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# 1

## Romantic Celebrity

Celebrity culture does not want to be understood. It functions best when consumers remain mystified by it, attributing a celebrity's success to his or her magical star quality. Only recently have cultural theorists begun to map celebrity's structures, and scholars of literature, theatre and the visual arts to trace its historical contours. This chapter elaborates a theory and a history of celebrity, which not only underpin my reading of Byron's career, but are also, I hope, more widely applicable. Celebrity is a cultural apparatus consisting of three elements: an individual, an industry and an audience. Modern celebrity culture begins when these three components routinely work together to render an individual personally fascinating. This kind of fascination is unlike the pre-modern interest with an individual's public role, and its genesis is historically specific. I argue that we've had celebrities since the late eighteenth century and a celebrity culture since the beginning of the nineteenth.

Reviewing *Childe Harold* Canto Three in 1816, the *Portfolio* knew what kind of text it was dealing with, and dissected the new 'species of distinction':

Indeed it is the real romance of [Byron's] life, immeasurably more than the fabled one of his pen, which the public expects to find in his pages, and which not so much engages its sympathy, as piques its curiosity, and feeds thought and conversation. The Noble Poet, in the mean time, is content with – it should be said is ambitious of – this species of distinction; the booksellers, printers, and stationers, all profit by the traffic to which the exhibition gives rise; and thus every party is a gainer in this remarkable phenomenon of the time.<sup>1</sup>

First, the reviewer identified an audience that was fascinated by the author's life, which seemed to be a 'real romance' operating on a more remarkable plane than the lives of his readers. They enjoyed contemplating the celebrity's subjectivity through the lens of his (and elsewhere her) poems, and their fascination fed both private 'thought' and sociable 'conversation'. On one hand, that fascination enabled a retreat from social life into thoughts about the poet. On the other, it provoked controversy, unifying and dividing Byron's readers into accusers and defenders of his personal motives, admirers and condemners of his private conduct, lovers and haters of his poetry. Providing a topic about which anyone could take a view, celebrity structured social intercourse and supplied a ligament of group identity.

Having diagnosed readers' expectations, the reviewer proceeded to join them in peering behind the text to glimpse an individual whose motives could be discerned. The author, he claimed, was ambitious for a particular kind of public profile – an implicitly inferior 'species of distinction' – and was responsive to the demands of his audience. His ambitions and their demands coalesced into a particular kind of text. It was not simply an autobiography, although the emergence of a vocabulary for autobiography is part of celebrity culture, but a laminar text that overlaid revelation and concealment.<sup>2</sup> On the surface it was a fabled romance, a doubly fictive construction. But the enterprising and curious reader could 'find in his pages' a 'real romance' which was both remarkable and yet routinely expected from the author's texts. Once it was uncovered or decoded, this layer not only offered a superior kind of satisfaction, but also 'pique[d]' the reader to search for a further, extra-textual layer of authenticity, where the 'real romance' would give way to reality itself.

This torrid partnership of confessional author and curious reader was supplemented and mediated by a third term: an industry of 'book-sellers, printers, and stationers' whose primary motive was pecuniary. Availing themselves of technological developments in papermaking, printing and engraving, of improvements in infrastructure and the new promotional opportunities afforded by an enlarged market for newspapers, magazines and literary journals, this industry promulgated 'the traffic to which the exhibition gives rise'. It produced celebrity texts in unprecedented numbers by industrial means and distributed them rapidly around the country, the continent and – before long – the world. When the individual, the industry and the audience clicked into place to form the celebrity apparatus, it seemed to the *Portfolio* that no one could lose. '[E]very party [was] a gainer': the author gained cultural

distinction and often financial reward, the industry sustained and expanded a profitable business, and the audience enjoyed both private pleasures and social amusements in exchange for the price of a book. These authorial activities, readerly rewards and industrial enterprises were worth commenting on because they were new. When the *Portfolio* identified this as a 'remarkable phenomenon of the time' it did so because the reviewer thought it was a decidedly modern and significant development.

## 1. History and theory

I contend that any analysis of celebrity culture should be built on the three pillars of an industry, an individual and an audience. An *industry* arranges the available technology, labour and skill in order to produce and distribute multiple copies, in large numbers, of a commodity which need not refer back to any 'original'. The celebrity apparatus embraces both the primary industry which produces the celebrity's work (such as literary publishing or Hollywood cinema) and several secondary industries which promote and distribute it (such as newspapers and engravings, or photography and television). In this book I am concerned with the industries that produce and distribute verbal and visual printed matter.<sup>3</sup> These industries were displaced, but not simply made redundant, by the later flourishing of celebrity through lens-based media, which continue to work hand in hand with print. The celebrity *individual* enters a feedback loop in which being a celebrity affects his or her self-understanding, so that neither self nor celebrity can be conceptually quarantined from the other. The non-celebrity does not survive unchanged within the celebrity apparatus, but neither does the apparatus operate without reference to the subject at its core. The individual may, however, be concerned to defend a kernel of subjectivity that appears to be untouched by celebrity. An *audience* – massive, anonymous, socially diverse, geographically distributed – consumes and interprets celebrity, often in creative ways. These responses are unauthorised by the celebrity individual or the industry, and beyond their control, although the industry may attempt to police them in various ways. The audience's responses are acts of self-fashioning: definitions and declarations of individual and group identity which may entail both emulation and critique. The nature of each element in the celebrity apparatus – the individual, the industry and the audience – may change over time. But particular characteristics of each, and particular relations between them, are necessary for celebrity culture to get going in the first

place. I argue that the crucial changes that produced modern celebrity culture occurred in the Romantic period.

In the story that celebrity culture tells about itself, the celebrity's public profile appears as the well-deserved reward for talent and determination and the seemingly magical crystallisation of personal qualities. A priority for critics of celebrity culture, therefore, has been to demystify its ideological work. Daniel Boorstin began this process with a notable jeremiad that characterised celebrity as recognition without substance. For Boorstin, celebrities were 'human pseudo-events' symptomatic of a lamentable inauthenticity in American life.<sup>4</sup> Richard Dyer limited his analysis to film stars, but provided a useful way of thinking about the star as a 'sign'.<sup>5</sup> Critics such as Joshua Gamson, Tyler Cowen and P. David Marshall performed a strategic shift, bracketing the experience of the celebrity individual in order to focus on the phenomenon's cultural and economic scaffolding. Gamson offers a sociological account based on participant observation and on interviews with media professionals and audience members, concluding that at least some people in both camps have a highly developed sense of irony.<sup>6</sup> Cowen analyses the economics of celebrity culture, arguing that it is a non-zero-sum business with potential trickle-down benefits.<sup>7</sup> Marshall, in the most sophisticated study to date, employs a 'double hermeneutic' that considers both 'intention' and 'reception'.<sup>8</sup> He locates intention not in the individual but in the culture industry, and looks to reception aesthetics and social psychology for insights into audience response. Graeme Turner surveys the existing work on the subject, paying attention to production (the industry) and consumption (the audience).<sup>9</sup> These studies all tend to avoid discussing the experience of individual celebrities and to concentrate on the industry and/or the audience. They represent celebrities as what Marshall, Gamson and Moran variously call a 'bridge of meaning', 'built on major [...] fault lines' or 'a contested area of cultural production'.<sup>10</sup> Forming an important node of cultural concerns, celebrities connect producers and consumers, elite and popular pursuits, high and low culture, bourgeois individualism and proletarian collectivity, cultural capital and hard cash.

