from an early age, the sexual authority emanated by John Wayne shaped her ideas about what a man could and should be. 'When John Wayne rode through my childhood, and perhaps through yours,' she wrote, 'he determined for ever the shape of certain of our dreams'.[9] Prolific British diarist Jean Lucey Pratt, who wrote fully and frankly about her disappointments in love in her diaries of the 1940s and 1950s, was aware of being 'drawn to pirate types'. Though desperate for marriage, she couldn't summon interest in the nicer and more dependable men who approached her. Even so, Jean felt a lot more in touch with reality than her friend Josephine, who had hero-worshipped the actor Leslie Howard for years, and after Howard's death, became utterly convinced of sustaining a ghost or spirit relationship with him.[10]

Imaginative worlds can be extraordinarily rich and powerful. In Rachel Ferguson's strangely compelling novel, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* (1931), three sisters construct a dreamworld in which they lose themselves to the point where it becomes difficult—not least for the reader—to know where fantasy ends and reality begins to intrude.[11] The story is narrated by Deirdre, all too conscious of literary precedents, who ruefully confesses that her imagination may have damaged her ability to make sensible choices about her life. She tells us that a while ago a man had proposed marriage to her, but much as she liked the person in question, she could not accept him because she was in love with Sherlock Holmes: 'For Holmes and his personality and brain I had a force of feeling which, for the time, converted living men to shadows'.[12] Wasn't this what love was about, she asked herself, 'the worship of an idea or an illusion' with 'flesh and blood the least part of the business'?

For many of the girls who grew up after the Second World War, youthful fantasies of love were as likely to flower around a pop idol or member of a boy band as a literary figure or a cinema star. What did it mean to be in love with a Beatle, with David Cassidy, Donny Osmond, or, more recently, to be obsessed by one of the members of One Direction? Academics now study fandom as cultural history, and there has been a long debate about whether girls are powerful or passive

consumers of popular culture.[13] As consumers they have always exercised some clout. Young women in the 1920s and 1930s bought novels and film magazines and trooped into cinemas and dance halls. In the 1950s they spent their pocket money on fan magazines, coffee pots, cosmetics, ballerina pumps, and circle skirts. In the 1960s, sales of records, record players, and clothes designed specifically with teenagers in mind had begun to boom.[14] Some social theorists—the feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich, for instance—identified Beatlemania as a form of libidinal self-expression for girls who had long been expected to keep a lid on their passions and to be demure.[15] Back in the 1970s Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber drew attention to the importance of girls' bedrooms as cultural spaces: areas where female friendships could flourish alongside activities like listening to records, trying on make-up, and endless discussions about boys.[16]

We now have literary and autobiographical studies of fandom, alongside studies by sociologists and pop historians. The more personal accounts support the idea of the pop idol as a kind of transitional object in the emotional development of young girls; the worship of the teen heartthrob as a kind of 'dress rehearsal for love'. In Allison Pearson's novel *I Think I Love You* (2010), Petra and her friend Sharon spend hours in Sharon's room, stapling bits of a poster of David Cassidy together before sticking it to the wall, face at mouth-height, so that Sharon can implant a fervent kiss on his lips every bedtime.[17] Sharon constructs a shrine to David Cassidy in her bedroom. Together, the girls make a special study of every aspect of David's personality that it's possible to latch on to—most of it completely invented by his publicity machine. The highlight of their young lives is a visit to the Cassidy concert at London's White City Stadium in 1974: a real-life event at which many fans were crushed and trampled over, and one fourteen-year-old girl actually died from her injuries.[18] Pearson's novel shows adolescent girls in love with the idea of love, anxious about their own desirability, competitive, and vulnerable. It then switches in time to the girls as grown-ups, and to a process of disillusion and loss. Not all is lost, because some of the friendships

endure, and the women have acquired understanding and tolerance of their younger selves. Pearson argues through her characters that teen heartthrobs change through time—the adult Petra's daughter in the novel is obsessed with the actor Leonardo DiCaprio—but that the need that they fulfil, the need to try out feelings about love and one's own desirability, is there through the generations.

