

Introduction

‘Love it or hate it, celebrity is one of the dominant features of modern life’, Fred Inglis pronounces in his book *A Short History of Celebrity* (2010).¹ His statement is undoubtedly true: on television and the internet we are continually confronted with celebrities. Even animals can become stars. People who are not famous want to become famous. Fame, the process of rising above the masses, has become desirable. Hollywood in particular is responsible for an almost infinite procession of stars. It seems as if people can never get enough. Magazines, filled to the brim with celebrity gossip, are devoured all over the world. It is certainly not far-fetched along with sociologist Robert van Krieken to label the western world as a ‘Celebrity Society’: our economic, political and social existence has become organised around celebrities.² This phenomenon is, according to him, an indisputable product of modernity.

‘Famous’ is explained in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: ‘Celebrated in fame or public report; much talked about, renowned’. Two aspects are implied in this definition: a person should be widely known, and he or she should do something that is valued positively. This explanation is, however, not quite satisfactory. Fame is not something that can be acquired independently; it is something that is attributed by cultural institutions or ‘intermediaries’.³ As such, the phenomenon of celebrity is related to what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as attributed ‘symbolic capital’. Art does not have any intrinsic quality. According to Bourdieu the symbolic value thereof is attributed by institutions.

Something similar can be said about celebrity. The German sociologist Max Weber describes charisma as ‘a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.’⁴ Regardless of whether we understand celebrity as charisma or as a form of capital, it is undoubtedly attributed by a public. Fame is not essentially related to merit. Paris Hilton presents a good example. With regard to her it is tempting to recall Daniel J. Boorstin’s well-known definition of celebrity as somebody

who is predominantly 'known for being well-known'.⁵ Certainly not everybody sees Hilton in a positive light. Her extravagant lifestyle and affairs – parties, driving under the influence, a disclosed sex video – gives an impression of superficiality, which many people do not appreciate. Yet, for some reason it is exactly this lifestyle we admire. People seem to relish every controversial incident she gets involved in: celebrities are indeed people whom 'we love to hate'.⁶ Irrespective of how controversial she might be, Paris Hilton is a celebrity because she is regarded as one by her public and is attributed a certain value by them. Thus, compared to Daniel Boorstin's definition of celebrity, preference is given to that of Chris Rojek: 'the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere'.⁷

Function, definition, periodisation

How can the fascination with celebrity be understood? As far as research topics are concerned celebrity and celebrity culture are relatively recent. Even though Boorstin explored the phenomenon as early as 1961 in his work *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, the rapid development of this field of research only started gaining momentum during the last decade with the publication of monographs, the introduction of the *Celebrity Studies Journal* and the initiation of big international conferences devoted to this issue. Not just sociologists, but also media researchers, historians, art historians and literary theorists have become active in the field with many studies published on the theory and history of celebrity.⁸ Many of these studies have indicated a close link between celebrity and the ever-increasing individualisation and globalisation processes, and have claimed that celebrities fulfill significant functions within these developments.

In *Understanding Celebrity* (2004) Graeme Turner discusses the 'parasocial' role of celebrities in our modern capitalist world. Firstly, Turner argues, they provide much-needed compensation for the shrinking number of real-life contacts. This happens, for example, through 'the illusion of intimacy': the feeling that you know a star and that you are emotionally involved with him or her.⁹ The overwhelming response to the death of celebrities such as Elvis Presley, John Lennon, Lady Di, David Bowie and Prince signifies this bond.

Secondly, celebrities play a role in the construction of the social and cultural identities of individuals. According to Turner, they serve as 'a source of gossip, which is itself understood as an important social process through which relationships, identity, and social and cultural norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared'. Thirdly, the fascination is related to the human need for sense making. Celebrities actually become 'mattering maps': methods we implement to create order in the world around us. In this sense celebrity can be related to religion: 'the gap left by the decline in the cultural purchase of organized religion has at least partly been filled by celebrity.' In this regard it is often referred to as 'post-God celebrity'.¹⁰

Van Krieken sees the meaning of celebrity as twofold. In the first instance he regards it as a quality or status by means of which a person attracts attention, and from which he or she – being 'well-known' and 'highly visible' – derives value in at least one public domain. He states that the attention can be either positive or negative. A second element is that a celebrity has higher status than that of 'ordinary' people. This is even stronger in the case of a 'distinctive narrative': a deviant image through which the public and the private person flow together.¹¹ There are countless examples of celebrities who explicitly cultivate an image. For decades Madonna has attracted and is still attracting public attention with extraordinary looks and extravagant behaviour. Michael Jackson was another master in the creation of an eccentric image. More recently Lady Gaga attracted attention by appearing at the 2010 MTV Awards in a dress of raw meat. Celebrities are obviously aware of the necessity to distinguish themselves from the masses.

