

## DIANA: HER DEATH AND THE BRITISH PUBLIC

I first met Newton Gunasinghe when he was a student at Manchester University working with Max Gluckman and Scarlett Epstein in the early seventies. Later, a year or so after I moved to Sussex, Newton also arrived, again working with Scarlett Epstein, to finish his doctoral thesis at the Institute of Development Studies. Not surprisingly, having just completed an intensive period of field research in Sri Lanka, his main interests were in events and processes in his home country rather than with what was happening in Britain. And even though he took a lively if somewhat nuanced view of British affairs, I doubt if he was much aware of the beginnings of what was to become the longest running, most intense and most dramatic soap opera so far staged in Britain: the story of Princess Diana. Yet whilst he was probably only vaguely aware of the beginnings of this story, (her engagement and marriage to Prince Charles), if he had been alive today I am sure that he would have taken a lively, involved and wry interest in one of the most dramatic events in contemporary British history: the death and funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales.

As I almost certainly do not need to remind you, Diana and her companion Dodi Fayed, were killed in a car crash in Paris on the early morning of Sunday 31st August. From then until her funeral the following Saturday public life in Britain (and it seems much of the rest of the world) revolved around the dead princess. Literally hundreds of thousands of people queued outside St James Palace to sign books of condolence. Elsewhere similar books were available in shopping malls and supermarkets throughout the country. Outside St James and Buckingham Palace huge piles of flowers (and for some reason teddy bears) were laid by mourners who came from all over the country, whilst elsewhere flowers were laid at public places, most commonly it seems war memorials. Such was the demand for white flowers that special supplies had to be flown in from Israel and even then the price rose by 10%. Despite the widespread belief that the newspapers were in some sense responsible for Diana's death, demand for special commemorative issues was such that there was a crisis in newsprint supplies in the week following her death. Many of these publications promised a donation to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and such was the response to the establishment of this fund that more money was pledged to this charity in the first week than to all UK charities in an average year. And finally sales of Elton John's remake of *Candle in the Wind* sold over 31.8 million copies worldwide in the 37 days after its release, rapidly overtaking the previous record of 30 million copies of Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*. It is expected that sales of this record alone will generate over 100 million for the Memorial Fund.

The scale of public involvement in Diana's funeral clearly invites some sort of response from the anthropologist. During the first week of September there was a feeling in Britain that what was happening was one those unique events akin to the death of Kennedy or the

landing of the first men on the moon. Indeed, newspaper columnists and TV commentators vied with each other to identify the peculiar significance of the moment. A couple of months later there may not be the same intensity of interest, and a growing realization that perhaps this was not the great climacteric moment it was hailed to be in the early days of August. Yet even so, popular magazines such as *Hello!* and *OK* as well as the tabloid newspapers continue to devote many column inches to the story of Diana. So how does one start understanding such mass interest and involvement? Why was there this peculiar outpouring of grief? What do the events of the last few days in August tell us about contemporary British society and culture?

One of the problems here is that no matter where one starts to disentangle (perhaps a better word in this context than deconstruct) the story of Diana's death and the events surrounding it the result is a journey through an extremely exotic and often bizarre and contradictory world. Let me give a few examples.

In the days after her death, Diana was often represented as the victim of a distant royal family (a theme which emerged most strongly in her brother's funeral oration). Yet her sister is married to the Queen's private secretary, one grandmother was a Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and the other was one of the Queen Mother's Women of the Bedchamber, whilst her father served as an equerry to both George VIth and to the present Queen. If fully explored this thread would take us into an exploration of the ways in which families such as the Spencers have for generations supplied courtiers for the British monarchy. Far from being an ordinary commoner (a theme which I shall return to later) Diana came from that narrow class from which royalty have traditionally recruited its loyal and closest servants.

