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Giacomo Casanova : Histoire de ma vie (comme un célébrité)

“History of my life as a celebrity”

An Undergraduate Thesis

by
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Introduction

Casanova is such a well-known person that his name is part of the modern vernacular. The most common usage of the word Casanova is, of course, in reference to one who is a proficient lover and seducer of women. What is not so commonly known about this historical figure is that he was also a lover of literature, politics and art. He was a writer, a violinist and a spy. He organized a lottery for the French government and escaped from the Leads, a famous prison in Venice. He traveled widely, and nothing seemed to escape his interest. When Casanova started a Dictionary of Cheese, he noted that “Parmesan: It does not come from Parma, but from Lodi.”¹ Casanova’s travels were also what prevented him from finishing this book; he moved on to another town (and another woman) before he could complete the work.

Casanova’s 12-volume autobiography *History of My Life*, or *Histoire de ma vie*, is, in a large part, a narrative of his romantic intrigues and escapades. Casanova writes about sexual encounters with 122 different women in his memoirs.² While his ability to be so successful with so many women no doubt helped his reputation while he was alive, this honesty in self-reporting has hurt him in the eyes of modern society. We look back on Casanova as a mere, well, Casanova – nothing more than a smooth talker who has exceptionally good luck with women. In reality, his life was much more meaningful and significant.

The purpose of this thesis is to look at Casanova’s life from a new perspective. Although historians recognize that Casanova was learned in a variety of subjects, they overlook the fact that he was a mass communicator far ahead of his time. His expert self-promotion and networking skills lifted him from his humble beginnings as the son of an

actor and an actress (generally not considered to be respectable occupations in Enlightenment Europe) to his adult life as a celebrity libertine who lived lavishly in all the great cities of Europe. This view runs counter to contemporary views on the origins of celebrityhood. “First basic assumption: there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century,” writes film critic Richard Schickel.³ “The specifically modern quality of the celebrity” is a focal point of P. David Marshall’s book, *Celebrity and Power*.⁴ Daniel Boorstin goes so far as to date celebrityhood to 1850, the year the term was first used to mean “a person of celebrity.”⁵ This thesis will prove that Casanova was a celebrity in the modern sense of the word, despite living in the eighteenth century, and perhaps even because of it.

What is a celebrity? Academics have yet to come up with a succinct definition. Marshall cites these dictionary entries: “Well-known person...the condition of being much extolled or talked about; famousness, notoriety.”⁶ Boorstin writes, “The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness.”⁷ Boorstin’s definition could be reworded to say that a celebrity is famous for being famous, and a more nearly correct interpretation of the word celebrity can be developed by fine-tuning this phrase still further. A celebrity is someone who is good at *being* famous. Many people are famous, but are not celebrities by virtue of that famousness. Monica Lewinsky is an example of a person who achieved fame, but did not become a celebrity. Lewinsky and Casanova have similarities on a superficial level. Both, as the saying goes, “slept their way to the top” in some fashion.

The similarities end there, however. While Casanova’s sexual conquests gained him increasing renown, Lewinsky’s romantic episode in the Oval Office with Clinton

brought her little more than public humiliation and ridicule. At the time the Monicagate scandal broke, Lewinsky was in a position to use the intense public interest in the situation to her advantage. Instead, the situation got out of control, and Lewinsky became the butt of many late night talk show hosts' jokes.

Casanova's used his fifteen minutes of fame to create fifteen more minutes of fame. He had nothing but his innate talent for self-promotion and would take advantage of every opportunity and business contact. Each adventure in his life ultimately led to another adventure: a new occupation, a new woman, or a sojourn in a new country. Lewinsky, on the other hand, with attorneys and image consultants in tow, ended up with only new hairdo and a line of handbags. Efforts to portray her as a naïve intern fell flat; in 2001 a publicist made the following statement regarding Lewinsky's "new" image:

Monica is dismayed this incident ever occurred, but that was in 1998, when her name was linked to the presidential scandal. It's February 2001, and when people hear her name now, they think Monica Lewinsky the handbag designer, e-commerce entrepreneur, *Yahoo Internet Life* cover girl, and the *Post*'s own 'It' girl. Clearly, she has moved on and taken her good name with her.⁸

Casanova would have never made such a laughable comment. He was a public relations professional far ahead of his time, and knew how to manipulate the different factors that control a person's reputation: public opinion, social standards and perception. For example, although he had sex with over 100 women, he made sure to always say and do the right things so that women felt that they were lucky to be getting involved with him. He showered them with expensive gifts, and there were several situations of Casanova arranging favorable marriages for girls with whom he had previously been involved. Historians agree that most of those women thought of Casanova as a caring, generous lover and not a sex-obsessed scoundrel.

According to Schickel, celebrities cannot exist without modern means of communication such as television, movies and the Internet; “the history of the celebrity and the history of communications technology over the last century are very closely linked.”⁹ Many scholars agree that celebrities cannot exist without the communication-rich environment that we have today. Monthly magazines, daily newspapers and the instantaneous Internet all play important roles in modern information exchange, and, consequently, in celebrity creation.

Robert Darnton is of a different opinion. “I would like...to argue that every age was an age of information, each in its own way, and that communication systems have always shaped events.”¹⁰ Information exchange can be a product of non-media factors. Gossip, for example, was an oft-used form of communication in Enlightenment France,¹¹ and the salon culture of the period was the vital infrastructure to spreading this gossip. Other factors, such as economic and political democracy and the presence of an entrepreneurial spirit also play important roles in the exchange of information. This being the case, Enlightenment Europe, set on a background of democratic rumblings, was a hotbed for communication and an age of information.

Casanova was a prime specimen of a celebrity. And even though he lived in the eighteenth century, he fulfills all the requirements of being a modern celebrity. In fact, Casanova could be considered an *über*-celebrity, or professional celebrity, due to the fact that he was a self-made man, one who achieved notoriety strictly by his own merits and talents and he was mostly famous for being famous.

What then, are the characteristics of celebrities that differentiate them from run-of-the-mill “famous people”? How have Casanova and his reputation lingered in public

consciousness for over 200 years? There are two different kinds of celebrities. One is those who are good at something and then parlay that talent into being a brand name in other forums. Britney Spears, for example, used her pop star status to score a role in a feature film, but she is still known primarily for her musical career. The second type of celebrity is those who are simply good at being celebrities. The basic skill in this latter method is not being good at a sport, acting, singing or politics; the basic skill here is simply being good at being famous. The professional celebrity (whom Boorstin calls “hero”) is different from a regular celebrity in that “the hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name.”¹²

There are four trademark qualities of an *über*-celebrity. Although scholars have yet to create a definitive list of celebrity traits, Boorstin discusses these four particular qualities in his book *The Image*. The following four-step test is based on information from the chapter entitled “From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event.”

Revelation of personal facts is extremely valuable in making the audience feel that the *über*-celebrity is in fact just a regular person. This is the first step in *über*-celebrity creation. No detail is too personal. “We try to become chummy, gossipy, and friendly with our heroes,” Boorstin explains. “Jesus, we are told from the pulpit, was ‘no sissy, but a regular fellow.’ Instead of inventing heroic exploits for our heroes, we invent commonplaces about them (for example, in the successful juvenile series ‘The Childhood of Famous Americans.’)”¹³ The objective is to make the public curious and to make them yearn for personal information about the professional celebrity in order to feel like they have a closer, more genuine relationship with him.

The second step of becoming an *über*-celebrity is to self-promote. “We can fabricate fame, we can at will (though usually at considerable expense) make a man or woman well known; but we cannot make him great,” Boorstin says. “We can make a celebrity, but we can never make a hero. In a now-almost-forgotten sense, all heroes are self-made.”¹⁴ Audiences want a celebrity who they feel is genuine. The most successful celebrities are those who promote themselves constantly, in as many ways as possible.

Networking, the third step, is an important part of being a successful professional celebrity. “Celebrities tend to breed more celebrities. They help make and celebrate and publicize one another,” Boorstin observes. “By a kind of symbiosis, celebrities live off one another.”¹⁵ The Enlightenment was a time of exciting new networking possibilities, especially for those who were not aristocrats. The previously unheard-of intermingling between different levels of the social strata presented many opportunities to those born without titles. This social change aided self-created professional celebrities, because their circle of acquaintances became so much more extensive when interaction among most levels of society as equals became commonplace.

Constant reinvention is the final step of professional celebrityhood. “Celebrities, because they are made to order, can be made to please, comfort, fascinate, and flatter us,” Childs observes. Common celebrities are created by managers, publicists and the media; professional celebrities are responsible for constantly reinventing themselves to fill particular needs. They are able to transcend the departmentalization and two-dimensionality of common celebrityhood through talent diversification. Being considered an expert in any field is an excellent way of increasing one’s fame and wellknownness, to use Boorstin’s term. Being considered an expert in many fields is even better.

Casanova's memoirs, *History of My Life*, are the primary source of information for this thesis. The twelve volumes are lively and detailed, although the reader may question the validity of some facts. To counter the possibility of factual errors on Casanova's part, I used J. Rives Child's *Casanova: A New Perspective*¹⁶ as a secondary source of information. Child's book is considered the definitive biography of Casanova in that it portrays as him as a man with a wealth of abilities and talents and not as the "caricature drawn...by mythmakers."¹⁷

Based on the four-step celebrity test, I will prove that Casanova was indeed a successful professional celebrity using stories drawn from his narrative. He has been pigeonholed as a lover and seducer of women while his outstanding communication and promotion skills have gone nearly unrecognized. This thesis will show that Casanova was a savvy Enlightenment mass communicator and celebrity.

Chapter One

Revelation of personal/private facts

“Let us dress quickly, my dear, my love; I must get back to the convent.”
- M.M. to Casanova, Venice 1753

“I was standing in the corner of a room, leaning against the wall, holding my head, and staring at the blood which was streaming to the floor from my nose.”¹⁸ This was Casanova’s very first memory; he was eight years old. For someone who would lead a life filled with intriguing personalities and unforgettable events, his childhood was unspectacular. Casanova was sickly, suffered from chronic nosebleeds, and was basically regarded as an idiot. “My disease had made me dull, and very poor company; people felt sorry for me and left me alone; everyone supposed that I would not live long. My mother and father never spoke to me.”¹⁹

According to Casanova, his life changed the day his grandmother took him to a witch to have his affliction cured.

At the end of their dialogue in the Friulian language, my grandmother gave the witch a silver ducat, whereupon she opened a chest, took me up in his arms, put me into it, shut it, and locked the lid on me, telling me not to be afraid. *It was just the way to make me afraid*, if I had been able to think; but I was in a stupor ... I heard alternate laughter and weeping, cries, singing, and sundry thumps on the chest. It was all one to me. Finally they took me out; my blood stops flowing. After giving me numberless caresses, this strange woman undresses me, lays me on the bed, burns simples, collects the smoke from them in a sheet, wraps me in it, recites spells over me, then unwraps me and gives me five very good-tasting sweetmeats. She next rubs my temples and the back of my neck with a sweet smelling unguent, and dresses me again. She says that my bleeding will gradually diminish, provided I tell no one what she had done to cure me, but solemnly warns me that I will lose all my blood and die if I dare reveal her mysteries to anyone. After impressing this upon me she tells me that a charming lady will visit me the following night, and that my happiness will depend upon her, and if I have the strength of mind to tell no one that I received such a visit.²⁰

Casanova received a visitor that night in the form of a beautiful ethereal woman, and from then on, he became a different person. Like Pinocchio turning into a real boy, Casanova not only stopped having nosebleeds, but even developed his faculty of memory and learned to read in less than a month. This experience also was the beginning of Casanova's lifelong attachment to the occult.²¹

Casanova's expertise as a mass communicator, evident in this story from his memoirs, left the reader wanting more intimate details about his life. He is able to grab the attention of the reader with the very first passage, which is so unusual and mystical that the reader immediately wants to know what happens to this overnight idiot-turned-genius. Although everyone has hidden and private details in his life, intimate aspects are rarely or never revealed to the public. Celebrities, on the other hand, are accustomed to having the most personal or embarrassing aspects of their lives published in the press. Many, in fact, crow these details as loudly as possible.

"There's a certain bit of equipment I am desperately wondering about," said actress Cameron Diaz in a recent interview with *Cosmopolitan*, on what she would be interested in doing if she were to be male for a day. "I am really curious to know what it's like to pee standing up and all those guy things. It must be so interesting."²²

"[The film star aura] was built on a dialectic of knowledge and mystery," Marshall explains. "The incomplete nature of the audience's knowledge of any screen character became the foundation on which the film celebrity was constructed into an economic force...the combination of familiarity and extraordinariness gives the celebrity its ideological power."²³ Diaz's comment, while asinine, gives her the appearance of

being an ordinary, down-to-earth girl. Celebrities' popularity is dependent on audiences feeling that they have a personal relationship with the celebrity.

Another example of this delicate practice of revealing some but not all is examined in Marshall's case study of Tom Cruise as a modern celebrity. Newspaper articles and entertainment magazines carry articles not about Cruise as an actor, but about Cruise as a person. Readers feel they have a close relationship with Cruise are more interested in his personal life than they are his professional life. The articles talk about his dyslexia and how it affects his ability reading scripts. They also talk about how he is very protective of his family because he grew up with no father and several sisters.

Marshall held up the 1990 *Us* cover story as a typical feature story about Cruise. The story featured photos of Cruise's living room and publicity photo stills from his films. The interview itself attempts to uncover the "authentic" Tom Cruise.²⁴

Us: They also said that your dog was in therapy. [Referring to rumors]

Cruise: (laughing) My dog?! Get the hell outta here! Are you serious?

Us: Dead serious.

Cruise: Oh my God, give me a break! Where do they get this stuff?

Us: So it's not true?

Cruise: Yeah right, like my dog is sneaking out and going to therapy!

Us: Do you have a dog?

Cruise: I have two golden retrievers. They travel with me wherever I go. They're really good. They're just kinda there and they're always happy to see me. I love them.²⁵

Casanova had mastered the art of this sort of informational flirtation long before Cruise and Diaz's agents coached them on how to give interviews. Casanova knew that in order to remain a celebrity he had to keep himself as a topic of gossip and speculation for as long as possible. Revealing personal facts about himself was an especially effective way of accomplishing this.

The story of how his nosebleeds were cured accomplished two things. First, it portrayed Casanova as someone who had not always been a glamorous libertine. The episode showed Casanova in an unfavorable light by making him seem physically and mentally inferior. In fact, he said himself that he was an idiot and “poor company.” Although his life as a libertine was a feat few could accomplish in his day, he made his readers feel that they, too, could become as fascinating as he had become, since he begun life as a sickly idiot.

Secondly, his experience with the witch wrapped the entire episode up in an aura of mystery and mysticism. Casanova was able to use the mysterious art of the occult later in his life to deceive more than one woman, although his deception was typically prompted out of a need for money more than it was for a need to satisfy carnal desires. Casanova’s mysterious cure left the reader wondering how such a thing could happen, and also, gave the reader a glimpse of a seemingly miraculous turnaround as Casanova went from a bleeding idiot to a reading youth within a month.

The bulk of Casanova’s story, however, focused not on his youth but on his years as a libertine wandering Europe. These pages, mostly of the romantic nature, are by far the most colorful and the most controversial of the 12 volumes. All throughout, Casanova sprinkled stories that most would consider too personal to share with the public. Casanova, though, may not have felt that less is more. His notoriety thrived on what he may have considered honesty, as Childs explains.

No man in history has probably left quite so sincere a record of his life as Casanova; no one has revealed the truth about himself and about his era with such a telling effect as he. Where others have masked their lives and testimonies, he told all – or almost all. Such unparalleled procedure has proved too much for a world habituated to deceit; the consequence has been that Casanova has been damned incontinently for the best part of two centuries.²⁶

Modern critics warn against reading Casanova's memoirs while judging him by contemporary moral and social standards. "In many respects, the outlook of the eighteenth century is as far removed and as different from our own as that of the Middle Ages," Childs writes. "It is inconceivable that he would have enjoyed the friendship of some of the most notable Europeans of his time if he had been to them the moral leper he appears today to some." Casanova was doing the same things as his contemporaries; what is important is that he was successful in using and promoting his adventures and romantic intrigues to create a celebrity personae.

Madame Butterfly

Besides telling readers about his family background and humble beginnings, Casanova revealed many details about his colorful and exciting sex life. Reading about someone else's sexual exploits is very thrilling, especially when the stories involve outrageous characters, lush settings and unexpected plot twists. Casanova had sex with young virgins, old women, nuns and actresses, and it seems that he liked telling the story almost as much as performing the act. Casanova aroused not only his readers' sex drives; he also aroused their interest in him as a celebrity.

"I could not look into his eyes and not burn with love. I told him that since his eyes were a woman's and not a man's, I needed to convince myself by touch that what I had seen when he had run away was not a monstrous clitoris."²⁷ The year was 1744, and Casanova was 19 years old. Although he had only started shaving the year before²⁸, Casanova was already starting his career as a notorious libertine. The person he referred to in the previous passage is not a man, but a girl disguised as a castrate. Until the end of

the eighteenth century, women were not allowed to sing publicly in the Papal States. As a result, many singers in Italy were males who had been castrated before reaching puberty in order to preserve the high range of their voices.²⁹ These castrated singers commanded high salaries, and this girl had no choice but to disguise herself as a castrate in order to make a living.

What is significant about this relationship is that it was the first of many relationships Casanova was to have with singers, actresses, dancers, and entertainers in general. This particular female has the distinction of being the only entertainer in the *Memoirs* to which Casanova gave a pseudonym.³⁰ Entertainers in the Enlightenment enjoyed reputations much like those of entertainers today: loose and easy. The fact that Casanova made the effort to conceal this woman's identity shows that she was not just any singer to him. "Although he was scrupulous in protecting the identities of those women of position with whom he had affairs by attributing false names to them, he had no similar compunction generally about women of the stage," Childs says. "They themselves rarely, if ever, were concerned about the concealment of their peccadillos."³¹

Casanova met "Bellino" in Ancona when "he" was singing in a troupe as a castrato. Casanova discovered several days later that "he" was actually "Teresa," whom historians have identified as the famous 18th century soprano Angiola Calori. "Bellino" captured Casanova's attention, who, with his knowledge of the female form, inferred that this castrato was actually a female. "The face seemed to me feminine," he thought. "And the masculine attire did not prevent my seeing a certain fullness of bosom, which put it into my head that despite the billing, this must be a girl. In this conviction, I made no resistance to the desires which he aroused in me."³²

Casanova's reputation as a notorious lover may lead some to automatically assume that his sexual experiences ran the gamut of the sexual spectrum. It was not so. Casanova was never one to partake in homosexual behavior. Although he was almost always happy to have sex with women, the thought of sex with men revolted him. "At table I could not take my eyes from this being whom my depraved nature impelled me to love and to believe a member of the sex to which it was necessary to my purposes that he should belong."³³

Casanova had to be sure he wasn't upsetting what he considered the balance of nature in his pursuit of this intriguing person. Bellino was coy, and refused Casanova's repeated requests for examination of his genitalia to ensure that "he" was actually a he. Casanova even made a frantic grab at a moment that caught Bellino unaware, and discovered that he was indeed a castrato. "Astonished, angered, mortified, disgusted, I let him leave."³⁴

Yet after some reflection, Casanova was still convinced that Bellino was a woman. "I told him...his eyes were a woman's a not a man's."³⁵ Perhaps, he thought, what he saw was actually an enormous clitoris. He insisted on verifying by touch. "I no longer want to see," Casanova told Bellino. "All I ask is to touch, and you may be sure that as soon as I am certain I will become as gentle as a dove, for once I discover that you are a man, I cannot possibly love you. That is an abomination for which – God be praised! – I feel no inclination in myself."³⁶

Bellino convinced Casanova through words that he was indeed a male, and the two travelers (they were traveling to Rimini, where Bellino was engaged to sing in an opera) arrived at an inn where they were staying for the night. The room had only one

bed, and Bellino did not insist on getting another room. In fact, "He surprised me by gently answering that he had no objection to sleeping in my bed."³⁷

The magnetism that drew women to Casanova is undeniable, yet unexplainable, especially in light of his attempts to force Bellino to expose himself to a humiliating examination. Yet,

I had scarcely got into bed before I was overcome to see him moving toward me. I clasp him to me, I see that he is fired by the same transport. The exordium of our dialogue was a deluge of mingling kisses. His arms were first to slip down from my back to his loins. I stretch mine still lower, it is revelation enough that I am happy, I sense it, I feel it, I am convinced of it.³⁸

"Bellino" finally revealed her true identity. The daughter of a poor man, Teresa made the acquaintance of the celebrated castrato Salimbeni when she was 12 years old. She took lessons from him, and soon developed a romantic relationship with the handsome singer. Shortly thereafter, Teresa's father died, and without any means of supporting herself, she pleaded with Salimbeni to take her in. He agreed, but circumstances forced her to live as a castrato, so that the devout Queen of Poland, whose service Salimbeni was under, would not have any reason to object when Teresa would eventually join him.

Teresa left all her girl's clothes behind and moved to Rimini to study with a music teacher there. Salimbeni acquired an apparatus, made of soft gut, which could be attached to Teresa's body in a way that it would appear to the mutilated genitalia of a castrato if anyone ever asked to examine her. Salimbeni died the year prior to Teresa's meeting Casanova, but she continued to live as a castrato in order to make a living. Her guardian hoped to send her to sing in Rome one day.

Casanova's relationship with Teresa was provocative and unusual. Although the death penalty was imposed on anyone found performing a castration, many singers in Italy were castrates, according to both Casanova and other visitors to Italy during that time.³⁹ A female masquerading as a castrate, however, is more unusual than the already unnatural castrato singer. Teresa was even more a specimen of interest because of her eventual renown as a singer. In fact, she captured the imagination of not only Casanova, but also Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who "dramatized in *Der Abenteurer und die Sangerin* one episode in [Teresa's] life when Casanova met her again in Florence in 1760...Balzac is believed to have been inspired by her story to write *Sarrasine*."⁴⁰ Casanova's association with this celebrated woman was a good way for him to create some publicity about himself. In fact, he even asked her to marry him, although, as with several other women to follow, the marriage plans failed to come to fruition.

Casanova's relationship with Teresa did not end at their parting ways that year. Seventeen years later, Casanova met Teresa again, through a twist of fate, in Florence. Traveling alone, he went to the theater, mainly to be seen. As the theater was the gathering place of both the wealthy elite and the entertainers, this was the best place for someone like Casanova to get introduced to the society of a new city.

After dining alone I dressed for the occasion and went to the opera in the Via della Pergola, taking a seat in a box near the orchestra more to see the actresses than to hear the music, which has never transported me. But what a surprise when I see the prima donna! I instantly recognized Teresa, whom, after she dropped the mask of Bellino, I had left in Rimini at the beginning of the year 1744 – the very Teresa whom I would certainly have married if Signor de Gages had not had me put under arrest.⁴¹

Seeing Teresa again was not his only surprise. At a dinner party Teresa introduced Casanova to a youth whom she said was her brother. "I receive him as I should, but

flabbergasted, not having had time to recover myself. This supposed brother of Teresa's was the image of me, except that he was not as dark; I instantly see that he is my son; nature had never been more indiscreet."⁴² Teresa had kept the product of their love affair secret from both Casanova and their son Don Cesarino. Her husband also had no knowledge of her past. In fact, she passed herself off as being 24 years old, although she was actually 31, in order to tell people that she was the sister of Don Cesarino, who was

16.

The others [guests at Teresa's dinner party] could only conclude that I had been the intimate friend of Teresa's mother, if it was true that she was this sister, for at the age she appeared to be it was impossible to suppose that she was his mother. Nor was it possible to conclude that I was Teresa's father, for I looked almost as young as she did.

Casanova's story about Bellino/Teresa accomplishes several things. First, it gives the reader the impression that he was a very astute expert on women, considering that Teresa had duped everyone she came into contact with prior to meeting Casanova. Secondly, it portrays Casanova as a politically correct lover in that he did not discriminate against Teresa because she was masquerading as a man in order to make a living. Finally, it set the bounds of what Casanova would do for love – he wouldn't have sex with a man, but he would go to great lengths to prove that this "man" was actually a woman.

This love affair with a cross-dressing soprano also produced a love child, Don Cesarino, whom Casanova was not able to publicly claim as his son. The details of this story are what make it interesting, because there are probably few readers who can say they have had a romantic relationship anything like this. The reader lives vicariously through Casanova, and this is one way of establishing oneself as a celebrity – leading a

life so provocative and then telling the story so vividly that the reader himself lives the story through reading it.

Sister Act

This next story is one so extraordinary that historians questioned the veracity of it. Again, the secret is in the details. The audience reads this tale and can't help but think, "How is this possible?" Casanovists (Casanova experts) have proved that these events actually took place, but that it beside the point. The main purpose of this story in establishing Casanova as a celebrity is that it portrays him as a generous, virile and dashing lover.

This torrid and scandalous love affair was with M.M., a nun in a convent in Murano (a town close to Venice). Previous to Casanova's meeting this nun, he was in love with a young girl, C.C., whose father was so enraged when he discovered his daughter's relationship with the libertine Casanova that he put her in the convent to keep the lovers apart. Unbeknownst to the father, however, was that Casanova could circumvent their forced separation by attending masses at the church. It was at one of these masses that Casanova, in fine clothes with his hair elaborately dressed, attracted the attention of M.M.

To communicate with Casanova, M.M. sent a note by messenger in which she told him that he was intriguing to her and that she wanted to meet him. Casanova had no idea who she was and what she looked like, since the nuns were out of sight at masses. In fact, the only contact nuns were allowed to have with members of the outside world was through a grating in the visiting room of the convent. M.M. arranged for a meeting at the

convent, in the presence of a Countess friend of hers to not arouse suspicion, so that Casanova could see what she looked like. Although the two did not speak during this meeting, Casanova was “very nearly beside myself with admiration.”⁴³

The note also suggested that the two of them meet for dinner sometime.

The same nun who writes you this letter will give you the address of a casino here in Murano where you will find her alone at the first hour of the night on the day you indicate to her...[or] would you prefer to offer her supper in Venice? Let her know the day, the hour of the night, and the place to which she is to go, and you will see her leave a gondola masked, provided you are on the quay alone, without a servant, masker, and holding a candle.⁴⁴

M.M. was no ordinary nun. Casanova, in maintaining the anonymity of his love interest, identified her only by initials; however, he made it quite clear that she was of a patrician family.⁴⁵ At the time, Casanova knew very little about her, and found out through gossip that M.M. was rich, highly cultivated and a freethinker. She became a nun through sheer caprice. Her fluency in French indicated the education of a wealthy woman. In addition, M.M.’s bold ways surprised even someone as open-minded as Casanova. “I was much surprised at the great freedom enjoyed by these holy virgins, who could so easily violate their rule of enclosure.”⁴⁶

Casanova revealed many personal and private details of his trysts with M.M. as he did with all his sexual escapades. The details of this amorous relationship with a nun were particularly juicy and interesting. The reader wonders if Casanova will tell all. Casanova does not disappoint. “I was to taste a forbidden fruit,” he wrote, on the eve of meeting M.M. at her casino for the first time. “I was to infringe on the rights of an omnipotent husband, snatching from his seraglio the most beautiful of his sultanas.”⁴⁷

The word choices in this one passage set the tone for the sexy details to come. The alliteration in the words “snatching,” “seraglio,” and “sultanas” create a seductive

mood leading up to this first, highly anticipated meeting. Casanova suggests he is doing something wrong or illegal through use of words such as “forbidden,” “infringe,” and “snatching.” These words imply that Casanova was committing a moral sin. Perhaps he was.

Casanova had no way to know that M.M. was quite the libertine herself. Not only was she the lover of Monsieur de Bernis, the French Ambassador to Venice, she was also the lesbian lover of C.C., Casanova’s young friend. The four lovers had a string of complicated amorous adventures during the length of their yearlong relationship, as Childs illustrates:

De Bernis had particular tastes which he satisfied as concealed spectator of Casanova’s first night with M.M., passed in the retreat loaned her for that purpose by the ambassador. There followed a series of light-hearted supper parties in which the participants were Casanova, M.M., and de Bernis, another with the addition of C.C., one when Casanova spent the night with both M.M. and C.C., and still another when Casanova was maneuvered by de Bernis’ skillful diplomacy into ceding his place to the ambassador.⁴⁸

Although Childs does not delve into the voluptuous details of the romantic encounters, Casanova’s narrative, of course, contains vivid detail and description. He portrays himself as the prize jealously fought over and desired by the two impassioned nuns.

The sight of my two beauties in combat making me ardent, I am at a loss how to begin. For the honor of sentiment I should have given the preference to C.C., but I feared M.M.’s jibes, for she was sure to crow over my love which I wanted her to believe was hers alone. C.C. was thinner than M.M., yet she had bigger hips and thighs; her ornaments were brown, the other’s blonde, and they were both equally skilled in a combat which was tiring them without the possibility of their reaching a conclusion.⁴⁹

“The content of these episodes is not of great importance, but their illumination of the manners and morals of the age merits particular examination, and from this comes

the long-debated question of how much is fact and how much is fiction,”⁵⁰ Childs notes. Yet, all this discussion on whether the events ever happened achieved Casanova’s goal of creating celebrity. Because Casanova revealed so many details, historians are forced to make him an object of study. What kind of man has a sexual relationship with a beautiful bisexual patrician nun, the lover of another nun and also the lover of the French ambassador to Venice, who in turn had a fetish of secretly watching his mistress have sex with other men? It may be fabricated, yet it could be true. Most importantly, it’s exciting.

The details of Casanova’s life made him famous, but fame comes at a price. Casanova was good at promoting himself – so good that he attracted the attention of the Venetian State Inquisitors, who sent someone to spy on Casanova. The spy reported that he was socializing with foreign diplomats while living off of patricians (an illegal relationship, because of the potential of revealing state secrets). The spy also accused Casanova of cheating at cards and being an atheist.⁵¹ There was no trial: On July 26, 1755, Casanova was arrested and incarcerated in The Leads.

The Name Game

Revealing personal details does not have to deal only with sex stories. Casanova revealed many details about his family background. He called himself “Giacomo Casanova, Chevalier de Seingalt” throughout most of his adult life. Where did this title come from? “Chevalier” means “knight,” but there is no indication in the memoirs that Casanova was ever knighted into any society. Actually, Casanova never let his low birth deter him from distinguishing himself from the commoners. He thought of himself as an elite, socially and culturally. He did not have an inherited title; his father was an actor. So, Casanova made one up.

It is not known at what time he adopted this title, although Casanova first mentions using it during his stay in Switzerland in mid-1760. "Once a man of honor takes a name to which no one else can lay claim it is his duty to keep it," he wrote.⁵² In Augsburg in 1761, the burgomaster (called a Stadtpfleger), summoned Casanova to appear on charges of using a false name. The Stadtpfleger asked Casanova how one can claim a name which is not his by birth. Casanova explained:

It is the simplest and easiest thing in the world. The alphabet belongs to everyone; there's no denying that. I took eight letters, and combined them in such a way as to produce the word Seingalt. The word thus formed pleased me, and I adopted it as my surname, in the firm conviction that, since no one ever bore it before me, no one has the right to deny it to me, still less to bear it without my permission.⁵³

The burgomaster persisted. "But you will admit that there are laws against false names?" he asked. "Yes, against false names; but I repeat that nothing is more true than my name," replied Casanova. "Yours, which I respect without knowing it, cannot be truer than mine for it is possible that you are not the son of the man whom you believe to be your father."⁵⁴

This passage showed that Casanova was frank and open about his humble birth. This practice of making up titles was fairly common during the Enlightenment. Voltaire did it. However, most people who did so didn't announce that fact. Some famous people hide the fact that they are not who they appear to be; Casanova fiercely defended his right to portray himself as whoever he wished to be. As a professional celebrity, Casanova knew his entire reputation was based on perceived credibility. Why not call himself a knight if he feels he deserves to be one? One mark of an *über*-celebrity is the conviction that one can be anyone they want, and feel deserving in every respect of such titles.

