein as public figure has, not only now but even early in her career, attracted almost as much critical notice as her famous modernist style, to the point where a 2014 book carries the subtitle *Returning to the Writing of Gertrude Stein*.[3] There are two figures, then: Stein the writer and producer of literary texts and Stein the star author, a celebrity produced through recognition of her literary value and through her publicly-performed personality.

This understanding of celebrity as both a producer and product of promotional value in a mass-media age has also been well-documented. Graeme Turner uses the idea to structure the whole of his volume *Understanding Celebrity* (2004/2014), with separate sections on 'Production' and 'Consumption' to underline the celebrity as commodity. Richard Dyer, often credited with the formation of celebrity studies as a critical discipline, makes the same principle the foundation of his introduction to *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), using Eve Arnold's photograph of Joan Crawford from 1976 to represent the various portraits of a celebrity—as one who labors to produce the star image, but also as one who is produced by the mediation of the image to fulfil the social expectation of an audience.[4] That Arnold portrays multiple Joan Crawfords in a single image is crucial to Dyer's description of a celebrity as defined simultaneously by the individual, by media and by the audience, for the celebrity ultimately plays multiple roles as producer, as means of production and as product itself. David Marshall cites Foucault's 'author-function' as an important idea for understanding the meaning of the celebrity figure, recognizing the agency of the celebrity person and their capacity for producing their own meaning, but also the social discourse that sustains or denies the celebrity value of the individual person.[5] The celebrity as both producer and as product has even been applied specifically to modernist authorship in relation to stylistic techniques, gender and the private–public divide.[6]

Indeed, this dual nature of the celebrity is actively played out in the career of literary modernists in general and Stein in particular. In the case of Stein, however, there appear to be numerous instances of contemporary recognition of the phenomenon. The idea that there were two Steins is not uncommon now, but was even more widely recognized at the time her career was developing, evident in personal correspondence, in public writings and performances, in gossip columns and in cartoons and

caricatures. Borrowing from theoretical ideas on the production of celebrity value from the critics mentioned above, and with special attention to Walter Benjamin's contemporary ideas on reproduction in an age of mass markets, this chapter seeks to reveal just how far Stein sought to establish her celebrity persona, how far this persona was proliferated and duplicated by mass-media representations and how far the representations of dual Gertrude Steins reflect the tensions inherent in celebrity authorship in more general terms. It is clear that Stein was always interested in an audience who would consume her work, reinforcing for her the value of her literary production; but it is also clear that she was disturbed by what resulted from her authorial celebrity. Once she was a product for reproduction, proliferation and consumption, new questions of identity, authenticity and value in the literary sphere arose. Before Foucault asked 'What is an Author?', Stein, faced with the very real problem of having her aesthetic production overtaken by a mass-reproduced persona of the celebrity author, asked: 'I am I why.'[7] While the latter question might be asked by any human being, this chapter will argue that it certainly applies to literary celebrities surrounded by reproductions of their work, their styles, their persona and personal image, and that Stein in particular was subjected to repeated duplication and intense proliferation of her authorial, public and personal identities.

Stein's literary production and journalistic reproduction

Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) mentions Stein a number of times, but primarily in sections of the study dedicated to collaborative and promotional networking, or what he calls 'Authorship to deliver Publicity'.[8] Stein certainly belongs in discussions of this sort, but she would equally provide a clear demonstration of what Jaffe terms the authorial 'imprimatur' in the modernist period, a trademark style or 'textual signature' that functioned by 'hybridizing bodily agency and textual form'.[9] Stein's unique prose style was easily recognizable and widely quoted in mass media outlets, leading to the adjective 'Steinese' to describe her technique—a word already in use, as Alyson Tischler has shown, as early as 1914.[10] Clearly Stein's style of writing was not only capable of attracting notice, but distinctive enough to promote its author as a unique figure in early twentieth-century literature. It was also in 1914

that Stein's second book, *Tender Buttons*, was first published, a volume which still appears avant-garde more than a hundred years later. Printed in a limited edition of 1,000 copies, Stein's experimental prose poems were so unlike anything then published that her remarkable style instantly became 'news'. As Leonard Diepeveen has shown, during 1914, 'every newspaper editor in the United States seems to have assigned someone to the *Tender Buttons* beat'.[11] This small volume of obscure modernist text became a national event, according to Diepeveen, because of new channels of distribution, the media sensation of a unique style and reportage based on expansive quotation. In other words, while Stein labored over the production of her unique and innovative style, her celebrity imprimatur, the mass media reproduced this unique trademark style through citation, parody, plagiarism and far-reaching distribution into places remote from the centers of modernist experimentation. The result was that Stein became a celebrity, not due to an interested audience reading her literary productions, but due to the highly mediated forms of their journalistic reproductions.

Tender Buttons could be described as a text that few Americans in 1914 wanted to read and even fewer could find, but one that was reviewed by an enormous range of publications across the nation, almost all of which warned their readers *not* to read it by offering a large enough sample of the most obscure lines to intrigue and baffle readers. Stein was well aware of the fascination she induced, as evident from her lecture tour of the United States in 1934, where she recalls that 'they wanted to know how I had succeeded in getting so much publicity, I said by having a small audience'.[12] Stein's success follows the model of modernist mutual engagement with public culture and elite authorship established by Lawrence Rainey in *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), where the market value of modernist works is closely linked to how limited or obscure they are. However, as Karen Leick makes clear, there is still a tendency to consider her celebrity as a product of her bestselling *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, despite the fact her trademark prose had already made her a celebrity nearly twenty years before her bestseller was published.[13] Stein may not have been widely read until her *Autobiography*, but she was certainly well-known before she was widely read. It was her imprimatur that allowed her work to be so extensively reproduced, despite its failure to appeal to a larger audience and despite the limited quantities available.

If the production of her stylistic imprimatur, however, allowed her to be quoted and parodied as a celebrated trademark style, its reproduction

raised new questions about the value of her art, even after her celebrity had been confirmed with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. While one can trademark or copyright a brand or a publication, Stein's technique—the distinctive style labeled Steinese—could be reproduced without sanction. In fact, the lampooning of Stein's distinctive language, rather than the employment of serious review, was a popular pastime and the source of much journalistic humor, as Stein herself acknowledged in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: 'Getting reviews was a difficulty, there are always plenty of humorous references to Gertrude Stein's work, as Gertrude Stein always says to comfort herself, they do quote me, that means that my words and sentences get under their skins although they do not know it.'[14] As this comment makes clear, Stein took comfort in her influence and her renown, but was troubled by the ridicule to be found in certain parodies. Still, as a majority of the reviews of her bestselling *Autobiography* were quick to point out, Alice B. Toklas's voice was easier to read and more straightforward in syntax and punctuation. The imprimatur, previously underwritten by the name of Gertrude Stein, appeared to be undermined by the announcement that the autobiography belonged to Alice. The style, while easier to read, was still distinctive, however, and once it became common knowledge that the work was produced by the famous author of *Tender Buttons* and other obscure works, the tendency toward parody and imitation of style regained momentum in the popular press. Lucy Van Gogh, for instance, in the *Toronto Saturday Night* offers a whole review attempting to replicate Stein's language from *The Autobiography*. She finishes with a typical run-on sentence, summarizing her intent in the review: 'It is very confusing. When I began this review I was trying to make my sentences passionate and not bothering about paragraphs and I think the first sentence is rather good anyhow it is just the same as the first sentence of Alice only the place is different and a little better.'[15] Whether the place or the sentence is 'a little better' than Alice's is left ambiguous, but clearly this reviewer believes that Stein's imprimatur is capable of duplication, if not improvement. And she is not alone.

In fact, it was a common enough reviewing tactic that one month after publication of the first edition of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the publishing firm Harcourt, Brace felt obliged to put out a press release, announcing that the book was indeed 'written in Gertrude Stein's own and actually inimitable style', but going on to claim that 'every reviewer has partially or entirely, consciously or unconsciously, been influenced by that style. They imitate, echo, mock, applaud, experiment, perorate, and

try again—in Gertrude's style'.[16] The tensions between the production of a unique imprimatur and the reproduction of the more generic Steinese is readily apparent in Harcourt's advertisement, where the 'inimitable' style is not only a singular influence on popular culture but is subject to, in their own words, imitation. The question raised, then, is whether an inimitable style, a unique, trademarked literary voice, can be recognizably imitated, duplicated or otherwise reproduced? The truth is, Stein's style is both difficult to imitate (at least adequately), but so distinctive that even a poor pastiche is recognizable as hers. Yet this raises another question: if reproduced widely and regularly, can that style still be called 'hers'? Just as Stein comforts herself that 'they do quote me', indicating that her style is infectious and influential in the public sphere, there is the evident discomfort implied by her phrasing. Clearly, she is troubled to find that she is misunderstood or ignored, but also, perhaps, by the fact that the reproduction of her style is carried out in her name. Even the worst parody or mockery of her stylistic imprimatur is still carried out under the label of Steinese. It is as if, in getting 'under the skin' of the reviewers, Stein finds her own 'inimitable' style or authentic voice is overwritten by the proliferation and reproductions of the popular press.

A discussion of reproduction and authenticity during the continued emergence of mass media in the 1930s must draw on Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. It was first published shortly after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Stein's celebrity lecture tour of the United States, and just prior to her second autobiography, which reflects in depth on her identity, celebrity and popular reception. These contemporary texts in some ways speak to each other, particularly with reference to the production of works of art and the emergent mass media that threaten them through reproducibility and proliferation. While Benjamin refers more particularly to the reproduction of art through mechanical duplication, including photography and film, his comments on the aura of the work of art and its authenticity when widely dispersed through the media are very relevant here.

In his essay, Benjamin writes: 'The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.'[17] In the case of Stein, however, the original was markedly *not* present, in more ways than one: her work was the product of an impersonal high-modernist, resident of far-off Paris, and originally available only in limited quantities. As Diepeveen has pointed out, her earliest readers, facing the remarkable proliferation of Stein's textual production, were regularly unsure how to read the original,

openly questioning her sincerity or authenticity.[18] The journalistic tactics of mass quotation and stylistic parody were ultimately the result of uncertainty as to whether Stein herself should be taken seriously as a producer of authentic art. Yet the light-hearted pastiche and mockery also had the effect of calling into question the authenticity of her celebrity imprimatur. For as Benjamin goes on to say, even when mass reproduction and proliferation 'may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated'.[19] In other words, Stein's style was promoted and celebrated by its wide distribution—even when the reproduction was in mockery—but often at the expense of her own production of authorial imprimatur.

Still, reproduction and the loss of authenticity or aura, as described by Benjamin, is hardly a uniform and consistent effect of the emergent media, and in some ways plays into the hands of authorial celebrity. For example, Marjorie Perloff quite rightly questions Andreas Huyssen's assertion that 'by exhibiting a mass-produced urinal as a fountain sculpture, Duchamp succeeded in destroying what Benjamin called the traditional art work's aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness', by pointing to the persistent aura of Duchamp's mass-produced (and then reproduced) 'Fountain' in the world's art galleries.[20] Naturally, Duchamp's treatment of the mass-produced object as a work of art called into question the authenticity or aura of art works in general, but simultaneously it sustained Duchamp's own authenticity as artist, elevating the art object that was originally indistinguishable from others produced by the same factory—first through the signature attached and the manner in which it was displayed at the Society of Independent Artists, then through the wider social recognition of Duchamp's status as artist and the place his work takes in the history of art.

In many respects, Duchamp was one of the first to call attention to the aura of the artist as producer of value, what Foucault would later call 'the author-function', as opposed to an emphasis placed on the work of art as product of artistic labor. Stein's prose style nevertheless works in an inverse manner: produced as a labored, trademark style, but then reproduced in the mass media in order to question its authenticity as the sincere voice of an artist. If Stein's style can be copied in such ignoble ways by such evident non-artists, one might ask, how can it be authentic? Benjamin would suggest that such mocking reproductions diminish the aura of Stein's work, the product she offers as author. One could also argue, however, that they manage to promote her image as authorial producer of artistic values

through the proliferation of her imprimatur, and via her celebrity status as author. Thus, Stein's trademark style may be depreciated through its reproduction, but her name and image as author *appreciate* with every recurrence of someone else's tribute to or parody of Steinese.

In many ways, Stein herself called attention to this process of authentication in her manner of composition and presentation of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. In taking on Toklas's voice, she is already calling into question the authenticity of an artist's role in the discourse that supports the celebrity author-function. Stein is naturally the subject of the volume and her role at the center of modernism serves to promote her own authorial personality and positioning. Thus, in two ways, Stein serves as author of the bestselling volume—both as writer and as the authorial figure serving as the book's focus. But what is regularly missed by those parodists of the new volume of Steinese is that, though Stein's celebrity underwrites the text, Toklas must be considered the author of her own autobiography, by definition of that term. There are questions, even, as to Toklas's involvement in the composition or the style of the book, as Richard Bridgman has outlined.[21] The question of authorship was an issue especially for the earliest readers of the book, as it was sent first to Stein's agent, then to her publishers, and finally printed without reference to her own imprimatur; there was no mention of Gertrude Stein on the cover or the title page of the first-edition. Against this background, the parodying of the Alice B. Toklas style seems that much more perplexing, especially with the prevalent mood of the reviewers being summed up by the repeated observation across newspapers that, at last, Stein was lucid. Yet if the prose technique is neither entirely owned by Stein, nor overly obscure, nor subject for the kind of mockery reserved for more unorthodox texts like *Tender Buttons*, what is the purpose of the stylistic reproduction? Part of the answer surely has to do with journalistic habit; this is the mainstream response to a Stein work. But the parodies also signal that Stein has, after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, become more than a singular trademark style owned by her: she has turned into a larger brand of unorthodox style that belongs to everyone. Steinese is both a distinctive, original form of artistic production belonging to a self-professed genius and a readily-available mode of reproduction signaling a token engagement with the emerging cultural manifestations of the period.