Even though celebrity culture might seem to be a modern trend, it is certainly not new. There are various opinions about when this phenomenon came into being. Some historians see a connection with the various processes of democratisation throughout history, others with the advent of modernity and mass culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, while most film historians regard the beginning of the twentieth century as the time of origin. Film historian Richard Schickel is of the opinion that, although some talented people enjoyed a certain amount of fame during previous centuries, celebrity came into existence only during the early twentieth century.¹² Graeme Turner also argues 'that the growth of celebrity is historically linked to the spread of the mass media (particularly the visual media)'.¹³

Robert van Krieken has a different view. According to him the celebrity phenomenon was not discovered by Hollywood, but developed through a long historic process. This is in line with the thinking of Leo Braudy whose classic study *The Frenzy of Renown. Fame & Its History* (1986) explores the historical roots of fame.¹⁴ Celebrity is timeless, Braudy says. Albeit in different forms, it has been present ever since classical antiquity. Sharing this opinion, Van Krieken sees similarities in the fame of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Princess Diana despite the different eras they lived in. Both had an aversion to the excessive attention they received. Rousseau, for example, complained about the visitors who came to stare at him as if he were a curiosity – not for his ideas, but for his fame. Lady Di was similarly burdened by the stalking paparazzi. In short, both were acquainted with ‘the experience of celebrity’: being highly visible to a broader public and possessing the capacity to attract relatively large amounts of attention.¹⁵

Van Krieken emphasises an important characteristic of celebrity. Even though many celebrities do have virtues, their exceptional status results from the fact that they generate attention: ‘Layered on top of whatever talents, skills and moral virtues they may have – which is what constitutes their identity as a superhuman football player, an incredibly beautiful and moving actress, or an inspiring singer – is their social function as larger or smaller bundles of attention-capital, and this is what constitutes them as a celebrity.’¹⁶ Obviously previous centuries had known different forms of attention than the present media-flooded internet era in which fame is measured by the number of friends and followers one has on Facebook or Twitter, an era in which somebody can become famous at the drop of a hat (and can lose his or her fame at the same speed).

Star Authors in the Age of Romanticism presents an analysis of how five Dutch poets from the nineteenth century manifested themselves as literary celebrities and how their fans saw them. Although celebrity predominantly relates to film stars, pop idols and sports heroes, it is not exclusively the domain of entertainment and popular culture. Literary history has also produced many celebrities. In fact, one specific form of celebrity is ‘literary celebrity’, which has also become a topic of research. Throughout the centuries there have always been readers who admired authors for their fascinating lives, their unusual opinions or eccentric personalities. Thus, undoubtedly, ‘star authors’ – to use Joe Moran’s term¹⁷ – is a long-standing historical phenomenon. Whichever century they lived in, as cultural entrepreneurs they were perceptive of the tastes of the public and the field in which they operated.¹⁸ Eighteenth-

and nineteenth-century sources of literary celebrity,¹⁹ its close yet tense relation with modernism²⁰ and its fusion with postmodern popular culture have been successfully explored by scholars.²¹ Their research has proved that this is an intriguing form of fame, as widespread as it is perplexing.

Ample examples exist of authors who have acquired international fame in the form of fan clubs, merchandising and continuous media attention. Bret Easton Ellis, Haruki Murakami and J.K. Rowling are examples of contemporary literary celebrities. But there are also many historical examples such as Lord Byron, Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. Yet, literary fame is not a foregone conclusion. There is a long tradition of associating literary prestige with intellectual satisfaction, cultural capital and elitist refinement (high culture), while celebrity, on the other hand, is often related to popular amusement, commercial attributes and mass production (mass culture). This has, however, not prevented high and popular culture from often merging.

From Court culture to mass culture

Even though there were already celebrities in classic antiquity, the birth of modern celebrity culture has a different character. According to Van Krieken various historical developments have influenced the emergence of this culture. He firstly sees a link between fame-cult and the court culture at the royal courts of early modern Europe. Here Van Krieken expands on an earlier work, *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie* (1969) by German sociologist Norbert Elias. From early on some kings have been conscious of the functionality of an image and a public persona, and understood the significance of playing a role. They were cognizant of the fact that spontaneity could undermine a position of power.²² Van Krieken perceives the court culture of then as a microcosm with similar developments and strategies as in contemporary celebrity culture.