There is an art in the dissemination of information about oneself. Casanova's life was filled with many personal details and events, yet the way he tells his story makes the reader want to know more and read on in the *Memoirs*. Like Tom Cruise, who makes his fans feel like they have a personal relationship with him, Casanova was able to reach his readers in a similar fashion, and entice them to delve deeper into his story. He used vivid details to portray himself in a certain light: as a politically correct lover, as a virile lover, or as a commoner worthy of a title.

Chapter Two Self-promotion

“Believe me: never think of writing your biography.”
-Marquis d’Argens to Casanova, Aix-en-Provence 1769

Casanova was a master of self-promotion and never wasted an opportunity to spread news about any of his adventures in order to create publicity. This is why the reader can’t help but laugh at the exchange between the Marquis d’Argens, the Director of the Academy of Sciences of Berlin, and Casanova, in Vol. 11 of *Histoire de ma vie*.

The Marquis warned Casanova about the dangers of writing one’s autobiography:

As a gentleman you cannot write anything but the truth, and as an honest writer you are obliged not only not to leave anything that may have happened to you unrecorded, but also not to spare yourself in all the sins you have committed, while, as a sound philosopher you must bring out all your good actions. You must blame and praise yourself by turns. All your confessions will be taken at face value, and you will not be believed when you tell truths which are to your credit. Besides all that, you will make enemies when you have to reveal secrets which do no honor to the people who will have had dealings with you. If you do not give their names, they will be guessed, which comes to the same thing. Believe me, my friend, if a man may not talk about himself, still less may he write about himself. It is permitted only to a man whom slander forces to justify himself.⁵⁵

At the time, 1769, Casanova responded with earnest agreement. Thirty years later, he wrote, “I began my biography seven years ago, and by now I have promised myself that I will finish it, although I am already repentant. I write in the hope that my history will never be published; I flatter myself that in my last illness, grown wise at last, I will have all my notebooks burned in my presence.”⁵⁶

It is hard to imagine Casanova, the notorious self-promoter, genuinely thinking that he would not one day preserve his legacy for future generations in the form of an autobiography. Casanova took great in recording the “truths and confessions” about with

the Marquis warned him. His celebrity status would be permanent upon the world's learning of stories such as his escaping from the Leads and having sex with nuns. He wanted his "confessions...taken at face value." This is the way of the professional celebrity: he controls what information the public receives about him, and therefore controls his public image.

The *Memoirs* is perhaps Casanova's most powerful and effective promotional tool. "Notwithstanding his prolific writings, Casanova's place in world literature rests on one book, and that was published a quarter of a century after his death: the *Memoirs*, or *Histoire de ma vie*, as he himself entitled his manuscript," Childs asserts. "But for it, his name would have long disappeared beneath the sediment of history."⁵⁷

Of course, the *Memoirs* were only part of Casanova's lifelong self-promotional campaign. It was his vehicle for immortality, but during his life he used other forms of promotion to achieve goals of celebrityhood and sexual satisfaction. These different methods included storytelling, publishing books, advertising and dueling. Casanova was able to use these methods to self-promote himself and change the course of his life anytime he was not satisfied with the status quo.

Storytelling

Storytelling was Casanova's most frequently used form of self-promotion. While not all people liked to, or could, read, they did enjoy gossiping and discussing current events. The social culture of the Enlightenment was extremely conducive to spreading news and information via word of mouth. Aristocrats rarely did any real work, and filled their days with social calls, lunches and afternoon teas. The topic of conversation

invariably would turn to current events, such as the arrival of the dashing Chavalier de Seingalt in town.

The *salonnière* was also an important source of news, since regular and reputable news publications were rare. In the Enlightenment, women hosted regular lunches in their homes, and the attendees of these lunches would hold discuss a variety of intellectual, philosophical or newsworthy topics. Historian Robert Darnton tells of a Mme. M.A.L. Doublet, who held regular meetings in her Parisian parlor to discuss news and gossip. The attendees of these meetings included those well connected to the court and other influential bodies.⁵⁸ Mme. Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin, historian Dena Goodman reports, even regulated the attendees of her lunches by days of week: Monday for artists, Wednesday for men of letters.⁵⁹ In *salonnières*, news of Casanova's numerous exploits spread quickly via word of mouth.

Casanova's biggest contribution to the fodder of salon gossip was his story of escape from The Leads. This Venetian prison was considered to be impenetrable because of its lead roof. (Thus, the name "The Leads.") Casanova was the first man ever to escape, and the tale of his escape spread like wildfire through European society. He intrigued all who heard the story with his ingenuity, perseverance and plain luck in his breakout effort. It took Casanova over 2 hours to tell his story. The following is a condensed version.

The reason for Casanova's imprisonment was unclear to him for many years. The State Inquisitors never formally charged him with any crime at the time of his arrest. Casanova eventually found out years later that he was imprisoned for possession of books about magic and for allegedly being an atheist. A spy for the State Inquisitors discovered

five books in Casanova's possession that dealt with magic. Casanova said these books were of no value to him, but they were nevertheless in his possession.

A lady of position also accused Casanova of leading her sons toward atheism with his cabala. An informer and two witnesses accused Casanova of only believing in the devil.

They testified that when I lost my money at cards, a time when all true believers blasphemed God, no one heard me curse anyone but the devil. I was accused of eating meat every day, of going only to showy masses, and there were strong reasons for believing that I was a Freemason. To all this they added that I frequented foreign embassies and that since I lived with three patricians it was certain that, knowing everything that was done in the Senate, I revealed it for the large sums of money which I was seen to lose.⁶⁰

Casanova could have escaped imprisonment entirely if he had heeded the advice of friends and an anonymous letter that told him the State Inquisitors were making inquiries into his affairs. Everyone suggested that a trip abroad was in order. But Casanova was always self-assured and stubborn and felt that since he had done nothing wrong, there was no cause for the State Inquisitors to arrest him.

I answer [Signor Bragadin, a patrician friend] that since I know I am not guilty of anything I could not fear the tribunal and that consequently I could not follow his advice, though I saw that it was very prudent. He answers that the tribunal of the State Inquisitors could find me guilty of crimes of which I had no knowledge. He urged me to consult my oracle whether I should follow his advice or not, and I declined, saying that I asked only when I was in doubt. As my final argument I put it to him that if I fled I should be showing a fear which would declare me guilty, for an innocent person, having no remorse, can have no fears either.⁶¹

Casanova was arrested the next day, July 26, 1755. He was 30 years old.

For four months Casanova was put in solitary confinement, forced to suffer the punishment of spending the hottest days of the summer under the lead roof of the Doge's Palace. Not only did the heat and the fleas bother him, perhaps the hardest part of the sentence was boredom. Casanova's active mind was not accustomed to being denied

books, newspapers, paper and pens. He was only given two books, one of which, *The Mystical City of God*, Casanova described as “everything that the extravagance of the heated imagination of an extremely devout Spanish virgin, given to melancholy, shut up in a convent, and guided by ignorant and flattering confessors, could bring forth.” The other book, *Heart of Jesus*, called for “a new special adoration directed to the heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶² It was so ridiculous that even Casanova, a voracious reader, was unable to read more than the first page of this book.

In this state of boredom, Casanova convinced himself that he would be released on October 1, the day the new Inquisitors took office. He believed that the Inquisitors in office had wrongfully imprisoned him, and knew it, and that once the new Inquisitors took office they would release him because they had no cause to keep him incarcerated. “I imagined that the Inquisitors must have recognized their injustice in my innocence and hence were keeping me there only as a matter of form and for the sake of their reputation, but that they would certainly have to set me free when their reign ended,” Casanova reasoned.⁶³

October 1 came and went. Casanova went into a sort of a rage when he realized that he might have to remain in the Leads for the rest of his life. “This terrible idea made me laugh, for I knew that I had the power to remain there only a very short time, once I had made up my mind to gain freedom at the risk of my life. Either they would kill me or I would succeed in it.”⁶⁴

In the middle of November Casanova’s jailer Lorenzo allowed his inmate the privilege of walking for half an hour each day on the garret. It was while walking on the garret that Casanova found “a piece of black polished marble an inch thick, six inches

long, and three wide” in a pile of household furniture that had been put in the garret and was no longer used. On another day Casanova found “a sort of perfectly straight bolt as thick as my thumb and a foot and a half long.”⁶⁵

Casanova went to work fashioning a sort of spear out of the bolt, sharpening the metal on the polished marble.

Interested in this strange kind of work, in which I was a novice, and to which I was inspired by the hope of possessing a tool which must be strictly forbidden up there, and further urged on by pride in managing to produce a weapon without the necessary instruments to make it with, even exasperated by the very difficulties – for I had to rub the bolt almost in darkness, working on the sill, only able to keep the stone from slipping with my left hand, and having no oil with which to wet and soften the iron on which I wanted to put a point – I used nothing but my saliva and I toiled for two weeks filing down eight triangular facets which at their apexes formed a perfect point; the facets were an inch and a half long.⁶⁶

Casanova hid the product of his two weeks’ worth of toiling in his armchair where Lorenzo would not think to look. He planned on using his newly formed pike to make a hole under his bed, knowing that his cell was directly above the office chamber where his identity was verified the day he was brought to the prison. Casanova planned on dropping into that room using a ladder made of his bedclothes, hiding under the table until the room was unlocked in the morning and then escaping to freedom before anyone realized he was gone.

The problem was, Casanova’s room was flea-infested and he had ordered the room to be swept every morning. It would have been impossible to hide a hole under the bed. How could he stop the constables from doing something he had previously ordered them to do? By trickery, of course. He claimed that the dust raised from the sweeping was bringing on a case of tuberculosis. To trick Lorenzo, he pricked a finger, bloodied his

handkerchief, and said that he had contracted consumption from the dust. Lorenzo immediately stopped having the room swept.

After a delay caused by the paralyzing cold of winter and the arrival and departure of a cellmate, Casanova finally set to work digging a hole under his bed two weeks after Easter in 1756. He made relatively quick progress digging through three layers of boards two inches thick. The next layer, however, was more of a challenge. It was what is known in Venice as terrazzo marmorin, a kind of flooring with bits of marble. Casanova found that his pike would not cut into the hard material.

Then I remember Hannibal, who, according to Livy, had opened a passage through the Alps by chopping away the rock which he had softened through the action of vinegar – a thing I considered incredible, not so much because of the power of the acid but because of the prodigious quantity of vinegar he must have had.⁶⁷

Casanova conveniently had a bottle of strong vinegar on hand. He remained dubious, considering the fact that the copyists had probably made an error when copying out the story of Hannibal, and that he had performed his feat not “aceto” (by vinegar), but “asceta” (ax).

The vinegar worked. Casanova dug through the terrazzo marmorin in four days. Finally, he reached the last board, which was the first board above the ceiling of the room below. He planned on making his escape the night of Aug. 27, the night before St. Augustine’s Day, when he knew that none of the Great Council would be present.

Fate had other plans. On Aug. 25, Lorenzo unlocked the cell door and announced that Casanova was going to be moved into another cell “which is light and brand-new, where you will see half of Venice from two windows, where you can stand upright.” Casanova protested, but Lorenzo would hear nothing of it.

I rose, I left the cell, and I instantly felt a slight relief when I heard him order one of his men to follow him with my armchair. As always, my pike was hidden in its stuffing, and that was at least something. I wished I were also being followed by the fine hole I had made with such effort, and which I had to abandon; but it was impossible. My body moved on, but my soul remained behind.⁶⁸

Lorenzo found the hole, and punished Casanova by giving him nothing but spoiled food for eight days. However, Lorenzo's power over Casanova was limited, because Casanova could easily have had him hanged for allowing a hole to be dug right under his nose. He could not report Casanova to the Inquisitors for fear of losing his job, and perhaps even his life.

Casanova had asked Lorenzo to buy him a set of books so that he could have something to read, but Lorenzo did not want to spend the money. Casanova always gave what money was left over at the end of the month to him. Lorenzo suggested that Casanova instead exchange books with other prisoners, since he was not the only learned person in the prison. Casanova had another idea in mind. He used the books as a way to pass messages with the other prisoner.

He discovered that the prisoner whose books he was borrowing was Father Balbi, who was imprisoned for fathering three bastards with three virgins, and then baptizing the infants under his own name. Casanova knew right off from the first letter from Father Balbi, which ran sixteen pages long, that he was a "blockhead." However, the acquaintance of Father Balbi had its distinct advantages, since his jailer, Niccolo, was willing to bring him everything he wanted with the proper financial compensation.

Casanova realized that he would not be able to break out of his new cell, because a constable came and checked the room each day to make sure there were no holes in the floor. The only way out was through the ceiling, by a hole made from the outside. To do

this, he enlisted Father Balbi's help. First, Casanova told Father Balbi to buy forty or fifty prints of saints with which to paper his entire cell. That way, he could make a hole in the ceiling of the cell and cover it up with a print. Casanova then had Lorenzo buy him a copy of a folio Bible that had recently been printed. He hoped that the book would be large enough that he could hide his pike in the back of the binding and send it to Father Balbi's cell hidden in this fashion.

When the book arrived, Casanova found that the pike was two inches longer than the Bible, which measured a foot and a half. Lacking a forge with which to shorten the pike, Casanova had to think of a way to get the pike from his cell to Father Balbi's cell next door. The plan he devised and executed was nothing short of ingenious ... and incredibly lucky. Casanova informed Lorenzo that he wanted to celebrate the upcoming St. Michael's Day by preparing a dish of macaroni for the person who lent him his books. Casanova specified that he wanted to prepare the meal himself, and that he wanted Lorenzo to bring him the biggest dish he had in his house. Father Balbi then asked Lorenzo to see the big Bible that had cost three zecchini. Casanova hoped that by placing a big dish of macaroni swimming in butter on the Bible, Lorenzo would be more occupied with making sure the butter didn't spill than with looking at the Bible, from which two inches of the pike would be protruding.

The plan went off without a hitch:

I picked it [the large dish of macaroni] up and set it on the big book, which I had put beside the door of my cell, and holding it on the palms of my hands with the spine toward Lorenzo I told him to put out his arms and spread his fingers, and I admonished him to carry it with the greatest care and slowly so that the butter would not spill out of the dish and run over the Bible. As I admonished him to be careful of his most important burden, I kept my eyes fixed on his, which I was most happy to see never moved from the butter, which he was afraid of spilling.

He wanted to take the macaroni and come back for the Bible afterward; but I laughed and said that if he did that, my present would lose all its beauty.⁶⁹

The pike made its way safely to Father Balbi's cell.

Two and a half weeks later Father Balbi had dug his way through his ceiling, through the wall separating their cells, and through Casanova's ceiling. They escaped from their cells through the ceiling, and still using the pike, made a hole in the side of the Palace where the wood had rotted away under one of the lead plates. The two escapees scaled the steep lead plates wet with dew, and entered an adjoining building after breaking a window and the iron grating covering it. Casanova and Father Balbi picked a lock and broke through a door inside the building before finally coming to a door that led to the outside world. Casanova opened a window and looked outside, and attracted the attention of some idlers, who notified the man who had the keys to the building. They let the man think he had accidentally locked someone inside the night before.

From there, Casanova and Father Balbi took a gondola to Mestre, went on horseback to Treviso, and from there on foot leaving the Venetian State. It was October 31, 1756, All Saints' Day. Casanova would not return again to his home state until 1774.

Immediately after his escape, the first city Casanova stopped at was Paris. He knew he had to get serious and get a job because he could no longer depend on his friends in Venice. "I saw that to accomplish anything I must bring all my physical and moral faculties into play, make the acquaintance of the great and the powerful, exercise self-control, and play the chameleon to all those whom I should see it was my interest to please."⁷⁰

Casanova wasted no time in putting his plan into action. His first visit was to the Duke of Choiseul, who at the time was the French Ambassador to Rome, and who in two

years' time would become the powerful French Minister of Foreign Affairs. De Choiseul happened to be in Paris, and Casanova went to visit him one morning while the ambassador was at his toilet table writing and having his hair dressed.

After finishing his letter he said to me in Italian that the Abbé de Bernis had told him part of the story of my escape.

'Tell me how you managed to bring it off.'

'The story, Monseigneur, takes two hours, and I have the impression that Your Excellency is in a hurry.'

'Tell it to me briefly.'

'It is the very shortest version of it which takes two hours.'

'You can tell me the details another time.'

'Without the details the story is not interesting.'

'Of course. But one can abbreviate anything as much as one wishes.'