The reviews of *The Autobiography* therefore continue to be written in long, loopy sentences making a show of reproducing Stein's style. Paul Rosseter, for example, has a column in *The Daily Journal* of Sturgis,

Michigan, in which he offers a pastiche of Stein's book throughout, concluding with this: 'After this comes the end of the book, which you know is definitely the end because the last page of the book is a facsimile reproduction of the first page of the book which leaves you exactly where you started with a cosy feeling about it all.'[22] From an aesthetic point of view, this may be poor parody, but it does call attention to, firstly, how Stein's repetitive style becomes lazily reproduced, and, more importantly, to Stein's own use of mechanical reproduction in the first edition of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. If Stein refused to place her own name on the title page of her partner's memoirs, the famous closing lines of the book do reveal her authorship, with Alice narrating Stein's words: 'I am going to write it for you. […] And she has and this is it.'[23] The original manuscript of the *Autobiography*, however, reveals that she initially had in mind to include a signature line, 'Sincerely Yours, Alice B. Toklas', intended to effectively erase Toklas's imprimatur as forged by Stein.[24] However, in the first edition, as Rossetter brings to light in his review, Toklas's signature line is replaced with a photographic reproduction of Stein's own autograph copy of the famous first page. This compels the reader who (Stein had hoped) had not yet determined the authorship of the volume to return to the *Autobiography* a second time in order to read the text previously narrated by Toklas in her voice, now under the sign of Stein's authorship, as if in her handwriting. The production of the *Autobiography* thus ensured that Stein's imprimatur, even from within the soulless journalistic reproduction of her style or the mechanical reproduction of her handwriting, retained a certain aura.

'There are two Steins': celebrity reproduction and duplicate images

That the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* altered Stein's public image and her reception is an understatement, and much of her literary production after her bestseller was dedicated to working through the tensions of a public expectation for the engaging and accessible celebrity figure and her own need to continue her pursuit of difficult, often unpopular literary arts. This was a tension Stein felt keenly, as Lucy Daniel outlines in her biography: 'Later Stein would admit that in writing *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* she had "lost her personality". Properly speaking Stein became a personality and lost her identity.'[25] This is an important distinction, as Stein's problem with identity in the wake

of *The Autobiography* was not that she had no personality, but that, as this section aims to reveal, she was sometimes subject to the public personality projected on her personal life. Instead of no personality, Stein had multiple, sometimes competing, reproductions of her personality played out in the press and other media. As Daniel goes on to say: 'Stein packaged herself so successfully that she lost control of herself as a commodity.'[26] Stein as writer of *The Autobiography* had projected Toklas as author, as we have seen, but had staged herself using the celebrity author-function, setting up a proliferation of Stein figures in the process.

The multiple Steins are apparent in some of the earliest visual depictions of Stein's popular success, as two newspaper cartoons demonstrate. Irma Selz's cartoon, published in the *New York Post* from 14 September 1933, directly comments on the composition of *The Autobiography*, depicting Stein the writer facing Stein the authorial figure or literary celebrity (Fig. 7.1). The caption, 'Gertrude Stein interviews herself about "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas"', clearly plays on the dual nature required of Stein by the book's approach, where authorship is not only the act of composing text but also that of performing the role of the author-function. The cartoon is more than a commentary on the author's dual role within *The Autobiography*, however, for it also comments on Stein's public self-promotion and her own involvement in the mediated celebrity image. Stein the writer, seated on the right in this particular image, is not the stylistic genius of the Stein imprimatur, but merely a servant of the other Stein, the celebrity personality whose private self is made public by the scribe. The author, in interviewing herself, has now taken on the role of journalist, Selz appears to suggest. In adopting the new autobiographical style that appeals to a wider audience and promotes the celebrity figure who has already by this time become detached from her obscure writing, Stein is herself responsible for her own reproduction.

In another caricature commenting on the publication of the *Autobiography*, published in *Chicago Daily News* on September 20, 1933, Roy C. Nelson similarly reveals a duplication of Stein figures placed next to each other, emphasizing the dual nature of the author's image (Fig. 7.2). The emphasis has shifted, however, as there are no longer two equally animated, human figures, but one living Stein and one idol to which she pays homage. The accompanying text once more labels the author 'the inimitable Stein', despite the fact the caricature reveals the author bowing before a sculpted imitation of herself—the real Stein here subjecting herself to her own image, the celebrity author as object.

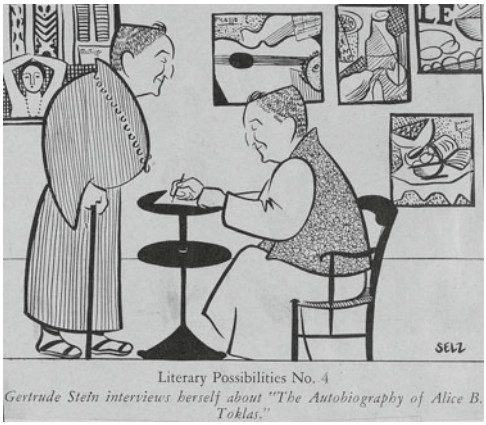

Fig. 7.1 Cartoon by Irma Selz, 'Literary Possibilities No. 4: Gertrude Stein interviews herself about *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*', *New York Post* (September 14, 1933, Beinecke YCAL MSS76) (Reproduced with permission of Beinecke)

Many reviewers focused on this objectified image of the genius, displaying ambivalence as to whether Stein's work was actually legitimate art or not, but certain that Stein was, as well as a self-absorbed egotist, an influential figure in modern culture, a powerful personality deserving of the public notice. As Sterling North writes in the review accompanying Nelson's caricature: 'There was a lady loved a lady and both ladies were Gertrude Stein. We hasten to admit that she had reason. She profoundly influenced the second and third generations of 20th Century American writers.'[27] North first calls attention to the dual roles Stein plays, both as object and as subject of veneration, but also reminds readers that she is a deserving object. This is not to say that North, who would publish his first novel the following year, affirms that her trademark style is the work of genius, but simply that she is an acknowledged influential figure within the emerging literary history of the century—a public figure of literary value and a celebrity author of note.

This double role of literary genius and public celebrity was increasingly the part Stein was forced to play after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas.* Just as she had finally given in to write her memoirs, she relented at last to public demand and to the desire of her agent to tour the United States. As Stein recalls in *Everybody's*

Fig. 7.2 Cartoon by Roy C. Nelson, 'At the Shrine of Stein', *Chicago Daily News* (September 20, 1933, Beinecke YCAL MSS76) (Reproduced with permission of Beinecke)

Autobiography (1937), she initially declined for a very specific reason: 'And Mr. Bradley said I was making a mistake and I said no, Jo Davidson always said one should sell one's personality and I always said only insofar as that personality expressed itself in work. It always did bother me that the American public were more interested in me than in my work.'[28] Here, Stein herself acknowledges the two sides of her personality, one represented by her work as writer, and one represented by her celebrity position as notable personality. She remembers being aware of the dangers of appearing in the media as celebrity author, a public image distinct from her textual body, even before the publication of *The Autobiography* had so profoundly placed her celebrated personality next to her personal expression in text, effectively separating and duplicating the public image of herself. However, the insight that this effect has everything to do with

the nature of twentieth-century celebrity appears lost on Stein, as she ultimately offers her fame as the reason for her agreement to the lecture tour: 'I used to say that I would not go to America until I was a real lion a real celebrity at that time of course I did not really think I was going to be one. But now we were coming and I was going to be one.'[29] Once Stein's *Autobiography* had made her 'a real celebrity' through that text's promotion of herself as author/personality, in other words, she was willing to accept the invitation to tour America, somehow unaware that this would inevitably increase her chances of the American public being more interested in her personality than in her work. In reality, she was not as prepared as she remembers here, for once she had arrived in the United States with 'real celebrity' fanfare she discovered that it was not her work that would be the center of attention.

It was not just print journalism that began to reveal the kinds of reproduction of Stein's identity that would result from her position as celebrity author. For example, Stein was quite clearly shaken by her experience in Times Square, when she encountered the electronic moving sign repeating the phrase: 'Gertrude Stein has arrived.' Still, it must be made clear that it was not the celebrity promotion of her authorial self that made her uncomfortable. As she acknowledges in *Everybody's Autobiography*, there are many benefits of 'being a celebrity and all the privileges of being that thing'.[30] She does not mind being recognized by strangers on the street, even when they have not read her work. She relates the man selling fruit in a store who knows her name and says: 'How do you do Miss Stein […] He was so natural about knowing my name that it was not surprising and yet we had not expected anything like that to happen.' But recognition is only half of celebrity for Stein, as she goes on to say: 'And then we saw an electric sign moving around a building and it said Gertrude Stein has come and that was upsetting. […] Of course it happened to me pretty often [seeing her own name unexpectedly] and I like it to happen just as often but always it does give me a little shock of recognition and nonrecognition.'[31] Recognition is a natural product of her self-promotional efforts in *The Autobiography*, but the unnatural reproduction of her name in electric lights, repeated endlessly in a parody of Steinese, leads to shock. Despite the fact that this shock too relates to her self-promotion and celebrity persona, Stein experiences it as 'nonrecognition', mainly because it is coldly detached from the direct, human interaction ('How do you do Miss Stein') that she desires. Stein the private person looks upon the public authorial name in lights and for a moment does not recognize it herself,

such is the power of celebrity reproduction to alienate the writer from the effects of their own imprimatur.

In his essay on the loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin writes of 'the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction'.[32] Stein's experience of Times Square is an instance of the reproduction, not of the work of art, but of the artist herself, where the name Gertrude Stein signifies more than the private person, more than the authorial text, and reaches into the mass-produced signification of a public persona, constructed and owned not by the individual but by those who desire to get 'closer' to the celebrity author. Of course, Benjamin writes mainly about the work of art, but that his essay extends to the celebrity persona is clear from his discussion of film actors. In particular, Benjamin discusses the alienation effect of the film actor in front of the camera in terms that reflect Stein's experience in front of her own name reproduced in lights. Benjamin characterizes the actor in terms of an 'estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror'. Once captured on film, his or her 'reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public'.[33] Indeed, it is the public reproduction of Stein's celebrity name and authorial image that most disrupts Stein's expectations for her promotional tour, because her imprimatur is entirely removed from the textual page and reproduced electronically as a brand label and a sign of her public personality. Her image has become separated from her work, just as *Everybody's Autobiography* claims she had predicted, transported by the electric sign before the public but rendered via this mediation into a persona alienated from herself.

Besides newspaper articles and electronic signs, there were other media that made Stein feel uncomfortable during her tour of the United States. Early on her tour she was asked to perform radio and other media engagements, but since she was the subject of these live broadcasts, she could not encounter her own persona objectively through its reproduction. However, recorded film—the newsreel—was another matter. As she relates in *Everybody's Autobiography*:

> When we first arrived in New York I did make an actuality of reading the Pigeons On The Grass and taking off my glasses and putting them on again while I was doing that thing, and it was given in the cinema theatres

> everywhere and everybody said everybody liked it but we had not gone. So finally Pathé asked us [when at Warner Brothers in California] when they heard we had not gone to come and see it all alone. We went to their place and there it was and when I saw myself almost as large and moving around and talking I did not like it particularly the talking, it gave me a very funny feeling and I did not like that funny feeling.[34]

Stein appears to offer no regret for making the film, and she is happy when others enjoy the 'actuality' of her reading the famous, baffling lines from the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (as well as offering her own cryptic explanation, according to reports).[35] Yet once she is witness to her own mass-reproduced self, 'large and moving around and talking', she feels estranged from her own public image, just as Benjamin described the effect of film on the actor two years earlier. The two Steins, the writer and private person in the audience and the celebrity author mass reproduced through the newsreel, come together in a way unsettling to Stein, as the writer shrinks into the darkness of the theatre and the mass-reproduced personality brings the work before a public far removed from the author's original mode of production. Even as the voice remains hers, it loses its aura through reproduction.

It is in this way that Stein felt she had 'lost her personality' just as it grew increasingly visible to the public. The aura of her literary production was first undermined by journalistic proliferation and parody, then erased by the mass reproduction of her celebrity personality. As Benjamin remarks about the personality culture surrounding the film actor: 'The film responds to the shrivelling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star […] preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality", the phony spell of a commodity.'[36] Stein's celebrity was pleasurable to her when it meant increased attention from individuals, but disturbing when it transformed her into a mass-reproduced object before a public, at least when extended to the point where interest in her work was diminished and 'the spell of the personality' took over everything. As she would write in *Everybody's Autobiography*: 'You are of course never yourself.'[37] But despite the anxieties it caused her, Stein's celebrity led, both directly and indirectly, to some of her most fascinating writing about identity and the public/private self. Being a public figure is not always a burden, as she claims in *Everybody's Autobiography*: 'Everybody continued to know me and that

continued to be a pleasure.'[38] In fact, as she goes on to say, her celebrity image led to an encounter with a stranger, Donald Vestal, stopping her on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. When she asked him about his 'satchel of a funny shape', he showed her his marionettes, then later writing to ask her for a 'marionette play' for his puppet theatre project funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).[39] Stein offered him 'Identity, or I am I because my little dog knows me', a spare, repetitive treatise on identity and recognition. As well as the 'characters' required by Stein's script, Vestal added two further marionette figures, one named 'Gertrude Stein, a playwright' and the other 'Gertrude Stein herself' (Fig. 7.3). Once more Stein finds herself in duplicate, reproduced this time in the art of modernist puppetry—designed by WPA puppeteers, hand-carved from wood, works

Fig. 7.3 Two Gertrude Steins in Donald B. Vestal's performance of *Identity: A Play*. Photograph from the Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, Beinecke YCAL, Box 130, Folder 2824. Courtesy of the Estaty of Gertrude Stein (Reproduced with permission of Beinecke)

of art decidedly not mechanically reproduced—to enact her own play, a text in the style of her more obscure utterances, twice performed in Detroit. Stein would later remember that Vestal 'sent me photos of it and they are rather touching, there are two Gertrude Steins and they are rather touching'.[40] In this case, she was neither entirely disturbed by her celebrity nor by her reproduction, as they were connected to her private self and her textual body in some fashion. But when her personality was detached from her work or from her person via mechanical reproduction or mass media representation, however, she felt estranged from herself and bound by an audience to the public image of her celebrity. One of Stein's most-quoted lines, first heard in 'And Now', but repeated in *Everybody's Autobiography* and giving her marionette play its subtitle, is that 'I am I because my little dog knows me'.[41] Yet as *Identity: A Play* makes clear via the duplication of Stein puppets, identity can be reproduced in so many different manners that even a dog cannot be trusted to reaffirm one's sense of self. For, as Stein says in that play: 'I am I has really nothing to do with the little dog knowing me, he is my audience, but an audience never does prove to you that you are you.'[42]

Conclusion: Stein's afterlives

Even if an audience was incapable of proving her identity to her, Stein became the kind of public figure whose identity was regularly reproduced before mass audiences, as we have seen, both during her life and after. Stein chose only one reproduction of herself to closely relate to her identity, her portrait painted by Pablo Picasso in 1906. She would say of this painting, only eight years before her death: 'I was and I still am satisfied with my portrait, for me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me.'[43] Stein, in her self-construction via *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, naturally makes this portrait central to the ongoing narrative of Stein and Picasso's intimacy, but one of the earliest mentions of this portrait in the memoirs relates to the perception that the portrait does *not* accurately capture her identity—at least not at that time. Alice, having shared with Picasso that she liked the portrait, records his reply: 'Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said.'[44] This is a remarkable prophecy, for, of course, Picasso's portrait would circulate as one of the most common public images of Stein leading up to her *Autobiography*, to the point where

this single work of art was likely more widely known than the individual who sat for it, as Noel Sloboda has observed.[45] Picasso's reproduction of his friend, painted before either had become celebrities, endures long after both are dead as a key illustration of Stein's involvement in the early developments of modern art.