Diana spent her last few days with Dodi Fayed and the general view is that they would have married. Such a marriage would have created a string of somewhat strange relationships for the mother of the future king of England. The most obvious of these is that the head of the Church of England would have had a Muslim stepfather, an eventuality which has led the Arabic press in particular to speculate on a plot by the British authorities to ensure that this marriage could not take place. But it has to be said that no matter how deep Islamophobia is in Britain, the topic of a recent report by the Runnymede Trust, such prejudices are strongly orchestrated by class, and a whole strain in British thought glorifies the *-Sheikh of Araby*, the rich, manly and romantic Muslim. A close friend of Diana, Jemima Goldsmith (daughter of James Goldsmith who funded and led a virulent anti-European and little-Englishish campaign at the 1997 election) recently married

Imran Khan. Diana visited them during her recent trip to Pakistan and her name was linked in early 1997 to another

Muslim, a Pakistani surgeon living in Britain. Clearly for her Islam was no barrier to friendship. Furthermore, it should be added that throughout the week of the funeral there was not, in Britain at least, any signs of anti-Islamic feeling nor criticisms of Diana for her involvement with a Muslim. For the aristocracy (and the rich) globalization and multiculturalism are nothing new: after all the British Royal Family were until 1916 the house of Saxe Coburg.

Dodi's father, Mohammed Al Fayed, is notorious (or famous) for his alleged practice of bribing Tory MPs with cash in plain brown envelopes. Indeed, his actions and his disclosures were important elements in the general climate of sleaze which helped to bring down the Tory party at the 1997 election. One rather puzzling aspect of Al Fayed's life is why his applications for British citizenship should have been turned down by successive Tory Home Secretaries. Yet at no point in the weeks after her death was the moral turpitude of her potential father-in-law raised as an issue, and in general the morality of Al Fayed's life was not seen as an issue worth commenting on - except by maverick publications such as *Private Eye*.

One of Al Fayed's activities appears to be collecting property. Besides Harrods in London (where incidentally Diana's stepmother is employed) and The Ritz in Paris, Al Fayed also owns a Parisian building known as Maison Windsor which Dodi and Diana are said to have been considering as a potential home and viewed on the afternoon before their death. Maison Windsor was of course the home of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor after his abdication from the throne because the Duchess was a divorcee. Diana appeared to be working through a strange transformation of the earlier Windsor saga. Whilst he lost his throne and moved to Paris because he married a divorced woman she was about to move to the same house because she had been divorced by the king to be.

Dodi has been generally represented as a playboy with a heart of gold who dabbled in the world of films. His major success was *Chariots of Fire*, a rather sentimental celebration of Britishness and surely a somewhat ironic success for someone whose father was denied British citizenship. Furthermore, Dodi's mother's brother is the celebrated Saudi arms dealer, Adnan Khashoggi, perhaps not the most fitting potential affine for a woman who at the time of her death had become synonymous with the campaign against land mines.

Other examples of the strange world which Diana inhabited could be produced, but the point I wish to make here is that she lived in a world of extreme wealth and privilege. On the one hand this was a very narrow and exclusionist world (the Royal family and its courtiers; the world of the very rich) yet on the other it consisted of a sort of global village of private villas and yachts linked to each other by private jets. The world inhabited by the "Peoples princess" was a world about as far away as it is possible to get from the lives

of -ordinary people ( a recurring phrase in the days after her death) who flocked in their thousands to sign the books of condolence or leave flowers in her memory.

This then, is the theme of my lecture today: why was it and how was it that so many people in Britain were deeply moved in a very real sense by the death of Diana, Princess of Wales? Why did British people of all ages and all backgrounds travel often hundreds of miles to honour her? What was it that made her death not simply a private tragedy for her family, her children, relations and friends, but for the vast majority of the people of Britain? And what (if anything) does this tell us about the nature of Britain today?

Let me return for a moment to Diana's funeral. One of the centrepieces at the service in Westminster Abbey was the song "Candle in the Wind" sung by Elton John. As I have already mentioned, this is now the largest selling record in history. In Britain it is claimed that over 40% of all households now own the record! Yet it has to be said that the choice of this song was not unproblematic. The original version was written and sung in memory of Marilyn Monroe and started out, "Goodbye Norma Jean". The new version starts out with "Goodbye English Rose" and goes on to talk of how, "your footsteps will always fall here/ along England's greenest hills". This is surely a rather strange theme given that she was (notionally) Princess of Wales, and this at the time when referenda were being held in Scotland and Wales over, devolution. It was also slightly ironic that later in the service Diana's brother in his funeral oration claimed that "-she talked endlessly of getting away from England"....

