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9 The Icarus Complex

The myth of Icarus is the most powerful Ancient Greek parable of hubris. In a bid to escape exile in Crete, Icarus uses wings made from wax and feathers made by his father, the Athenian master craftsman Daedalus. But the sin of hubris causes him to pay no heed to his father's warnings. He flies too close to the sun, so burning his wings, and falls into the sea and drowns.

The parable is often used to highlight the perils of pride and the reckless, impulsive behaviour that it fosters. The frontier nature of celebrity culture perpetuates and enlarges narcissistic characteristics in stars and stargazers. Impulsive behaviour and recklessness are commonplace. They figure prominently in the entertainment pages and gossip columns of newspapers and magazines, prompting commentators to conjecture about the contagious effects of celebrity culture upon personal health and the social fabric. Do celebrities sometimes get too big for their boots and get involved in social and political issues that are beyond their competence? Can one posit an Icarus complex in some types of celebrity behaviour?

This chapter addresses these questions by examining celanthropy and its discontents (notably Madonna's controversial adoption of two Malawi children); celebrity health advice (Tom Cruise and Scientology); and celebrity pranks (the Sachsgate phone calls involving Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross). Frontierism involves many superstars in sincerely believing that they are living at the cutting edge of existence, beyond the experience of ordinary mortals. When this is allied to megalomaniacal tendencies of celebrity inflation to save the world, proselytize or engage in brinkmanship, the result can end in the pratfall of the star.

Celanthropy and its discontents

There is no reason to doubt that people in need have benefited from the humanitarian labour of superstars like Bono, Michael Stipe, Annie Lennox, Madonna, Naomi Watts, Angelina Jolie, Bianca Jagger and George Clooney, to name but a few. But celanthropy has also generated criticism that celebrities are often ill-informed and overstep the mark with their can-do attitude.

We have already referred to Paul Theroux's (2006) condemnation of Bono's African aid programme for privileging publicity-sensitive relief over more durable reforms of infrastructure. Geldof and Bono are portrayed as blinkered modern-day

Robin Hoods, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, but fleeced in the process by unscrupulous criminal elements in the developing world. Geldof and Bono have strongly denied these allegations, insisting that aid money has been properly distributed to target groups. But, given their many other artistic and business interests, it is not difficult to see why charges of absentee management are regularly laid at their feet.¹

There is also a criticism in the undertow surrounding the 'one world' ideology that supports Third World relief. Critics regard it to be spurious, alleging that the relationship repeats old colonial patterns of affluent countries imperiously imposing solutions upon native peoples. In sum, who are white, privileged superstars to speak for 'the world'?

That the economically advanced world produces celebrity know-alls and celebrity aid packages that are insufficiently informed about local conditions is a familiar complaint. In 2007 such a complaint was levelled at Oprah Winfrey following allegations of sexual abuse at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls, which she founded for underprivileged children in Johannesburg. Oprah, who herself came from a background in which abuse figured, invested £22 million from her charitable foundation in the school.

The Cape media carried local complaints that unemployed labour was prevented from cleaning and kitchen jobs at the school, and the police objected to security being provided by private firms. The insinuation was that Winfrey, who is known as 'Mama Oprah' in the region, had unwittingly created a gated community in which unscrupulous individuals might easily shield sexual misconduct from public scrutiny. The dorm matron at the centre of scandal was eventually dismissed. But Oprah suffered similar complaints of absentee management in 2009 when seventeen girls in the school were suspended after charges of sexual harassment.

The involvement of the celebrity elite in education programmes in the emerging and developing world is particularly vulnerable to the accusation of cultural imprinting. Subjecting native pupils to principles of Western education, even if it takes account of sensitivities to local conditions, is regarded by some commentators as being colonialism in modern dress. The issue is complex and full of contradictions and ironies.

Oprah's academy would not exist without funding from her charitable trust. It provides opportunities for the empowerment of pupils and social mobility that the South African state does not afford. More widely, her involvement creates publicity for aid to Africa that has a multiplier effect in terms of charity donations and government aid funding. However, when celebrity benefactors based in the economically advanced Western world get involved in the affairs of the Third World, it is inevitably seen in some quarters as the intrusion of privilege. For every one that

welcomes the investment as pure, disinterested chivalry, others smell the scent of pampered narcissism and naked self-glorification.

The same could be said of celebrities who adopt children from the developing world, which raises some very thorny issues. Take the contrasting cases of Angelina Jolie and Madonna:

1. Angelina Jolie and multinational adoption

Angelina Jolie's charity work is legendary. In 2001 she was named a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Goodwill Ambassador. This has involved her in field missions to more than 20 countries, including Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Cambodia, Pakistan, Ecuador, Thailand, Kosovo, Kenya, Namibia, Sri Lanka, North Causcasus, Jordan, Egypt, New Delhi, Costa Rica, Chad, Syria, Iraq and Haiti. Jolie has a reputation for personally bearing all of the costs of UNHCR missions and sharing accommodation with UNHCR staff.

The Jolie-Pitt Foundation is dedicated to eradicating extreme poverty, protecting natural resources and conserving wildlife. It has provided financial support for *Doctors Without Borders*, a humanitarian organization founded in France in 1971, to help victims of neglect as a result of circumstances such as catastrophes, epidemics, malnutrition and exclusion from health care.

Jolie also chairs the Education Partnership for Children of Conflict, part of the Clinton Global Initiative dedicated to provide support for children affected by conflict. Since 2006 the Clinton Initiative has brought together over 100 former heads of state, fourteen Nobel Peace Prize winners, scores of major global CEOs, prominent philanthropists, directors of non-government organizations and leading members of the press.

In addition she has also supported the Clean Streets project of Wyclef Jean to improve conditions in New Orleans after the hurricane and Haiti after the earthquake.

In 2003 she was the first recipient of the Citizen of the World Award given by the UN Correspondents Association to those who have made a significant contribution to global relief. Two years later she was awarded the Global Humanitarian Award by the UN Association of the USA for her work with UNHCR and with refugees.

The strength of the charity contribution made by Angelina Jolie is not in doubt. It is significant and most commendable. The critical issue lies elsewhere and it has to do with the charge of overstepping the mark by allegedly using fame to create 'designer families'.

In 2002 Jolie adopted her first child, seven-month-old Maddox Chivan. He was born as Rath Vibol in Cambodia and lived in an orphanage. Jolie decided on the adoption while filming *Tomb Raider* and making a UNCHR field trip.

Three years later she adopted a six-month Ethiopian girl, Zahara Marley (originally named Yemsrach by her mother), from an orphanage in Addis Ababa.

In 2007, she adopted a three-year-old abandoned child from Vietnam, Pax Thien (initially named Pham Quang Sang).

The media has criticized Jolie for overstepping the mark between humanitarian work and motherhood. It is one thing to work tirelessly on behalf of the races of mankind, but it is another to seek to combine these races, with their different histories and cultural traditions, in one family unit. Jolie's role as a mother to her adopted children is not an issue. It is the ambition of creating a multicultural mix in one family unit that is regarded as the ill-judged expression of star power. But the criticism directed against Jolie pales into insignificance when compared with the media furore over Madonna's ventures in adoption in Malawi.

2. Madonna, Raising Malawi and adoption

Like Jolie, Madonna is widely celebrated as a major celebrity humanitarian. She has supported the Afghanistan Relief Organization, American Foundation for AIDS Research, BID 2 BEAT AIDS, Bony Pony Ranch, Charity Projects Entertainment Fund, Children In Need, Children of Peace, Live Earth, Make-A-Wish Foundation, Millennium Promise Alliance, Millennium Villages, MusiCares, Partners in Health, Raisa Gorbachev Foundation, Sentebale, Sweet Relief Musicians Fund, Treatment Action Campaign, UNICEF and the UN Millennium Project.

Her most high-profile campaign is Raising Malawi, a non-profit organization she founded in 2006 with Michael Berg. The charity is dedicated to providing vulnerable children and caregivers with nutritious food, clothing, secure shelter, formal education, targeted medical care, emotional care and psychosocial support. Madonna matches every dollar raised through corporate, community and academic support.

In 2006 she adopted one-year-old David Banda from Malawi. Human rights organizations objected on the grounds that that Malawi law forbids inter-country adoption. But Madonna's legal team dismissed the residency requirement of petitioning adoptive parents as 'archaic'. They argued that in a globalized world these requirements are invalid because the rights of the child living with non-domiciled parents can be guaranteed by bilateral agreements. Further, the lifestyle that Madonna was offering David was so manifestly superior that it nullified local protests that the adoption law was being willfully circumvented.

Three years later the Malawi Supreme Court approved her application to adopt four-year-old Chifundo 'Mercy' James. Her original application was again rejected over residency issues. But on appeal, the ruling was rescinded. Madonna's legal team portrayed Madonna as a humanitarian committed to the nation and demonstrated

that her parenting of David had fulfilled the requirements of the two-year mandatory probation period set by the law. Patricia Kaliati, the Malawi Information Minister was reported to back the appeal because Madonna had been 'good' to the country by donating millions of dollars via her Raising Malawi charity (Singh, 2009).

The adoptions of David Banda and Chifundo 'Mercy' James raise the same difficult questions as Angelina Jolie's adoptions of Maddox Chivan, Zahara Marley and Pax Thien. Four points must be made.

First, there is the question of celebrity parenting overriding the rights of the surviving biological parents and extended family. The traditional defence of celebrity parents petitioning for adoption in the developing world is that adoption is the salvation of the child. Thus, Madonna is quoted in the media as justifying the adoption of David Banda on the grounds that it 'helps one child escape an extreme life of hardship, poverty and, in many cases, death' (Lamont, 2006). Putting aside the vexed question of arbitrarily 'saving' one child while leaving thousands at risk, it is one thing for wealthy celebrities to adopt children from orphanages in developing countries in the grip of famine and disease. However, this does not mean that the child is exactly being rescued from surviving biological parents and the extended family, who often live below the poverty line.

Africa News reports figures from the Ministry of Information which indicate that Malawi has nearly 2 million orphans, 500,000 of which are roaming the streets surviving on donations and child prostitution: <http://www.afriquejet.com/news.africa-news/madonna-sparks-adoption-law-changes> [03.04.2009]. In this context, the press quotes from the biological father of David Banda that he never relinquished parental rights over David, but was concerned above all, to protect him, seem perfectly rational. He maintains that he put his baby son in an orphanage because he did not have the means to care for him. His intention was to fetch him and take him back when his employment circumstances changed. However, this defence did not carry the day in the courts. Similarly, Madonna's adoption of Chifundo was opposed by the child's biological father and grandmother, but their objections were overruled.

Given the differences in wealth between a petitioning celebrity of Madonna's stature and the poverty of the surviving biological parent and extended family, it is difficult to view celebrity adoptions in the developing world as anything other than a David and Goliath battle. Madonna's high-profile Raising Malawi charity is clearly appreciated by the cash-strapped government, not least because it massively raises global awareness of Malawi's plight. It may not provide children with the same material opportunities that Madonna provides for David Banda and Chifundo 'Mercy' James, but it undoubtedly gives relief and support to thousands of children in need. Against this, the impoverished biological parents have only the hand of

natural justice to play, i.e. that the laws of nature dictate that it is right for the child to remain with their biological relations.

Second, there is the issue of the rights of the adopted child. Western countries have a strict code of conduct that prohibits the media from using the fame, notoriety or position of a parent as the sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life. In the United Kingdom, the Press Complaints Commission protects children under 16 from being photographed on matters concerning their welfare without parental consent. These considerations were observed when David Banda was taken to Heathrow Airport in London. His face was covered and he was guarded from the press by a nanny and security staff. In Malawi the situation was very different. Madonna was photographed carrying the child on her back, apparently indifferent to the intrusion of photographers (Lamont, 2006). The inference is that the photographs in Malawi were material in influencing legal and press opinion in favour of the adoption process.

Madonna's adoption of Mercy also involved the questionable use of photographic propaganda as an adjunct to the legal proceedings.

Martin Parr (2009) describes Madonna's release of a photographic image of herself in sepia with soft pink hue brushed onto the image of her skin in contrast to the audience of black Malawians in the background, holding Mercy, as 'a soft version of propaganda'. Comparing it with the use of black and white photographs to heighten consciousness about famine and hardship in the colour supplements, Parr contends that the image was designed to make Madonna look romantic and idealistic. The photograph conveys a saintly iconic image of Madonna, which indeed seemed to exert a positive influence on the judicial adoption process.

Stars have an international publicity machine that helps them get their own way. This breeds disquiet among the media and the public that star power produces quick fixes with states that want aid and publicity, which override due legal process.

Third, there is the question of the precedent set by celebrity adoption in developing countries. Many human rights organizations object to the relaxation or elimination of residency requirements in adoption on the grounds that it inadvertently paves the way for trafficking in children. High-profile celebrity adoptions may be exploited by traffickers as the pretext for the clandestine induction of children into trafficking routes. UNICEF estimates that up to 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. The majority are bundled into cheap labour activities or sex work (http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html). The crux of the objection of human rights organizations is that celebrity insistence on challenging residency requirements privileges the interest of the celebrity over the interests of the majority of children.

Fourth, there are the related issues of judgement and proportion. If celandropy is truly dedicated to providing concrete solutions to the problems of Africa and other developing regions it should concentrate its resources in campaigning Western governments on questions of tariff restrictions with the Third World. Persuading the EU and the United States to drop domestic farm subsidies and introduce trade barriers to protect fledgling industries in the developing world would do more to solve the problems of hunger and global inequality than adopting a child or opening a school for disadvantaged girls or an orphanage for homeless people.

Admittedly, it should not be considered in either/or terms. Angelina Jolie is a regular attendee at World Refugee Day in Washington DC, which campaigns for raising public awareness of the condition of refugees. Even so, effective political campaigning is a full-time job. It follows that the balance between high-profile field trips and adoptions, and behind-the-scenes process of winning the hearts and minds of policy makers in Brussels and Washington, is regarded as being out of kilter. In short, celandropy is seen to be overinterested in the limelight and not interested enough in the less visible, grinding process of lobbying.

To give to the Third World is at the heart of the humanitarian enterprise. Celebrities who donate time, money and engage in fundraising make a contribution. When celandropists are criticized for taking too many field trips and not lobbying enough, they must despair that they are in a no-win situation. For even if critics contend that in many cases the latent goal of celandropy is self-glorification, the manifest achievements of providing help and relief are indisputable.

But, to take, is another matter. Even if celebrities act with the best intentions, adopting children and raising them in the affluent industrial world inevitably leads to separate, difficult questions of colonial privilege and cultural indifference. In adoption, these questions are centred on the most defenceless, namely the adopted child. Celebrities and the cultural intermediaries that surround them inevitably appear to adopt a 'we know best' policy in the eyes of the biological relations of the child and the local media.

The idea of wealthy celebrities riding in from a clear blue sky into desperate conditions to save children who are in mortal peril, revives the old, discredited colonial notion of 'the white man's burden'. To argue that the children will have a better life in the West is oversimplistic. It trivializes the relations between the child and the biological family, is heedless of cultural distinctions and it smacks of the patronizing imperial belief that it is the duty of white people to save native Africans from themselves.