Bracketing the individual out of the investigation made a critical theory of celebrity possible. But it also made it difficult to develop an account of the limits that impose on the celebrity's agency and the tactics he or she develops to function within those limits. These issues are important because the celebrity experiences the subjective trauma of commodity capitalism in a particularly acute fashion. He is both a producer of commodities and himself, in a sense, a commodity.

Seeing his or her image return in industrially mediated forms, the celebrity's experience goes beyond the standard Marxist diagnosis of alienation to become self-alienation.<sup>11</sup> Bracketing celebrity subjectivity may give the impression that identity remains unchanged by celebrity. But subjectivity is not an extrinsic component for the critic to plug in once his or her understanding of the celebrity apparatus is complete. The subjectivity of the individual and the apparatus of celebrity may in fact be mutually constitutive. Moreover, the historical emergence of celebrity is connected, I believe, to the normalisation of certain modern ideas about subjectivity. Celebrity impacts not only on the selfhood of the celebrity, but on conceptions of selfhood itself.

Such conceptions must be understood in relation to a history of private life and the public sphere. The historical emergence of modern celebrity culture contributes, in an early and pervasive fashion, to the disintegration of the Habermasian public sphere. Habermas suggests several factors that contribute to this disintegration, from the intrusion of state power to the inclusion of previously excluded groups, but celebrity also plays its part in two ways.<sup>12</sup> First, the growth of celebrity culture helps to blur the boundary between the private and the public experiences of individuals; secondly, it contributes to the colonisation of the public sphere by the market. The Habermasian public sphere passed off the interests of its limited membership as universal and representative, but historians have also identified a variety of counter public spheres, occupied by women, radicals and other disenfranchised groups.<sup>13</sup> The celebrity apparatus does not set up another counter public sphere in which celebrity discourse circulates. Rather, celebrity is a tendency that cuts across all public and counter public spheres, emphasising not just the permeability of private and public, but their commercialised interpenetration.

A similar caveat applies to the doctrine of separate spheres for the genders. The notion that 'separate spheres' ever described a historical reality is now routinely questioned. The doctrine is better understood as a prescriptive discourse which tried to regulate women's participation in either the Habermasian public sphere or a feminised counter public sphere.<sup>14</sup> The existence of female celebrities shows that the doctrine of separate spheres is not an accurate description of gender roles in the Romantic period, but nonetheless female celebrities often fell foul of the *prescriptive* discourse of separate spheres, and had to adjust or excuse their practice accordingly. Studying celebrity culture requires us to look again at the public sphere's history. Rather than argue that private overtook public, or vice versa, it would be more accurate to say

that a liminal space between the two expanded to take over both public and private, with the result that, in the experience of both the celebrity and the fan, public and private aspects are constantly referred to one another.<sup>15</sup>

I use the term *apparatus* to give my theory a historical dimension.<sup>16</sup> The term encompasses the individual, the industry and the audience that combine to produce the celebrity phenomenon and acknowledges that these elements come together at a specific historical moment. Brecht uses the term (*apparat* in German) to refer to the physical conditions of production in the opera, the theatre or the press, which proceed unquestioned and impose their logic on the work produced.<sup>17</sup> Foucault extends the term (*dispositif* in French) to refer to 'a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble' whose elements are 'the said as much as the unsaid' and which consists of 'the system of relations that can be established between these elements.'<sup>18</sup> Foucault also insists that an apparatus has a history, and is tied to a particular genesis. It is a 'formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*'.<sup>19</sup> The elements that make up celebrity's heterogeneous ensemble are modified over time, as I have suggested. But I will argue that the *urgent need*, which leads to the apparatus becoming a cultural norm, should be located in the Romantic period and has not yet been studied.

There is little consensus about when modern celebrity culture began. For Leo Braudy, fame is a 'constant theme in the history of Western society', and he acknowledges no decisive break inaugurating modern celebrity.<sup>20</sup> Chris Rojek invokes the 'major interrelated historical processes' of 'democratisation', 'decline in organised religion' and 'the commodification of everyday life', before claiming that 'celebrity must be understood as a *modern* phenomenon, a phenomenon of mass-circulation newspapers, TV, radio and film'.<sup>21</sup> Several film historians date modern celebrity culture from the story of Florence Lawrence. Her fans knew her as the 'Biograph Girl' until 1910, when her employers apparently planted a false newspaper report of her sudden death. A few days later they placed an advertisement in *Moving Picture World*, with a photo, refuting the first story and confirming that Lawrence now worked for them at IMP.<sup>22</sup> Neal Gabler and Charles L. Ponce de Leon, by contrast, argue for the emergence of celebrity in twentieth-century human-interest journalism.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Braudy, all these critics share Richard Schickel's 'first basic assumption' that 'there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century'.<sup>24</sup>

However, a number of critics have recently argued for a longer view of celebrity culture's history. Investigating late-nineteenth-century celebrity, Richard Salmon has cited as evidence the proliferation of photographs, the rise of interviewing as a journalistic form, a tendency to conduct interviews in the subject's home and the fashion for authors to give public readings.<sup>25</sup> Film historians studying Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) have argued for her importance as a transitional figure between theatrical and cinematic celebrity.<sup>26</sup> Lenard R. Berlanstein has examined gendered aspects of celebrity in the nineteenth-century French press and Claire Brock has drawn attention to the 'feminization' of fame in the Romantic period.<sup>27</sup> Art historians have argued that Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) was a pivotal figure in cultivating celebrity for himself and his sitters.<sup>28</sup> Frank Donoghue and David Higgins have argued for the importance of periodical writing to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary celebrity.<sup>29</sup> Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody have suggested that theatrical celebrity can be traced back to 1660.<sup>30</sup> And Antonin Careme (1783–1833) has been claimed as 'the first celebrity chef'.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, careful distinctions are required to make a history of modern celebrity culture compelling. Elements of celebrity culture are certainly visible by the early 1700s, but I will argue that the cultural apparatus did not start to function in earnest until the end of the century. David Garrick (1717–1779) is my first example. His London debut, as Richard III at Goodman's Fields Theatre in 1741, aged 24, was hailed as a revolution in acting style. Garrick aimed 'to bring the Sock & Buskin down to Nature', replacing a stylised representation of the passions with a 'natural' acting style.<sup>32</sup> He became famous for his facial expressions, which were indebted to Charles Lebrun's scheme for portraying emotions in painting.<sup>33</sup> Having drawn on painterly conventions, Garrick's style lent itself to pictorial representation, which consolidated his public profile.<sup>34</sup> His efforts to promote and control his public image foreshadow many later celebrity strategies, but take place in a largely pre-industrial culture.