During her lifetime, Stein's image was also captured by other painters, including Francis Picabia and Félix Valloton, by the sculptor Jo Davidson and by Man Ray's photography, all works of art that continue to represent Stein's involvement in the Paris cultural sphere. In fact, one of the most intriguing representations of the endless reproduction of Stein's image is the Man Ray photograph of Jo Davidson working on his famous sculpture of Stein, with the celebrity author herself observing from behind him, assuming the same squatting position as the stone object before her—a photograph apparently taken, according to Wanda Corn and Tirza True Latimer, while Man Ray was on assignment from *Vanity Fair*.[46] Stein's death, however, hardly brought an end to her artistic reproduction. Corn and Latimer's major exhibition 'Seeing Gertrude Stein' revealed the extent to which other artists continued to reproduce her celebrity image long after her literary production had ceased. As Latimer suggests in a section of their book entitled 'Legacies':

> Today, Stein's collaborators include global art stars, cultural critics, feminists, performing artists, and queers whose interventions have expanded her artistic authority. Many consider themselves Stein's progeny. They have interpreted, appropriated, cited, parodied, emulated, critiqued, and revitalized Stein's oeuvre and rehabilitated her persona.[47]

Yet the nature of her rehabilitation is a significant question. Stein never fully faded from public attention and the value of her *literary* production is rarely the subject of these posthumous 'collaborations', as Corn and Latimer see them. Instead, we find Stein's celebrity image repeatedly reproduced in many works of art, from further caricatures and humorous sketches by David Levine (1966), Red Grooms (1975), Tom Hachtman (1979–1984) and Edward Sorel (1988) to reproductions of Picasso's iconic image of her—the one which, he predicted, would one day represent her—reused in works of art by Robert Rauschenberg (1969), Deborah Kass (1991), Faith Ringgold (1991) and Devorah Sperber (2006).[48] The most famous reproduction of Stein's personal

image in contemporary art is Andy Warhol's *Gertrude Stein* from 1980, using screen-printing techniques to reproduce a public image of her via her French identity card, as Edward Powers has shown.[49] While her celebrity value is regularly engaged by these posthumous works, there is hardly a rehabilitation of her individuality, her personality or her textual body.

Similar reproductions exist in popular film, including Woody Allen's 2011 romantic comedy, *Midnight in Paris*. Gertrude Stein, played by Kathy Bates, figures prominently as a main character, center of the Parisian circle of artists and writers that time-travelling Gil Pender encounters at midnight while on holiday in that city. While various historical figures make cameo appearances, including Picasso, Djuna Barnes, Man Ray, Josephine Baker and a rhinoceros-obsessed Salvador Dali, Stein's character serves to carry forward the plot, obligingly reading multiple copies of Pender's novel and offering encouragement and managing to progress a number of scenes. Sadly, a casual viewer of *Midnight in Paris* would have little sense that she was herself a writer with a singular style. The character of Ernest Hemingway, who provides a role of comparable size to Stein's in the film, is allowed more than one moment of stylistic, literary expression, impressing the lines spoken by his character with his trademark imprimatur—and offering, at times, a recognizable pastiche of the Hemingway style. Yet Bates's Stein hardly conveys any particular style or aesthetic influence, offering none of the famous lines of Steinese that had originally made her famous, so that her celebrity imprimatur in the film is limited to personality merely. Consequently, she serves as little more than a symbol of 1920s expatriate life and salon art.

It appears this was Stein's fate after *The Autobiography*, when she had first packaged and produced herself as celebrity author. After this point, her mass-market image became increasingly linked to her celebrity personality rather than to reproductions of her trademark prose—to encounters with Picasso, to driving her Ford, sitting in a birdbath or wearing a basket on her head, as she is reproduced in both Roy Nelson's caricature and Sylvia Beach's memoirs. Stein the literary artist—the reason she had become a celebrity in the first place—had, and in some respects still has, disappeared behind the image she produced of herself, ultimately suffering an estrangement from her own persona as she watched it reproduced many times across a range of media.[50]

Notes

1. Cerf 1977, p. 102; Stein 1974, p. 63.
2. Stein 1993a, p. 211.
3. Boyd and Kirsch 2014.
4. Dyer 1986, pp. 1–2.
5. Marshall 1997, p. 57.
6. Jaffe 2005; Goldman 2011; Hammill 2007; Rosenquist 2013.
7. Foucault 1998; Stein 1993b, p. 591.
8. Jaffe 2005, p. 94.
9. Jaffe 2005, p. 3.
10. 'New York Letter', a clipping from an unrecorded publication found in Beinecke's Yale Collection of American Literature (YCAL), quoted in Tischler 2003, p. 16.
11. Diepeveen 2008, p. 199. On 'Books and News', see also Leick 2009, pp. 9–16.
12. Stein 1993a, p. 292.
13. Leick 2009, p. 8.
14. Stein 2001, p. 262.
15. Van Gogh 1933.
16. Harcourt 1933.
17. Benjamin 1999, p. 214.
18. Diepeveen 2013.
19. Benjamin 1999, p. 215.
20. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (1986) quoted by Perloff 2005, p. 1.
21. Bridgman 1970, pp. 209–217.
22. Rossetter 1933.
23. Stein 2001, p. 272.
24. Dydo and Rice 2003, p. 537.
25. Daniel 2009, p. 156. The actual quote is 'I lost my personality' in Stein 1974, p. 63.
26. Daniel 2009, p. 156.
27. North 1933.
28. Stein 1993a, p. 51.
29. Stein 1993a, p. 173.
30. Stein 1993a, p. 172.
31. Stein 1993a, p. 180.
32. Benjamin 1999, pp. 216–217.
33. Benjamin 1999, p. 224.
34. Stein 1993a, p. 288.
35. Leick 2009, pp. 166–168.
36. Benjamin 1999, p. 224.
37. Stein 1993a, p. 70.

38. Stein 1993a, p. 209.
39. See Bell 2006 for full details.
40. Stein 1993a, p. 211.
41. Stein 1974, p. 63.
42. Stein 1993b, p. 593.
43. Stein 1938, p. 8.
44. Stein 2001, p. 16.
45. Sloboda 2008, pp. 21–22.
46. Corn and Latimer 2011, p. 45.
47. Corn and Latimer 2011, p. 275. The exhibition at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2011) and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC (2011–2012) provided an impressive range of images from Stein's life and into the present, still accessible at http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/stein.
48. All these works are reproduced in Corn & Latimer's final section, 'Legacies' (2011, pp. 274–333), an invaluable resource for surveying Stein's afterlife.
49. Powers 2014.
50. Research for this chapter was generously funded by a Donald C. Gallup Fellowship in American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscipts Library at Yale University, who also provided the images. Thanks also go to Tom Engelhardt for allowing use of the Irma Selz caricature.

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8

The Silence of the Celebrity: J.D. Salinger (1919–2010)

Gaston Franssen

Thomas Reed Whissen's book *Classic Cult Fiction*: *A Companion to Popular Cult Literature* (1992) includes an entire chapter dedicated to J.D. Salinger, and even the opening sentence of its preface evokes the figure of this celebrated author, whose novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) touched the hearts of so many readers.[1] 'Ask anyone to name a cult novel and the answer you are most likely to get is *The Catcher in the Rye*', the author writes in his chapter on Salinger's debut work.[2] Whissen has, of course, a valid point and the prominence that he grants in his book to this classic work of American literature illustrates how its author went down in literary history: Salinger is considered to be a 'cult author'.

Indeed, the components that go to make up cult literature according to Whissen can be easily identified in both the work and the reception of Salinger: on the one hand, the appearance of an alienated and suffering character in a work of fiction, and on the other hand, the profound emotional impact of this character on large numbers of equally alienated and suffering readers, who find themselves reflected in the mirror that the book holds up to them.[3] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of*

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Young Werther (1774) fulfills these same criteria, as does Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Holden Caulfield, the soul-searching protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, is also an angry, sensitive and vulnerable character who struck a chord with many readers. Consequently, Salinger's novel became the sort of book that Holden himself would have appreciated: one that, 'when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it'.[4] However, following the novel's publication Salinger soon discovered, much to his dismay, that he had become exactly that: an author that his readers consistently called upon.

Yet labeling Salinger as a cult author is more an act of a mystification than a real explanation for his success. In fact, it is debatable whether he can be considered a cult writer at all. Cult status tends to be awarded to a work or an artist that provides a particular group of individuals with the means to construct a shared, subcultural identity, or to engage in a politics of oppositional taste.[5] In other words, cult practices are forms of resistance, however paradoxically, to both mainstream cultural production and the official culture of critics, connoisseurs and the canon. Admittedly, many readers in the early 1950s may have recognized an oppositional stance in Holden's chafing critique of all things insincere, but as a form of literary production, Salinger's work was quickly accepted into mainstream culture as well as the literary canon.

A closer look at the start of the author's career can serve as an illustration of this. Even before the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, screenwriters Julius and Philip Epstein, famous for *Casablanca* (1942), had already adapted Salinger's story 'Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut' (1948) for the big screen.[6] The result, *My Foolish Heart* (1949), was crushed by the critics, but the fact that the story was believed to be material for a commercial film production points out that the producers trusted it to find favor with a mass audience. The tremendous impact of *The Catcher in the Rye* two years later was undoubtedly a result of the emotional appeal of the main character, but a crucial element of its success was that the novel was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1951. Salinger's biographer Kenneth Slawenski notes that 'the selection would guarantee the novel instant popularity and was a publicity coup bar none'.[7] The book appeared on the 1951 *New York Times* bestseller list, and was to remain there for seven months.[8] It was praised by literary reviewers, who labeled it 'unusually brilliant' (*The New York Times*), 'remarkable and absorbing' (*The Saturday Review*) and 'literature of a very high order' (*San Francisco Chronicle*).[9] Moreover, critics such as Ihab Hassan, Arthur Heiserman and

James E. Miller were quick to reframe the novel ideologically as a 'national allegory' and a tale of American heroism, thus smoothing out any countercultural edges.[10] By 1961, it was selling 250,000 copies per year, while Salinger's new stories were being published 'in the highest-paying and most widely read magazines of the day'.[11] Since the 1960s, *The Catcher in the Rye* has become compulsory reading at countless high schools, colleges and universities. Against the background of this bestseller success, literary acclaim and rapid canonization, it becomes difficult to support a notion of Salinger as a cult author: the author's cultural status can hardly be compared to the underground appeal of typical 'cult' products, such as b-movies, punk rock or pulp fiction classics.

What is it, then, that endows a successful, culturally consecrated and ideologically malleable figure like Salinger with such an appeal? The answer to this question lies firstly in acknowledging that Salinger has become a literary celebrity. Celebrity studies scholars such as Richard Dyer and P. David Marshall have argued that celebrity is a discursive construction of a particular form of subjectivity. Dyer describes the celebrity as a 'sign', an intertextual construct consisting of 'media texts'—images of celebrities and statements made by them and about them, which are produced and consumed by a particular audience.[12] The star itself is not deprived of agency, but 'the audience', Marshall writes, 'is central in sustaining the power of any celebrity sign'.[13] Dyer and Marshall argue that celebrities play an important role in the construction of individual identity. 'The celebrity', Marshall writes, 'is an embodiment of a discursive battleground on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture'.[14] In the case of literary celebrity, the norms that are fought over are those of authorial subjectivity: literary celebrity raises the question of what it means to be an author in contemporary society.

Secondly, in order to understand Salinger's appeal, it is imperative to investigate the role of his legendary reclusiveness—the most important component of his celebrity sign. The story is well known: after a youth spent in high society circles and a phenomenal debut novel, Salinger started to withdraw from the limelight. He turned down interview requests, recoiled from any form of media attention and ensconced himself in his cottage in Cornish, New Hampshire. Dedicating himself to yoga, Zen Buddhism and Vedanta Hinduism, Salinger continued writing fiction, but stopped publishing his work. The author's reticence, however, only made him more famous. It led to a stream of gossip and speculations about his life and work, and drew intrigued fans to Cornish, hoping to get a glimpse

of their idol. Shrouding himself in silence, Salinger continued to speak to the imagination. His life became the topic of numerous biographies and memoirs, his authorial persona was a source of inspiration for other novelists, and many lines from *The Catcher in the Rye* found their way into film scenes and pop songs, ultimately becoming part of the fabric of public consciousness. Thus, it is Salinger's refusal of celebrity that constitutes his particular appeal.