Between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries – the period of the Renaissance – court culture started undergoing significant changes, Van Krieken explains. Whereas social mobility was limited during the Middle Ages, the significance of the individual increased during the Renaissance – society started becoming a meritocracy and status was no longer related only to origin or class, but also to individual qualities

or merits such as talent, expertise and charisma. Celebrity too is related to individuality; it only thrives in societies with an appreciation for the individual. Court culture is characterised by a battle for power: the so-called ‘combativeness of court society’, with nobles trying to improve their standing, acquire valuable positions, and gain favour with their superiors. This explains their obsession with image, a form of ‘celebrity rationality’.²³

A second development was the introduction of the art of printing around 1450. Books became less exclusive, information was distributed more quickly, and a public sphere developed around the printed word. The relatively easy distribution of texts and the growth of a reading public paved the way for authors to increase their individuality and fame: ‘print made literature hugely more attractive and effective as a means of achieving celebrity’. The growing circulation of books, newspapers and magazines contributed to the expansion of the ‘world of celebrity’.²⁴

Finally, Van Krieken also mentions the significant influence of changes in the theatre.²⁵ During the Middle Ages theatre had a mainly religious content and function. This started changing in the sixteenth century when, with their own entertainment in mind, monarchs and noblemen began to support the theatre. This was an important stimulus for the breakthrough of secular theatre. From the onset of King Charles II’s reign in England from 1660, women for the first time began to appear on stage. The public was fascinated by the figure of the female actor. Partly as a result of this there was, from the seventeenth century onwards, a rise in interest in the personality of artists. Some playwrights even started writing scripts for one specific actor and audiences became increasingly interested in the lives of theatre stars. Thus a new type of celebrity came into existence.²⁶

Van Krieken concludes: ‘These three intersecting trajectories of historical transformation – the emergence and evolution of court society, the growth of individualism, and the development of printing as a means of mass communication, especially in relation to theatre and art – together established the basic principles and logic of celebrity society’.²⁷ However, it was developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that moved celebrity culture to another level.

As with other areas of culture, celebrity too was influenced by industrialisation. Cities developed, rural areas and small towns became urbanised, the population expanded and a larger public needed amusement. Through the introduction of trains, steamships, telegraphy

and new print techniques the circulation of information took place much more quickly. The number of newspapers and magazines increased. With the introduction of photography around 1840 the democratisation of celebrity was given an important impulse. Through this medium celebrities had ample opportunity to manifest themselves, and the public could now see what they looked like in real life.

By the start of the twentieth century the film industry too became part of this scenario, and in 1911 the first studio was set up in Hollywood. Gradually a professional infrastructure developed, a 'field of celebrity'. Thus, an economic dimension was added to the celebrity culture. A definite link developed between fame and money.²⁸ In the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, and through the gradual emergence of an autonomous literary field, a simultaneous but 'reverse economic' development took place, with authors turning away from the market.²⁹ The thought was that the value of arts and literature could not be expressed in money, and they should not function as a source of income. For a long time cultural life scorned any commercial tendency in the arts.

During the early twentieth century, particularly in the period after the First World War, the phenomenon of the film star emerged on the social scene. The film created a sphere of intimacy during a time when people had become disillusioned with the increasingly anonymous and fragmented nature of human existence.³⁰ Film stars became magical attractions: 'Cinema stars ... offered the reassurance of individual recognisability at a time when that was proving increasingly hard to find.'³¹

A new generation of political leaders also happily exploited the possibilities offered by the new media to enhance their fame. The narrative of the twentieth century is, according to Fred Inglis, about dictators such as Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin becoming celebrities through the exploitation of the media and propaganda.³² Mussolini created an image of himself as a strong, passionate Italian – a showcase of masculinity and leadership. But it was Adolf Hitler who excelled in taking advantage of modern resources in creating an image. By using film, photography and radio he brought the glorification of his person-focused Führer cult closer to the people than ever before: right into their lounges.

Hitler is a good example of how, in modern times, one can become a public figure – in his case through his Führer image – and how a clear distinction between the private and the public figure fades: he played who he was and he was whom he played. For this he made use of the most modern resource available: the film. While Julius Caesar gave his subjects



In the queue at Berchtesgaden to see Adolf Hitler, 1934 (bpk/Bayerische Staatsbibliothek/Heinrich Hoffmann).

gladiator games, the German dictator gave his people the spectacle of Nazi culture. His role as a modern messiah formed a significant part of it.³³ In his speeches he very strategically employed particular mannerisms, silences and voice techniques. Propaganda films like Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935) helped in propagating his image as Führer, a person with superhuman stature.

That Hitler's fans regarded him as a celebrity was obvious. Hitler oaks were planted, bakeries sold Hitler cakes, florists sold Hitler roses and parents named their children after the dictator. According to the historian and Hitler biographer Volker Ulrich, 'a lively trade developed around Führer-busts; Hitler images adorned beer mugs, porcelain tiles, ashtrays, cards, fountain pen holders and other everyday objects. The collectors' pictures that came with cigarettes were particularly popular.' Hitler portraits, preferably with signature, were also immensely popular. Day and night a continuous flow of fan mail was delivered to the State Chancellery, and on his birthday he was flooded with gifts from admirers – from valuable paintings to home-knitted socks. Hitler's country home at Obersalzberg became a place of pilgrimage. Thousands of pilgrims travelled there hoping to catch a glimpse of the Führer. An observer remarked: 'In silence they passed by with expressions from which it was clear that it was one of the greatest moments of their lives.' Wherever

