Celebrity Studies ›

Volume 5, 2014 - Issue 1-2

560 Views | 4 CrossRef citations to date | 1 Altmetric

Conference Forum

Fade out/fade in: dead 1920s and 1930s Hollywood stars and the mechanisms of posthumous stardom

Lisa Bode

Pages 90-92 | Received 15 Jul 2013, Accepted 12 Aug 2013, Published online: 09 Apr 2014

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.887525 Check for updates

Sample our Humanities Journals
>> Sign in here to start your access to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Click to increase image size

Celebrity Studies, 2014
Vol. 5, Nos. 1–2, 90–92, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.887525

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

FORUM

Fade out/fade in: dead 1920s and 1930s Hollywood stars and the mechanisms of posthumous stardom

Lisa Bode*

School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

(*Received 15 July 2013; accepted 12 August 2013*)

In her work on the circulation of posthumous fame discourses around Hollywood film actors' graves, Linda Levitt writes that: 'stardom persists for only a handful of iconic performers, as fame typically diminishes without the workings of the culture machine' (2010, p. 70). She shows how this machine operates in the particular context of dark tourism, as it weaves strands from star biographies and lurid tales from Kenneth Anger's (1975 cited Levitt 2010, p. 64) *Hollywood Babylon* into narratives of reverence and morbidity. But her work also prompts further questions about the extent to which the mechanisms of posthumous fame remain constant or change between different interests and eras. I offer some brief thoughts towards a broader conception of these processes, and trace lightly the posthumous fade-out of two stars who both died at the peak of their fame: Marie Dressler (d. 1934) and Wallace Reid (d. 1923). For through such long fade-outs (and tentative fade-ins), we can gain a better understanding of how the mechanisms of posthumous fame have operated during different moments of Hollywood history.

The constellation of the remembered Hollywood dead shrinks or expands depending on the context. For instance, Mark Roesler, CEO of CMG Worldwide – an agency that represents stars such as Jean Harlow and James Dean – operates as a 'consecrating agent' (Bourdieu 1993, p. 41), bestowing 'classic star' labels on lesser figures whose heirs pay him a percentage, such as Gene Tierny, Sharon Tate, and Virgina Mayo. This kind of consecration occurs wherever a star name or image can be financially leveraged. As Levitt (2006) has shown, operators in Hollywood's dark tourism routes pad their tour highlights with B-movie actors and chorines who just happen to be interred or have died in an unusual manner in the right locale, drawing them all into the embrace of both 'classic' and morbid Hollywood histories.

But in the early 1930s there was a move on the part of fan magazines to more strictly hierarchise and constrain screen immortality in the face of an ever-expanding constellation of dead or retired stars. Litanies of names of dead and retired stars had become common in newspapers and fan magazines, such as *Picture Play* and *Motion Picture Magazine*, by the late 1920s. For instance, Herbert Cruikshank's 'The celestial super' lists pages of names of dead stars and supporting players, with the solemn command that 'They shall be remembered. Always. They shall live. Forever' (1929, p. 31). Such memorial writing jostled against a growing number of articles that ruminated on the transience of screen fame, where 'new faces crowd out the old' (Chamberlain 1929, p. 87). During the early 1930s this preoccupation with explaining transience continued, with articles like 'Stars Who Have Vanished' (Grant 1932, p. 32). At the same time we see articles attempting to define the unforgettable qualities of particular stars with 'Immortals of the Screen' (Lee 1933). These articles sought to delineate

*Email: l.bode@uq.edu.au

© 2014 Taylor & Francis

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their useful feedback and the Celebrity Studies editors, Sean Redmond and James Bennett, for their encouragement and assistance in developing this article.

Additional information

Notes on contributors

Lisa Bode

Lisa Bode is lecturer in Film and Television Studies at The University of Queensland. Her research interests include screen performance and illusionism, posthumous fame, and cultural reception. She is currently writing a book historicising screen acting in the context of visual and special effects.

Log in via your institution

Access through your institution

Log in to Taylor & Francis Online

Log in

Restore content access

Restore content access for purchases made as guest

Purchase options *

Save for later

PDF download + Online access

- 48 hours access to article PDF & online version
- Article PDF can be downloaded
- Article PDF can be printed

EUR 48.00

Add to cart

Issue Purchase

- 30 days online access to complete issue
- Article PDFs can be downloaded
- Article PDFs can be printed

EUR 195.00

Add to cart

* Local tax will be added as applicable

Related Research

People also read | Recommended articles | Cited by 4

Information for

- Authors
- R&D professionals
- Editors
- Librarians
- Societies

Open access

- Overview
- Open journals
- Open Select
- Dove Medical Press
- F1000Research

Opportunities

- Reprints and e-prints
- Advertising solutions
- Accelerated publication
- Corporate access solutions

Help and information

- Help and contact
- Newsroom
- All journals
- Books

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email

Sign me up

Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited Privacy policy

Cookies Terms & conditions Accessibility

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG