AN ANATOMY OF CELEBRITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF CELEBRITY IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FICTION

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An Anatomy of Celebrity: Representations of Celebrity in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction

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Abstract

Although there is a wide spectrum of contemporary works of literature currently available that implicitly engage issues of celebrity culture, this thesis focuses specifically on three representations of celebrity that have contemporary cultural resonance: 1. celebrity as image in Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), where I examine how the trappings of celebrity culture can detrimentally shape self-image and dictate behavioral conformity; 2. celebrity as identity in Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* (1998), where I examine how celebrity defines cultural conceptions of success, desire, image, and fashion, and encourages a superficial, surface-level engagement with the world; and, 3. celebrity as secular religion in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* (1999), where I explore how the same reverential mechanisms of celebrity operate in religious fanaticism. I have selected these novels in order to provide a representative sampling of contemporary fiction dealing with celebrity from the 1980s to present, a period which coincides with the explosion of popular culture in the academy, and the emergence of celebrity as a topic of theoretical attention, if not critical literary attention.

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Table of Contents

Page

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Topic

In a society where stories about celebrity figures such as Britney Spears, Anna Nicole Smith, and Paris Hilton often garner more press and screen time than events with widespread real-world consequences (like the war in Iraq), the concept of celebrity has never been a more relevant topic for critical discussion. This thesis will examine how representations of celebrity in late twentieth-century literature can provide us with a behind-the-scenes understanding of the mechanisms at work, both in the production and marketing of celebrity, and how celebrity functions ideologically in Western culture.

Literature has been a particularly understudied area of celebrity culture. Literary studies that engage celebrity have until now consisted primarily of biographical examinations of select celebrity authors who fit the criteria of celebrity based on their recognizability in the public sphere (Phillips 1992, Donoghue 1996, Moran 2000, Tuite 2007)—for instance, the celebrity personae of Shakespeare, Lord Byron, and James Joyce. In comparison, there has been no substantive scholarship discussing celebrity culture as it is configured and represented in contemporary fiction. My thesis is intended to redress this scholarly gap through an analysis of the workings of celebrity in representative examples of late twentieth-century Anglo-American fiction.

Although there is a wide range of celebrity-themed works of literature available, I will be focusing specifically on three representations of celebrity that have contemporary cultural resonance: 1. celebrity as image in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984),

religion Tender uses to achieve fame has only a temporary shelf life. Tender's immoral manipulation of celebrity to construct his legacy culminates in his hijacking a plane and crashing it in order to create a spectacular martyrdom. This plan underscores celebrity's connections to notoriety, where the media attention of celebrity is obtainable through infamous behaviour. The real world consequences of this amorality of celebrity are that spectacular acts of murder and terrorism become viable routes to celebrity status.

Thus, *Money*, *Glamorama*, and *Survivor* all provide insightful commentaries on the ways in which celebrity functions ideologically in contemporary society. All three of the novels unwittingly highlight the mechanisms of celebrity production to reveal celebrity as an artificially constructed façade. Each also deals, in one way or another, with celebrity as both a form of distraction and behavioural control. Celebrity exerts a powerful influence over each of the protagonists of these novels, setting the stage for their eventual deception and fall through celebrity's hidden connections to media construction and social conformity.

where I will examine how the trappings of celebrity culture can detrimentally shape self-image and dictate behavioral conformity; 2. celebrity as identity in Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* (1998), where I will examine how celebrity defines cultural conceptions of success, desire, image, and fashion, and encourages a decidedly superficial, surface-level engagement with the world; and, 3. celebrity as secular religion in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* (1999), where I will explore how the same reverential mechanisms of celebrity that operate in the world of popular culture are at work in practices of religious fanaticism. I have selected these three novels in order to provide a spectrum of representative late twentieth-century fiction dealing with celebrity from the 1980s to present, a period which coincides with the explosion of popular culture as an area of study in the academy, and the emergence of celebrity culture as a topic of theoretical and critical attention in recent scholarship.

I justify my choice of novels for this project because each of the works of contemporary fiction I've selected engages the intersections of popular culture and media publicity without specifically naming celebrity as the central subject matter. Because of this ubiquitous and topical content, I could have chosen any number of contemporary novels that incorporate aspects of what I am identifying as literary representations of celebrity culture. None of my selected authors would have described their works as being thematically preoccupied with issues of celebrity and the culture that surrounds it, even though each novel has been written in the wake of the foundational theoretical statements on celebrity culture. Instead, I argue that these three novels unwittingly offer critical insights into the behind-the-scenes machinations (and pitfalls) of celebrity lifestyles and

practices. For instance, the central thematic focus in Amis's *Money* is on the cruel practical joke played on John Self; in *Glamorama*, the focus is on the superficiality of the fashion world; and, in *Survivor*, Palahniuk focuses on cultic religious fanaticism. In each of these novels, issues of celebrity function as enabling, unprivileged background detail. To this end, I have performed in-depth close readings of these literary works—applying existing theory to understudied textual examples—to reveal how celebrity functions as an inescapable paradigmatic influence on both social behaviour and cultural production.

Moreover, each novel is also a cautionary tale about the human trauma experienced by literary protagonists who choose to live celebrity lives. For example, John Self (*Money*) is financially ruined and his reputation as a film/television director is destroyed at the end of the novel. The same is true of Victor (*Glamorama*) who, as a fashion model, is replaced professionally and abandoned personally. Tender Branson (*Survivor*) even commits suicide to escape the pressures of celebrity and in doing so martyrs himself into a new type of celebrity status. In terms of secondary sources that discuss these three novels, the most critical ink has been spilt on *Money*; however, none has dealt with the issues of celebrity that exist in the work. As such, my critical readings of *Money* establish a template from which to interpret the two lesser known novels (*Glamorama*, *Survivor*) that have had almost nothing scholarly written about them in comparison to the better known works of these same authors (Ellis's *American Psycho* and Palahniuk's *Fight Club*).

rehababilitation from celebrity as an addiction, which underscores the pervasiveness and potential harmfulness of its control over him.

The desire to be recognizable becomes an obsession, causing Victor to think and behave irrationally, demonstrating the detrimental effects a commitment to celebrity can have on a character's behaviour. For example, before Victor's co-owned club is about to open he receives several threatening telegrams that read "I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING" (119). Victor's assistant, J.D., is "vaguely panicked;" however, Victor's first thought is, "Do you think I'm actually being stalked? . . . Wait – how cool" (119). The message could be referring to any number of Victor's recent transgressions, from his plan to go against his partner in opening his own club to his several infidelities. Yet, none of these possibilities even dawn upon Victor. Oblivious to the danger at hand, Victor is blinded by the implications the letters may have for his celebrity status. Aware of the numerous examples of celebrity stalkers, which have become a convention of the celebrity world, he perceives the telegram as a sign of personal achievement. The fact that the message is on a telegram displays the type of individualized attention that Victor craves. Because the sender has to pay by the word, the message is typically superficial and brief. For the very same reasons, the form of the message represents a luxury item. Telegrams are usually sent in the case of an emergency or event of special importance, but because Victor's consciousness filters everything through celebrity status and image, the telegram instead fits the conventions of celebrity. This misperception of the vehicle of communication, much like his fashion-speak, clichés, and selective interaction based on image, illustrates how celebrity influences

The Novels

In Martin Amis's *Money*, I will examine the illusory nature of the celebrity image, especially the way in which celebrity reconfigures the American Dream. The democratic ideal of equal opportunity through hard work is replaced by the attainment of a certain type of image that publicly signifies success only in a very superficial way. For the purposes of this study, I use the term *celebrity image* to describe not only media representations of celebrity, but also to include a lifestyle characterized by conspicuous consumption[1] that often displays an obliviousness to the costs of celebrity status, both financially and psychologically. The main focus of my discussion on *Money* is the way in which characters confuse celebrity with fame, thinking that celebrity is grounded in achievement or merit, when in fact it is fundamentally no more than a media-constructed image of success. It is this misconception which sets the money trap for John Self, a moderately successful British television commercial writer who is led to believe that he is a sort of celebrity-in-production based on the exaggerated merits of his past work in televisual advertisement.

Fielding, the face of the illusory financial backing for Self's first full-length film, uses the conventions of celebrity image to dupe Self. Understanding the consumer imperative of celebrity, Fielding instructs Self to behave the part of a full-fledged celebrity through careless spending. Thus, in his efforts to realize his celebrity potential, Self adopts all of the extravagant habits that are culturally associated with the celebrity lifestyle, equally consuming cars, clothes, sex, and alcohol with reckless abandon.

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[1] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899) 47.

However, despite his projection of the celebrity image, in truth, Self remains nothing more than a caricature of celebrity, living the lifestyle, but without the fame or real financial base from which to lead a life of conspicuous consumption. In his pursuit of celebrity image, Self is having a cruel practical joke played on him, one that exploits the trappings of celebrity culture. When his base of illusory credit runs out and his image is no longer viable as a commodity, his celebrity lifestyle is quickly stripped away. In so doing, it necessarily exposes celebrity's false façade, a warning about the superficiality of celebrity, and the ease with which it can come and go. In contrast to famed achievement, celebrity reveals itself to be only image, a bankrupt lifestyle of appearances that can be maintained only by wealth and media support networks.

In Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama*, my critical reading shifts to a discussion of celebrity as identity where I consider how celebrity creates a pseudo-identity and the consequences of what happens when participation in celebrity culture becomes no longer a choice but an inescapable way of life. In this context, celebrity has moved beyond mere superficial image to become a lived identity such that the commitment to superficiality occurs in every aspect of life. In *Glamorama*, celebrity has become one of the major benchmarks for Western conceptions of not only success but also desire, fashion, and beauty, as well as one of the most powerful sources of identity formation. The main character in the novel, Victor Ward, a fashion model of moderate success and celebrity, is so conditioned by celebrity culture that he is chronically unable to see past the surfaces of things. He exists in his personal life as he does in the public eye, as an image, a collection

of gestures appropriated from popular culture, celebrity fashion, and advertisements, with little evidence of any underlying humanity.

Celebrity culture replaces Victor's personal/individual identity with a superficial persona based on image. Highlighting the idea of celebrity as disposable commodity, Victor's superficial existence in the public and private spheres makes him literally and tragically replaceable in both. Victor's obliviousness to his dispensability underscores the power of celebrity culture to produce narcissistic celebrity figures that are shallow to the point of extreme ignorance. Victor demonstrates a shocking ignorance of world historical events and issues, yet his memory for fashionable name brands, for factoids from celebrity biographies, and for pop-cultural references shows encyclopedic breadth. Victor's egocentrism and his surface-level engagement with the world also mean that he has very little sense of right and wrong. He has no qualms about using people, even longtime friends and lovers, strictly for personal gain and then discarding them or betraying them. Thus, celebrity generates insensitivity to individual rights, whereby characters value each other solely in terms of their use-value and commodify and use each other like pop-culture sound bites. This association between celebrity and egocentrism is the reason that Bobby, an ex-model celebrity turned terrorist mastermind, selects celebrity models like Victor to join his terrorist group, seeing them as ideal terrorists. Since his celebrity recruits exist in a world of bare images and surfaces, they place no value on things of substance, such as human life, and have nothing of substance to lose if they die.

I explore the connection between celebrity and terrorism further in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*, where I shift my focus to celebrity as religion and argue that the same types of mechanisms involved in celebrity cultural production function in the worlds of religious fanaticism and terrorism, where public notoriety and symbolic recognizability have a media currency. The novel tells the story of Tender Branson, a former cult nobody turned international celebrity and religious leader, and it reaccentuates many of the same aspects of celebrity that operate in *Money* and *Glamorama*, such as image production, commodification, publicity, and media coverage. For instance, *Survivor* provides a useful companion piece to *Glamorama*, because it details many of the behind-the-scenes processes of celebrity production and marketing that help to explain how depthless characters like Victor are conditioned and produced by celebrity culture. However, unlike the protagonists in the other two novels, Tender is self-reflexive about his manipulation as a celebrity figure. His introspection provides a unique narrative perspective on and an insider's view of how celebrity shapes and exploits people by selling them as commodities. Tender candidly describes how the production of his celebrity involved brainwashing, extensive cosmetic surgeries, cosmetic drugs, a strict regimen of exercise and diet in order to transform his image, and an extensive media campaign geared to make him a household name. Finally, he discusses how his name was commodified and mass reproduced on a whole host of merchandise from signature motivational tapes to signature edition bibles.

In *Survivor*, celebrity, like religion, induces people's devotion through social programming. Both the religious cult of Tender's childhood and the cult of celebrity later

built around him involve a group of followers relinquishing personal identity to a central role model or the cult leader: the celebrity figure. Thus, just as the members of the Creedish cult in Tender's class surrender their individuality to serve the cult financially through a life of ascetic labor, the followers of Tender's celebrity related doctrines mute their individuality by adopting the lifestyle advice he preaches/sells to them. This interplay between the capitalist mechanisms of celebrity and religion in *Survivor* highlight not only the types of social programming involved in each of these ideological constructions but also the material imperative that underpins both of them. In my examination of *Survivor*, I explore how both religious and celebrity worship are negotiated through material means: objects of idolatry and relics. As both a celebrity and a figure of religious significance, Tender is the focus of both types of worship. The consumer products attached to him, such as prayer books, replica dolls, and a clothing line, are both objects of religious idolatry and relics consumed by people in order to feel closer to Tender's celebrity.

One of the main attractions of celebrity in *Survivor*, and one of the main reasons it is able to elicit this type of religious response from people, is its posthumous power. Much in the same way that religion offers the promise of life after death, the attainment of celebrity offers the opportunity of a secular kind of immortality in the form of a posthumous legacy. Tender combats his profound fear of death and his subsequent desire for immortality by building his legacy through his celebrity. The coupling of celebrity and religion/cults in *Survivor* demonstrates how celebrity not only uses a religious-styled

type of power structure to inspire adoration and devotion but also how celebrity culture offers its own kind of posthumous afterlife in terms of legacy.

When considered in conjunction with the terrorism in the novel, the power harnessed by celebrity has particularly dire implications for current world events. I argue that *Survivor*, written before the events of 9-11, subtly frames religious fanaticism and terrorism in terms of our culture's (and particularly the media's) lack of discrimination between celebrity and notoriety. Through sensationalistic media coverage, the mechanism of celebrity production, our disaster-obsessed culture enables these attacks. Terrorism becomes just another example of the sensationalized media coverage of disasters, and we become complicit in this terror by hyping it and giving it saturation levels of media attention. Moreover, celebrity, as Tender demonstrates, represents a route to a type of immortality and legacy that figures as an enticing reward for those willing to go far enough to attain it. In the discourse of celebrity culture, attention and visibility equal rewards, financial and otherwise. In the context of religious terrorism, then, celebrity can provide suicide bombers with secular martyrdom (legacy of recognizable iconicity) to go along with their religious martyrdom.

Celebrity Theory - A Scholarship Review

The following scholarly review traces some of the major theoretical interpretations of celebrity, identifying the ways in which each has contributed to and shaped my arguments about the nature of celebrity and how it functions. I have divided the scholarship into three sections which correspond to my three main arguments,

celebrity as image, celebrity as identity, and celebrity as religion, citing the relevance of each theorist to his or her respective section.

Celebrity as Image

In my analysis of how culture and media construct celebrity as image, the earliest theorist I address is Daniel J. Boorstin, who, in his book *The Image* (1961), saw celebrity as a perversion of the concept of fame, a sort of renown stripped bare of its merit (47). Boorstin's obsoletely gendered definition of the celebrity, "known for his well-knownness" is the fundamental concept that underlies most scholarship on the topic published since and provides the theoretical foundation for my study of celebrity as a media construction. Boorstin traces the emergence of celebrity as a direct result of a broader cultural movement which he calls "The Graphic Revolution," beginning, especially in America, around the start of the twentieth-century (47). This movement describes a period of rapid technological advancement with the advent and/or mass production of television, movies, radio, newspapers, and magazines (47).

As Boorstin sees it, this cultural development results in an "age of contrivance" (253) marked by media fabrication in nearly every aspect of our culture from news to political rhetoric (3-5). The development of these media of mass production and dissemination provided "the means of fabricating well-knownness" (47). As a result, fame became an overnight phenomenon (47). Boorstin sees this culminating in "a world filled with artificial fame" (47) and an age defined by "a new kind of eminence" (57): celebrity. For Boorstin, the rise of celebrity is just one example of a general movement in

our culture away from ideals towards images (181). In this post-Graphic Revolution context, "image" sells everything from cars to political campaigns (183).

Boorstin's discussion of celebrities as fabricated and illusory images provides the theoretical backdrop for my investigation of the ways in which celebrity functions as a false status and idealized, image-driven lifestyle. He distinguishes the celebrity from "the hero" (61), the conventional historical figure of renown and fame. Unlike "the hero," who is distinguished by "achievement," the celebrity is distinguished "by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name" (61). While "the hero" is known for actual deeds, the celebrity is simply known for being well known. These distinctions posit celebrity as inherently illusory and unstable and, therefore, a misleading lifestyle category in our culture. Boorstin's theories provide a model for my reading of *Money*, which illustrates the possible detrimental results of the pursuit of celebrity when the roles associated with celebrity image become an unsustainable lifestyle.

Moving from Boorstin's distinction between celebrity and fame, Richard Schickel, in his book *Intimate Strangers* (1985), examines how celebrity has erased the line between categories of distinction, a perspective that is germane to my discussion of how characters in *Money* confuse celebrity with fame. Schickel describes how, as a result of the emergence of celebrity, fame becomes increasingly divorced from its original associations with achievement, so that "a moment of fame" can be granted almost at random to, for example, "anyone who is eyewitness to a disaster" (62). The distinction between fame and celebrity is rendered obsolete when celebrity is granted for simply

being in the right place at the right time. In the world of overnight celebrity, the foundations of renown are no longer stable or, often, even identifiable. As a result, I argue in my novel analysis that characters are easily taken in by the appeal and spectacle of celebrity image and misled about their status in the public sphere, mistaking celebrity as a signifier of achievement.

Another aspect of celebrity's deceptiveness is the democratic myth that it is available to everyone. This myth, which I engage in my reading of *Money*, is best summarized by David P. Marshall in his book *Celebrity and Power* (1997). From Marshall's perspective, the myth that the celebrity represents the universal potential for success in American society is based on appearance (9). Thus, the celebrity is "part of a system of false promise in the system of capital" in which celebrity is granted seemingly at random to a select few in order to reinforce the façade (9). Furthermore, the media's focus on the "external appearance" of the Hollywood film celebrity, instead of focusing on talent or achievement, perpetuates the democratic myth that celebrity is granted for superficial reasons, by "luck or circumstance," so that anyone can become a star. (91). In *Money*, it is Self's focus on image in his quest for celebrity that distracts him from seeing his own manipulation. Because it is fundamentally about image, celebrity appears obtainable for anyone who has the money to pay for the consumer products and cosmetic enhancements that signify it. However, as Self discovers when his financial base is revealed to be nonexistent, without money there is often nothing beneath the celebrity image to sustain it.

