

introduction

I belonged to the Public and to the world, not because I was talented or even beautiful but because I had never belonged to anything or anyone else.

—Marilyn Monroe

There is a certain quality, easy to perceive but hard to define, possessed by abnormally interesting people. Call it “it.” For the sake of clarity, let *it*, as a pronoun aspiring to the condition of a noun, be capitalized hereafter, except where it appears in its ordinary pronominal role. Most of us immediately assume that It has to do with sex, and we’re right, but mainly because everything has to do with sex. Most of us also think that It necessarily entails glamour, and so it does, but not for long. Most of us think that It is rare, and it is quite, even to the point of seeming magical, but It is also everywhere to be seen. In fact, however elusive this quality may be in the flesh, some version of it will, at any given moment, fall within our direct view or easy reach as a mass-circulation image; if not, a worthy substitute will quickly come to mind, even to the minds of those who, commendably, want to resist generalizations like these, along with the pervasively seductive imposition of the icons that they describe.

Let’s not be unduly prim, however. This is the way of the world right now, and it has been so, with increasingly invasive saturation and ingenious manipulation since the seventeenth century, when popular celebrities began to circulate their images in the place of

religious and regal icons. Today these totems can pop up anywhere. Just at the limit of my reach, on the magazine table at the barbershop on the corner of Chapel and High streets in New Haven, but looking close enough to touch, Uma Thurman returns my gaze from the cover of *GQ*. It's uncanny. She might, with minor adjustments perhaps, just as easily be looking up from the cover of *Cosmopolitan* in the checkout line of Stop & Shop at the Amity Mall, but here she is, big as life, sitting right beside me at Tony's, miraculously outshining the lesser deities of *Maxim* and *Esquire*.

Of course she hasn't popped up just anywhere, because there's history everywhere. In one direction lies the town green, zoned for sheep and churches by the founders of New Haven Colony in 1638, the same year that the royal surveyor Inigo Jones laid out Covent Garden Piazza, later to become London's teeming market of flowers, flesh, and fantasy; in the other direction, three streets—Dixwell, Whalley, and Goffe—named for the regicides who took refuge in Connecticut after 1660 to escape the retribution of the restored king Charles II, who installed his flashiest mistress and her complacent, papist husband in the very house in King Street, Westminster, that Major-General Edward Whalley had abandoned in order to end up hiding out in a cave near here. Taking local inventory of a still-active front in these long-running culture wars, there's no doubt which side has pulled ahead on points: mocking the Puritan heritage that once sheltered and even honored the most die-hard iconoclasts anywhere, painted harlots now reign like royals on newsstands everywhere. As *GQ*'s cover girl, Thurman is fragile of feature—eyelids drooping, lips parted, hair bad—and negligent of dress, or about to be, the silken filament of one strap sliding down almost to her right elbow, carrying part of the lace bodice with it, the rest apparently soon to follow, if the insinuated narrative of volition or gravity is to keep its eye-catching promise.¹

Then again, let's not be wholly prurient either. Thurman's image fascinates, not merely because she looks to be nearly naked, but also because she looks to be completely alone. Even as her eyes meet mine as seductively as they must in order to do their work, her countenance somehow keeps a modicum of privacy where none seems possible, a discreet veil of solitude in a world brought

into illusory fullness of being by the general congregation of unaverted stares. That countenance, the effortless look of public intimacy well known in actresses and models, but also common among high-visibility professionals of other kinds, is but one part, albeit an important one, of the multifaceted genius of It.

The following account of that genius—including its characteristic manifestations of public intimacy (the illusion of availability), synthetic experience (vicariousness), and the It-Effect (personality-driven mass attraction)—is a highly selective one. In its Anglocentrism, for instance, my account will pass over a densely woven fabric of thousands of different threads to follow one particular strand. That strand, thin but bright, connects the Stuart Restoration and the theater it launched, a marketing revolution within the larger consumer revolution of the long eighteenth century, to Hollywood. Although admittedly self-limiting, this selection is not arbitrary in either its specifics or its generalities, and this introduction will outline the theoretical and historical issues in detail so as to provide a road map for what follows in the rest of the book. These preliminaries include a definition of It as secular magic and a description of the period of It's modern emergence, here called the "deep eighteenth century." They also include a profile of each of the principal authorities in that period, from a Restoration diarist and his charismatic king to a Hollywood maven and her dressmaker sister, and from sex-bombs to Victorian sages, whose words and deeds best explain the hottest sources of mass attraction.

"It" is a very large subject, but this book begins and ends in very specific locations and engages very particular objects and events along the way, starting at Chapel and High. Across the street from the goddess-infested barbershop looms Louis Kahn's suave facade for the Paul Mellon Center for British Art, a North American repository of Tory glamour, with negligently dressed deities of its own à la Sir Peter Lely, a decisive rebuke to the regicides and iconoclasts, and a privileged resource for research into the ideas and techniques behind It. Here primrose-bearing Diana Kirke, Countess of Oxford, for instance (fig. 1), painted *en déshabillé* by Lely in the late 1660s, returns the gaze of the beholder with a publicly

intimate nonchalance that remains both representative of its age and still syndicated in reruns today. A primary purpose of this book is to show how the message her look communicates, combining semidivinity with seminudity, found its way to Hollywood in the 1920s, another colony, like New Haven in the 1660s, for refugees and exiles, except that those pilgrims came to promote the mass worship of graven idols, not to smash or exorcise them. They found the ways and means to spread the It-Effect worldwide, but they did not invent it. They also did as much as anyone has ever done to answer the burning question on everyone's lips: What is It?

What It Is

The most pertinent usage of the word *it* was coined in 1927 by a British expatriate, romance-author, and Hollywood tastemaker Elinor Glyn (1864–1943), writing in the foreword to *It*, one of her pulpiest fictions, also done into a screenplay for Paramount. A culture-industry insider, she briskly specifies the properties shared by abnormally interesting people, intervening with an analytic rigor that shapes up the flabby abstractions with which critical theory has otherwise weighted down the subject of celebrity. Glyn writes leanly: “To have ‘It,’ the fortunate possessor must have that strange magnetism which attracts both sexes. He or she must be entirely unselfconscious and full of self-confidence, indifferent to the effect he or she is producing, and uninfluenced by others. There must be physical attraction, but beauty is unnecessary. Conceit or self-consciousness destroys ‘It’ immediately. In the animal world ‘It’ demonstrates [itself] in tigers and cats—both animals being fascinating and mysterious, and quite unbiddable.”² Setting a standard of cavalier sangfroid in charismatic demeanor, Glyn peels away the outer layers of It to discover its basis in an attraction that, as the oft-heard rationalization goes, “isn’t just physical” or, more plausibly still, is fundamentally polymorphous. Few have It, but almost everyone wants to get it anywhere he or she can find it.

The intensity of this attraction presupposes a certain element of danger, however—of rejection at least, if not something even

worse. Glyn had a quirky interest in animal magnetism and a pronounced weakness for alpha predators found in both sexes and all orientations but only in a few select species. The most interesting point she makes about It across the animal kingdom concerns the “unbiddable” nature of tigers and other cats. An air of perceived indifference counts heavily in the production of this special allure, which must appear to be exercised effortlessly or not at all. Evidently, dogs try too hard. Although her distinction between physical attraction and beauty seems disingenuous coming from a knowledgeable moviemaker, she has support from the entry for *it* in the *OED*, which cites a variety of uses of the word in Edwardian slang, including Rudyard Kipling’s folksy tautology of 1904:

“Tisn’t beauty, so to speak, nor good talk necessarily. It’s just It. Some women’ll stay in a man’s memory if they once walk down a street.”³

Glyn royally dubbed silent film star Clara Bow (1905–1965), whose brief but dazzling career epitomized the flapper era, “The ‘It’ Girl.”⁴ Bow’s explosive rise to stardom exemplifies the disruptive impact, usefully theorized by Michael Quinn, of the It-Effect on the materials of the scripted character, story line, apparatus of production, and public consciousness of the work. “The shift of perception that celebrity allows,” Quinn notes, “is a key one, and is extraordinarily powerful: the audience’s attitude shifts from an awareness of the presence of fictional illusion to the acceptance of an illusion, however false, of the celebrity’s absolute presence.”⁵ Behind the refractory celebrity of which Quinn speaks lurks the prior condition of It, emerging from an apparently singular nexus of personal quirks, irreducible to type, yet, paradoxically, the epitome of a type or prototype that almost everyone eventually wants to see or be like. In this sense, there was only one Clara Bow, there will never be another, yet even seventy years after her reclusive retirement and forty years after her death, she still remains everywhere to be seen, leaving behind an afterimage, one that persists and even regenerates in the public mind. As Marvin Carlson has shown, a celebrity actor is “entrapped by the memories of the public, so that each new appearance requires a renegotiation with those memories.”⁶ Carlson calls this phenomenon “ghosting,” and it need not end with the retirement or death of the star. An abused dropout with a painful stammer and hole-in-the-bucket self-esteem, Brooklyn-born Bow won a screen test in a contest run by *Motion Picture* magazine and parlayed it into stardom as the rags-to-riches avatar of sexy pluck and smarty-pants, working-girl attitude. Pinned up thereafter in revolutionary haircut and underwear, she was so unforgettably one of a kind that she lost her self forever in the creation of her type. *It*, the 1927 Paramount Bow-vehicle, recently returned in the form of a musical comedy, *The It Girl* (2001), by Paul McKibbins and B. T. McNicholl, which boasted, “She’ll Turn Your Sadness into Gladness!” In Carlson’s terms, Bow’s screen persona was “ghosted” yet again the very next year by

the title character in the flapper revival *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002), whose promoters breathlessly asked, “Will Millie become this season’s ‘It Girl?’” She did.