'Very well. I will tell Your Excellency that the State Inquisitors had me imprisoned under the Leads. At the end of fifteen months and five days I made a hole in the roof; I entered the Chancellery through a dormer and broke open the door to it; I went down to the Piazza; I took a gondola which carried me to the mainland, whence I went to Munich. From there I came to Paris, where I have the honor to pay you my respects.'

'But – what are the Leads?'

'That, Monseigneur, takes a quarter of an hour.'

'How did you manage to make a hole in the roof?'

'That takes half an hour.'

'Why were you imprisoned up there?'

'Another half hour.'

'I think you are right. The interest of the thing is in the details. I have to go to Versailles. I should be glad to have you call on me from time to time. Meanwhile, think of how I can be of use to you.'⁷¹

Casanova's use of word choice was critical in keeping de Choiseul interested in hearing the story. An important minister heard many interesting stories every day. Casanova was clever by refusing to tell the story, knowing that the Duke was in a hurry and wanted to know what happened. The Duke asked to hear the story, and Casanova refused, saying that the story took two entire hours to tell. In fact, he continued, it is the very shortest version that takes two hours. Even explaining what the Leads are would take a quarter of an hour. How he managed to make a hole in the roof would take another

half-hour. He simply could not tell the story without all the proper details, because it would not do the story justice. By this time, the Duke is hooked. Casanova has baited him with so many juicy tidbits that he is dying to hear the story. The Duke must leave, but he asks Casanova to call on him and to think of how he could help the clever escapee. Casanova's first promotional effort was a success. He promoted himself by not telling his story.

The Abbé de Bernis, the fourth player in Casanova's former complicated love affair with M.M. and C.C., was more than happy to help Casanova secure a steady income in Paris. He knew many important and powerful people. With this relationship established, Casanova pursued acquaintances with other men of distinction as a friend of de Bernis. He used his story of escape from the Leads as an icebreaker, since everyone wanted to hear this story.

Upon first arriving in Paris and calling on de Bernis, he found that the minister had already heard about the story of his escape through letters from M.M. The story had spread immediately by word of mouth, and Casanova had scarcely told it himself. He found, though, that the details of M.M.'s story were all wrong. "I promised to send him [de Bernis] the true story of it...and he promised to keep me in mind and to let me know when he would need to speak to me. A week later I sent him the story of my escape, giving him permission to have it copied and to use it as he thought best to interest anyone who could be helpful to me." It was like a press release, and de Bernis did in fact have it copied and distributed it to prominent Parisians. As Casanova was unable to tell the story to so many people personally, he did the next best thing: he distributed copies of his story.

Still, the most effective way of promoting himself with this escape story was by personally recounting it. Storytelling allowed Casanova to tailor each recitation of a story to appeal to the individual or group. "I found that wherever I went I had to tell the story of my escape; it was a task, for it took two hours; but I felt I must oblige those who were eager to hear it," Casanova reasoned self-assuredly, "for their eagerness could arise only from their lively interest in myself." He told the story to anyone who would listen: politicians, entertainers and aristocrats. They were all equally enthralled by the story. "He is insupportable except when he speaks of his escape [from the Leads], which he recounts admirably," wrote Justinienne Wynne (Mlle. X.C.V.) to her lover Andrea Memmo, in a letter dated January 8, 1759. Though she faked disgust with Casanova (whom she described in the letter as, in addition to "insupportable," "quite full of himself and foolishly proud") to not arouse suspicion of her and Casanova's love affair, she could not pretend to be unimpressed by the story of the escape. She could lie about disliking his character, and say she wasn't taken in with his flashy style of dress, but saying she didn't like his famous escape story would have led Memmo to believe that she was hiding something.

Casanova's self-promotion through storytelling among men of power in Paris gave Casanova the opportunity to head the new French lottery system, a position that was extremely profitable. Casanova told his story to many men like de Choiseul, and in this way made gained access to the office suites of powerful decision-makers. His storytelling to women and actresses gained him popularity and acclaim in the most prominent social circles of Paris. Although he had just arrived in the city, Casanova found that many women wanted to invite him into their salons to hear him recount his story. He had been

imprisoned for more than a year, but upon escaping found that his popularity had not waned. Being put in prison was one of the best things to happen to this celebrity.

Books

Good self-promoters are able to use different kinds of media. During Casanova's time, there was a wide variety of printed matter available, including pamphlets, news sheets, periodicals and books. According to "visibility marketing expert" Raleigh Pinsky, books are a good way to open doors to "career and personal recognition, authority status in your field, enhanced job status, [and] the start of a new career."⁷²

Casanova used books to accomplish all those things. During the Enlightenment, books were quite expensive and relatively hard to acquire,⁷³ but luckily, Casanova's audience was primarily rich and aristocratic, the group most likely to read and own books. This allowed him to reach out to his audience very directly when writing, because like storytelling, he could tailor the message in a highly individualized manner. Casanova used books as a major self-promotional medium in that he wrote and published stories that either portrayed him in an important, heroic light, or advanced a personal cause.

With the exception of the *Memoirs*, the book that was Casanova's most ambitious self-promotional work was *Confutation of the History of the Government of Venice*.

Hidden under the guise of a literary confutation, this book was actually a self-promotional piece written for an audience of three: the Venetian State Inquisitors.

Casanova traveled all over Europe for many years, but in 1769, he was 45 years old and tired of the constant travel. Perhaps feeling his advancing age, Casanova felt the call of his mother city. More importantly, he knew that his popularity was waning and there was

little he could do about it. "Fortune scorns old age," he wrote.⁷⁴ His petition for reentry was this book.

History of the Government of Venice had been published in Paris in 1676. The book made a mockery of the history of Venice and so enraged the Venetian government that it succeeded in having the author, Amelot de la Houssaye, imprisoned in the Bastille. Venetian authorities forbade anyone from discussing the work, and this included discussing the *History* as a work of slander against the Venetian State. As a person exiled from Venice, Casanova had the advantage of being able to rebut this work without repercussion from the Venetian government.

"My purpose in printing this work was to earn a pardon from the Venetian State Inquisitors," Casanova said matter-of-factly. "Amelot de la Houssaye had written his *History of the Government of Venice* as an inveterate enemy of the Venetians; his history was a satire, which contained learned disquisitions interlarded with slanders."⁷⁵ Casanova hoped that by writing the proper rebuttal the Venetian authorities would allow him to return home on the pretext of rewarding him for his unwavering patriotism.

The first draft of Casanova's confutation was written in pencil in forty-two days during Casanova's imprisonment in the Torre de San Juan, also called "The Tower," in Barcelona. The jail sentence was a result of becoming too intimate with the mistress of a jealous count. Casanova wrote while in "The Tower" without the work he was confuting in the first place, since he was not allowed any books. After his release and having obtained a copy of the *History*, Casanova finished the *Confutation of the History of the Government of Venice* in Lugano, "where facilities existed for the printing of Italian books without censorship."⁷⁶ For once unrestrained by the demands of a love affair,

Casanova was able to work 14-hour days in order to finish the three-volume work within two months.⁷⁷

The *Confutation* was a hit. With the help of his friends Signor Dandolo and Signor Barbaro, Casanova even had 50 subscribers in Venice. The edition sold out within a year.⁷⁸ Despite the popularity of the book, though, Casanova still did not get permission to return to Venice for another five years. He was finally issued safe-conduct on Sept. 3, 1774 after years of persistent self-promotion. He returned to Venice on Sept. 14, after 18 years of exile.⁷⁹

The *Confutation* was one of the few major works written before the later years of Casanova's life. He published many books, most of them after 1780, and this was probably because he was so busy constantly promoting himself during his younger and middle-aged years. As his social schedule slowed, his output of books and other publications increased dramatically. In 1780 Casanova published his account of the duel with Polish nobleman Xavier Branicki, an event that will be discussed later in this chapter. Seven years after that, in 1788, Casanova published a book about his escape from the Leads, called *Histoire de ma fuite*, or *History of my escape*. Friends tried to convince him to publish more stories about his life, but he refused. These two events were his most significant accomplishments in his taking control of matters and changing the direction of his life.

Instead of writing about his own life, Casanova started writing on a variety of other subjects. First, he published three works on mathematical issues: *Solution to the Delos Problem*, *Corollary to the Duplication of the Hexahedron*, and *Geometrical Demonstration of the Duplication of the Cube*. Then, he worked on *History of Unrest in*

Poland, of which he had already published three volumes. Casanova's other works from this period include *The Philosopher and the Theologian* (philosophical dialogues), *Critical Essay on Morals, the Sciences and the Arts*, and *Musings on the Mean Measurement of Time According to Gregorian Reform*.⁸⁰

At this point, Casanova felt that the timing was right to release a work that would make him famous. In promotion, supply and demand control the flow of information. "I saw myself obtaining the approval of the whole world, everyone feeling obliged to say, after reading my work, Oh! Happy world...Here is a work that will vault me to immortality," Casanova wrote in a letter to a friend in 1785. Obviously, he felt that there was a demand for a utopian novel: *Icosaméron, or, The History of Edouard and Elisabeth Who Spent Eighty-One Years among the Megamicres, Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Protocosm Inside our Globe*.⁸¹ He was wrong. *Icosaméron*, published in five volumes in 1788, had only 156 subscribers. Casanova was bitterly disappointed and lost a great deal of money.

By now, Casanova was alone and miserable, serving as librarian in Count Waldstein's castle in Dux. His days as a celebrity were all but over, and he had become a subject of ridicule and derision. The historian De Ligne left a clear portrait of what life was like for Casanova during these times:

He had failed to be presented to a visitor of distinction who had come to see the lance that had pierced the great Wallenstein. The count had loaned a book without notifying him. A groom had not doffed his hat when passing him. He had become angry, they had laughed. He had shown his French verses, they had laughed. He had gesticulated declaiming Italian verses, they had laughed. He had made, on entering a room, the bow taught him by Marcel, the famous dancing master sixty years before, they had laughed. He had performed at every ball the grave step of his minuet, they had laughed. He had dressed up with his white plume, his suit of gold embroidered silk, his vest of black velvet, and his garters of rhinestone buckles on his silk stockings, they had laughed.⁸²

It is easy to imagine the Casanova's frustration and sadness. In the spring of 1789, Casanova fell ill and the physician recommended a respite from mathematical research and suggested that the patient instead write his reminiscences, an activity he felt would be more restful. Casanova followed his doctor's orders, and wrote constantly. "The reader will forgive me when he learns that writing my memoirs was the only remedy I thought I could employ to keep from going mad or dying of chagrin over the vexations to which I was subjected by the scoundrels who inhabited Count Waldstein's castle at Dux." Casanova had a draft finished in two years' time. From then until his death, he was constantly revising and retouching the work. According to Childs, Casanova was torn between burning the manuscript and passing his story on to posterity so that he would always be remembered.

The manuscript for *Histoire de ma vie* was not immediately published and instead passed to Casanova's nephew-in-law, who sold the manuscript. It was passed around until 1821, when it became the possession of the German publishing house Brockhaus. It wasn't until 1960, 160 years after Casanova's death, that the *Memoirs* were published in its original French text.

Although not an astrologer, cabalist or fortune-teller, as he had claimed he was during his life, Casanova had amazing foresight. The *Memoirs* "will be translated perhaps into all languages," he wrote to a friend. However, cynicism would cause their reading to be forbidden "in all countries where one loves decent manners," he wrote to another.⁸³ He was right on both counts. Today, translations of the *Memoirs* are available in over 20 languages, and the work is also still outlawed in some countries.⁸⁴

It was the *Memoirs*, not *Icosaméron* that helped Casanova achieve his goal of worldwide fame. Although he started the work as a form of therapy, it turned into a labor of love, a crotchety old librarian's way of showing everyone that he was once a dashing libertine. This work was the ultimate self-promotional tool, because it was a three thousand-some page work all about him, as told by him. There shouldn't have been any doubt as to if Casanova would write his autobiography. He was an unalloyed, unrepentant self-promoter. The *Memoirs* has allowed Casanova's legacy to live on, and has kept his celebrity status secure for over 200 years.

Advertising

Promotional tools range from complicated events to simple flyers. Casanova's promotional strategies included both the promotional event, and, as this example shows, the basic flyer. Casanova's stay in London in 1763 was a departure from the romantic escapades and bustling social life he typically enjoyed on the Continent. He did not speak English and this language barrier stifled his ability to promote himself and therefore hurt his celebrityhood. "Amid so many pleasures I was bored because I did not have a dear mistress in my bed and at my table, and I had already been in London for five weeks."⁸⁵ Casanova was very clear: he wanted sex, and he wanted attention.

Casanova chose a very direct form of communication to get what he wanted – he put up an advertisement. In this ad, he stated explicitly what he was looking for. "Third-floor or fourth-floor furnished apartment to be let cheaply to a young lady alone and her own mistress who speaks English and French and who will receive no visitors either by

day or by night.”⁸⁶ Most Londoners thought this ad was a joke, but nevertheless, it accomplished its purpose of attracting a great deal of attention.

The St. James Chronicle, a London newspaper published three times a week, even ran a commentary on the unusual advertisement. “He [Casanova] ran the risk of being the victim of it [the conditions of the contract], for he might find a very pretty girl who, having obtained the apartment cheaply, would use it only to sleep in, or who might even refuse to receive the landlord if he took it into his head to pay her a visit.”⁸⁷ Casanova appreciated the insight of the article, commenting that he liked English newspapers because they wrote about everything that happened in London and was able to make even trifles interesting.

Casanova’s ad also struck a chord among Londoners. Humorous and indecent parodies of Casanova’s ad appeared in a London *Advertiser*.

One said that there was an empty apartment suitable for a young and pretty lady who was leaving her husband because he objected to her having cuckolded him on the day after their wedding; it named the house in which the apartment was located, and said that the fugitive would pay only six shillings a week, but for that amount she would have board and the master of the house to sleep with her every night.⁸⁸

Casanova’s simple plan worked. Two weeks after posting his advertisement, a young woman named Pauline answered the ad. She was twenty-two years old, and spoke five languages. In order to avoid being forced into an unhappy marriage, Pauline left her native Portugal, and waited in England under the protection of its laws until she received word that she could return home and publicly marry the man she loved. Naturally, Casanova fell in love with her, and, as with many women who came before her, Pauline could not resist Casanova’s charms.⁸⁹

Advertising is promotion in its purest form. Casanova's ad stated simply that he wanted a woman to come live with him, and that he wanted to be the sole recipient of her attention. He got what he asked for. A byproduct of his ad's honesty was that he became a mini-celebrity. Spoofs of his ad showed up across London, a tribute to the man who was bold enough to come out and say plainly that he was lonely and wanted a woman's companionship. This was simple, direct, but most importantly, effective.

Dueling

All celebrities, even professional celebrities, eventually fall out of fashion. For Casanova, this point in his life came during a stay in Poland in 1766. He was becoming a bit too old to be considered in the prime of his life; it was taking more and more effort to seduce women. Young men no longer felt threatened when he flirted with their mistresses. Young women thought Casanova was agreeable, intelligent and charming in an old fashioned way, but they did not think he was dashing, handsome or sexually irresistible. Casanova's purse was also almost completely depleted; the reason he was in Poland was to find a job that provided a steady income.

Casanova knew his popularity was on the decline, and a special promotional event was in order. What could he do to prove that he was still as daring as ever? A combination of promotional skills and good luck created the perfect opportunity – a duel. All the elements of an exciting confrontation were present: a beautiful dancer, two jealous men, a vicious insult and injured pride. Casanova could justify his challenging Count Xavier Branicki, a gallant young nobleman, to a duel, claiming reasons of loss of face and public humiliation. Still, Europe was shocked at Casanova's effrontery in being

so bold as to challenge a high-ranking nobleman to duel when he was nothing but the son of actors.

Usually, a challenge to duel was only taken seriously when the two parties were of equal rank. Casanova was not a count; in fact, the only title he had was one he made up. Branicki could have shrugged off what many would have called insolence from a commoner such as Casanova. Voltaire, a contemporary of Casanova, found himself in a similar situation in 1726. Another Enlightenment intellectual who made up his own title, Voltaire claimed that the Chevalier de Rohan had publicly insulted him, and challenged the young nobleman to a duel. Rohan refused to lower himself by responding to the commoner's challenge, and instead sent his henchmen to give Voltaire a proper beating to teach him to respect those of a higher social class. Voltaire, humiliated, fled to England to avoid imprisonment in the Bastille for planning to take a nobleman's life.⁹⁰ Casanova's challenge was much more successful. Instead of being forced to flee the country, he built up a great deal of anticipation prior to the duel and was treated as a celebrity afterward for his narrow escape from death.