The deceptiveness of celebrity is also central to my analysis of how celebrity grants individuals special power in the public sphere to act without the restraint or concern for basic rules and boundaries that govern the rest of society. Thus, as a group, celebrities "are given greater presence and a wider scope of activity and agency than are those who make up the rest of the population" (Marshall ix). One manifestation of this power, which I examine in my discussion of celebrity as image, is how public recognizability provides individuals with a license to behave excessively or reprehensively without reprimand. In *Money*, the film stars whom Self interacts with are self-indulgent in the extreme and expect to be catered to by everyone around them. Not unlike the actors, Self believes that in order to perform his celebrity image according to Fielding's instructions, he must consume everything in excess. In this way, Fielding uses the conventions of celebrity image to distract Self from the falsity of his own celebrity status.

Celebrity as Identity

My reading of celebrity as identity focuses on the negative ways in which celebrity culture socializes people to think and behave in superficial ways that perpetuate capitalist practices of commodification and dehumanized exchange of material goods. In order to examine the idea of celebrity as identity, the first and earliest theorist I consider is Schickel, whose focus on the negative effects of celebrity culture on people's behaviour informs my study with concrete, real-life examples. For Schickel, celebrity has the ability to distort the consciousnesses of those who follow and worship it (23). One of the ways celebrity does this is through the media, which foster "imagined intimacy"

between followers and stars (25). Because expansive 24-hour media broadcasting allows celebrities to be ubiquitous in our lives, celebrities are able to attract our emotional attachments, giving us the feeling that we are actually closer to or more intimate with them than we really are (4). This point leads to Schickel's discussion of celebrity killers and stalkers, who often act antisocially or even kill on the basis of these types of delusions about their relationships with celebrities (6). Furthermore, because celebrity is often attributed to notorious achievement, it sends the message that gaining attention is the only thing that matters, no matter how, no matter the cost. In this sense, celebrity is inherently amoral (276). According to Schickel, this is "the subtle and permanent power of celebrity . . . to cloud men's minds and to change our traditional modes of apprehending the world and responding to the world" (24).

In my discussion of celebrity in *Glamorama*, I take Schickel's assertion one step further, locating the influence of celebrity at the very core of identity and moving the discussion to celebrity's affect on the personalities of the celebrities themselves. I argue that *Glamorama* provides a turn-of-the-century context for celebrity, one in which celebrity characters are fully indoctrinated at the level of identity formation by the superficial, materialistic perspectives of a consumer culture. I argue that the commodity based culture of celebrity provides a model for social interaction that encourages people, both celebrity and non-celebrity alike, to treat each other as commodities. In his examination of the entertainment industry, Joshua Gamson offers a practical understanding of the processes by which celebrity is produced as a commodity. In *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (1994), Gamson explores the

economic/commercial mechanisms through which celebrities, publicly recognizable *people*, become "admired commodities" (16). He explains how celebrities are fabricated through a system involving a host of commercial forces, including publicists, groomers, agents, and promoters, who mold and manipulate them in order to produce them as "brand-name products" (61). In the market of fan consumption, publicity sells celebrities, and visibility determines their relative market value.

In addition, Marshall's *Celebrity and Power*, which builds on Gamson's analysis of the celebrity as commodity, offers a model of analysis for interpreting the dehumanizing effects of treating celebrities as objects of exchange. Marshall claims that celebrity extends and legitimizes the model of exchange value that is the basis of capitalist economy by extending it to the realm of the individual (x). This argument highlights how celebrity blurs the distinction between commodity and personhood. Moreover, celebrities represent "pure exchange value cleaved from use value" (xi) and, therefore, "gain and lose value like commodities on the stock market" (6). Thus, as commodities, celebrities are infinitely replaceable and disposable. Ultimately, the production of celebrities involves the transformation and reduction of people into consumer products. These qualities of celebrity, as described by Gamson and Marshall, directly inform my discussion of the detrimental, dehumanizing effects of celebrity culture on human interaction in *Glamorama*.

Because my research deals with the ways in which celebrity culture replaces personal identity with the pseudo-identity of celebrity, I turn to Ellis Cashmore's *Celebrity/Culture* (2006), which extends the critical discussion about celebrity-consumer

culture relationships to include how celebrity affects our consciousness. Cashmore explains how celebrity is the driving force behind consumer culture, transforming desire into material need and vice versa. This relationship is at the very center of modern capitalist ideology (Cashmore 264-65). Furthermore, he explains that "celebrities have energized our material expectations, helping shape a culture in which demand is now a basic human experience" (269). As a consequence, desire for celebrities transforms consumption from a "utilitarian" activity into an activity geared towards cosmetic enhancement and accessorizing (15). Celebrity culture encourages people to shop as a means of feeling an attachment to their idols, purchasing celebrity-endorsed products in order to look as if they live like celebrities (15). Thus, from a societal/institutional perspective, "celebrity culture's most basic imperative is material: it encourages consumption at every level of society" (269). These ideas about celebrity's consumerist agenda, as well as the idea of spending in order to feel closer to celebrities, speak directly to the way in which celebrity serves as an institutionalized form of social programming, affecting people's desires and behaviour at the level of identity formation.

Another aspect of my discussion of celebrity as identity is the way in which celebrity culture blurs the line between public and private identity in contemporary fiction. My understanding of this aspect of celebrity and identity is directly informed by Marshall's consideration of the ways in which celebrity embodies and situates negotiation for issues of subjectivity and individuality in modern capitalist culture. In his analysis of the different types of celebrity, Marshall explores the process by which celebrities become embedded with a "discourse on the individual and individuality that is

organized around the will to uncover a hidden truth, or, . . . to uncover the 'real' person behind the public persona" (4). Thus, in the case of film stars, Marshall divides the celebrity's constructed identity in the public sphere into two false "realities," both of which contribute to the total picture that the audience perceives (187). First, there are the celebrity's film representations, which portray them as "fixed images," offering "fixed conceptions" of their identity. In contrast, there are the stars' supposed "real lives" that are portrayed in the media and entertainment industries (talk shows, tabloid television, magazines) and which are assumed by the audience to be authentic, but which are also performed (187). In *Glamorama* , for example, I argue that characters like Victor are so deeply socialized by celebrity that there is no longer a distinction between public representations of celebrities and their private personas because celebrity subsumes both. Thus, the two-dimensional Victor we see on the pages of fashion magazines is the same superficial Victor that we see interacting with his friends and lovers.

Celebrity as Religion

I argue that celebrity also functions in modern society as a secular religion. Both religion and celebrity are systems of worship that wield social influence over large numbers of people. Marshall frames the mass appeal and potential mass influence of celebrity in terms of a "voice above others" (x). He notes that celebrity status provides the individual with the visibility, recognizability, and authority to express himself or herself in the public sphere in a way that is unavailable to the general population (x). In both celebrity culture and religion, celebrity status enhances the attention and weight that an individual voice carries. Moreover, as in the case of *Survivor*, where celebrity and

religious authority are combined, this power of voice is doubly effective in gaining attention and enacting behavioural influence.

To analyze the relationship between religion/religious fanaticism and celebrity found in *Survivor*, I turn to Chris Rojek's *Celebrity* (2001), which details some of the operational similarities between the mechanisms of celebrity and religion. Rojek sees celebrity fitting into the fabric of modern culture as a secular panacea for the decline of religion (177), providing a theoretical template for my examination of celebrity as a modern secular religion. He explains, "In secular society, the sacred loses its connotation with organized religious belief and becomes attached to mass-media celebrities who become objects of cult-worship" (53). Citing instances of celebrity devotion that take on the characteristics of religious fanaticism, such as the fan worship of Elvis and John Lennon, Rojek describes how fans conceive of celebrities as having "God-like qualities," garnering profound affective power from a distant, elevated social position (53). In my discussion of *Survivor*, I explore how this type of celebrity power is harnessed to achieve mass social programming in cult contexts.

One of the ways in which religious fanaticism is expressed towards celebrities is through the consumption of products that are attached to them, which are inscribed with sacred significance. Rojek's examination of celebrity "reliquaries" (58) offers my study a model of analysis with which to interpret this phenomenon of religious-type idolatry in late twentieth-century literature. Rojek explains how fans treat celebrity material possessions, even materials that are distantly associated with celebrities, as if they were religious relics, collecting items as obscure as "cigarette butts" or "a chewed piece of

gum" in order to close the distance between them and their celebrity idols (58). Evidence of this phenomenon of religious-type idolatry in *Survivor* includes public fascination with and consumption of a whole host of mass-produced goods associated with celebrity, from inspirational tapes to figurines. The material negotiation of worship in Palahniuk's novel highlights how celebrity worship and religious worship overlap and how both systems operate through material investment and commodification practices.

It is the existential dilemma of loss of religious faith that provides the catalyst for the excessive consumerism in *Survivor*, both in terms of the consumer products sold as religious relics and the consumption of the religious rhetoric that these products symbolically incorporate. Situating celebrity socially in the modern "culture of distraction" (90), Rojek offers a way of seeing celebrity's material imperative as escapism. Celebrity culture serves the dual-function of distracting people from institutionalized inequality and filling a void left by the demise of religion (90). In place of the spiritual comfort offered by religion, the "culture of distraction" offers consumer investment in celebrity (90). In doing so, celebrity and the consumption of celebrity products provide an alternative to the loss of religious faith.

Summation

In summary, several theories on celebrity highlight the ways in which celebrity functions as a type of influential form of behavioural control. In much the same way, celebrity as behavioural control also binds all three of the novels I will be examining, each of which presents protagonists that are controlled or manipulated because of their desire for celebrity status. In Amis's *Money*, John Self is easily duped by the lure of

celebrity status, buying into the myth of his own celebrity potential. In Ellis' *Glamorama*, Victor Ward is too shallow to recognize the reality of his superficial status in the celebrity sphere and is so conditioned by celebrity culture that it takes his forced involvement in torture, murder, and terrorism to shock him out of his depthless celebrity false consciousness. Palahniuk's *Survivor* presents Tender Branson, who, unlike the protagonists in the other two novels, is self-reflexive about his celebrity status. He is, however, unable to escape by using his celebrity as a means of building a posthumous legacy to combat his fear of death. Tender's example raises the important question about whether or not we are all always already indoctrinated on some level by celebrity because of its integral role in modern society and culture. I will address this and other questions concerning the theory and practice of celebrity production, dissemination, and reception in North American culture in the chapter sections that follow.

Chapter 2 – Celebrity as Image in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*

Martin Amis's *Money* is a novel about the deception inherent in celebrity image. Because money can purchase the material signifiers of celebrity culture, it is an unstable measure of success because consumption via credit can easily mimic the appearances of actual wealth and fame. *Money* tells the story of just such a cruel deception that is played on narrator John Self using the trappings of celebrity culture. Despite its inherent instability as a category of renown and success, celebrity still maintains strong associations with definitions of both and, as a result, has a powerful allure that seduces Self. In *Money*, success is equated with the attainment of a certain type of celebrity image that is based on the appearance of success rather than the actual attainment of it. Detached from hard work, merit or achievement, celebrity is traditionally understood as a modern phenomenon of "artificial fame," whereby one is "known" simply for "well-knownness" (Boorstin 47). This has direct ramifications for the traditional sense of the American dream, which is perverted by celebrity so that the focus shifts from becoming successful through hard work to the attainment of the appearances of success. As a result, celebrity image, in Amis's novel, consists of the appearance of physical health through cosmetic enhancement and wealth through conspicuous consumption.

It is the superficial signifiers of celebrity image that provide the means by which Self is conned. A British television commercial director, Self is brought to America by Fielding Goodney, a "failed actor" who poses as a wealthy financial backer and offers to back Self's directorial debut in the feature film industry, promising to make Self a star

(376). However, revealing the deceptive façade of celebrity image, Fielding merely uses Self's face and name to act out his twisted "actor's revenge" on the industry that shunned him. This explains his manipulation of Self, a director, and the actors, each of whom have or are about to have established names in the celebrity sphere. Thus, ironically, Fielding, who Self sees as having the quintessential celebrity image, turns out to be, like Self, no more than image.

Fielding places Self at the helm of a film that is predetermined to fail, with a cast of unmanageable, clashing star actors and non-existent financial backing (376). Meanwhile Fielding distracts Self from his deception with the attainment of celebrity image, encouraging Self to spend increasingly exorbitant amounts of money under the pretext that it is necessary to the development of his image. The demanding, delusional actors in the film provide additional distraction for Self, who is put in charge of negotiating their unreasonable demands concerning their onscreen presentation. They too are engaging with image, and, like Self, are deceived by image. The actors are so invested in themselves that they are easily misled by Self's superficial praise and reassurances. The clearly artificial, delusional actors provide Self with a model of celebrity that encourages him to expect and accept facades and, therefore, contribute to his deception. While Self is put in charge of manipulating the celebrity actors by constructing their images in the film in such a way that their egos can coexist, he is simultaneously and ironically being misled about his own constructed celebrity image, which, unlike the actors, is supported only by the appearance of money, credit.

As it turns out, the enormous amount of money spent both on the film and by Self at Fielding's behest is all credit spent in Self's name, and his name, both figuratively and literally, says much about his manipulation. Martin, Self's script-writer and Amis's metafictional representation, is the first to uncover Fielding's plot:

> It's finally come to me. And it *is* beautiful. You signed a lot of documents. My guess is that you signed them all twice. Once under *Co-signatory*, once under *Self*. It was your *name*. The company you formed wasn't Goodney & Self. It was Self & Self. It was Self. The hotels, the plane tickets, the limousines, the wage bill, the studio rental. You were paying. (378)

Martin's epiphany that it was Self's "*name*" that allowed him to be duped has several multilayered meanings. Most obviously, Self's name is what Fielding uses to con him. While Fielding distracts him with fixing his image, spending money, and managing the irascible star actors, all the trappings of celebrity, Self indiscriminately signs everything Fielding puts in front of him, believing it all to be no more than just inconsequential, administrative paperwork. In the process, he unknowingly allows Fielding to use his name to finance everything with money that Self doesn't have. Literally his ego, or self, is signing cheques he can't back. Secondly, as Self's name suggests, it is his *self*-absorption and inclination towards his id that make him so susceptible to Fielding's game. Preoccupied with appearance, image and self-gratification (money, sex, masturbation, pornography, drinking), Self is an easy fit for the celebrity lifestyle Fielding constructs for him (293).

Lastly, Self is a viable target because he overestimates his name value and, as a result, has a false sense of security about his place in the celebrity sphere. In fact, Self's inflated ego comes into play even before it is reinforced by Fielding's exorbitant amounts of empty credit. Self has enough success in the past with his directing to make him a reasonably viable candidate for celebrity status and, by extension, to allow the con to work. Admittedly "tolerably well known in some circles," Martin recognizes his name as "the guy who made those commercials, the ones they took off the air" (175). It is ironic, then, that Self overestimates his success and status when the work that he attributes them to is known only for its failure. He debates with Fielding over matters of artistic integrity, typically a concern reserved for established directors, even before he's made his first film. During the casting for the film, Victor snubs one of Fielding's casting recommendations as "a pampered moviestar," explaining that he is instead looking for "one of those new-deal actresses, the sort that look like averagely scuffed-up housewives," the ones prized by "critics" (21). This appeal to artistic integrity is especially ironic considering the unashamed gaudiness of the work that made Self successful in the first place. A director of "fast food" commercials, his "trademark" selling point was "a big bim in cool pants and bra" (70). This inclination towards superficialities predisposes Self to be easily trapped by celebrity image. Self is easily taken in by the glitz and glamour of the celebrity lifestyle through Fielding's combination of praise and distraction.

Self begins to overestimate the power of his image and his recognizability. This delusion is readily apparent in the scene at the restaurant where his credit card bounces

and he first discovers that there is a problem with the money situation. When the waiter returns his credit card to him "snipped into four," Self appeals to his name value: "You know who this is? Butch Beausoleil! You know who this is? Spunk Davis! You know who I am? I could buy you out ten times over" (343). The fact that Self mentions himself in the same breath as the stars whose names actually carry weight in the public sphere highlights how misinformed he is about his name value. Using Self's credit, Fielding has constructed a situation in which Self is able to live like a celebrity, flying, dining, and partying first class with the stars, but without either the financial foundation or name value to support or sustain it. Without this tangible financial base, Self is blindsided by the ease with which celebrity can be faked.

In *Money* there is a repeated staging of the mechanisms of celebrity construction that formally and thematically enact the irony and cruelty of Self's deception. One of the principal examples of this textual motif is the focus on the superficiality of celebrity image. Ironically, it is Fielding, a "failed actor," (376) and the mastermind behind Self's duping, who becomes Self's main role model (19), epitomizing this modern Hollywood conception of the star image. In the first meeting between Self and Fielding, Self describes with awe and admiration how he "felt the rush" of Fielding's "health and colour – his Californian, peanut-butter body-tone" (20). Self highlights the artificiality and constructedness of celebrity image by characterizing Fielding's skin tone as the colour of a processed, man-made good. Self is also struck by Fielding's eyes, which are "supercandid cornflower blue, the kind made fashionable by the first wave of technicolor American filmstars" (20). Self describes Fielding's eye-colour using a natural colour;

however, ironically, it is a colour that he knows about only through its artificial approximation. The "cornflower blue" Self is familiar with is the "supercandid" variety "made fashionable by the first wave of American filmstars," as opposed to the colour of the plant that bears its name. Self's description underscores how the celebrity image that Fielding represents is, like his skin tone, processed and manufactured in order to fit a "fashionable" trend, no more skin-deep than a mass-produced clothing style.

There is a self-reflexive and meta-critical acknowledgement to the construction of celebrity image in *Money* which Amis represents as attainable through money and artificial physical enhancement or vanity surgery. Ironically, even though Self is aware of this artificiality, he embraces it as a convention of celebrity. Self understands the importance of image in the world of the successful, and he fantasizes about buying celebrity image through the surgical modification of his body parts. Soon after arriving in New York, while watching a "veteran entertainer" on T.V. in his hotel room, Self contemplates the way in which cosmetic surgery can build and preserve celebrity. Self describes his amazement at the fact that the variety show host, who was "pretty well over the hill" when Self was "a kid," is not only "still around," but "still earning" (17):

> They don't make them like that any more. No, come on, let's be accurate: only now, in 1981, do they make them like that. They couldn't before – they didn't have the technology. Jesus Christ, this old prong has been sutured and stitched together in a state-of-the-art cosmetics lab. . . . Check out the tan on the guy – it's like a paintjob. He looks terrific, positively rosy. His Latin rug sweats with vitamins. His falsy ears are sharp and succulent. (17-18)

This passage underscores how Self sees celebrity as manufactured in both senses of the word, via surgery and media representation. In Self's view, it is the preservation of the T.V. personality's image, "sutured and stitched together," that has been responsible for the preservation of his face value or cultural relevance and, by extension, his ability to generate money.