This chapter will focus on the remarkably rich afterlife of Salinger's celebrity sign. In the first section, the construction of Salinger's authorial persona is charted—how, after the author's withdrawal from public view, his reclusiveness became his most important trademark. The second section examines how the author's refusal to give in to the demands of literary celebrity intensified the affective and semantic potential of his image: by refusing to meet the expectations of his audience, Salinger opened his authorial persona up to a wide range of interpretations. The section goes on to describe how this open-ended celebrity sign was interpreted and appropriated in critical and scholarly literature as well as popular culture. Subsequently, it is argued that the audience's investment in Salinger's persona is a characteristic form of fandom, in particular an expression of the practice of celebrity gossip. The final section explores how the varying interpretations of Salinger's authorial persona resonate in complex ways with his own literary reflections on success and celebrity. As will become clear, the author's critique of fame and success was overshadowed by his public persona, thus becoming part and parcel of the celebrity culture that he so radically rejected.

The birth of a literary recluse

Salinger's afterlife started not following, but actually during his lifetime. The author had retreated from public attention by the early 1960s and by the 1980s he was, as Ian Hamilton writes, 'in any real-life sense, invisible, as good as dead'. Yet his public persona continued to hold an 'active mythic force', drawing attention from readers, fans and journalists for more than half a century.[15] The richness of this afterlife is all the more remarkable when one considers that Salinger's literary career, in the strictest sense, consisted of just a handful of publications. Leaving aside the early stories from the 1940s, which Salinger did not want to be considered part of his literary legacy, as well as his last publication 'Hapworth 16, 1924' (1965), as it never made it into book form, his oeuvre consists of

one novel and four story collections: *The Catcher in the Rye* from 1951, *Nine Stories* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (1961) and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction* (1963), the combined publication of two earlier stories.

The Catcher in the Rye is narrated retrospectively by Holden Caulfield, a teenager who is deeply disappointed by the insincerity and hypocrisy—'phoniness' is the term Holden uses—of the adult world. He drops out of preparatory school and runs away to New York City. Holden roams the city and meets several characters in bars and hotels, attempting to dispel his feelings of angst and frustration. Finally, he calls his younger sister Phoebe, who entices him to meet her. They end up going to Central Park, where Holden catches a glimpse of the youthful innocence he is looking for as he watches his sister riding the Central Park carrousel.[16] Readers of *The Catcher in the Rye* eagerly awaited new stories about the Caulfield family, but the author had already turned his creative attention to a new group of characters: the Glass children, a group of highly intelligent and sensitive siblings. Their biographical details are scattered through multiple stories, so it is left to the reader to reconstruct the family history.[17] The Glass family consists of Les and Betty Glass and their seven children. The oldest is Seymour, who returns from service during the Second World War as a traumatized man: in the story 'A Perfect Day For Banana Fish' (1948), he shoots himself in a Florida hotel room.[18] Second in line is Buddy, a writer and the narrator of several of the Glass stories.[19] The first girl in the family is Boo Boo, who plays a central role in the story 'Down at the Dinghy' (1949).[20] After Boo Boo, Betty gives birth to the twins Waker and Walt, who are only mentioned in passing. The two youngest children are the main characters of *Franny and Zooey*: Zooey, the older of the two, is a television actor, and the youngest child Franny has acting ambitions as well.[21] The stories evoke the psychological and spiritual struggles of the Glass children, as they try to gain a foothold in a world that they find to be as phony and shallow as Holden deemed it to be.

Naturally, the above summary does no justice to Salinger's stylistic craftsmanship, nor to the psychological depth of his work. *The Catcher in the Rye* alone, for instance, has been the topic of an impressive number of articles, theses and papers, and has proven itself worthy to withstand a wide variety of critical approaches throughout the decades.[22] The point here is that in terms of characters and events, Salinger's oeuvre can be summarized in a single paragraph. The literary universe created by this author is limited to two families and is bound within the covers of four

volumes. As for biographical background information, Salinger always remained tight-lipped. Apart from a few interviews and a handful of misleading book blurbs, the author refused to give his readers any clues for an autobiographical reading of his work. Thus, Salinger's audience did not have much to go on: to construct the author's celebrity sign, they had to make do with limited resources. Except from the collected stories, reluctant interviews and oblique blurbs, the only thing they could work with was the author's baffling silence.

It was exactly this silence, however, that readers, critics, journalists and fans turned to their best advantage. Already in the early 1950s, the public image of the author had become that of a recluse, a man publicity-shy and uncomfortable with his success. Salinger actively contributed to the formation of this image. Apparently he once confided to a fellow writer that he found publishing 'a goddamn embarrassment', adding that 'the poor boob who lets himself in for it might as well walk down Madison Avenue with his pants down'.[23] In a 1952 interview he claimed that he was 'relieved' that 'the season for the success of *The Catcher in the Rye*' appeared to be over: 'I enjoyed a small part of it but most of it I found hectic and professionally and personally demoralizing.'[24] When pressed, he would state that 'contact with the public hinders my work': 'Publication is an agonizing thing to go through. It takes at least a year and a half *after* publication to get back in stride.'[25] The last time he willingly accepted to be interviewed was 1953. Then, in 1964, he simply stopped publishing.

Salinger's emerging silence, ironically, was to set the tone for his subsequent public reception. In 1961, *Time Magazine* ran a cover story on the author, depicting him as a man leading the life of a recluse. A drawing on the front cover of the issue depicts the author standing in a field of rye, looking away from the reader. At the top of the cover, a banner reads: 'A Private World of Love and Death.'[26] Soon, the author came to be referred to as 'the reclusive J.D. Salinger', even to the extent that is has become 'impossible', as Thomas Beller observes, to discuss his life 'without addressing his reclusiveness'.[27] With his decision to keep his work to himself and steer away from media attention Salinger 'forfeited the field to speculation', Beller rightly observes.[28] As a result, the author became 'an enigmatic icon', as the blurb on an early 1962 critical anthology states.[29] Newspaper articles with revealing titles such as 'The Salinger Myth', 'The Salinger Phenomenon' or 'The Salinger Puzzle' indicate that the authorial persona of Salinger had become a cipher, waiting to be decoded.[30] The attempt to break the code and reveal the truth about Salinger became

in itself the main story—arguably the most exciting part of it. Hamilton, for example, made his failed attempt to write the author's biography the central topic of his book *In Search of J.D. Salinger* (1988), as Salinger himself had legally prevented the intended biography to be published.[31] In a similar vein, the difficult and bound to fail quest for the author became the central topic of later television documentaries, with telling titles such as *J.D. Salinger Doesn't Want to Talk* (by Sarah Aspinall, 1999).

Solving the Salinger puzzle

The search for Salinger became a central concern in the scholarly field as well. In the 1960s, the first monographs and anthologies dedicated to the author's work started to appear. Most of the early academic publications offered structuralist readings of particular stories or attempts to trace the religious or specifically Buddhist influences in Salinger's work.[32] According to George Steiner, the stream of scholarly publications was simply the result of the rising publish-or-perish culture within literary academy in which Salinger, as 'a small though clearly interesting fish', offered a chance for a quick publication 'with few footnotes'.[33]

Whether Steiner had a point or not, the fact is that by the 1970s, the interpretive attention to the work itself dwindled, only to be replaced by a rising interest in Salinger himself as a phenomenon. Scholarly publications since the 1980s have focused not so much on *The Catcher in the Rye* or the Glass stories, but on the elusive figure of their author. In *Star Authors* (2000), for example, Joe Moran presents Salinger as an example of a writer that unsuccessfully tried to extricate himself from the machinery of literary fame. Tellingly, more extensive reflections such as Moran's, or those of Mark Conroy, focus mainly on the representation of the author in novels written by *other* writers, such as Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), Jay McInerny's *Brightness Falls* (1992) and W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* (1992), all of which evoke Salinger as a literary character.[34] In other words, in his academic afterlife Salinger has become a stock character in stories about the commercialization and mediatization of contemporary culture. The implicit author of his novels and stories has been drowned out, apparently, by the case study in the history of literary celebrity.

The debate on Salinger's reclusiveness, moreover, proves to be fueled by his absence: his persistent silence has had the effect of opening up his celebrity sign to a wide variety of readings.[35] Essentially, the author's refusal to respond opens the door for others to speculate on the reasons for his

withdrawal from the literary scene. Critics and scholars alike have suggested a variety of hypotheses and explanations, which range from the commonsense to the cynical, even to the absurd. Ernest Havemann, for instance, suggests Salinger's isolation is related to his 'almost slavish devotion to his work'.[36] Whilst, according to Tom Wolfe, the author's disappearance from the literary scene is simply indicative of 'a classic burnt-out case'.[37] Hamilton reads the author's retreat into the mountains of New Hampshire as an 'endearing imitation' of Holden's dream to build a cabin for himself in the woods.[38] Other, more spiritually oriented readers point to Salinger's interests in Zen Buddhism and Eastern religions, suggesting that these might explain the author's artistic reticence and worldly withdrawal.[39] Some explanations are more suspecting and cynical: both the Salinger biographers Paul Alexander and Kenneth Slawenski maintain that the author, precisely by playing the recluse, was actually investing in his celebrity. 'To guarantee that there was no way the public could forget him', according to Alexander, Salinger 'periodically surfaced in the press by doing something that was sure to attract publicity—giving a calculatedly strange interview [...], calling a reporter from the *New York Times* to complain about pirated editions of his short stories, and showing up from time to time at events certain to be covered in the media.'[40] Finally, some explanations simply border on the absurd: David Shields and Shane Salerno attribute Salinger's reclusiveness to a series of 'conditions', including, oddly enough, that he allegedly had only one testicle.[41] Journalistic rumors on the author's reclusiveness, and critical and academic speculations about the reasons for it, then, have become primary media texts that constitute Salinger's celebrity sign. By closing himself off, Salinger has turned his authorial persona into an enigmatic puzzle, thus inviting reader interpretations.

This mysterious quality of Salinger's authorial persona has proven to be a source of inspiration for a range of popular culture adaptations as well. Feature films such as *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993) and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), television series such as *Frasier* and *The Simpsons*, pop songs like Billy Joel's 'We Didn't Start the Fire' (1990) and Green Day's 'Who Wrote Holden Caulfield' (1992)—they all allude to Salinger and his work. One of the most exemplarily Salinger myth spin-offs, however, is *Finding Forrester* (2000), a Columbia Pictures drama directed by Gus van Sant. Sean Connery plays William Forrester, who has ensconced himself in his apartment after the overwhelming success of his novel *Avalon Landing*. Decades later, Forrester meets Jamal, played by Rob Brown, a young Afro-American student living in his neighborhood. After a rough

start, the two bond and Forrester takes Jamal, who has a gift for literary writing, under his wing. In return, Jamal entices the solitary author to leave his apartment and re-engage with the world.

The allusions to Salinger in *Finding Forrester* are clear: a reclusive author, with a name quite similar to Salinger's, who achieves fame with his Pulitzer Prize-winning debut novel. In one scene, it is suggested that the author, like Salinger, has become demoralized by the relentless attention and questions of his readers: 'The last thing I need', Forrester angrily states when questioned about *Avalon Landing*, 'is another person telling me what *they* think it is'. Finally, the film includes a scene of a literature professor pointing out to his students that *Avalon Landing* was 'the only one [the author] chose to publish, for all we know the only one he chose to write'. 'Your job over the next week', he then says to his students, 'is to read it and tell me why.' In other words, all the basic elements of the Salinger puzzle are covered. The author's persona, however, merely functions as a starting point, for the film develops according to a completely new scenario, adding a range of new elements—ethnic stereotyping, an interracial love affair, the value of keeping a promise and, of course, a happy ending. As such, *Finding Forrester* demonstrates nicely the working of the Salinger myth in popular culture: a mysterious cluster of facts constitutes the start of an open-ended scenario, upon which others can elaborate in multifarious ways.

Writing in 1959 and therefore unable to foresee how Salinger's vast and prolific afterlife would become, Steiner was, in some ways, correct when he observed the coming into being of a 'Salinger Industry'.[42] Since then, Salinger's work, authorial persona, and afterlife have merged into a reproducible and adaptable structure of signifiers. Salinger the author has been transformed into a fixed, yet open-ended, semiotic configuration that invites readers to come up with narratives of their own in order to complete the process of signification and invest the result with their personal associations. This aspect of the Salinger industry—as will be outlined in the next section—is not limited to critical interpretations or the industry of Hollywood: it is an essential element of the sensibility of fandom.

What we talk about when we talk about Salinger

Salinger is one of those authors who have an actual fan base, consisting of readers that are passionately dedicated to his work. Unique, perhaps, about Salinger's case is that some of his fans have become famous

themselves. Notorious examples include Mark David Chapman, who shot John Lennon in 1980 while carrying around a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and John Hinckley Jr.—a copy of the novel was discovered in his hotel room following his arrest for attempting to kill the American President Ronald Reagan.[43]

Of course, the majority of the Salinger fans that came to be known to the general public were far less violent. They were simply young, admiring readers, growing up in confusing times and looking for answers to difficult life questions. In Holden, and by proxy in Salinger, they found a role model: someone they could both emulate and seek out for guidance. A number of these fans have had their personal Salinger stories published. The scenario underlying these stories is often the same: it finds them driving up to the author's cottage, hoping to engage in a conversation with him. In 1978, Salinger fan Michael Clarkson drove 450 miles, hoping to meet his idol; he recounts his meeting with the vexed author in a 1979 article.[44] In the same year, C. David Heymann published about his (unsuccessful) pilgrimage to Cornish.[45] In a 1997 piece for *Esquire*, Ron Rosenbaum remembers how he once stood on Salinger's driveway, pondering the author's silence.[46] A final, more recent example is Jean-Marie Perier's *L'Attrape-Salinger* (2007), two years later re-issued as *Catching Salinger*, a documentary that follows the French author Frédéric Beigbeder as he travels to the USA to meet his literary idol. The documentary ends with the suggestion that Beigbeder walks up to the author's front door, intending to ask Salinger whether he is 'happy'.