Like a crown, the It-Girl appellation became a transferable title, once openly aspired to by successive generations of Hollywood starlets, now demurely coveted again under the reactionary aegis of stealth postfeminism.⁷ But as Glyn’s liberally polymorphous definition suggests, men can have It too. In fact, they have had It for millennia. At the Eureka moment when she found her way to the word, just as the talkies were coming in but before her career as an unofficial chargé d’affaires for British culture in Hollywood burned out, Glyn rechristened what was then only the latest and most powerful version of an oft-observed phenomenon known by many aliases in the annals of cultural performance.

How many? For Quintilian, Latin rhetor in the rule of Vespasian, It was *ethos*, the compellingly singular character of the great orator. For Zeami, the Zen-inflected theorist of Noh acting, It was the ninth and highest level of *hana*, “The Flower of Peerless Charm.” For Castiglione, It was *sprezzatura*, the courtly possessor of which turned every head when he, and he alone, suavely entered a room. For many religious thinkers, from the biblical prophets and apostles to modern theologians, It was expressed by the word *charisma*, a special gift vouchsafed by God, a grace or favor, which sociologist Max Weber then condensed into a principle of powerfully inspirational leadership or authority.⁸ For adherents of science, It was captured by the metaphoric terms of *magnetism* and *radiance*, which, taken together, neatly express the opposite motions instigated by the contradictory forces of It: drawing toward the charismatic figure as *attraction*; radiating away from him or her as broadcast *aura*. Such metaphors well describe the effects of the phenomenon, but they still explain very little of its mystery. No closer today to a satisfactory theory of It, contemporary speakers of proper English employ various synonyms, such as *charm*, *charisma*, and *presence*. Americans also have recourse to a well-stocked slang lexicon, including *stuff*, *spunk*, and *moxie*, the latter term suggesting supreme self-possession even at moments of self-abandonment, a kind of psychical extension of exceptional

physical courage, undaunted even by the fear of being found objectionable. What has still gone missing, Glyn's pioneering effort from the 1920s aside, is an analysis of precisely what qualities, then and now, make moxie the cat's meow.

"It" is the power of apparently effortless embodiment of contradictory qualities simultaneously: strength *and* vulnerability, innocence *and* experience, and singularity *and* typicality among them. The possessor of It keeps a precarious balance between such mutually exclusive alternatives, suspended at the tipping point like a tightrope dancer on one foot; and the empathic tension of waiting for the apparently inevitable fall makes for breathless spectatorship: hence Glyn's location of a psychological contradiction with reversible polarities like egoless self-confidence or unbiddable magnetism at the source of the mysterious fascination of It. In *The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991), Eugenio Barba explains the success of analogous oppositions in compelling physical performances: "The performer develops resistance by creating oppositions: this resistance increases the density of each movement, gives movement altered intensity and muscular tone."⁹ In classical European theater, such oppositions and hence resistance are suggested by the term *contraposto*, which describes a pose in which the performer turns in different directions simultaneously at the knees, the hips, the shoulders, and the head, making an interesting line of the body. *Resistance* is another way of describing the novelty-inducing asymmetries contained—resisted—by the performer even as they register in the mind of the spectator as a miracle of unstable but inevitable harmonies.

This definition of It, paradox-ridden as it is, moves beyond the tautology of innate charm and enters into the realm of theatrical and cinematic technique, though the open question of whether It is a "God-given" gift to the fortunate few or the hardscrabble self-selection of the fiercely driven is yet another mystery that makes It fascinating. Like perfect pitch, which some have and most don't, It makes certain people interesting all the time; others require a lucky break or a lurid calamity—the fortuitous convergence of personality and extraordinary circumstances or efforts—to activate

the fickle prurience of the public. In any event, It comes out in the play of suddenly reversible polarities. Like a gestalt switch, during which the vase transforms itself, in the blink of the beholder's eye, into two faces juxtaposed, only to switch back again, reversible polarities appear both to cause It and to assert themselves as its most startling and continuously compelling effect.

Theatrical performance and the social performances that resemble it consist of struggle, the simultaneous experience of mutually exclusive possibilities—truth and illusion, presence and absence, face and mask. Performers are none other than themselves doing a job in which they are always someone else, filling our field of vision with the flesh-and-blood matter of what can only be imagined to exist. But with an intensity of focus beyond the reach of normal people, those with It can project these and other antinomies apparently at will. From moment to moment on the stage or on the set, they must hold them together with the force of their personalities, but in the service of a representation to which their personalities are supposedly excrescent. Such a precarious center, at once self-expression and self-erasure, cannot hold; but for the two-hour traffic of our stage, the contending forces remain in play, while their contingent interaction generates an intense, charismatic radiance that emanates from their fissionable source. They create a continuous category crisis at twenty-four frames per second (or the digitized equivalent of that analogical pace), oscillating between categories in the minds of spectators faster than Faye Dunaway's child does between "sister" and "daughter" in *Chinatown* (Paramount, 1974). As in all melodrama, the outcome of the struggle between implacable opposites must be deferred to maintain suspense, but at the end, a dark secret remains untold, and even in the afterglow of the most illuminating disclosure, there is an uncanny translucence without transparency, a silhouette. Nor do such contentions always unfold as high drama, for in moments of quiet absorption they can also appear as the flickering play of light and shadow barely perceptible as a disturbance in the soul. But in the most sensitive instrument the subtlest turbulence has its effect as well as its affect, and from the perspective of the

audience, we find that inchoate urges, desires *and* identifications, have been stirred in us without claiming anything so vulgar as a name. That being the case, we can't take our eyes off of It.

While the phenomenon of It seems to have been noted at many times in history, particular periods shape it to their own purposes and impress it with their own peculiar styles. Ambivalent heirs to the English theater of "the last century," by which commentators from Charles Lamb to Thomas Babington Macaulay meant the era that began with the Restoration of Charles II and continued into the Regency of George IV (1811–20), the Victorians of Elinor Glyn's youth and the Edwardians of her early adulthood well understood the concept of It, whether they approved of it or not. In fact, they understood it as well as she did after seven years in Hollywood and a lifetime of writing "romance." The novelist George Meredith, for instance, wrote a spot-on description of the phenomenon in *Beauchamp's Career* (1876). In the key scene of the novel, Cecelia, an aristocratic English beauty, gazes fixedly on the photograph of her less beautiful but nonetheless apparently invincible rival for the love of novel's hero. That rival is Renée, Madame de Rouaillont, and her image keeps the jealous, fascinated beholder "enchained" along with everyone else who encounters it. Here's why:

Dark-eyed Renée was not beauty but attraction; she touched the double chords within us which are we know not whether harmony or discord, but a divine discord if an uncertified harmony, memorable beyond plain sweetness or majesty. There are touches of bliss in anguish that superhumanize bliss, touches of mystery in simplicity, of the eternal in the variable. These two chords of poignant antiphony she struck throughout the range of the hearts of men, and strangely interwove them in vibrating unison. Only to look at her face, without hearing her voice, without the charm of her speech, was to feel it.¹⁰

Meredith's concluding "it" is It. Cecelia, with her statuesque beauty and considerable fortune, should have It, but the quality possessed by Madame la marquise remains irresistibly "dark" in its superior attraction, unsettling not only to the putative order of

romantic inclination and the hierarchy of sexual selection, but also to every other character's peace of mind.

What Meredith calls "poignant antiphony" bestows a preternatural strangeness on It and often a certain social apartness on those who possess it. In children's games, the player ritually chosen to be "it" is simultaneously elected and ostracized. There is a kind of freakishness to having It; and despite the allure, a potential for monstrosity, which haunts the meaning of *it* as the proper neuter pronoun of the third-person singular, used to refer to things without life, of animals when sex is not specified, and sometimes of infants (*OED*). Charles Addams capitalized on this disturbingly elastic sense of the word by naming a beguilingly amorphous character "Cousin It." Stephen King did the same by titling a horror-thriller *It* (1986) and adding a special frisson to the danger by making the eponymous monster a performer: "The face of the clown in the stormdrain was white, there were funny tufts of red hair on either side of his bald head, and there was a big clown-smile painted over his mouth."¹¹ P. T. Barnum anticipated both Addams and King by billing his leading sideshow geek "What-is-It?" The uncanny allure of It intensifies when a charismatic performer takes over the typifying marks of gender from the opposite sex, ensuring the prominence of transvestism in the greatest theatrical traditions, but also attracting the routine suspicion of the authorities on grounds of ontological subversion. "Unbiddable" as a cat, the Janus-faced quality of It thus manifests itself in expressive behavior that people who don't think of themselves as actors may find off-putting or threatening, even as they crave to experience its seductive glamour and participate in its public adulation. The audience clamors for It and punishes it too, sometimes at considerable psychic cost to the designated paragon, who might at any time bring out in fans the dark underside of the "poignant antiphony" they nurse deeply within themselves like a jealous lover's grudge. Some even resent the iconic few as thieves, who have stolen from them not what they had, but what they always wanted.

Reappearing as it does in some version of itself throughout history, It cannot be discussed intelligibly apart from its social con-

texts at specified points in its reception. This is particularly so because, as Gordon Rogoff rightly observes, glossing Max Weber: “Charisma is, by definition, a description of shared needs.”¹² As charismatics seem to know telepathically who needs them most when they walk into a room, so particular audiences in different times and places have known what they most needed and from whom when they walked into a theater district, which might be called an “It-Zone,” serving as the Habermasian public sphere for newly self-fashioning mobs of star-gazers. “It” occupies much the same place in the empathic life of a reception community that “True Wit” does for the readers of the tightly packed couplet in Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Like “Wit,” It is

Something, whose Truth convinc’d at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind.