*The Farmer's Return* is a good example of Garrick's practice. He wrote this short interlude in 1762 and played the title role at Drury Lane. He got Hogarth to draw the scene and hung the drawing in his London house. Then he arranged for Johan Zoffany, who had already painted four pictures of Garrick and his family enjoying the domestic comforts of the gentry, to paint the same scene. Zoffany exhibited his painting at the Society of Artists before it too was hung in Garrick's house. Finally, Garrick got Hogarth's drawing engraved and used it as a frontispiece

when the play was published later in the year. Neither script, performance, drawing, painting nor engraving is a significant work of art on its own. But taken together they represent a multimedia effort to promote Garrick's career, which exploits the permeability of domestic and public spaces to boost his cultural visibility. At the same time, Garrick was being portrayed not only in his roles, but as himself. In Joshua Reynolds's painting *David Garrick Between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761), Garrick appears in an allegory of his own career. Equally talented in tragic and comic roles, Garrick is wooed by both muses, and must choose between the soft delights of a comely Comedy and the stern virtues of the matriarch Tragedy. Reynolds's 1784 portrait of Sarah Siddons (1755–1831) as the tragic muse treads similar ground, and Thomas Lawrence's 1804 portrait shows her out of costume, giving a dramatic reading.<sup>35</sup> Rather than commemorating particular productions, these portraits show actors enacting their ability to act. Reynolds presents Garrick and Siddons as heightened versions of themselves, propagating a fascination with them as individuals which would flower with the advent of celebrity culture at the end of the century.

David Garrick would also play his part in promoting another versatile eighteenth-century performer: Laurence Sterne (1713–1768). Armed with a provincial printer and a metropolitan distributor, Sterne was keen to leave his Yorkshire parishes behind and make a stir in London. After a pre-publication advertisement appeared in the *London Chronicle*, he wrote a letter in praise of *Tristram Shandy*, which he got his mistress Catherine Fourmantel to copy out and send to Garrick, as though it came from her.<sup>36</sup> Garrick subsequently befriended Sterne, and is mentioned by name four times in *Tristram Shandy*. Meanwhile, Sterne's first biographer, John Hill, was keen to tell a different story: one about merit making good. 'Here were none of the common arts of making a reputation practised', he wrote, 'no friend before hand told people how excellent a book it was [...] A parcel of books were [*sic*] sent up out of the country; they were unknown, and scarce advertised; but thus friendless they made their own way, and their author's.'<sup>37</sup> Here a parcel of books stands as a metonym for the author, in a now-familiar story of the unknown aspirant who comes to the big city and waits for someone to scout out her star quality. There was a backlash when it emerged that Sterne was a clergyman, but he cemented his success on his visits to London, where, Hill wrote, '[e]very body is curious to see the author; and, when they see him, every body loves the man'.<sup>38</sup> Peter Briggs suggests that Sterne positioned himself 'not as a literary candidate for slow fame but as a theatrical candidate for sudden fame'.<sup>39</sup> Sterne went on to circulate his

portrait as a frontispiece engraving, and enjoyed a more limited success with the publication of his sermons. Garrick and Sterne operated on the cusp of modern celebrity culture, but I will argue that technological innovations and social changes were necessary before celebrity became a cultural norm.

Garrick's experience in the 1760s suggests that the three elements which make up the celebrity apparatus were not yet working in concert. While visiting Paris, Garrick wrote to his brother that he was 'plagu'd here for my Prints or rather Prints of Me', and asked him to send 'six prints from Reynolds's picture [...] & any other prints of Me, if tolerable'.<sup>40</sup> But it seems that prints of the Reynolds portrait were already circulating in Paris – it's just that no one knew they were of Garrick. Just a few months later, George Colman the Elder wrote to Garrick from Paris, 'There hang out in every street, pirated prints of Reynolds's Picture of you, which are underwritten "L'homme entre le Vice et la Virtu"'.<sup>41</sup> Mistaking the identities of Garrick and his allegorical co-stars, the Paris printsellers marketed the image as a moral emblem rather than a celebrity spin-off. The pirates, knowingly or otherwise, detached the picture from the individual in order to promote it in abstract terms to a wider audience. In celebrity culture the opposite approach will dominate. Texts that do not originate with the celebrity individual will be associated with him or her in order to enhance their circulation and boost their market value.

Sterne's strategies of self-promotion closely resemble those of later celebrities. But the same reservations apply.<sup>42</sup> His success relied on ceaselessly collecting subscriptions; he secured six hundred and fifty of them for *The Sermons of Mr Yorick*, and for a later volume of sermons he aimed to compile 'the largest, and most splendid list which ever pranced before a book, since subscriptions came into fashion'.<sup>43</sup> Sterne's tireless dining-out won his books a large audience among the 'splendid' social and ecclesiastical elite. But without the later industrial developments in print technology, the growth of the periodical market to which they gave rise, the improvements in infrastructure which enabled wider distribution of printed matter to the increasing number of literate people among a rapidly enlarging population, and the shift from subscription publication to unmediated commercial publication, Sterne could not reach the mass audience of modern celebrity, nor reach his audience with such speed. When Walter Scott reflected on the impact of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, it was this sense of the audience's size and social diversity, and the speed with which new works could reach it, that seemed to him to mark off his generation from that of Sterne:

Reading is indeed so general among all ranks and classes, that the impulse received by the public mind on such occasions is instantaneous through all but the lowest classes of society, instead of being slowly communicated from one set of readers to another, as was the case in the days of our fathers.<sup>44</sup>

Although the self-presentation of individuals such as Sterne and Garrick included celebrity characteristics, it required the growth of a modern industry of production, promotion and distribution, and a modern audience – massive, anonymous, socially diverse and geographically distributed – before these elements combined to form a celebrity culture in the modern sense.

## 2. Personality overload and readerly alienation

Celebrity became a modern cultural phenomenon because it answered an '*urgent need*' created by the industrialised print culture of the Romantic period. Industrial publishing functioned as the primary industry for literary celebrities such as Byron, and as the secondary industry which promoted celebrities from other media, such as the theatre. Industrialisation combined with new intellectual property regimes, population growth, urbanisation and rising literacy to drive the explosive, unprecedented growth in the annual output of printed items from the late eighteenth century, which is visible in statistics from the English Short Title Catalogue (Fig. 1.1). After a phase of slow growth in the 1700s (possibly a fall in real terms) during what William St Clair calls the 'high monopoly period', we see an exponential growth curve begun by Donaldson v. Beckett in 1774, sustained by industrialisation and augmented by rising demand.<sup>45</sup> These statistics should be treated with caution, but the overall picture is unmistakable. By the turn of the century there were not only more readers in Britain than ever before, but also a great deal more for them to read.

The explosion of printed matter threatened both to reach a disturbingly radical popular audience and to swamp those readers who by remaining *au courant* might have checked and guided the tide of popular opinion. The overwhelmingly large and exponentially growing body of text called for strategies of selective reading. By 1795, the flood of new material had already overwhelmed Isaac D'Israeli:

When I reflect that every literary journal consists of 50 or 60 publications, and that of those, five or six at least are capital performances,

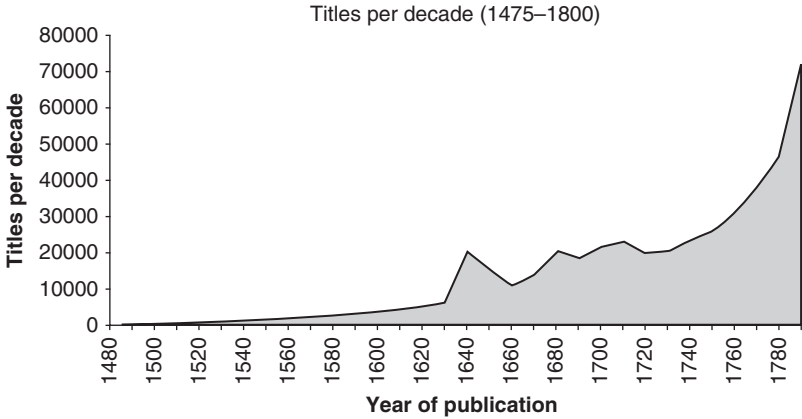


Figure 1.1 Graph showing publication totals from the English Short Title Catalogue.