The linkage between Diana and Marilyn Monroe raises a whole series of issues. As far as I know no one made any conscious equation between the two after her death (although Diana a few years earlier had compared herself with Marilyn Monroe), and I suspect the grieving crowds would have been somewhat shocked if such an equation had been made. Yet at the same time, the link established between them by the use of the same anthem suggests a more abstract equation between the two: that they are both in some sense icons for and of our time.

-Icon is an increasingly overused term in discussions of popular culture in western societies, and here I use it in the very specific way suggested by Paige Baty in her book, *American Monroe: the Making of a Body Politic*. For Baty, icons are essential items in the operation of mass communications, circulated figures that become the very surface on which other meanings are communicated. Icons are, she claims, "the sites for the repeated stagings of narratives, the sites on which the past, present and future may be written". Icons are used to,

express different meanings, modes of organising culture, of remembering a time and place. They operate as shorthand for a series of meanings: early death, glamour, dissipation, isolation, triumph, youth, fame, domestic violence, racial identity etc.

For Baty,

...the icon I am ... positing ...resembles the object it represents, but that object does not exist in some unconstructed, natural sense. ...the iconic sign enacts the position of the simulacrum: the sign represents the copy with no original.

Penetrating such language is not easy, but as I understand Baty, what I think she is arguing is that figures such as Marilyn Monroe (and the other iconic figures of western society: James Dean, Eva Peron, Elvis Presley for instance) have no essential meaning. There is no true Marilyn Monroe but rather a series of self-referential images which feed off each other. Thus Marilyn Monroe the person (if one can use the term in this context) is in a sense the product of Marilyn Monroe the image which in turn defines Marilyn Monroe the person and so on. Iconic renditions are caught in what she calls a self-referential loop. Furthermore, their strength as icons, their cultural significance, depends on the ways in which they are used to express cultural values or meanings. What she shows is how the iconic Monroe is used and reused in different ways to express different ideas about the nature of the American polity. Part of the nature of true icons, she implies, is their malleability; their constructedness, the lack of any essential nature.

Icons thus become the vehicles for dreams, both real and figurative. Thus there were reports in the popular British press of an upsurge in dreams about Diana after her death, and more serious studies of dreams have shown the popularity of such iconic figures in the dream world. But at another level, iconic figures become the means through which people can express the inexpressible, either because it can not be articulated or because that articulation is culturally barred. Thus icons are more than symbols which stand for something else. Rather they embody what they stand for; they are that dream.

As Baty uses the term, icons are primarily (possibly always) associated with dead people: they have no say in their iconicity and are simply the tablets upon which meaning is written. Yet this is to overly limit the use of the concept for iconic figures can be alive and can to a greater or lesser extent participate in their own production. This, I shall try to argue, is what happened in the case of Princess Diana, and that to understand her life and reactions after her death we have to look at the process by which Diana was both constructed by others and constructed herself in her life.

In Britain of course the prime example of such an act of iconic autonomy is the Royal Family itself, and not surprisingly the Royal Family play leading roles in the bed time fantasies of the British people. The modern history of the British Royalty is in a sense a history of iconic production, an attempt to generate and control meaning. Thus up until the 1960s, the basic policy of presentation and management by Royalty was to place themselves above and out with normal life, and to generate a set of self-referential images which stressed both identity with the British people (particularly through the propagation of a mythical ordinary family life) and a separation from them through the propagation of the myth of an

essential difference: the mystery of royalty, as Bagehot put it in the mid-nineteenth century.

Such a policy worked fairly successfully until the mid sixties, but from then on it became difficult to sustain. Part of the problem, and I will return to it later, is that it depended upon the maintenance of a distinction between the public and the private, and of the implicit encouragement of an interest in the mystery of royalty. The media was the essential mediator between the people (the audience) and the royals (the performers), and it is not surprising that the cult of royal mystery is historically associated with the growth of the mass media from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. This was perfectly sustainable as long as there existed a deferential press and an acceptance of hierarchy. But with the changes in British society which reached their apogee in the long rule of Mrs Thatcher, that scourge of the very concept of the social and the proponent of a radical form of individualism which implies a populist egalitarianism, the mystery became increasingly threatened as a previously deferential media attempted to meet the demands of its clientele.