The cosmetic enhancements he describes highlight how celebrity is quite literally a construction, the result of an artificial process that is based mostly on socially sanctioned image. A quintessential example of Boorstinian celebrity, the host's enduring "well-knownness" is the result of "a state-of-the-art cosmetics lab" rather than any individual talent or merit. In fact, there is nothing natural about him. He is made possible by "technology" and, "like a paintjob," his celebrity is maintained by surface upgrades, "falsy ears" and "tan." The diction that Self uses to describe the T.V. host ironically and self-reflexively betrays both the manufactured, technologically enhanced nature of celebrity image and the way in which celebrity functions as a commodity that garners lasting value through continued reconstructions. This literal and physical construction of celebrity image comments on the way in which celebrity is a persona that is artificially sold through media representation in order to maximize viewership and profits. Nonetheless, it is this type of cosmetically enhanced celebrity image that Self aspires to attain. Once he makes all the money he is "due," Self plans to "go off to California for that well-earned body transplant," with "old green eyes" the T.V. host as a model for his surgery (18).

Self's excitement about getting a complete "body transplant" speaks to the way in which a commitment to celebrity culture leads to a desire for the synthetic in place of the real. Fielding, who explains artificiality as a convention of celebrity, has a significant influence in making Self think in this way and encouraging an acceptance of the artificial. For instance, in response to Self's argument for a lead female actor who seems more "real" (21) and less manufactured, Fielding explains that "filmstars *aren't* real, John" (113). Under Fielding's tutelage, Self comes to understand that film stars are, by their nature, manufactured. Though, because he comes to understand this artificiality as the norm for the rich and famous, Self fails to suspect the falsity of his own precarious celebrity status:

> being rich is about acting too, isn't it? A style, a pose, an interpretation that you force upon the world? Whether or not you've made the stuff yourself, you have to set about pretending you merit it, that money chose right in choosing you, and that you'll do right by money in turn. (333)

This acceptance of the synthetic is part of the way in which Self is deceived about his own celebrity when he is unable to recognize the spuriousness of his seemingly endless money source.

With the star actors he deals with on the film, none of whom are what they appear to be on screen, as his main and most familiar examples of celebrity, Self comes to equate artificiality with "being rich" in general. The actors, who are in many cases the antitheses of their celebrity images, also ironically parallel Self's illusory lifestyle and image. None of the star actors is what he or she appears to be on camera and, contrary to the

conventional western perception of celebrated image as a measure of success, in these cases celebrity image conceals a string of personal issues and failures. For instance, Lorne Guyland, who is the top financial draw for Self's film (22) and known for playing the roles of great, conquering luminaries such as "Genghis Khan, Al Capone, [and] Marco Polo," (111) is a man struggling with impotence and self-esteem (183). Similarly, Caduta, an aging female actor and one-time sex symbol, wants to use her on-screen character to sublimate her real-life conflict with sterility (21). She approaches Self about the number of children her character is going to have in the film, requesting that she have "many more" than the one she has in the film's script (16). With these two-sided stars as some of his celebrity role models, Self comes to think of the artificial as a component of celebrity. However, what Self fails to recognize is that for stars like the ones in his film, a money base has already been established, and they no longer have to worry about cost. In contrast, Self has yet to establish his name sufficiently to have a stable money base, even though his financial support is seemingly already in place before he has made his first movie (19).

Because Self wrongly believes that his celebrity is based on achievement, he is caught off guard by Fielding's dupe. Self displays this belief in the way he describes his working relationship with Fielding: "Fielding, my moneyman, my contact and my pal. He's the reason I'm here. I'm the reason he's here too. We're going to make lots of money together" (19). In his assertion that he is "the reason" Fielding is "here," Self betrays his perception that he has been chosen based on past achievements. Self's belief that celebrity must appear to be based on "merit" (333) demonstrates his misconstrual of

celebrity as fame. Unlike celebrity, which is distinguished by "image or trademark," (Boorstin 61) fame, in its traditional sense, is "the by-product of concrete commonly agreed upon, perhaps even measurable achievement" (Schickel 24). Self confuses the meanings of the two terms, believing that his status is based on "merit" and that image is the essential ingredient to success. Fielding encourages this misconception with frequent reassurances of Self's work on the film and by rewarding him with more money. Fielding talks of the overwhelming success of the film and encourages Self to spend more: "The way the dough's coming in, it's unstoppable. I want you to start thinking about your second feature. . . . Fly out your people, Slick. It's green light time. All you're looking at is blank cheques" (284). Fielding leads Self to believe that the money is a result of Self's work on the film, rewarding him with a "second feature" on a supposedly limitless bankroll. Thus, Self develops a false sense of security about his worth. The "blank cheques" Fielding promises are ironically a false yet accurate assurance. Like the cheques and his celebrity status, Self's entire money source is nothing more than a blank, a complete façade.

Money is the means by which Fielding cons Self. In order to dupe Self, Fielding preoccupies him with purchasing the material signifiers of celebrity image. The first step in this master plan is to make Self hyper-aware of his physical shortcomings. In order to accomplish this objective, Fielding first sets up a tennis match with Self, which allows Fielding to highlight the monetary divide that distinguishes their images from one another. In setting up this juxtaposition, Fielding takes every measure to humiliate Self into changing his physical appearance. First, he fits Self in a less than flattering outfit

composed of a "Hippie-red tanktop drummer's T-shirt, Fielding's hideous trunks (they weren't tennis shorts at all..., they were skintight Bermudas, with golfing check), black socks, ... [and] cracked and parched sneakers" (31). In addition to its gaudiness and inappropriateness for the activity, the outfit draws attention to Self's portly physique in embarrassing ways. At the check-in area, Self is greeted by the attendant's "startled glance," which he perceives is directed at his "gut" and "the crushed bullybag in the widechecked Bermudas" (31). Fielding also orchestrates their little recreational match to take place in front of an audience of "the middle-management of Manhattan," who stare down, scrutinizing him from behind a glass window (32). This setup mimics the public opinion and attention that are such a crucial aspect of celebrity. Gaining celebrity image is about being publicly recognized and revered, and Self is painfully aware of this scrutinizing audience with their "sharp faces" (33) as he is thoroughly trounced by Fielding and revealed to be lacking in all aspects of his image.

Part of the appeal of celebrity and the money that it typically provides is the privileged treatment and all-access lifestyle celebrities garner because of their status. The tennis match serves Fielding's purpose perfectly, causing Self to compare his sloppy appearance to Fielding's pristine "health" (32) and strength, the results of Fielding's impressive access to vanity surgery, luxury foods and supplements, and the free time to exercise regularly that having a lot of money affords:

> Fielding, tanned, tuned, a king's ransom of orthodonture having passed through his mouth, reared on steaks and on milk sweetened with iron and zinc. . . . Me, . . . 200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout, and fast food. (32)

Each of Fielding's superior physical traits is a result of the superior access to luxury that money affords him. The "king's ransom" that has been spent on Fielding's "orthodonture" indicates that Self equates Fielding's image with purchasing power. Fielding's healthy appearance reflects the money that went into his upbringing. With money at his disposal, he was "reared on steaks," a metonym for costly foods, and "milk sweetened with iron and zinc," an unusual modification, and a specialty item not available to the majority in grocery stores. These luxury characteristics of Fielding's health and appearance bespeak an attention to detail made possible by money. Tanning, cosmetic surgery, and modified diet, all conventions of the Hollywood celebrity image, are also examples of artificial enhancements that speak to the superficiality and fabrication of celebrity. These prominent examples of the motif of artificiality are another instance in which the text restages the mechanisms of celebrity image and ironically parallels Self's duping by these very same mechanisms. Thus, the public humiliation staged in the tennis match is also formally enacted by the text, in Self's inability to see through the façade his narration repeatedly draws attention to.

Fielding's use of the tennis match to convince Self to spend money on image demonstrates the consumer imperative of celebrity. The message the tennis match sends about Self's need to spend money to fix his image fosters Self's belief that celebrity is judged solely on appearances. After shaming Self about his physical appearance and performance, both of which comprise aspects of his image, Fielding proposes spending money as the solution:

> "Relax, Slick". He said. "You just need to sink a couple of thou into your backhand, maybe a grand on your serve. You should quit smoking, drink less, eat right. You should go to high-priced health clubs and fancy massage studios. You should undergo a series of long, painful and expensive operations". (34)

Fielding's lecture displays how the tennis match has allowed him to prove a point about Self's need to clean up his lifestyle and improve his image in order to better fit the celebrity mold. The more convincing a celebrity image Self portrays, the more access he has to credit and, therefore, the better a scapegoat he is for Fielding's scheme of credit-card fraud. Fielding's use of slang and a relaxed, nonchalant tone when talking about spending demonstrate the attitude he is trying to cultivate in Self, who "just" needs to "sink a couple of thou" here, "maybe a grand" there. Fielding's use of "just" and "maybe" in these contexts, in conjunction with the words "thou" and "grand," trivializes the subject of money, making the idea of attaining it and spending it sound easy and insignificant. "Grand" and "thou" represent pet words that suggest a familiarity and ease with money only afforded to those who are wealthy enough not to have to worry about cost. "Thou" enacts this same type of trivializing of money formally and semantically in the text, as both the word "thousand" and the amount of money it represents are belittled both in form and meaning. These words, "grand" and "thou," also represent prestige words that are used to demonstrate status and can be seen as microcosmic examples of the same mechanism of prestige that drives the desire for celebrity image. Not many people have the amount of money or the assurance about money that wealth affords, where a thousand dollars is considered trivial and discussed casually as a "Thou."

Fielding's laissez-faire manner as he tells Self that he simply "should go" to "high-priced health clubs and fancy massage studios" again trivializes the amount of money they cost. Fielding makes it sound as if having the money to go is a given. However, much like the use of "grand" and "thou," going to these "high-priced," luxury services is all about showing off the privilege and prestige involved in high-priced spending. Thus, Fielding posits money as a cure-all for Self's lack of celebrity image. By spending exorbitant amounts of money on expensive "health clubs and fancy massage studios," Self both displays his monetary worth and works towards improving his appearance, simultaneously improving his image physically and financially. Money, specifically "a couple of thou," can even fix Self's lack of skill in tennis.

Fielding's choice of tennis as the sport he uses to manipulate Self is also significant, because it is a sport traditionally associated with the rich and upper-classes, where playing is often as much about image as it is about recreation or exercise. In fact, according to *The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition*, "Court tennis," which "originated in France . . . and became a favorite of British royalty," was "also known as royal tennis" ("Tennis," *The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition*). This historical association with royalty delineates tennis as a sport symbolic of status, which played, even in its modern form, signifies the status and money of those who can afford the equipment and club fees to play it. Even Fielding's choice of sport then subtly contributes to his plan to make Self more aware of image. The tennis match provides the platform for Fielding's initial attempt to preoccupy Self with the trappings, attitudes, and structures of celebrity image, cosmetic enhancement, displaying status, privilege, and spending.

This focus on the signifiers of prestige translates into conspicuous consumption, or spending well beyond need or requirement simply in order to demonstrate status. To make Self's fall that much more dramatic when his credit runs out, Fielding manipulates Self using this convention of celebrity image, encouraging Self to spend increasingly *conspicuous* amounts of money:

> "Slick, I'm going to have to talk to you very seriously about your expenses. Shape up, John. It's an embarrassment. It looks bad to the moneymen. Take a floor at the Gustave. Hire a jet and have a weekend with Butch and Caduta in the Caribbean. Go buy a case of champagne and pour it all over your dick. Spend. You're no *use* to me when you fly coach. Fly supersonic. Fly sharp end. God damn it, Slick, fly *right*." (181-82)

Fielding instructs Self to buy the celebrity lifestyle by staying at expensive hotels, renting jets, and taking Caribbean vacations. Fielding's hyperbolic recommendation to "buy a case of champagne and pour it all over your dick," which suggests spending purely for show, most explicitly highlights how Fielding wants Self to spend money in such a conspicuous way that he no longer appears to value it. The purpose of this demonstration is to display a disregard for money that communicates a future assured by money and an ability, associated with success and fame, not to have to worry about the cost of things. However, Fielding's use of hyperbole also represents the way in which he is parodying the absurd extravagance of celebrity image. The idea of conspicuous spending relates back to the issue of public perception and the relationship between celebrities and the public that legitimizes them by giving them attention. By spending conspicuous amounts

of money, celebrities are playing to public opinion by demonstrating status and building prestige around their image and lifestyle. The "moneymen" are representative of the public, and Fielding's concern about "embarrassment" and what "looks bad" highlight the importance of public perception as a crucial element of celebrity image. Fielding's actions and manner are transparent. His emphasis on Self's "*use*" demonstrates fairly openly how he is using Self as his pawn, in addition to the belief that everyone like everything is usable and a commodity of sorts.

It is the ability to do things such as spending money in excess, the ability to release one's id, which is a large part of the appeal of celebrity. As his inclinations towards addiction demonstrate (293), Self is already an id-driven personality even before he has much money, so Self takes this capability that money affords him to let his libidinal desires reign free to the extreme. After mixing with "filmstars" (188) at an exclusive party, he celebrates his "successes and achievements" by going on an extravagant shopping spree (189):

> I went down to Mercutio's and bought four suits, eight shirts, six ties and a stylish lightweight mackintosh. These garments now await the guile of high-priced tailors before transfer to my hotel. . . . Cost: $3,476.93. I paid through US Approach.
>
> At LimoRent on Third Avenue I hired a six-door Jefferson with cocktail bar, TV and telephone. I drove it straight round the corner and installed it in a costly carpark on Lexington and Forty-Third. This would come out better than $150 a day.

> I had a hundred-dollar lunch at La Cage d'Or on Fifty-Fourth Street and a two-hundred dollar massage plus assisted shower at Elysium on Fifty-Fifth. Running low on ideas . . . I bought four drunks and three strippers nine bottles of champagne in a topless bar on Broadway. (189-90)

Self's spree, which far exceeds any measure of functionality, is spending solely in order to demonstrate status. He is specific about the names of the clothing store and the restaurant he visits because both carry symbolic name-value, providing prestige and demonstrating the status of those who consume in them. For the same reasons, he is also careful to specify the extravagant amount of money he spends in each place. In order to display his money potential, Self is downright wasteful, renting an expensive limo only to drive it "straight round the corner," where he parks it in a "costly carpark." While the limo is sitting idle, Self continues his spending binge in restaurants and massage parlors before "running low on ideas" and resorting to giving expensive handouts to complete strangers. The limo, which embodies the extravagance of Self's consumption, represents spending cleaved from use value. Thus, money itself is commodified by Self's spending purely to display his status. His spending has an element of self-destruction, demonstrating a reckless abandon, almost as if he is trying to test the limits of his money. With the belief that his future is secured by the seemingly endless amounts of money Fielding continues to provide him with, Self is able to essentially turn up his id-drive. As a consequence, the rational judgment that may have alerted him to the suspiciousness of Fielding's tasks and money fails to register.

With his frequent monetary reassurances, Fielding obscures Self's perception of the value of money to the point that he has a false sense of confidence and ignores how much he is spending. Fielding provides him with the means with which to splurge, rewarding Self's excessive consumption with "a Platinum US Approach card, a brick of traveller's cheques, and a cash-facility authorization at Fifth Avenue bank for a thousand dollars a day" (191). This extravagant offer is an exceedingly expensive payoff, even in terms of the rich and famous. Fielding calculatedly balances the conspicuous "thousand dollars a day" with the reassurance of the nearly guaranteed cash offered by the "traveller's cheques." This apparently generous offer is indicative of the way Fielding continues to distract Self from his manipulation by providing him with new ways to spend money. After giving his girlfriend, Selena, a large sum of money, Self contemplates, "Two thousand five hundred pounds – now that's a lot of money. But Fielding was talking millions" (175). Self is under the delusion that "money was falling from the sky quicker than Fielding could catch it" (175). In instances such as this, we see the results of Fielding's talk of huge, abstract quantities of money, which obscure Self's perception of value and cause him to vastly overestimate his funding. As a result, Self comes to believe that regardless of his actions, he will "just get more and more money" (191). Furthermore, when Self asks about the money situation, Fielding brushes him off, "the money is beautiful" (23). By calling the money "beautiful," Fielding is mapping an aesthetic qualifier onto a request for amounts, using the very idea of appearance to ironically communicate that the money is there and plentiful, but only the appearance of

money in the form of credit: a beautiful scam. With this gesture Fielding also comments subtly and ironically on Self's celebrity, which like his financial base is merely a veneer.

Fielding also distracts Self from his true circumstances while simultaneously drawing attention to the mechanisms of his manipulation using the film, which ironically parodies the artificiality of both Self and the actors' celebrity images, mocking their inability to see its implication in their manipulation. Entitled both *Bad Money* and *Good Money* alternately, the film, though unbeknownst to the actors, is about the true problems and shortcomings that are hidden behind the media constructed image of film celebrities, a fact that neither Self nor the two-faced actors are able to relate to their own situations. Self sees *Bad Money/Good Money* as a unique cinematic statement about the underbelly of Hollywood, a triumph of realism: "When was the last time you saw a film where all the stars were so faint and baffled, so wanton and weak? This was realism" (296). Perhaps even more ironic than the stars' perception of the film as a positive vehicle for their images is Self's failure to relate the film's message to his illusory celebrity image. Though Self directs the film, which is loosely based on his personal life (182), he fails to see the façade of his own image. Self believes that he and Fielding are working together in their exploitation of the film stars (23). However, while Self is manipulating the actors' images to suit his personal vision of the film by pretending to cater to their demands about the portrayals of their characters, both Self and the actors are being manipulated by Fielding, who is using them to act out his revenge on celebrity. The dual title of the film speaks to the duality of Self's money source, "good" in the sense that it allows him

access to the image and lifestyle he desires, but "bad," in that the money only exists as credit.