The implication of the Augustan poet’s use of the first-person plural still obtains: images charged with that certain “*Something*” are more alive in us than ever as the open secrets of our waking dreams. With the rise of print-world publicity and its mass-mediated progeny, preconceptions of abnormally interesting personae become more specialized, even standardized as role-icons—“beauty,” “femme fatale,” “rake,” “fop” and “pirate,” for instance—only to be jolted from time to time into fads and crazes through novel iterations by exceptional interpreters: “What oft was Thought,” as Pope put it, “but ne’er so well Express.”¹³ What marks the emergence of these objects of abnormal interest, now sufficiently pervasive as to seem unremarkable, is an intensified self-consciousness about the social character of what had once looked like miracles. The most fertile historical period for that emergence is very extensive, but it is not boundless.

The Deep Eighteenth Century

Scholars have accepted the notion of a *long* eighteenth century, pushing the book-ending dates of the period back to 1660 and forward to 1820. They have more recently introduced the idea of a *wide* or “global” eighteenth century, expanding the Eurocentric

boundaries of previous research to encompass the four corners of the world.¹⁴ The shift from popular to mass attraction in the expanding English-speaking theater, however, offers but one reason among many to welcome the addition of a *deep* eighteenth century. The deep eighteenth century is the one that isn't over yet. It stays alive among us as a repertoire of long-running performances. In fact, some of them we can't get rid of, hard as we might try: chattel slavery and colonialism, for example, still exist as themselves here and there and as their consequences everywhere. The deep eighteenth century is thus not merely a period of time, but a kind of time, imagined by its narrators as progress, but experienced by its subjects as uneven developments and periodic returns. As Michel Serres and Bruno Latour succinctly put it, "Time doesn't flow; it percolates."¹⁵ The rationale for imagining a newly complicated three-dimensional period, acknowledging the steadily accelerating commercialization of leisure from 1660 as a long but spastic revolution, is in part the consequence of its culturally prescient texts and discourses, but mainly of its prolific performances and behaviors, which constantly mutate but also persist, rolling through the *longue durée* like human waves through crowds of complicit strangers.¹⁶ The unsteady rise of the actress to prominence and professional respectability offers a general example of this genealogy of performance. The constantly returning hit of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) offers a specific one. Hydra-headed in its modern revivals, knockoffs, and sequels, John Gay's Newgate pastoral has carried forward the It-Effect of glamorized criminality to bring its guilty pleasures to each succeeding generation, epitomizing what John Brewer has so influentially extolled, channeling Joseph Addison, as "the pleasures of the imagination" in the eighteenth century.¹⁷ But the stagy panoply of demimondaines and rakish gallants popularly associated with the hedonistic performances of this period, on the stage and off, complicated its reputation even as their notoriety publicized and extended it.

Victorian and Edwardian appreciations of the staying power of the deep eighteenth century, cited in very different kinds of books, from the fulminations of John Ruskin against the concupiscent frivolity of baroque funerary monuments in *The Stones of Venice*

(1851–53) to the discerning views of Walter Bagehot on the “visible government” of the nostalgically sacred monarchy in *The English Constitution* (1867), show the extent to which the transitional eighteenth century became a touchstone and a hyperbolic mirror, especially with regard to the shape-shifting “Artificial Comedy of the Last Century.” A beguilingly wispy essay by Charles Lamb by that title, originally written in 1822, but appended to an anthology of Restoration playwrights published in 1840, argued, inflammatorily as it turned out, that Restoration and eighteenth-century playwrights wrote free comedy. In Lamb’s view, the characters of Etherege, Wycherley, and their successors romp harmlessly through inconsequential predicaments, bouncing off one other like inflatable toys in the moral equivalent of zero gravity: “They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland. . . — a Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scheme of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is.” If “we” were to censure this enchanted Cloud-cuckoo-land, Lamb pleads, speaking for the modernizing genius of the new age, “we would indict our dreams.”¹⁸ Macaulay answered Lamb directly in his review of the anthology and indirectly in his still hypnotically readable *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1848–61). He pointed out severely that the immorality of the characters and their language in the supposedly “Artificial” comedies, populated as he believed them to be by fornicating rakehells and smut-spewing sluts, offer not an escape from but rather a damning documentation of the depravity of the late but stubbornly persistent age. So vehemently indignant that it recalls the classics of antitheatricalist polemic from Tertullian to William Prynne and the Reverend Jeremy Collier, Macaulay’s contempt for the allure of the restored dynasty is of a piece with his disgust with the restored stage: “From the day on which the theatres were reopened they became seminaries of vice.” Macaulay’s view of the actors and actresses is surpassed in opprobrium only by his opinion of the playwrighting wits with whom the monarchs and aristocrats consorted and whose borrowings from Shakespeare, Calderón, and Molière indelibly soiled the originals: “Nothing could be so pure or so heroic but

that it became foul and ignoble by transfusion through those foul and ignoble minds.”¹⁹

On the face of it, the preeminent Victorian historian of the later Stuarts seems to take self-congratulatory pleasure in denouncing their most glamorous productions. Behind Macaulay’s moral outrage at the culture of the deep eighteenth century, however, lurks the iconoclastic fear that the convergent celebrity of actors and kings may reduce substance to image and nothing more. In that, he was writing as both historian and prophet. Anticipating the terms of Edwardian revisionism, which included a revival of the plays of the Restoration and eighteenth century and a runaway enthusiasm for their theatrical history, Macaulay makes an interesting excuse for the libertine excesses of the Restoration as a predictable if tragically regrettable response to the idol-smashing Interregnum that preceded it: “The turpitude of the drama became such as to astonish all those who are not aware that extreme relaxation is the natural effect of extreme restraint, and that an age of hypocrisy is, in the regular course of things, followed by an age of impudence.”²⁰ By the same logic, he might have added that an age of iconoclasm could be expected to yield to an age of icons, which it certainly did, with consequences still widely to be seen and deeply felt.

Today theater practitioners will sometimes speak of the “Restoration comedy of manners” as belonging to something called “period style,” signifying the utopian remoteness of the genre from the present, and the results onstage usually confirm their presuppositions. But Norman Holland came much closer to the truth when he called them, in the title of his critical study of the behaviors they represent, *The First Modern Comedies* (1959). “There is nothing in earlier English comedy quite like this,” Holland argued,²¹ and although not all the reasons he gave then would necessarily be the ones critics emphasize now, his stress on the regulative power of these plays as probative arenas of true attraction and glamour—witty contests between those who have something quite magical about their persons that others obviously lack—sets the scene for subsequent theater historians. They have gone on to explore the intricate relationship between the suc-

cesses of the characters created by the playwrights and the talents of the sexually self-possessed performers for whom the roles were often specifically tailored.²² When plays sometimes touted the feature-by-feature attributes of the actresses playing the heroines and when both prologues and epilogues alluded leeringly to their sex lives offstage, the practice of intimacy in public had clearly arrived. Persona and personality oscillated between foreground and background with the speed of innuendo, intensified by the personal chemistry of the starring actors, igniting the precinematic It-Effect and blazing its trail. Herbert Blau puts the case succinctly when he speaks, apropos of the Restoration drama's modernity, of "an economy of pleasure in which sex, matching wits, is the measuring rod, a principle of intelligibility, a critical limit giving the impression that it is the source of pleasure when in actuality it is pleasure's Law, justifying regulation and social control."²³ In the sex battles of the adversary lovers, whose obstacles tend to arise within themselves rather than from the external resistance of blocking characters, fear of self-disclosure sharpens tactics of self-governance, staging erotic play as the most entertaining of all legalities. "Hold!" says the witty Harriet to her lover Dorimant in the famous "proviso scene" of *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), making one of the many profane allusions to religion with which the play abounds, "Though I wish you devout, I would not have you turn fanatic" (5.2.155-56; BA 582).

Public intimacy may seem to be a purely modern and secular idea, but it is in fact rooted in traditional religious doctrine and, more deeply and lastingly, in popular religious feeling. In a critique of the Enlightenment shibboleth of disenchantment as the sign and substance of modernity itself, cultural theorists have interpreted the mysterious force of mass attraction as a "reenchantment" of the world.²⁴ As an instance of temporal "percolation" rather than "flow," reenchantment has doctrinally orthodox beginnings but no end in sight. In order to become enchanted in the first place, saints and martyrs must make themselves tangibly accessible to ordinary mortals even as they communicate with the divine. They must seem at once touchable and transcendent, like movie stars and cover girls, and like them also and for that reason,

they very often appear in representation seminude. Their images circulate widely in the absence of their persons—a necessary condition of modern celebrity—but the very tension between their widespread visibility and their actual remoteness creates an unfulfilled need in the hearts of the public. One aspect of this need manifests itself as a craving to communicate with the privately embodied source of the aura, as in the “I and Thou” relationship imagined to exist between a praying supplicant and a god, in which the archaic “*du form*” of intimate second-person address allows the devout speaker to imagine a conversation with an abstract deity personified as if it had a body, a face, and a voice.²⁵ To be efficacious, the “I and Thou” experience of It requires mental pictures or ideas, not reducible to any single one of the materially circulating images of the celebrity, but nevertheless generally available by association when summoned from the enchanted memories of those imagining themselves in communication with the special, spectral other. An image thus synthesized as an idea, here called an *effigy*,²⁶ will very likely have only a coincidental relationship to the identity of the actual human person whose peculiar attraction triggered the hunger for the experience in the first place. Typically known to the public, as kings are, by their first names, the effigies produce the uncanny effect of lifelikeness: just because such icons exist only in other people’s imagination of them doesn’t mean they’re unreal. In the extreme case of stalking behavior, the effigy might become more real than anything else, and the celebrity’s refusal to conform to the deranged and urgent imperatives of that reality brings the stalker to the door with love on the lips but murder in the heart.