High-profile celebrities who adopt and parent children from the developing world may object that this line of argument has all the hallmarks of stellar paranoia. Yet it also exposes a cocksure, superior take-it-or-leave-it-attitude in celebrity culture. Taking a

child from the developing world is regarded locally as a matter of cultural assertion quite as much as an issue of legal adoption. The global para-social facades of Madonna and, to a lesser extent, Angelina Jolie (because she adopted from countries where domicile requirements were not a major legal issue), have been tarnished by the media mill running stories about 'selfish superstars' and 'carry-out babies'.

Tom Cruise: Scientology, postnatal depression and Oprah

Fame is not for the faint-hearted. While every human perspective is partial, superstardom gives many celebrities the confidence and licence to behave as if their word is the universal law. This can result in an outspokenness and inflexibility about private and public issues, which many see as strident and insensitive. In some cases, media criticism produces defensive obstinacy so that the word of the celebrity comes across as belligerent, intemperate and mule-headed.

As an example, consider what analysts take to be a rash of serious para-social mistimings during the last eight years by Tom Cruise. It is commonly assented that by the mid 1990s Cruise was the leading film star in the world (Johnstone, 2006). It was a position built upon a string of box office triumphs: *Top Gun* (1986), *The Color of Money* (1986), *Rain Man* (1988), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *Mission Impossible* (1996) and *Jerry Maguire* (1996).

Until the peak of his stardom his public image was founded upon the public persona of an easy-going, accessible superstar. *Risky Business* (1983) and *Top Gun* (1985) established his reputation as the premier Generation X film star. His co-starring roles with Paul Newman in *The Color of Money* (1986) and Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man* (1988) labelled him in the public mind as a serious young actor eager to hone his craft by learning from Hollywood elders. His marriage to Mimi Rogers in 1987 was life changing. Although the marriage lasted for only three years, Rogers is generally understood to have introduced him to Scientology.

Darker roles followed with *Born On The Fourth of July* (1989) and *Interview With The Vampire* (1994). At the time, critics interpreted these as diligent choices by the actor intent upon extending his acting range. However, they also reveal a new assurance and sense of entitlement of belonging to the Hollywood Pantheon. It would be quite wrong to suggest that, at this time, Cruise became indifferent to his public image. He retained a public relations management team, dutifully attended film premieres and engaged in humanitarian activities with the Hollywood Education and Literacy Project (H.E.L.P.), Children's Hospice and Palliative Care Coalition, Jackie Chan Charitable Foundation, Mentor LA and Stockings With Care. He also participated in the *America: A Tribute to Heroes* charity telethon for victims of 9/11.

However, he was also more assertive, less deferential and more conscious of his status as a Scientologist and superstar. What went with this was a new attitude in the presentation of his public façade. If Cruise spent the first part of his acting career being comparatively reserved, unassuming and guarded in his public pronouncements, his superstardom was marked by what many critics took to be ill-judged and ill-timed candour.

The new century witnessed some high-profile para-social mistimings that are widely regarded to have seriously damaged Cruise's public image. For example, on *Larry King Live* (2003) Cruise frankly rejected psychology, psychiatry and prescription drugs. He reiterated these views in *Access Hollywood* (2006), where he claimed to have saved a child from prescription dependency for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and put her on the road to healthy food and vitamins.

At the time, the actress Brooke Shields had recently published a harrowing account of postnatal depression, entitled *Down Came The Rain: My Journey Through Postpartum Depression*. Shields climbed out of her depression through psychiatry and the drug Paxil. In the book she gives credit to both. As a rookie cinema actor, Cruise had a minor role in the Brooke Shields movie *Endless Love* (1981). However, in the interview he did not permit personal acquaintance to moderate his strong opinions. He denounced Paxil as 'lethal' and made the ad hominem remark that Shields's movie career had slumped since she used the drug. Cruise has no recognized medical training. So, not unreasonably, Shields publicly attacked him for being out of order and ill-informed.

The main source of Cruise's strong opinions is his belief in, and practice of, Scientology. This controversial system of beliefs has attracted many Hollywood stars, including John Travolta, Kelly Preston, Kirstie Alley and Tom Arnold. None of them has been more vociferous in their public advocacy than Cruise. He has used the media platform to proselytize Scientology, has required interviewers to spend part of the day at the Church of Scientology in Los Angeles before meeting him, and made it a condition of filming to have Scientology tents erected on the filmset.

Scientology is a much-disputed body of belief. Created by the science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard, it has been under federal surveillance in Germany.

It has the reputation of being cranky, over-assertive and intolerant. A US District Court Memorandum of Decision ruled that it had sought to 'destroy' opponents and accused it of 'malicious', 'wanton' and 'oppressive' conduct (Central District of California 1993).

Cruise responds to these criticisms as misguided and presents Scientology as beleaguered and slandered. However, many people find his defence inflexible, and his advocacy of Scientology as redolent of old-style salvationism. It has raised

separate questions about his judgement and the use of his fame as a pulpit to evangelize.

These came to a head in a TV interview on the *Today Show* with Matt Lauer that was broadcast in 2005.