Source: Alain Veylit, 'Some Statistics on the Number of Surviving Printed Titles for Great Britain and Dependencies from the Beginnings of Print in England to the year 1800', <http://www.cbsr.ucr.edu/ESTCStatistics.html> consulted 11 November 2003. Veylit notes that 'This [...] chart gives us a global picture of the printed material from Great Britain, dependencies and North America that has survived in public libraries organised by number of titles per decade. The overall mathematical shape is clear: it is an exponential curve. Even if we compensate for the fact that more items are likely to survive from the 18th than they are from the 16th century, and are cautious about the distorting lens of cataloguing procedures, it is very unlikely that historical reality could have been very much different.' See Note 47 for further comments on interpreting these data.

and the greater part not contemptible, when I take the pen and attempt to calculate, by these given sums, the number of volumes which the next century must infallibly produce, my feeble faculties wander in a perplexed series, and as I lose myself among billions, trillions, and quartillions, I am obliged to lay down my pen, and stop at infinity.<sup>46</sup>

After the turn of the century, the *Edinburgh Review* (founded in 1802), and its rival the *Quarterly* (1809), abandoned the ambition of earlier journals such as the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731) to notice every new publication. Their radically selective and evaluative approach helped to mediate between this glut of text and its audience.<sup>47</sup> But it was not simply a surge in the amount of printed matter that assaulted Romantic readers; it was also a deluge of proper names.

It is now possible to calculate the percentage of poetry and novels in the Romantic period that appeared anonymously. The results shed

a new light on the received idea that this is an age of personality. Not only were there more printed items to read, but, for these two literary forms, an increasing proportion of them emerged with a proper name attached. More books, more names. Both novels and poetry volumes show a marked and rapid drop in percentage anonymity until 1807 (Fig. 1.2). After that year the downward trend continues steadily for poetry volumes, while the percentage of novels published anonymously increases once again.<sup>48</sup> In 1770, over 60 per cent of poetry volumes were published anonymously. In the years that followed, it became increasingly common for authors to fix names to their books, and when Byron was born in 1788 only 36 per cent of poetry books were anonymous. When he died in 1824 the figure was only 22.7 per cent and it went on to reach a low point of 16.7 per cent in 1834: only 22 volumes out of

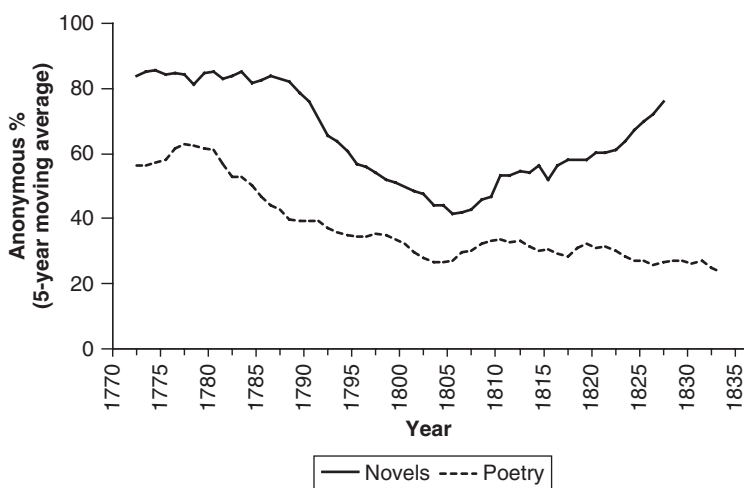


Figure 1.2 Graph showing percentage of new novels and poems published anonymously in the Romantic period.

Source: My calculations for poetry volumes are based on Lee Erickson's data in his article 'Unboastful Bard': Originally Anonymous English Romantic Poetry Book Publication, 1770–1835', *New Literary History*, 33 (2002), 247–78. Erickson's figures are drawn from J. R. de J. Jackson, *Annals of English verse, 1770–1835: A Preliminary Survey of the Volumes Published* (New York: Garland, 1985) and supplemented by additional titles from J. R. de J. Jackson, *Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770–1835* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For the novel, I have drawn on *The English Novel 1770–1829, a Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. James Raven, Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), using data from tables on I, 46–7 and II, 73. For the graph, a 5-year moving average has been used to smooth out peaks and troughs in the data.

132 recorded. The strength of the general trend away from anonymous poetry in the period is striking.

The less anonymous writing there was, the more names had to compete for attention in the increasingly overcrowded public sphere. Mary Robinson – herself celebrated as a poet, novelist, actress and sometime mistress of the Prince of Wales – listed the aspirants in 1795:

Poets, painters, and musicians;  
Lawyers, doctors, politicians:  
Pamphlets, newspapers, and odes,  
Seeking fame by diff'rent roads.<sup>49</sup>

In an Augustan descriptive catalogue, she linked an emerging professionalism with the varieties of print that propelled all kinds of people towards the common goal of individual celebrity. Print culture thronged with named individuals promoting their products and policies, their ideas and ideals – themselves. Proper names circulated along newly formed distribution networks, jostling for public notice. The numbers point to a Romantic surfeit of public personality.

This surfeit required people to develop new strategies for discriminating between the claims on their attention made by different individuals. And once print culture had redrawn the map of public life, strategies of self-promotion took on a new significance. When the surge in public profiles combined with the historic power shifts that were underway, established ways of working out who mattered would no longer hold. Paralleling the shift from inclusiveness to selectivity in the reviews, biographical encyclopaedias in the period show the difficulty of assimilating all the information circulating about personalities. Granger's *Biographical History of England* marks the failure of attempts to be comprehensive. Its first edition in 1769 was in three volumes and bore the long-winded title:

A BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND, FROM EGBERT the GREAT to the REVOLUTION: CONSISTING OF CHARACTERS disposed in different CLASSES, and adapted to a METHODICAL CATALOGUE of Engraved BRITISH HEADS: INTENDED AS An ESSAY towards reducing our BIOGRAPHY to SYSTEM, and a Help to the Knowledge of PORTRAITS: INTERSPERSED WITH Variety of ANECDOTES, and MEMOIRS of a great Number of PERSONS, not to be found in any other Biographical Work: With a PREFACE, shewing the Utility of

a Collection of ENGRAVED PORTRAITS to supply the Defect, and answer the various Purposes of MEDALS.