The It-Effect thus often takes on a powerful and sometimes even fearsome religiosity of its own, making everyday experience seem not only strange but also enchanted, as if possessed by the mischievous spirits of portentous little gods. Sociologist Chris Rojek aptly summarizes this theology of pop culture in *Celebrity* (2001), acknowledging the force of the spiritual attraction that drives public intimacy but leaving its source—its It—unnamed and unexamined, except in its idiopathic consequences. “There are many striking parallels between religious belief and practice and celebrity

cultures,” Rojek writes, citing the fan reception of film idols and rock stars. Indeed, these oft-noted parallels, which include reliquaries, death rites, ceremonies of ascent and descent, shamanic interventions, eucharistic offerings, confessions, resurrections, and promises of everlasting redemption, tend to “reinforce the hypothesis that considerable partial convergence between religion and celebrity has occurred.”²⁷ Rojek makes particularly productive use of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), in which Emile Durkheim slyly but systematically interpreted the structures of his own society in the defamiliarizing light of the animistic beliefs of indigenous peoples. In each case, these structures and beliefs are expressed through “totems,” the unifying symbols around which a culture or a people coheres. No matter how “advanced” the members of society may think that their special way of doing things is, their social life is *la vie religieuse*, however secular it may seem and however deeply entrenched its adherents’ self-flattering sense of their own rationality may have become. “If the totem is the symbol of both the god and the society,” Durkheim asks rhetorically, “is it not because the god and the society are one and the same?”²⁸

Two Durkheimian keywords in particular illuminate the history of reenchancement: *mana*, “the Idea of Force,” which Durkheim adopted from the Polynesian word for the powers of nature embodied in an object or person; and *effervescence*, which he used to describe the collective experience of religious ecstasy. Speaking for the adepts in any religion that posits some version of mana as the motive force of the spirit world, Durkheim writes: “That it is the soul of so many different things shows how different it is from the beings in which it resides.” Durkheim explains effervescence in a way that ought to make sense to anyone who has been part of the crush at a rock concert or other celebrity gala, where the very thought of the proximity of It has triggered the exhilaration of the ensemble and the evaporation of the individual: “The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation.”²⁹ The kind of trigger required for an outburst of mass effervescence, when the It-Effect rolls through

the culture like an outsized wave, can be illustrated by the peculiarly North American provocation expressed in the title of Marilyn Monroe's collected poems: *My Sex Is Ice Cream* (1996).

For purposes of appreciating the persistence of Durkheim's influence and the attraction of his analysis as the basis for examining the religious dimensions of putatively secular cultures, historians of reenchantment should return as frequently as is necessary to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957). While divulging the secret paths of meaning that connect sacred totems like "Steak and Chips," "Plastic," and "The New Citroën," Barthes writes an astringent ethnography of public intimacy, synthetic experience, and the It-Effect in "The Face of Garbo": "The name given to her, *the Divine*, probably aimed to convey less a superlative state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, descended from heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light."³⁰ Greta Garbo famously wanted to be alone, but that pathetic wish succeeded only in summoning millions more to genuflect at her shrine. Consummately unreachable and yet everywhere to be seen, she takes her place in the foremost ranks of the miracle workers who have turned mere bread and wine into bread and circuses.

In an economy inflated by charismatic attractions such as these—and the deep eighteenth century is a mystified economy of guilty pleasures—consumers submit to the caress or the slap of an "invisible hand." Adam Smith's famous phrase from *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) summarizes his insights into the general efficacy of self-interested behavior, celebrated as "rational" in economic theory, but in fact dependent on stupendous leaps of faith. If each participant in an economy is free simply to maximize his own gain ("laissez-faire"), Smith would have everyone believe, the resulting activity will work spontaneously to enlarge the economy as a whole, promoting "an end which was no part of his intention," hence "invisible" to him and the other entrepreneurial participants, but also mutually advantageous to them all.³¹ Smith inverts the logic of a gift economy without changing its basis in blind faith. In an economy driven by gift exchange as described by Marcel Mauss, participants work to increase their own aura of prestige by giving away as much as possible—the logic of belief behind traditional potlatch

and modern philanthropy. To grasp the applicability of these two economies to a general theory of It, the point to remember is that the medium of exchange (the gift or the money) functions as an accessory to the principal values of the exchange (the obeisant allegiance or the labor). In the memorable chapter “Of Money considered as a particular Branch of the general Stock of Society,” Smith describes what he terms “the great wheel of circulation.” He emphasizes that money itself is largely worthless *except* as the symbolic instrument that redistributes the value of goods and services vicariously:

Money, therefore, the great wheel of circulation, the great instrument of commerce, like all other instruments of trade, though it makes a part and a very valuable part of the capital, makes no part of the revenue of the society to which it belongs, and though the metal pieces of which it is composed, in the course of their annual circulation, distribute to every man the revenue which properly belongs to him, they make themselves no part of that revenue.³²

In the progressive and accelerating metamorphosis of money from precious metal into paper and then into electronic blips, as in the contemporaneous transformation of saints and monarchs into matinee idols, “the great wheel of circulation” requires ever more, not less, readiness on the part of the participants to engage in what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called “the willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith” and Walter Benjamin, “re-enchantment.”³³ Smith’s classic has become the holy scripture of the three-dimensional eighteenth century because it promulgates money as the synthetic experience of value, backed, like celebrity, by the full faith and credit of the commonwealth. That’s why the authorities stamp the faces of abnormally interesting people on coins and engrave them on bills. The way that Smith uses the word *capital* in *The Wealth of Nations* (money is part of the “capital” but not the “revenue” of society) resembles the way Durkheim uses the word *mana* in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and Barthes uses the word *myth* in *Mythologies*: “the general Stock of Society,” the efficacy of mana (which, like Marilyn, belongs to everybody

because it belongs to nobody), and the power of myths to turn history into “Nature”—all require some version of the infectious hallucination of the It-Effect.

Again it was a Victorian sage, in this case Matthew Arnold, who most cogently forecast not the outright replacement of religion by the long-running secular productions of the late age, but their surreptitious insinuation into its functions, meeting the spiraling need for more supple and accessible rituals: “There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve,” he wrote of the continuing Enlightenment, adding, “The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry.”³⁴ As mass culture assumes many of the responsibilities that Arnold formerly assigned to anarchy, however, the Sea of Faith does not so much retreat as turn into soda pop.

Two New Women

The self-authored myth of Elinor Glyn’s life—that of a Victorian Crusoe cast away among flappers—constructs a historical framework for elucidating It by reference to the social attitudes, theatrical traditions, and performance techniques that she inherited from what she lovingly called “Fairy Kingdoms,” the unconscious poetry of her national heritage. It also came from her more pragmatic assessment of the liberated sex lives of actresses. Anita Loos, best known as the author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (1925), described the authoritative way in which Glyn, whose stage idols growing up had included Lillie Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt, “moved in” on the film colony in 1920: “Had Hollywood never existed,” Loos wrote in her memoir, “Elinor Glyn would have invented it.”³⁵ Refracting the light of Hollywood star power through the peculiar lens of her romantic and archly royalist understanding of English history and culture, Glyn interpreted modern celebrity as a survival or longed-for revival of what she called the “ancien régime,” which for her represented a return of the enchanted and enchanting “noblesse oblige” of monarchy, particularly that of the Stuarts, and above all that of

Charles II, her favorite king. Despite the fact that her historical intuition about the monarchical roots of showbiz can be backed up by good evidence, such as the actual and symbolic durability of the theatrical patents granted during the Restoration, Elinor Glyn branded herself as a proselytizing believer in reincarnation and as an unapologetic snob, so understandably not everyone took her seriously then, and few do today; but in order to make my argument about the urgent role of historic iterations of public intimacy and synthetic experience in the modern creation of It, I must take her any way I can get her, for she understood early on that the most charismatic celebrities are the ones we can only imagine, even if we see them naked everywhere.

Glyn thought of herself as a proper Englishwoman; this meant, of course, that her life was a tangled skein of contradictory idiosyncrasies. Born Elinor Sutherland on Jersey to a relatively well-connected but impecunious family of Franco-Irish-Canadians and raised on both sides of the Atlantic, she believed that she was descended from a titled but attainted follower of the Old Pretender. In 1896, she was presented at court, to Alexandra, Princess of Wales, during the absence due to illness of Queen Victoria herself, in a gown made for the occasion by her elder sister, the exceptionally resourceful couturiere “Lucile,” later Lady Duff-Gordon (1862–1935). Both sisters—Elinor, who became a prolific novelist and scriptwriter for Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and Lucy, who became the most fashionable dressmaker of her time and an innovative costume designer for Florenz Ziegfeld—were born into the middle classes in the middle of Victoria’s reign but grew up temperamentally Edwardian as “New Women.” As such, each sister maintained a full-time career and multiple sex partners. Each sister also married up, and both remained ambitious trendsetters and tastemakers into the 1920s. Their memoirs, Lucy’s *Discretions and Indiscretions* (1932) and Elinor’s *Romantic Adventure* (1937), prove that they were also vigilant transatlantic trend-spotters, even from their very early childhood years. These two remarkable women serve as touchstones for most of what follows in this book. They do so in part because both the writer and

the designer, particularly the former, had a passionate, if wildly skewed sense of history as the majestic chronicle of lost but redeemable glamour, always driven by the mystical force of “romance,” which meant for each sister another way, her own way, of saying “It.”³⁶