The Royal Family appears to have made a conscious decision to react to this changing situation by deliberately changing their presentation of themselves. Rather than attempting to isolate themselves from the public, the new policy, encouraged most strongly by Prince Phillip, was one of modernization; of trying to show themselves as part of modern Britain rather than a quaint relic of the past. Of course, this was not meant to deny the mystery of royalty, but rather to change the relationship between the Royals and the people. Thus a deliberate effort was made to present the royal family as extraordinary -ordinary people. Television cameras were invited into Buckingham Palace; royals took part in television game shows; royals married commoners. What distinguished royalty from other famous people became blurred.

Given this context, there is a sense in which Prince Charles' marriage to Diana has to be seen as an element in this opening out: in this process of demystifying royalty. After all, Diana is the first British woman to marry the heir to the throne for over 300 years, previous marriages favouring European royalty, even European aristocrats over native aristocrats. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the choice of Diana as his bride was at least in part provoked by the Palace's consideration of how the media would react. As one pressman interviewed recently (but before Dianas death) put it, "It was, to a certain extent, a marriage made by the media". She was created, if you like, as a bride for Charles.

After her name was linked to Prince Charles, and particularly after their engagement, Diana rapidly became an iconic figure, a surface on which meanings could be inscribed. From the beginning Diana was constructed not as an ordinary young woman, not as a member of the minor aristocracy but as a figure out of fairy tales. Rather than stress her aristocratic background, she was presented as a Cinderella figure: the product of a broken home; of an unhappy childhood who had worked as a cleaner (shades of Cinderella in the kitchen) and then a children's nurse. Alternatively, and overlapping, was a different rendition which presented her as an ugly duckling who grew into a beautiful swan. The fairytale motif continued with talk

of the handsome prince and his beautiful bride, and of course the spectacular wedding at St Pauls where Diana appeared as every little girls ideal of what a princess should look like. (Well, at least thats what my six year old daughter tells me.)

Throughout these narratives Diana is presented as a passive being. In the mass of writing which appeared at the time of the marriage, it was as if she had no will, no agency. Her history, the narrative of her as a young woman consisted of a person who was primarily passive. She was *sent* to boarding school; she was *sent* to a Swiss finishing school; she *drifted* into child care as a preliminary to marriage; she *was discovered* by her prince. Even the photographs of her taken at that time show her as a passive being, doe eyed, gazing blankly at the camera. Whether or not she was such a passive creature is difficult to say, but given this representation of her it is not surprising that she became a blank page on which various values could be inscribed, most notably the idea of the dutiful beautiful wife and later mother.

Diana thus became not a person who happened to be married to a prince and who happened to be a mother. Increasingly she became the prisoner of constructs, a constructed being, an icon upon which different and often contradictory meanings were imposed. Thus as well as the dutiful wife and mother, there was also the image of the beautiful (and supposedly fun-loving and in some sense modern) princess. Whilst on the one hand she was expected to partake of royal mystery, she was also expected to be the people's princess.

There is a sense in which she fulfilled her role as icon only too well. Earlier, I argued that royalty in Britain depended in large measure on the mediating role of the media, and that the logic of media activity was based on the continual search for the magic of royalty. What the -modernising faction in the royal family had succeeded in doing was to put into question the distinction between public and private and to implicitly encourage the media to pursue to the logical end their search for news about the royal family. Given the energy that the royals had placed on encouraging interest in Diana, it is not surprising that she became the focus of intense media interest. Increasingly, media constructions began to take over all aspects of her life, and these frequently came into conflict with the alternative demands being made upon her by the royal family.

The overall result was in effect a denial of self. Diana ceased to be a person with her own wishes, dreams and desires, but found her life governed increasingly by meanings inscribed on her by others. And this is the context in which, I think, her eating disorders have to be understood.

There is a considerable literature discussing Diana's bulimia, much of it stressing the problematic nature of her childhood (her parents divorce; her uneasy relationship with her step parents; her relationship with her elder sister). But an alternative way of understanding it is to stress the context in which she found herself in the early years of her marriage. Like anorexia, bulimia can be seen in terms of the sufferer losing control over reality, and the world in which Diana found herself was one in which she had no control. In such a context all that was left of her personhood was herself as body, and thus it

can, I think, be argued that her bulimia, her binge eating and controlled vomiting, was a means by which she was able to hold on to a semblance of self.