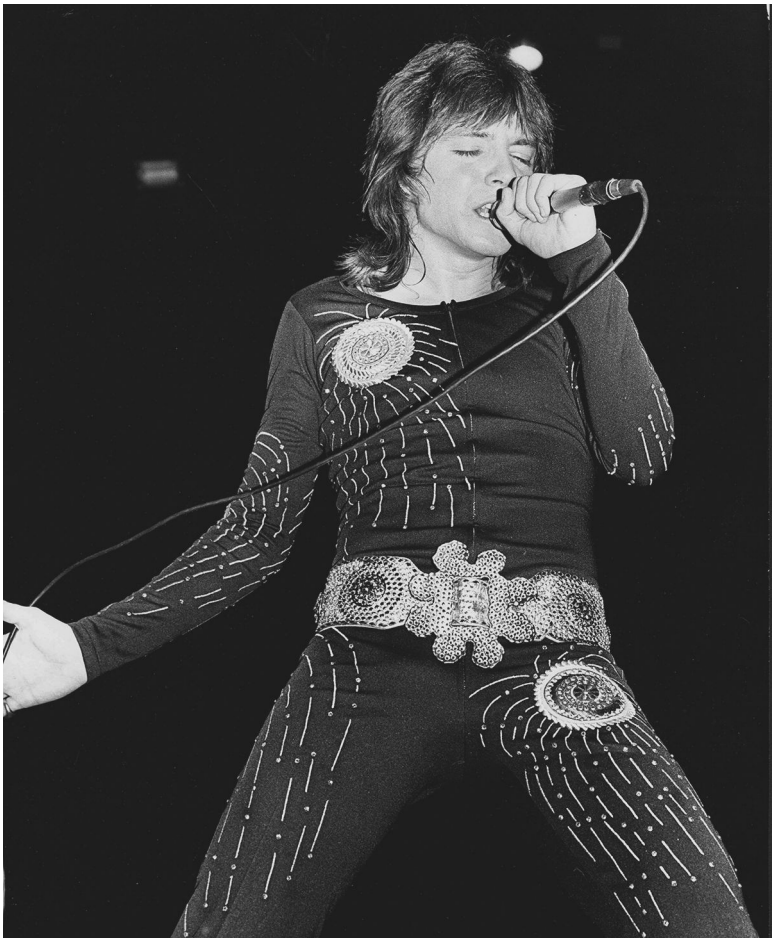

Figure 24. David Cassidy at the Empire Pool, Wembley, 1973.

Cassidy was adored by incalculable numbers of young girls in the 1970s not least because he was so pretty and unthreatening. Sneered at by men who derided him as a girly-boy, with Bambi-like looks and a penchant for tank tops worn over flowery cheesecloth shirts, girls saw him, almost, as one of themselves and had no difficulty in imagining a special bond. Many women attest to having fantasized about this 'special relationship'. Journalist Liz Jones recalled that for her Cassidy was 'the perfect boy'. She put him on the cover of a magazine called 'Trendy', which she wrote and illustrated herself, and her adoration reached new heights at White City when he performed in an 'all-in-one jumpsuit scattered with rhinestones' and she could scarcely believe that they breathed the same air.[19] Writer Emma Freud confessed that at the age of thirteen David Cassidy was her 'total and complete No 1 love-boat'.[20] Nina Myskow, editor of *Jackie* magazine in the early 1970s, remembered Cassidy as by far the most popular of the boy pin-ups of the day.[21] He was *nice*, had a sweet smile, and felt *safe*. Among the mountain of Cassidy-themed memorabilia of the day was a white fluffy teddy bear, with a red satin bow and 'I think I love you' inscribed on its vest.

Donny Osmond and Marc Bolan also had their following. Bolan fans were likely to regard Osmond as too wholesome. Bolan, with his top hats and glittery eye make-up, could look like an evil cherub.[22] Any tendency towards the diabolic was balanced by his prettiness, though: his feather boas and his girly Mary-Jane shoes. Musician Viviane Albertine, one-time guitarist for the punk band The Slits, confessed that for a year in her teens, Marc Bolan had been 'the most important man in her life'.[23] What had appealed most was his prettiness in combination with an overt, but non-threatening, sexiness: 'pouting and licking and throwing his hips forward'. Marc had been safe to fantasize about, sexually: 'he wasn't the kind of guy who would jump on you or hurt you'.[24] There were other male musicians, more overtly sexual, that she remembered feeling intimidated by: Jimi Hendrix, for instance, whereas 'Marc was almost a girl.' Bolan's polymorphous appeal could offer young people a way of imagining