“Romance” for Lucy, who is unfairly more often remembered in connection with her second husband’s widely despised conduct as a well-born, adult-male lifeboat occupant during the sinking of the *Titanic* than she is in her own right, meant women’s clothes—brilliantly shimmering, diaphanously daring, drop-dead-gorgeous gowns and intimates, which she exhibited and sold in exclusive salons in London, New York, and Paris. As her smart-set clientele would say, “Lucile” frocks were *it*. She called them “emotion dresses,” and she gave each one of them its own name, such as “The Liquid Whisper of Early Spring,” “Love Will Find Out a Way,” or “The Birth of Venus.” Among her circle of acquaintances, the theater-loving Lucy particularly enthused over beautiful, celebrated, and liberated actresses who attracted the devotion of both sexes. In *Discretions and Indiscretions*, she remembered calling on the free-spirited Ellen Terry (1847–1928), even after friends warned her that an association with the actress would damage her own reputation. She encountered the star, then appearing in *Faust*, surrounded by a bevy of Sapphic admirers like a romantic queen in her court, gowned, coifed, and accessorized: “I was shown into a room which seemed full of sunlight and flowers, where I found her sitting in the midst of a group of girls who were sewing. She was wearing a flowing robe of blue velvet, and her fair hair was bound round her head like a coronet. She reminded me, in that first glimpse of her in her own home, of a medieval queen seated among her maids of honor.” Like both Sarah Bernhardt and Lily Elsie, two other actresses Lucy admired, “Ellen Terry had many men in love with her, but I do not think she cared for any of them seriously.” The actresses loved their jobs in a way that “Lucile,” the New Woman with her own label, could fully embrace in terms of her own life and presciently on behalf of the flapper generation:

The modern girl has, I think, learnt to look life in the face. She is not afraid of being left unmarried because marriage is no longer vitally necessary to her happiness. So many things are possible to her that were denied to her mother's generation of girls, and she has learnt how to make the most of them. Perhaps she has not the restraint that we, her elders, think she ought to have, but then very few young people have restraint—it is one of the things that the years teach us.³⁷

That was “romance” for latitudinarian sister Lucy, Lady Duff-Gordon, who married on a whim twice and cohabited with her husbands as a periodic convenience.

“Romance” for sister Elinor, while deeply spiritual in abstract feeling, also required, for better or worse, behavior, and socially daring actresses proved exemplary for her as well. In *Romantic Adventure*, she recounts her adolescent infatuation with Sarah Bernhardt, a redhead like herself, in language that evokes the seriousness of a first Communion: “I was tremendously stirred by what I saw and heard, and became quite intoxicated with her voice, her marvelous art, and with the realization of a new and undreamt of kind of love—a rather wicked, tigerish, variety.”³⁸ A precocious free-spirit even in her teens, Elinor married well nonetheless; but after fifteen exciting and widely traveled years, Clayton Glyn exhausted both his weak liver and his considerable inheritance (tragically, for her, not in that order). With two children and a slowly dying invalid of a husband to support, she turned her hand to writing romances and snaring extended invitations as a house guest of the rich and famous. One of these, the conspicuously eligible Lord Curzon, the heartbreaking love of her life, kept her on as his mistress for years before wordlessly dumping her to marry an Argentine heiress. Thus twice widowed, in a manner of speaking, Elinor seized the opportunity to invent herself anew.

In the end, both Glyn's writing and her racy lifestyle proved to be good career moves. Her thirty-six novels include *Three Weeks* (1907), a succès de scandale, featuring a memorable scene of erotic encounter, teasingly autobiographical, on a tiger-skin, which led to local ostracism from English society but international

fame. Her purported sexual adventures inspired the epigram, circulated anonymously but attributed by some to George Bernard Shaw, which to this day literate gentlemen of a certain age will recite on the slightest pretext while their put-upon wives just roll their eyes, as if to say, “Oh no, not again”:

Would you like to sin
 With Elinor Glyn
 On a tiger skin?
 Or would you prefer
 To err with her
 On some other fur?³⁹

Cecil Beaton read *Three Weeks* on the sly at Eton, recalling that while “bishops and headmasters inveighed against it, schoolgirls and schoolboys read it under the bedclothes.” He went so far as to claim that the book and controversy surrounding it made a significant contribution “in breaking down much of the remaining Victorian hypocrisy.”⁴⁰ With over two million copies of this one book sold, Elinor’s stock as an entertaining and decorative house-guest skyrocketed. Her hosts ranged from the Grand Duchess Kiril of the Russian empire to William Randolph Hearst of the newspaper empire. Celebrity fascinated her at a distance and at close range, and long before her fateful rendezvous with Clara Bow in the late 1920s, her way of understanding It percolated through a number of filters of historical precedent and her own experience, synthetic and otherwise.

Samuel Pepys in Hollywood

As a self-fashioning entrepreneur who sincerely believed that almost everything worth having in life is inherited, Glyn found her historical imagination excited most vividly by the Stuart Restoration of 1660. Meditating on the extreme carelessness of some aspects of her otherwise exemplary Victorian upbringing, she savored the memory of being turned loose at age ten in her stepfather’s library, where she found her way to what she called the “unexpurgated” edition of the *Diary* of Samuel Pepys. In fact,

either one of the two editions that she might possibly have discovered at this date (Lord Braybrooke's of 1825, enlarged in 1848 and 1854, or the Reverend Bright's of 1875–79) was Bowdlerized; nevertheless, much material remained behind that many parents even today would regard as unsuitable for ten-year-olds. Undetected, little Elinor read the *Diary* through with great curiosity and, what is worse, growing comprehension. Among other stimulations, Glyn recounts, "Pepys awakened my great interest in the Charles II period, and strengthened my Stuart proclivities. I wrote under his picture, in a child's illustrated History of England which we had, the words 'Dear Good King' and 'Nasty old Beast!' under the portrait of Cromwell."⁴¹

Like Richard Eyre's *Stage Beauty* (Lions Gate, 2004), dreamily set at the moment in theatrical history when women replaced female impersonators at the behest of the restored king, Glyn's concept of the romantic genesis of theatrical and cinematic celebrity leans heavily on Pepys's account of the English Restoration's improvisatory mix of theater, politics, religion, careerism, and sex. She cites him on the first page of her memoir as a kindred spirit in practicing, as she tried to do with mixed results, the diurnal ritual of disciplined self-reflection that writing a diary requires. She also realized that reading Pepys let her be what she wanted throughout her rebellious childhood—a very naughty Victorian indeed: "Pepys' diary is immortal because it was not intended for other eyes, and is a genuine, intimate chronicle of a very human personality in an important period of History."⁴² She rarely capitalizes substantives, but here the oracular voice of "History" speaks to her through the publicly intimate pages of Pepys with a capital *H*.

The affinity of Pepys and Glyn across three centuries was deeper than a shared sense of authorial self-discipline or daring, however, because his *Diary*, which covers ten years in the life of an ambitiously self-fashioning man of affairs, also tracks the diarist's awareness of the rise of synthetic experience. This comes out especially through his account of his preoccupation with celebrity and its role in his prodigious erotic life—vicarious and firsthand—around town, at court, and in the playhouse, predictably enough, but also, even more strikingly, during religious services: "I did entertain

myself with my perspective glass up and down the church," he recorded in his entry for Sunday, 26 May 1667, in a passage that ten-year-old Elinor, who even then detested homilies in particular and orthodoxy in general, could have read and might well have underlined, "by which I had the great pleasure of seeing and gazing [at] a great many fine women; and what with that and sleeping, I passed away the time till sermon was done" (8:236). Pepys devoted his fully alert attention to the theater, however; and like Glyn, who decided to go to Hollywood because she believed "a great new art was being born, which would profoundly influence the whole world,"⁴³ he was present at the founding of a new medium supplied with new techniques, predominantly a producer's or performer's theater, which opened up new places for those who could prove that they had It. And like Glyn, but with a lifetime's worth of more urgently compelling reasons, Pepys preoccupied himself with Charles II, who during the *Diary* years was neither "dear" nor "good" but every inch a king.

Beloved by naval historians as the talented administrator who rationalized the work of the Navy Board as its Clerk of Acts, Pepys imparts to his diary his professional intentions and frustrations, including his complicated feelings toward Charles, the man to whom he is ultimately, if somewhat distantly, accountable. Pepys's ambivalence about this semidivine but all-too-human sovereign comes out in the sexual gossip he retails with mixed disapprobation and envy. His decade-long obsession with the king's most flagrant paramour, for example, opens in 1660 with her installation in the house "which was Whallys; the King and the Dukes there with Madame Palmer, a pretty woman that they have a fancy to make her husband a cuckold" (1:199). On the one hand, Pepys rode across the Channel at the time of the Restoration with the king's footman, who had charge of one of the royal spaniels, "a dog that the King loved (which shit in the boat, which made us laugh and me think that a King and all that belong to him are but just as others are)" (1:158). On the other hand, he also attended services to watch while Charles, in his office as a consecrated king, laid his anointed hands on his afflicted subjects to cure them of scrofula, "the King's evil" (1:182; 2:74). For his part, the king

knew Pepys by name and came to rely on him to improve the management of the largest and most expensive department of his government, but even as Pepys meticulously notes the signs of his growing prosperity and prominence, the reader knows in retrospect what the diarist could not have foretold at the time: that the knighthood he had many good reasons to hope for would somehow slip from his grasp (*Companion* 10:58).

Pepys rose, nevertheless, from a position in household service to professional eminence as a respected public official with servants of his own and the wherewithal to become a careful but highly acquisitive consumer of tangible goods and intangible experiences. He pursued the best of the things and attractions that his age kept in good supply for the improvement and pleasure of the well-to-do: pictures, books, fancy clothes, musical instruments, scientific devices such as telescopes and microscopes, printed ballads, music lessons, dancing lessons, foods and beverages in plenty, plays, operas, tennis, horse-racing, ice-skating, swords, furniture, wigs, pornography, portrait sittings, puppet shows, freak shows, and the punctual submission of compliant subordinates' wives—to list them representatively but not exhaustively. Above all, historians of performance revere Pepys for the record he kept as an indefatigable consumer of the most consequential synthetic experience of the century in which he lived: the theater.