Taking this approach, Diana's behaviour can be seen in the context of a long tradition in Western Europe. From an anthropological point of view, one of the most interesting books to appear in recent years on the subject of women and eating disorders is Caroline Bynums, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, a study of medieval female saints. Here she argues that the high frequency of abnormal forms of eating behaviour amongst these women is not to be understood in terms of some -illness but rather as attempts to regain control and a sense of self in situations where control is lacking. This, argues Bynum, is intimately related to a central theme in Christianity which is a preoccupation with the body, for after all, what is central to Christianity is the physical embodiment of God in the form of his son Christ. The same theme is taken up in her more recent work, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* and can also be found in Peter Browns work on the body in early Christianity and Peter Gearys monograph on saintly relics, *Furta Sacra*. Later I shall return to the saintly aspects of Diana as icon, but for the moment all I want to stress is how her bulimia does not have to be seen as an isolated idiosyncratic piece of behaviour but can be seen as a variation on an age old theme in the Christian tradition which stresses the importance of body to selfhood. Furthermore, rather than be interpreted simply as a sign of illness, it can, I think, be seen as the first step in her attempt to recover a sense of self.

Returning to Diana's life, for my present purposes it is not necessary to go into the details of her divorce from Charles in any detail (although it may be of interest here to note that his mistress, Camilla Parker-Bowes, is the elder sister of Mark Shand who gained a certain notoriety in Sri Lanka a few years ago owing to the death of an elephant he was supposedly studying). But what does have to be mentioned is that the conflict between them was fought out not in private but through the media, and that it was concerned primarily with controlling what I have labelled their iconic roles. As far as Diana was concerned, this I think was the crucial move in that it marked a shift from passivity to activity; from being defined as an icon to defining herself in iconic terms.

The major events in this process of self-assertion and recreation involved both television and the printed word. In 1992, through a series of intermediaries, she collaborated with Andrew Morton to produce *Diana, Her True Story*. Although at the time presented as a work about Diana, it now appears that she was instrumental in its production to the extent of reading chapter drafts. Thus whilst it can be read as a biography, it can also be read as a self-constructed narrative and a means of beginning the construction of self: Diana as she wished to see herself and be seen by others. It was, if you like, an experimental essay in reasserting a sense of self.

Morton's book was serialised and widely commented on in the press and elsewhere, not always sympathetically. Furthermore, her frequent appearances in the media led to criticisms, also in the media, that she was a media junkie, and this in part appears to have been instrumental in her withdrawal from public life in late 1993 and

early 1994. Yet this withdrawal was only temporary, four months in all. From one point of view it was unrealistic: such was the interest in her, such was her iconic power, that withdrawal was impossible. But more importantly, by this stage her sense of self was such that it could only be defined in terms of the media. Her very being which in some ways had been destroyed by the media required that she remake herself through the media.

The key event in this process is probably her appearance on television in November 1995. This in part was a response to her husband's interview in the preceding year, but it also has to be seen as the culmination of a long preparatory process. Thus from 1992 onwards she took advice from various actors and media specialists on speech making and presentation of self. By 1994, it was clear that she was timing at least some of her public appearances to upstage her husband (for instance at the time of his television interview). Public and private were interlinked in a very real sense in that how she remade herself was determined by her public role. Furthermore, her new self was not made of new cloth but rather a reworking of the old; a transformation of how she had been created by the media in the past. Thus the most memorable point in Diana's 1995 television interview was the phrase, "I would like to be a Queen in peoples hearts". This was generally greeted as her own invention, yet in fact it was a reworking of a headline in *The Sun* of fourteen years earlier when it labelled her, "Queen of Hearts". At the same time, the increasingly glamorous ways in which she presented herself, for instance when she received the Humanitarian of the Year award from Henry Kissinger in 1996, were clearly for public consumption, and it is fascinating to compare pictures of Diana in 1994-1996 with those of a decade earlier. Gone is the passive little-girl-lost look, gone is the soft-focussed pictures of the cuddly young mother to be replaced by a much sharper, much more glamorous person who clearly revelled in the impact of her physical presence..