Hitler made an appearance he was revered like a star, surrounded by masses of admirers.³⁴

That the worship of Hitler took on an almost religious character became obvious in the symbols (the swastika), the mass rallies, the torchlight marches, the rabble-rousing parades and songs, and of course in Hitler presenting himself as a charismatic messiah. The Führer cult proves the close resemblance between celebrity and religion. Both are concerned with the creation and appreciation of charisma. The glorification of a celebrity is very similar to the worshipping of a deity. Fans as well as religious believers are fascinated by places that are in a significant way related to the life of a star or a saint, such as a place of birth, house of death, or other symbolic location – take for example the grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes or the Graceland estate of Elvis Presley. Referring to this phenomenon, Chris Rojek writes: ‘Cemeteries that contain the remains of celebrities are also popular tourist attractions, just as cathedrals housing the graves of saints have been popular places of pilgrimage.’³⁵ Common, too, is the glorification of relics – whether it is a piece of bone or holy water, a signature, a lock of hair or a book with a dedication. Both religion and celebrity-cult maintain an unequal relationship between fan and star.³⁶ Both saint and celebrity are inaccessible: the precise reason for their allure.³⁷

Since the Second World War modern media have performed an increasingly significant role in the creation of celebrity. The possibilities presented by television have proven to be particularly powerful, and more so the internet, which has made it even easier to become famous. Nevertheless, a book about *Star Authors in the Age of Romanticism* does not require an in-depth exploration of these recent developments. From here the focus will be on the nineteenth century, a period during which poets were regarded as inimitable geniuses.

Romantic fame

Around 1800 there was a substantial growth in the interest in celebrities. The status of the artist changed. People became fascinated with his extraordinary nature: ‘a highly spiritual being, separate from the debased everyday world.’³⁸ These changes coincided with new ideas emerging at the end of the eighteenth century. The writer no longer lived an isolated life, like a saint in the desert, but became a known figure with a public image.³⁹

International studies have pointed out a parallel between the increasing fascination with celebrities and the commencement of Romanticism.⁴⁰ The latter brought about a change, which still has an influence on our thinking about art and literature. The emphasis on rationality during the Age of Enlightenment made way for the supremacy of feeling and imagination. Other characteristics of Romanticism include artistic inspiration, the importance of originality and authenticity, desire for freedom, non-conformity and the idea of the artist as genius. A shift from mimesis to expression also took place – true art was no longer seen as an imitation of reality, but rather as an expression of feeling. M.H. Abrams used the famous metaphor of the mirror and the lamp to typify this shift: initially writers only reflected the light, but during Romanticism they themselves became the lamp.⁴¹

For the major part of the eighteenth century poetry was related to craftsmanship, something that could be learned or acquired. The poet had a social function and a social responsibility. During disasters, such as the Earthquake of Lisbon (1755), the poet fulfilled the task that was expected of him. From the end of the eighteenth century, though, the poet was increasingly seen as an original and inimitable genius, whose talents were not learned but innate, and who was capable of extraordinary achievements.⁴² Thus, the literature of the nineteenth century gradually developed a metaphysical dimension.

The onset of Romanticism started in Europe around 1800. The French Revolution and its aftermath unleashed a landslide. Under the influence of the political changes, an aesthetic revolution took off. Starting in Germany, the genius cult and stardom also spread to other countries. According to David Higgins: 'by the end of the eighteenth century, genius had become a key term across Europe in aesthetics ... In particular, its valorization of originality and self-expression ... gave writers the courage to experiment with literary form and content. Genius was one of the concepts that fuelled the cultural-revolution, which we now call Romanticism.'⁴³

During Romanticism the uniqueness of the artist was emphasised. William Marx provides a good example of the changed position of the author in his book *L'adieu à la littérature* (2005). When, in 1820, the English critic Charles Lamb for the first time saw John Milton's manuscripts with all their corrections, he was overcome with a feeling of having been deceived. He had always thought that Milton's verses erupted from his soul and could not bear to see them like that 'as if the words

were mortal and could arbitrarily be changed or moved around'. The substantial changes that had taken place in the ideas about the nature of literature are evident when considering that only a couple of decades prior to this, Samuel Johnson expressed his admiration for Milton's industrious labour.⁴⁴ Thus, in the nineteenth century the poet is often seen as a prophet and his poetry as an outpouring of the most individual feelings. Charles Baudelaire's metaphor of the poet as an albatross that should not be constrained in spreading his wings and rising to a higher realm is well known. The Scottish literary critic and scholar Thomas Carlyle asserts: 'Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning. Fundamentally indeed they are still the same; in this most important respect especially, that they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe'. According to Carlyle, both Dante and Shakespeare are apt examples of the convergence of these qualities in one person. Referring to the latter, he writes: 'I feel that there is actually a kind of sacredness in the fact of such a man being sent into this Earth. Is he not an eye to us all; a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light?'⁴⁵