Synthetic experience must answer the human need, regulated by both curiosity and fear, to experience life vicariously as well as directly. Vicariousness suggests the derivative nature of experience from some prior authenticity. The word *vicarious* is cognate to *vicar*, in the sense of one who serves as a substitute, agent or administrative deputy (as in “Vicar of God” for the king of England as head of the church).⁴⁴ Professional playwrights and performers manufacture and sell such experiences. Over time, their products have largely displaced, though not wholly replaced others that were once available for free, when amateurs amused one another by performing Mysteries or staging carnivals in the demotic swirl of the public streets. Historians of the “consumer revolution,” the origins of which have been variously traced to periods ranging from the Elizabethan age to the eighteenth cen-

ture, tend to think of commodities as things.⁴⁵ Theater historians need to complicate that definition because they know that the experience of attending a performance is not a thing; it is a service of a very dynamic and labile kind. That people would part with good money to experience experience (by vicariously living through someone else's embodiment of it) was a discovery as exciting to some as fire. To them, theatrical performance, like fire—releasing energy from matter that is utterly consumed in the process, disappearing as a condition of its iteration, and leaving behind little trace of itself except the desire for more—roared to life as charismatic attractions on the cusp of medieval vernacular religion and the magic of the market, a revolutionary change in the nature of performances and their reception: hence Shakespeare's famous invocation of "a Muse of fire" in the prologue to *Henry V* (1.prologue.1). Apologizing for the inadequacy of his "unworthy scaffold" to hold the real battle of Agincourt or the warrior-kings and their dragooned armies who fought it, the prologue instead calls upon the audience to experience them through the power of poetic suggestion, specifically stimulated by the trope of staged synecdoche. Like monarchy, synecdoche lets the one stand in vicariously for the many with same celerity as it does the part for the whole:

O, pardon—since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million
 And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
 On your *imaginary* forces work.
 (1.prologue.15–18; emphasis added)

In recompense for these mental labors, the prologue promises the auditors something very special in the flesh: the synthetic experience of public intimacy, face time with an actor who, crooked or not, represents no less than "the mirror of all Christian kings" (2.prologue.6), the victor at Agincourt in *propria persona*, addressing them just as familiarly within the "wooden O" as he had once showed himself among the "band of brothers" on the eve of battle, "A little touch of Harry in the night" (4.prologue.47), making them confederate in the private travails of "warlike Harry, like

himself" (1.prologue.5) and privy to his dynastic love-life as an implacable suitor to Katherine of Valois.

As we shall see, Samuel Pepys had a shockingly intimate public encounter with the remains, imaginary and otherwise, of one of these same royal celebrities. But in the theater, he first met them in the romantic version of their lives and loves dramatized in 1664 by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, and brought to vivid life by the acting of the incomparable Bettertons, Thomas and Mary, "whose parts are most incomparably wrote and done, and the whole play the most full of heighth and raptures of wit and sense that ever I heard" (5:240-41). The limited evidence suggests that the most popular actors in Shakespeare's time enjoyed robust celebrity status, but not under anything like the monarchical mantle that protected the playhouse of Pepys. "The play was Splendidly Cloath'd," noted the old prompter John Downes in *Roscius Anglicanus* (1708) about the production of Orrery's *Henry the Fifth*, and well might it have been: Charles II enhanced the actors' thrilling synthesis of the whole Lancastrian experience by loaning his royal coronation robes to Betterton to wear as a costume, a synecdochical embassy from the ritually sacred past to the vicariously intimate present.⁴⁶ "The Cult of Elizabeth" presaged the later political appropriations of traditional devotional practices, but she is not known to have attended the public playhouse. Charles II, by contrast, made attending the theaters, which he also had patented under his own and his royal brother's titles, one of the hallmarks of his reign, along with the prominent display of his other appetites. Given the tabloid-like scrutiny of his personal affairs, it could be argued that the last sacred king was also the first modern head of state, at least on the score of flagrant public intimacy.⁴⁷

The Last King

When Shakespeare's plays were revived, royalists among the dramatist-adaptors explicitly sought to legitimate them by attaching the Bard to sacral monarchy. While Pepys noted the morale-boosting presence of the king and his whole court on the jam-packed opening night of *The Tempest; or, the Enchanted Island* in

1667 (8:521–22), the adaptors William Davenant and John Dryden set the tone for the occasion by inserting a pointed line into their prologue: “Shakespear’s Pow’r is sacred as a King’s.”⁴⁸ While this gestured backward to the precedents of an ancient authority, in practice the Restoration patentees, playwrights, and performers more often had to improvise a new theater out of thin air as well as the bits and pieces of the old repertoire. It is the historic tenacity of that eclectically renovated theater, with its emphasis on the drawing power of celebrity actors and actresses, availability to the general public, and rapidly rotating repertory in two competing patent theaters, that did the most for the theater of the future.

The decade that Pepys’s *Diary* documents in flesh-and-blood detail thus began with the official reinstatement of the stage in the repertoire of popular pleasures, but now under the legal and symbolic aegis of the monarchy and with the added attractions of painted scenes and painted women. The overall mise-en-scène became more pictorial, without abandoning the poetic trope of synecdoche in the staging of details (hand props, set pieces, crowd scenes). The successive royal warrants and patents whereby Charles authorized the theaters in 1660–62, which held up in one form or another until 1843 and under which Drury Lane and Covent Garden still legally operate today, specifically encouraged the patentees to cast women in the female roles. In their success, at first evidently uncertain, “the first actresses” eventually superannuated the boy actors, now aging men, who had acted the women’s parts before the closing of the theaters. Drawn from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds, the Restoration actresses pioneered a new profession that hovered on the cusp of the oldest one, making the path of their ascent one that could and did lead to a zenith of concubinage in the king’s own bed and to the ennoblement of the royal bastards they bore him as peers of the realm. These sensational stories should not be allowed to detract from the fact that Restoration actresses, though they generally made less, worked every bit as hard as the actors, that is, very hard indeed: bills changed frequently, often daily, requiring prodigious feats of quick-study memorization, rehearsal, and performance. Some of these actresses played memorable roles in the

history of It, and Pepys remains the principal source for the initial effect they had on their contemporaries, which he savored especially when they turned the tables on the transvestite boys and wore tight pants: “I to the Theatre and there saw *Argalus and Parthenia*; where a woman acted Parthenia and came afterward on the Stage in man’s clothes, and had the best legs that ever I saw; and I was very well pleased with it” (2:203). Staged synecdoche survives in the totality of illusion so long as there are parts, including parts of the body, which the audience will allow to stand for the whole: hence “britches roles” and later “leg shows.” It’s untrue to say that in such spectacles nothing is left to the imagination.

The iconic status of the double-bodied king, God’s Vicar on Earth and now titular head of the playhouse in the bargain, became ever so much more intimate and therefore problematic in this strange twilight of sacral monarchy, both in the way contemporaries such as Pepys and John Evelyn saw Charles at the time and in the way later historians, particularly the Victorians, judged him in retrospect. Like the best of his actors and paramours, the “Dear Good King” had It, not only on account of his widely reputed personal charm, but also by virtue of his job description, which still empowered him, on the one hand, to cure scrofula by touch and, on the other, to commit serial adultery with social impunity. A number of the most telling episodes of his performance of public intimacy cluster around the theater: carrying on flirtations and even open rows with his mistresses in the auditorium; passing notes with actors and actresses backstage; proposing new plays and translations for the repertoire, and, most remarkably of course, loaning his coronation suit for use as a costume. Wrapped in the theater’s cloak of a thousand colors, flaunting his affairs with actresses so notorious that they were popularly known, as he was, by their first names, Charles nevertheless properly signed official documents, including the theatrical patents that legally incorporated the stage into his regime, as “Defender of the Faith.”⁴⁹

No wonder Glyn, the coiner of *It*, the royalist spirit-rapper of the old Hollywood Hotel, and a devout believer in reincarnation, found him so attractive across the intervening centuries. “In the theatre of kingship in the age of baroque,” writes a modern biog-

rapher, “he was a star.”⁵⁰ Like other Edwardian temperaments in self-conscious rebellion against their immediate predecessors, Glyn used her enthusiasm for Charles II and the Restoration in general as a lever to pry loose Victorian mores, making him the It King of the It Age. In fact, the Victorians themselves used the king they called the “Merry Monarch” as an object lesson, as a touchstone, and as soft-core pornography. Historians ought to try to calibrate the extent to which the prevailing views of the Restoration, our own no less than Glyn’s, come down to us filtered either through a layer of yellowing varnish on the history paintings of Augustus Egg or the haze of brimstone lingering from the polemics of Macaulay, who concluded that Charles, though he possessed “some talent for lively conversation,” showed alarming deficiencies in every category of moral sentience, his personal sloth and cynicism having grown so all-engulfing as to inure him to the voice of reproach from without or of conscience from within: “Honour and shame were scarcely more to him than light and darkness to the blind.”⁵¹ Contrarily, attention should be paid to the extent to which our received opinions show the results of the Edwardians’ zealous overcleaning of the reputations of Restoration celebrities by way of reaction, topped off by the bonbon of Shaw’s *In Good King Charles’ Golden Days* (1939). Shaw portrays the saturnine king forsaking his bed of harlots to make a house call, spaniels in tow, on Sir Isaac Newton to investigate new developments in astronomy and mathematics. Only a touch more plausibly, his most notorious mistresses—Lady Castlemaine (Barbara Palmer), the actress Nell Gwyn, and the Catholic Louise de Kéroualle—follow him there to join animatedly in the intellectual feast.

