



THE GLOBAL FLASH of emotion following Lennon's murder went beyond sadness. For many it was one of those moments, alongside the assassination of Kennedy, the death of Diana and September 11, in which it seemed as if the world had descended into permanent eclipse. Footage of the public aftermath show the faces of men and women frozen in baffled devastation, of spontaneous, candlelit vigils on the part of devotees, as if trying to compensate for the light that had just disappeared from their lives. This was an unprecedented act of violence which apparently told us something new and terrible about ourselves, about the nature of mass celebrity and the madness it inevitably engenders.

Of course, in time, the more outlandish conspiracy theories, the morbid sentimentality, the grief and retrospectively embarrassing feelings that the world

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would never be the same again - all of it subsided. The '80s followed a different agenda. Lennon belonged to the '60s and '70s. By the late '80s, Albert Goldman's biography had appeared, in which he systematically desecrated the Lennon myth, playing up the monstrous elements of the man. And while the book should be approached with some caution, it may be significant that no one actually sued.

There is a plausible case to be made against what Lennon became in the '70s. He proclaimed love, peace, and death of the ego while his own life was packed with turbulence, spite and grotesque self-absorption. He was fickle in his dabblings with leftist politics, abandoning his comrades when he grew bored as the radical chic wore off. He was gullible, prey to whatever crackpot theory, from Primal Scream therapy to astrology, happened to drift across his addled attention span.

He was wayward and weak, barely able to function as a decent human being except when in the thrall (or under the thumb) of



born-again Christianity. This was a little rich, perhaps, coming from Lennon, who had himself briefly considered becoming a born-again Christian following a TV appearance by US evangelist Pat Robertson - still grasping for ideals, even from the pit of his bed.

The world of music made rapid leaps forward in Lennon's absence. Punk had reduced most of the early-'70s rock aristocracy to obsolete irrelevancies, laughing stocks even. Younger, skinnier, hipper, sharper bands were springing up everywhere, not least in New York. Lennon nurtured an ambivalent attitude towards The B-52s. In an interview with Andy Peebles broadcast just before Lennon's death, he listed them among a number of bands who in his consideration were doing "nothing The Beatles hadn't already done".

As an ex-Beatle he was entitled to be dismissive of every other band ever, but even so the remark seemed hollow and reactionary. Yet, despite being angered by The B-52s' "Rock Lobster" with its pastiche of Yoko's trademark shriek, he also saw it as a sign of his and Yoko's relevancy. He wanted to go back in the studio and redeem himself once more.

His much-vaunted 1980 comeback album, *Double Fantasy*, received mixed reviews, with its soft-focus, self-absorbed balladeering-but there was also **widespread relief that Lennon was fit and well and**

back among us, chattering away in a series of upbeat, engaging interviews. There were others who abided by wishful notions, still not quite banished by punk, of a rock community, who had been lacking guidance in Lennon's absence and now felt shepherded back to old feelings of certainty by his reappearance.

Lennon had developed a phobia of the outside world almost as intense as his cabin fever during his exile. He'd managed to break out of that double bind. He was back in the studio by the end of the year, brimming with songs of celebration and self-purgative examination. His guard of paranoia had dropped. He felt safe in New York, he said. He was signing autographs. December 8, 1980 had been another good day at the office. He stepped out of his limo. Somebody called out. Lennon turned to see who it was. There were gunshots, blood, screams, sirens...

Yoko. His musical output lacked the discipline and quality control he'd enjoyed when partnered by McCartney. His grand dreams yielded a comically ironic wreckage of misjudgement and failure. That Lennon was a deeply flawed human being is inarguable; that he was contradictory, undeniable. Yet even Goldman argued the paradoxical case for Lennon-he understood and projected the value of peace precisely because he was not a man of peace. Much of what Lennon said and did seems naive by modern standards. No contemporary rock or pop icon would be daft enough to pull the sort of stunts Lennon did. They'd realise in advance that it would be impossible to live up to the high ideals that Lennon espoused, that no one looks to pop stars for answers any more, that the post modern world is too complex to allow for clear white visions of Utopia. »