TC: I've never agreed with psychiatry, ever. Before I was a Scientologist I never agreed with psychiatry. And then when I studied the history of psychiatry I started realizing more and more why I didn't agree with psychology. And as far as the Brooke Shields thing, look, you got to understand I really care about Brooke Shields. I think here's a wonderful and talented woman. And I want to see her do well. And I know that psychiatry is a pseudoscience.

ML: But Tom, if she said that this particular thing helped her feel better, whether it is antidepressants or going to a counselor or psychiatrist, isn't that enough?

TC: Matt, you have to understand this. Here we are today, where I talk out against drugs and psychiatric abuses of electric shocking people, okay, against their will, of drugging children with them not knowing the effects of these drugs. Do you know what Aderol is? Do you know Ritalin? Do you understand that?

ML: The difference is –

TC: No, no Matt.

ML: This wasn't against her will, though.

TC: Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt –

ML: But this wasn't against her will.

TC: Matt, I'm asking you a question.

ML: I understand there's abuse of all things.

TC: No, you see. Here's the problem. You don't know the history of psychiatry. I do.

ML: Aren't there examples, and might not Brooke Shields be an example, of someone who benefited from one of those drugs?

TC: All it does is mask the problem, Matt. And if you understand the history of it, it masks the problem. That's all it does. You're not getting to the reason why. There is no such thing as a chemical imbalance.

ML: So, postpartum depression to you is a kind of a little psychological gobbledygook –

TC: No. I did not say that.

ML: I'm just asking what you, what you would call it?

TC: No. No. Abso – Matt, now you're talking about two different things.

ML: But that's what she went on the antidepressant for.

TC: But what happens, the antidepressant, all it does is mask the problem. There's ways [with] vitamins and through exercise and various things ... I'm not saying that that isn't real. That's not what I'm saying. That's an alteration of what I'm saying. I'm saying that drugs aren't the answer, these drugs are very dangerous. They're mind-altering, antipsychotic drugs. And there are ways of doing it without that so that we don't end up in a brave new world. The thing that I'm saying about Brooke is that there's misinformation, okay. And she doesn't understand the history of psychiatry. She doesn't understand in the same way that you don't understand it, Matt.

ML: But a little bit of what you're saying Tom is, you say you want people to do well. But you want them to do well by taking the road that you approve of, as opposed to a road that may work for them.

TC: No, no. I'm not.

ML: Well, if antidepressants work for Brooke Shields, why isn't that okay?

TC: I disagree with it. And I think that there's a higher and better quality of life. And I think that, promoting – for me personally, see, you're saying what, I can't discuss what I wanna discuss?

ML: No, you absolutely can.

TC: I know. But Matt, you're going in and saying that, that I can't discuss this.

ML: I'm only asking, isn't there a possibility that – do you examine the possibility that these things do work for some people? That yes, maybe there are abuses. And yes, maybe they've gone too far in certain areas. Maybe there are too many kids on Ritalin. Maybe electric shock –

TC: Too many kids on Ritalin? Matt.

ML: I'm just saying. But aren't there examples where it works?

TC: Matt, Matt, Matt, you don't even – you're glib. You don't even know what Ritalin is. If you start talking about chemical imbalance, you have to evaluate and read the research papers on how they came up with these theories, Matt, okay? That's what I've done. Then you go and say where's the medical test? Where's the blood test that says how much Ritalin you're supposed to get?

The interview produced a hugely negative reaction from the media and an enormous mixed, but largely hostile, postbag from the public. Cruise was accused of dogmatism and eccentricity. His remarks on psychiatry, Brooke Shields and pharmaceutical companies were condemned as ill-informed and inflammatory. The American Psychiatric Association issued a statement censuring him for being 'irresponsible' in promoting 'ideological' views that might dissuade people with mental health issues from seeking professional care.

The question of Cruise's eccentricity recurred in the same year during an infamous interview on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Cruise, who declared himself to be in love with Katie Holmes, jumped on the couch and engaged in zany, child-like behaviour. This was a highly public instance of cognitive dissonance in which the public were presented with a facet of the star's personality that conflicted with the regular, disciplined, restrained, nice guy facade that Cruise had cultivated for twenty years. Together with the *Today Show* interview it left many people in the public with the impression of an out-of-control celebrity who had lost touch with reality.

There is no law against a celebrity acting as an ombudsman for the public. People are free to agree or reject Cruise's case against Ritalin, psychiatry and the rest. The question is, should celebrities employ their pedestal in para-social relationships to make contentious pronouncements that may influence the medication and parenting practices of uninformed audiences? The techniques of advocacy and persuasion that he uses apply the standard techniques of demagoguery. Thus, he plays upon public fears of being powerless in the face of professional and big business manipulation. The psychotherapists and pharmaceutical companies are portrayed as targeting the most defenceless group in society, namely children. Cruise presents himself as a lone ranger, backed by the authority of Scientology, to defend public interest.

Three years later, as part of the promotional campaign for his new film *Valkyrie* (2008), Cruise returned to the *Today Show* with Matt Lauer, and described his remarks in the 2005 interview as 'arrogant'. He stopped short of recantation. When pressed, he maintained that he had *not* ceased to talk in public about Scientology. However, he now acknowledged that there is a proper time and place to air his views on the subject.