As do descriptions of any star performer who has It, accounts of Charles II emphasize the contradictions of his character, which still fascinate and disturb his biographers under the aura of what George Meredith called “poignant antiphony.” Monumentally selfish, gratuitously treacherous, and vindictively cruel, he nevertheless could, whenever he cared to tilt his head just so and focus his piercing eyes, convince any interlocutor that his or her ideas or qualities interested him more than anyone else’s, a sure sign of the

strangely empathic presence of It. Part of his celebrity he earned honestly by the sweat of his brow: among his prodigious accomplishments as a divine-right monarch in the rising republican tide must be numbered keeping his head on his shoulders and dying in his bed undeposed, a feat that neither his predecessor nor his successor could manage. Even when ancient ceremonial custom ascribed It to him as a perquisite of office, he could still add to its efficacy by the aplomb with which he conducted the affair: unlike his agoraphobic father, the second Charles seemed to indulge willingly the ritual of curing for the king's evil. Moreover, he was good at it, laying his comforting hands convincingly on tens of thousands of afflicted subjects during his reign, treating up to two hundred in a single ceremony. Pepys recorded that the king did the ancient and holy office "with great gravity" (2:74). John Browne's *Charisma Basilicon* (1684) interprets Charles's gift as presumptive evidence of the divinity of kings, noting that he exceeded all his predecessors in healing as Edward I did *his* ancestors, "which places him on a par with England's last royal saint."⁵² The pre-modern history of the modern It-Effect has few more effervescent rituals, a connection reinforced by the seventeenth-century usage of the word *celebrity* as a sacred performance: a solemn funeral could be performed with "great celebrity" for instance, or a mass could be denominated as "the first Celebrity of Divine Service with organ and Choristers" (*OED*). Haunting the ritual continuity of the reign of Charles II was the memory of his judicially murdered father, reverently apostrophized in the memoirs of the actor Thomas Betterton as "the Royal Martyr."⁵³ Samuel Pepys's guilty memory of this experience, while consummately theatrical, was not vicarious: as a schoolboy of fifteen, he played truant to watch while the first Charles's head was cut off and held up to the shuddering crowd (1:265, 280).

The legal fiction and symbolic truth that the king had not one but two bodies—the body natural and the body politic—developed out of medieval Christology (the duality of man and God) and into an increasingly pragmatic and secular principle of sovereign succession and legal continuity.⁵⁴ The reign of Charles II straddled these two worlds, the one not yet dead, the other stirring

to revolutionary life. The royalist critique of republican government cites the trappings of ceremonial kingship as useful props to legitimacy when, as so often happens in history, the incumbent proves personally disappointing. Elinor Glyn, in a moving aside on the rarity of a great democratic leader like Abraham Lincoln emerging at precisely the hour of greatest need (“one in a thousand years, I fear”), underlined the importance of the ritual continuity of the body politic in ascribing it to officeholders *ex officio* where it cannot be conferred on the merits:

I am convinced that pageantry is an important part of the life of a nation, and should not be given up. The total abandonment of all such public functions in America is, I feel sure, one of the reasons why the law is held in such little respect there. The subconscious mind is always impressed by fine ceremonial, just as it is by the dignity of complete simplicity; but while the perfection of character which commands respect through simplicity is rare, the trappings of majesty can maintain dignity even when the figure which they clothe is not in itself noble. The respect for the Constitution and the traditions engendered by the greatness of one ruler or judge can be perpetuated in the time of a less worthy successor by the actual descent of the Prophet's mantle upon him in the shape of the Coronation Robes, or full-bottomed wig.⁵⁵

Of course Tories historically pride themselves on spotting and elevating truly exceptional talent from outside the birthright of their immediate tribe, but they also tend to insist, not unreasonably, that authority must be continuously performed even when it cannot be perfectly embodied. Here ascribed manna has played an important role: to call this role superficial underestimates what Glyn terms the “subconscious” impression made by the stylish pageants of the player-kings.

When Charles II reinforced the unapologetic theatricality of his reign by loaning his coronation robes to the playhouse, he did not do so because the staging of symbolic legitimacy severely tested a nation so freakishly prolific in producing miracle-working actors. Of Charles Hart's impersonation of Alexander the Great, the

prompter John Downes remembered: “he Acting [the role] with such Grandeur and Agreeable Majesty, That one of the Court was pleas’d to Honour him with this Commendation; that *Hart* might Teach any King on Earth how to Comport himself.”⁵⁶ Of the whole institution of the stage under the later Stuarts, Charles Gildon, in his *Life of Thomas Betterton* (1710), wrote that it was a “Mimic State.”⁵⁷ The key element of monarchical government, as Glyn attests, is the public visibility of its sacred head, and His Majesties Servants made their sovereign intimately visible through their daily performances of all genres in his name or his brother’s name, not merely on those rare and dangerous occasions when, as in the Exclusion Crisis of 1680–81, they edged too close to current events and seemed to mimic a reigning monarch or his deputies directly and critically. Every performance, except the silenced ones, proceeded with legally explicit royal authorization, like religious services, on every day except Sundays. As increasingly commercial enterprises operating under the variously exercised authority of the state, the “Theatres Royal” enjoyed a long run.

Mimic State

Celebrities, then, like kings, have two bodies, the body natural, which decays and dies, and the body cinematic, which does neither. But the immortal body of their image, even though it is preserved on celluloid, on digitalized files, or in the memory of the theatergoing public as an afterimage, always bears the nagging reminder of the former. (“She looks great. Isn’t she dead by now?”) As their sacred images circulate in the vortex of the profane imagination, these double-bodied persons foreground a peculiar combination of contradictory attributes expressed through outward signs of the union of their imperishable and mortal bodies. These include the simultaneous appearance of strength and vulnerability in the same performance, even in the same gesture. Let those marks of strength be called *charismata*; the signs of vulnerability, *stigmata*. They work cooperatively, like muscles in opposable pairs, and their mesmerizing interplay has a long history as well as popular currency as the source of public intimacy.

With or without the Stuarts, the mimic state provided a conduit through which the double body-type of the monarch devolved upon the most famous of his or her subjects. In this expansion of celebrity to a wider aperture of visibility, the stage produced totemic signs, by which the intimate persons of its stars became as familiar to the public as the heraldic trappings of monarchy once were and continued to be. Anne Bracegirdle's white teeth, David Garrick's flashing eyes, and Dorothy Jordan's curly hair, for example, are celebrated *charismata* in English theatrical history. At the same time, Elizabeth Barry's asymmetrical face, David Garrick's short stature, and Sarah Siddons's embonpoint are equally well-known *stigmata*. In the creation of public intimacy, psyche and soma intertwine, and the stigmatizing marks, visible or invisible, leave their emotional trace in every expression, especially the strongest.

As Achilles was a more compelling hero because of his heel, not in spite of it, so Thomas Betterton (1635–1710) became a more effective tragedian in part because his increasingly vulnerable body contrasted so poignantly with his growing moral strength. Except for those by Pepys, who revered him above all other actors at the time, the eyewitness accounts of him come from later in his career, most pertinently Tony Aston's deferential but clear-eyed portrait:

Mr. Betterton (although a superlative good Actor) labour'd under ill Figure, being clumsily made, having a great Head, a short thick Neck, stoop'd in the Shoulders, and had fat short Arms, which he rarely lifted higher than his Stomach. His Left Hand frequently lodg'd in his Breast, between his Coat and Waist-coat, while, with his Right, he prepar'd his Speech. His Actions were few, but just. He had little Eyes, and a Broad Face, a little Pock-fretten, a corpulent Body, and thick Legs, with large Feet. He was better to meet, than to follow; for his Aspect was serious, venerable, and majestic; in his latter Time a little paralytic. His Voice was low and grumbling; yet he could Time it by an artful Climax, which enforc'd universal Attention, even from the Fops and Orange-Girls.⁵⁸

In many religious traditions worldwide, “shamans, sorcerers, and medicine men” are singled out by extraordinary physical marks or eccentricities of behavior.⁵⁹ In modernity, actors are identified in much the same way, even if their oddity is abnormal perfection. Whatever its source, their apartness is no less important than their availability. With Betterton’s physical peculiarity came a more powerfully distinguished magic, and contemporaries felt *It*. Richard Steele’s eulogy on the occasion of the actor’s burial in Westminster Abbey conveyed the preternaturally vivid presence of the characters he created over a long career, as if he had, before Steele’s astonished eyes, actually done the many extraordinary deeds attributed to the heroes and kings he represented and had actually suffered their extraordinary travails. In some sense, he had. In death, Steele realized, Betterton, son of an undercook in the service of Charles I, had officially joined the appropriate assembly in the pantheon of English worthies, avatars of a “Free-born People”: “the Sacred Heads which lie buried in the Neighborhood of this little Portion of Earth in which my poor Friend is deposited, are returned to Dust as well as he.” Steele further concluded that all differences among living men are “merely Scenical” and “that there is no Difference in the Grave between the Imaginary and the Real Monarch.”⁶⁰ With growing audacity, performers, whose celebrity was achieved, did not wait for the grave before they claimed their place in the public eye beside aristocrats and royals, whose celebrity was ascribed. This does not mean that they thereby became altogether socially acceptable, but it does mean that they became increasingly interesting.