The actors' attempts to refashion their film characters in order to bolster their celebrity images further illustrates the way in which celebrity allows for fantastical re-makings. The constructed instability and malleability of celebrity image, which can fit anyone's desire to receive media attention, makes it conducive to wish-fulfillment. This is what allows both Self and the actors, who fail to recognize the implausibility of their respective attempts at re-fashioning themselves, to be conned. Blinded to the realities of their circumstances by their preoccupation with image, the actors, like Self, are victims of the deceptive nature of celebrity. Each of the actors brings personal ultimatums to Self's film, believing their celebrity images wield more power and influence than they actually do. They attempt to use the film in order to enhance their star images, which they confuse with their on-screen roles in the film, everyone vying for the most screen time and the most positive exposure to raise the commodity value of their public images (182). Spunk Davis, an upstart young actor, is adamant that his on-screen role is portrayed as faithful to his wholesome, religious celebrity image. Described as "very religious," he demands that his character not drink, smoke or have sex (140). Spunk's demands that the two images, on-film and public, match reveal an awareness of the constructed malleability of celebrity image. In much the same way that the T.V. host, "old greeneyes" (18), cosmetically enhances his image to extend the duration of his commodity value, the actors want to use the film as a platform for their own personal re-fashioning.

Of the actors, Lorne, a character who embodies Boorstin's concept of the celebrity "known for his well-knownness," is the most demanding and delusional about the amount of control he has over his image. Despite being an actor of questionable talent and in a "low" point in his career, Lorne is still the most financially viable star in the film because of the endurance of his name-value. As Fielding says in the scene in which he and Self are discussing the casting of the film, "He'll do anything now. Space opera, road movies, good-ole-boy stuff, TV specials. . . . This is the first real part that's come his way for four-five years" (22). Self's reaction to Lorne's recent body of work demonstrates the lack of discrimination with which Lorne has chosen his recent roles:

> 'Have you seen *The Cyborg Sanction*?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> '*Pookie Hits the Trail*? *Dynamite Dick*?'
>
> 'Of course not.' (22)

The ridiculous titles and Self's dismissive attitude attest to the inferior quality and obscurity of Lorne's films. Yet, because of his public recognizability, Lorne's name still "respectabilizes" (22) the film and is a more viable commodity than those of the lesser-known actors. Fielding summarizes the effect of having Lorne's name attached to the film:

> I have a bunch of old farts with five hundred grand under the cot. They won't haul it out for Christopher Meadowbrook or Spunk Davis or Butch Beausoleil. Never heard of them. But they'll haul it out for Guyland. Lorne's our man, Slick. (22)

Lorne's example demonstrates how, behind all the glamour of the image, name value and recognizability are the cruces by which celebrity functions. Despite having a washed-up image, Lorne, the best-known of the actors, carries the largest potential to draw attention and money, even in comparison to actors such as Spunk who are known for their talent (127, 128). Fielding is fully aware of this, and because he is the only one in *Money* who really understands how celebrity works, he is able to manipulate Self and the stars with ease. Everyone else is just operating on the surface of celebrity. Fielding's use of the moniker "Slick" for Self figuratively illustrates the liquid and unstable hold characters such as Self and the actors have on even their own celebrity, precariously sliding along its surface. "Slick" also invokes the malleability of celebrity itself, which is what allows Fielding to set his trap by appealing to this ability for Self to reconstruct himself exactly to his liking. Ironically, of the two, it is Fielding who is the more slick.

Lorne has his own delusions about his celebrity, and he attempts to use the film in order to reconstruct himself and act out his fantasies. Contrary to what his recent film roles would suggest, Lorne is very concerned with the on-screen presentation of his celebrity image. Lorne tries to construct his character's image to compensate for his personal shortcomings: age, impotency, and insecurity. Having not "had a hard-on for thirty-five years" (183), Lorne also wants to use the film and his character's image as sexual wish-fulfillment. He makes the argument that his character should have the exclusive sexual attention of the two main female characters in the film. Lorne envisions his character as "a man of some considerable culture," a more erudite version of Gary, Garfield (184), and takes issue with the fact that his son in the film (Spunk) shares one of

Garfield's lovers: "'It makes no sense. It just doesn't add up.' Lorne laughed. 'If Butch is fucking Garfield, how could she risk that happiness, that fulfillment, John, on a young punk like…'" (186). In the absence of youth and sexual potency, "Garfield" serves as Lorne's sexual surrogate. The climax of Lorne's masturbatory vision of the film occurs in the final scene, in which he sees himself dying a ridiculously sensationalized death:

> I fought like crazy but there were fifteen of the bastards. . . . As these cocksuckers torture me, Butch and Caduta are forced to watch. . . . And these two women, as they see me, suffering, silent, naked, this guy who's given them everything and who's the greatest fuck they ever had in their goddam lives – these women, these simple, nude women, they forget their rivalry and weep in each other's arms. Credits. (186)

Lorne's use of the personal pronoun "I" when referring to his character punctuates his conflation of Garfield/Gary and himself. In this fantasy-version of the ending, Lorne sensationalizes Gary's virtues to the point of absurdity. Ever concerned with the portrayal of Gary's manliness and physical power, Lorne is careful to clarify the fact that it takes "fifteen" people to subdue him, which happens only after he "fought like crazy." This made-up scenario is indicative of the way in which Lorne attempts to heroicize his on-screen image and compensate for the things he is lacking through hyperbole. Lorne is also eager to demonstrate his character's unbelievable sexual prowess. Not only has Gary given his rival lovers "everything," he is "the greatest fuck they ever had in their goddam lives." Symptomatic of Lorne's delusional attempts at wish-fulfillment, in addition to his fantasy of macho prowess, he also envisions himself in the film as some kind of

ridiculous martyr figure. His influence has been so great on "these women" that the image of his prone figure moves them to forget their "rivalry" for his affections, and they embrace each other in mutual grief. Even though the film is never completed, simply by virtue of its hyperbole, this fantasy mix of sexual prowess and implausible martyrdom does more to draw attention to the insecurities he's compensating for rather than concealing them. Like the other star actors in the film, Lorne is ineffective at shaping and controlling his celebrity image and is no more than a pawn in Fielding's multi-layered game of deceptions.

Just as Self requires Fielding's frequent reassurances, the attraction of praise and reaffirmation by an "other" is what seduces the actors into compliance and allows Self to deceive them about their roles in the film. Fielding instructs Self on how to manipulate the demanding, self-absorbed actors in order to keep everyone happy: "Say you'll do everything he wants and then when the time comes don't do any of it. If he goes bananas, you shoot the scene then lose the take. You'll have the final cut, John" (23). As it turns out, the non-existent financial backing for the film is exposed long before the filming is finished, and this "final cut," just like the money, is a false assurance of control and authority. However, Self follows Fielding's instructions, becoming a negotiator and peacemaker for the clashing egos involved with the film. Whenever "Lorne wants reassuring" (42) or Caduta is "in need of reassurance" (97), Fielding calls on Self to fix matters. Self procures a new script from his own, independently contracted writer, Martin, which allows him to successfully balance the conflicting demands of the stars through flattery. The new script caters to the egos of the stars by artificially and

temporarily bolstering their on-screen images: "The characters were no less squalid and compromising. He had simply interwedged a rota-system of long monologues, in which each of the four stars was elaborately praised, exonerated and legitimized by the other three" (283). This new setup permits Self to be a "yes man" to the stars' faces, while simultaneously going behind their backs to deceive them. When he deals with them in person, Self inflates their egos by giving them these gushing monologues, which he intends to later drop "straight down the cutting-room toilet" (283).

Because he believes that his celebrity is based on the merit of his work, Self disassociates himself from the actors with the false conviction that he is more authentic than the star actors and that he and Fielding are working together in their manipulation of the actors (23). Self demonstrates this false sense of superiority through the patronizing tone he often adopts when describing or dealing with the stars. For instance, when Butch approaches Self with ideas to change the film, he concludes their meeting with dismissive, demeaning finality: "Now listen. I don't want to hear any more of your lousy ideas. You're an actress. From now on you just shut up and do as your Poppa Bear says" (282). Self establishes his sense of superiority by referring to himself as "Poppa Bear." This snide, sarcastic gesture undercuts Butch's authority in its juvenile implications, suggesting that Butch requires fairytale allusions to understand his meaning. This fairytale reference is also consistent with the theme in *Money* of the illusory fantasies that characterize celebrity and deceive people into believing that celebrity is anything but a pipe-dream. Starved for public reaffirmation, Self's use of the word "spoonfed" (297) to describe the stars suggests their infantile, shortsighted reactions to praise and attention.

Self's description of the stars suggests the way in which celebrities become accustomed to deferring to agents, publicists, and producers who shape how their images are represented in the media. As a result of this infantile quality, the stars in *Money* are easily misled by the characters who are in positions of authority over them, namely Self and Fielding. Significantly, the praise in the monologues isn't self-addressed, but rather from others, mimicking the needed other-directed praise that is the cornerstone and appeal of celebrity and the means by which Self too is manipulated.

In his pursuit of celebrity image, Self is duped by the trappings of celebrity culture. Already inclined towards his id, even before he has the open access afforded by Fielding's false money source, Self presents an easy target for the flashy appeal of celebrity. Under Fielding's influence, he becomes so absorbed in buying the material and physical signifiers of the celebrity lifestyle that he becomes oblivious to the value of money and to the conspicuous signs of his manipulation. The fact that Self is unable to see through Fielding's thinly-veiled façade, which is cruel in its conspicuousness, speaks to the fakery of the celebrity world, where superficial interaction is the accepted norm. Self's Achilles heel is his conflation of fame and celebrity. With a false sense of accomplishment, he believes that he is chosen for stardom in America as a result of the merit of his success directing television commercials. Similarly, he attributes the unrealistic amounts of money he is given to his present success directing the film. With the insider's perspective of the director, he sees first hand the types of flawed, dependent personalities that are behind glossy celebrity images. However, he fails to recognize the "transparency" of his own celebrity. Unlike the star actors, who can literally afford to be

conned and used as commodities, Self's celebrity status, without the real financial base that the filmstars have to support their celebrity status, is on borrowed time from the start. Once his celebrity lifestyle is no longer sustainable, Self's fall exposes celebrity's false veneer and provides a warning about the artificiality of celebrity. In contrast to famed achievement, celebrity is merely image, a lifestyle of surfaces sustainable only with the help of money and media support.

Chapter 3 – Celebrity as Identity in Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama*

Whereas in *Money* celebrity is merely a set of performed roles associated with a particular image, in *Glamorama*, celebrity becomes a lived identity, a way of behaving and interpreting the world and a commitment to superficiality that operates both consciously and subconsciously in every aspect of life. No longer merely a definition of success, celebrity in *Glamorama* functions on the level of identity formation, defining not only cultural conceptions of success but also desire, fashion, beauty, and value in general. This influence is a profoundly negative and dehumanizing one. As in *Money*, celebrity in *Glamorama* seems to promise characters special individuality or uniqueness in the form of special public attention, through the attainment of a certain commodified, fetishized image and lifestyle. However, celebrity commodifies identity to such a degree that it becomes based on mere surfaces, appearances, and clichés, a set of superficial conventions that are, ironically, easily mimicked. The most extreme example is Victor Ward, a "semi-famous" (13) fashion model whose entire identity, from his obsession with image and fashion to his cool detachment from the world outside the celebrity sphere, is constructed by celebrity. Victor's personality is an amalgamation of pop culture references, fashionable posturing, and clichés which he has assimilated from eminent figures in the magazines, interviews, songs, and movies that circulate endlessly in our celebrity-obsessed culture. In his desire to be famous, Victor has been utterly conditioned by celebrity, so that the persona he portrays in public is indistinguishable from his private self, if indeed he has one. This superficiality has a profoundly detrimental effect on his

relationships, because he is totally disengaged from everything besides image and fame. Just as celebrity's false promise of unique individuality traps Self in *Money*, characters in *Glamorama* are so thoroughly consumed by celebrity that, in its pursuit, they become shallow, uni-dimensional selves that are literally replaceable. A dangerous by-product of this extreme commodification of identity is that characters no longer perceive value beyond the surface, and notoriety at all costs becomes an equally desirable form of celebrity.

The pivotal moment in Victor's transformation into his superficial celebrity persona is his first encounter with Chloe Byrnes, celebrity-model, and his future girlfriend. Chloe's dismissive, detached attitude has a profound effect on Victor, in many ways providing a model for his behaviour. Before meeting her, he remembers being

> confused by what passed for love in this world: people were discarded because they were too old or too fat or too poor or they had too much hair or not enough, they were wrinkled, they had no muscles, no definition, no *tone*, they weren't hip, they weren't remotely famous. This was how you chose lovers. This was what decided friends. (545)

Victor's rumination frames many of the issues of celebrity that the novel examines. First, it highlights the negative effect celebrity has on human relationships by encouraging people to value one another based merely on "well-knownness" and appearances. The repeated exposure of celebrities set physical standards in magazines and on television that become cultural benchmarks that the public is socialized to desire. As a result, celebrities and non-celebrities alike are judged according to superficial, unstable criteria such as

"tone," a term that embodies celebrity's privileging of surfaces and fetishization of anatomical perfection. When he first catches Chloe's eye at an exclusive party, he recalls her shrugging towards him and mouthing the words "*Take . . . a . . . hike*" (545). This one simple gesture of rejection brings Victor to the realization that if he "wanted to get anywhere. . . . in a world where beauty was considered an accomplishment," he must "accept" superficiality as a way of life (545). Moved to "the verge of tears," he makes a "promise" to himself "to be harder, to not care, to be cool" (545). Thus, for Victor, celebrity means not only social acceptance, but a freedom from emotional engagement. He describes the sensation of "disappearing" from the scene at the party until he "no longer existed" (545). This represents the metaphorical death of Victor Ward and the complete takeover of Victor's celebrity persona.

Celebrity's influence on Victor creates a pseudo-identity that mutes his individuality and replaces his personal identity with a veneer of superficial gestures. Some of the earliest evidence of celebrity's influence on Victor is the way that it infiltrates his language. In order to express himself, he frequently uses a type of fashion-speak that signifies his familiarity with and participation in both the worlds of fashion and celebrity. For instance, early in the novel Victor runs into one of the many fashion models of his acquaintance, Anjanette, with whom he communicates almost exclusively using this flashy language: "Hey Anjanette, what's up pussycat? You're looking very Uma-ish. Love the outfit" (20). Victor uses the made-up adjective "Uma-ish" to display not only his fashion-sense but also his familiarity with Uma Thurman, a celebrity actor. This incorporation of a celebrity name into an otherwise conventional gesture,

complementing someone on her appearance as a way of greeting, provides a common frame of reference in the celebrity world. By using only the actor's first name Victor appeals to his status in the celebrity sphere, in which only first names are needed, and name-dropping is a way of demonstrating status and familiar association. This phrase also embodies the paradox of celebrity image, which represents unique individuality in terms of public attention above and beyond the majority. While "Uma-ish" appeals to the prestige of celebrity, it also compares Uma Thurman's supposedly exceptional appearance to that of Anjanette, a non-celebrity who is merely performing "a look." This idea that celebrity image is merely a "look" underscores how celebrity image is replicable and, therefore, a poor signifier of exceptional, privileged status. Victor's use of the name to describe Anjanette's appearance also shows how celebrity culture filters his perception of the world. He evaluates everyone and everything based on the relationship to celebrity, both in terms of image and/or eminence.

Victor's phrase "what's up pussycat?," which alludes to the Tom Jones song "What's New Pussycat," demonstrates how his language also relies heavily on quotes and clichés that he has assimilated from pop culture. His use of these clichéd phrases in his everyday speech is exemplary of how his commitment to celebrity creates a personality built on superficialities, even at the level of language use. When Anjanette tries to admonish Victor for flirting with her, citing his relationship with Chloe, "What would Chloe think of . . . ," he merely brushes her off: "Spare me, baby, but you're supergreat. . . . Take your passion and make it happen" (21). Victor's automatic reliance on clichés as a sort of safety net in place of actual personal thoughts and feelings prevents him from

engaging with his subject. In this instance, Victor's catchphrases of quasi-advice allow him to avoid engaging with the topic of his infidelities. The disengagement is implied formally in the flirtation. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, to "flirt with" means to "experiment with or show a superficial interest in (an idea, activity, or movement) without committing to it seriously." Significantly, flirtation is the method by which Victor communicates with nearly all of the females he encounters. Thus, even Victor's speech enacts the superficiality of his celebrity persona. Moreover, his choice of lyrics, "take your passion and make it happen," from the musical *Fame*, ironically highlights his all-consuming desire for fame. Like the high-school dance characters in the musical who yearn to "have it all," Victor is completely enamored by fame. While "pulling away," he abruptly concludes the conversation using more clichés: "Baby, you're a face to watch. . . . A star of tomorrow" (22). Consistent with Victor's celebrity-filtered consciousness, this refrain is characteristic of the way in which Victor appeals to people's "star" potential as an answer to the social dilemmas he faces. In their relationship to the public, celebrities are no more than faces and bodies "to watch," existing only as distant, fetishized media images. However, as his use of the phrase suggests, Victor is so conditioned by celebrity that he views actual people through this same shallow lens so that everyone is just image.

During one of his visits to his mistress, Allison Poole, Victor uses the same recycled, clichéd celebrity rhetoric in order to brush off Juan, Allison's doorman, about a promise Victor made to him:

"But man, you said he'd see me and also set up a meeting with-"

"I'm setting it up, buddy, it's cool," I stress, pressing again for the top floor.

"You're the next Markus Schenkenberg. You're the white Tyson."

I reach over and push his hand away.

"Hey man, I'm Hispanic-" . . . .

"You're the next Hispanic Markus Schenkenberg. You're the, um Hispanic Tyson. . . . You're a star, man." (22)

As in his encounter with Anjanette, Victor shirks responsibility with empty clichés. His repetitive use of the phrase "You're the next" again ironically implies the disposability of celebrities. Juan may be "the next Markus Shenkenberg," but that necessarily implies that individual celebrities such as Markus Shenkenberg are replaceable. Furthermore, by being "the next," Juan would be just another copy in an ongoing lineage of celebrities with the same interchangeable and replaceable image. There was one before him, and there would be another one after him. Thus, while signifying celebrity as something rare and prestigious, this phrase semantically undercuts its value.

Likewise, Victor's indiscriminate over-use of the phrase "You're a star," a phrase already bankrupt of meaning, serves to highlight the emptiness of celebrity's false promise. As Marshall explains in *Celebrity and Power*,

> The star is meant to epitomize the potential of everyone in American society. . . . the star is part of a system of false promise in the system of capital, which offers the reward of stardom to [what appear to be] a random few in order to perpetuate the myth of potential success. (Marshall 9)

Thus, Victor's repeated use of the phrase "You're a star," without conviction or meaning, formally reenacts the way in which celebrity falls short of its democratic promise of universal availability. Victor's celebrity-obsessed consciousness draws on these phrases as automated responses. His inability to notice something as obvious as Juan's ethnicity displays Victor's celebrity tunnel vision at work. Because Juan lacks celebrity appeal, he is not worthy of Victor's full attention, and the little attention Victor grants him is superficial, self-serving attention. As a quasi-celebrity, Victor thrives on attention, and instead of dismissing Juan outright, Victor strings him along with false promises. This ensures that Juan will continue to approach Victor, providing reaffirmation of Victor's appeal and status. In this way, Juan serves as the metaphorical public attention to Victor's celebrity.