Why are Salinger's fans so invested in his work? And why are they so eager to share their experiences with others? On closer inspection, rather than being unique, their motivations and behavior turn out to be characteristic of fandom in general. In his insightful essay, 'The Affective Sensibility of Fandom' (1992), Lawrence Grossberg charts the emotional and psychological patterns that structure such fan practices, understanding fandom as a sensibility, a 'form of engagement or mode of operation' with specific texts or cultural practices.[47] In the case of fandom, this form of engagement 'operates in the domain of affect', or what Grossberg describes as 'the feeling of life'.[48] A celebrity, a genre of music or a specific life style, in other words, offer fans opportunities for affective investments, that is, for passionate engagement with cultural forms that are significant to them and allow them to construct their own identity. Specifically, forms of popular culture can become a 'crucial ground' on which fans can construct 'mattering maps', allowing them to navigate their emotions, pleasures and experiences.[49]

For Saligner fans, the author's celebrity sign thus became such a ground for the construction of mattering maps. By engaging with the author and his work, and by sharing their experiences with others, fans turned Salinger into what Grossberg describes as 'an investment portfolio': a mattering map that told them 'how to use and to generate energy, how to navigate [their] way into and through various moods, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories'.[50] Mark Silverberg has described how *The Catcher in the Rye* indeed served this purpose for many of its readers: the novel invites 'formative responses', along the lines of 'I fell in love with that book', 'it became part of me', and 'it changed my life'.[51] Silverberg's line of reasoning can be extended to include the author's public image: the enigmatic phenomenon of Salinger invites readers and fans to respond. Looking for recognition and answers, they can easily find something with which to relate in the author's celebrity sign, as it allows for a range of interpretations. In other words, talking about Salinger is a form of talking about ourselves—of exploring new ways to shape and discuss what really matters to us.

What is more, the particular way in which readers engage with Salinger's celebrity sign suggest that they in fact take part in a form of celebrity gossip. It may seem unusual to describe a literary author's afterlife in such terms, as gossip tends to be associated with idle chatter, but the fact of the matter is that the public debate on the Salinger case is often laced with hearsay. Moreover, academic research has revealed that gossip does not always deserve its bad reputation. In her seminal work *Gossip* (1986), for instance, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that gossip has a valuable social function. She defines it as a continuum: At one extreme, 'gossip manifests itself as distilled malice' as it 'plays with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes about the motives and feelings, of others'.[52] Whilst at the other extreme, Spacks situates 'serious gossip', which exists 'only as a function of intimacy', stating: 'It takes place in private, at leisure, in a context of trust, usually among no more than two or three people. Its participants use talk about others to reflect about themselves, to express wonder and uncertainty and to locate certainties, to enlarge their knowledge of one another.'[53] In its more serious forms, then, gossip is a form of self-expression or identity construction, as well as a form of solidarity or community building. Elaborating on Spacks' definition of serious gossip, Joke Hermes argues that *reading* gossip has a comparable function. Reading gossip, she maintains, 'tends to create closeness or familiar faces in a wider world by helping the reader

to bring celebrities into her or his circle of family, friends and acquaintances'.[54] Part of the attraction of reading gossip is 'the pleasure of extending your family by including the star', as well as the promise of gaining '"secret", inside knowledge', which offers a form of satisfaction that is 'akin to the pleasure of puzzle solving'.[55] Gossiping about celebrities creates communities in which human values and emotions can be shared, discussed, acknowledged or dismissed.

In the afterlife of Salinger this form of serious gossip is clearly at work. In order to establish a connection with the reclusive author, readers attempt to draw him into their circle of friends and acquaintances through the practice of gossip. At the same time, they can indulge in the pleasure of solving the Salinger puzzle through the acquisition and exchange of 'inside knowledge'. That Salinger's readers indeed engage in this form of celebrity gossip can be illustrated by looking more closely at two examples taken from his prolific afterlife.

The first example, which highlights the close affinity between the ritual search for Salinger and the practice of celebrity gossip, is *Salinger* (2013), a project consisting of a documentary and a biography by Shields and Salerno. The 700-page biography mimics the style of the documentary—shots of talking heads, interspersed with historical film footage. Each chapter consists of a series of quotations, often no more than a single paragraph long, providing details about Salinger's life and work. The quotations are introduced only by the name of the source, his or her name capitalized, their statement quoted verbatim. At times, Salinger himself is speaking, but mostly family members or friends, while Shields and Salerno at times also contribute. Shields and Salerno claim that *Salinger* is a form of oral history, but the dominant effect of the procedure is that the reader is drawn into an ongoing group conversation. In some cases, the interviewees confirm each other, but in other cases they contradict each other and offer alternative readings. The notes at the end of the book offer sources, but it remains difficult to discern between subjective opinion, trustworthy information and historical sources. In a review of the project, Sam Leith concludes that 'the format implies that anything that has been said about Salinger, by virtue of its having been said, carries as much authority as anything else that has been said'.[56] Other critics, variously describing the book as a 'maddening biography', 'impertinent in its rush to judgments', as well as 'leering and gossipy', though harsh in their judgments, hit the nail on the head: *Salinger* is not about a quest to reveal the final truth, but a project that revels in the ongoing speculations and interpretations

of the author's celebrity sign.[57] Very much like celebrity gossip, it is not fact-finding that fuels the conversation, but the forging of an affective and moral community, one in which the participants can share emotions and opinions.

Salinger's reliance on the practice of celebrity gossip is further underlined by the large and strangely eclectic community of interviewees that Shields and Salerno have turned to. One might reasonably expect that a documentary on a famous writer would include statements from friends, family, fans and literary peers, such as Tom Wolfe or E.L. Doctorow. Rather unexpectedly, however, Shields and Salerno have decided to interview several celebrity figures as well. Martin Sheen, for example, voices his opinion on Salinger, as well as Edward Norton and Philip Seymour Hoffman. Shields and Salerno do not explain why these film stars were interviewed. The accompanying book merely states that, in order to provide a 'multilayered perspective' on Salinger, 'more than two hundred people' were interviewed, including 'many prominent figures who discuss his influence on their lives, their work, and the broader culture'.[58]

On closer inspection, the added value of the celebrities appears to be that they specifically can shed a particular light on Salinger. Reflecting on the author's decision to disappear into the mountains of New Hampshire, the American star actor Norton, for instance, offers the following observation: 'Maybe what [Salinger] did was liberate himself to actually experience the world more truthfully. With some anonymity intact. Because being known is not a liberation. It's a cage.'[59] The suggestion is that celebrities are included in the conversation about Salinger because they can provide an insider's perspective on what media psychologist David Giles describes as 'the problems of being famous': the loss of privacy, the perpetual gaze of the media and the isolation that comes with constant public attention.[60]

Both the documentary and the book, in other words, are manifestations of the practice of celebrity gossip—in the double sense of gossip *about* as well as *by* celebrities, as experts on the topic. In both cases, it is unimportant whether the opinions voiced have a certain authority or not: what matters is that the author becomes a ground for the construction of mattering maps, a way to navigate one's own emotional life—whether that is the life of a soul-searching teenager or a celebrity struggling with the effects of fame. Salinger, in a sense, is merely a pretext for a conversation about the costs of fame and success. Interestingly, the cinematography of the documentary even highlights how the author functions as a background for new stories. Early on in the documentary, the audience sees the actor

Todd Brandenburg walk up a theater stage and position himself, smoking, behind a typewriter. The audience never sees his face, nor does the actor speak during the documentary. It is clear, however, that he is supposed to be Salinger. As the story about the author's life unfolds, historical footage is projected over and behind the faceless actor playing the silent Salinger, turning him, in a very literal sense, into a blank projection screen.

A second example of the connections between Salinger's afterlife and the practice of gossip, one that foregrounds the importance of forging communities, is Chris Kubica's 'Sallinger letters' project. Out of love for both Salinger's work and the art of letter writing, Kubica, a writer and producer, has been collecting letters to his favorite author since the late 1990s. Kubica invites anyone who wishes to reach out to Salinger to send in their letters, which Kubica then publishes on his website.[61] By early 2015, the website's archive counted 4,860 letters. Some are by high school students who need help with their class assignment and ask the author about the autobiographical details of his work. Other letters are by teenagers who recognize the emotional struggles Holden is going through. On November 22, 2015, for example, a letter writer asks Salinger: 'I was wondering what Holden does after he gets out of the mental hospital or if he gets out?' A letter from February 28, 2012 reads: 'Holden was a great character for me to read about because he helped me feel like I wasn't alone in the world.'[62] In 2002, Kubica and Will Hochman, Professor of English, published a book version of the project. *Letters to J.D. Salinger* contains a selection of website postings, supplemented with invited letters written by authors, teachers and students. They write about their first Salinger reading experience, name their favorite scene from the Glass stories and reflect on their experiences teaching *The Catcher in the Rye*.[63] The letters range from formal ('Dear Mr. Salinger') to casual ('Hiya JD').[64]

The project is a clear illustration of the importance of forging a community through gossip, for the point of the project is *not* that readers expect a response from the author. On the contrary, as Kubica makes clear in his introduction. 'People sometimes ask me, what's the whole point? Why even bother with all this? If Salinger even hears about this book he won't read it.' The answer, he continues, is simple:

> This book isn't for Salinger. It's for me. And for you. And for anyone who has read and been touched by Salinger's words and wants to find out what everyone *else* thinks about them. […] Before you ask, no I don't expect Salinger to respond to any of these letters. The letters contained herein are for the *rest* of us to read, digest, and respond to.[65]

The *Letters to J.D. Salinger* project clearly demonstrates the workings of fandom's affective sensibility. It is not the author who is addressed, but the participants of the community of readers who engage in serious gossip about their favorite celebrity. By writing to their idol, these readers write letters to themselves, thus creating a community and expressing their 'feeling of life', as they mirror themselves to their absent idol.

Conclusion: the piano player in the closet

With all the attention focused on Salinger as a literary celebrity figure, it is easy to overlook that a good deal of the author's work is actually *about* celebrity culture. Numerous stories, directly or implicitly, comment on the darker sides of fame and success. A telling, early story, 'The Varioni Brothers' (1943), portrays two brothers—a musician, whose only ambition is to achieve fame and fortune, and a sensitive writer. The writer has been working on a novel, but his brother convinces him to turn to songwriting. As a result, the duo becomes famous, but the story ends with the musician-brother being killed by a gangster. Slawenski reads the story as a 'kitsch morality play', in which the author 'expresses his fear that his own commercial success will suffocate his creative purity'.[66] Another uncollected story, 'Elaine' (1945), describes how a young, innocent girl is consumed by a Hollywood-obsessed world, a lifestyle of superficial glamour.[67] And though Zooey Glass, one of the two main characters in *Franny and Zooey*, may be a 'sought after' television actor, he clearly has his misgivings about Hollywood.[68] He criticizes a befriended script writer as being 'stupid', like 'everybody else in television. *And* Hollywood. *And* Broadway.'[69]

The most extensive critique of Hollywood culture, however, is to be found in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden's criticisms about phoniness are often directed at individuals and elements somehow related to celebrity culture. Already early on in the novel, Holden has a swipe at his brother, D.B., who used to be 'a regular writer', but who is now 'out in Hollywood'. D.B.'s decision to turn to screenwriting, in Holden's eyes, is tantamount to 'being a prostitute'.[70] Writing for money, selling out for profit and aiming for effect are all 'phony' stuff to Holden. When he is out on a movie date, it becomes clear that it is not only the commerciality of Hollywood that he finds unacceptable: it is also the artificiality inherent in an actor's performance. Criticizing the actors' performance, he judges it to be inauthentic and overdone: 'They didn't act like people and they didn't act like actors. […] They acted more like they knew they were celebrities and all. I mean they were good, but they were *too* good.'[71] Later, in a piano bar,

he watches a showy performance. Holden is annoyed by the audience's willingness to be impressed by the piano player's 'dumb, show-offy ripples in the high notes': '[The crowd] went mad. They were exactly the same morons that laugh like hyenas in the movies at stuff that isn't funny.' If he, Holden thinks to himself, were to play the piano, 'I wouldn't even want them to *clap* for me. People always clap for the wrong things. If I were a piano player, I'd play it in the goddam closet.'[72]

Despite Holden's misgivings about contemporary culture at the time, there remain cultural practices that do meet with his approval. There are moments in Salinger's work where readers can get a glimpse of what true, great art, should be like. Such art is surprisingly quotidian and transient. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden speaks reverently of Phoebe's unfinished stories about her favorite fictional character Hazel Weatherfield.[73] He is also struck by his deceased younger brother's habit to write poems in 'green ink' all over 'the fingers and the pocket' of his baseball glove, 'so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat'.[74] In her reading of the novel, Sally Robinson points out that Allie and Phoebe have often been understood as 'figures of childhood innocence', but argues convincingly that they can also be interpreted as 'representatives of an anti-commercial, anti-consumerist ethos': in Holden's imagination, they 'occupy an innocent, non-consumer paradise uncorrupted by all those "phonies" who allow the movies, advertising and corporate values to define and commodify their identities'.[75] Holden himself, with his unwillingness to sell out, Robinson argues, 'swears allegiance to an ethic of creative genius, in which the artist retains his integrity only by maintaining his independence from an audience'.[76] Little wonder, then, that Zooey advises his sister Franny, who has acting ambitions of her own, *not* to perform for the entertainment of an audience, but to 'act for God': 'An artist's only concern', Zooey tells his sister, 'is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and *on his own terms*, not anyone else's'.[77]

Salinger's work, then, contains a sustained critique of what Olivier Driessens calls the 'celebritization' of culture in general, and the mediatization, personalization and commercialization of artistic practices in particular.[78] It is rather an ironic twist of literary history that Saligner himself has become a stock figure in studies on literary celebrity and that his celebrity sign has been so extensively appropriated in bestselling novels, Hollywood scenario's and popular television series. Robinson, reflecting upon the success of *The Catcher in the Rye*, points out that Salinger's critique of mass culture was apparently so ingrained in popular discourse, that this critique

itself could be commodified.[79] Her argument pertains to Salinger's celebrity sign as well: within modern literary culture, even the reluctance of a literary author such as Salinger can serve as raw material for gossipy speculations, sensationalist memoirs, and an endless series of commercial spin-offs.

If Holden had been a piano player, he would have kept to himself, playing in the closet. Salinger tried to do exactly that: writing for himself, creating a fictional world on his own terms, in his 'meticulously maintained vault' in Cornish.[80] His silence, however, turned him into a readily appropriable sign. Undoubtedly, the search for Salinger will continue, especially as new, posthumous publications, as well as a film adaptation of Slawenski's biography have been announced.[81] The bottom line, however, remains the same: literary culture thrives on the impossibility to find him.

