Introduction

Celebrity Rites

JOSEPH A. BOONE AND NANCY J. VICKERS

"I DREAMED A DREAM," SANG THE IMPROBABLE SUSAN BOYLE ON *Britain's Got Talent* to an audience about to leap to its feet before she could finish her first stanza. It was April of 2009. Within hours she became a *YouTube* sensation; within days more than twenty million viewers worldwide had watched her performance; within months she had released what would become the best-selling album of the year. Two months after Boyle burst on the scene, the self-anointed King of Pop, exhausted and sleepless on the eve of his much touted "comeback" tour, *This Is It*, died of an overdose and never got to see a crowd leap to its feet again. Michael Jackson's memorial service electronically assembled a global community of mourners estimated at a billion. Smokey Robinson pronounced him "the greatest entertainer of all time"; Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown, who had seen in him a mesmerizing "quality we couldn't quite understand" and placed him under contract some forty years earlier, observed that despite some "sad times" and "questionable decisions," Jackson had "accomplished everything he ever dreamed of."[1] Thus celebrity "dreams [are] made and used and wasted" (figs. 1 and 2).[2]

Between Boyle's stunning entrance and Jackson's shocking exit, the submissions for a special issue of *PMLA* on "Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety" were making their way (or not) to the other side of the arduous editorial process. Early glimmers of content loomed: Charles I, Shylock, Sarah Bernhardt, Walt Whitman. What might these figures possibly have in common with twenty-first-century notions of celebrity? Could these historically specific cases be read in terms tailored to contemporary parables of rise and fall, such as those of Susan Boyle and Michael Jackson?

Lying behind such musings is the larger question this introduction hopes to address: Why assemble a special issue of *PMLA*

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NANCY J. VICKERS recently retired from the presidency of Bryn Mawr College, where she was also a professor of French, Italian, and comparative literatures. Before she moved into academic administration, her work in literary and cultural criticism focused on Dante, early modern poetry, and twentieth-century music video.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.900 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Michael Jackson, a performer who radiated "It" from childhood, rehearses for his aptly titled—but never to be staged—tour *This Is It* (fig. 1). Susan Boyle seems the antithesis of "It" as she strides onto the talent-show stage (fig. 2). Judges and audience members alike roll their eyes as the middle-aged villager invokes her "dream" of becoming a professional singer. But when her voice takes flight, the "secular magic" of "It" (Roach 3) circles the hall and, via the Internet, the globe. (*Fig. 1:* Kevin Mazur / AEG via Getty Images; *fig. 2:* © FremantleMedia Limited / Simco Limited.)

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.900 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on celebrity, fame, and notoriety at all? What do these notions have to do with scholars primarily interested in "literature," however broadly the term is defined? As one colleague with whom we discussed the topic commented, "Celebrity deals with people; we deal with texts." Annie Leibovitz, a photographer of celebrities who is something of a celebrity herself, recently voiced a version of the same attitude when she sniffed, "I hate the word 'celebrity.' I've always been more interested in what people do than who they are. . . ." The contents of this special issue suggest a variety of intelligent responses to such dismissals. Its contributors not only show how individual celebrities may become "texts" worthy of analysis in and of themselves, but they also trace the textual, representational, mediated, and phenomenological effects that surround celebrity as a psychosocial phenomenon. Leibovitz complains that she is less interested in who celebrities are than in what they do, but our contributors show that what one "is" is often indistinguishable from what one "does" when it comes to famous people and celebrity-mediated events. Indeed, the results of such doing (that is, the material and discursive effects produced around and by celebrities) are especially suited to the skills that define a community of scholars dedicated to literary-textual interpretation.

There is a more basic reason to examine the interplay between the study of celebrity and textual analysis. Now more than ever we live in a culture saturated in celebrity images and stories, and it shows no sign of retreat. Such images and stories inform our notions of self and community; our sense of the intermingling spheres of public and private life; our fears, aspirations, dreams. From the matter of popular entertainment to presidential politics, from (not so) real housewives to Olympic gold medalists, from dancing *YouTube* babies to National Book Award winners, celebrity is everywhere. How can we not take seriously such images and stories—images and stories being two of the primary building blocks of our profession's intellectual work as reader-critics—as objects of inquiry and analysis? How can we not pursue their histories? The latter word, *histories*, is key to what the reader will find special about this special issue. For in inviting essays "on a wide range of topics throughout history, from criminal broadsides to the lives of martyrs and saints, from the self-promotion of charlatans to the disclaimers of reluctant superstars, from the gossip of the literary salon to that of the online chat room," *PMLA* asserts that celebrity is by no means just a phenomenon of the present. Rather, the creative pursuit of renown and recognition has a rich and varied past.