The question of how Cruise uses the personal element in para-social persuasion is pivotal and we shall come back to it at the end of this chapter. For the moment, the time has come to move on to a third example of celebrity behaviour that may be construed as revealing invulnerability, undue self-regard and hubris.

Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross: Sachsgate

Cruise may have made slighting remarks concerning Brooke Shields and the medical profession, but he was not guilty of invasion of privacy. In some cases celebrities have developed a powerful sense of omnipotence and untouchability that allows them to treat anything and any one as fair game. Chat- and talk-show hosts are especially prone to this because their stock-in-trade is to try to get behind the persona of a celebrity interviewee or social issue and, in the name of public interest, tease out the true facts. Comedians are also used to calling a spade a spade and making a gag out of embarrassing information or delicate circumstances. Matching a comedian with a chat-show host can be a turbulent combination in which all bets are off.

Sachsgate refers to the British scandal in 2008, involving two prominent British broadcasters, Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross, who, on Brand's BBC Radio 2 show, made tasteless comments about 'obscene' messages that they left on the answerphone of the *Fawlty Towers* actor and septuagenarian Andrew Sachs. The messages involved lewd remarks about Sachs's granddaughter, Georgina Baillie. In no uncertain terms, Brand informed Sachs of his former sexual relationship with Baillie, and Ross lent raucous support from the sidelines.

The prank backfired. It produced a storm of public complaints, including criticism from a number of MPs and the Prime Minister of the day, Gordon Brown. Ross, who, at the time, was the jewel in the crown of BBC chat- and talk-show hosts, was suspended without pay for twelve weeks. Brand and Lesley Douglas, Controller of BBC Radio 2, resigned. The incident was investigated by the BBC and the public regulator Ofcom. The BBC was eventually fined £150,000 by Ofcom. In 2010 Ross was forced out of the BBC after the Director-General, Mark Thompson, made it clear that his three-year contract – reputed to be worth £18 million – would not be renewed.

Ross, interviewed two years after the scandal, appeared to be nonchalant. In a newspaper interview he was reported as saying:

Can I be quite honest with you? In a way, the whole experience was fun. Life can sometimes potter along in the same direction, and then something comes along over which you have no control ... It became almost like I was watching it happen to someone else ... It was weird watching people get themselves into a lather over something so intrinsically unimportant as that. It was just silly. Silly people writing silly things. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/7572792/Jonathan-Ross-Sachsgate-was-hilarious-and-I-cant-wait-to-leave-BBC.html>)

In 2010 as part of the publicity round for his new autobiography, Russell Brand was interviewed on the BBC radio cultural flagship show, *Front Row*, during which the interviewer, Mark Lawson, brought up the Sachsgate affair.

ML: When you wrote the book you knew you were going to have to deal with the Jonathan Ross/Andrew Sachs incident in some way. What a lot of people will pick up on clearly is that Jonathan Ross tried to persuade you to remove those phone calls. And that again is the streak you have. You just thought 'I want to go with this'.

RB: Yeah, I just become – needlessly – also I am not good in confrontations. If people confront me with something I become more steadfast and more deliberate in my position. It fortifies my beliefs. It wasn't like I madly believed they (the messages) were incredibly funny, I just thought I hadn't considered it from any other perspective other than comedy and as content for a radio show. And when people said, 'Maybe we should remove that, you know, because it is sort of left on his answering messages', I was, 'No that's alright, I think it'll be OK'. I was sort of flippant about it and Jonathan, when Jonathan called, he said, 'Do you think we should be leaving them on? Maybe we should move it?' I said, 'Er, yeah. I think it's funny really, Jonathan', and it took up quite a lot of the radio show. It seems peculiar now, but of course at the time it was not subject to such scrutiny and hadn't been inflated to that degree.

ML: Well that's the other thing you say, there's a lot of remorse in this book about what happened, and you say that when it happened you were thinking of him (Sachs) as Manuel the waiter from *Fawlty Towers* rather than an old man with a family.

RB: I had no image of a grandad in my head. I wasn't particularly close to – well, one of my grandparents I was kinda close to, but like sort of, I didn't have – that's not a reference I really have. But the reference of Manuel from *Fawlty Towers*, that's really a prominent, archetype in my mind. I knew the words to *Fawlty Towers* from when I was five. And for me, yeah, I didn't think, I was just ... it was a peculiar ... I was peculiarly, single-minded about ... oh no, it's just a funny thing to have done, you know, I thought that – do you know what I thought? I thought 'I am going to have to end up apologizing to Andrew Sachs'. It is definitely rude, but I didn't think there would be consequences beyond that.

ML: And one of the things that struck me, I mean I know from other people that I know who have been through it, er, rehab, that one of the things that is encouraged is that you have to face up to what you've done and take responsibility for it. And that I guess, that is one of the ... very quickly you did, you resigned from Radio 2 and you did take responsibility.

RB: Yes, I think that's part of my programme for living, is taking responsibility for my actions and making amends where possible. And, it was – to tell you the truth – in this particular instance, I didn't feel that I had ... I felt that my options were limited. I only really wanted to make people laugh. I was only trying to be funny. Then I thought, well, that's definitely not what's happening now. This is not making people laugh. It's not funny. You've got no option but to stop.