A byproduct of this narcissism is Victor's inattention to the world outside the realms of fashion and celebrity. Celebrity culture's influence on Victor gives him an extremely narrow and superficial perspective, so that celebrity and image are the focal points of Victor's values and perceptions. Victor's self-centeredness also means that he is exceedingly ignorant of nearly all matters except those that directly concern him. For instance, Victor thinks that "the Israeli embassy" is "a club" (318). World events, widespread human concerns, and important political issues are all outside the realm of Victor's consciousness. When brainstorming to find "a cause" to use to promote the opening of his new club, he dismisses J.D.'s suggestions, "global warming," "the Amazon," and "AIDS," as "passé" (11). This dismissal of very serious global concerns as

merely unfashionable highlights Victor's detachment from matters outside the image-centered celebrity sphere.

Demonstrating how celebrity image is a constructed persona, Victor later uses some of these same global issues to appear fashionable and fit the convention of "the conscientious celebrity" for an interview with MTV. Part-way through the interview, after a "long pause" from which he recovers by mentioning that he's "a Capricorn," Victor claims, "Oh yeah, and I'm also for regaining the incentive to get this generation more involved in environmental issues" (160). Victor's spontaneous mention of this aspiration as a last resort, when he can't think of anything to say, belies his glaring insincerity. Even the inconsequential factoid about his birth sign is more immediate in Victor's mind than this afterthought about "environmental issues." Based on his earlier discussion with JD about promoting a "cause," it is clear that he doesn't know the first thing about "environmental issues," which are at variance with the consumer culture of celebrity that he obsesses over and that privileges consumption beyond need or use. In much the same way that he uses clichés and song lyrics to remain disengaged, he is simply recycling conventional words and phrases from celebrity interviews to promote himself in a favorable way.

In contrast, Victor has been conditioned to recognize and value superficialities, so that his attention to and knowledge of brand names and pop culture is extensive. He demonstrates his astute eye for brand names during a visit to Allison's apartment, where he focuses on every piece of brand name press, clothing, and furniture he encounters. Among these items are a "Vivienne Tam sofa bed," (23) a "Vivienne Tam-designed

mirror," (26-7) a "Vivienne Tam-designed sink," (29) and a "Vivienne Tam armchair" (31). Victor's repetition of the same brand name for each of these items displays his conditioned response to fashion. What is important to him is not the object itself but the prestige attached to its brand name. Victor qualifies the items by their brand names, privileging their symbolic exchange value rather than their use value. These brand-name possessions are an extension of Allison's image, used to display her status in the same way as her "Todd Oldham" dress, which she brags is "an *original*" (26). Victor shows the same type of attention to detail when he sizes people up, judging them based on their brand-name associations. Clearly, despite his inattention to people and his ignorance about world affairs and commonly known information, Victor has the capacity to be observant and knowledgeable, but only about superficialities. His focus is limited to celebrity, pop culture, and fashion. Thus, like his celebrity status, Victor's knowledge base is superficial and surface-based.

Victor demonstrates his conditioning in the involuntary way he is drawn to the material signifiers of celebrity. During the boat ride from America to England, Victor is struck by a beautiful young woman who portrays many of these signifiers:

> the girl with the total Juliette-Binoche-if-Juliette-Binoche-were-blond-and-from-Darien-Connecticut look lying on a chaise longue in a row of twenty: tall statuesque, killer abs, a little too muscular maybe but the hardness offset by large, soft-looking breasts straining against a white gauzy half-shirt, the prerequisite curvy legs outlined beneath leopard-print Capri pants. On the table next to her, copies of *Vogue*, *Details*, a *W* Chloe and I are in, *Vanity Fair* and *Harper's*

Bazaar are kept from flying overboard by a small pitcher of iced tea placed on top of them and I'm instinctively moving into frame, hitting my mark. (222)

Just as he does with Anjanette, Victor conceptualizes the girl according to her resemblance to a female celebrity, "Juliette Binoche," and judges her based on how well she fits the celebrity image as he sees it. The impersonal, technical tone he uses to categorically evaluate her individual body parts highlights the dehumanizing effects of his conditioning. In a highly systematic, calculated way, Victor assesses the celebrity potential of her body, which is "tall" and "statuesque," fitting the basic "criteria" of the female model/celebrity mold. Victor is programmed to operate strictly on a surface level, and he describes the woman as if he is analyzing the specifications of a commercial product that he is considering for purchase. While she is "a little too muscular," the "hardness" is "offset by large soft-looking breasts." The girl's taste in magazines communicates an awareness of fashion and celebrity that is also enticing. A product of celebrity culture, Victor is "instinctively" attracted to this combination of celebrity and fashion signifiers and compelled to approach her. His description of "instinctively moving into frame, hitting my mark," also highlights how, for Victor, life is a performance of celebrity and roles, so that he is acting even when he is not acting in a film or advertisement. Having stared "into her face for over an hour" while chatting with her, Victor realizes that he has "been activated" (239). When he discovers that she is a fellow model named "Marina Gibson," Victor exclaims excitedly, "Baby, that is *so* cool, . . . I knew you were a model. I knew you were recognizable" (225). Recognizability is a key component of celebrity, and Victor's discovery of her recognizability reaffirms his

rehababilitation from celebrity as an addiction, which underscores the pervasiveness and potential harmfulness of its control over him.

The desire to be recognizable becomes an obsession, causing Victor to think and behave irrationally, demonstrating the detrimental effects a commitment to celebrity can have on a character's behaviour. For example, before Victor's co-owned club is about to open he receives several threatening telegrams that read "I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING" (119). Victor's assistant, J.D., is "vaguely panicked;" however, Victor's first thought is, "Do you think I'm actually being stalked? . . . Wait – how cool" (119). The message could be referring to any number of Victor's recent transgressions, from his plan to go against his partner in opening his own club to his several infidelities. Yet, none of these possibilities even dawn upon Victor. Oblivious to the danger at hand, Victor is blinded by the implications the letters may have for his celebrity status. Aware of the numerous examples of celebrity stalkers, which have become a convention of the celebrity world, he perceives the telegram as a sign of personal achievement. The fact that the message is on a telegram displays the type of individualized attention that Victor craves. Because the sender has to pay by the word, the message is typically superficial and brief. For the very same reasons, the form of the message represents a luxury item. Telegrams are usually sent in the case of an emergency or event of special importance, but because Victor's consciousness filters everything through celebrity status and image, the telegram instead fits the conventions of celebrity. This misperception of the vehicle of communication, much like his fashion-speak, clichés, and selective interaction based on image, illustrates how celebrity influences

Victor's communication with and perception of the world around him. Victor's irrational focus on the growth of his fame, rather than the thinly-veiled threat entailed by the telegram, indicates the blinding negative and dangerous effects celebrity culture has on Victor's consciousness. As he later learns, there are real consequences to the superficial attitude encouraged by celebrity.

As in *Money*, celebrity is negotiated through image, and in *Glamorama*, the surface-level engagement that results from Victor's commitment to image has a detrimental effect on his most important relationships. A prime example is his fraught relationship with Chloe, who is the most stable force in Victor's life and perhaps the only real connection he has. Victor's preoccupation with superficialities alienates Chloe and ultimately results in the couple's separation (203-04). During one of the earliest scenes between the two, Victor shows how his prioritizing of surfaces interferes with their communication:

> "Lauren Hynde?" she asks in disbelief. "You don't remember dating her? My god, what are you going to say about *me*?"
>
> "Nothing, baby," I tell her, finally done deseeding. "We're gonna get married and grow old together. How did the shows go? Look – there's Scott Bakula. Hey, peace, man. Richard's looking for you, bud."
>
> "Lauren Hynde, Victor."
>
> "That's so cool. Hey Alfonse – great tattoo, guy." I turn back to Chloe. "Did you know Damien wears a hairpiece? He's some kind of demented wig addict." . . . .
>
> "Lauren Hynde, Victor. Lauren Hynde."

"Who's *dat*?" I say, making a crazy face, leaning over, kissing her neck noisily. (39)

Victor's inability to remember his former girlfriend, which shows the shallowness of his surface-focused consciousness, distresses Chloe, who is concerned about how he thinks of her. When asked by Chloe what he will say about her in the future, he tellingly says, "nothing," which ironically undercuts his intended meaning. Instead of "nothing bad," his response highlights how he will likely forget her altogether, just as he has forgotten his other girlfriends. "Nothing" also describes his level of engagement in the conversation. Absurdly, he forgets what Chloe is talking about mid-conversation. Here again, the scene formally comments on Victor's detachment. In response to Chloe's concerns, he predictably and briskly brushes her off using a cliché, "We're gonna get married and grow old together," before quickly changing the subject. His casual, dismissive manner undercuts the meaning of his message, which, like many of his clichés, he uses on cue as a defense mechanism.

In this scene, he is so distracted by celebrity, performing his part, and other superficialities that he can't even focus on a conversation of importance. When he changes the subject to Chloe's shows to avoid scrutiny, a celebrity sighting quickly diverts his attention from her: "Look – there's Scott Bakula." Chloe's concerns, which are interpersonal relationship issues of some depth, are of no importance to Victor, instantly taking a back seat to the temporary excitement of a minor celebrity sighting. When Chloe presses Victor on the subject of Lauren, he simply ignores her, remarking on the sighting, "That's so cool," before being distracted again, this time by a celebrity-

model's "great tattoo." Damien's "hairpiece" is yet another surface that draws Victor's attention away from Chloe. Victor's comment on it is an example of gossip, which, whether in the form of tabloids, talk shows, or news, is what celebrity thrives on. Each of Victor's diversions is grounded in image, and this passage encapsulates how Victor prioritizes superficial, surface-level concerns over personal communication and relationships. Ironically, Victor adopts the detached, narcissistic model of celebrity that Chloe represented to such a hyperbolic extreme that even she is unable to reach him. This again points to the irony of celebrity, at once the pinnacle of cultural and individual achievement, yet based on conventions that are infinitely reproducible.

Because celebrity represents the reduction of people into consumer objects of desire, it produces a model for social interaction that encourages people to treat one another as commodities. For most of the novel, Victor is unable to see or value Chloe as anything but a fetishized celebrity figure. He displays this limited, impersonal perspective in a conversation the couple has four pages after Chloe explains Victor's relation to Lauren, with Chloe still trying unsuccessfully to get through to him:

> "Lauren who?"
>
> "You're not listening to me, Victor."
>
> "Oh come on, baby, when you were young and your heart was an open book you used to say live and let live. . . ."
>
> "You're not talking to me," Chloe says stemly, with too much emotion. "You're looking at me but you're not talking to me."
>
> "Baby, I'm your biggest fan," I say. (43)

Not only does Victor seem to have little space in his head for the past, but because of his superficial consciousness, he also gives very little attention to the people he closely associates with in the present. As Chloe points out, when Victor communicates with her, it is only in the most superficial sense, listening to her selectively at best. Here, Victor uses a clichéd line from a popular song, "Live and Let Die," by Paul McCartney and Wings, in order to avoid engaging with her. A characteristic behaviour of Victor's, quoting lines like these from popular music, allows him to show how in touch he is with fashionable culture, and by extension, how fashionable he is.

This behaviour demonstrates how Victor lacks an authentic voice, a fact that his choice in song lyrics reenacts thematically. Talking in clichés in place of personal thoughts is symptomatic of Victor's celebrity persona in general, which is a constructed amalgamation of pop cultural clichés and celebrity signifiers. Thus, as the song title "Live and let die" suggests in a very literal sense, Victor is *living* an inauthentic life. In his utter disengagement, Victor lacks the depth and human emotion of a living creature, as if he were inanimate. By adopting this hyper-shallow celebrity persona, Victor has figuratively "let" his personal identity "die." In this particular context, the song title is doubly ironic. Based on his reconciliatory tone, "Oh come on, baby," and context of the remark, a domestic dispute, "live and let live" appears to be an appropriate response to Chloe's gripes. However, the lyric is equivalent to the phrase "forgive and forget," which means forgetting things that are burdensome, a superficial mantra that highlights Victor's continued refusal to engage with Chloe. Furthermore, because the lyric comes from a song entitled "Live and Let Die," it carries a dire connotation that is contradictory to its

literal meaning. On a figurative level, "Live and Let Die" is more apropos to the way in which Victor is treating his relationship with Chloe.

As further pseudo-reassurance, Victor uses yet another cliché, confirming what Chloe says about his unwillingness to actually talk *to her*, "Baby, I'm your biggest fan." Ironically, as a result of his preoccupation with celebrity, it is only from the perspective of a "fan" that Victor is able to see Chloe. This dynamic represents the predominant context of celebrity culture, in which fans are the sustaining life force of celebrity. In response to Alison's insults concerning Chloe's personal problems with drugs and depression, Victor proudly describes some of Chloe's celebrity credentials, "Axl Rose and Prince both wrote songs about her, may I remind you" (27). Victor's comment again highlights how his perception is filtered through pop culture and celebrity. Listing Chloe's celebrity credentials in no way defends her from Alison's accusations or engages with her very real personal problems, yet it is only as a celebrity that Victor is able to perceive her. Victor also shows his fan-based perception of Chloe in the way he mentally groups her with unknown celebrities. In contrast to his name-dropping the first-names of celebrities that he knows only by acquaintance, Victor formally uses Chloe's full name when talking and thinking about her as if she is unfamiliar on any kind of personal level. In a scene soon after Victor's friends and lovers discover his recent infidelities and he is left alone, he uses Chloe's full name while trying to think of celebrities in order to arouse himself: "I hobbled into the bathroom to jerk off . . . but I was too wasted even to get half hard or to conjure up a fantasy about Lauren Hynde or Chloe Byrnes or, for that matter, Gwen Stefani" (217). Victor's celebrity-obsessed consciousness functions in the realm of

images, so that images supplant people and personalities. Even his close personal relations exist in his mind merely as images. Victor thinks of his two former lovers by their full names in the same way he thinks of "Gwen Stefani," as a remote, sexually stimulating celebrity image. Celebrities are cultural objects of desire, playing a significant role in defining conventions of beauty and sexual desirability. Victor's attempt to use celebrity as a sexual stimulus demonstrates how celebrity filters nearly everything in his consciousness in a very tangible way. The failure of celebrity image to satisfy him shows how interaction with celebrity image is a poor and dehumanizing substitute for actual human interaction.

As we see in *Money*, in the world of celebrity, individual celebrities are basically commodities with limited use value and, therefore, typically with limited life in the public sphere. Similarly, in *Glamorama*, celebrities such as Victor are valuable only as recognizable images and, consequently, expendable. As in *Money*, celebrity in *Glamorama* is unrelated to accomplishment or merit. A characteristic example of Boorstin's concept of celebrity, Victor's "well-knownness" is almost entirely attributable to the appeal of his image. One of Victor's acquaintances in the celebrity gossip magazine business, Buddy, says how Victor gets publicity "for doing nothing" (85). Similarly, Lauren highlights the disparate relationship between celebrity and merit by pointing out the conspicuous lack of actual "work" involved in Victor's status:

> "Yeah, modeling's tough, Victor," she says. "The only thing you need to be is on time. Hard work."
>
> "It *is*," I whine.

"It's a job where you need to know how to wear clothes?" she's asking. "It's a job where you need to know how to – now let me get this straight – *walk*?"

"Hey, all I did was learn how to make the most of my looks."

"What about your mind?"

"Right," I snicker. "Like in this world" – I'm gesturing – "my mind matters more than my abs. Oh boy, raise your hand if you believe that." (125)

Lauren's sarcastic tone in describing the "hard work" that Victor does reaffirms Buddy's point that Victor gets publicity "for doing nothing." The fact that his "mind" is superfluous in the equation of his success is further evidence of Victor's lack of personal merit or engagement. He is just a pawn of the celebrity machine, made "quasi-famous," by his own admission, because of his "looks." His recognition of the value of his "mind" in relation to his "abs" illustrates both his superficial consciousness and the fact that his value in the celebrity sphere derives entirely from his image.

Victor is a hyperbolic example of celebrity as replaceable commodity and is literally and easily replaced, not just as a public persona but as a person. There is a plethora of instances in *Glamorama* in which characters claim to have seen and talked to Victor in places he has no recollection of being. However, it is not until towards the end of the novel, when Chloe reveals that she is pregnant with what she thinks is Victor's baby, that he realizes that he has an imposter:

"How do you . . . know it's mine?" I ask.

She sighs. "Because the only person I've been with since we broke up" – she laughs derisively – "is you. . . . Four weeks ago? Remember? That day you came over?" . . . . Four weeks ago I was on a ship in the middle of the ocean. . . .

Four weeks ago an imposter arrived in Chloe's apartment. (469-470)

Victor's memory is suspect at the best of times; however, here he clearly remembers being elsewhere. His one-track, image-centered consciousness prevents him from noticing the obvious signs that something is wrong, and at this point, when it finally dawns on Victor that he has an imposter; it is already too late for him to reverse the damage done by his superficiality. The closing chapters of *Glamorama* contrast the diverging lives of the two Victors, the true Victor and the imposter who has usurped Victor's old life in New York.

First, there is the imposter, who poses as a reformed Victor, who has patched things up with his friends and family and given up his fast lifestyle in order to go to law school (509). The imposter, who self-reflexively mimics the clichéd behaviours of Victor's shallow persona, is a testament to Victor's replaceability. He easily fits into Victor's former life merely by copying phrases such as "brill" (508), "dig it," and "baby," which he parrots as if "mimicking a robot" (525). This comparison speaks to the dehumanizing results of the superficial behaviour and lifestyle celebrity encourages, which renders Victor an entirely replaceable automaton. Everyone believes that "the Impersonator" is Victor and that he is acting in Europe under a "huge contract with Dreamworks" (513). The characters in *Glamorama* are being filmed periodically for what is supposed to be a movie, but when Victor arrives in Milan and falls in with a group of

celebrity-model terrorists, he begins to be followed by a different film crew, the "French film crew" (532) who film the terrorists for what turns out to be a different version of the movie. Thus, while Victor is indeed acting a part in a film, he is being held hostage in Milan by the film crew (532-35). After the dissolution of the terrorist group, the director contacts Victor to tell him his "role is over" (535). This is the culmination of Victor's life as a celebrity persona, unemployed, cut off from friends and family, and replaced by an imposter, a discarded commodity.