Granger produced a second edition in 1775, a third edition 'with large additions and improvements' in 1779 and a fourth edition in 1804, each in four volumes.<sup>50</sup> By the fifth edition in 1824, the original three volumes had swelled to six 'with upwards of a hundred additional lives'. Granger's effort 'towards reducing our BIOGRAPHY to SYSTEM' required a comprehensive classification scheme. He arranged the catalogue historically by the reigns of English monarchs and hierarchically within each reign into 12 classes. The royal family came at the top, followed by 'Great Officers of State', peers, churchmen and so on. 'Ladies, and others, of the Female Sex' were grouped in the eleventh category, and at the bottom came 'Persons of both Sexes, chiefly of the lowest Order of the People, remarkable from only one Circumstance in their Lives; namely [...] deformed Persons, Convicts, &c.'<sup>51</sup> Bibliomaniacs collected the engraved portraits that Granger catalogued, and bound them into his book, in a practice that became known as *Grangerizing*. In the process, a single copy of Granger's book might expand into a multi-volume set containing thousands of illustrations.<sup>52</sup> Such unwieldy and hubristic attempts at comprehensiveness were bound to fail once the Romantic personality overload set in. No matter how fast Granger's *History* grew with each edition, it couldn't hope to keep pace with the increasing number of names that demanded inclusion in its pages and made its system seem hopelessly dated.

Instead of comprehensiveness, selectivity was required. While the *Edinburgh Review* took the flood of printed matter in hand, deigning to notice only a tiny fraction, another kind of biographical collection aimed to sift through the surfeit of public personality. Nobility provided the obvious tool for selection, and 75 different guides to the peerage were published between 1770 and 1830, including the first edition of Debrett's in 1802 and Burke's in 1826.<sup>53</sup> But in a changing political climate, rank was no longer such an effective rule of thumb. Claims to public notice could no longer rest solely on heraldic devices, inherited titles or inalienable estates. These historic shifts both displaced the authority of the old codes and made it all the more urgent to find new ones for winnowing claims on the public's attention. Lord Byron, as both an aristocrat and a celebrity, eased the transition to a new form of personal distinction.

In the shadow of the French Revolution, it also seemed vital to assert British individuality over French collectivity. Jerome Christensen

suggests that the French Revolution was characterised in Britain as the 'collective subordination of manifold, contingent life courses to the idea of an inevitable historical event'. The British reacted by looking for a 'new man' whose individual strength of character would oppose the Revolutionary 'supersession of biography by typology' and reassure them that revolution was an exclusively Continental trauma.<sup>54</sup> But a personality vacuum occupied the political power centre after the deaths of Pitt and Fox in 1806, and the ironically named Ministry of All the Talents (1806–1807) failed to fill the gap; moreover, the Regency crisis of 1811 only made things worse.<sup>55</sup> The British seemed to be deluged with personalities, yet lacking a way to work out who really mattered.

What was true for public life in general was true for literature in particular. 'This truth at least let Satire's self allow', Byron wrote, 'No dearth of Bards can be complained of now.'<sup>56</sup> And Thomas Moore raised a laugh by pretending that the opposite was true, in an 'Announcement of a New Grand Acceleration Company for the Promotion of the Speed of Literature'.<sup>57</sup> The company would feed the newly enlarged reading public's demand for books, 'Loud complaints being made, in these quick-reading times, / Of too slack a supply, both of prose works and rhymes' (1–2). The company had established a literature factory where 'We keep authors ready, all perch'd, pen in hand, / To write off, in any giv'n style, at command' (40–1). It thus aimed to profit from the importance of proper names in the literary market. '[O]n th' establishment' were to be found:

six Walter Scotts,  
 One capital Wordsworth, and Southey's in lots; –  
 Three choice Mrs. Nortons, all singing like syrens,  
 While most of our pallid young clerks are Lord Byrons.  
 Then we've \*\*\*s and \*\*\*s (for whom there's small call),  
 And \*\*\*s and \*\*\*s (for whom no call at all).

(44–9)

There was no call for authors with no names. Meanwhile, named authors flooded the market with writing that seemed to be churned out of the factories that were appearing across the English countryside.

The rise of industrially produced books interposed an impersonal mediating layer between writers and readers. With 'general commercial publishing of the modern kind', in Raymond Williams's classic characterisation, came 'the institution of "the market" as the type of a writer's

actual relations with society'.<sup>58</sup> As more published writers became known to their readers by name, writers could know the names of a smaller fraction of their readership. The audience became anonymous and unknowable, creating a new alienation between writer and reader. Many authors despaired of finding a sympathetic audience, and denigrated the marketplace and the reading multitude as a result.<sup>59</sup> Readers likewise felt estranged from authors: how were they to find among the mass of new reading material an author who shared their assumptions and concerns? Thomas De Quincey recalled his childhood experience of this estrangement in *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845). Having contracted a debt with a local bookseller, De Quincey recalled how he seemed to have stumbled into a 'vast systematic machinery' for the industrial production of innumerable books and their distribution into every corner of England.<sup>60</sup> He imagined an endless 'procession of carts and waggons' emanating from the mysterious and impersonal metropolis to jettison piles of books at his door.<sup>61</sup> 'De Quincey's fantasy', writes Lucy Newlyn, 'figures the reader as the helpless consumer of books and as the humiliated victim of a powerful machinery of literary production designed precisely to remind him of his anonymous unimportance.'<sup>62</sup> The apparatus of celebrity was among the structures that Romantic culture developed to mitigate this sense of information overload and alienation. It responded to the surfeit of public personality by branding an individual's identity in order to make it amenable to commercial promotion. It palliated the feeling of alienation between cultural producers and consumers by constructing a sense of intimacy.

### 3. The branded identity

In order to boost the celebrity individual's visibility over that of other aspirants, the celebrity apparatus turned his or her proper name into a brand name.<sup>63</sup> The words 'Edmund Kean', printed in red on the first two-colour playbills, were bound to draw an audience.<sup>64</sup> Theatregoers could rest assured that, whatever the play, they would witness another lightning flash of Kean's genius. When the *European Magazine* received a 'new volume of poetry, bearing the noble name of Byron as it's [*sic*] passport to celebrity' it knew that the noble name acted as a guarantor of certain marketable qualities and connotations.<sup>65</sup> Byron's name commanded notice, even when his writing did not. The volume in question included *Sardanapalus*, which had 'so very few claims upon our attention, that were it not the work of the author of "*Childe Harold*," it might be very readily permitted to pass unnoticed'.<sup>66</sup>

A branded identity was the product of many mentions in the Romantic print media such as these. Being connected to a particular newspaper or journal was invaluable. Mary Robinson was promoted through the pages of the *Morning Post*, where she was poetry editor from 1799. Judith Pascoe notes that a reader of the *Post* would often have seen 'a front-page advertisement for a subscription to a new Robinson volume, a poem, a puff, a promotion for a soon-to-be-published poem', a report on her health or a poem addressed to her by an admirer.<sup>67</sup> Robinson also promoted herself by including her name in the 'List of British Female Literary Characters', which concluded her initially pseudonymous *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799). Her efforts combined with sometimes-unwelcome attention from others to create a celebrity identity. Branded as Perdita after the Shakespearean role in which she caught the Prince of Wales's eye, she would later try to escape this branded identity by appearing under several pseudonyms, from the Della Cruscan Laura Maria to the thornier Tabitha Bramble.<sup>68</sup> While Robinson used multiple pseudonyms to escape her branded identity, Letitia Landon (1802–1838) was moulded into the compelling and mysterious initials L.E.L. in the pages of the *Literary Gazette*. Edward Bulwer Lytton recalled sharing with his undergraduate friends 'a rush every Saturday afternoon for *The Literary Gazette*, and an impatient anxiety to hasten at once to the corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters of "L.E.L."'. Having read Landon's weekly contribution to the paper, they joined in the twin pursuits of literary appreciation and celebrity fascination: 'all of us praised the verse, and all of us guessed at the author. We soon learned it was a female, and our admiration was doubled, and our conjectures tripled. Was she young? Was she pretty?'<sup>69</sup>