The evening started for Casanova as a typically as any other night at the theater. On March 4, 1766, Casanova was invited to see a show at the Warsaw theater with Polish King Stanislas Poniatowski, called Stanislas Augustus I. At the time, two Italian dancers divided Polish high society in a bitter rivalry. "The audience at the theater was divided into two parties, for La Catai, though her talent was nothing in comparison with that of the new arrival, felt under no obligation to yield the precedence to her. She danced in the first ballet, and La Binetti in the second, and those who applauded the former were mute

upon the appearance of the latter, and the party of the latter made not a sound when the former danced.”⁹¹

Although La Binetti was an old friend of Casanova’s, he had essentially no choice but to support La Catai because she had ties to the prominent Polish families that Casanova was trying to woo so as to obtain employment. His debts were mounting. The steady paychecks from employment with the Polish government would have been a temporary salve to the financial burdens of his lavish lifestyle.

La Binetti, however, refused to accept what she viewed as a slap in the face and an insult to their friendship. She urged her lover, Count Branicki, to publicly humiliate Casanova. As the rest of the audience was enthralled by the first comedy ever performed in Polish, Casanova stopped by La Binetti’s private dressing. Just then, Count Branicki entered, and Casanova, to show respect to the higher-ranked man, bowed and left.

Casanova then went to La Catai’s dressing room to speak with the dancer, who reproached him for not coming to visit her sooner. Count Branicki entered the room and accused Casanova of chasing after a woman whom he himself was in love with.

‘I entered here, Monsieur, at a bad moment for you; it seems that you love this lady,’ [Count Branicki said].

‘Certainly, Monseigneur, does not Your Excellency consider her worthy of love?’

‘Perfectly so; and what is more I will tell you that I love her, and that I am not of a humor to put up with rivals.’

‘Very well! Now that I know it, I will no longer love her.’

‘Then you yield to me?’

‘On the instant. Everyone must yield to such a nobleman as you.’

‘Very well; but a man who yields takes to his legs.’

Casanova was taken aback. He thought he would please the nobleman by ceding his rights to the lady. The Count, instead, egged on by his mistress to pick a fight, insulted him with a vulgar turn of phrase.

“That is a trifle strong,” said Casanova, who touched the hilt of his sword as he left the room. Branicki resorted to name-calling.

“Venetian coward!”

Casanova retorted that outside the theater, “a Venetian coward could kill a Polish bravo,” and immediately left the theater, and waited for Branicki outside to answer his challenge for a duel. Branicki did not show up.⁹²

The next day, Casanova decided that he either had to do a great deal or do nothing at all. A professional celebrity never misses an opportunity to promote himself. This situation was one that could attract a great deal of attention because it involved a count and an actress, both highly visible members of society. Casanova decided to make the most out of this affair, even at the risk of death. He needed the exposure to help his reputation. He wrote the following note:

Monseigneur, yesterday evening at the theater Your Excellency wantonly insulted me, having neither a right nor reason to behave to me in that fashion. That being so, I conclude that you hate me, Monseigneur, and that hence you would be glad to remove me from the number of the living. I can and I will satisfy Your Excellency. Be so good, then, Monseigneur, as to call for me in your carriage, and to take me where my defeat cannot make you guilty under the laws of Poland, and where I may enjoy the same advantage if God so far helps me that I kill Your Excellency. I should not, Monseigneur, make this proposal to you were it not for the idea I have formed of your generosity. I have the honor to be, Monseigneur, Your Excellency’s very humble and very obedient servant Casanova.⁹³

This note had to be carefully worded to induce the desired effect. Casanova had to challenge the Count to a duel, while at the same time show deference and respect to his rank. Count Branicki could very well have behaved in the same fashion as Chevalier de Rohan and have Casanova beat up and thrown in to jail. On the surface, the language in the letter was respectful. He talks about having the duel “where my defeat cannot make you guilty,” because dueling within the city limits of Warsaw was illegal. This showed

the Count that Casanova, although threatening him with his life, was not so inconsiderate as to try and get revenge by some legal loophole. It was to be an honest and honorable attempt on his life. He flatters the Count: "I should not, Monseigneur, make this proposal to you were it not for the idea I have formed of your generosity." The letter also used words to force Branicki to answer the challenge. "You would be glad to remove me" implied that the Count wanted to and would be happy to duel in the first place. Casanova alludes to a moral superiority when he said, "Your [had] neither a right nor reason to behave to me in that fashion." With the letter worded as such, Branicki would have looked foolish refusing to accept the challenge laid out in such a calm, seemingly rational manner.

Casanova and Count Branicki scheduled the duel for that afternoon. Casanova made sure to eat a good lunch, knowing that it may be his last meal. Casanova later found out that Count Branicki, instead of eating well, had gone to mass, confessed and communicated. "As for me," wrote Casanova thirty-two years later, "perhaps more, perhaps less a Christian than Branicki, I addressed God in only these few words: '*Lord, if my enemy kills me, I am damned; so save me from death.*'"⁹⁴

They arrived in a garden on the outskirts of Warsaw, and Branicki prepared the pistols. "As Branicki was a renowned marksman," observes Childs, "Casanova would most likely have met his death had he not, with great astuteness, thrown his adversary off balance at the moment of firing by announcing his determination to shoot him in the head."⁹⁵

Seeing him determined, as I was, with the mouth of his pistol toward the ground, I take off my hat with my left hand, asking him to do me the honor of firing at me first, and I put my hat on. Instead of firing at once, the Podstoli lost two or three

seconds drawing himself up and hiding his head behind the butt of his pistol; but the situation did not demand that I wait upon his every convenience.⁹⁶

The duelers fired simultaneously. Count Branicki was seriously wounded with a gunshot to the abdomen; the bullet grazed his intestines. Casanova escaped with a relatively minor wound to the left arm, although the wound did not fully heal for another year and a half.

And then came the publicity. Casanova had laid the groundwork before the duel by conspicuously arranging his affairs as if he were never to return alive, and then telling close friends that they may never see him again. By the time the duel was to take place it was a highly anticipated event. Casanova's return to Warsaw after the duel was also a promotional event itself; he was chased by an angry mob and had to seek asylum in a monastery. For weeks after the duel Casanova was invited to dinners and suppers where he retold the story of the duel again and again. His fame spread. He had many admirers and supporters, especially among nobles in the anti-Branicki faction. They sent at least four thousand ducats on the premise that Casanova, being a foreigner, may have needed the money. Casanova proudly refused all the money that was sent him, although "I repented of it afterward."⁹⁷

The duel was also talked about all over Europe and reported in the European press. Childs even cites an article about the duel in the September 3, 1766, edition of the *London Public Advertiser*.⁹⁸ This duel was newsworthy because it was between a high ranking nobleman and a commoner. Scoundrels dueled other scoundrels everyday, but commoners never challenged a nobleman to a duel. And the noblemen never dueled the commoners who challenged them, because that would be lowering themselves down to the base level. Class differences during the eighteenth century ran deep. "There is certainly no lack of evidence that the eighteenth century elite, from workhouse governors

and economic theorists to Marie Antoinette acting out rustic fantasies, were not only heavily patronizing towards the poor, but determined to set themselves apart from ordinary people.”⁹⁹ Casanova was rarely prevented from doing what he wanted to do by anything as trifling as class distinctions. By challenging the count to a duel, he forced the elite to recognize him as someone worth their time and attention. And, he got a lot of attention too.

In his subsequent travels throughout Europe Casanova spread the word of the duel as much as he could. In Dresden, where he went after leaving Warsaw, “everyone made much of me, and I had to tell the story of my duel everywhere; I was glad to tell it, for I was proud of it.”¹⁰⁰ Casanova was so proud of this duel that he eventually published an account of it in 1780. This account was the first indication that he would eventually publish the history of his life in its entirety.¹⁰¹

Casanova could teach a great deal about the art of self-promotion. He innately knew how to fulfill the informational demands of his audience and molded his message to accomplish his goal. Sometimes, though, it is not what was said, but what was not said that is so telling. Duke de Choiseul wanted to hear the story of escape from the Leads, but Casanova refused to tell it right then. He wanted another appointment with this powerful man. Casanova let out just enough details to make sure the Duke was hooked, and then promised to tell the tale another time. When preparing for the duel, Casanova never came right out and said he was going to duel. He told his friends something was to happen that day, something that he couldn’t talk about, but he might not come back alive. A secret such as this spread quickly.

Casanova was a shameless self-promoter. This was his greatest talent. He had a flair for storytelling and a quick wit, and people loved to hear his stories. Usually, his stories were about himself. He told of his escape from the Leads to prominent Parisians and quickly gained access to the best social circles. He also gained employment through this method. To facilitate the dissemination of his story, Casanova handed out copies of it to friends to give to their friends. Telling the story took Casanova two entire hours, and this expedited the process of getting his name and story out.

Tailoring the message for each specific audience is also an important part of effective promotion. As an exile, Casanova used his unique position as someone outside the state of Venice to confute the criminal *History of the Government of Venice*. The book's becoming a bestseller was only a by-product of Casanova's real purpose in writing it. It gave the Venetian State Inquisitors an excuse to grant Casanova reentry into Venice. This method was an indirect way of getting his message out. A direct way was putting up an advertisement on the front door that stated, without mincing words, that he wanted a single young woman to come live in the house. This advertising message was specific and therefore effective – no one was misled about the true intentions of the advertiser.

Though there was no formal communications infrastructure, Casanova easily circumvented the problem by simply adapting his promotional methods to the media available. He created events that made for great stories, since bored gossiping aristocrats loved to sit in their salons and talk about current events. When the situation involved a small audience, Casanova wrote a book. When the situation involved a large audience, Casanova put up an advertisement with a simple message. By determining which medium

was most effective for each particular situation, Casanova easily promoted himself as a celebrity.

Chapter Three

Networking

“Who on earth,” I ask my fat neighbor, “is that fat sow?” “She is the wife of this fat pig.”
-Casanova to M. de Beauchamp, Receiver-General of Finances, Paris 1750

Networking is an important skill for anyone seeking to become a celebrity.

Casanova, endowed with a quick wit, was able to endear himself to people through the art of conversation. “The Prince de Ligne,” says Childs, “perhaps the most distinguished European of his day, wrote of him: ‘His every word is a revelation and every thought a book,’ adding that he was the most interesting odd character that he had ever met. Such qualifications constituted a passport that admitted him everywhere.”¹⁰² Casanova was a highly entrepreneurial networker – when he promoted himself, he did so in an intelligent way in which he was selective on whom he expended his energies. He rarely spent his time on people of little importance. Casanova went after those with money or position; he preferred those who had both.

The Enlightenment Age was a time of highly formalized relationships. Personal and business relationships were not as casual as they are today. In a time like this, networking was an important skill for someone looking to rise through the ranks into celebrityhood. Having connections was the key to obtaining a good job, making money, and, in Casanova’s case, being a celebrity. Casanova was extremely adept at making himself known to people of power and prestige who, in turn, recommended him to their equally powerful and prestigious friends in other cities and countries.

The Enlightenment was a time of great social change. Whereas the previous era was a feudal society based on rigid class structures, this social arrangement began to

change in the 1700s. One major cause of this shift to more a democratic social system was due to the unprecedented spread of literacy that had begun slowly in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, the education movement was progressing full tilt.¹⁰³ Educated people tended to question social norms, especially when the power structure was heavily skewed toward the aristocratic end of the social spectrum. These educated citizens created a new middle class of people who were as educated as the aristocracy.

As a result, this was a time of unprecedented opportunity for men like Casanova. The Age of Enlightenment was an age built on the ideals of equality. Noblemen were forced, in a way, due to the popular philosophies of the day, to interact with these untitled people who were equally learned, but not as well born. This is how Casanova was able to interact so closely with some very powerful people. This was an age when a man was theoretically judged more by his merits than by his birth. Of course, things didn't necessarily work this way in practice. Casanova, though, was able to take advantage of these new social possibilities. He ingratiated himself with noblemen and aristocrats by his wit and charm. Casanova was a successful networker because he was able to present an image of himself as someone on an equal level as a count, duke, or minister. Casanova used networking as a professional celebrity to propagate his image by socializing, undaunted by his low birth, with people of much higher rank.

A Formulaic Approach

Casanova's networking efforts were based partly on his quick wit, and partly on his ability to make people believe he was rich and well off. When arriving in a new city, Casanova usually had letters of introduction to a prominent civic leader, and through this

person he would become a part of the city's social scene. In the event that he didn't have a letter of introduction, Casanova would follow an almost formulaic plan of action that was practically fail-proof in ensuring that the socialites in town knew who he was by the next morning.

For example, in 1760, Casanova arrived in Florence, one of a dozen cities he visited in that one year. He did not have any letters of introduction, only a letter of credit to a banker in town. With money but no connections, Casanova was able to network himself in with the most exciting portion of Florentine society. His actions were typical of his arrival in any new town. This particular visit is used as an example because it involves several different kinds of strategies Casanova used when networking in a new city.

First, he found lodging at Doctor Vannini's hostel, which, according to *Memoirs* translator Willard Trask, enjoyed an excellent reputation in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Doctor Vannini was a doctor of letters, and this hostel was doubtless a gathering place for other men of letters and adventurers like Casanova. Next, he rented a carriage, along with horseman and lackey, in which to travel during his brief stay in Florence. He dressed his hired help in the colored livery of Signor Bragadin. This was to appear as if he were an aristocrat rich enough to have servants who wear matching uniforms. "I wanted to make an impression," Casanova remarked on his decision to incur this extravagant expense.

Next, Casanova explored the city. Although he claimed he only wanted "to see Florence and be seen by no one," the truth was, Casanova loved being seen. If, as he claimed, he wanted to be seen by no one, why would he go to the theater that afternoon to attend the performance of a popular singer? This statement must have been made in half-

seriousness. Now, feeling reasonably comfortable in his new surroundings, Casanova prepared to make his “debut” in Florence – attending a show in the Via della Pergola, a grand theater that still stands today. That evening he dined alone, then got dressed in his best finery. Imagine the scene Casanova created in front of the theater when his carriage attended by uniformed coachmen pulled up and stopped. “Who is this well-dressed dashing stranger?” the locals (especially the women) asked themselves.

Casanova proceeded to the front of the opera house, where he took a seat in a box near the orchestra. He chose this seat “more to see the actresses than to hear the music,” he admitted. As the show started, he realized that the prima donna was none other than Teresa, the singer who, as a girl, pretended to be a castrato. He hadn’t seen her in years. Casanova and Teresa had a happy reunion, but it was cut short as Teresa’s cue to go back onstage came up. They agreed to meet for breakfast the next day. Casanova realized he had no idea where Teresa lived, or even what name she used. He turned to his neighbor in the next seat and asked what the name of the actress was. “Her name is the same as mine,” Casanova’s neighbor replied, “because she is my wife.”¹⁰⁵

This was Casanova’s second day in Florence, and he had spent two entire days busily establishing his reputation through actions. He was living in a hostel known for attracting men of letters. He had been seen all over town and at an afternoon theater performance. His coachmen wore the colors of an aristocrat. He made a grand entrance at a popular theater, where he discovered that the lead actress was a former lover; his seatmate was the former lover’s current husband. By the next morning, Casanova had met numerous friends of Teresa’s: actresses, dancers and even an abbot whom Casanova had known seventeen years earlier while in the service of Cardinal Acquaviva. Casanova

had been in Florence only a short time, and he was already known many prominent members of Florentine society.

Casanova's formula laid the foundation for networking after arriving in a new city. First, he found a well-known place to live that sent out a signal about what kind of man he was – a wealthy libertine. Then, he acquired transportation and outfitted it to show off his wealth. He showed his face all over town, in preparation for the night when he made his grand entrance into society. At the theater, he either found someone whom he already knew or met someone new. Using this person as a base, Casanova network his way through society, his reputation as a wealthy libertine already having preceded him.