This of course links back with the way in which the remaking of Diana was so closely linked up with her body. Earlier I commented on her bulimia, and how it could be understood not in terms of illness but rather in terms of a search for self and control in a situation where she had no control. Through the nineties, what Diana did was attempt to take control over her visual appearance, and in part as the result of serious training she did transform herself physically. But there was more to it than simply her own body. One of the costs of being a princess, she had discovered, was a series of obligations to a host of charities. In 1996 she relinquished over 100 such obligations, but the ones she chose to remain associated with were almost all in one way or another associated with the body. Some of these were concerned with the physically sick, for instance AIDS sufferers and cancer victims. Others, most notably the Royal Ballet, were associated with presentation of the body beautiful. And of course in Diana's last months there was her close association with the movement to ban land mines.

So what I am suggesting is that Diana recreated herself. From being a passive icon subject to construction by others, she became an active participant in her reconstruction, based in part on previous iconic representations of her being. This new construction centred on the body: on her own body and the bodies of others linked through

physical contact. Thus stories abound of how she -touched and -cuddled the sick and the dying. Physical contact, warmth and directness was what counted in this new rendition of Diana, Princess of Wales. And of course, such qualities stood in stark contrast with what were seen as the qualities that marked the Royals: coldness, distance, aloofness, non-physicality.

Yet of course, such a transformation, such a rebirth, could not be achieved alone but depended crucially on the media, particularly the pictorial media. Visual representations of her self, of her clothes, of her contact with others, was essential in this remaking of the Princess. Her humanitarian work with her chosen charities and her attempts to become a sort of humanitarian roving ambassador for the British government all depended on her visual fame. The impact she had for instance on the campaign against land mines would have been as nothing if not for her iconic status.

In sum, the remaking of Diana depended on the media. Thus to quote Mary Riddell, "If there was a luminous presence, a candle in the wind, then the press applied match to wick". The media provided the arena in which she could present herself and the form of that presentation. It was precisely their images of her which made her famous and these images fed off each other in a self-referential way. But because this recreation of self depended so strongly on the media, there was a sense in which any distinction between public and private became questionable. What Diana had become above all else was a series of media moments; a set of iconic representations. The bizarre logic of the situation was that Diana through her collusion with the media had made all aspects of her life newsworthy and maintaining any semblance of a distinction between public and private was a vain effort. For after all, Diana had recreated herself as an icon. In recreating herself Diana rode a tiger, and in the end was destroyed by that tiger. If, as is claimed, the car crash in Paris was in part the result of pursuit by paparazzi, they were in a sense only carrying out the essential role of acting as mediators between Diana and her public, a role which Diana herself had encouraged.

Now, perhaps, we can return to some of the questions which I raised at the beginning of this talk: why were people in Britain so deeply moved by her death? What do their reactions tell us about the nature of British society today?

In this context I am tempted to talk in terms of an "Imagined Community" of grievers, much as Anderson has written of the nation as an Imagined Community. It is perhaps no accident that flowers in Diana's honour were placed at war memorials, so much an element of Anderson's imagined nation.

Anderson and other writers on nationalism such as Gellner have noted the close relationship between the rise of the concept of the nation with the rise of print capitalism, the argument being that it is only with print capitalism that people can conceive of themselves as a homogeneous, unified entity. In a sense, Anderson's arguments have been overtaken by technology for now it is not so much the printed word that takes prime place but rather the visual image, either in the press or on television. In the construction that was

Diana, images, pictures of her with her children, visiting AIDS victims, comforting the sick, going shopping, attending balls, were all important. One could speculate that this visual quality of contemporary media is crucial in the development of cultural transnationalism and that this in part lies behind the way in which Diana's death had a significance outside the narrow confines of one national or linguistic community. But more importantly for my present argument, the relationship between people and pictures is rather different than that between people and the written word. The former appears to be more direct, more immediate, less mediated. And to return to Baty, given that icons are what they stand for, visual icons do not mediate between viewer and subject but are the end point of the relationship. In a sense the shared community of grievors knew Diana - Diana as icon - in a way that a previous generation could not.