Robinson and Landon were sophisticated literary performers, but the mechanisms for branding identity were so crucial to Romantic celebrity culture that they functioned even when most strenuously disavowed. Ann Yearsley (*bap.* 1753, *d.* 1806), with little effort on her part and against the moralising intentions of her patrons, found herself branded as Lactilla, milkmaid poet of Bristol. Having 'discovered' Yearsley, Hannah More embarked on a promotional scheme which, whatever its charitable intentions, effectively turned her protégée into a celebrity. More began by writing about Yearsley to literary friends such as Mary Hamilton, Horace Walpole and Elizabeth Montagu. The latter had already been the patron of James Woodhouse (*bap.* 1735, *d.* 1820), the 'shoemaker poet', and so brought valuable experience to More's project. More then arranged for Yearsley's *Poems on Several*

*Occasions* to be published in 1785 and supplied a 'Prefatory Letter' addressed to Montagu.<sup>70</sup> The volume received pre-publication publicity from two letters to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, possibly written by More herself. It was also advertised in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, and More collected over one thousand subscribers, assuring the volume's commercial success and Lactilla's celebrity profile.<sup>71</sup> In each of these cases, the circulation of poems by Byron, Robinson, Landon and Yearsley was accompanied by information (or speculation) about their authors, fostering celebrity culture's fascination with personalities who became the subjects of discourse once their identities were branded through a variety of mutually supporting texts.

The 'texts' that branded an identity could be visual as well as verbal. Mary Robinson's flamboyant dresses and carriages appeared in popular prints, and such distinguished artists as Gainsborough, Reynolds and Romney painted her.<sup>72</sup> Byron's image also permeated Romantic visual culture. The celebrity apparatus cultivated visual trademarks, making Byron recognisable from a few repeated features: a curl of hair, a high forehead, an open collar. These were depicted in portraits which circulated via the new technology of steel plate engraving, creating almost endlessly reproducible prints whose features were then picked up in illustrations and cartoons.<sup>73</sup> These images, which are the subject of Chapter 5, helped to create a fascination with seeing celebrities in the flesh. Byron experienced the sharp end of this fascination when he went to dinner at Madame de Staël's and 'found the room full of strangers, who had come to stare at me as at some outlandish beast in a rareeshow'.<sup>74</sup> And Landon encountered it when *Blackwood's Magazine* printed directions to her house in its review of *The Improvisatrice*.<sup>75</sup>

The visual and verbal texts that constructed the branded identity were bolstered by the celebrity's social appearances. Mary Robinson's performances didn't stop when she stepped off the stage. One of her neighbours noted her 'remarkable facility in adapting her deportment to her dress':

To-day she was a *paysanne*, with her straw hat tied at the back of her head, looking as if too new to what she passed, to know what she looked at. Yesterday she, perhaps, had been the dressed *belle* of Hyde Park, trimmed, powdered, patched, painted to the utmost power of rouge and white lead; to-morrow, she would be the cravatted Amazon of the riding house[.]<sup>76</sup>

Robinson complained in her *Memoirs* that the high visibility her celebrity brought her was nothing but trouble. When she went out shopping in her trademark carriage, 'I scarcely ventured to enter a shop without experiencing the greatest inconvenience. Many hours have I waited till the crowd dispersed, which surrounded my carriage, in expectation of my quitting the shop.'<sup>77</sup> Those readers who crowded Robinson's carriage, stared at Byron or went to Chelsea for a glimpse of Landon took their cue both from the poems those celebrities produced and from the texts, images and appearances that surrounded them and produced a branded identity.

Robinson began her career as an early example of a new breed of theatrical celebrity. Star actors became literally more visible in the Romantic period when stage lighting improved greatly: smoky tallow candles were replaced with high-quality wax ones, and in 1817 Drury Lane theatre introduced gas lighting. The invention of limelight in 1816 meant that a star performer could be spot lit, while the rest of the stage remained in darkness. While spectators had traditionally sat on the stage, from 1763 onwards (at Drury Lane) they were banished to the increasingly dim auditorium.<sup>78</sup> Star actors, meanwhile, had minimal rehearsal with the rest of the company, who were expected to accommodate their performances. They toured alone, working with local companies each night and, without a modern conception of the director, they were entirely responsible for their own interpretation of a role. Their salaries reflected their increased status; they greatly exceeded those paid to other members of the company, and they might be doubled by a successful benefit performance. At the same time, the rise of a distinct genre of thespian biography fed the audience's interest in their private lives.<sup>79</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, spectators came and went throughout the evening's entertainment, in a lighted auditorium where they would look at, and converse with, other audience members as much as the actors. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they tended to sit in silence, in a darkened auditorium, watching a star actor on a brightly lit stage: a trip to the theatre now seemed like an interpersonal interaction between audience member and star. As a result, actors like Sarah Siddons and Edmund Kean functioned as Romantic celebrities. Something comparable happened to concert music, with the rise of the *virtuoso* – a word which, like *celebrity*, changed its meaning in this period to denote a new way to enter the public eye.

While his appearance became recognised for a few distinctive features, Byron's poetry played with several formulae, which were repeated with variations. The Byronic hero enabled readers to project ideas and

emotions connected with the author onto his characters, functioning as a further tool for increasing his personal visibility in Romantic culture. By shaping his poems into an integrated oeuvre, repeated formulae like the Byronic hero enhanced their cumulative effect of increasing Byron's celebrity. Landon also created a variety of heroines, poets or lovers like Erinna, Eulalia or the Improvisatrice, who appeared to her readers as avatars of L.E.L.<sup>80</sup> Byron's use of series to which he could return at crucial moments provided touchstones of public prominence, ways in which he could remind his readers of his characteristic qualities. *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* kept readers coming back to purchase the next instalment and kept Byron's branded identity in the public eye so long as he continued to write them. The result, as John Scott noted in 1821, was that Byron 'awakened, by literary exertion, a more intense interest in his person than ever before resulted from literature.'<sup>81</sup> Although the process of branding identity began by fixing on existing features of Byron's style, it quickly became implicated in shaping that style, making Byron's celebrity not simply an adjunct to his writing but a component of it. Critics of Romanticism have traditionally preferred poetry that could be detached from contingencies of patronage or promotion, in the belief that authentic poetry did not lay waste its powers in getting and spending. Byron's poetry reveals that distinction between a poet's writing and his or her promotion as a celebrity to be an artificial one. Celebrity is folded back into literary creation.