A Network of Association

With his reputation thus established, Casanova took advantage of every opportunity to meet new people. He made sure to make himself known to as many people as possible, because anyone could prove to be helpful at some point in the future. A person may have a friend in another town who could help him out in a pinch. Casanova showed how this art of networking was something that had to be approached in a systematic, calculated way. One had to be constantly persistent, but in the end, knowing the right people paid off. Sometimes things didn't work out the way Casanova expected them to, but as an *über*-celebrity he had a talent for making the best of any situation.

Although she showed little maternal affection for him, Casanova's mother Zanetta did make efforts to get a permanent position for her son with Bishop Bernardo de Bernardis. At the time Casanova, eighteen years old and recently released from jail, had nowhere to go. Zanetta used her own networking skills to secure this position for

Casanova. She promised Bernadis that she would appeal to the Queen of Poland to persuade her daughter, the Queen of Naples, to give him an appointment in his hometown of Martirano. In return, Zanetta asked that Bernadis take her son in and give him a job.

Casanova arrived in Martirano and was appalled by the dismal conditions and poverty of Bernadis' diocese. He knew this was not somewhere he could live. "He [Bernadis] admitted that in his entire diocese there was not a person who could boast of writing decently, still less of having taste and any notion of good literature, not a single real library, and no one curious enough to look in a newspaper," Casanova remembered disgustedly. "I saw nothing but brutes who seemed to me positively scandalized by my entire appearance. What ugly women!"¹⁰⁶

Casanova stayed in Martirano for only 60 hours. This may have been one of the smartest moves he ever made. Bernadis sent Casanova back to Rome with both money and letters to people in Naples, which he would pass on his way. This practice of giving someone letters of introduction when they traveled to new places was quite common, Childs notes.

Casanova was always particular, in accordance with the custom prevailing in the eighteenth century when human relations were still highly formalized, about obtaining such letters [of introduction]. He sought them from people of prominence to those with whom he was already acquainted in order to give him added prestige. With the backing thereby given him in Naples, he made such influential acquaintances as the Marquis de Galiani, brother of the famous abbé, and Lelio Caraffa, Duke of Matalone, one of the leading families of Naples, who, in turn, gave him letters of introduction to Cardinal Acquaviva, one of the great personages of Rome, into whose service he was to enter for a time. It was perhaps for the excellent relations he formed at Naples that this city became one of his favorites.¹⁰⁷

The letter of introduction to Cardinal Acquaviva led to Casanova's gaining employment in the powerful ecclesiastic's palace. "He is the one man who has more

power in Rome than the Pope,”¹⁰⁸ Casanova was told. Casanova, whose job at the palace was to learn French and make abstracts of letters, felt that Rome was the place for him to make a name for himself. “I knew that Rome was the one city in which a man who set out from nothing had often risen very high; and it is not surprising that I believed I possessed all the qualities needed to rise.”¹⁰⁹

He was right, although his stay in Rome was cut short, not surprisingly, by an intrigue. To his credit, Casanova was merely trying to help his French teacher’s daughter, whose father sent authorities out to arrest her and her lover for trying to elope. The young woman, Barbaruccia, came to Casanova in tears and appealed to him for help. Casanova hid her in the cardinal’s palace, out of the jurisdiction of Roman police. Although nothing untoward happened between Casanova and Barbaruccia that night, Cardinal Acquaviva had no choice but to terminate Casanova’s employment upon learning of these events. To make up for the sudden dismissal, the Cardinal offered him letters of recommendation to any country that he chose.¹¹⁰ Casanova decided that this was his opportunity to see the world. As a celebrity, travel to foreign lands offered the unique chance to become acquainted with not only new people but also a new way of life. How far could he spread his name and reputation? Casanova chose to go to Constantinople.

These events illustrated the importance of networking as a way to advance one’s professional career (in Casanova’s case, as a professional celebrity). Casanova’s mother used her influence to secure an appointment for a bishop, if he promised to employ her son when he got the appointment. Although the job in Martirano did not work out for Casanova, he got letters from the bishop to the Duke of Matalone in Naples. The Duke, in turn, wrote a letter for Casanova to the powerful Cardinal Acquaviva. Although he was

abruptly dismissed from his position in the cardinal's palace, Casanova was able to travel to Constantinople. There, he lived among the Muslims and learned to appreciate a new world view. The only thing he didn't like about Constantinople was the extreme modesty of the Muslim women.

Entertainers

Although Casanova was well acquainted with members of the cultural elite, he also enjoyed the companionship of entertainers. Cardinals and actresses may seem like strange bedfellows, but in Casanova's world, this combination made good sense. People like Cardinal Acquaviva were important as members of a society who held a great deal of political power. People like Silvia Balletti, a renowned actress, played a significant role in setting social and cultural norms. Casanova made himself prominent in all aspects of society through his association with people of a variety of professions.

Casanova came to know Silvia through her son. In 1750, at the age of 25, Casanova traveled from Venice to Paris in the company of his friend Antoine Balletti. Upon arriving in Paris, Silvia immediately invited her son's traveling companion to dine at her house.¹¹¹ Casanova saw in this visit great opportunity. According to Childs, "Through Silvia, at that time the idol of France, Casanova was introduced both to the theatrical and to the literary world of Paris."¹¹²

Shortly after his arrival, Casanova met the celebrated dramatist Crébillon, whose work Casanova greatly admired, at a dinner in the Balletti home. One of the first things Casanova did was "recite him the finest scene in his *Zénobie et Rhadamiste*, in my blank verse translation."¹¹³

Casanova admitted to the Crébillon that his reason for coming to Paris in the first place was to learn French. However, he confessed that “I am an intolerable pupil, always questioning, curious, demanding, insatiable.”¹¹⁴ Crébillon was so impressed by Casanova’s enthusiasm that he agreed to teach him French. Casanova took French lessons for a year, three times a week, from the writer. Casanova gave Crébillon credit for teaching him all the French he knew, the language in which he would later write *Historie de ma fuite* and *Histoire de ma vie*.

Casanova’s connection to the theater proved to be extremely beneficial throughout his life. Not only was he meeting prominent society members at the Balletti home, he was also meeting prominent Parisians at the theater itself. Casanova was a habitual theatergoer no matter what city he was in; all the potential networking opportunities seated in the private boxes were too good to pass up.

To illustrate this point, only one episode is necessary to show how easy it was for Casanova to meet important people while attending an opera or play. During the same stay in Paris while he was a regular guest at the Balletti home, Casanova attended a performance at the Théâtre Italien. The play itself, *Cénie*, was secondary to Casanova’s primary intentions.

The ladies covered with diamonds who were entering the first-tier boxes interested me, and I observed them attentively...while my attention was thus occupied a richly dressed man three times my size approaches me and politely asks if I am a foreigner. Balletti tells me privately that it is Monsieur de Beauchamp, Receiver-General of Finances. He [Beauchamp]...most graciously invited me to come to supper at his house that evening. In their house I found the lavishness which was the rule among all people of their sort in Paris: a great crowd of guests, a great many parties at cards, and great gaiety at table. The house was open to me during all the time I stayed in Paris, and it was very useful to me. Those who say that all foreigners who go to Paris are bored for at least the first two weeks are right, for it takes time to make one’s way in. For my part, I know

that in twenty-four hours I was already kept occupied and was sure that I would enjoy myself there.¹¹⁵

The simple act of going to the theater was an important event. As a newcomer to Paris, Casanova was a virtual unknown. Networking did not take place only in the form of serious conversations; the quote at the beginning of the chapter involving Beauchamp shows how Casanova could network even when making a joke about a person's fat wife. In an earlier time, such comment could have landed Casanova in jail, or worse. In the Age of Enlightenment, a time of equality, it was taken as a joke, and even led to invitations to dinner parties in the bustling home of an important politician.

Freemasons and Mozart

The social environment of the Enlightenment was the incubator of societies such as the Freemasons. In the same year as his trip to Paris, 1750, Casanova gained admission to a lodge of Freemasons in Lyons.¹¹⁶ This secret organization, based on the concepts of equality and brotherhood, was gaining widespread popularity and acceptance throughout Europe. In 1738 the Papacy even issued a bull imposing a ban on membership into this society because it viewed the Freemasons as a threat to Church power. Freemason lodges flourished despite the ban. "Many scholars and clergymen – particularly the Anglican clergy – joined the Order. In the lodges the higher aristocracy, officials of the courts, advisors and friends of royalty, travelling foreigners, diplomats, bankers, businessmen and military all met and mingled."¹¹⁷

Contemporary estimates count membership in French Freemason societies in 1789 with anywhere from 50 to 10,000 members in over 600 lodges. Members included Montesquieu, Benjamin Franklin, Mozart and Frederick II of Prussia.¹¹⁸ Casanova was

able to use his membership as a Freemason to get introduced to men of power all across Europe. Many of Casanova's friends, including the Duke of Matalone of Naples, the Prince de Ligne and Count Waldstein were fellow Masons. It is probable that many other acquaintances were masons, although they have not been identified as such.¹¹⁹ Being a freemason was also socially beneficial. By being seen with the most visible members of society, Casanova was able to use the associative power of fame and celebrity to build a name for himself.

Throughout his life, Casanova was able to make acquaintances based solely on his membership in this secret society. Even with his awesome self-promotional skills and networking abilities, Casanova knew having the help of some of the most prominent Europeans of the day would give him an advantage as a celebrity.

There is not a man on earth who succeeds in knowing everything; but every man should aspire to know everything. Every young man who travels, who wishes to know society, who does not wish to be inferior to another and excluded from the company of his equals in the age in which we live, should be initiated into what is called Freemasonry, if only to acquire a superficial knowledge of what it is.¹²⁰

It was a fellow Freemason who gave Casanova the opportunity to make his most well-known contribution to the music world. In October of 1787 Mozart was busily trying to finish his opera *Don Giovanni* in time for a performance that same week. Mozart was so behind schedule that he hadn't even written the overture. The words of the opera needed work too, but Lorenzo Da Ponte, the author of the libretto for *Don Giovanni*, had been summoned to Vienna by Emperor Joseph II. Casanova happened to pass through Prague during this time and called on Mozart. More than happy to help out a friend, he recounted some lively episodes from his life and put them down on paper.

It was only circumstance that caused Casanova to be in Prague at the critical

junction when Mozart's librettist had to be called away. Casanova was not recognized as a guest librettist for *Don Giovanni*, but after his death two variations of scene 10, act II for the opera were found among his numerous manuscripts. Historians agree that Casanova played a small role in the creation of this famous opera, the plot of which was in some respects, was similar to Casanova's life.¹²¹ It was the Freemason connection that gave Casanova the opportunity to play a role in the composition in this famous operatic work. As a networking event, it was relatively quiet and unsubstantial; as a musical event *Don Giovanni* was one of Mozart's finest accomplishments. A minor networking operation could reap substantial results.

Dueling

Although being a Freemason acquainted Casanova with a great number of people, there was still sometimes the need to create a networking event. Casanova's duel with Count Branicki, discussed in the previous chapter, fell into the category of an event that was used as a vehicle for Casanova to get his name out and become acquainted with influential people whom he did not know previously.

The need to create a networking event did not become necessary until the end of Casanova's life, when he was gradually falling out of popularity. With the exception of collaborating on the libretto of *Don Giovanni*, all of the networking events detailed in this chapter took place within one particular time frame – Casanova's youth. Networking is most effective when the networker seems fresh and innovative. This feeling, real or perceived, is at the heart of networking as a tool for the creation of celebrities. The public makes distinctions between what it perceives as innovative and what it perceives as trite.

The duel happened at the turning point in Casanova's life when he realized that he was getting older and falling out of style. Challenging Count Branicki to a duel was a networking activity because it was Casanova's way of pushing the envelope and testing the limits of what was socially acceptable. This allowed him to maneuver in social settings not as Casanova the former libertine, as he was becoming to be known, but as Casanova, the daring bravo. This act opened doors to the homes of people who previously had no interest in Casanova. People across Europe knew of this duel, and it attracted media attention as far away as London. Being a celebrity was becoming harder for Casanova, but the duel showed that he still had his celebrity fire inside.

Nothing is quite so effective for getting one's name out as networking. With the right connections, anything is possible. Casanova was never afraid to ask an acquaintance, particularly one of stature or wealth, to write a letter of recommendation for him. These letters were invaluable to his celebrity status during his travels through Europe. His connection with the Freemason society also was an integral tool in helping Casanova meet the most influential Europeans of the time. And when his connection to high society started to fade, Casanova simply created a networking event and consequently reason for the elite to talk about him to their friends.

A person's celebrity status is never a sure thing. While Casanova was a successful celebrity in that he was popular throughout most of his life, even he was not able to keep his popularity going single-handedly. As Boorstin says, celebrities have a symbiotic relationship with each other, and are interdependent on each other to build fame on top of existing fame.¹²² Casanova was dependent on others to provide the opportunities needed

for personal growth, such as a trip abroad, a new occupation or a letter of introduction to a prominent citizen in a foreign city. Networking takes on many forms, and Casanova's networking skills were an integral part of preserving the longevity of his career as a celebrity.

Chapter Four Reinvention

“I maintained a modest silence, though finding it difficult to stifle my laughter, while the physician looked at me and rightly concluded that I was a brazen charlatan who had dared to supplant him.”

-Casanova, Venice 1746

A person can become a celebrity in two ways, by being good at something and turning that skill into a reputation and consequently, celebrityhood, or by simply being good at being a celebrity. Casanova's wide range of skills and his longevity as a household name indicate that he was good at being a celebrity. He was a professional celebrity. Throughout his life he was constantly redefining and changing himself to take advantage of each situation.

His variety of professions seems to imply that Casanova had been trained in each trade. Nothing could be further from the truth. Casanova's only real job training experience was the brief period in 1743¹²³ he spent as a student of the Church. Even with education in the field, Casanova was still a bad cleric. Not only did his romantic pursuits proceed with unaltered fervor (not that this was unusual; Cardinal Acquaviva was more well known than Casanova for his romantic affairs)¹²⁴, but he used his position as an abbot primarily to gain admission into the salons of prominent families.

Although his plans of becoming a member of the clergy failed to come true, this was by no means the end of Casanova's colorful employment record. Casanova was able to secure jobs in a variety of fields, from playing the violin in a Venetian theater to consulting a Polish duke on mining affairs. Other jobs included running the first French lottery system, spying, managing a theater troupe, and writing horoscopes. And of course,

the most financially lucrative job of all was Casanova's employment as the agent responsible for transforming the fanatical Madame d'Urfé from her body as a woman into the body of a boy. This incredible story, so farfetched that historians have questioned its veracity, will be discussed in full later in the chapter.

In order to obtain these jobs, Casanova used a combination of networking skills, self-promotion and deception. He showed little remorse at the time for lying to people in order to gain their respect and trust. "If in strict honesty I had told her [Madame d'Urfé] that all her notions were ridiculous, she would not have believed me; so I took the course of drifting with the tide. I could not but enjoy letting myself be considered the greatest of all Rosicrucians and the most powerful of all men by a lady who was allied to the greatest houses in France."¹²⁵

The wide variety of Casanova's jobs helped gain him reputations in an equally wide variety of fields. His self-promotional skills were key in helping him become prominent in each field in a short amount of time, since he never stayed with one job for any extended period of time. This was also an important networking tool, as he was able to come into contact with people from varied backgrounds.

A violinist, a physician, a cabalist

A professional celebrity is able to change himself on the spot as each situation sees fit. He is a chameleon whose true colors are never revealed. Casanova played many roles during his life, each time playing his part so well the others involved never had any idea that he had never had any formal training as a physician, or that he really could not forecast the future. The following story details the events that played a major role in

Casanova's becoming a celebrity because it was the beginning of his association with patricians and the start of a handsome monthly allowance.

Casanova returned to Venice from his three-month stay in Constantinople after his release from the service of Cardinal Acquaviva. Although he was back in his home state, he had no steady income. To support himself, Casanova took a violinist's position at the San Samuele theatre. He was unaccustomed to holding such a lowly position, but he felt that luck was on his side. "Not having adjured the goddess Fortune, I thought that I could still count on her. I knew that she exercises her sway over all mortals without consulting them, provided that they are young; and I was young."¹²⁶

Casanova was right in thinking that his luck would change. One hour before dawn on April 20, 1746, Casanova left a ball held as part of the wedding festivities for the son and daughter of two prominent Venetian families.¹²⁷ He had played his violin in one of the many orchestras hired to entertain guests at the three day long festivities. As he was leaving the palace he observed a senator dressed in the red robe of the patrician class drop a letter while boarding a gondola. Casanova picked up the letter and restored it to its owner, who insisted on bringing Casanova home.