Such a rise in status was also attributed to the writers of the time. In previous centuries an author wrote to amuse a king, but in the nineteenth century a metamorphosis took place: the 'servant of princes became the light of the world.'⁴⁶ His position became more crucial, as well as the imperative to distinguish himself from the rest. The modern artist's urge for distinction, as far as image and behaviour are concerned, is closely connected to Romanticism. In other words, celebrity culture is related to the modern notion of authorship. During the nineteenth century it became standard that the position of the artist is above that of ordinary people and that the artist should distinguish him- or herself socially and culturally by means of an exceptional lifestyle and a particular image. Tom Mole says: 'By the end of the Romantic period, one could meaningfully speak of a celebrity or a star as a special kind of person with a distinct kind of public profile.'⁴⁷

Mole also asserts that, although earlier centuries had known famous people, celebrity culture started to become a reality only in the nineteenth century. According to him, Rousseau was famous but he was no celebrity. Celebrity status requires three conditions: an individual, an industry and a public. Lord Byron is the one author who is generally considered, also by Tom Mole, as the first literary celebrity.⁴⁸ Fred Inglis argues: 'Perhaps we can say ... that it is during Byron's brief lifetime – he died at thirty-six in 1824 – that charm and its distorted and magnified echo,

glamour, become public values, and what is more, values looked for as attributes of celebrity.⁷⁴⁹ Byron's rebellious and revolutionary personality, combined with a scandal- and affair-ridden life was considered unusual. It spoke to the imagination in the same way as his self-inflicted exile did and his legendary death during the Greek War of Independence in 1824.⁵⁰ Likewise, Leo Braudy regards Lord Byron as the first author to be a product of 'the new machine of literary celebrity'.⁵¹

According to Mole a new type of fame arose with Byron. Though somebody like Laurence Sterne certainly enjoyed a form of fame, he lived in a pre-industrial period and can therefore not be regarded as a true celebrity: 'Although the self-presentation of individuals such as Sterne ... included celebrity characteristics, it required the growth of a modern industry of production, promotion and distribution, and a modern audience – massive, anonymous, socially diverse and geographically distributed – before these elements combined to form a celebrity culture in the modern sense.'⁵² Byron became a celebrity because he succeeded in creating a branded identity. Not only was this related to his life, but according to Mole also to the techniques employed in his poetry. By suggesting a very special and personal connection between reader and author in his poems, Byron established a remarkably effective 'hermeneutic of intimacy'. Also the reader is given the impression that the poet and his persona are one and the same person, and thereby prompted to read Byron's work as if it were autobiographical.

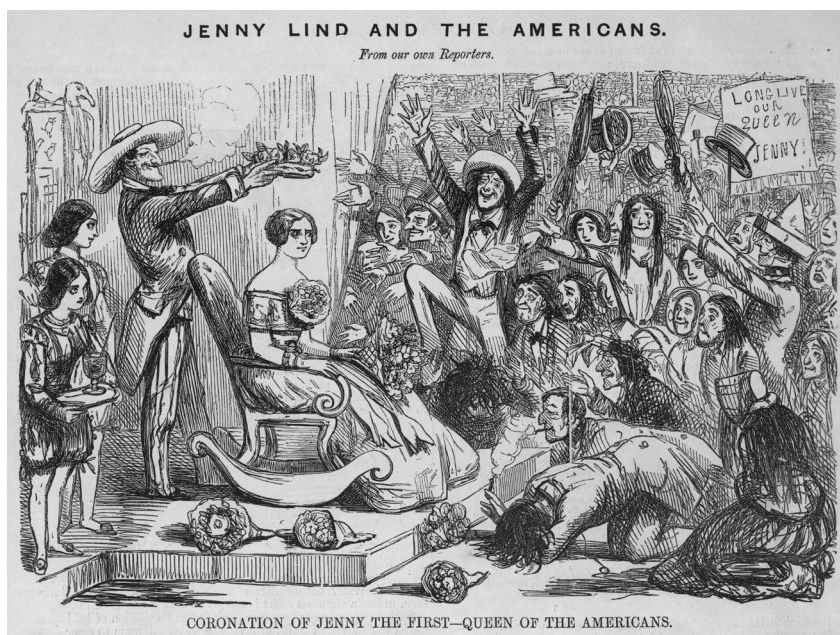
During the nineteenth century celebrity culture started spreading widely. It was not limited to literature but also manifested in other areas of culture. Actors, for example, were exceptionally efficient in obtaining star status. When in 1811 Napoleon attended a performance in Amsterdam, he brought along his own actors from the *Comédie Française*, amongst them François Joseph Talma and Catherine-Joséphine Duchesnois, the most renowned actor and actress in Europe.