Centering on the past distinguishes our project from the predominantly twentieth- and twenty-first-century agenda of the field of "celebrity studies" as it has emerged in the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, film studies, and media or communications. The primary focus of this new field has been, understandably, on the ways that developments in the media industries over the past century (recorded sound, film, television, digital communication) have radically transformed conceptions of fame and celebrity through their global reach and mass appeal. That Susan Boyle had millions of fans around the world within twenty-four hours or that Barack Obama "arguably won the presidency because of his effectiveness at mobilizing [traditional and Internet] media spectacle" (Kellner 121) powerfully attests to the fact that we have entered a new era that demands new tools of analysis.

At the same time, this new work has roots in schools of thought that date back a half century or more. One can trace a direct line between the Frankfurt school's emphasis on the threats posed to culture by popular mass modes of entertainment—and by the public's addiction to, and embrace of, its celebrity stars—and both conservative and Marxist denunciations of celebrity as a hegemonic for-

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mation in which stars and consumers are hapless puppets of the market forces of capitalism and social control (Adorno and Horkheimer; Boorstin; Monaco). Such monolithic interpretations, often referred to as the manipulation thesis, were followed by increasingly subtle analyses, ranging from the French philosopher Edgar Morin's *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (1956) and *Les stars* (1957), to the work of Richard Dyer on star formation and the audience's active role in creating celebrity (*Stars* [1979] and *Heavenly Bodies* [1986]), to the American scholar Charles Affron's *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (1977). For such theorists, celebrity and the star system are equally constructed by the multiple forces of production and consumption, forces that engage each other in dialectical relations mediated in and by ideology. In this nexus of relations, the individual star, like the fan, may—in the face of commodification—attain or exercise a limited amount of agency (Marshall, *Celebrity*; Moran; Glass). The sociologist Joshua Gamson's *Claims to Fame* (1994) heralded a shift in the focus of study from the individual who achieves fame to celebrity as an all-embracing constellation of any number of industrial relations—one that includes managers and photographers, publicists and journalists—such that the individual celebrity is one among many agents constituting his or her star status. Emphasizing not only the social and organizational relations that shape the production of celebrity, Gamson also analyzed the meanings and pleasures derived by celebrity-watching audiences. A decade later, Graeme Turner's *Understanding Celebrity* usefully synthesized, updated, and developed the systemic approach. In *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City* (2007), Elizabeth Currid-Halkett marshaled sociology, economics, and urban planning to illustrate the geographic concentrations and effects of celebrity cultures.

From these roots, among others, celebrity studies has emerged not only as a legitimate field but also as, in Loren Glass's words, a "growth industry" in the academy (3), a development signaled by the appearance in 2010 of a new scholarly journal entitled *Celebrity Studies*. This scholarly turn is for some academics and pundits a cause for despair (the dumbing down of the academy, as well as of culture) and for others a cause for delight (the long-overdue dethroning of academic elitism). But, as the coeditors of *Celebrity Studies*, Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, remind readers of the journal's inaugural issue, to engage with the pervasiveness of celebrity in contemporary life is neither to accept it uncritically nor to condemn it but rather "to defamiliarise the everyday" and thereby "to make apparent the cultural politics and power relations which sit at the centre of the 'taken for granted.'" This task of uncovering and analyzing the systems and structures—including the discursive systems and structures—that produce celebrity and regulate its reception, they acknowledge, lies at "the foundations of media, television, and cultural studies," from which the nascent field of celebrity studies has taken its lead (3).