Three minutes later, the senator remarked how he had lost feeling in his left arm, and shortly after, in his left leg as well. Casanova held up a lamp and was alarmed to see that the senator's mouth was drawn to one side, and that his eyes were dimming. "I call to the gondoliers to stop and let me get out to find a surgeon who will come at once and bleed His Excellency, who had certainly been struck by apoplexy."¹²⁸

Casanova insisted on staying with the dying man all night, along with two other senators who arrived shortly after he did. A priest was called, as the senator was not

expected to live. The next morning, the two senators told Casanova that he was free to leave. He replied: "I will sleep in the chair in which I was, since I felt certain that he could not die so long as I remained there. I see them exchange looks, astonished at my answer."¹²⁹

Casanova discovered that the ailing senator was none other than the celebrated Signor Bragadin, and that his two friends were the equally respected Signors Dandolo and Barbaro. They called a physician by the name of Ferro, who convinced the well-meaning friends that he could cure Bragadin by applying a mercury ointment to his chest. Casanova was doubtful of this remedy's effectiveness, and his fears were realized when Bragadin developed a violent fever within 24 hours. Casanova, without consulting the friends, immediately washed off the ointment and the patient soon recovered from the fever.

The next morning, Ferro arrived to find his patient in as good health as could be expected.

Signor Bragadin tells him that the person who had delivered him from the mercury which was about to kill him was a physician who knew more than he did; and so saying points to me. I do not know which of us was the more surprised, whether the physician at seeing a young man he had never seen before declared more learned than himself, or I, who did not know that I was so. I maintained a modest silence, though finding it difficult to stifle my laughter, while the physician looked at me and rightly concluded that I was a brazen charlatan who had dared to supplant him. He coldly informed the sick man that he surrendered his place to me, and he was taken at his word. He, leaves, and leaves me promoted physician to one of the most illustrious members of the Venetian Senate. All in all, I was delighted.¹³⁰

Casanova's exploitation of the senators' trust did not end there. "His Excellency listened to me as if I were an oracle. His two surprised friends accorded me the same attention. Encouraged by this obsequiousness, I spoke as a physician, I dogmatized, and I

cited authors whom I had never read.”¹³¹ Signor Bragadin told Casanova that he was too wise for a young man, and that Casanova had to have a supernatural gift. Casanova’s response to this statement would change the course of his life.

In order not to offend his vanity by telling him he was wrong, I hit upon the strange expedient of making him, in the presence of his two friends, a confidence as false as it was extravagant, namely, that I was in possession of a numerical calculus which, when I put it a written question which I reduced to numerals, returned me an answer, likewise in numerals, which gave me the information I wanted and which no one on earth could have imparted to me.¹³²

The numeric device Casanova claimed to possess was known as a cabala, an outgrowth of medieval Jewish mystical doctrines. He said he had learned the secret from a hermit. The senators, astonished, asked Casanova questions to which there was no way of knowing the answer. To devise the answer, Casanova constructed a pyramid of 21 numbers formed from the number of letters of each word of the question. Each letter of the reply had a numeric value that corresponded to a letter of the alphabet. There was nothing magical in his system. As a youth, Casanova had memorized the numeric values of each letter of the alphabet, and he was able to quickly derive the number he needed from the pyramid in order to frame the cabala’s response.¹³³ Casanova always gave answers that had two meanings. “My cabala was never wrong. I now understood how easy it had been for the ancient priests of paganism to impose on the ignorant and credulous universe.”¹³⁴

The senators yearned to know the secret of the cabala, but Casanova tricked them easily by saying that he would drop dead in three days if he revealed the secret. In telling this simple lie, Casanova gained control of three of the most powerful men in Venice. “If you wish to be my son,” Signor Bragadin told him, “you have only to recognize me as your father and from thenceforth I will treat you as such in my house until I die.”¹³⁵

Even Casanova was amazed at what his self-promoting and white lies could accomplish. Within a month, he had gone from being a violinist to a physician to a cabalist to the son of a powerful Senator. Casanova found his life had changed overnight, from being penniless to having an apartment at the Senator's palace, a servant, a gondola and not to mention, a monthly stipend for which Bragadin commanded him to "not think of the future; think of amusing yourself."¹³⁶ With this sort of financial support, the following three years in Venice was perhaps the most carefree and leisurely portion of Casanova's life.

This story shows Casanova's ability to change and make up stories in a split decision, an indication of, if nothing else, his intellectual capabilities. The three senators were not the only people Casanova duped; they were the first link of a long chain of people whom Casanova tricked out of convenience, for money, or for sex. As a professional celebrity Casanova was skilled in making believe he was something he was not. He benefited greatly from this skill.

A lottery expert, a spy

Sometimes, Casanova was put in a unique situation where, if he played his cards right, he could reap great financial benefits. In situations like these, he felt the best thing to do was to go with the flow, and to make things up as he went along. Casanova arrived in Paris in 1757 after escaping from the Leads. He immediately called on the Abbé de Bernis, who was soon to be named Minister of Foreign Affairs. De Bernis, in turn, introduced Casanova to Monsieur de Boulogne, who at the time served as the powerful financial controller. "The foreign minister, with the heedlessness that marked the era,

represented Casanova as a man well versed in financial matters.”¹³⁷ De Boulogne introduced Casanova to Monsieur Pâris-Duverney, who had created the French Ecole Militaire and was looking for a way to raise funds for the school. Casanova immediately responded that he had the solution to Pâris-Duverney’s financial problem.

‘Everything,’ I answered, ‘has become more difficult, I know; nevertheless, I have a plan in mind which would yield the King the return on a hundred millions.’

‘And how much would such a yield cost the King?’

‘Only the expense of collecting it.’

‘Then it is the nation which would supply the revenue?’

‘Yes, but voluntarily.’

‘I know what you have in mind.’

‘I should be surprised, Monsieur, for I have imparted my idea to no one.’¹³⁸

So what was Casanova’s amazing plan? He didn’t have one, but he was scheduled to present the plan the next day to the financial wizard who had saved France from financial ruin 40 years prior.¹³⁹

I am told that twenty millions are needed, I boast that I can furnish a hundred millions without having any idea how to do it, and a famous man, thoroughly experienced in business, invites me to dinner to convince me he already knows my plan. If he thinks he can worm it out of me I defy him to do it; when he has imparted his own plan to me I shall be at liberty to tell him whether he has guessed mine or not, and if the thing is within my comprehension I will perhaps say something new; if I don’t understand a word of it, I will maintain a mysterious silence.¹⁴⁰

Fortunately, Pâris-Duverney’s plan was a lottery. Italians were the first to introduce lotteries to Europe, so the concept was familiar to Casanova. He was able to speak so knowledgeably on the topic that he convinced both financial ministers and the French Council to pass a decree and create a lottery system. Casanova was rewarded for “his” idea with six lottery offices, five of which he immediately sold for 2 thousand francs. These lottery offices were to be incredible sources of income, since all lottery

tickets had to be sold through them. The sixth office Casanova kept for himself, and it supported his lavish lifestyle until 1759 when he gave the office to his manager.¹⁴¹

Casanova's success with establishing the lottery system convinced de Bernis to secure him another important job several months later: as a spy to the French navy. De Bernis presented Casanova to the Abbot de Laville, who asked if Casanova would visit 10 or 12 warships docked at Dunkirk and obtain information "on how well they were provisioned in all respects, especially as to their supplies in general, the numbers of their crews, their stock of munitions of all kinds, their administration, and their discipline."¹⁴² Casanova replied that he would try, and he set out three days later.

Such an assignment would have been difficult for someone trying to obtain such information clandestinely. So Casanova, a first-time spy, took the opposite route. Through letters of introduction he obtained from the actress Silvia, Casanova was introduced to the Commandant, Monsieur du Bareil. The Commandant invited Casanova to his home for dinner, and there, Casanova became acquainted with the army and navy officers.

Making a point of talking about all the European navies and giving myself out to be an expert on the subject from having served in the fleet of my Republic, it took me no more than three days not only to pick up an acquaintance of all the naval captains but to become good friends with them. I rattled away about shipbuilding and the Venetian system of maneuvers, and I observed that the worthy sailors who listened to me were even more attentive when I talked nonsense than they were when I said anything sensible.¹⁴³

Through his friendship with the captains Casanova was able to tour each warship and interview the sailors on board regarding all the questions that needed to be answered in his report. His final report was so thorough that even the naval minister learned things reading it. Working as a spy not only helped Casanova gain financially (he was paid five

hundred louis), but he was also able to interact with both powerful politicians and common sailors.

This job was a rare opportunity for Casanova to interact with people he did not usually encounter in his daily life, namely, sailors. This did not help him promote himself as a celebrity, since he had to pretend to be someone he was not. However, it was good practice for when he went back to his regular routine of tricking naïve and unsuspecting people. A spy is someone who is constantly reinventing himself – that is his job. Casanova, it seems, made a perfect spy.

An astrologer

Similar to Casanova's career as a cabalist were his dabblings in astrology. He stumbled upon the profession in a seemingly innocuous way. "I ask if her horoscope has been cast; she replies that she has found no one able to do her the favor. I answer that there is still time; and *God* made me add that it would be I who would cast it for her."¹⁴⁴ "She" was Mademoiselle Morin, upon whose beautiful cousin Casanova had designs. As Casanova prepared Mademoiselle Morin's horoscope, he found that astrology came easily when one was also an "accomplished" cabalist. "I easily filled eight pages with pedantic charlatanry...I risked nothing, for they were all buttressed with 'ifs.' The 'ifs' always constituted the whole science of astrologers, who have all been fools or knaves."¹⁴⁵ Astrology was easy, Casanova thought. Anyone could do it.

The cousin, Mademoiselle Roman-Coupier, found her life changed as a result of Casanova's astrological predictions. As an attempt to be asked to escort the young girl to Paris, Casanova predicted in her horoscope that her fortune awaited in Paris, where she

must go before the end of her 18th year. Casanova wrote that she was to become the mistress of King Louis XV, and bear him a son, the heir to the throne.

Casanova reasoned, "The monarch could not but fall in love with her as soon as he saw her."¹⁴⁶ He was right. Anne Roman-Coupier, her journey to Paris financed by Casanova himself, was the mistress of King Louis XV from 1761 to 1765. Unfortunately for Casanova, his money and efforts did not benefit him sexually, as Mademoiselle Roman-Coupier's aunt accompanied her to Paris.

Casanova also admitted to pretending to be an astrologer for selfish reasons. "The idea of becoming a famous astrologer in my century, in which reason had so thoroughly discredited astrology, filled me with delight. I rejoiced in anticipation, seeing myself sought out by monarchs and wrapped in aloofness in my old age."¹⁴⁷ Like a true celebrity, Casanova was careful in planning how he was to remain popular, even when he himself may be out of style. He had already taken into consideration the decline of his popularity, and weighed the possibilities of being known for his astrological predictions as a way to stay popular and important.

A theater troupe manager, a financier, a mining consultant

Sometimes Casanova mislead people in order to impress them. A celebrity's popularity is often affected by the dynamic relationship between him and his public. In some situations he had to appear down to earth and approachable. In situations like these, though, he needed to be intellectually superior, professionally inspired and morally deceptive in order to dazzle his audience.

In Augsburg, Casanova served as manager of a down-and-out troupe of Italian actors, while telling people he was actually a doctor. He had never held either job before. Casanova was surprised to find that the leading actor, Bassi, was a Venetian with whom he studied at the Seminary of San Cipriano. Fate, however, had led the two former seminarians down different paths. Although both had renounced the priesthood, “his destiny had made him take up the trade of actor, and from all appearances he was miserable poor, whereas I, whom chance had launched on a course which was all vicissitudes, appeared to be wealthy.”¹⁴⁸

“I took it into my head to tell him I was a doctor,” and with such an impressive resumé, Casanova set out on a scheme to attract audience members. His plan involved charging high prices for the box seats while the gallery was to be free for the commoners. “Bassi’s handbills set the whole city laughing. Everyone said he was mad; but when it came out that the speculation was the manager’s and that the manager was I, it was my turn to be called mad – but what did I care?”¹⁴⁹ At the end of the week, “Bassi continued to give performances, returning to the usual prices for tickets and putting an end to the free places in the gallery. He did rather well.”¹⁵⁰ This venture into the world of theater management helped Casanova because it got his name out in that field as he became known as a manager willing to take big risks to turn over a profit.

Casanova was also an imposter when necessary to get in the good favor of kings, monarchs and other persons of power and importance. Casanova was advised by a friend that if he wanted to speak to the King of Prussia, he should simply write him a letter stating this desire. The next day, Casanova was granted an interview in Berlin’s garden of

Sans Souci. Casanova hoped to impress the King in some way, and to obtain employment.

“You are certainly a financier,” the King said to Casanova as they strolled in the gardens. “Tell me what you think about taxes.”

“I thought I was called upon to play a scene of Italian improvised comedy, where, if the actor is at a loss, the groundlings hiss him. So I answered the proud King, assuming the financier’s arrogance and adjusting my expression to match, that I could talk to him about the theory of taxation...I had to take my time, for I was making it up.”¹⁵¹

Casanova impressed the King, who offered him a position as a tutor to a corps of Pomeranian cadets. The school was one that the King had recently established. An aristocratic academy, the fifteen top cadets were to be instructed by “renowned masters.”¹⁵² Although the position was considered one of respect and dignity, Casanova felt otherwise after visiting the school.

I was dumbfounded when I saw the great Frederick [King of Prussia] in a sort of fury looking at a chamber pot which was near a cadet’s bed and which displayed to the curious eye the tartarous sediment which must have made it stink.

‘Whose bed is this?’ said the King.

‘Mine,’ replied a cadet.

‘Very good, but it is not you I am angry with. Where is your tutor?’”

Casanova was shocked at the derogatory way in which the King treated the tutors. This was not the place for him, and Casanova declined the position. “I told His Lordship that I was thinking of going to Russia.”¹⁵³

It was not a convenient lie. He wasn’t saying that just as a graceful way of telling the King no. Casanova went to Russia in the year 1764 but was sidetracked in what was then the Kingdom of Poland. He had a letter of introduction to Baron Keyserling, Grand

Chancellor of Mitau, who introduced Casanova to the Duchess and the Duke. The Duke, in turn, invited Casanova to lunch at Court. The conversation at table having turned to the mineral resources of the country, Casanova spoke as if he were an expert on the subject. Of course, he knew nothing of mining. "I made bold to say that such resources, being dependent on exploitation, became precarious, and to justify my assertion I talked on the subject as if I had known it perfectly both in theory and in practice."¹⁵⁴

Unbeknownst to Casanova, one of the people at the lunch was an aristocrat in charge of all the mines in the area. The Duke, impressed by Casanova's apparent knowledge of the science and practice of mining, hired him as a consultant. He asked Casanova to visit each mine in his duchies, and write down observations on how efficiently each mine was run.

Casanova showed no apprehension toward taking on a job the nature of which he knew very little. He set off the next day with his valet Lambert, who, luckily, happened to be a down-on-his-luck mathematician. "In our tour, which continued for two weeks, we stopped at five places where there were establishments for workers in copper mines or iron mines."¹⁵⁵

Casanova realized that performing his job did not require expertise in mining. "In order to write something everywhere I did not need to be an expert, but only to reason soundly, principally on the economical conduct of the operation, which is what the Duke had principally urged upon me."¹⁵⁶ He prescribed an increase in the labor force at one site. At another site, he designed a channel leading from a river, which, by the power of the water, would do the work of twenty men. Lambert used his mathematical knowledge to draw the plans for this idea.

The conclusion for all these examples is that in the end, both parties were satisfied. The theater troupe increased its profits. The King of Prussia learned a thing or two about taxation. The Polish duke found his mines more productive and more efficient. Casanova may not have known what he was talking about all the time, but in the end he used common sense to produce effects satisfactory to everyone.