The public pronouncements by Ross and Brand are revealing. Ross obscures the question of the invasion of privacy by concentrating on the public reaction to the prank. The attitude of the media is portrayed as frenzied and that of the BBC as exaggerated. He passes off the incident as an enjoyable diversion from routine.

By implying lofty distance from the reactions of the media and the BBC, he boldly signals notification that the phone messages were inherently trivial. Hence, his use of the term 'lather' to describe the response of BBC management and op-ed columnists.

Turning to Russell Brand, it is interesting that he takes responsibility for resigning but continues to see the obscene phone messages as justified by comedy value. As with Ross, the question of the invasion of Sachs's privacy is scarcely acknowledged. Brand uses the common-or-garden argument that there is nothing intrinsically wrong about having a laugh. That in this case the joke involves informing a grandfather about the private sexual life of his granddaughter seems to be regarded by Brand as a reasonable jest.

Again, these celebrity interviews are noteworthy for their use of the personal element in scandal management. Ross and Brand portray themselves as much maligned, awfully misunderstood ordinary Joes. The name of the game is fraternization with the ordinary man and woman. By mocking the sanctimonious who cannot see the joke, Ross and Brand identify with the people against authority in all its forms. Their twinning of sex with comedy is offered as droll compared with the stuffed-shirt attitude of critics and lily-livered do-gooders. In this way Ross and Brand carry off the invasion of privacy as an act of defiance. A private ill is magically transformed into a public good.

The personal element in para-social persuasion

Bernays presents what we now call syndicated fraternization in purely technical terms. According to him the big practical problem in large urban-industrial society is to furnish the masses with a sense of direction that they are unable to generate for themselves (Bernays, 1928, 1947). The public-relations solution is to construct political and business leaders who articulate progressive, popular sentiments.

Nowadays, celebrities are increasingly enlisted to achieve the same ends because they are known quantities, popular with the public. For Bernays the construction of successful policies is a matter of combining the conviction of leaders and celebrities with various scientific quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Part of optimizing leadership is winning hearts and minds. The logic of Bernays's position is that the various techniques of syndicated fraternization are merely the right tools for the communication age. They get the job done.

Bernays constantly stresses the idea that ethical restraint by PR-Media professionals pre-empts manipulation against the public interest. But this is hard to swallow. Even in Bernays's own day, the manipulation of public opinion between the 1920s and end of the war, by Fascist leaders and their PR-Media hubs in Germany and Italy, clearly demonstrated that the new technologies of mass persuasion were perfectly compatible with a sinister battle for the public mind. The use of celebrities and the organization of programming to bait opponents and encourage a paranoid attitude in audiences was a tool of the Nazi party. Para-social relationships were clearly constructed around myths of authoritarian salvation, built around a leader who is projected as a worthy object of hero worship, and a means of racial purification.

Para-social relationships afford ample opportunity for para-social persuasion by allowing the celebrity to apply the common touch and invoke solidarity with the public. Stargazers are flattered by glamorous, adored stars who appear to share their most important values, even if they are not exactly sure what these values are, and talk directly to them. Presumed intimacy is the cloak for smuggling in contentious statements and passing them off as facts. Confiding with the public on air is intended to win approval because it demonstrates to invisible viewers that they are worthy of celebrity trust. Presumed intimacy is the badge of unity because it conveys the impression that the invisible viewers would act just like the celebrity if only they knew the real state of affairs and had the power to make things better.

In *The Today Show* interview, Cruise uses the personal element at several junctures. He presents himself as being on the side of the underdog. That is the ordinary man and woman who are presented variously as being either misinformed or ignorant about the details of psychiatry and the harmful effects of drugs like

Aderol and Ritalin.² He stereotypes the *Today Show* interviewer as 'glib' and scapegoats his opponents (psychiatrists and the pharmaceutical companies) as 'pseudoscientists'. He claims that his controversial views about psychiatry and the use of antidepressants are supported by history and science. They aren't. As the public statement issued by the American Psychiatric Association makes clear, the track record of psychiatry in dealing with mental illness is not in scientific doubt. It is one thing to propose that this record is far from spotless. It scarcely needs to be added that psychiatry can be used to harm people as well as to help them.³ But Cruise does not make this perfectly reasonable submission. Instead he dismisses psychiatry *tout court* as a pseudoscience. This is not an objectively credible argument. It is built upon prejudice and invective.

Cruise weaves the veneer of democratic unity with the little man by ridiculing 'highbrow' attitudes. He uses the authority of the interview to exploit general feelings of impotence and resentment in the audience. On several occasions he resorts to shock statements to win over the viewers. The innocence of children is threatened by 'drugging' them with 'mind-altering' potions and ignoring other, safer ways of intervention. Antidepressants are the easy, false way out. There is a 'better', 'higher' quality of life solution. Firm decisions are required. Again, the appeal to strong leadership for the good of the people is reiterated. Scientology has the answers.