Of course, the very terms we use to conjure up these underlying systems and structures have deep roots, as the etymologies of *celebrity* and *fame* reveal. *Celebrity* derives from the Latin nouns *celebritas* and *celebratio*, both of which signify the presence of a multitude, a large assembly or gathering, a crowd. By extension, these and related terms also point to an attribute (that of being famous or renowned) of the thing or person whose presence gives birth to the crowd (fig. 3). Not insignificantly, the idea of a large assembly takes on religious connotations.[3] The Catholic Mass, for example, is "celebrated"; its officiator is a "celebrant." To this day, the numinous aura of the godly and the ineffable surrounds both the celebrity "icons" or "idols" on whom the mysterious gift of "It" has been bestowed ("heavenly bodies," as Dyer aptly calls them) and the participants in celebrity worship, the congregation

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.900 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Fig. 3
Whether or not one agrees with Neal Gabler's provocative assessment upon Elizabeth Taylor's death in 2011 that "she was the personality who defined modern celebrity," this photograph of the awed throng watching as Eddie Fisher escorted Taylor down the aisle to accept her 1961 best actress Oscar captures the ritualistic essence of the *celebratio*—or worshipful crowd—that gives the star an otherworldly aura of intimate proximity yet untouchable distance. (Ralph Crane / Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images.)

of the faithful. *Fame* derives from the Latin noun *fama* (the talk of the multitude, the voice or judgment of the many, public opinion), which in turn evolves from the verb *fari*, "to speak." To be famous or to be a celebrity is, then, to be talked about by the crowd (Braudy 125, 592). And to be one or the other requires a personality that fascinates, an audience, and a relation between the two that is "spoken" into existence. Seen in this light, gossip and rumor are neither ancillary to the system of renown nor sullying by-products that follow in the wake of the object of the fans' adoration; rather, gossip and rumor are the very bedrock of renown's formation and existence.

Given these etymological roots, how to encapsulate and differentiate between the notions of fame and celebrity as they are understood and used today? The pursuit of fame, as Leo Braudy demonstrated in his groundbreaking *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), forms a constant throughout history, expressing the need to thwart mortality by achieving, through reputation, a good name that outlasts death, a version of immortality. By contrast, celebrity (which may encompass the desire for a more lasting fame) is a phenomenon that flares in the moment, is experienced in its noisy immediacy, and thrives on the ephemerality that is the condition of its being. These two phenomena—fame and celebrity—are not, as Braudy reminds us in his contribution to this issue, necessarily or easily separable. The essays that follow also speak to the imbrication of these two concepts. Nonetheless, we were surprised when most of our contributors singled out celebrity as the organizing principle and theoretical lens through which to make their contributions to an issue calling for papers on "celebrity, fame, notoriety." (Likewise, we found that whenever our colleagues asked us for updates, they inevitably referred to the "celebrity issue," not the "fame" or the "notoriety" issue.) This prioritizing of celebrity over fame and notoriety—perhaps an inevitable by-product of the emergence of celebrity studies—also reflects a sea change in social attitudes. In an intermediated age in which it is easier than ever to dream of becoming a star, no matter one's ordinariness or lack of talent (and sometimes precisely because of it), aspirants to public renown care more and more about the instant gratification that comes with recognition in the present (even if that present only lasts Warhol's proverbial fifteen minutes) than about being remembered by future generations.[4] When teenagers consider celebrity per se to be a "genuine career option" (Turner, *Understanding* 67), the proliferation of those who are famous for being famous (e.g., Hiltons and Kardashians) is inevitable. In the twenty-first century, the immortality of traditional fame has taken a back seat to the incandescence of celebrity.

What is at stake for social scientists in interrogating the "total social fact"[5] of ubiquitous celebrity is clear, but how can the methods, theories, and terms emanating from celebrity studies work for and inflect the kinds of literary and cultural critique that

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matter to most readers of *PMLA*? Foremost, in the preelectronic era literature figured among the principal modes of celebrity creation. Likewise, many texts themselves (literary and otherwise) have achieved renown, rendering their creators or performers instant celebrities. The community of readers, viewers, listeners, and critics that congeals in the wake of such literary superstars constitutes a version of the crowd, or *celebratio*, that lies at the root of celebrity. Indeed, the celebrated text may serve as a means of connecting the members of this multitude in their mercurial deification or denunciation of its creators or performers. These are the forces that produce celebrity writers and actors and that impel us to confront how texts and canons are shaped by, and shape, devoted readers. To address these topics is to read literary-cultural production in a social context. James F. English notes that the theorizing of "relationships of literary forms to social forces" has expanded in recent years to the point of being "everywhere" and has evolved into a critical "disciplinary contact zone" ("Everywhere" vii, xii). In arguing that we are now drawn to reading with a broader view (or "on the surface"), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus speculate that this is perhaps because our moment is one in which "so much seems to be on the surface" (2). As a phenomenon at once dismissed as superficial and acknowledged as pervasive in our culture, celebrity clearly begs analysis.

Over the past decade, several important studies have advanced the work of examining traditional objects of literary study through the lens of celebrity. Joe Moran in *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000) pursued in-depth analysis of how writers negotiate their own celebrity. In *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), English situated that phenomenon within the market forces and networks that produced a twentieth-century explosion of the literary awards and prizes that confer authorial stardom. Still others trained in literature have advanced valuable period- and author-specific case studies: for example, Frank Donoghue's *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (1996), Brenda Silver's *Virginia Woolf Icon* (1999), Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), David Blake's *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (2006), Joseph Roach's *It* (2007), Tom Mole's *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850* (2009), Eric Eisner's *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (2009), and Jonathan Goldman's *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (2011). When Jonathan Culler questions whether "literary studies and hence literary criticism [will] need to take new forms," given "the eroding of the value of the cultural capital long represented by literature" (907), we would respond that exploring the "contact zone" between literature and celebrity is one such form.

If most of our contributors use celebrity as their structuring concept, most of them also attempt to theorize the myriad ways in which celebrity thrives in, and is negotiated through, a middle ground that is brought into being between producers and consumers of culture who, in negotiating this space, create and define one another. In the dynamic interaction of charisma and fascination, visibility and voyeurism, the will to power and the will to be empowered, the "dream" of celebrity is—to recall the lyrics that launched Susan Boyle—"made and used and wasted" in an unending cycle. Call it what one will—the community-defining worlds of sports, politics, the arts, literature, or the blogosphere—that middle ground of negotiation is the constituting site of celebrity.[6]

A history of the media that traverse the middle ground is essential to anyone attempting to understand the breadth, depth, and intensity of the exchanges between dreamers—both producers and consumers—who speak to one another across the terrain of public opinion. Here the overlapping technol-

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ogies include modes of oral communication between performer and audience (which dominated preliterate society and are still present today), the copying and circulation of manuscripts, the invention of print (with its attendant book, periodical, and newsprint cultures), and the creation of electronic media. These technologies do not replace but rather "redefine and resituate" their predecessors (Masten, Stallybrass, and Vickers 1); their invention advances, if it does not necessarily cause, paradigmatic shifts in the scope and engagement of audience. Consider, for example, the late-medieval-to-early-modern expansion of audience to include those who spoke (and in some cases read) only in the vernacular. Although the potential for vernacular literary celebrity certainly increases with the output of the printing press, it does not necessarily depend on it. When Petrarch writes to Boccaccio about Dante (all three card-carrying members of "manuscript culture"), he worries about the latter's choice to widen his appeal by writing his *Commedia* in Tuscan (later to become Italian) rather than Latin. It was an undertaking elevated, Dante would argue, by its broader accessibility (to, among others, women, children, and common people) through "multiple channels—learned and lay, written and oral, public and private" (Steinberg 267). Petrarch, by contrast, would contend that the *Commedia* was more debased than ennobled by the attention of undiscerning crowds assembled in public spaces—of "illiterates in the taverns and squares" (204; bk. 21, letter 15)—whose favor Dante seemed to court. What is contested here is the value of appealing to a (somewhat uncontrollable) popular audience, one that would persist through centuries of accreting technologies: performance (Roberto Benigni's international tour of Dante recitations), print (today's thriving market of Dante translation and commentary), film, television (the Channel Four Television Corporation's 1990 *A TV Dante*), and video games (Electronic Arts' 2009 *Dante's Inferno*). Though this history of exposure through layered technologies cannot be read as progress, it nonetheless traces the making of the author into a household name. When a bottle of Dan.T's Inferno (an internationally distributed hot sauce) appears on your kitchen table, you know you are about to taste such stuff as celebrity dreams are made of.

Many of our contributors single out a specific historical epoch in which they argue that the complex relation of media to celebrity formation underwent an essential change. The debate about whether "modern celebrity" originated in the twentieth century with the advent of cinema, or in the court of Henry VIII, or in the worship of saints' icons, will continue; but it is tantalizing to note that several essays in this issue pinpoint the long eighteenth century as the moment in which changes in the theater, periodicals, and the press and an expanded audience created a form of celebrity that is recognizable to this day.[7] This historicizing of celebrity speaks to Holmes and Redmond's assertion that "the porous and interconnected nature of media forms" is not "only of prime concern to more contemporary studies of celebrity: such a context can prompt historical work to return to the past in order to take a more expansive media, and often disciplinary approach." Holmes and Redmond go on to hope "for an increasingly dynamic dialogue about the origins of 'modern' celebrity" (5), a dialogue initiated by Braudy's *Frenzy of Renown* and energetically advanced by the authors in this issue.

Considered as a group, what do the essays chosen for inclusion in this special issue bring to the discussion of celebrity and to the field of celebrity studies? And what is omitted in this process of selection?

- *Celebrity has a history.* Obsessed as our culture may be with contemporary celebrity and with the technologies that make contemporary celebrity culture inescapable, concepts of fame, renown, and celebrity have a deep history—and most of our contributors focus on textual and discursive

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manifestations of this past. Such literary-historical work meshes with Holmes and Redmond's call for scholars "to return to the past" better to understand "the interplay between past and present" (5).

- *Celebrity demands a gaze.* Several of our essayists stress the importance of the constituting gaze, the primacy of the visible. The face of celebrity depends on being seen and on celebrities' reflecting back images of their own fantasies and failures to spectators (fig. 4). The increased emphasis on media visibility, in turn, is reshaping understandings of what constitutes identity for new generations for whom subjectivity is synonymous with performing versions of oneself in the public eye.[8] That said, while some of our contributors work in film or television, we were surprised to find that analyses of contemporary visual media and technology did not dominate the submissions to this issue.
- *Celebrities perform.* Many contributors focus on figures with careers as performers—Colley Cibber, David Garrick, Sarah Bernhardt, Anna May Wong, Lucecita Benítez, Audrey Tautou—and several place their analysis in dialogue with performance studies. Indeed, as Braudy wryly notes in his contribution to this volume, we might well talk about "performer studies." A primary route—perhaps *the* primary route—for literarily trained scholars interested in celebrity lies directly through the related disciplines of performance studies and theater history, attesting to the critical contribution of these two fields (and of Peggy Phelan and Joseph Roach) to literary studies over the past decade. Hence, no doubt, the preponderance of submissions *PMLA* received focusing on aspects of the stage rather than of, say, cinema; hence the fact that so many submissions—as well as accepted essays—centered on the eighteenth century.
- *Celebrity resides in the public sphere.* When, in the throes of the 2008 presidential campaign, a glossy pro-McCain television ad attacked Barack Obama by calling him "the biggest celebrity in the world" and by likening him to Britney Spears and Paris Hilton, our topic manifestly moved front and center in the twenty-first-century public sphere.[9] Looking back, several of our authors take up what they judge to be "the historical coincidence of the critical public sphere, mass culture, and celebrity" as they seek to complicate received views that industrial capitalism and commercialization are unequivocally harmful by noting how those forces beneficially broaden social participation (see Bonnie Carr O'Neill's article on Walt Whitman in



Fig. 4
Despite Greta Garbo's famous retreat from the screen and even more notorious reclusiveness, her divine "Essence," as Roland Barthes put it in "Garbo's Face," depended on the interplay between not wanting to be seen—strikingly evoked in this image—and the insatiable desire of the public to gaze on its deified stars. (Georges Dudognon, *Greta Garbo in the Club St. Germain*, 1950s. Gelatin silver print, 17.9 × 18.1 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Foto Forum purchase. © Estate of Georges Dudognon.)

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this issue). Created by, and subject to, the vagaries of public opinion, celebrities are the very substance of a public discourse through which communities negotiate mores, values, and politics.

- *Celebrity invites close reading.* In a provocative call to arms in the inaugural issue of *Celebrity Studies*, Graeme Turner sees as a "weakness" in current celebrity studies the "dependence upon the methods of textual analysis" that have dominated work to date; the focus on modes of representation and discourse strikes him as "slightly regressive." While conceding that "textual analysis certainly remains a valid methodology," he correctly argues that it does not constitute an "entirely sufficient basis" for a broad celebrity studies agenda ("Approaching" 14–15). And yet our contributors overwhelmingly (and predictably) show how close textual reading—particularly when executed with a literarily trained sensitivity—has a continuing role to play in understanding celebrity as a social desire and cultural phenomenon.

While inspired by what our contents offer, we are also mindful of issues that get short shrift here. This incomplete coverage is in part a function of *PMLA*'s readership and selection process; critics working in contemporary culture and media certainly have alternative outlets for their work on celebrity. At any rate, what we see as gaps in the range of topics covered here—gaps partially filled by the materials that we solicited for the Theories and Methodologies section—point in directions where further exploration is encouraged. Politics, sports, crime, and popular entertainment—four familiar arenas of celebrity that are largely absent in this volume—might usefully be illuminated through the techniques of discursive analysis our profession has honed. Likewise, the geographic reach of our table of contents is not as broad as we had anticipated. Indeed, literatures and cultures other than English and North American receive scant attention here. To what degree is celebrity production in other star-saturated cultures—India's Bollywood immediately comes to mind, as does France's culture of public intellectualism, in which philosophers and critics populate the celebrity ranks—different from or similar to the formations here included? What does the fate of reality TV in the Middle East have to tell us about another culture's principles of star commodification and about the relation between concepts of democracy and state values? How do media organizations collaborate in the production of celebrity as a form of "indoctritainment" in authoritarian political regimes (Sun and Zhao)? What role does censorship—both official and self-assumed—play in the making of celebrity culture and celebrity renegades? Can the tools of literary-cultural criticism illuminate the more subterranean, unwritten flows of "celebrity chatter" and rumor mongering? Or provide inroads into demystifying the transnational means of producing and branding the commodities that increasingly subtend celebrity culture? While these questions and others not posed by our contributors suggest the provocative work that lies ahead and directions yet to be pursued, the essays in this special issue demonstrate in impressive measure the myriad insights to be discovered at the intersection of the studies of celebrity and literature.

After opening with reflections on two media-saturated contemporary "It" events—the rise of Susan Boyle and fall of Michael Jackson—we have decided in closing to turn to an event reported to have occurred in the distant past: a dinner party at which the pursuit of fame was a topic on the table. We offer it as a parable that continues to speak to the making and unmaking of celebrity, the changing vectors of fame, and the irresistible fascination that these themes have for professionals of our ilk, sometimes despite our vociferous denials. Attending this party, itself a celebration, were several celebrities of the

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moment (writers, actors, politicians), as well as other notables who went on to achieve immortal fame. The party conversation was so gossip-worthy (so we are told) that a dozen years afterward the event was still a source of speculation ("do you know what they really said?"), insatiable questioning ("was *he* there?"), and craven envy ("*he* was there!").

Although we might seem to be describing some fabulous happening hosted by Andy Warhol or Truman Capote, this celebrated repast occurred over two millennia ago and was recorded for all time in Plato's *Symposium*. In this philosophical dialogue, the prominent Athenians who have gathered over food and wine to celebrate Agathon's first prize in tragedy at the Lenaia—an Oscars for another age—have decided to entertain themselves by delivering eulogies on the subject of *erōs*, or passionate love. Socrates, as usual, trumps everyone else when he finally takes center stage. Pretending to modesty, he couches his lesson as a repetition of the words of his wise teacher, the prophetess Diotima. He explains that what human beings seek by loving beauty is, quite simply, immortality, be it of a lower (or physical) order, through procreation, or of a higher (or spiritual) order, through fame. For Plato fame represents a lasting reputation won by creating exceptional thoughts and deeds, noble works and efforts, to be remembered and venerated by future generations. Diotima also tells Socrates that love is neither a god nor a mortal, neither good nor bad, in itself: rather, it is a *daimōn*, a spirit-force that traverses the ether connecting celestial and earthly realms. Hence, love (like its motivating desire, lasting renown) carries with it not only numinous whispers of the immortal gods but also noxious whiffs emanating from the cesspool of earthy limitations in which human consciousness—in all its embarrassing vainglory—is mired.