Notes

1. Whissen 1992, p. ix.
2. Whissen 1992, p. 47.
3. Whissen 1992, pp. xxv–xxxviii.
4. Salinger 2010a, p. 25.
5. Thompson 1995; Jancovich 2010.
6. Salinger 2010c, pp. 27–56.
7. Slawinski 2012, p. 198.
8. Slawinski 2012, p. 204.
9. Quoted in Slawinski 2012, p. 203. There were less favorable reviews as well, mostly criticizing Holden's language, which was considered course and blasphemous. See Graham 2007, pp. 37–40.
10. Medovoi 1997.
11. Beller 2014, p. 31.
12. Dyer 1998, p. 60.
13. Marshall 1997, p. 65.
14. Marshall 1997, p. 65.
15. Hamilton 1988, p. 4.
16. Salinger 2010a.
17. See Mizener 2006, pp. 97–100; Shields and Salerno 2013, pp. 585–588.
18. Salinger 2010c, pp. 3–26.
19. In particular Salinger 2010d.
20. Salinger 2010c, pp. 111–130.
21. Salinger 2010b.
22. Readings of *The Catcher in the Rye* have been anthologized and summarized in several volumes and publications, see for example Salzberg 1990; Salzman 1991; Graham 2007; Bloom 1996.

23. Quoted in Salinger 2000, p. 11.
24. Quoted in Slawinski 2012, p. 216.
25. Quoted in Sublette 1984, p. 48.
26. Slawinski 2012, p. 339.
27. Beller 2014, p. 158.
28. Beller 2014, p. 158.
29. Grunwald 2009.
30. Leitch 2009; Nordell 1961; Hugh-Jones 1962. In Paul D. Aron's popularizing history book *Mysteries in History: From Prehistory to the Present* (2006), 'What has J.D. Salinger written?' is included as one of the great unanswered questions in history—on a par with questions such as 'Was Mozart poisoned?' and 'Who built the statues on Easter Island?'
31. Beller 2014, pp. 3–10.
32. Mueller and Hochman 2011, pp. 461–478.
33. Steiner 2009, p. 84.
34. Moran 2000, pp. 74–79; Conroy 2004, pp. 155–168.
35. See Weber 2005, pp. 118–130.
36. Havemann 2006, p. 21.
37. Quoted in Weber 2005, p. 123.
38. Hamilton 1988, p. 137; Salinger 2010a, p. 169.
39. Lundquist 1985; Pattanaik 1998; Weber 2005.
40. Alexander 2010, p. 293. Likewise, Slawenski (2012, pp. 320–321) maintains that Salinger 'made sure that he presented the right image to the public, but he kept that image at a distance, close enough to inspire admiration, but far enough to discourage close scrutiny'.
41. Shields and Salerno 2013, pp. 562–571.
42. Steiner 2009.
43. Whitfield 1997, pp. 571–572.
44. Shields and Salerno 2013, pp. 94–101.
45. See Weber 2005, pp. 121–122.
46. Rosenbaum 2006.
47. Grossberg 1992, p. 54.
48. Grossberg 1992, pp. 56–57.
49. Grossberg 1992, p. 59.
50. Grossberg 1992, p. 58.
51. Silverberg 2002; Silverberg 2011.
52. Spacks 1986, p. 4.
53. Spacks 1986, p. 5.
54. Hermes 1995, p. 121.
55. Hermes 1995, p. 124.
56. Leith 2013.
57. Campel 2013; Scott 2013.
58. Shields and Salerno 2013, p. xiv.

59. Shields and Salerno 2013, p. 279.
60. Giles 2000, pp. 90–108.
61. Kubica 2016.
62. Kubica 2016.
63. Kubica and Hochman 2002, pp. 45, 52, 161.
64. Kubica and Hochman 2002, pp. 109, 141.
65. Kubica and Hochman 2002, p. xviii.
66. Salinger 1943; Slawenski 2012, p. 58.
67. Salinger 1945; Slawenski 2012, p. 67.
68. Salinger 2010b, p. 52.
69. Salinger 2010b, p. 139.
70. Salinger 2010a, pp. 3–4.
71. Salinger 2010a, p. 164.
72. Salinger 2010a, p. 110.
73. Salinger 2010a, p. 89.
74. Salinger 2010a, p. 49.
75. Robinson 2007, p. 73.
76. Robinson 2007, p. 74.
77. Salinger 2010b, pp. 197–198.
78. Driessens 2013.
79. Robinson 2007, p. 76.
80. Shields and Salerno 2013, p. xiii.
81. Shields and Salerno 2013, pp. 574–575; McNary 2015.

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9

Public and Private Posture: Zadie Smith (1975)

Odile Heynders

Zadie Smith's first novel, *White Teeth* (2000), brought her instant fame. The reasons for her immediate success were multifarious: the multicultural novel written by a young woman was lavishly promoted by the publisher and immediately hailed as a masterpiece by critics and journalists. Another reason for Smith's rapid rise to fame was undoubtedly her appearance and, last but not least, she came on stage at a moment when the public was in need of a positive message about the British multicultural society. There she was, 'Britain's literary darling', as *The Sunday Telegraph* would later dub her: a young, talented, Cambridge educated, beautiful female author of mixed English-Caribbean parentage, writing in an attractive humorous style, with a keen eye for the details of everyday life and the mechanisms of popular culture.[1] Although this was only her debut, Smith's cultural authority was immediately recognized; she was compared to the prize-showered novelist Sir Salman Rushdie and placed in the intellectual context of world-famous philosophers such as Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy.[2]

Ever since the kick-start of her career, Smith's success has been connected with money, which marks her as a typical star author. As Joe Moran

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states in his book, *Star Authors* (2000), literary celebrities are by definition controversial figures due to their position in between art and money. Being a celebrity presupposes taking part in economic activity, which in Smith's case was a given fact even *before* the publication of her debut. In a first decisive interview in the *Observer*, Stephanie Merritt notes that twenty-one-year-old Smith was already a hype in the autumn of 1997, when an 80-page draft of her first novel was sold to Hamish Hamilton publishers for an advance of 250,000 pounds.[3] Here, unlike in most cases, the money preceded the book. It subsequently took the author some years to write the 462-page novel, but, once published, it won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Commonwealth Writers Prize, The Guardian First Book Award and The Whitbread First Novel Award.

However, as briefly mentioned above, Smith's rise to celebrity status was not only based on the grand advance, the shower of awards or the quality of her lively prose as such: in the literary marketplace her physical appearance was a valuable asset as well. Merritt compared her interviewee to a famous and equally attractive actress and hip-hop star: 'In her turban, thick-rimmed glasses and big trainers, she looks like a fairer-skinned version of Lauryn Hill.' The implication of this comparison appears to be that Smith as a young author brought together literature and hip hop, high and popular culture, prestige and entertainment, intellect and looks. Merritt's framing in terms of stardom was followed—home and abroad—in numerous reviews, feature articles and interview introductions, labeling Smith as 'the biggest literary celebrity to have emerged in the new millennium', 'ein Star der internationalen Literaturszene' and 'Zadie la nouvelle star'.[4] The media fascination for her physical features continued over the years, up to the point where Smith felt pressed to object against 'the media's "ridiculous" obsession with her looks', pointing out that it was not up to her, but to 'photo editors' how she was pictured in the media.[5] Yet up to this day, photographers and editors still tend to zoom in on her fashionable looks, as a quick scroll through Google Images will learn.

The persistent concurrence in Smith's reception of fascination for the author's literary talent and obsession with her media appeal is not unique. In fact, literary celebrity is by definition constructed as an amalgam of cultural capital—that is, the talent to write and a certain level of knowledge of literature—market and media demands, the social context, and the public performance of the author. As Moran observes in *Star Authors*, there is an increasing tendency towards integrating literary production into the media industry and promoting authors as celebrity personalities.

At the same time, Smith's success can be clarified as the need of a 'symbol of multicultural hope and positivity'.[6] In the *avant* 9/11 British context, the young and talented woman author could serve as an attractive role model. Obviously, another explanation for the huge interest can be found in the work itself: a captivating mixture of autobiography, youth culture and intertextual canonical references, as such addressing various audiences.

The Smith case illustrates that contemporary authorship and success cannot be understood without analyzing the interrelated components of work, persona, societal context and media performance. Focusing on all these different factors, it is in particular the complicated relation between the public and private sphere that has to be scrutinized and interpreted. An intriguing recent interview with Smith may serve as an example for the complexity of this particular relationship. In April 2015, the author was invited to a public conversation with Dutch celebrity author Arnon Grunberg in the *De Balie* venue in Amsterdam.[7] After the interview, Grunberg posted a message on his Facebook and website:

> Tonight I had a public conversation with Zadie Smith. Afterwards we drank two cocktails. Sometimes it's hard to say what's the best part of the conversation, before, during or after the public interview. I would say: after, but the cocktails may have been important.[8]

This somewhat self-satisfied statement reveals how the public and private spheres are intermingled and at the same time set alongside each other. The author in the public conversation on stage turns out to be defeated by the private Smith in a confidential conversation with Grunberg after the interview. Subsequently, the privilege Grunberg enjoyed is made public by sharing it with his 'friends' on his Facebook page. The Dutch celebrity author reveals an intimate moment with another celebrity author, thereby bolstering his own public image.

The Facebook post followed after an engaging discussion, in which Smith, dressed in black and gracefully wearing a red turban and red accessories, expressed her ideas on the delicateness of identity, on self-delusion and assimilation, mixed-raced individuals and experiences of life as relevant and useful for novel writing—topics that lie close to Grunberg's heart. Fascinatingly, the interview affirmed the position of both writers as cultural icons in two different national contexts: Grunberg as the cosmopolitan Jewish-Dutch intellectual and Smith as the prominent novelist from a Jamaican-British background, aware of an assigned position as

representative of a multiracial community. Both Smith and Grunberg acted as public personas: they performed what the sociologist Jerôme Meizoz would call a 'posture', a dynamic self-representative frame in which their work and behavior should be understood.[9] By taking on a posture, they carried out the very visible role of the author with a particular style, as a construction comparable to a literary character. In this context even the personal Facebook post is an intriguing blending of private and public spheres, of text and world, of authentic and ironic statement, and therefore has to be understood as integral to the process of literary performance.

This chapter focuses on Smith's posture as a celebrity author and seeks to analyze in particular how her public position and literary work negotiate issues such as identification, celebrity, style and authenticity. In the next section, the paradox of the 'celebrity authority' will be examined, followed by a reading of Smith's second novel, *The Autograph Man* (2002), as it deals explicitly with fame, stardom and fandom. A closer look at some of Smith's essays, in the third section, will confirm that the construction of Smith's self-image in and beyond the text has to be understood as an inventive play intertwining authenticity, style and an autobiographical voice. In the conclusion it will be argued that Smith's orchestration of posture(s) transforms the author into a star while retaining her cultural authority.

Posture as self-representation

Smith is a celebrity author who strategically makes use of her personal experiences, background and credentials in order to create a particular posture. As mentioned in the previous section, the concept of posture was coined by the Swiss literary theorist Meizoz. Inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, he published in 2007 his *Postures littéraires: Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*. As the subtitle of this work indicates, Meizoz sees a literary posture as a 'dramatization' of authorship, the staging of an image constructed by the author and adopted by the media to introduce a particular work to the readers.[10] Posture is a form of self-representation that authors implement in the context of their literary production. This image is partly considered to be a discursive identity, since it is made up on the basis of what is written and created in the author's texts, and partly a non-discursive one, as it is also informed by the author's appearance, clothing, manners and behavior.[11] This self-representation can be regarded as being part of the poetics of the author. A striking example of how this self-representation can negotiate between text and author, or between

discursive and non-discursive identity, is the performance of the contemporary French author Michel Houellebecq acting as a *chansonnier* in a YouTube music video.[12] In the company of singer Jean-Louis Aubert, a disheveled and presumably inebriated Houellebecq lip syncs the lines of one of his poems, 'Isolement' ('Dites moi qui je suis'), as such underlining the fading identity of the author as an ageing man. Ostensibly showing his deteriorating physical condition, a balding man with a toothless mouth, the author is convincingly real, but at the same time he is wearing a mask as he role-plays as a singer. A discursive element in this posture is the reference to his poem, non-discursive is his behavior as a drunkard (which on the other hand could also be understood as referring to several protagonists in his novels). It could further be argued that Houellebecq is also mocking the French literary and intellectual establishment by sitting at a café table, smoking, smiling, drinking wine—as the existentialist intellectuals *par excellence* did in the 1950s. It is precisely the deliberate estrangement of the performance that fits tailor-made in the context of the author's depressing realist novels saturated with culture critique. The clip underscores the author's posture as a strange, maladjusted and anti-bourgeois character.[13]

Smith subtly develops a posture of her own by taking on the role of intelligent, open and compassionate conversation partner in interviews and public speeches, conscious of her cultural capital based on her Cambridge education, Harvard fellowship and in-depth knowledge of the British literary canon. At the same time, she exploits her acquaintance with popular culture, as such foregrounding her multicultural, middle-class background in a London suburb. Changeability, stylistic eclecticism and an interest in various subcultures are at the basis of Smith's discursive and non-discursive posture: 'When I was 21 I wanted to write like Kafka. But, unfortunately for me, I wrote like a script editor for *The Simpsons* who'd briefly joined a religious cult and then discovered Foucault. Such is life.'[14] The act of self-representation is a precisely measured processing of image and identity, poetics and ethos, irony and seriousness. According to Meizoz, self-representation is to be distinguished from hetero-representation, which is the image of the author constructed by others, such as critics, fellow writers, journalists and booksellers. One could argue, however, particularly with regard to Smith, that in the highly developed media society in which we currently live it has become almost impossible to draw a line between auto-representation and hetero-representation. Self-images created by contemporary authors and the images made of them by others are immediately spread over various platforms, through clips, Google Images,

Facebook posts, tweets, blogs and so on, breaking free from their source and original context. Clearly, it is extremely difficult to fully manage one's public image or to completely orchestrate one's own self-representation.