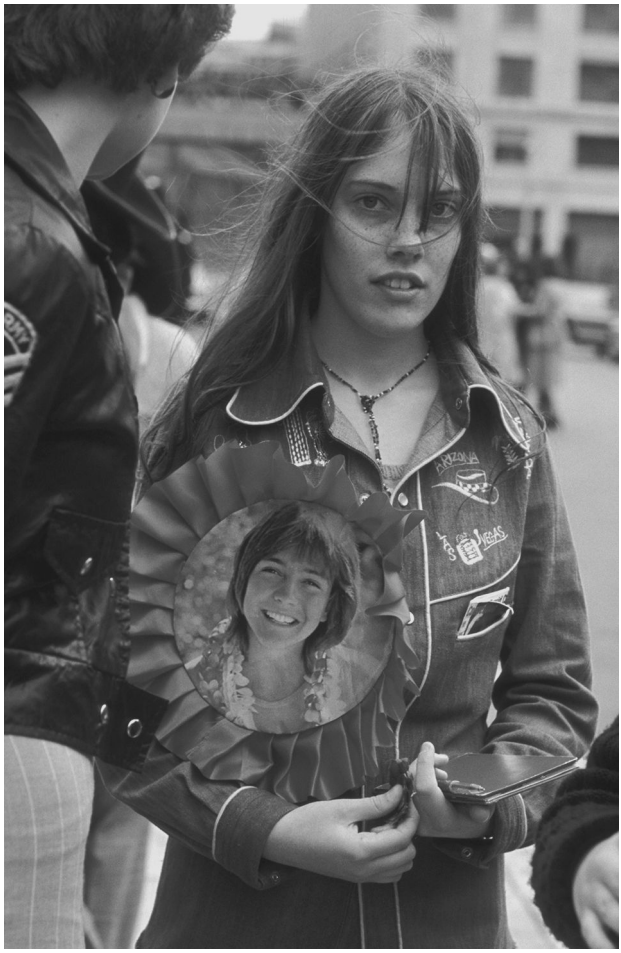

Figure 25. David Cassidy fan wearing huge rosette.

identities outside the gendered templates of the time. Viv Albertine's account of the passions of her youth is fascinating because of the way she weaves them into a coming-of-age story, her search for purpose and identity. The male musicians she fantasized about as desirable (Donovan, Lennon) also inspired her as musicians: at first she would

study record covers for details about their girlfriends and wives, looking for the kind of clues that would enable her to enter their world.[25] What kind of woman did she have to become if she wanted to attract singers and poets? It was much harder to even begin to imagine herself as an independently sexual individual, a performer and a player in her own right.

Liz Jones once declared that as a young girl her adoration for David Cassidy ruined her life, because nothing or no-one afterwards ever quite measured up to the intensity of the experience.[26] But most accounts of teenage pop idolatry—or teen heartthrobs—are about how the subject or narrator moved on, into an adult awareness or towards a more dispassionate viewpoint. This often involved the facing of truths: the idolized one was only human, with human failings, his image carefully crafted by marketing and publicity machines. Not least, there's a coming to terms with ageing, both of the self and of the one-time hero. These themes, delicately dissected in Allison Pearson's *I Think I Love You*, are of course the stuff of many people's lives.

'Who was your first heartthrob?' someone asked a few years ago on Gransnet.com, 'an internet forum for grandparents'.[27] A lively discussion followed. For the post-war generation, Elvis and Richard Chamberlain loomed large. Photos of Elvis had adorned many bedroom walls as well as having been regularly Sellotaped under classroom desk-lids. Cowboys had also been popular. Clint Eastwood as Rowdy Yates in *Rawhide*, and Robert Horton as Flint McCulloch in *Wagon Train* were fondly remembered for their good looks and creaky leather cowboy gear by this first television-watching generation. One respondent reminisced:

> Adam Faith and Billy J Kramer were plastered all over my walls, along with most of the cast of Bonanza: I liked them all. Richard Chamberlain as Dr Kildare. I love the voice of Billy Fury but he was a bit daring for my mum to allow me to have his pic on my wall. I have two signed pictures of Billy Fury in a suitcase still and would not part with them for the world. Such memories.[28]