This concept of love as a *daimōn* reminds us of Jennifer Wicke's description of celebrity in her contribution to this issue as a version of Platonic nous, "a nonrational intelligence linking us to the divine," as well as to what we earlier described as the transactional energy that flows between the charismatic idol and the crowd. In *The Symposium*, of course, Plato describes not celebrity but fame, a concept whose historically contingent value, as we have already suggested, has largely been eclipsed by the desire for celebrity in twenty-first-century culture. Nonetheless, we find a provocative analogy in the dialogue's suggestive linking of passionate love to the human desire to make a mark—be that mark on the face of time (to say, like Kilroy, "I *was* here") or in the moment (to say on *YouTube* "I *am* here"). On the one hand, a divine energy infuses human endeavor, and fame cheats death by providing a form of afterlife. On the other, a nonrational energy fueling celebrity (which may or may not lead to fame) cheats oblivion through inspiring the passions of a fascinated crowd in the present.

Like love, celebrity is something we cannot live with or without. It is, in Wicke's words, "a mode of social knowledge that is persuasive, immanent, and paradoxical all at once." Craven and inspiring, obsessive and mercurial, transcendent and debased: celebrity is a tangle of contradictions. Like love, too, it is everywhere and nowhere. It binds opposing modes of feeling and being into an all-embracing system whose logic is (at least in part) its own. At once social fact and fictive construction, celebrity joins together human communities in acts of mass worship, be it of the banal or of the sacred. In these rites, the exalted star of the moment and the transported throng of fans make their creative mark on time's wall, if only to see it erased seconds later. Such celebrity rites, then, are powerful creations of imagination, necessary—if often deluded—narratives that, sparking to life before dying away, exceed empirical ways of knowing. Little wonder at the potential affinities between the studying of literature—a gift of numinous imagination

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.900 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the stuff of dreams—and the equally numinous phenomenon we call celebrity.

Notes

1. "It was a moment shared by perhaps 1 billion people" is the single-sentence lead paragraph of Huffstutter and Fausset; they go on to describe the extended memorial "moment" as "both global and intimate" (A1). Robinson's and Gordy's remarks are reported by Boucher and Fernandez (A1). Both eulogies are available on *YouTube*, Robinson's at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVru-mzjm_4, Gordy's at www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vibRwe8iCk.

2. This phrase is from "I Dreamed a Dream," the song from the musical *Les Misérables* chosen by Boyle for her television debut. Claude-Michel Schönberg wrote the music, and Alain Boublil wrote the French lyrics, which were adapted into English by Herbert Kretzmer. On the processes that make "a 'nobody'" into "a 'somebody'" in contemporary culture, see Gamson in this issue. Boyle's performance is available on *YouTube*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxPZh4AnWyk.

3. On celebrity and religion, see Roach 16–19; Rojek, ch. 2; and Wicke in this issue.

4. See Gamson in this issue.

5. On this concept, see Wicke, invoking Marcel Mauss, in this issue.

6. On the study of "social interaction" as the agenda for a sociology of celebrity that moves through and past "commodification" and "pathology," see Ferris and Harris.

7. On the "long," "wide," and "deep" eighteenth century, see Roach 12–21.

8. As Graeme Turner notes, celebrity-driven "notions of media visibility" are now authoring social identities, embedding themselves "in our culture's repertoire of understandings of what it is to be a subject, what constitutes identity" ("Approaching" 18). P. David Marshall also argues that social networks are creating new constructions of the self that are, in turn, integrally related to twenty-first-century celebrity formations: "What makes [these social networks] very much connected to celebrity is that as much as they are about an exchange and dissemination of thoughts and links to other media and on-line sources, they are a constitutive and organic production of the self. This self-production is the very core of celebrity activity and it now serves as a rubric and template for the organisation and production of the on-line self which has become at the very least an important component of our presentation of ourselves to the world" ("Promotion" 39).

9. The pro-McCain advertisement is available on *YouTube*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHXYsw_ZDXg.

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