As various more cynical observers have pointed out, there was a remarkably fast and total shift in the attitudes of the popular press towards Diana over the weekend of her death. Until the moment of her death the unambiguously saintly attributes which she gained early in the morning of August 31st were still debatable and in the weeks before there were widespread criticisms of her association with Al Fayed and her playgirl lifestyle. Not surprisingly, some media were wrong footed. Thus the American National Enquirer was still on the news stands on the days after her death with the unfortunate headline, "Di goes Sex Mad" before it was replaced with, "A Farewell to the Princess we all Loved". (In a slightly different way, Mercedes-Benz was caught out with an advertisement reading, "Mercedes-Benz. Engineered to move the human spirit"). Only after her death did her virtues become unquestionable, few remembering Oscar Wilde's dictum that, "To die in Paris cannot betoken a very serious state of mind".

Yet this shift in the attitude of the popular media only reflected a corresponding change in popular views of Diana. From a prurient interest in her private life with Dodi, from a general feeling that perhaps she was an over-rich play girl, the popular mood shifted with similar speed. Part of this change appears to be associated with guilt, a general guilt amongst the populace. After all, they were the ones who were buying the papers and journals and consuming the images of Diana and Dodi. What the media was supplying and what the paparazzi were engaged in was to meet this large and constant market. Looked at in social terms, precisely the same sorts of people were overwhelmed by grief as bought the products which supposedly led to her death. The community of mourners was also the community of the guilty.

Not surprisingly, one way of dealing with this guilt was to shift it onto the media, the mediators between Diana and her public. Commentators and editors colluded in this, vying with each other as to who could be more critical, more damning of the popular media and the paparazzi who served them. But the most damning criticisms came from Dianas brother who in his funeral oration castigated the ever present paparazzi and the treatment she had received from the newspapers. Yet he had been a journalist himself, not above using his royal connections in his coverage of Prince Andrew's wedding. It is also claimed that a few months before Dianas death

he unsuccessfully demanded 250,000 from *Hello!* magazine for a story on his South African house and family.

The particular vision of Diana which dominated the days leading up to her funeral developed within this context of guilt and responsibility-shifting. Of course her life was a mass of contradictions, but what emerged was a sanitised version, one which all could relate to and which excluded possible sources of embarrassment: the 3,000 per week grooming allowance; the prolonged absences on holiday away from her children in the months preceding her death. Here, let me quote Nicci Gerard, a feminist writing on the day of the funeral:

Diana was Cinderella. She was the anorexic girl. She was the Lady of Shallott, imprisoned in her tower. She was the betrayed wife, jilted and abandoned. She was the divorcee, representing all the millions of people who are divorced and alone and wounded. She was the single mother and on the side of all those other single mothers up and down the country... She was the girl about town with her nippy car and the visits to the gym. She was the rock -n roll princess. She was the nurturer, visiting the sick and the poor and laying on her hands. She was the language of modernity in the time-warped Royal Family.. She was the victim, passive and abused. She was the strong woman, fighting back. She was the survivor... She was the performer. She was the besieged star, caught in the glare of the flashlights and yearning for privacy. She was the adoring mother...

This was in *The Guardian*, not usually the most populist of papers. And whilst Gerard's panegyric might express a particular women's view, Ben Pimlott was writing in the *New Statesman* that, "People who saw her as a fantasy girlfriend or mistress perhaps also saw her as a fantasy mum. In other words, she was someone for everyone, a multi-dimensional figure to whom all could relate - even if it was as fantasy mum.

As far as I am aware, prior to her death there were few if any references to Diana as a saint, but almost immediately such ways of referring to her rapidly developed, perhaps the most bizarre being a T-shirt emblazoned (incorrectly) with, "Born a princess, died a saint". So frequent were the references to Saint Diana that her brother pleaded that she should not be beatified; that she stood tall enough as a human being. Yet there is a sense in which, for that week at least, she did become a sort of saint, a thoroughly modern saint.

Earlier I have tried to show how there are certain parallels between the narratives which describe Diana's life and those which narrate the lives of female saints, a central theme of which was a preoccupation with the body, with suffering and to a lesser extent with healing. I have to admit that as yet I know of no cases where Diana's intervention is claimed to have led to a miraculous physical cure. But in the days after her death there were many stories about how, during her life, she had at the least given people spiritual succour through her visits to the sick and the dying. Furthermore, the death of Sister Theresa in the same week gave rise to a whole series of parallels being drawn between the two.