Celebrities often found themselves trapped in that fold. The mechanisms for branding identity were wonderfully effective, but they also left Byron committed to a logic of celebrity which could be constraining. Having risen to public prominence, he felt the burden of public expectation. Too often, it seemed, he had to produce what a correspondent of the *Brighton Magazine* called 'the paltry impostures and *tours de finesse* to which a popular writer is obliged to resort in order to preserve what, in modern cant, is called the ear of the public'.<sup>82</sup> Such constraints were often gendered. The existence of female celebrities reveals existing narratives about female 'anxiety of authorship', and the 'vanishing acts' that turned women writers into 'nobody', to be only part of the historical story.<sup>83</sup> Subject to the same fascination with private lives that turned actresses of the period into 'sexual suspects', Landon's reputation was dogged by rumours about her love life and untimely death.<sup>84</sup> She objected humorously to biographical readings of her poetry in the 'Preface' to *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829):

With regard to the frequent application of my works to myself, considering that I sometimes pourtrayed [*sic*] love unrequited, then betrayed, and again destroyed by death – may I hint the conclusions are not quite logically drawn, as assuredly the same mind cannot have suffered such varied modes of misery. However, if I must have an unhappy passion, I can only console myself with my own perfect unconsciousness of so great a misfortune.<sup>85</sup>

Mary Robinson made a similar claim in her Preface to *Sappho and Phaon* (1796). She imagined that Sappho's audience, unlike her own, had 'an unprejudiced enthusiasm for the works of genius' which prevented them from turning Sappho into a celebrity: 'when they paid adoration to Sappho, they idolised the MUSE and not the WOMAN'.<sup>86</sup> Yearsley, doubly disempowered by her gender and social status, found herself trapped in a promotional apparatus that apparently worked independently of her poetry. Mary Waldron suggests that, like other 'primitive' poets, her work was characterised as wild, natural and unschooled, whilst in fact she was keen to display her classical knowledge and stylistic polish.<sup>87</sup> Yearsley, Robinson and Landon might all have joined in the complaint of Landon's heroine Eulalia: 'I am a woman: – tell me not of fame.'<sup>88</sup> But it would be wrong to present the celebrity apparatus as something that constrained women while it empowered men. It constrained and empowered celebrities of both genders in gender-specific ways, but neither gender had a monopoly on constraint or empowerment. Despite having every advantage of class and gender, Byron was also constrained by his celebrity. As I show in Chapter 6, the limits of his branded identity obstructed his efforts to move his work in a new direction. A century later, Rudolph Valentino expressed the same problem succinctly. 'A man should control his life,' he said. 'Mine is controlling me. I don't like it.'<sup>89</sup>

The branded identity's commercial success was ensured because it was easily recognisable in the crowded marketplace, continually developing to offer new satisfactions but remaining reassuringly familiar. It rose to public prominence because it circulated effectively, and this circulation was guaranteed by the ease with which it could be appropriated. 'A star', writes Andrew Wernick, 'is anyone whose name and fame have been built up to the point where reference to them [...] can serve as a promotional booster in itself.'<sup>90</sup> Sterne was at first delighted and then unsettled by the outpouring of Shandeanism, which left him with a 'sense that he was competing with his imitators for the right to speak authoritatively in Tristram's voice'.<sup>91</sup> While Byron's noble name acted

as a passport to celebrity for each new volume on its first appearance, Murray appropriated his branded identity to sell other products. These included collected editions, which contrived to sell the same poems in other formats, illustrations, which traded on Byron's visual familiarity, and opportunities for synergy, such as the publication of Moore's *Jacqueline* in the same volume as *Lara*. Byron's celebrity could also be appropriated to sell other products, for example magazines, over which Byron and even Murray had little control. Letitia Landon helped to sell copies of the *Literary Gazette* not only by supplying poems for the editors to print over her trademark initials, but also because her persona generated the large numbers of poems addressed to L.E.L. which appeared in its pages.<sup>92</sup> Mary Robinson's celebrity identity was appropriated to provide commercial profit or cultural currency every time a newspaper (including her own *Morning Post*) published a story about her, a caricature of her, or a poem addressed to her. Authors of the latter ranged from Robert Merry to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, knitting Robinson into complex intertextual relationships with male authors, in which each tried to gain by association with the other.<sup>93</sup>

On the one hand a commercial asset constructed with the help of a single publisher, the celebrity's branded identity garnered cultural prominence and commercial success because it was also impossible to maintain a monopoly over its exploitation. In the undeveloped copyright conditions of the Romantic period, a celebrity identity took on a life of its own in the marketplace, where it was appropriated and redeployed by both entrepreneurs and consumers. This set of practices for branding an individual's identity in order to boost his or her cultural visibility and create a fascination with his or her personality and private life enabled certain individuals to rise to prominence above the Romantic surfeit of public personality. These practices were not controlled by any individual celebrity or svengali, but they shaped the public profiles of many individuals. They established the structures that governed a Romantic celebrity culture which is the ancestor of our own.

#### 4. The hermeneutic of intimacy

The growth of celebrity culture also eased the sense of industrial alienation between readers and writers. The celebrity apparatus relied on the concealed use of new cultural technologies to construct an impression of unmediated contact. Instead of appearing as industrial productions competing for attention in a crowded market made up of increasingly estranged readers and writers, the poems fostered a hermeneutic of

intimacy. Mary Robinson forged an apparently intimate connection with her readers in ostensibly confessional poems. In 'Stanzas' ('When the bleak blast of winter') she hints to her readers that she's brooding over a secret amorous sorrow, for which fame and talent are no consolation. 'What the laurel of Fame, or the song of the Muse,' she asks, 'When the heart bleeds in silence, the victim of woe?' (19–20). But although she will not lament the loss of her lover in verse, her sorrow will apparently make itself visible on her body:

Yes, in silence, proud silence, I'll muse o'er his worth,  
 Though reflection shall steal the faint Rose from my cheek,  
 Though my eye's faded lustre its poison shall speak,  
 And my heart-bursting sighs bend my frame to the earth!

(29–32)

While suggesting that her sorrow lies too deep for words, the speaker invites us to read it in her cheek, her eyes and her sighs. Using a strategy similar to Byron's (see Chapter 4), Robinson constructs a speaker who's associated with herself, hints at a hidden pain and suggests that readers can understand that pain by gazing at her, at the same time as she was being represented in frontispieces and portraits. While seemingly reluctant to reveal her intimate concerns in her poetry, Robinson suggested that those who learned how to read and where to look could share them.