Famous singers also emerged, such as Farinelli, the eighteenth century soprano castrato from Italy. Another example is Jenny Lind, the Swedish nightingale, famous in Europe and the USA for both her voice and her looks. Various forms of fan culture developed around her. During her life she was often written about in the press, but her fame continued also after her death: ships, streets, hospitals and even an island were called after her. Also musicians acquired star status, for example Niccolò Paganini, the Italian violin virtuoso who became known as the 'demonic violinist'. His audiences were fascinated by his self-invented image of the

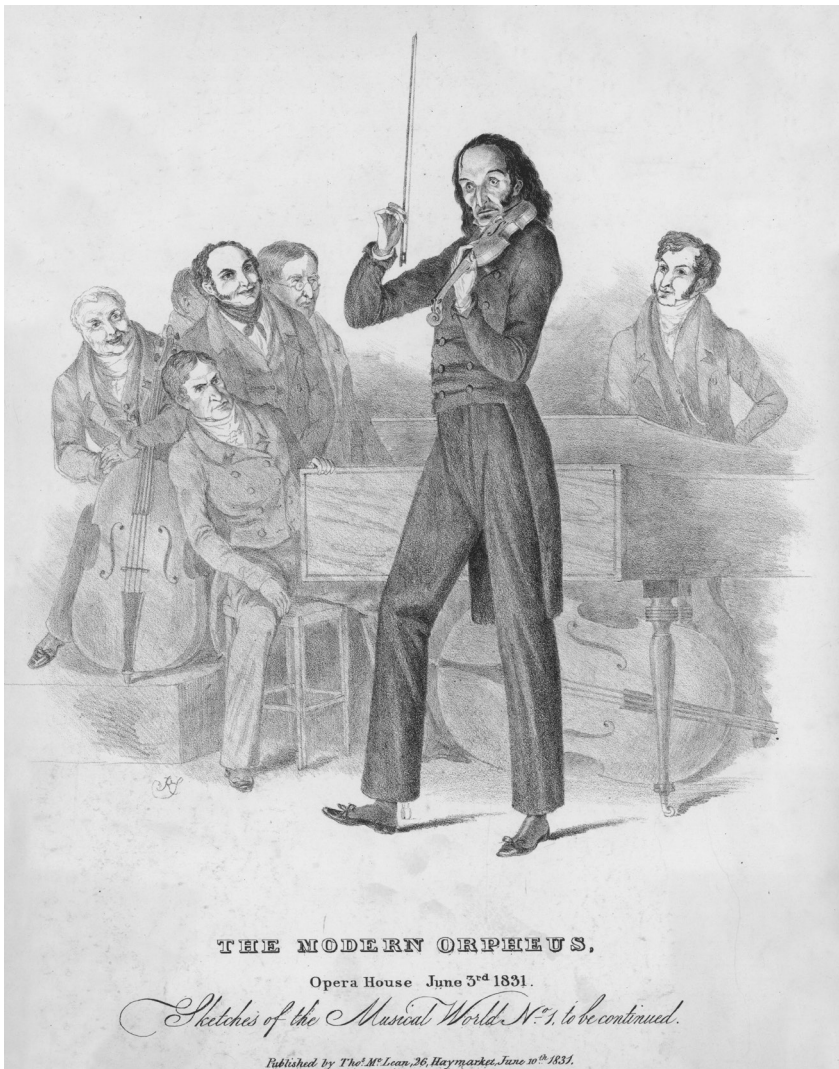
suffering artist, which he enhanced by painting his face white and giving nocturnal concerts at cemeteries. The composers Frédéric Chopin and Hector Berlioz were also known for their striking performing personas, which became the subject of stories and gossip.⁵³ The best-known example, however, is the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, around whom a real ‘Lisztomania’ developed. Also the visual arts were influenced by the genius cult. That celebrity culture was a widespread phenomenon during the nineteenth century cannot be denied.

The invention of the fan

During Romanticism the position of the author changed, but also that of the public with the phenomenon of the fan and associated fandom coming into existence. Mark Duffett, author of *Understanding Fandom* (2013), defines the concept as ‘a sociocultural phenomenon largely associated with modern capitalist societies, electronic media, mass culture and public performance’.⁵⁴ In general it is regarded as a (not always positive) symptom of modernity. Joli Jensen remarks: ‘Fandom,



The Swedish singer Jenny Lind (1820–1887) honoured in America, 1850 (Mary Evans Picture Library).