Certainly places associated with Diana became shrines in her honour, huge piles of flowers being deposited outside the palaces in London and outside her family home in Lincolnshire. Journeys to such places became at the least metaphorical pilgrimages in search of a form of spiritual peace, or at least that is how many people put it. Finally, there were the letters and messages attached to the

flowers. Many were addressed to her children or the Royal Family, but it seems that even more were addressed to Diana herself. She was treated as if she was still alive, still a force with whom communication could be made. In this sense, then, she became a saint, for the week at least, and a thoroughly modern saint with all the qualities I have quoted earlier: a model and an exemplar shorn of all fault, marked not just by her external beauty but, as her brother put it, beauty both internal and external. And of course, internal beauty, spiritual purity, is what marks the saint. Perhaps it is no accident that she was buried on an island, specially consecrated, in a lake on her family estate. In part this reverberates with themes in Arthurian legend, but it also decreases the risk of relic theft, that scourge of medieval saints. For a few weeks each year pilgrims are to be allowed to visit the tomb, of course under close supervision.

By way of conclusion, I want to consider very briefly what all this tells us about Britain today. As I said in my introduction, around the time of Diana's funeral there was much talk of its wider significance. Yet I doubt whether in the long run it will have much impact. So for instance although there was a massive response to the establishment of the Princess Diana Memorial Fund, this does not mean that charity is back in fashion in the United Kingdom. Rather it means that charities not on the charmed list of Fund beneficiaries are likely to have an extremely hard time over the next few months. The responses to Diana's funeral have I think to be understood as a symptom or a manifestation of broader shifts in the British polity.

If the Tories had won the elections earlier this year, it is doubtful whether the funeral would have taken place in the way it did. Almost certainly it would have been a smaller, private affair. There was always distance between successive Tory governments and Diana, in part as a result of particular policy differences (for instance Diana's espousment of the anti-mines campaign) and in part because of much deeper philosophical problems. Thus in the days between her death and the funeral, the Tory party failed to respond in any way to public interest and involvement in her death. In contrast, the new Labour government moved with remarkable speed to become centrally involved in the funeral process managing both to identify itself with popular sentiment and forge closer relations

with the Royal Family. So successful was Blair that some commentators have claimed, over-dramatically, that this was his Falklands.

What the beatification of Diana and the election of the Labour government have in common is of course the rejection of a set of values which the Tories had become associated with. In part this centred around Tory sleaze, the atmosphere of corruption and nepotism, which pervaded the final years of Tory rule. Labour in contrast was seen as the party which embodied decent standards of honesty and propriety, and Diana, despite her occasional forgiveable and forgotten falls from grace was and still is seen as a basically decent human being. But what was more important in the fall of the Tories was the rejection of a particular social philosophy. The last government was the heir to the Thatcherite experiment which denied the social and which based itself on rampant individualism and a strident populist egalitarianism exemplified by the cult of Essex man. The Tory party became identified with an uncaring, uncompassionate glorification of individual greed.

New Labour's success in the 1997 elections was in large part based on its ability to present itself as caring and compassionate. Furthermore, this is *New Labour*, and New Labour has shed much of its old ideological baggage. Socialist egalitarianism is no more: New Labour is a party which in effect accepts hierarchy and inequality as the necessary cost of reintroducing the idea of the social, and the importance of values such as duty and obligation, care and compassion, into British politics. In a sense this marks a return to one strand in the history of British socialism: an alliance against the rampant individualism of free-running capitalism involving the working class on the one hand and the traditional anti-capitalist British aristocracy on the other.

Diana in a way exemplifies these values of New Labour. Stylish, aristocratic, fun loving, but at the same time caring and loving, the -feely-touchy face of New Labour. In this Diana became an icon for New Labour, a visual representation of what the new government stood for. More than that, she was also a martyr for these values, pursued to her death by the excesses of the media reptiles.

These I think are the aspects of Diana's death and funeral which would have fascinated Newton: the ways in which a private tragedy became in the end an episode in a political process: the way in which hegemonic ideas concerning the nature of society, of hierarchy, of goodness and evil, of gender and morality, can be conveyed through and coalesce around one individual and personal tragedy. As with Marilyn Monroe, the making of Diana was the making of a body politic. ■