Even so, the fact that such images give input to mechanisms of commercial production and distribution is often a reason to try and gain at least *some* form of control over the construction of the authorial self. Contemporary authors *need* to brand themselves, to mark and strengthen their value and credentials in order to establish the freedom to write and publish. Financial independence gained by acting as media figures allows authors to continue with the projects they consider important and feel committed to. Self-representation as branding, indeed, foregrounds the tensions inherent to literary production in the context of the modern market society: the fiction author has the creative freedom to invent his or her own world, but, paradoxically, this freedom can only be attained by catching the attention of others and engaging the readers—in other words, by acknowledging the importance of the media and the market.

Stars & fans: *The Autograph Man*

Smith's second novel, *The Autograph Man*, longlisted for the Booker Prize 2002, is a wide-ranging and comic narrative on fame and fan culture, and as such provides an interesting perspective on the celebrity persona and strategies of posture. A close reading of this novel will demonstrate a sustained reflection on identity, both of the fan and the celebrity, and can be understood as contributing to—and intervening in—the construction of Smith's own image as a star author.

The plot as well as the layout of the novel, with its diagrams, drawings and text balloons, immediately attract attention. The novel opens with a drawing of the 'Kabbalah of Alex-Li Tandem' in which various famous intellectuals and other celebrities have a place: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, John Lennon, Fats Waller, Jimmy Stewart, Bette Davies and Muhammad Ali. This eclectic list of high and low culture icons functions as a framing introduction to the ideas of both the protagonist and the author. The novel's Kabbalah, or mystical doctrine, is made up by all sorts of ideas and is followed by quotes from 'Jewish and Goyish', a famous 1960s routine by American stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce on the Jewish propensity to see the world as split up into Jews and non-Jews. The reader is introduced to the half-Chinese, half-Jewish protagonist Alex-Li Tandem, collector of and dealer in autographs.

He lives in Mountjoy, a London suburb, and is obsessed with his Jewish background, while at the same time constantly denying it. Everything in his life is viewed from the perspective 'what is Jewish and what is not'. By dividing the world into categories, Alex-Li tries to get a grip on life, yet losing it immediately in his exaggerated attempts at structuring and symbolizing. A humorous and quite absurd story ensues with funny conversations between youngsters and statements on current popular tendencies, culminating in the meeting of Alex-Li with his favorite American actress Kitty Alexander, who starred in the 1952 movie *The Girl from Peking*. Every week since he was thirteen, Alex-Li has sent a letter to the actress, through a fan club address in Manhattan, but all of them remained unanswered. Now, in the narrative present, he has grown up, but he is still uncertain about his identity and in need of self-confirmation: 'He was twenty-seven years old. He was emotionally undeveloped, he supposed, like most Western kids. He was probably in denial of death. He was certainly suspicious of enlightenment.'[15] The particular focalization, underlined by the free indirect speech, enables the reader to follow Alex-Li's deliberations and fantasies at close range, revealing him as a familiar, likeable and sincere character. By foregrounding private thoughts and presenting lively dialogues, Smith is capable of creating a credible, albeit strange, protagonist in a particular suburban social context.

The central theme of the novel is the feasibility of identity as a dynamic, ongoing and intersubjective process of combining and attuning real and imagined character traits. As such, the novel thematizes that identity is always a construction, whether you are famous or not. Alex-Li invents himself as an autograph man, collecting, trading, verifying but also often forging the signatures of other people. He buys and sells autographs of well-known people and by doing so he has based his own identity on the fame and fandom of others. He is convinced that celebrities such as 'Olympians, Inventors, TV Personalities, Weathermen, Nobel Prize Winners, Writers, Lepidopterists, Entomologists, Movie Actors, Scientists, Assassins and the Assassinated, Singers, Composers', differ fundamentally from ordinary people. For that reason Alex-Li's encounter with the 'real' singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen in the streets of London may be seen as a pivotal event:

> A minute later, Alex found himself in the coffee shop against his rational will, standing behind Leonard, admiring the foreverness of Leonard, his infinite nature, the fact that long after the physical Leonard was worm

> food, somewhere the virtual Leonard would still be moving, singing and being interviewed. […] Even standing beside him, Alex felt worlds away. Leonard's fame was going to save him. […] He just looked like a guy. What was so special about him? And why was he in this coffee shop anyway? What kind of a famous person walks into a coffee shop full of ordinary people like Alex?[16]

This passage unfolds a reflection on who the other is, at first by dividing the world into simple categories: celebrities versus everyday people, Jewish versus goyish ones, old versus young, Canadian singer-songwriter versus British youngster and so forth. But soon these neat divisions fall apart, because celebrities turn out to be normal and the real and the imagined hard to distinguish. On the one hand, Alex-Li identifies himself with the famous singer, repeatedly calling him by his first name as to mark confidentiality; on the other hand, he keeps him at a distance, wondering how it can be that a celebrity like Cohen just walks into a London coffee shop and orders a *caffè mocha*. The underlying idea is, of course, that famous people are not supposed to go out for a coffee as we all do: they are thought to be of a different ontological category, a 'different order of being', as Richard Dyer points out in his seminal *Stars* (1979).[17] This passage not only offers an insight into mechanisms of fandom, but also illustrates how the author Smith plays with 'real' and literary characters, orchestrating what they do and think. She makes use of the recognizable sense that everyone 'knows' Leonard Cohen and his eternal classics 'Suzanne', 'Hallelujah' and 'Sisters of Mercy', meanwhile bringing forward the question of his ontological status. Cohen is introduced as an actual celebrity in a fictional world, which raises the issue whether he would be any more real if we were to meet him outside the novel, in reality. Does the novel grant us a proximity to and familiarity with his persona that we as fans will never experience in the real world? By introducing the historical figure of Leonard Cohen in a fictional narrative, Smith blurs the line between reality and imagination, between being a self and being a public or famous figure readily invoked in the narrative of others. This brings us back to Meizoz's distinction between auto-presentation and hetero-presentation: constructing an identity implies a careful navigation between how we present ourselves and how others imagine us to be.

The Autograph Man is divided into two parts, conveying the protagonist's Jewish-Chinese background. In the first part, 'The Kabbalah of Alex-Li Tandem', each chapter is given the name of one of the *sefirot*, the

Kabbalistic (divine) attributes. Part two, 'The Zen of Alex-Li Tandem', suggests a relaxation and a movement towards epiphany, represented by the traditional pictures of the ten bulls, standing for the ten steps towards enlightenment and finding one's true nature. In the second part the scene moves from London to New York where Alex-Li finally meets in person the actress Kitty Alexander, of whom he has been a fan since he was thirteen years old. He discovers that all the letters sent by him have been kept away from her by her manager. Eventually, she is able to obtain the letters and after reading them *she* turns out to be a fan of *him*:

> 'Alex-Li *Tandem*. I cannot *believe* it is you. I am such a fan of yours, truly. But you are not at *all* what I expected. Not at *all*. And meanwhile, I think I sit just as you wrote it, no? One leg up, one leg down …' She glanced down at herself and then back at him with a look that only magicians and doctors rightfully deserve.[18]

Intriguingly, the letters are not in any sense written as communicative messages to an addressee: they are purely imaginary portrayals of the actress herself. All these years Alex-Li has been imagining how Kitty moves through town, how she behaves and what goes on in her mind, as becomes clear from the following letter:

> Dear Kitty,
>
> She walks into the store and winces at the age of the boy serving her. Even his knuckles have no lines. He should be in school, she thinks.
>
> Love, Alex-Li Tandem.[19]

These passages again remind us that the issue of the ontological status of the famous figure is interwoven with a reflection on writing. Kitty is a *Vorstellung* in Alex-Li's mind, a mental image put in words. And now, meeting her fan in New York, the actress identifies herself with his descriptions, while the dimensions of reality and imagination fuse even further when she claims to be a fan of him. Smith shows that the interactions between celebrity and fan are imaginary constructions, just as characters in a novel are constructions of the mind. The workings of celebrity culture appear to be very similar to those of literary creation, then: characters come into existence by the attention, identification and empathy of the reading public or the perceiving audience. In other words, they become real by the interpreting observer.

After the passage in which the fan meets his heroin, and the star turns out to be a fan of her admirer, the novel evolves into a phantasmagoric narrative, in which Alex takes the famous actress with him to London. There, she is assumed dead, which allows Alex to sell her signature for 150,000 pounds. The prerequisite, however, for being rich and independent is to keep up the lie that Kitty Alexander has died. In order to live as the rich and famous, in other words, the fan has to fake the death of the star. At last Kitty forgives Alex-Li for this marketing of her signature: 'You are a realist, like me. This is good. You kill me, but then you resurrect me. And so you are forgiven.'[20] In the epilogue of the novel, Alex-Li seems to come to terms with his unstable identity. In the final passage, which is as ceremonial as it is ironic, the Mourner's Kaddish is recited for Alex-Li's Chinese father. At last Alex appears to accept who he is and where he comes from: he is a Jewish-Chinese boy in London. It is clear, however, that this particular personal identity is a construction like any other: it is only accepted on the basis of his social network and the stimulus of his friends, who have pushed him to take part in the ritual.

Signatures as paradoxes of the self

The fact that Smith after her critically acclaimed debut, *White Teeth*, wrote a satire on celebrity culture was not appreciated by all literary reviewers. A representative example is the critical analysis James Wood published in *The London Review of Books*. Annoyed with the cartoonish energy and perpetual mobility of the novel, Wood observes that *The Autograph Man* 'sounds too much like a contemporary American' and bears the impress of *McSweeney's* Dave Eggers and David Foster Wallace, 'clever, nervy exhibitionists', according to him. He strongly rejects the enthusiasm for popular culture. 'It is like reading a newspaper designed by a kindergarten', Wood writes, insinuating that popular culture phenomena are less complicated, informative and coded.[21] It could be argued, however, that in her second novel Smith positions herself even more as a cultural analyst than in the first novel, with a keen eye for the ambivalence of culture, either traditional or popular, literary or celebrity. Smith's second novel can be characterized as hybrid, which is in particular demonstrated by the challenging motif of identity as a form of being *and* acting. This idea is tied to the banality of everyday identity as experienced by second-generation migrants—and the irony revealed is that no one has a fixed identity.

This instability of identity is exactly what the paradox of the signature underlines. Becoming an autograph man not only makes it possible for Alex-Li to make a living out of selling signatures, but it also enables him to establish an identity and to create his own personal mark.[22] He pursues to invent a self beyond the reductive binary system that he uses to interpret the world: he is struggling, as it were, to find proof of his own being. In this respect, Smith's novel echoes Jacques Derrida's theoretical insights in the iteration ('iterabilité') of the signature. As Derrida explains in *Limited Inc* (1988), the signature proves to be a paradoxical sign. After all, in order to convince the signature must be repeatable, which condition at the same time corrupts its singularity. Because of the iterability, the signature becomes detached from the empirical presence of the signer and the singular intention of its production: the signature marks and retains someone's 'having-been present in a past *now* or present', Derrida writes, but at the same time 'a written signature implies the actual or empirical non-presence of the signer'.[23] As a collector of autographs, it is Alex-Li's job to isolate signatures from the persons who have written them. A decisive moment in the narrative is when he finds a blank postcard with Kitty's autograph written on it; he immediately realizes, even though no one believes him, that this signature has to be authentic. The blankness of the card—mirroring Alex-Li's mind that goes complete blank when he tries to remember where the card came from—affirms Derrida's idea of the non-presence of the signer. In order for the signature to function as a sign, to be 'real', the signer has to be absent.

The paradox of the signature ties in seamlessly with the paradox of fame and being a celebrity. Generally, fame is distinguished from celebrity: the latter, much more recent, phenomenon, is often linked with popular culture and superficiality (as demonstrated by Wood's allusion to a 'kindergarten'), while fame, with a long history, is associated with authority, depth and talent.[24] By writing a literary novel on stardom, Smith makes this distinction fluid. As a highly educated and prize-honored British writer of thought-provoking novels, she deliberately encapsulates elements of popular culture in her work, thereby introducing these elements into the realm of canonical literature. Indeed, by invoking popular culture phenomena by means of literary storytelling techniques, Smith demonstrates that they rely on the same mechanisms—the repeatability of identities, the desire for presence, and the necessary absence of the 'real' for the creative imagination.

Literary characters, media stars and celebrities are all identity constructions that invite—and rely on—the response of consumers, fans or readers. This can be illustrated with a passage from *The Autograph Man* in which Honey Smith, one of the celebrity characters in New York, explains to Alex-Li that 'you know you made it' when you are printed on a billboard and looked at by a half-million commuters every day.[25] The billboard 'self' is more visible, present and real than a person of flesh and blood. The general and abstract image overrules the actual person, just as old film stars, as Alex-Li tries to explain to his friends, really *are* what they play, because they play 'essences of themselves'.[26] He seems to understand that celebrities are personalities constructed to satisfy people's exaggerated expectations of human greatness: their identities are interwoven with grand fantasies and imagined qualities, but somehow this is what makes them convincing and *real*. The celebrity's value and significance, in other words, depend on the powers of discernment of the fans. They create a very sensible distinction between what is valuable and significant and what is not. Alex-Li can thus be seen as the embodiment of the fan's general ability to tell the authentic from the fake, as described by Lawrence Grossberg:

> The fan is able to discriminate between those forms of popular culture which are 'authentic' (that is, which really are art, which really do represent their experience, etc.) and those which are the result of the efforts of the commercial mainstream to appropriate these forms and produce tainted versions for the larger audience.[27]

Alex-Li does not seem to think very highly of his work as an 'Autograph Man', as he reflects that 'autographs are a small blip in the desire network, historical flotsam'.[28] Still, he thinks that collecting them is a skill and an art. It is a skill to know the difference between the fabricated and the real thing, '[to distinguish] the robotic scratch of a Kennedy autopen from the real presidential signature', he explains, and what is even more: 'Knowing when to lie about these matters, and how much, is an art.'[29] The whole plot, in fact, of *The Autograph Man* revolves around this staggering paradox of collecting 'signs' that are sold to fans who are readily willing to pay, although they know that some of them are real and some fake. 'Philography's very lucrative', as one of Smith's characters remarks, underscoring the critical perspective of the novel on fame and admiration. Fans are affective investors in signatures, identities and pleasures, as Grossberg would say, but Smith's novel reminds us that they can also be gullible consumers or dishonest dealers.[30]

Posture as performance in 'Ten Notes on Oscar Weekend'

Smith's second novel, as we have seen, addresses interacting practices and conventions of youth culture, celebrity culture and literary writing. Interestingly, her involvement with these phenomena stretches beyond her novels: it is also expressed by her personal behavior and public self-representation. To elaborate on this, it is necessary to extend Meizoz's concept of posture by acknowledging that its non-discursive dimension can be considered as a strategy of performance. Here, performance can best be thought of in terms of Erving Goffman's sociological investigations, in which it refers to 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers'.[31] A closer look at performances enables us to examine the effects of various public strategies such as giving interviews, delivering lectures, writing in magazines and newspapers, posing for a photo-shoot, and using social media to interact with audiences and to be recognized by them. Performative practices support a certain posture and address various audiences, continuously adapting and transforming the author's self-representation. Posture's discursive dimension and authorial performance, then, should not be considered separately. On July 5, 2013, for instance, Smith appeared on the Twitter account of Penguin Books for an hour, giving fans the chance to communicate directly with her: through the Twitter Q&A readers could converse directly with the author and re-engage with her writings.[32] She seemed near and approachable—a tweeted photograph showed her sitting behind her desk in comfy clothes—but the tweet-setting was evidently staged as well. Seemingly insignificant, the online performance can be read as an acting out of the author's image as a famous and media savvy figure.

