

FAME AND THE CELEBRITY CULTURE



It is commonly assumed that fame can open the door to a privileged way of life beyond the realm of everyday living. The media present it as the ultimate lifestyle. Back in the 1980s, I worked at an exclusive residential club in London. Its status was such that the world's most famous and influential stars were frequent visitors and often stayed for months at a time. It was, as they say, "the place to be seen". From that experience I was able to observe both sides of the fame game, the glamorous and the sordid.

The fickle nature of the entertainment industry, together with the pressures of being continually scrutinised by the media, can have a polarising effect on the individual. In the initial halcyon period of the celebrity's career, probably the first few years of

success, the original desire to be famous and creatively expressive is continually being reaffirmed. When established he or she can then appear to emanate a certain authority and worldly detachment that stems from the elevated position attained. But all is not how it appears. The fact is I often witnessed behind the scenes deep insecurities and behaviour bordering on the paranoia from established stars. In acute contrast to the highs of public acclaim, in the personal life there is often an emotional chasm and sense of isolation from those closest to them. Keeping busy to re-experience the glorious feelings of success becomes the abiding passion in the life. However, like a discarded lover, the ageing celebrity is inevitably tossed aside in favour of fresh talent, with alcohol, sex and drugs being the usual palliatives to numb the pain of rejection. But nothing really changes, as demonstrated by the veteran stars of the era and those continually trying to make their come-back. The seductive lure of glamour is so powerfully persuasive that few ever manage to detach from its illusory suggestion of an uninterrupted state of freedom and pleasure.

The extraordinary rise of the celebrity culture is generated by sexual energy and manifests as glamour. Glamour is a psychic entity, an invisible force that manipulates an unsuspecting audience. The entertainment industry relies on glamour in varying degrees. In advertising, movies or even a soap opera it can present a situation that appears to represent the ordinary lives of people but is outside their normal living experience. This has the effect of stirring the emotions. Whether the feeling generated is positive or negative is irrelevant as long as some kind of emotional connection is established. Glamour is the master of the mind as long as it can excite or stimulate the imagination to satisfy its cravings for experience. But where did it all begin?

Fame is not a modern phenomenon. In the earliest of times, whether achieved through outstanding courage shown in battle or athletic prowess, the hero received special privileges and reward on account of his elevated status among his people. Being famous clearly had its advantages even then. But it is even further back in time that the influence of a certain group of individuals set the fame and celebrity ball rolling with their ability to create the ultimate reality show. These were the mythical gods of the ancient world.

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The mythic legacy of the gods of ancient Greece, as well in other civilisations, continues to reverberate within the psyche of our western culture. In Hollywood it's a typical practice to incorporate mythic themes into movie storylines. This is to subliminally arouse in the audience those most tantalising of feelings of original art and pleasure. The gods' preoccupation with sex, seduction and the power of illusion is the substance of the myths that exerts such a magnetic pull on the condition of mind. In the individual this manifests as sexual obsession, fantasy and the desire for power over others. Shame, guilt and self doubt are the inevitable consequences of sex without the reassuring presence of love.

The celebrity culture has now engulfed the world and serves to provide a comforting sense of continuity to offset the pain and unhappiness of our times. About ten years ago I was walking down to the local shop in the Lake District, where we lived at the time, and I realised the secret of a perfect world. Not everybody can be famous but everyone is a uniquely creative being. Regardless of artistic talent the ultimate creativity is surely to discover – and then live – something that is fulfilling every moment. From this perception I could see the purpose of this phase of life and the idea of real art to which humanity is heading. In a world where there is just the acknowledgment of the beauty and rightness of another there is an absence of trying to be anything other than what I am. All that remains is a deepening significance of living reality and the spontaneous expression of love on earth. This is an echo of paradise the original Garden of Eden. Many people have resonated to this ideal and sensed this to be the utopia to which humanity is progressing towards. It will come once more but not before a final reckoning in the dream of existence. Before that, fame and the celebrity culture will continue but will change radically with the new wave of entertainment technology that will revolutionise the viewing experience and the relationship between celebrities and their public. This will be the subject of another article.

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