The ease with which the imposter is able to fit into Victor's old life and the way in which Victor's old friends and acquaintances are unable to distinguish the new Victor from the old one provide a strong commentary on the detrimental effects celebrity culture has on people's individuality. In a final irony, Victor's sister finds the imposter to be a more convincing brother than the real Victor. When Victor attempts to call her for help, "She barely pauses before her voice changes and she says, 'Whoever this is, I've gotta go'" (534). When he attempts to reach her by phone a second time, she hands the phone to the imposter, who answers as "Victor Johnson [Victor's name by birth]" and says, "It'd be really cool if you stopped bothering my sister. . . . Okay?" (540). Victor's replacement speaks to the seemingly ever-increasing power celebrity exerts in our modern, celebrity-obsessed culture to shape people's identities. This is an inherently dehumanizing process whereby people are socialized by the media to think and behave like superficial, manufactured automatons rather than individuals.

Victor has an inflated view of his status and uniqueness in the public sphere. However, the meager evidence he repeatedly references to demonstrate his status

ironically undercuts his claims to special individuality. The most redundantly referenced example is his picture on the cover of *YouthQuake* magazine, a publication of questionable readership and significance (22). His repeated reliance on the cover shot as evidence of his personal importance and achievements (22, 28, 263) dilutes any impact it may have initially had. These repeated references formally represent the irony of Victor's gesture, referencing a magazine, a publication that reproduces his image en mass as evidence of his uniqueness. Like his magazine semblance, he is reproducible. He is no more than "the It Boy of the moment" (62), a media-constructed phrase that comments on the constructedness and abstract and depersonalized transience of his celebrity. Evidence of Victor's delusional narcissism includes everything from his bank code "(COOLGUY)" (20) to his impulse to possess every piece of press with his name or face on it (22). A self-proclaimed "legend" (159), Victor even has "a high-class porno movie" that he's "watched hundreds of times" that stars actors who resemble him and Chloe (163). Evident in each of these examples, particularly the latter, is Victor's fetishization of his own image. He is so indoctrinated by celebrity culture's focus on image value that he desires his own image in the same way that a common fan desires that of a remote, fetishized celebrity figure.

A logical extension of the narcissistic self-indulgence and concern with image shown by celebrities is a lack of moral conscience. In *Glamorama*, where celebrity is amoral by nature, the dangers of these narcissistic and apathetic tendencies are taken to an extreme. Victor appears to lack any moral distinctions for most of the novel, and during a magazine interview he says that the people he "would most like to have lunch

with" are "the Foo Fighters, astrologist Patrick Walker – who is dead, . . . and the Unabomber" (92). Once again showing his ignorance of people and events outside the celebrity sphere, Victor singles out a dead astrologist and a mass murderer as the famous figures whom he would most like to meet. Victor chooses these seemingly incongruous figures for the simple reason that they are famous names. Since celebrity is attached to the names and images of public figures, the fact that Patrick Walker is dead and the Unabomber is a mass-murderer is irrelevant compared to their "well-knownness".

Victor's placing the Unabomber in the same category as "the Foo Fighters" represents society's conflation of celebrity and notoriety. As a result of the media attention given to people who commit destructive and/or immoral acts, celebrity through notoriety is a self-justifying phenomenon. With infamy and notoriety as viable forms of fame, celebrity as a category exists outside the bounds of moral distinctions. Victor demonstrates his lack of moral conscience elsewhere while reminiscing about a leisure trip he and Chloe once took:

> We spent too much time at the Four Seasons bar and not enough at the beach. A friend of Chloe's gave birth to a dead baby. . . . Drinks with Depeche Mode. So many people we vaguely knew died or disappeared the weeks we were there – car accidents, AIDS, murders, overdoses, run over by a truck, fell into vats of acid or maybe were pushed – that the amount for funeral wreaths on Chloe's Visa was almost five thousand dollars. I looked really great. (102)

Characteristically oblivious to the real danger that may have threatened his own life while staying among this series of disasters, Victor reacts to the conspicuous misfortunes of so

many of his acquaintances with shocking detachment. He nonchalantly mentions the string of deaths and disappearances among comparatively mundane highlights from the trip while maintaining the same matter-of-fact tone. Victor casually describes spending "too much time at the . . . bar," a "dead baby," "Drinks with Depeche Mode," and a series of conspicuous deaths. For Victor, all that these deaths amount to is the exorbitant cost on "Chloe's Visa" for "funeral wreaths," which is the only thing that actually gives him cause for alarm. Summing up the trip, Victor concludes, "I looked great," which once again demonstrates the premium he places on image. The juxtaposition of this closing sentence with the rest of the paragraph highlights how Victor is unable to comprehend anything beyond surfaces. The deaths of his acquaintances that may suggest a threat to his own well-being are no different to Victor than news reports of deaths that have nothing to do with him.

Victor confuses morals with appearances and fashion. Nowhere is this more evident than in his interaction with his band mates, who are one of the several personal ties Victor severs before leaving New York. Just as he neglects his relationships with Chloe, Damien and Allison, Victor has recently been interacting with his fellow band members in an increasingly superficial capacity. As his band-mate, Conrad, tells him, "All you do here, Victor, is drink beer and reread magazines that you or your girlfriend happen to be in this month" (105). In response to this denunciation of his all-consuming narcissism, Victor lashes out at his fellow band members: "Jesus, Aztec – cut your toenails! Where are your fucking morals? What do you even *do* besides going to fucking poetry readings at Fez? Why don't you go to a fucking gym or something?" (105).

Victor's criticisms, which are pointed towards his band-mates' hygiene and physical appearances, showcase how he equates morals with image. In place of actual morals, Victor's superficial value system covets qualities such as appearing fashionable, celebrity status and a certain physical ideal.

The inherent amorality of celebrity is what Bobby Hughes, a former celebrity-model, exploits in forming his celebrity-model terrorist group. Because they thrive in a world of superficialities and surfaces, the celebrities he recruits are already fully committed to the superficiality of the celebrity world and place little value on things outside celebrity and image. In a regretful moment, Jamie Fields, Victor's ex-girlfriend and one of the members of the group, explains how Bobby used his celebrity to recruit people that fit the same basic criteria:

> "How did he recruit people? . . . It was only models . . . and famous models . . . He wasn't interested in anyone else. . . . and it wasn't hard to recruit people . . . everyone wanted to be around us . . . everyone wanted to be movie stars . . . and in the end, basically everyone was a sociopath." (352)

The types of celebrity actor-models Bobby targets as recruits aspire to be actors, but without talent beyond looking good, they are bound to be disappointed and, as a result, they represent ready recruits. Membership in the group represents the desperate lengths people will go to in order to obtain and retain celebrity. In this case, the actor-models attempt to retain and build their status through notorious acts rather than relying only on pop celebrity media publicity. Because models are machine-like in their unquestioning,

unthinking obedience to commands and because they appear and do as they are told without moral qualms, they are the perfect terrorists.

With Victor's lack of empathy for the friends and lovers he has betrayed, his ability to erase close relations completely from his memory, and his ignorant, superficial perspective on the world, he appears to be an ideal fit for Bobby's group of amoral celebrities. In Bobby's words, Victor has no "agenda" or "answers" (327). The sustained influence Bobby has on Victor, despite his misgivings about Bobby's sadistic methods, is a testament to the power and attraction of celebrity. Victor is immediately drawn to his "lure" and continues to seek Bobby's approval long after Bobby's sociopathic behaviour becomes apparent. During their first encounter, Victor describes "listening to him more intently than to any man I've ever met because the unavoidable fact is: he's too good-looking to resist" (305). This reaction to Bobby's celebrity image stands in stark contrast to his interaction with Chloe, whom he barely listens to and often outright ignores. When Victor questions the group's "killing civilians," Bobby merely has to "smile" at him to regain a measure of Victor's trust, and Victor looks back at him "hopefully" (358). A slave to his celebrity-obsessed, surface-level consciousness, Victor is swayed easily by the influence of Bobby's powerful celebrity image. Because celebrity culture has trained Victor to perceive people merely as superficial images, being complicit to the murders of strangers, even those he witnesses firsthand, isn't enough to override the influence of Bobby's surface appeal.

Victor's inability to see past Bobby's celebrity, long after it becomes apparent what type of person lies beneath the image, showcases the way in which characters in

Glamorama base value judgments about good and bad on appearance. This represents yet another byproduct of celebrity's cultural influence in placing a premium on image. As Jamie explains, "because we were young and rich and beautiful . . . , no one – and this is very important, Victor, - *no one* was skeptical of us" (353). Indeed, while at an exclusive celebrity party Victor attempts to explain to fellow model/celebrity Markus Schenkenberg that Bobby is "a terrorist," Markus dismisses the notion outright: "He doesn't look like a terrorist. He's way too gorgeous" (361). This faulty moral judgment, reflecting the cultural norm that equates beauty with morality, is indicative of the types of cultural values that Bobby capitalizes on by using celebrity as a diversion for his terrorist operations (367).

There is reason to believe that whatever resistance Victor displays initially is no more than his becoming acclimated to murder. Like the other members, regardless of his verbal misgivings, Victor is involved in setting off a bomb that kills innocent people (362). Indeed, it is only when he receives direct orders from the French film crew that he actually *acts*, something that is antithetical to his celebrity (492). Thus, his killing of Bobby in the final showdown between the two is just another instance of Victor's following orders like a mindless, celebrity conditioned puppet. The fact that the French film crew order the death indicates how they are the ones pulling the strings behind the scenes. In this way, Bobby is used and discarded by a symbolic media source, the film crew, in exactly the same way as Victor, like a commodity.

The commentary in *Glamorama* on the danger the surface-level engagement celebrity encourages is reenacted formally by the text as each of the deaths caused by the

terrorist attacks is filmed by the French film crew, blurring the line between reality and fiction. Shockingly, Victor is completely oblivious to the first terrorist attack he witnesses. After seeing the detonation of an entire city block, he detachedly surveys the "damage" (271):

> [the] mangled bodies lie, the gore surrounding them looks inauthentic, as if someone had dumped barrels containing smashed tomatoes across sidewalks, splattered this mixture on top of body parts and mannequins still standing behind decimated storefront windows – the blood and flesh of the art students – and it just seems too red. But later I will find out that this particular color looks more real than I could ever have imagined. (271)

Socialized by celebrity and desensitized by the spectacular violence of movies, Victor perceives the glaring evidence of reality as "inauthentic," even "the blood and flesh of the art students," whom he sees talking to one another not a minute before. His remark about the "color" of the blood indicates a hindsight narrative knowledge of the authenticity of the scene. However, the description that follows of the "disconnected heads and arms and legs . . . made of foam" and the "crew members . . . picking them up effortlessly," as well as the "director" yelling, "Cut," undercut this evidence, making things completely ambiguous (272). As it later turns out in subsequent similar scenes, these staged terrorist attacks are in fact a mix of fiction and reality (364). The text frames fact and fiction by the same media vehicles; therefore, whether the narrator is describing the filming of actual or staged events, the result is the same mediated and edited version of reality. Indeed, the same can be said of celebrity in *Glamorama*, which is equally mediated, both

in public form as media image and in private life as displaced identity. The ambiguity of this juxtaposition, which the presence of the camera and camera crew represent formally, highlights the dangers presented by becoming caught up in a world of surfaces, such as celebrity, where nothing has consequences because nothing is authentic.

The closest that Bobby comes to revealing his motivations for terrorism is his explanation to Jamie: "We are just reflections of our time" (353). The group of celebrity-terrorists in *Glamorama*, including Victor, mirrors the superficiality of celebrity-obsessed contemporary culture. They represent the potentially dangerous consequences of celebrity's dehumanizing influence, where people become merely images and, therefore, lose the depth of character to distinguish the difference between good and bad. Bobby's recruits are as thin in character as "reflections," lacking the humanity to perceive the consequences of their actions. Believing that everyone is superficial, shallow, and "phony," (353) like the celebrities he has encountered, Bobby sees everyone as expendable. This type of perspective unites the members of Bobby's celebrity group. Not only do they view the lives of others as worthless, but, by the same token, they have nothing of substance to lose if they themselves die. These intricate connections between the perspectives and behaviours of both celebrity and terrorism in *Glamorama* have implications for the discussion of notoriety and fanatical religious terrorism in *Survivor*, in which, as in *Glamorama*, celebrity is a fundamentally dehumanizing phenomenon that prizes superficial image and devalues human life.

Chapter 4 – Celebrity as Secular Religion in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*

In Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*, the social influence of celebrity discussed in *Glamorama* realizes its potential, coexisting with, and in many ways replacing, religion as a major form of worship. The novel is narrated by Tender Branson, and Tender's fusion of celebrity and religion provides a striking example of how two cultural phenomena, which appear at first to be antithetical, share marked similarities in structure and practice. Tender's manipulation of celebrity and cult religion in order to stage his own spectacular martyrdom underscores how both operate through the same media mechanisms of celebrity production and image construction. The novel begins on page 289 and counts down in reverse as Tender narrates his life story to the black box of the plane he has hijacked. After the mass suicide of the Creedish church community in which he grew up, Tender pursues celebrity status, and his bid for celebrity status plays off the potential for a secular afterlife that celebrity can offer tragic stars in terms of posthumous legacy. The surviving box represents a time capsule for his celebrity legacy. From his account of growing up in an oppressive cult setting to his description of the media's manipulation of his tragic past for financial gain, Tender plays off a popular cultural archetype of celebrity by using the black box to reconstruct his celebrity image and legacy as a sympathetic victim.

Both religion and celebrity function as systems of worship that garner mass appeal and mass devotion. The Creedish church and Tender's celebrity share a powerful influence over their followers. Tender's rise to stardom and transformation into

celebrated spiritual leader highlights the way in which celebrities exist as secular deities in contemporary culture. As his desire for a dramatic suicide suggests, celebrity even has its own form of otherworldly worship in terms of the attention and homage paid to certain celebrities posthumously. Celebrity and religious worship also attract devotion in much the same way, by elevating individual figures as symbolic idols that serve as role models. Tender's combination of celebrity cult figure and celebrated religious leader embodies both types of role model, simultaneously defining a standard of fashion, consumer lifestyle, and spiritual guidance. However, most importantly, Tender's alternating descriptions of his celebrity production and the structures of control and conformity of cult life underscore how celebrity and cult religion represent institutionalized forms of mass behavioural control. From the performance enhancing drugs to the transformative vanity surgery, Tender's celebrity production mirrors the type of conditioning and conformity displayed by the Creedish cult, in which everything from appearance to speech are controlled by strict conventions.

Tender's self-reflexive narration provides an insider's perspective on many of the aspects of celebrity discussed in *Money* and *Glamorama*. This unique perspective probes the mechanisms that operate behind-the-scenes of both cult-religion and celebrity. From the many layers of deception and manipulation and the commodification of people to the plane hijacking that looms thematically, *Survivor* picks up where *Glamorama* leaves off concerning the cultural acceptance of notoriety as a viable form of celebrity. Seeking fame no matter the cost, Tender willingly sells his identity, his faith, his morals, his freewill, and eventually his own life, all for the sake of celebrity.

Celebrity in *Survivor* serves as a kind of false panacea for the failure of religion. Rojek frames this relationship in terms of the "distraction" celebrity provides:

> Society requires distraction so as to deflect consciousness from both the fact of structured inequality and the meaninglessness of existence following the death of God. Religion provides a solution to the problem of structured inequality in this life by promising eternal salvation to true believers. With the death of God, and the decline of the Church, the sacramental props in the quest for salvation have been undermined. Celebrity and spectacle fill the vacuum. They contribute to the cult of distraction that valorizes the superficial, the gaudy, the domination of commodity culture. (Rojek 90)

Not only do the "superficialities" of celebrity temporarily distract Tender from his spiritual void, but these same types of superficialities are what he sells to the public as a televangelist and spiritual leader. Tender uses religion as a pretense to build his fame sufficiently so that he can "off himself [commit suicide] with everyone's full attention" (133). With the help of "the agent," who wants to cash in on his survivor status (170), Tender falsely styles himself as a prophet, manipulating the structure and appearance of religion. The spiritual wisdom he preaches is packaged in the form of a comprehensive media and advertising campaign that suggests the partial cultural convergence of religion and celebrity in *Survivor*, where celebrity has become such a pervasive force of behavioural influence that it defines the representation of all types of public figures. The way in which Tender is marketed also illustrates how both religion and celebrity participate in "commodity culture." The multi-million dollar campaign that is put in

motion to construct and sell Tender as a spiritual leader, and which is composed of large grossing televangical tours, T.V. programming, merchandising, and paraphernalia packaged and sold as religious relics, underscores how religion uses the same mechanisms of media advertising and image construction by which celebrity functions. By the same token, the "spectacle" built around Tender's name and image demonstrates how, in its material imperative, celebrity mimics the idolatry of religious worship, highlighting how both engage in capitalist economy.

Jesus Christ's blend of spiritual leadership and celebrity status serves as a template for Tender's fusion of the two forms of worship. Both celebrity and religion attract attention and disseminate ideology in the realm of images. In order to do this, they rely on the reproduction of symbols and iconography that acquire special significance and importance by virtue of the frequency and the privileged context in which they appear. In celebrity terms, this translates into publicity and recognizability. Perhaps the most prolific example of this process in *Survivor* is the many representations of Jesus Christ. In addition to being an icon of tremendous religious significance, Jesus provides an iconic example of how religion functions using many of the same mechanisms of representation as celebrity. Tender's agent poses the question, "if Jesus Christ had died in prison, with no one watching and with no one there to mourn or torture him, would we be saved?" (152). The point is that, in large part, Jesus's "well-knownness" and legacy can be attributed to the spectacular way in which he died and the amount of public and historical attention he received. As the agent observes, "the biggest factor that makes you a saint is the amount of press coverage you get" (152). Press coverage and publicity are also the

driving forces behind the endorsement campaign launching Tender's celebrity. From magazine covers to appearances on the "talk show circuit" (170) to his own "infomercial" (168), he is sold to the public in large part simply by appearing, and the way in which his recognizability skyrockets is primarily attributable to the exposure of his image. What Tender takes from the agent's lesson is that "The key to salvation is how much attention you get" (151). After his disillusionment with faith, this chance for a kind of media-constructed "salvation" or sainthood is what motivates Tender to become a celebrity.