The Italian violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) (Mary Evans Picture Library).

especially “excessive” fandom, is defined as a form of psychological compensation, an attempt to make up for all that modern life lacks Fans ... seek contact with famous people in order to compensate for their own inadequate lives’.⁵⁵

In the theory of the phenomenon of ‘fandom’ the fan is seen not as a passive consumer, but rather as an active participant. Admirers dress like their favourite characters, attend fan conventions and produce their

own creative texts (fan fiction). In this regard John Fiske talks about the 'textual productivity' of fans.⁵⁶ All these 'fan practices' are characterised by communality: the fan is an active part of a community of kindred spirits. In earlier periods, such as the nineteenth century, fan culture was less institutionalised and much less the work of a collective. This is evident from the examples presented in *Star Authors in the Age of Romanticism*.

Everybody knows somebody who is a fan of a pop star or an actor, but the admirer of an author will not as readily regard him- or herself as a fan. Whether literary fan culture really exists is a valid question. There seems to be a big gap between literature and fandom, and equivalently between high and popular culture. Literature forms part of high culture, meant for connoisseurs. Fan culture, on the other hand, seems to be more prevalent in popular culture and is characterised by immense idolisation, consumption behaviour and hysteria. It is not without reason that Pierre Bourdieu in *La Distinction* (1979) places the writers Bertolt Brecht and Franz Kafka on one side of the spectrum of social positions and Charles Aznavour and Brigitte Bardot on the other.⁵⁷ A literary fan is, according to Bourdieu, a *contradictio in terminis*. This, however, does not provide a true reflection of reality, where various forms of literary fan culture exist.

Another bone of contention is between the historic and modern views of fandom. According to some researchers fandom is a typical twentieth- and twenty-first century phenomenon. It is, however, certainly not new. Various studies have pointed out that early forms of this phenomenon existed in previous centuries. As early as in the sixteenth century, for instance, the dwellings of the fourteenth century poet, Petrarch, had become places of literary pilgrimage where people could admire his chair or embalmed cat. Likewise, the house of Erasmus in Rotterdam had, from early on, been a place of pilgrimage.⁵⁸

Whereas the term 'fan' already popped up in seventeenth century England as an abbreviation for fanatic, the phenomenon of fandom only really took off in the nineteenth century. To quote Duffett: 'In the early part of the nineteenth century romantic poets like Lord Byron established a new benchmark in literary popularity.'⁵⁹ Byron, for example, received fan mail and had his own groupies. Walter Scott too was a literary attraction during his lifetime.⁶⁰ The same is true of the German star author Goethe.⁶¹ Some other authors acquired fans only after their deaths, whereby an early death counted in their favour. During his life Percy Bysshe Shelley was mainly notorious for his affairs and his openly declared denial of God.

In 1822 he drowned during a sailing trip off the coast of Italy. It was only after his death that he obtained star status. Shelley's poetry was read as a testimony of his innermost feelings: 'Such a model of reading generated sensations of unusual closeness to the poet.'⁶²

With the emergence of 'the fan' in the nineteenth century new forms of this culture came into existence. Nowadays on eBay one can come across objects like Britney Spears's chewing gum, Marilyn Monroe's white dress or the used underpants of Michael Jackson. The origin of this practice can be found in the nineteenth century: 'the period swirled with talk about crazes, manias, idols and idol-worshippers, enthusiasts, and devotees.'⁶³ The fans of that time wanted to get hold of first editions, manuscripts, signatures, portraits, figures, souvenirs, objects and paraphernalia of and about their literary heroes. Admirers sent letters to their idols, visited their houses or the places they wrote about, imitated their images and styles of dress, and sometimes even fantasised about becoming a friend or a beloved of the particular celebrity.⁶⁴

For a fan nothing is more precious than to meet the admired celebrity. A particular form thereof is literary tourism: 'the interconnected practices of visiting and marking sites associated with writers and their work.'⁶⁵ This often entails fans travelling to meet their idol or paying a visit to a place of significance in his or her life.⁶⁶ In her study *The Literary Tourist* (2006) Nicola L. Watson mentions the following about the nineteenth century: 'This period saw the practice of visiting places associated with particular books in order to savor text, place and their interrelations grow into a commercially significant phenomenon, witnessing the rise of William Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon, Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford, Robert Burns's Alloway and the Brontë sisters' Haworth, amongst other flourishing sites of native literary pilgrimage.'⁶⁷

Ample examples exist of literary tourism in the present as well as the past. Even during his lifetime Goethe's Haus am Frauenplan in Weimar was an attraction. Local visitors and visitors from abroad travelled there to catch a glimpse of the supreme poet. Similarly Missolonghi, the Greek city where Byron died in 1824, attracted many tourists. Also Abbotsford House, the home of Walter Scott, became a well-known attraction. This estate, refashioned by the author as a medieval castle, became a place of commemoration. Many visitors passed by during Scott's lifetime, but it became an even bigger tourist attraction after his death in 1832 – a Graceland *avant la lettre*. As Ann Rigney points out in *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (2012) Scott tourism gradually became more and more