In its hybrid mixture of cultural authority, celebrity status, public performance and personal opinion, Smith's posture is a clear illustration of the development of authorship in late modern times.[33] While a modernist artist like T.S. Eliot considered the escape from personality imperative, and while the postmodernist author used the supernatural in fiction to establish a fantastic perspective on the personal, as in the case of Salman Rushdie, the late modern author blends the personal with various voices and conventions of counterculture in an ingenious mixture of styles: characters and dialogues are interwoven with autobiographical facts and motifs.[34] The Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard or the Italian novelist Elena Ferrante, well known for their particular blend of the public

and the personal, can be seen as Smith's companions in this late modern authorship. Disagreeing explicitly with Eliot, Smith maintains that personality is 'much more than autobiographical detail, it's our way of processing the world, our way of being, and it cannot be artificially removed from our activities'.[35] The personal intervenes in the literary and, in the case of Smith, becomes a modus for the public performance. Smith creates and shapes her public position on the basis of private experiences. As a result, her authorship exemplifies the writer's condition in the fully mediatized, commercialized and globalized society of the twenty-first century. Yet Smith's posture does not imply an uncritical acceptance of that condition: the personal, in fact, can also take the shape of an ironic response to the contemporary state of literature.

This ironic authorial performance—the setting of the private against (or within) the public, and the extra-ordinary against (or within) the mundane—can be further analyzed by taking a closer look at Smith's essay 'Ten Notes on Oscar Weekend'. Smith wrote this essay for the British *Sunday Telegraph* and published it in *Changing my Mind*: *Occasional Essays* (2009). The essay is a compilation of apodictic statements, personal observations and hindsight wisdom; it is ironic in Simon Critchley's sense that there is a clear disjunction between the way things are and how they are represented.[36] In the first note, Smith observes how oddly oppressive it is to set off on a journey to Hollywood, 'a place so thoroughly imagined by other people'. She is on her way to The Oscars, the Academy Awards Ceremony, and in a dress bag she has 'the very picture of someone else's Hollywood dream', as she has made the mistake of telling the women in a London shop that she would undertake this trip.[37] Just as in *The Autograph Man*, Smith ingeniously plays with focalization and indirect speech: the implication is that the shop ladies have decided for her what to wear for this special occasion. 'I can tell by the weight—it's fabulous', the airplane steward remarks approvingly when hanging the bag in a closet.[38] Making herself ridiculous is, of course, part of her use of humor as a strategy. However, Smith gives herself at least some celebrity credentials, as ordinary people or everyday tourists do not carry fabulous dresses as hand-baggage. In the fourth note, Smith gives a likewise double-voiced description of a celebrity party she visits:

> It is an effort to be continually amazed; these are humans, after all, and in a celebrity party without any press, the celebrity aspect fades, having nothing to contrast with. After passing through the shock of their normal human

> scale and all that Photoshop obscures—smallness, wrinkles, slightly smeared mascara—you are left with something like a golden wedding anniversary party at which no one can identify the happy couple.[39]

Smith marks her double position as an academic and journalist on the one hand and as a celebrity on the other, by observing that this 'celebrity party'—at which there is no press present, no paparazzi, so no external markers of fame—is very much like an average university party: 'People talk about Hollywood in Hollywood as they speak of Harvard at Harvard.'[40] People take care not to say anything foolish and not to misunderstand the local *mise en scène*. Again, Smith opts for the strategy to make fun of herself while at the same time affirming her own celebrity status. Educated at Cambridge and a fellow at Harvard, Smith seems to be more at home in an academic setting than in a film star venue, but she fuses the two in her detailed observation, pointing out the differences and similarities. At a normal party, she continues, we 'befriend people with the hope of seeing them again'; a celebrity encounter, however, is 'like a badge to be collected and then shown to other people'.[41] The awards ceremony itself is an anticlimax: first everyone is exited, but soon only the happy few in possession of an Oscar are. The day after, while waiting for a taxi cab, Smith spots for the first time that weekend someone she 'actually [knows]: Bret Easton Ellis'. She considers telling the famous novelist that what she has been doing in Los Angeles has been part of a 'demystifying strategy': 'I wanted to share a novelist's joke with him: what if you got assigned to write about the Oscars and you didn't mention a single actor?' Yet Ellis rushes off in his car, leaving Smith to conclude that 'the fantasies of fame cannot be dislodged by anyone's pen. It'll have to be a collective effort.'[42]

'Ten Notes on Oscar Weekend' describes and actualizes an intriguing act of self-fashioning, confirming Smith's ironic stance towards celebrity. Smith offers a description of her Hollywood experiences from a personal point of view, that is to say, as the British author visiting the Hollywood scene. At the same time, her pose as the observing outsider is a strategic act of self-representation: she positions herself as the British literary writer unaccustomed to the American celebrity setting. Suggesting that she is not a celebrity herself, she apparently does not want to act like a fan either. She is unwilling to mention the names of the celebrities that surround her, as this would only acknowledge and affirm the 'fantasies of fame'. What is paradoxical about this posture is that Smith, even though she intends to dislodge such fantasies, does fashion herself with these notes as the famous

author who attends the academy awards—and shares inside jokes with her fellow star authors.

Conclusion: authenticating the posture

Both in her novelistic work as in her public posture, Smith consciously constructs self-images as the ironic, self-reflexive author. She employs a media strategy that draws attention to her work by performing in public lectures and interviews, contributing essays to newspapers and magazines, and taking care of her (online and offline) visibility. On several occasions, especially in the period after the publication of *The Autograph Man*, Smith declared that she had grown tired with all the media attention and was actually considering to withdraw from public life, or even to quit writing altogether.[43] About ten years later, however, she seems to have found a modus for this aversion to publicity by carefully balancing the personal and the public in her authorial postures, negotiating between the celebrity figure, the 'real' woman as daughter and mother, and the self-reflexive author.

Smith articulates her authenticity with her specific choice of topics and style, and by using private information and autobiographical facts in her work and performances. 'Authenticity' is here understood in the Heideggerian way, as making existence one's own by deciding what it is to be a human being.[44] From this existentialist perspective, authenticity can be defined as taking responsibility for the totality of circumstances and the potential meanings of these circumstances. In contrast, in-authenticity means to deny the choices one has made. As for Smith, it is evident that she wants to be held responsible for her writing, for the blending of high and popular culture, and for the *heteroglossia* in her work. It is precisely in her style that Smith's authenticity is achieved. Style, as the author explains in a 2007 essay, is 'the only possible expression of a particular human consciousness': it 'is a writer's way of telling the truth. Literary success or failure, by this measure, depends not only on the refinement of words on a page, but in the refinement of a consciousness, what Aristotle called the education of the emotions.'[45] In other words, style is not a pose or a mask, but a form of owning up to one's choices and decisions. Consequently, the performance of private and public identity is not unintentional or artificial, but a self-conscious posture, situated in a specific time and space. It is this playful but serious dance of identification, a far cry from postmodern *laissez-faire*, that Smith attempts to capture in her work. In an exposé on

her latest novel *NW* (2012), she affirms that the outward signs of individuality—the style, the roles, the performances of people—are predominantly the elements that make up her novels:

> My books don't seem to me to be *about* anything other than the people in them and the sentences used to construct them. […] But to me, an exercise in style is not a superficial matter—our lives are also an exercise in style. The hidden content of people's lives proves a very hard thing to discern: all we really have to go on are these outward, manifest signs, the way people speak, move, dress, treat each other. And that's what I try to concern myself with in fiction: the way of things in reality, as far as I am able to see and interpret them, which may not be especially far.[46]

Smith's signature style, manifested by lively dialogues in various voices, thus brings the reader back to reality. The world evoked in the narrative is made up, but 'the way of things in reality' often appear to be imaginary as well, a discursive realm in which phenomena cannot be understood just as they are and only exist because they are talked about. The same goes for one's self: even though the self is 'a bottomless pool', as Smith writes in 'Two Directions for the Novel', it needs to designate a signature, has to find its own voice.[47] Performing the personal once again, Smith recalls the time when she 'swapped' her accent, switching from the glottal stops of the Willesden working class to the posher, univocal vowels at Cambridge. Her hope was to become polyvocal, to be able to alternate between the two accents, but she later discovered that her working-class speech had left her. In hindsight, she realizes that she should have kept both voices 'alive in her mouth', because 'flexibility of voice leads to a flexibility in all things'.[48] Although Smith concludes that she has lost the flexibility of voice, it is in her style that it reappears, demonstrating the sensibility of her authorship which readers recognize and appreciate.

The intricate relationship between the private and the public marks the singularity of Smith's oeuvre and posture. This relationship finds expression in the autobiographical motifs in her fictional work, but her autobiography is also part of her public performance. Smith writes and talks openly about her background, her ideas and experiences. We have to keep in mind, however, that this public performance is always a carefully considered self-representation: she is very much aware of what she shares and what she keeps to herself. Smith's posture as an intelligent, compassionate and approachable writer is a well thought-out performance in a media-saturated environment, functioning at the same time as an aesthetic frame,

aligning the workings of celebrity culture with the reality of private life. After having been in the limelight for more than a decade, Smith is more and more capable of organizing and controlling her authorial representation. This can be observed in particular in 'Love in the gardens', an essay she wrote in 2013 in memory of her father. This highly personal essay, published in the *New York Review of Books*, is about gardens and parks, memories of Italy and France and about the first months of mourning. But it is also a public statement about 'black girl' Smith and her white father, who were considered to be a strange duo. Furthermore, the essay provides us with a new perspective on Smith's authorship as it draws our attention back to the advance money paid at the end of the 1990s by Smith's publisher, when her first novel was not even written. The money marked her as a star author, as was argued at the beginning of this chapter, but in the essay on her father we learn more about the spectacular advance from a private perspective. It was 'lottery money', Smith writes, that allowed her to take her family to the 'old country' of the Caribbean and to move her father from his shabby apartment to a cottage by the sea: 'I realized that the money — though it may have arrived somewhat prematurely for me — had come at the right time for my father. A working life launched when he was thirteen, which had ended in penury, old age, and divorce, might now, finally find a soft landing.'[49] Thus, in 2013 Smith herself transforms the well-known image of the young celebrity star author, who can make money out of her not yet written book, into the private image of a young girl surprised by the financial support that she suddenly had received, happy to be able to help out her father. That the advance may have been a matter of pure luck is by now safe to admit, because Smith's cultural authority, based on four successful novels, affirms that she kept her promise and that in retrospect the money was well spent: Britain's literary darling has grown into a serious woman author.

Notes

1. Reynolds 2002.
2. Tew 2010, pp. 123–127.
3. Merritt 2000.
4. Armistead 2006; Mangold 2015; Baptiste 2005.
5. Hastings 2013.
6. Tew 2010, p. 21.
7. Grunberg 2015a.

8. Grunberg 2015b.
9. Meizoz 2007.
10. Meizoz 2004, p. 51.
11. Meizoz 2004, p. 52.
12. Aubert and Houellebecq 2014.
13. The author's online performance, in fact, is very much in line with his portrait of the character 'Michel Houellebecq' in his novel *La Carte et le Territoire* (Houellebecq 2010).
14. Quoted in Tew 2010, p. 41.
15. Smith 2002, p. 54.
16. Smith 2002, p. 25.
17. Dyer 1979, p. 43.
18. Smith 2002, p. 232.
19. Smith 2002, p. 127.
20. Smith 2002, p. 330.
21. Wood 2002.
22. Sell 2006.
23. Derrida 1988, p. 20.
24. See Moudileno 2011, p. 71. Compare York 2015 for an overview of the history of the two terms.
25. Smith 2002, p. 218.
26. Smith 2002, p. 115.
27. Grossberg 2010, p. 582.
28. Smith 2002, p. 97.
29. Smith 2002, p. 51.
30. Grossberg 2010, p. 587.
31. Goffman 1959, p. 32.
32. The Twitter session can be found online, see Penguin 2013.
33. See Heynders 2015.
34. On authorial self-effacement (and self-promotion) in Eliot's work, see Glass 2004, pp. 6–7; on Rushdie's postmodern novels, see D'Haen 1997.
35. Quoted in Tew 2010, p. 18.
36. Critchley 2002.
37. Smith 2009, p. 215.
38. Smith 2009, p. 215.
39. Smith 2009, p. 218.
40. Smith 2009, p. 218.
41. Smith 2009, p. 223.
42. Smith 2009, p. 224.
43. See also Tew 2010, p. 43; Jakubiak 2008.
44. Baugh 1988, p. 478.
45. Smith 2007.

46. Smith 2013a.
47. Smith 2009, p. 74.
48. Smith 2009, pp. 134, 149.
49. Smith 2013b.

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