The build-up of propositions continues apace. Throughout, it is supported by anecdote and assertion, not scientific proof. Cruise's superstar glamour, which he is magnanimously putting to the service of the little people, and his lone ranger willingness to act as the public advocate against psychiatry and the pharmaceutical giants, invites approval and hero worship. Cruise is making a stand from which lesser men and women flinch. He presents himself as putting himself on the line for the public good.

Ross and Brand exploit and develop the personal element in a different way. In general, they adopt 'little boy lost tactics'. They are unable to see what the fuss about the obscene phone calls is really about. Ross brings the public into his confidence by giving them a scoop on what was really going in his mind in the aftermath of the scandal. He conflates having a sense of humour with holding a sense of common justice. The implication is that in transforming a jape into a matter of public censure the world has lost all sense of proportion. 'It's just a funny thing to have done, you know', agrees Brand in the *Front Row* interview. Their remorse is not focused on Andrew Sachs or Georgina Baillie, the victims whose privacy has been violated. It is concentrated on the media furore and the negative public reaction. Only when Brand decides that he cannot weather the media storm and the lashing of public disapproval does he concede, 'This is not making people laugh. It's not funny.'

The downfall of Icarus was that he flew too close to the sun. The mechanics of fame, hero worship and narcissistic idealization in today's celebrity culture result in some celebrities following the course he set. Thus, they develop and express strident, inflexible opinions about their beliefs or their entitlements, which produce cognitive dissonance in the public and indignation in the media. This is the result of the huge prestige and financial rewards that society showers upon them. Superstars live in gated properties, blanketed from the public by security staff and cultural intermediaries. In rarified conditions like these it is easy to lose touch with the public and live in a bubble of mindless acclaim and sycophancy.

Generally, the defence applied by cultural intermediaries for this behaviour is well worn and predictable. Celebrities are presented as living lives filled with emergency, risk and incident. Their frontier existence is contrasted pointedly with the routine, financial limitations and impotence of backwoodsmen and the para-social audience. The risky borderline existence that society requires of them, seduces some celebrities into believing that they have the right to behave just as they please without a by-your-leave for the consequences. Hence, Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic tirade against policemen on a Los Angeles freeway; Lindsay Lohan's repeated violations of restraining court orders; Winona Ryder's episode of shoplifting; and Boy George's menacing intimidation of a male prostitute. Although in each case this behaviour resulted in legal convictions, its source is the mental outlook that the star is above the law.

To some extent this is a perfectly sober, realistic attitude for celebrities to have. Historically, they may be damaged by allegations of invulnerability and imprisonment. But a variety of devices of rehabilitation, such as the ritual of a public apology before the media, voluntary community work and high-profile cash donations to charity, go a long way towards restoring public approval. In truth, there are comparatively few cases where public disapproval of behaviour brings stars down for good.

O. J. Simpson's persona of a polite, amenable and glamorous sport star and light comedy actor was destroyed by the trial in which he was controversially found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife and her associate, and his subsequent imprisonment for robbery. The career of the British glam rock star Gary Glitter imploded after his conviction as a child sex offender. Phil Spector, the highly eccentric 1960s and 70s record producer and Hollywood recluse, was found guilty of murdering the actress and nightclub hostess Lana Clarkson and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2009.

However, cases of the total annihilation of the celebrity facade are comparatively rare. In some cases celebrities take the threat of fallout and retribution into their own hands. For example, in 2009 the fugitive reality TV contestant Ryan Jenkins hanged himself after the murder of his ex-wife, the swimsuit model Jasmine Fiore. But episodes like this are exceptional.

This raises the separate question of how acute the emergencies and incidents of celebrity life really are. The frontier existence of celebrity involves stridency, narcissism and entitlement, but it is also compatible with self-correction and learning. The probability that Tom Cruise will ever engage in the childlike, zany antics he displayed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (2005) or make public denunciations of psychiatry and antidepressants, is low. His cultural intermediaries have advised that the publicity fall-out is too severe. Hence, Cruise's more measured comments on *The Today Show* in 2008 during an interview promoting the film *Valkyrie*, and his concession that his 2005 interview might have contained remarks that might be construed by many as 'arrogant'.

Yet celebrity expressions of invulnerability and hubris are constant challenges to exposure management. As the proliferation of media outlets conspire to support celebrities, in slipping between the public facade and private opinion they risk exposing aspects of personality or points of perspective that dent social impact factor ratings and trigger cognitive dissonance. The trend towards celanthropy increases these risks because it directly pits celebrities against sensitive personal, environmental and geopolitical issues. In expressing relevance, balance or responsibility for national or world issues, celebrities run the gauntlet of inadvertently revealing incompetence and arrogance. The acclaim that is habitually given to celebrities can seriously distort their judgement. Only superficially does commanding a concert auditorium or filling a movie theatre involve the same knowledge and skills as dominating the stage of world opinion. However, to refrain from celanthropy, serves notice on a literate media public of celebrity self absorption and downright selfishness. Celebrities are damned if they do, and damned if they don't. As Big Citizens their glamour and prestige may act as peerless private catalysts in fundraising, networking and consciousness raising. But in publicly taking on questions of global diplomacy and Third World debt that the world's political leaders have failed to solve, celebrities invite the unflattering comparison of being like turkeys voting for Christmas.