Byron would elaborate this hermeneutic of intimacy more systematically and potently. It worked by suggesting that his poems could only be understood fully by referring to their author's personality, that reading them was entering a kind of relationship with the author and that that relationship resembled an intimate connection between individuals. As a result, in Peter Manning's words, the poems 'furnished the simulacrum of intimacy the new readership craved'.<sup>94</sup> John Wilson, reviewing *Childe Harold* Canto Four in the *Edinburgh Review*, described the effect:

Each of us must have been aware in himself of a singular illusion by which these disclosures, when read with that tender or high interest which attaches to poetry, seem to have something of the nature of private and confidential communications. They are not felt, while we read, as declarations published to the world, – but almost as secrets whispered to chosen ears. Who is there that feels, for a moment, that the voice which reaches the inmost recesses of his heart is speaking

to the careless multitudes around him? Or, if we do so remember, the words seem to pass by others like air, and to find their way to the hearts for whom they were intended, – kindred and sympathizing spirits, who discern and own that secret language, of which the privacy is not violated, though spoken in hearing of the uninitiated, – because it is not understood. There is an unobserved beauty that smiles on us alone; and the more beautiful to us, because we feel as if chosen out from a crowd of lovers.<sup>95</sup>

Wilson figures Byron's poems not as broadcasts but as *billets-doux*, coded messages for those readers sympathetic enough to receive them.<sup>96</sup> Bypassing the careless multitudes, the poems avoid the Romantic sense of alienation by appearing as communications between intimates. Those communications are 'disclosures', referring back to a pre-textual Byron and revealing the details of his subjectivity. Twin engines drove the hermeneutic of intimacy. Firstly, it relied on the belief that Byron revealed himself in his poetry, though this revelation was never stable or complete. A large part of the poems' attraction for their first readers was the evidence they offered of an *ur-Byron*, a non-textual or pre-textual George Gordon with hidden subjective depths. Secondly, it gave the impression that his poems were not only the effusions of a particularly fascinating individual, but that they could also offer a kind of access to him.<sup>97</sup>

For many of Byron's first readers, buying, reading, reading aloud, lending, borrowing, copying into commonplace books, annotating and discussing Byron's poetry were the central activities among a group of practices aimed at investigating Byron the man in order to know more about him or relate more intimately to him. One of the many readers who wrote Byron a fan letter was anxious that 'Your Lordship may perhaps smile, and with a smile not wholly free from satire, that one to whom you are personally entirely unknown should thus take the liberty of addressing you.' But she was also certain that 'he who is known through the medium of his works, cannot be uninteresting even to a stranger'.<sup>98</sup> The poems fostered this impression, as I will show, by figuring reading as a form of relationship, a 'para-social interaction' that enabled an intimate bond.<sup>99</sup> When they also suggested that bodies could be read like texts and that texts could metonymically substitute for bodies, they charged that encounter with erotic undertones. Landon worked in similar ways, as Emma Francis suggests. She 'arouses but then holds off sexuality', creating 'a huge sexual tension which is never fully released'.<sup>100</sup> Reading Byron's poems was supplemented by such activities

as buying and looking at portraits of Byron, or illustrations in which the Byronic hero was represented as the poet, soliciting introductions to Byron, writing to him, dressing in Byronic fashion, reading newspapers, cartoons or reviews, and falling in love, either with the noble lord or violently, passionately and hopelessly, as his characters were wont to do. The hermeneutic of intimacy, then, is an intertextual paradigm for reading celebrity texts, seeded by the texts themselves and the ways in which they were published, propagated by a wider print culture, and variously enacted by individual readers, which, although it may not be consciously articulated or adopted, is difficult to avoid.

The hermeneutic of intimacy succeeded commercially because it marketed as a commodity an escape from the standardised impersonality of commodity culture. It therefore had attractions for both entrepreneurs and consumers, and answered the problem of individuation through consumption. If our patterns of consumption define us as individuals, how will we remain convinced of our own uniqueness while consuming mass-produced standardised products? The hermeneutic of intimacy allows readers to imagine that those endlessly copied poems are for them alone, not for the careless multitude.<sup>101</sup> This kind of reading then becomes the basis for claiming cultural distinction. Laying claim to the virtues of sympathy and perspicuity enables discriminating readers to distinguish their understanding of a celebrity from that of those around them, making them 'feel as if chosen out from a crowd of lovers'. While the rest read merely adequately, discerning readers have 'chosen ears'. Sympathy touches 'the inmost recesses' of their hearts. They are the 'kindred and sympathising spirits' who hear meaning in words that 'pass by others like air'. Numbered among the 'initiated', they feel as though the poems' 'secrets' are intended for them.

These techniques of branding and reading relied on assumptions about subjectivity which the celebrity apparatus played an important part in sponsoring. Branding an identity that would be amenable to commercial promotion required subjectivity to be understood as self-identical over time, but continually developing towards greater self-expression or self-fulfilment. This enabled the brand to remain immediately recognisable in the crowded market and yet to be always newly interesting. The hermeneutic of intimacy required subjectivity to be understood as structured around a private interior. That interior was hidden from the view of the undiscerning, but was also continually making itself legible, expressing itself in poems where its secrets could be read by the discerning few. One commentator found this 'something quite new and peculiar, indeed, in the whole career of Byron',

claiming that 'his poetry, at least a considerable portion of it, is a mirror in which are reflected the movements of his soul'.<sup>102</sup> Landon endorsed this Romantic understanding of poetics and subjectivity in her essay on Felicia Hemans, writing, 'Nothing is so strongly impressed on composition as the character of the writer.'<sup>103</sup> Critics have suggested that these ideas were among those to coalesce into a recognisably modern model of the subject in the Romantic period. What has not been understood is the role of the celebrity apparatus in normalising that model. The celebrity apparatus, I contend, championed this understanding of subjectivity not because it was 'natural', but because it fitted the commercial need for a kind of identity that could be reliably branded and consistently marketed.

As I show in the final chapter, Byron chafed against these conventions. So did Robinson and Yearsley. Both of their careers can be better understood as discontinuous series of experiments with varied models, forms and styles than as linear narratives of development. And both would foreground the difficulty of knowing anything about another individual's mind or heart. In 1793, at the height of her celebrity, Robinson stressed the impossibility of truly knowing another's pain in 'The Maniac'. The poem is a long series of questions to the maniac about his psychological distress, groundless speculations about its source and requests for him to 'tell me all thy pain' (115) so that the speaker can 'share thy pains, and soothe thy woes' (117).<sup>104</sup> But the maniac never answers, the speaker learns nothing and the poem remains unresolved. After several years in a celebrity apparatus that routinely assumed that secrets of her subjectivity were legible in her poems and her social performances, Robinson chose to represent an illegible subject who revealed nothing at all. Likewise, Yearsley claimed that those who accused her of ingratitude could no more understand the divinely hidden workings of the universe than they could 'scan the feelings of Lactilla's soul'.<sup>105</sup> These examples suggest that, whilst celebrity culture was crucial in shaping modern understandings of subjectivity, it also produced a strain of resistance to those assumptions in the writings of celebrities who found them intrusive and constricting. In Chapter 8, I examine evidence of that resistance in *Don Juan*.

Taken together, this assemblage of industrial technologies, driving ambitions and private pleasures, with its attendant techniques for branding identity and constructing intimacy, constitutes a still-unexamined strand of modernity. We will not understand why celebrities fascinate and trouble us so much until we have a more fully elaborated history of celebrity culture. Writing that history and

theorising its significance means turning back to Byron, whose celebrity seemed to Thomas Macaulay to be something new and strange. 'It is certain', he wrote, 'that the interest which he excited during his life is without a parallel in literary history.'<sup>106</sup> I site that unparalleled interest at the historical emergence of a modern obsession not in order to immure it in its two-hundred-year-old strangeness, but to allow it to resonate with the present. If Byron's works absorb your interest, as they absorb mine, you may be experiencing a kind of fascination that refuses to be over and done with, that is not an episode in the history of literature, but an element in the historicity of the present.

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