Abbotsford House, the residence of Walter Scott (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

commercialised. Steamboats and trains filled with Scott fans regularly travelled to Abbotsford.⁶⁸

A related phenomenon is that characters from books start to live a life of their own. Also places written about in books, even fictional places, become objects of literary tourism. Thus thousands of Walter Scott readers went in search of non-existent places in the Scottish landscape brought to life in the novels of Scott.⁶⁹ The Lottehaus in Wetzlar, where Goethe gained his experience for writing *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* (1774), already in the early nineteenth century became a destination for admirers of the author. This phenomenon still exists. In London one can visit the house of Sherlock Holmes at 221b Baker Street to admire his violin, pipes and other objects. Despite the fictional nature of this location, thousands of fans visit the place annually. More recently, visitors have been flocking to see places from Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books (and films). Stijn Reijnders, who has done research about media tourism, typifies these places as 'places of the imagination', a free adaptation of Pierre Nora's concept 'lieux de mémoire'. According to him these places fulfill a specific function as physical reference-points of a mental phenomenon. The visiting of places related to an author, book or film is in some ways similar to religious pilgrimages from previous centuries.⁷⁰

The Dutch dynamic

To what extent did a romantic celebrity culture, comparable to elsewhere, exist in the Netherlands of the nineteenth century? And, more specifically, which sociocultural characteristics were typical of the Netherlands? In other words, what does the Dutch dynamic of literary celebrity consist of?

Star Authors in the Age of Romanticism explores the different manifestations of the literary celebrity culture of the nineteenth century Netherlands, a topic that has not yet received much attention. This book will present an analysis of five authors, in their time highly acclaimed and still well known today: Willem Bilderdijk, Hendrik Tollens, Nicolaas Beets, François HaverSchmidt (Piet Paaltjens) and Eduard Douwes Dekker (Multatuli). The first four were poets, but the last one, although he also wrote poetry, has always been better known as a prose writer. Yet, as the most venerated Dutch author of the nineteenth century Multatuli should not be omitted. Another reason for his inclusion in this book is his poetic vision of authorship: even though he wrote prose, he personally saw himself as a poet and his contemporaries also regarded him as such. All these authors count as exponents of the view of the romantic genius. Furthermore, all of them sported a conspicuous, often eccentric and publically recognisable image.

In the study of literary celebrity two fields of research can be discerned. On the one hand there is an interest in the aspect of production: the way in which authors construct their own images and thereby contribute to their own fame. On the other hand there is the aspect of the public. In this book these two perspectives merge. Each chapter looks at the self-representation of the poet. How does he manifest himself and how does he structure his public image? But the admirer too has a central position. Which forms of fan culture manifested in relation to each author?

The primary work of the author is predominantly used to find answers to the first question. Critical texts and ego-documents are also used for the analysis. Research about the self-representation of the authors cannot sidestep the field of self-fashioning, a term introduced by the American literary theorist and historian Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance self-fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (1980). In this work he points out how, in early modern times, a person's identity was constructed in relation to his or her environment. This construction had two sides: a self-regulating one (through the author) and a sociocultural one

(controlled by the collective): Greenblatt's theory is especially applicable to the Renaissance, a period during which authors predominantly wrote in response to the wishes of a patron, a practice that in the nineteenth century had become more or less non-existent. However, even during that time a complex relationship still existed between 'self-regulating' and 'sociocultural'.⁷¹ In the meantime Greenblatt's theory has become more nuanced: behaviour is not self-regulated, nor sociocultural, but both at the same time.⁷² Recently, the theory of the Swiss scholar Jérôme Meizoz has become particularly influential. He invented the concept 'posture' with its double meaning: it refers to self-representation of authors by themselves ('auto-representation'), but also to the representation of authors by others ('hetero-representation').

As mentioned, each chapter will also focus on the aspect of the public within the context of the nineteenth century, the period during which the phenomenon of fandom took off. What forms of fan culture were taking place? Was literary tourism already in existence? What kinds of stories about poets were told? Anecdotes are, of course, a significant part of the process of mythologising, constituting both the cause and the consequence of fame.⁷³ Where relevant, anti-fan culture will also be looked at.⁷⁴ Sometimes famous people evoke hatred and are looked at negatively. Also material aspects of fan culture will come into the picture. How active were, for example, the hunters and collectors of signatures and other paraphernalia? Who wanted to be the owner of a lock of hair and why? Were coins minted, statues erected and commemorations organised? And how did individuals view famous poets?

The aim of this book is to map the literary celebrity culture that existed in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century. By means of five case studies, one on each author, I will explore to what extent the Netherlands had a unique form of celebrity culture. This will be explored in relation to the international context, especially that of the Anglo-Saxon literary world. What sociocultural factors were typically Dutch? *Star Authors in the Age of Romanticism* will thus offer an overview not only of the history, but also of the specific Dutch dynamics of literary celebrity.