The lifespan of celebrity image is proportional to its ability to adapt and shape itself in accordance with trends and changes in fashion. As the iconography of Christ in *Survivor* demonstrates, the same is true in the context of religion, in which the most enduring images are those that adapt to meet public demand, institutionalized agendas, and ideologies in different cultural and historical contexts. The image of Christ, with its near omnipresence and recognizability of its many manifestations, is among the most adaptable images in history. Fertility Hollis, an acquaintance that Tender meets through his fake "crisis hotline," (280) explains how iconography depicting Christ has changed in order to better fit ideological and cultural trends of different eras in history:

> In the oldest wing of the mausoleum, the wing called Contentment, Jesus is gaunt and romantic with a woman's huge wet eyes and long eye-lashes. In the wing built in the 1930s, Jesus is a Social Realist with huge superhero muscles. In the forties, in the Serenity wing, Jesus becomes an abstract assembly of planes and cubes. The fifties Jesus is polished fruitwood, a Danish Modern skeleton. The sixties Jesus is pegged together out of driftwood. (244)

These various depictions of Christ from "different twentieth-century art movements" (244) represent how religious iconography, like celebrity image, is inscribed with different meanings and marketed in order to suit different agendas and cultural contexts of a given historical period. Signifiers such as the "huge superhero muscles" associated with the "Social Realist" Christ indicate how the image of Christ has been used as a propagandistic tool. These hyperbolic "huge superhero muscles" also illustrate how the iconography of Christ in the mausoleum is visually idealized, which underscores the way in which celebrity and religion attract attention and reverence by constructing their symbolic images in order to meet market demand. As Tender's choice of words suggests, the Christ in the "Contentment" wing, a romanticized effeminate version with exaggerated features, is equally idealized. The eyes are not only big but abnormally "huge." These iconographic depictions of Christ grab Victor's attention by virtue of their distinguishable, larger-than-life qualities.

Tender's unlikely, near-overnight transformation from ostracized outcast to celebrated spiritual leader illustrates how both religion and celebrity obtain public interest and devotion by setting and adapting to trends. As in *Glamorama*, celebrity image in *Survivor* communicates cultural standards in fashion, beauty, and success, all of which are subject to changing trends. Tender's refashioning through celebrity allows him to bridge the gap of social acceptability, which comments on celebrity's ability to reconfigure identity in order to fit trends. When he is constructed as a celebrity, he becomes a "big international spiritual leader" (155), and his beliefs go from being marginalized to worshipped. For the majority of his adult life, Tender's affiliation with a

fundamentalist cult best known for mass suicide places him on the social outskirts of society. He and the members of the Creedish church, both those alive and deceased, are looked upon with derision as being part of an abusive and exploitative cult whose outrageous, unfounded beliefs brought about their own destruction (189). Their mass suicide, which is dubbed "the Deliverance" (229) and ordered by the church leaders to avoid a government investigation (188), becomes their defining event. Before Tender becomes a celebrity and his association with the Creedish cult becomes fashionable, the Creedish are demonized by the media, which labels them the "Creedish Death Cult" (105). Tender is self-conscious about the negative stigmas attached to his religion: "God forbid I should look like one of those stupid crazy people in the Midwest who all killed themselves because they thought their God was calling them home" (189). However, once he is repackaged as a celebrity through a commercial and media campaign, Tender and his spiritual beliefs become not only accepted but revered. "The sole survivor of America's latest death cult" (172), Tender is an example of the way in which celebrity and religion are guided by fashion. A cultural novelty, his stardom becomes the "latest" trend.

Celebrity creates its own larger-than-life, hyperbolic figures through physical modifications made possible by cosmetic surgery and physically enhancing drugs. Unlike Self in *Money*, who merely dreams of transforming his image on this level, Tender consciously allows himself to become a virtual guinea pig in his experimentation with all the body-altering drugs and vanity surgeries imaginable. This voluntary openness to subject his body to whatever means the agent deems necessary to produce Tender as a

celebrity makes him the perfect celebrity test. Like the iconography of Christ that adapts to different cultural contexts, the construction of Tender's image reflects how celebrity participates in commodity culture, operating according to supply and demand. The agent and the marketing companies behind Tender's celebrity aim to create a superhuman physical presence that people will believe is worthy of "a God" (135). This strategy suggests the thematic connection between celebrity image and religious iconography. The "whole campaign" built around Tender "is based on the fact" that he is "the last survivor" (140). The agent exploits and spins the enigma surrounding Tender's distinction as the only surviving member of the Creedish church as a sign of divine intervention or status. Subsequently, he attempts to reconstruct Tender's image to fit this fantasy remodeling. When telling Tender what modifications are going to be done to his body, the agent explains the public expectations for a superhuman figure:

> They want more than human.
>
> They want larger than life size.
>
> Nobody wants just anatomically correct.
>
> People want anatomical enhancement. Surgically augmented. New and improved.
>
> Silicone-implanted. Collagen-injected. (136)

The public desire for this artificially produced image comments on the way in which celebrity culture fosters a superficial focus, where the emphasis is no longer merely on image but image construction. In this context, transformative vanity surgery becomes an expected convention, and even prerequisite, of celebrity. As the agent's use of words that evoke modification suggests, human perfection is no longer enough. People expect

celebrity bodies that are the products of "enhancement, ... augmented[, and] . . . . improved." The agent explains the desire for celebrities with superhuman features as people's need for figures that physically and symbolically represent the remedy to all of his followers' short-comings (135). Thus, Tender must physically appear to be "everything regular people aren't" (135). The stringent and extensive requirements placed on Tender's physical transformation into spiritual leader underscores how "these days" celebrity's influence extends to arenas as diverse as religion. Celebrity sets a precedent of artificial physical enhancement that the audience has come to expect in nearly all forums of media representation where figures exist only as images. The same effect is achieved by the different media of religion, where figures in iconography, such as Christ, set standards for image.

An equally viable manifestation of Tender's celebrity image is his portrayal of the sympathetic victim, which stems from his association with the tragic demise of the "Creedish death cult" (146). Tender's suitability for this role is the reason that the agent originally identifies him as a potential celebrity investment. Tender becomes the vessel for this prepackaged, recycled celebrity novelty and becomes the face of the Creedish church. Just as celebrities exist as cultural metonyms for concepts such as success and sex appeal, Tender exists in the media and the public consciousness as a cultural metonym for the tragedy surrounding the Creedish chruch. Reminiscent of Self's signing away control of his money, Tender signs away the rights to his identity when he becomes legally known as "The Victim" and surrenders financial control and "the copyright" over his name and image (74). Like Tender's portrayal of a Godlike figure, "The Victim"

suggests the supply and demand model of economy that is the basis for these variations on celebrity image. The role of victim implies a suffering that is elite and exclusive, which functions to create/increase demand in a supply market. As the last survivor of the Creedish church, Tender is an especially exceptional victim whose rarity translates into exceptional demand. The agent constructs Tender as a victim, instructing him to rehearse "looking sincere and innocent" for talk show appearances (171). This type of acting self-consciously plays off the convention of celebrities who are well known solely for their happenstance association with tragedy. By actively portraying this image, Tender appeals to the public for sympathy in order to gain attention and draw ratings. He and his media beneficiaries coordinate their efforts to create and emphasize this marketable stigma:

> According to the journalist, she feels my pain. She's read my autobiography. She knows all about my humiliation. She's read all about the humiliating ordeal it must've been to be naked and sold as a slave, naked. Me being just seventeen or eighteen years old and all those people, everyone in the cult, being there to see me, naked. A naked slave, she says, in slavery. Naked. (106)

The interviewer embellishes details about his abuse and subjugation, which are fabricated (159) in order to sensationalize Tender's experiences in the cult. Tender was neither "naked," nor was he exactly "sold as a slave." He leaves the Church District willingly to work in menial labor, believing he is following God's preordained plan by subsidizing the church with his income (231). However, he and the interviewer illustrate the façade and adaptability of celebrity image by creating this imaginary, more marketable version of Tender's life. The interviewer attempts to accentuate the perception of Tender as

sympathetic victim by repeating the keywords of vulnerability, "humiliation" and "naked." Likewise, Tender is fed similar words through a teleprompter to reaffirm the interviewer's portrayal. Reading directly from the teleprompter, he tells the T.V. audience how he will "never get over the painful humiliating pain no matter how rich" he becomes (105). Tender's victim rhetoric displays the same strategy of repetition and emphasis on key evocative words, such as "painful[,] . . . pain[, and] humiliating," which are used to trigger audience sympathy. In addition to showing how he is created as a victim in the public eye, Tender's insider's perspective demonstrates the construction of celebrity personas and the artificial conventions of celebrity interviews.

Celebrities exist in our culture as secular deities, dictating public behaviour from an exalted social position with omnipresent media influence. In *Survivor*, the role models that celebrity and cult religion construct embody institutionally sanctioned rules or trends, which instruct people how to behave. As "a celebrated famous celebrity spiritual leader" (138), Tender represents a role model in a religious sense, providing his audience with spiritual guidance and proselytizations about how to live their lives. Similarly, he is a role model in the celebrity sense, personifying ideals of human beauty, consumer fashion, and health. Tender sells his image and false wisdom in the form of consumer products, demonstrating how both forms of worship function according to a material imperative. In addition to the media campaign launched to portray his image in a financially viable way, Tender's name and image are also used to promote a wide range of commercial products that acquire special interest by his endorsement of them. The extraordinary variety of products include his own "line of designer sportswear" (136), an "exercise video" (170),

"inspirational tapes" (168), and his own fragrance (169-70). Each of these products reflects the superficiality that celebrity encourages its followers to adopt as a lifestyle. The "sportswear" and "exercise video" both connote covering or altering the surface of the body in order to conform to the celebrity image Tender sanctions. Even the "fragrance," an artificial scent used to mask one's natural odor, evokes these themes of superficiality and facades. Similarly, the "inspirational tapes" suggest a superficial solution to issues of self-esteem and personality. The same can be said of celebrity, which, in *Survivor*, proves to be a faulty, superficial solution to these same issues of personal instability.

The perception of the material items associated with Tender invokes Rojek's concept of celebrity "reliquaries" (Rojek 58). Rojek's study demonstrates the way in which material items with associations to celebrities are treated in much the same way as objects of religious significance and power, or relics (58). Rojek observes the inclinations of fans to gather collections of these types of relics of celebrity in order to feel closer to the true objects of their desire, the celebrities themselves (58). One of the most prolific examples of the celebrity "reliquaries" in *Survivor* is the "Tender Branson Dashboard Statuette" (99) that embodies the material, secular idolatry of celebrity. Tender's image comes to ironically replace religious iconography such as the crucifix in everyday, conventional contexts, or Saint Christopher, patron saint of travelers.

Unlike celebrity, religion actively sells its role models, such as Christ, as sources of guidance that purport to tell people how to live their lives and function in the world. Religious role models typically represent moral distinctions between good and bad.

Celebrity creates figures that become role models simply by the privileged frequency with which they appear in the media and public spheres by default. However, Tender represents an unusual mix of both types of role model, offering his followers advice and distinctions between right and wrong, but only in a very superficial way and only as a façade to build his status. A kind of pseudo-messiah, Tender serves as a "guru to make sense out of" the "risk-free boredom of a lifestyle" of his followers (138). He offers this false "promise" through consumer products such as his *Book of Very Common Prayer* (126) that appropriate the form of religious paraphernalia but replace the religious content with Tender's purportedly personalized, false spiritual wisdom. The *Book of Very Common Prayer*, which consists of prayers to answer nearly every minor daily dilemma imaginable, symbolizes Tender's commodification of religion in his pursuit of fame and his refashioning of religion in order to make it more accessible and applicable to daily life. The book includes prayers for everything from "The Prayer to Remove Mildew Stains" (125) to "The Prayer to Silence Car Alarms" (124). As "The Prayer for a Parking Space" demonstrates, the book is filled with personal favors in the guise of prayer. These trivialized versions of conventional prayer undermine traditional belief, which is meant to address itself only to those matters of importance and necessity:

> Oh, divine merciful God,
>
> History is without equal for how much I will adore
>
> You, when You give me today, a place to park.
>
> For You are the provider.
>
> And you are the source.

From You all good is delivered. . . .

In Your care will I find respite. With your guidance, will I find peace. . . .

Amen. (124-23)

Despite the trivialization of the content, the form and purpose of these prayers is fundamentally the same as traditional prayer. Though the prayer is for something as banal as assistance finding "a place to park," it is nonetheless a request for help made in God's name. First, there is the self-subjugation and expression of devotion and praise, which is followed by the request and ended with the conventional "Amen." Even the language and phrasing are true to form. Phrases such as "Oh, divine merciful God" and "History is without equal for how much I will adore" display the romantic language, poetic apostrophe and pedantry of religious doctrine of traditional prayer. As the title suggests, the secularized prayers found in the *Book of Very Common Prayer* represent an expansion of the definitions of prayer in order to accommodate the more common and, therefore, more numerous problems in life. This increased applicability translates into greater market appeal. Ultimately, Tender's ironic and blasphemous bastardization of religion demonstrates how celebrity and religion can serve as institutions of capitalism that reinforce and exploit consumption-based economies.

The close affinity between celebrity and fanatical religion in *Survivor* illustrates the way in which both forms of worship operate through many of the same mechanisms of fanatical devotion and mass behavioural control. Celebrity and cults garner powerful control over their followers by eliminating individuality. By removing choice and encouraging uniformity, these systems of worship suppress individual identity, remove

individual agency and, therefore, remove the means of self-expression from their followers. Both celebrity and cult religion are, therefore, fundamentally homogenizing forces. Tender provides an insider's commentary on the controls cult religion and celebrity place on individual expression in their imperative for conformity.

One of the most apparent ways in which they limit individuality is by controlling appearance. While growing up in the church district, Tender is taught "to desire nothing. Keep a mild and downcast countenance. Preserve a modest posture and demeanor. Speak in a simple and quiet tone" (161). Each of these teachings represents the church's active suppression of self-expression. Even body language is placed under the control of the church. By confining members' behaviour so thoroughly, the church creates a population that is lacking the voice to even express itself. In its power to enact complete conformity and control over its followers, the long arm of the church extends beyond the church district. On the rare occasions when they encounter one another, the Creedish "labor missionaries" who are stationed outside the church district are limited by strict church rules to two short religious messages/greetings with which to interact with one another. Tender describes how "you could say":

> *May you be of complete service in your lifetime.*
>
> You could say:
>
> *Praise and glory to the Lord for this day through which we labor.*
>
> You could say:
>
> *May our efforts bring all those around us to Heaven.*
>
> And you could say:

May you die with all your work complete.

That was the limit. (230)

By limiting the labor missionaries to these few pointed phrases, the church is able to confine their self-expression within the boundaries of church rhetoric. In fact, this convention essentially removes the self from expression, replacing it with a set of phrases that reinforce each of the essential premises of the church's control over its followers. First, there is one's "complete service" to God. The strong word choice here expresses the "complete" surrender of autonomy that a life under the church's sanctioned rules entails. Next, there is the perception of continual "labor" as God's bidding. This second precept reinforces God's status as symbolic role model, worthy of praise and complete obedience. However, the connection between "labor" and God's will that the phrasing sets up also subtly implies the threat of being answerable to "the Lord" for those who do not comply. The last two parts of the exchange, concerning deliverance to "Heaven" and dying, represent conventionalized instructions to view life as merely a precursor to the afterlife. This structured, rehearsed phrasing is indicative of the church's social programming.

Furthermore, just as celebrity prescribes standards of appearance and fashion, as Tender's signature line of "religious sportswear" (159) illustrates, the cult sanctions what its members can wear. Tender describes how each of the sexes is limited to a single outfit of "regulation church clothes" (247):

> The man wore the suspenders, the baggy pants, long-sleeved shirt with the collar buttoned on even the hottest day of summer. The woman wore the blah-coloured

> smock of a dress I remember church women had to wear. On her head, she still wore the bonnet. The man always wore the wide-brimmed hat, straw in summer, black felt in winter. (247)

These outfits physically and symbolically enact the suppression of the cult members. Not only does the uniform restrain individuality, it is also physically restraining. The "regulation" male outfit is physically oppressive, with "the collar buttoned on even the hottest day of summer," subjecting the wearer to discomfort for no other reason than to keep him under the control of rules, at least in appearance. The focus on superficial appearances invokes the construction of Tender's celebrity image according to the agent's rigid, preconceived template. The detail of the outfit, which defies practicality, serves as a symbolic reminder of the wearer's subjugated position in the cult. Similarly, the woman's outfit is an amorphous smock that conceals her sexual characteristics and mutes her sexual identity.

In the cult setting of the Church district, the members' shared belief that they are no more than God's tools (273) trivializes human life and provides the pretense the church leaders need to create a populace complicit to its subjugation and, ultimately, its own self-destruction. Tender's brother, Adam, dispels Tender's selectively fond memory of their youth, explaining how Tender was used and discarded by the church: "You were bred and trained and sold" (41). As a labor missionary, Tender is "trained" to live only to serve the cult, and he is basically "sold" to his employers outside the Church district as a slave-laborer with all of his earnings returning directly to the church (231). To the church he represents no more than a disposable commodity, no different from the other labor

missionaries, and easily replaced. Further evidence of the dehumanizing effects of the church's devaluing of the individual is the lack of familial response to Tender's departure from the church colony: "Nobody cried and hugged. Nobody cried and hugged when we sold a pig either. Nobody cried and hugged before they killed a chicken or picked an apple" (274). This indifferent view of human life, according to which the permanent departure of a person is not different from that of a farm animal, underscores the dehumanizing effects of the Creedish belief system. The comparison Tender draws between his departure and the selling of a "pig" reiterates the idea that he is no more than a work animal, to be sold as a replaceable commodity. The stringent religious perspective is the same type of fundamentalism that is implicit in acts of violence based on religious fanaticism.

On the surface, celebrity appears to limit individual expression in a much more covert and much less intrusive manner. However, as Tender's behind-the-scenes perspective on celebrity illustrates, the construction of celebrity is every bit as much about the concealment of individuality. Just as the church instructs its followers how to behave, so too is Tender under the control of the parties that operate behind the camera. As we have seen, Tender receives very specific instructions about how to portray himself on camera, whether as a novelty victim or a messianic savior figure. During his stint as "a big international spiritual leader" (155), his behaviour both on and off screen is completely scripted and scheduled by his agents and the companies that purchase his identity. As Tender self-reflexively comments, "The image team has creative control on appearance. The writing team has control of every word that comes out of my mouth"

(134). In his relinquishment of individuality for the sake of fame, Tender represents the celebrity that conforms to the controls placed on their behaviour and image for media representation and a hyperbolic example of the public that displays its aspirations for fame by mimicking celebrity.