A big, fat lie

There was one masquerade where the people involved were more than just unhappy at the end, they were shocked to find out that they had been scammed of large amounts of money. The biggest and most unethical falsehood Casanova ever pulled off was his deception of Marquise d'Urfé. This woman, obsessed with alchemy and conversing with the elemental spirits, was easily deceived by anyone pretending to be knowledgeable in the subject.

She asked me if I had decoded the manuscript that contained the procedure for the Great Work. I told her that I had and hence had read it and that I would return it to her, giving her my word of honor that I had not copied it.

'I found nothing new in it,' I said.

'You will excuse me, Monsieur, but without the key I consider the thing impossible.'

'Shall I name your key to you, Madame?'

'Please do so.'

I thereupon give her the word, which belonged to no language, and I see that she is surprised. She said that it was too much, for she believed that she alone possessed the word, which she kept in her memory and had never written down.

I could have told her the truth, which was that the same calculation by which I had managed to decode the manuscript had taught me the word, but I took it into my head to tell her that a Genius had revealed it to me. It was this false confidence which put Madame d'Urfe into my power. On that day I became the arbiter of her soul, and I abused my ascendancy.¹⁵⁷

Early on in their relationship Madame d'Urfe revealed to Casanova that she wished to be reborn a man. She believed that as a woman, she was unable to converse with the Geniuses. However, "by an operation which I must certainly know, I could make her soul pass into the body of a male child born from a philosophical union between an immortal and a woman or between a man and a female being of divine nature."¹⁵⁸

Casanova knew no such thing. He made it all up as he went along, although his astute instincts often helped him to know what Madame d'Urfe was thinking or planning. For instance, the poison necessary to perform the operation of transporting Madame d'Urfe's soul into that of a male child was one of mythical origins.

'Do you know how the poison is made? And do you know that it cannot be made without the help of a salamander?' [asked Casanova.]

'That may be so, but I did not know it. I beg you to ask the cabala if there is anyone in Paris who possesses the poison.'

I immediately thought that she believed she possessed it herself; and not having hesitated to say so I my answer, I pretended to be astonished.¹⁵⁹

Madame d'Urfé then told Casanova the specifics of her plan for transformation.

"All I need is the child containing the male word drawn from an immortal creature."¹⁶⁰

She was convinced that Casanova was the one to provide her with these celestial beings.

There was no end to this woman's fanaticism, and Casanova let her imagination run wild by never contradicting her with the truth.

Casanova went to Holland in 1758 on an assignment to trade securities on behalf of the French government. While there, he went to the theater and realized that the woman singing on the stage was a former lover, and that her daughter was a product of their union six years prior. Casanova was enamored with the little girl, but her mother said she could never give her daughter away. She instead offered Casanova her 12-year-old son as a replacement.

Interestingly, Casanova received a letter at this time from Madame d'Urfé who said her Genius informed her that he was coming back to Paris with "a boy born from philosophical intercourse and that she hoped I would take pity on her."¹⁶¹ Casanova brought the boy to Paris and presented him as such, while warning the Marquise that she should not take any action until the boy had reached puberty. The Marquise gave the boy the title Count Aranda, and enrolled him in the most exclusive Parisian boarding school. "I let her believe that young Aranda belonged to the Great Order, that his birth was the result of an operation unknown to the world, that I was only his guardian, and that he would die without ceasing to live. All this came out of her own brain, and the best thing I could do was to agree with her."¹⁶²

For the next three years, Casanova traveled Europe at Madame d'Urfé's expense and gained entrance into the best houses based on recommendation letters from her. Upon returning to Paris in 1761, he called on the Marquise, and told her that "the operation by which she was to be reborn a man would take place as soon as Querilinte, one of the three heads of the Rosy Cross, had been freed from the dungeons of the Inquisition in Lisbon."¹⁶³ Querilinte was a Rosicrucian adept who had mysteriously disappeared the previous century.¹⁶⁴

The first regeneration attempt was to take place in early 1762. Casanova spent three weeks with the Marquise making preparations.

After these preparations I was to go to a place which would be made known to me only through the inspiration of the Geniuses and there obtain possession of a virgin, the daughter of an initiate, and impregnate her with a male child by a method known to no one except the brothers of the Rosy Cross. The child was to be born alive, but only with a sensitive soul. Madame d'Urfé was to receive him into her arms the instant he came into the world and keep him with her, in her own bed, for seven days. At the end of the seven days she was to die, pressing her mouth against that of the child, who would thus receive her intelligent soul.¹⁶⁵

Casanova immediately thought of asking La Corticelli, a second-rate dancer, to serve as the “virgin.” She was, as he described her, “an unscrupulous hussy.”¹⁶⁶ He brought her to Paris, after carefully explaining the situation and the role she was to play. Madame d’Urfé treated La Corticelli like royalty, and waited in anticipation for the 14th day of the April moon, the day the conception was to take place.

To a rational person this scheme was completely transparent, but Madame d’Urfé was crushed when she was told that Casanova had failed to impregnate the virgin. Another attempt was in order. The operation would be successful if performed under the May moon outside the French Kingdom, he told the Marquise.

All throughout this masquerade, Casanova was constantly terrified that La Corticelli would expose his plans. The dancer knew she could control Casanova since he was completely dependent on her cooperation. “The woman’s obstinacy was an inspiration of my Good Genius, who wanted to guard me against the greatest mistake I have made in all my life!”¹⁶⁷ Casanova’s mistake was placing too much trust in La Corticelli whom he knew was fickle and inconstant. He confiscated a pair of diamond earrings from her, a gift from the Marquise, for fear that she would take the jewels and leave. Angry that Casanova took what was rightfully hers, La Corticelli feigned convulsions the day the second impregnation attempt was to take place. Casanova had to devise some sort of explanation, for Madame d’Urfé was his major source of financial support.

Casanova used his cabalistic oracle to declare that La Corticelli had “gone mad. Fostering all her fears, I succeeded in making her read in the reply of a cabalistic figure that the princess had failed to answer our expectations because she had been defiled by a

black Genius hostile to the Rosicrucian Order; and, being now well launched, she added of her own motion that the girl must be pregnant with a gnome.”¹⁶⁸

The oracle also revealed that the next attempt had to take place in Marseilles a year hence. Childs’ observation on why there was such a long delay before the next attempt is exactly right. “Casanova’s continuous postponements of this rite on which she set such store were to ensure the continuance of the presents she plentifully bestowed upon him in her grateful credulity.”¹⁶⁹ The subsequent regeneration attempts included writing letters to the moon, the appearance of “Querilinte” (actually, Casanova’s secretary), and a ceremonial bath with the attendance of a water sprite (actually, an amenable young girl that Casanova seduced). At one point, the ceremonies even called for seven precious stones being cast into the sea in honor of the seven planets. Madame d’Urfé presented “a diamond, ruby, sapphire, emerald, opal, oriental topaz, and yellow chrysolite, each weighing seven carats.” She prepared a box with seven compartments in which the stones would be cast into the sea. Casanova made sure to pocket the gems and replaced them with pieces of lead before performing the “ceremony.”¹⁷⁰

Eventually, the lies caught up with Casanova. His secretary, Passano, disgruntled that he was not receiving his fair share as a supporting actor in the deception, announced in Lyons the details of Casanova’s unique relationship with Madame d’Urfé. La Corticelli had done the same in Turin after he dismissed her for her uncooperative behavior. Casanova was informed by a friend in a letter dated July 7, 1763 that “the marquise is discontented with you.” Understandably, her family was discontented as well.¹⁷¹

His relationship with Madame d'Urfé ended that year, the deception having lasted seven entire years. During that time, Casanova was able to lead a life without any financial care; what money he needed the Marquise was always able to supply. Historians do not know exactly how much money Casanova leached off the credulous woman; however, Childs reports that in 1767 her nephew reproached Casanova for fleecing his aunt of one million francs.¹⁷²

This story is not just a case study on the limits of human credulity. It showed how Casanova was unrepentant about tricking naïve people when the issue of personal financial enrichment was at hand. He was more concerned with keeping up a lavish lifestyle of dinner banquets, country homes and fine attire than he was with simple morality issues. Casanova knew full well that what he was doing was wrong. He simply felt that his objectives (gaining wealth and therefore being able to lead an extravagant celebrity existence) were justified when the dupe had so little common sense. An *über*-celebrity, as Casanova demonstrated, must be ruthless in all matters professional.

Casanova's best talents were perhaps his quick mind and knowledge of human nature. Though he was verifiably learned in a variety of fields, nothing profited him more than his ability to gain employment based on qualifications he did not have. Casanova's presence in so many different fields and his ability to constantly reinvent himself and his reputation was vital to his career as a celebrity.

This chapter gives just a sampling of the kinds of occupations Casanova took on. He spied on the navy and started a lottery. He told fortunes and played the violin. He improved mining operations and tricked an old lady into believing that he would

transport her philosophical soul into the body of an infant boy. As bizarre the events were, Casanova never let his demeanor falter. He approached each occupation with the seriousness of a real professional.

Most importantly, what matters is not what Casanova did; it's how he did these things. When he committed himself to a task he not only acted the role; he lived it. Professional celebrities are able to breathe life into every project they undertake, whether the cause is legitimate or just plain ridiculous. Casanova plunged into his occupations, and his apparent conviction in the undertaking led everyone around him to believe that he was quite assuredly the best person for the job. This is one of the most significant accomplishments for a celebrity – through constant reinvention, the public is convinced that he is a professional in many fields when actually his only real skill is the ability to make people believe what he wanted them to believe.

Conclusion

Casanova's talents as a mass communicator are indisputable. This historical figure started his life in relative poverty, but by his fortieth year he had traveled as far west as England and as far east as Constantinople. His friends were among the most powerful and influential people in Europe. His life experiences were as lavish and extraordinary as any European nobleman's.

What is significant about Casanova is not the things he accomplished, but how he accomplished them. In a time when there was no mass media, Casanova was able to become a celebrity by using his talents for self-promotion. In fact, he was a professional celebrity; the things he did were all geared toward achieving one goal – to make himself an even bigger celebrity.

Casanova is most well known for his sexual exploits, and this has earned him the unofficial title of the world's most famous lover. Within the context of this thesis, however, the significance of this moniker is not that he was a lover, but that he was famous for being a lover. Casanova was extremely proficient at revealing certain tantalizing details about every love affair, leaving the reader wondering what made this man so irresistible to women.

Although Casanova's enduring legacy is that of a lover, his accomplishments in other fields cannot go unrecognized. He escaped from the famous prison, the Leads. He started the French lottery system. He was a spy. He dueled a nobleman. He scammed rich old ladies. These accomplishments show the breadth of Casanova's talents, but more importantly, are indicative of his abilities as a mass communicator. He promoted himself

so well that his contemporaries thought of him as an expert in many fields. They didn't know that his only true expertise was in self-promotion.

This thesis brings to light facts that run contrary to contemporary thinking on the origins of celebrityhood. Academics say celebrities did not exist until the beginning of the 20th century when the media moved to a level of mass dissemination. Without media such as movies, television and magazines, they say, celebrities simply cannot exist.

Clearly, the beginnings of celebrityhood can clearly be positioned much earlier. Casanova is proof. Celebrityhood is not dependent on mass media as much as it is dependent on economic and social democracy and an entrepreneurial spirit. Casanova was able to these capitalize on the benefits of these social concepts, through revealing personal facts, self-promotion, networking, and reinvention, to help him rise to the top.

Darnton argues that every age is an information age, and historian Daniel Headrick agrees with this assessment. "The Information Age has no beginning, for it is as old as mankind."¹⁷³ The difference in the volume of information produced in each era is the product of variations in supply and demand. The Enlightenment was a period that saw a substantial increase in the number of educated people. "[They] judged one another by their conversations, their wit, their knowledge of the world and of the latest news," Headrick writes.¹⁷⁴ This increase in education spurred the growth in the quantity of information disseminated.

In the philosophical arena, educated people started to question the status quo. Neil Postman starts his book *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* with the following definition: "Enlightenment: A philosophical movement of the eighteenth century

focusing on the criticism of previously accepted doctrines and institutions from the point of view of rationalism.”¹⁷⁵ What is rationalism? It was an approach, a world-view based on scientific facts or logical observations. Rationalism challenged Church authority, a form of power based entirely on faith. The Enlightenment was not an atheistic period, however; people did not reject God so much as they turned their backs on the clergy and theology. “Rationalism,” Postman writes, “was essentially a revolt against orthodoxy, and since the Christian world-view was the principal orthodoxy of the time, it was inevitable that it would be the target of continuous attack.”¹⁷⁶ In the secular arena, rationalism was also an unrelenting attacker on monarchy and divine rights of kings. This was an effective campaign against rule by birthright, and overwhelming public opinion forced monarchs to rule like schoolteachers and not tyrants, Hof explains. Denis Diderot summed up the sentiments of rationalists with this vivid statement: “Men will never be free till the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest.”¹⁷⁷

What was Casanova’s role in this age of change? He embodied the currents of social and religious unrest. He lived his life as a professional celebrity, and his success at this occupation is proof that this period was one of unprecedented democracy and entrepreneurial spirit. A celebrity is a person who personifies the secret desires and fantasies of a society’s members. He lives the adventures that common people can only think about. He is a social phenomenon that exists only when society has elements of individuality and free will.

Casanova’s humble beginnings are particularly important in this historical examination of the origins of celebrityhood. He was born into a lower-middle class family yet his education allowed him to become an intellectual equal as those born into

upper-class aristocratic families. The barriers between classes were beginning to be only artificial walls made of money.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Enlightenment allowed for the new middle class of businessmen and professionals to accumulate more wealth than ever possible in a feudal society. Casanova was entrepreneurial in constantly reinventing himself and taking on new roles each time a financial opportunity presented itself. He networked among men of power, prestige, and yes, titles, to gain employment that was previously held by aristocrats or noblemen.

The freedom for different social levels to interact openly was also a hallmark of Enlightenment development. Organizations such as the Freemasons and forums such as *salons* allowed for a free-flowing exchange of ideas. Newspapers and periodicals started to become more and more common. Although this was not yet a mass media infrastructure, it was a beginning. For the first time, there was a “mass” culture. Knowledge passed from its roots in oral traditions into the more tangible form of books. “More than any other device,” writes Postman, citing Lewis Mumford, “the printed book released people from the domination of the immediate and the local;...print made a greater impression than actual events...To exist was to exist in print: the rest of the world tended gradually to become more shadowy.” Casanova was a forward-thinking communicator and seemed to understand this trend – he published numerous books about himself, his escape from the Leads, and his duel with a nobleman. Was the printed form of his story a more authentic version of the oral version? The popularity of these stories and Casanova’s longtime status as a celebrity certainly seem to indicate that this was true.

Printed matter also played a major role in the democratic movement. This was an age that saw the establishment of two great republics: the United States and France. The volume of published works in the Enlightenment created an unprecedented literary and cultural diversity. The democratic movement was the unifying theme of the Enlightenment, and the printed word was the medium that tied it all together. Education was the social equalizer as social mobility became the norm.

This thesis is a study of Casanova as an *über*-celebrity, but it is also an examination of the conditions necessary for celebrityhood. Casanova's main occupation throughout most of his life was that of professional celebrity. Not only was he able to support himself with this occupation, he flourished professionally. The changes that took place during the Enlightenment – shifts in the power, economic and social structures – opened doors that were previously closed to all but the aristocracy. Economic opportunities, personal growth through self-education, and a freedom to interact freely with all members of society all contributed to the shift toward democracy.

Casanova lived in a time when there were no daily newspapers, no television, and no Internet, yet he was still known throughout Europe. This thesis proves that mass media is not a necessary component of a vibrant celebrity culture. Other factors, such as social and economic democracy, education, and an entrepreneurial spirit are. The Enlightenment made Casanova's existence as a professional celebrity possible.

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¹⁶⁸ Casanova, Vol. VIII, 59.
¹⁶⁹ Childs, 155.
¹⁷⁰ Childs, 163-4.
¹⁷¹ Childs, 167.
¹⁷² Childs, 82.

Conclusion

- ¹⁷³ Daniel Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (Oxford: University Press, 2000).
¹⁷⁴ Headrick, 10.
¹⁷⁵ Postman, 3.
¹⁷⁶ Postman, 23.
¹⁷⁷ Postman, 23.

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