Above all the other precinematic theatrical attractions of the mimic state in the age of commercialized leisure and celebrity reenchantment was “*The Siddons*.” Like Betterton, whose authority increased with the passing decades, Sarah Siddons (1755–1831) became a more formidable tragedienne with the stigmatizing *avoirdupois* than without it, for after seven pregnancies, her signature emotions of distressed maternity gained greater conviction as well as gravity. William Hazlitt’s famous prayer to Mrs. Siddons as the long-reigning deity of the stage captures both the intensity and the fragility of her charismatic hold on her pub-

lic. In another place and time, the adulation he reports would be called “Momism.” To any Durkheimian, it would qualify as manna. To any sentient manager, it counted as box-office capital:

The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a superior order had dropped from another sphere, to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was Tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind.⁶¹

Less often noted is what Hazlitt says he is praying for: he implores Siddons to reconsider her ill-advised return to the stage in 1816, long enough after her retirement that the perfect balance between *charismata* and *stigmata* she had once been able to strike is no longer possible. Slow of speech and largely immobile, she now exhibits vulnerabilities that so surpass her strengths that by coming again upon the boards she risks the almost certain destruction of her hard-won image as an “idol” in the public mind. When *stigmata* so far overrun *charismata*, the embarrassed celebrity becomes too available to the identification of the audience, and that special quality of apartness, which Glyn describes as “unbiddable,” disappears, taking It down with it. “Players should be immortal,” Hazlitt explains, “if their own wishes or ours could make them so; but they are not.”⁶²

Apart from the hundreds of roles that Betterton and Siddons each played in their fifty-year careers, many of which they created, these two avatars of the It-Effect also turned themselves into what I am calling *role-icons*. The role-icon represents a part that certain exceptional performers play on and off stage, no matter what other parts they enact from night to night. Betterton’s career-long

role-icon might be called “the tragedy king”; Siddons’s, “the tragedy queen.” Other actors may vie for these coveted roles, but the public will usually embrace only one at time. Such role-icons affect box-office receipts because they raise expectations in anticipation of their auratic presence at an event regardless of the other attractions on the bill. The prestige of such role-icons prompted Edmund Burke to cite the tears that Sarah Siddons, along with her precursor David Garrick, one of Betterton’s successors as tragedy king, drew from him in connection with his emotional excursus on the sufferings of Marie Antoinette, a truly anointed tragedy queen, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Presciently, Burke went so far as to propose the replacement of religion by the stage, at least for the duration of the emergency: “Indeed, the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than churches, where the feelings of humanity are thus outraged.”⁶³ As Roland Barthes remarked about such a diffusion or transfusion of manna into modern life, “This mythical character of our kings is nowadays secularized, though not in the least exorcised.”⁶⁴ In a similar vein of thinking, but with very different politics, Elinor Glyn convinced herself that the Hollywood stars of the 1920s were reincarnated Stuarts, dynastic scions of a second Restoration, and it is the burden of my argument about It to demonstrate the uncanny extent to which she was right: the fact that all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty back together again did not rule out recycling.

Bits and Pieces

Like the mythical figure of Pygmalion, who modeled an image with which he promptly fell in love, the consumer of celebrity icons does the work of creating the effigy in the physical absence of the beloved. It’s the easiest thing in the world to fall in love with one’s own creation, of course, but like the shadow on the wall of Plato’s cave, the effigy remains incomplete as a condition of its vicarious advent. That is why the icon that Pygmalion creates, later identified as Galatea, comes to him in parts that can only stand in as surrogates for the whole, not embody it. Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as translated by John Dryden and printed in Samuel

Garth's edition of 1719, sets up the hero's predicament in a stately couplet, which encapsulates the seductive self-deception at the root of mass attraction:

Pleas'd with his idol, he commends, admires,
Adores; and last, the thing ador'd, desires.

Seeing her form emerge from his sculpting hands with such remarkable lifelikeness, Pygmalion begins to adorn her image further, as he would a living lover, carving in a kind of "madness" to complete the icon, as if completeness will bring her to wholeness or at least to life. Working synecdochically from the outside in, he creates each part of the image in its turn, as if the whole were ever equal to the sum of its parts, arranging an entire setting for it, replete with properties and costumes, starting first with the accessories:

He furnishes her closet first; and fills
The crowded shelves with rarities of shells;
Adds orient pearls, which from the conchs he drew,
And all the sparkling stones of various hue.

After desperately overdoing accessories with parrots and a singing-bird in a silver cage, Pygmalion then moves on to the clothes:

Rich fashionable robes her person deck,
Pendants her ears, and pearls adorn her neck;
Her taper'd fingers too with rings are grac'd,
And an embroider'd zone surrounds her slender waiste.

The addition of clothing and jewelry intensifies his obsession with the texture of her "iv'ry" hair and the "whiteness" of her skin, so smooth to his caress that he can't believe it's not flesh:

Thus like a queen array'd, so richly dress'd,
Beauteous she shew'd, but naked shew'd the best.

Finally, after he takes the statue into bed with him and prays to Venus that his creation may be brought to life as his bride, the goddess relents, and he rapturously kisses the sleeping beauty awake:

Then lips to lips he join'd; freed from fear,
 He found the savour of the kiss sincere:
 At this the waken'd image op'd her eyes,
 And view'd at once the light, and lover with surprize.⁶⁵

With the exception of bone, which has its own honored place among the charismatic dead, Ovid's narration of Pygmalion's creative process, in which the hero fashions It out of his idea, his living dream of it, announces the overall contents of the chapters that follow.

First, they survey representative afterimages of Charles II, beginning with and returning to his royal funeral effigy, an artifact of medieval mortuary ritual, bits and pieces of which appear in each chapter, which also includes readings of the theatrical enterprises set in motion during his reign. Second, they interpret those enterprises in light of the political philosophy of celebrity enchantment that the king's superstitious acolyte Elinor Glyn carried forward from the nineteenth century into the Hollywood dream-factory. Third, they overlay the transformed media of 1920s with those of the 1660s, recognizing that these historical moments cannot possibly be telescoped into one another, but putting them in conversation nevertheless to illuminate public intimacy, synthetic experience, and the It-Effect through the uncanny wormholes opened up by the unique source of Samuel Pepys's *Diary*.

Chapter 1 begins with accessories of Charles's effigy for the same reason that Pygmalion does with Galatea's. In their practical inutility, accessories do the basic symbolic work of propping up the illusion that the role-icon they adorn is complete and completely alive. Pepys takes up wearing a sword, for instance, because that's what the complete "gentleman" wears in the fashion of his time, not because the clerk has any real intention of defending himself or his honor with it. In the overall production of It as social manna, heads of state and actors play a similar role as living accessories to the ensemble of the culture writ large, a point made most incisively by Walter Bagehot in *The English Constitution* (1867) and most pertinently by Elinor Glyn in her asides about royalty, cinematic and otherwise, foregrounding visibility and invisibility as the

constitutional antinomy of It. Chapter 2 dresses the effigy with the expert advice of “Lucile,” taking as examples the nominated role-icons of the “beauty” and the “rake,” both of which provoke struggles between charisma and stigma for control of their afterimage. Chapters 3 and 4 add hair and skin, addressing the role-icons of the tragedy king and the tragedy queen, supplemented by that of the fop for comic relief: Meredith’s “poignant antiphony” plays out as a delicate balance of strength and vulnerability, based on the magical properties imputed to hair in four actors and a stateswoman; skin performs magic all its own, following on superstitions of lightness and darkness that surfaced in tragic performances by three tragedy queens—Anne Bracegirdle, Sarah Siddons, and Diana, Princess of Wales. Chapter 5 takes up the similarly touchy issue of flesh, situating its prominence in London’s Covent Garden, understood as an “It-Zone,” where tangible and intangible goods are exchanged as gifts and commodities, turning on Adam Smith’s “great wheel of circulation,” which is manna in motion. The role-icon of the Galatea-Cinderella type, which contrasts innocence and experience, famously circulates in Covent Garden, nominated as Eliza Doolittle and embodied by Frances Abington, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Audrey Hepburn, and, finally, “Barbie”: Eliza’s metamorphosis from working girl to celebrity icon epitomizes the creation of It out of the energy released by the transformation of a utensil into an accessory.

No doubt any effigy made of It partakes of the character of a fetish object as defined by Freud and even, as commercialized synthetic experience, of the commodity fetish as defined by Marx. But constantly assigning shaming motives to everything becomes tiresome, especially when the assignments might prove accurate in overly obvious ways. Psychoanalytically attuned readers will likely see the relationship between the mental processes discussed here and “transference,” the redirection of feelings toward an idealized object, but this is coincidental, as are the connections to the Lacanian mirror stage and *objet petit a*. So in the place of depth psychology, each of the chapters, except the last, offers a case study of surfaces, what Virginia Postrel, writing in *The Substance of Style* (2003), calls “the look and the feel of things.”⁶⁶ Accessories,

clothes, hair, skin, and flesh—each contributes attractive parts with different textures, any one of which might stand for the fugitive whole, which never quite manifests itself satisfactorily, until it disappears forever into bone. As a conciliatory gesture to depth, however, Chapter 6, which juxtaposes the role-icon of the “pirate” with one or two of the most disturbing and bizarre entries in Pepys’s *Diary*, will conclude with a brief reflection on the implications of Freud’s use of the German *es* as in *Das Ich und das Es* (1923), following a similar use in Groddeck’s *Das Buch vom Es*, as the German equivalent of the Latin word for *it*, which is *id* (*OED*). Here, finally, death hovers in poignant antiphony with love, summoning a Nemesis figure from the shadows, a role-icon who both possesses It and relentlessly stalks it too: the charismatic super-predator.

Public intimacy describes the illusion of proximity to the tantalizing apparition; synthetic experience, the consumption of its spun-off products such as plays, magazines, or movies; and the It-Effect, its deifying reception. The It-Effect, in turn, intensifies the craving for greater intimacy with the ultimately unavailable icon. Constructed both through the publicity manipulated by celebrities themselves or their acolytes and through the imaginative contribution of their fans, It patches together a specter more ragtag than any saintly relic: assorted features and body parts, bits of clothes and accessories, briefly glimpsed gestures and expressions—all cohering only in the mass hallucination that everyone either wants to touch or be touched by and no one can either find or forget. It is the “*Something*,” as Pope put it, “That gives us back the Image of our Mind,” but maddeningly, never exactly as itself. Historians will rightly decry as presentist those accounts of the past that reduce the long ago and far away to the exigencies of the here and now. What follows attempts to pull hard in the opposite direction, interpreting the present in light of a salient fact about the eighteenth century that historians don’t insist on often enough: it isn’t over yet.