Ultimately, as these shared mechanisms show, celebrity and cult religion serve the main function of controlling and shaping behaviour, and both systems of worship exert control through cult-style programming. Tender is programmed by cult religion as a child and by celebrity as an adult. He describes how his "whole life growing up" he had been "working toward . . . baptism and getting placed in a job cleaning houses in the wicked outside world," being led to believe that he would be doing God's work (231). His misconceptions about monotonous housework and his programming highlight the church-sanctioned perspectives that he has learned. His strong, preconceived bias towards "the wicked outside world" long before he actually sees it is evincive of cult programming. He is so conditioned by the church that before "the Deliverance" (229) he believed that he was "everyone's savior, whether they knew it or not," his monotonous, menial labor a kind of penance for the rest of mankind, a selfless martyrdom (230).

Typical of fundamentalist, fanatical religion, many of the church rules are based on literal interpretations of the Bible that allow no alternative explanations. For instance, the rule against labor missionaries participating "in sexual relations" is based on "Luke Chapter Twenty, Verse Thirty-five: 'But they which shall be accounted worthy . . . neither marry, nor are given marriage'" (229). With the aid of the Bible and strict literalism, the church makes unilateral decisions and every answer God's decree (273).

Tender remembers, for example, how the "elders of the Creedish made celibacy sound as easy as choosing not to play baseball" (229). The fictionalized Creedish cult in *Survivor* exemplifies the cultural atrocities committed in the name of religion and made possible by cult programming. Tender remembers how

> the most important rule to remember was always: If the members of the church district colony felt summoned by God, rejoice. When the apocalypse was imminent, celebrate, and all Creedish must deliver themselves unto God, amen. (229)

This "rule" granted the church leaders the power to trigger the mass cult-suicide of the entire colony on command. According to "Church doctrine," even the labor missionaries, who may hear about "the Deliverance" years after it happens, must kill themselves (229). "Ten years" after "the Deliverance," Tender is part of the minority who "failed" in their "ultimate sacrament" (228). The suicides that follow "the Deliverance" occur in waves according to trends (223), reiterating how cult behaviour, whether in the realm of celebrity or religious worship, is dictated by fashion. In much the same way that people are slaves to the trends set by celebrity, the survivors require the immediate social influence of others in order to trigger their conditioned response to commit suicide. With the knowledge that "the rules are all gone, and it doesn't matter" (228), Tender, however, resists death. Instead, under the agent's guidance, he adopts the position of a cult-like leader himself and, using celebrity, appropriates the methods of cult programming that were used on him in order to condition his own group of followers. Thus, the agent

ironically reconceptualizes what was originally Tender's failure to commit suicide into a marketable commodity.

Behind the scenes, Tender's rise to fame reenacts many of the same mechanisms of cult programming that he experienced in the Creedish colony. Just as the church leaders program Tender as a compliant automaton of the church, the agent, as the face of the Hollywood star-making apparatus, programs him as a celebrity. In a manner that evokes cult-brainwashing, the agent repeatedly yells instructions and commands at him in order to socialize Tender to believe that his body is just a tool to facilitate his celebrity (136-35). In so doing the agent commodifies the body, highlighting the fetishization of celebrities as merely attractive images:

> The agent's yelling that no matter how great you look, your body is just something you wear to accept your Academy Award.
>
> Your hand is just so you can hold your Nobel Prize.
>
> Your lips are only there for you to air-kiss a talk show host. (150)

The agent categorically reduces Tender's body parts to their dehumanized practical functions in his celebrity production. In the world of celebrity, bodies are valuable only in so far as their exchange value attracting attention and endorsing consumer products. Thus, Tender's body is merely part of his image, no more special than "something you wear." With celebrity and martyrdom as the ultimate goals, Tender, like Self in *Money*, comes to perceive his body strictly as an advertising tool: "your heart is only beating so you can be a regular dinner guest at the White House. Your central nervous system is just so you can address the UN General Assembly" (136). These suggestions underscore how

perceptually celebrity transforms the body into just a superficial surface, important only in terms of its role allowing Tender to appear in public forums. This perspective results in a kind of enhanced fatalism whereby Tender gladly damages his body for the betterment of his image:

> You're going to lose it anyway. Your body. You're already losing it. . . . This is why when the agent comes to you with anabolic steroids you say yes. You say yes to the back-to-back tanning sessions. Electrolysis? Yes. Teeth capping? Yes. Dermabrasion? Yes. (149)

Tender's short, declarative phrasing and flat, uninflected tone in his automatic repetition of the affirmative "Yes" evokes automaton-like unthinking obedience to an ordered checklist. This unquestioning compliance suggests Tender's perception that the physical transformations he lists are all necessary procedures to be inventoried in his celebrity production. The agent's transformative procedures all represent superficial, artificial physical enhancements, several of which enhance the surface while having harmful effects on the body as a whole. "Electrolysis," the destruction of hair roots by electric current, and "Dermabrasion," the removal of blemishes through abrasive contact with the skin, are both procedures that involve intrusive damage to the body that can be used for superficial reasons. The same is true of "anabolic steroids," which again are used in order to modify surface appearances for superficial reasons and can have detrimental effects on the functioning of the body as a whole, impairing and causing unusual stress on the organs. In much the same way, celebrity functions in *Survivor* as a temporary, superficial solution to social and existential issues that, in the end, causes more harm than good.

Tender's willingness to self-mutilate for the sake of his celebrity image is reminiscent of the same level of dedication displayed by the Creedish cult members, who are willing to kill themselves in order to serve the cult. Indeed, the extreme lengths to which people will go to obtain or even to encounter celebrity evokes cult worship.

As *Glamorama* demonstrates in its discussion of notoriety, this same mentality, which is encouraged by the media's indiscriminate attention, is what makes celebrity susceptible to being the motivation for infamous acts. Some of the celebrities with the most media coverage are those known for notorious or infamous behaviour, and Tender reflects this trend in contemporary culture. Ironically, Tender's book and merchandise sales enjoy a dramatic climb *after* he spoils the winner of the Superbowl and is on the run from the authorities for suspected murder (126). Tender is at once the most notoriously hated and the most marketable he's ever been: "The newspapers are calling me the Antichrist. The Creedish mass murderer. The value of Tender Branson merchandise is through the roof, but for all the wrong reasons" (24). Tender's case suggests that the most attention-getting deeds, both in the media and public perception, are negative deeds. Even though he is originally constructed and sold to the public as a messianic figure, he is more valuable as a commodity when he is seen as "the Antichrist." Tender is symptomatic of the ever-increasing number of celebrities who experience a growth or resurgence in relevance and media coverage after dramatic falls from public approval. Tender's growth in popularity after his immoral, taboo behaviour suggests the public attraction to negative celebrity behaviour. This attraction is created and fostered by the media through the frequent representation and sensationalization of these figures.

Not only is celebrity well suited to acts of infamy, but because it is so closely related to cult worship it can also serve as a convincing motivation for acts of terrorism and religious fanaticism. Perhaps the most subtle, yet most dangerous similarity between celebrity and religion is their inherent devaluing and dehumanization of the individual. Both systems of worship foster the perception that the individual is only as valuable as his or her use-value as a commodity and, therefore, expendable. This dehumanizing perspective lends itself to fanaticism and terrorism, where a disregard for human life is required. A prime example of the way in which celebrity is constructed rather than earned comes when the agent claims that Tender is no more than "a warm body and the survivor's name" (145). Thus, according to the agent, if there happen to be any Creedish left besides him, he becomes "worthless" (140). Before his infamous stunt at the Superbowl, even though his novelty remains intact, Tender observes signs that his commodity value is running out. With "attendance figures down" at his personal appearances and his lack of recent press, Tender suspects "the beginning of the end" (122), and he is fully aware of his fate as a celebrity of declining popularity:

> And there's no such thing as Celebrity Outplacement. You don't see faded movie stars or whoever going back to community college for retraining. The only field left to me was doing the game show circuit, and I'm not even that smart. (122)

Tender's assessment of his limited options as a washed up celebrity illustrates the disposability of celebrities. There are actually conventions to the way celebrities fall out of popularity. Other than daytime T.V. game shows with limited audiences, which are only an option for some, most celebrities disappear into obscurity, back into the

indistinguishable mass from which they were originally selected. Because they are objects of desire who exist merely as media images and who rise and fade according to fashion, individual celebrities are easily discarded from the public eye, a fate that is almost inevitable for the majority of these transient figures.

In order to achieve a more dramatic impact, modern acts of religious fanaticism appropriate the mechanisms of celebrity, such as playing to media attention through infamous acts and constructing image. As Tender observes, "the only difference between a suicide and a martyrdom really is the amount of press coverage" (134). This observation reiterates the power of celebrity to shape public perception and construct image, where the amount of media attention an individual receives can so drastically change how others perceive them. Thus, just as celebrity offers Tender the opportunity to build his own martyrdom through the mechanism of media spectacle (133), suicide bombers gain their own kind of notorious celebrity by choosing the largest and most attention-grabbing targets in order to gain the most media coverage. As is evident in the attacks of "9-11," contemporary religious fanatics also manipulate the mechanisms of celebrity in their special attention to the symbolic significance of their targets. The twin towers of the World Trade Center represented the pinnacle of many aspects of American identity, from capitalist economic success to (from a negative perspective) American excess. By attacking the towers, the terrorists mounted not only a physical attack on the largest, most prominent and most attention-getting targets but also a symbolic attack on an icon of American identity. At its most basic, this awareness of the perceptions of the public is the same concern embodied by celebrity, which constructs image to suit market

demand. Tender demonstrates this celebrity-influenced fanaticism when he plans to commit suicide in a context that attracts "everyone's full attention" (133). Terrorist by happenstance, he boards a commercial airliner full of people in order to stop a terrorist threat that turns out to be him, inadvertently hijacking the plane (6). However, this apparent accident provides Tender with the means to orchestrate just the type of climactic demise he needs to propel himself into posthumous stardom.

For a small minority, celebrity affords individuals with a kind of secular afterlife in the form a posthumous legacy. Tender manipulates this convention of celebrity by dramatically crashing the plane into the Australian outback (285), ensuring a spectacular demise and the requisite media attention. This literal blasting into history represents his one final, desperate attempt to secure a legacy using the conventions of celebrity. Whether he is aware of it or not, this bid for martyrdom, as a tragic victim of celebrity, recalls the convention of the tragic death of the young star, an archetype known for increasing and solidifying posthumous fame and legacy. As Erika Doss explains in *Afterlife as Afterimage* (2005), "dead-celebrity worship," in which "celebrities become immortal, superlative beings . . . [and] share characteristics inherent in supreme deities. . . . [,] may mimic a religious culture" (28). Doss elaborates on this concept using the example of Elvis fans, who, "by collecting and displaying his image, . . . construct his immortality" (71). After Tender's grand disillusionment from religion, he turns to celebrity in order to achieve this illusion of immortality. When his original plan to kill himself "with a decent audience share" on "Network television," with "a million billion people watching" fails, hijacking the plane presents a second chance to commit suicide in

dramatic fashion and the possibility of a "totally-not ignored martyrdom" (122). The black box that he records his account on represents the physical manifestation of his desire for immortality. The box, which is supposed to be indestructible, presents the physical embodiment of this desire for legacy. In Tender's own words, the box offers a "permanent record" (289) and a chance to "live on, forever" (1). Still very much immersed in the mechanisms of celebrity such as publicity and his engagement with public reception, Tender is very careful to construct the type of image he leaves behind.

Like celebrity, the box allows Tender to once again refashion himself to attract public interest in the most effective way. Thus, under the pretense of getting his "story right" (284) and in an effort to resurrect his image as a sympathetic victim, Tender uses the box to clarify his supposedly good intentions and to disclaim responsibility for the numerous blasphemies and travesties associated with his celebrity. In this way, it serves as a kind of ironic version of a religious confessional, representing another example of the way in which Tender uses and perverts the form of religion in order to construct his celebrity. First, he attempts to repair his image by disassociating himself from the blasphemous *Book of Very Common Prayer*, which he claims wasn't his "idea," but instead "the agent's brainchild" (127). Tender also tries to pass the buck on the "PornFill" that he signed his name to, allowing the government to dump the sum total of the country's "outdated pornography" over "all twenty thousand acres of the Creedish church district" (99): "The agent tells me to just initial next to each paragraph. He tells me, don't bother reading this bit, I won't understand. That's how the PornFill happened" (100-99). Tender glances only at the surface of the documents the agent asks him to sign

because all that matters in celebrity are surfaces. This is the same mentality that allows Tender to sacrifice his body, health and identity to celebrity. In addition to shirking responsibility for his actions and deflecting the blame in order to reconstruct himself as the victim, Tender gestures towards his coercion and manipulation. In regards to the prayer book, he claims, "my best option seemed to be to just keep my mouth shut and smile" (123). In these last two examples, Tender attempts to portray himself as the scapegoat or the innocent pawn of the companies that created him.

In addition to his victim angle, Tender also attempts to use the public voice celebrity has afforded him to gesture towards his pious intentions, with secular martyrdom still the underlying goal. He takes a stance of moral superiority, claiming that "people need to know that my personal intention all along has been to serve the glory of God. Pretty much" (123). This weak claim achieves a distinct absurdity in the context of his feeble attempts to distance himself from his role in the deplorable commodification of religion for the sake of personal profit and fame. As we know from his earlier admissions about his loss of faith, not to mention his willing manipulation of millions of people under the guise of false messiah, his motivations were anything but pious. His efforts to excuse himself from his transgressions highlights how ineffective a panacea celebrity is for existential and social dilemmas such as loss of faith and social alienation. Celebrity provides no more than a surface-level solution for complex issues where substance is required. Even though he is famous, Tender still feels shame for his failure to his faith and his people, and he becomes more hated and ostracized than ever. His celebrity

production exacerbates these problems by requiring him to prostitute his faith and himself for money and fame.

Ironically, by trying to portray himself again as a devout servant of God who was taken advantage of, while simultaneously trying to distance himself from celebrity, he is trapped into using the very same method of image construction that builds his celebrity. Tender's inability to escape the mechanisms of celebrity comments on its omnipresence in contemporary culture, to the point that nearly everyone is conditioned by it on some level. His use of the black box brings Tender's story full circle both formally and thematically. The novel concludes its 289-page countdown in reverse, moving from his self-construction as the victim of cult religion to his self-construction as a victim of celebrity. Tender's hijacking of the plane offers a subtle commentary on the twenty-first century manifestations of religious fanaticism and terrorism. As a result of the media's lack of distinction between celebrity and notoriety, celebrity offers the enticing reward of posthumous legacy for those willing to commit spectacular acts of destruction. Scarier still is the ever-raising bar of sensationalized coverage that is inherent in the very nature of media and news and that sets the scale for how much it takes to obtain media attention when secular afterlife is the coveted prize.

Conclusion: Celebrity in Contemporary Fiction

Each of the three novels in this study presents a strong statement concerning the negative, detrimental consequences of using celebrity as a basis or model for behaviour. All three of the main protagonists suffer dramatic defeats as a result of their engagement with celebrity. In *Money*, the material trappings of celebrity image are what allow John Self to be duped about his status and conned out of his money in pursuit of fame and fortune. He ends up in exile from America, hopelessly in debt, his dream dispelled. In *Glamorama*, Victor becomes so conditioned by celebrity that the superficialities of celebrity image invade his consciousness and become his personality. As a result, he becomes entirely one-dimensional, a walking set of pop-cultural clichés. A hyperbolic testament to celebrity as disposable commodity, he becomes so shallow that he is literally and easily replaced not just as a celebrity but as a person. His identity usurped, he ends up discarded by friends, family and the media, completely disenfranchised. He stands as a warning to adopting celebrity as a pseudo-identity. In *Survivor*, the chance for a posthumous legacy represented by celebrity drives Tender to hijack and crash a plane in his efforts to construct his own martyrdom and secular replacement for the afterlife.

Thus, in none of these novels does celebrity provide the characters with the solutions that they seek. Socialized by the media's saturation of celebrity in contemporary culture, these characters buy into the myth of celebrity as the pinnacle of success in society. However celebrity's instability is inherent in its functioning according to trends and fashion. This adaptability is at once why celebrity appears so attainable to different people in different contexts, yet why it is also so transitory. This last key

characteristic is one that each of the protagonists in these novels overlooks as each, to varying degrees, temporarily attains celebrity status, but none anticipates its inevitable expiration.

Amis's *Money* provides a warning about the deceptive nature of celebrity image in the context of 1980s American excess. Because celebrities exist in the public consciousness only as attractive media images, there is a danger of misconstruing the material signifiers of celebrity as its entire basis. Fielding capitalizes on this illusion in order to dupe John Self, who, as a result of his confusion between fame and celebrity, already presents a ready-made target. Because he believes that he is chosen by fame as a result of his work, Self ignores all of the conspicuous signs of his manipulation, most notably the unrealistic amounts of credit he is given as rewards for his merit. Fielding distracts Self with the material pursuit of the image and lifestyle of celebrity, legitimizing the fake credit using the conventions of the image, conspicuous material consumption. Self's grand delusion illustrates how celebrity image can deceive people about their status with the pursuit of its clichéd material signifiers. Without wealth and media support, these bankrupt superficialities mean nothing.

Ellis's *Glamorama*, published just before the turn of the twenty-first century, depicts the growth of celebrity influence to the point that simply by participating in society one is always affected by celebrity at the level of identity formation. In *Glamorama*, celebrity becomes a lived identity and a commitment to superficiality that filters the very way in which characters perceive the world. Victor is an example of the detrimental results of this influence. As in Self's case, celebrity serves to distract Victor

from the realities of his circumstances. However, not only does it distract him from his duping, it also distracts him from the world outside celebrity in general, so that he becomes basically unfit for social interaction. All of Victor's most important relationships fall apart as a result of his preoccupation with celebrity and its related superficialities. As a result of his adoption of celebrity image as a personality in the end, he is a less convincing human being than his imposter, who easily mimics Victor's clichéd behaviours. Victor's superficial consciousness makes him a candidate for a terrorist group composed of like-minded, shallow personalities. The relationship in *Glamorama* between celebrity and terrorism provides an extreme example of the superficiality celebrity encourages, where characters value everything only in terms of surfaces, so that they place no value on things of substance, such as human life.

Palahniuk's *Survivor* offers a commentary on celebrity in the twenty-first century, where, as a result of public and media attention, celebrities seemingly become omnipresent in culture and exist as false secular deities. Tender, who goes from cult follower to raising his own massive cult following as a celebrity, highlights this modern role of celebrity as a secular religion. Tender's case demonstrates how celebrity offers an ineffective distraction from the existential issues that conventional religion purports to answer. With the help of the media institutions that construct his image, he appropriates the structure of religion but, instead of spiritual and moral guidance, offers only superficial consumer products and false wisdom concerning trivial matters. In the end, when the artifice of Tender's perversion of religion to further his celebrity is discovered, there is universal backlash. Thus, like his celebrity itself, the celebrity-styled brand of

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