

CELEBRITY CULTURES

an introduction

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1

THE ANCIENT ART OF SELF-PUBLICITY

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter sets out the historical foundations of fame, a crucial place to start in evaluating the cultural impact of celebrity, as it stresses the ways in which common assumptions that celebrity is a contemporary social phenomena is not so clear-cut. While celebrity is closely associated with the rise of technologies of mass communication, the desire for fame, to stand out from the social mass, is deeply embedded within human civilizations, and has been for thousands of years. To fully articulate this view the chapter will focus upon:

- Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar's personal quests for enduring fame and the techniques that they developed to ensure that their 'celebrity' was recognized in their own time and throughout subsequent history (for example, conveying their own history, making use of images to circulate their images), and effectively engaging in Public Relations
- The reign of Louis XIV with regard to means by which he saturated France with images of himself and indulged in publicity stunts that Daniel Boorstin would later famously dub 'pseudo-events')
- Fame, publicity, and image manipulation in early Hollywood

ANCIENT ATTITUDES TO CELEBRITY

Within *Illusions of Immortality*, David Giles states that the 'ultimate modern celebrity is the member of the public who becomes famous solely through media involvement' (2000: 25). Similarly, Barry King (cited in Dyer, 1982) also suggests his own set of preconditions for stardom that (in addition to industrialization and

a rigid separation of work and leisure) stress that the development of technologies of mass communication were an essential component. Furthermore, P. David Marshall (1997) argues that the ‘audiences’ of these technologies emerged in the twentieth century (from large-scale social masses) as the power-givers to celebrities, as the sustainers of celebrity power and cultural influence. Moving through cinema, radio, and television to multi-channel TV, movies on demand, Internet blogs, and social networking sites, the means with which the public ‘consumes’ celebrity has only seemingly confirmed that the pantheon of celebrities that currently fill the cultural landscape are the product of a media-technology society. Be it via traditional ‘mass communication’ mediums such as cinema and television, or through ‘new media age’ forms that are more individually controlled and accessed, such as YouTube (Iezzi, 2010), celebrity is perceived to be a phenomenon of the modern world. So, from the early silent cinematic romances of Rudolf Valentino and the drama and glamour of later Hollywood, to the Reality TV antics of the denizens of *Jersey Shore* or the TV exploits of the Kardashian family, we can see how central the role of media/mass communication technologies have been and continue to be in the transmission of celebrity personalities, and the public construction of celebrity identities. However, although the existence of a celebrity culture is deemed to be a modern social phenomenon, the desire for fame and the resultant public adulation that fame bestows upon an individual is not limited to modern media-saturated societies; far from it. Here are the musings of Leo Braudy:

Gazing back from a world in which the production and multiplication of images is in the hands of many, we might wonder what it meant to be famous when the means of communication were slow and the methods primitive. (1986: 15)

Actually, there are discernible connections between the media-constructed/consumed celebrities of contemporary society and the pursuit of renown in the distant past. Indeed, on analysis it quickly becomes clear that even in pre-media ancient civilizations the intense desire for individual fame was manifest, if not, as Robert Garland states, already displaying pathological levels of obsession. To illustrate, Garland cites the example of the arsonist Herostratus who, in 348 BCE Turkey, set fire to the great temple of Artemis simply because of the fame and renown that the act would bestow upon him, suggesting that ‘something approximating to a celebrity culture was already alive and well over two thousand years ago’ (2010: 485).

Herostratus’ pursuit of fame is also striking with regard to the parallels that it has with more extreme forms of contemporary celebrity, primarily that of the ascent to celebrity status of multiple murders and, most dramatically, the ‘serial killer’ (as will be discussed in Chapter 10). However, there were other individuals in antiquity who also sought fame effectively through violence, albeit on a grander, military scale, and who combined acts of supreme achievement with a knowing awareness of the ways in which a famous public image can be cultivated and communicated. And the exemplar of this process is unquestionably Alexander the Great.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT: HISTORY'S FIRST CELEBRITY?

The cultural theorist Chris Rojek (2001), author of the book *Celebrity*, one of the first major and highly influential evaluations of celebrity culture, argues that Alexander the Great (born in 356 BCE and died in 323 BCE) possesses the status of being the first 'pre-figurative' celebrity in history, an individual who achieved global fame in an age that lacked any means of the mechanical reproduction and widespread dissemination of information and images. Alexander was granted the status of 'ascribed celebrity' during the lifetime of his father, Philip, King of the Macedonians (fame bestowed through monarchical lineage), but that was too restrictive, so Alexander alternatively sought fame achieved by his own means. Thus, 'Alexander aimed to become a universal, unquestionable "presence" in everyday life. He sought to inscribe himself on public consciousness as a man apart, a person without precedent' (2001: 30). As such, Alexander would ultimately constitute a key early possessor of the four key qualifications of fame: 'a person and an accomplishment, their immediate publicity, and what posterity has thought about them ever since' (Braudy, 1986: 15). But how did a man achieve such fame without the stock communicative technologies and agents that have characterized the acquisition, communication, and 'selling' of celebrity that have become the defining factors of the culture of fame from the early twentieth century? How did Alexander ensure that his name would be immortal?

For the Christian philosopher, St Augustine, Alexander the Great was nothing more than a roguish pirate 'infesting the earth!' (1984: 139); however, Alexander is conventionally read in far grander ways. For instance, the novelist Mary Butts (author of the 1931 novel, *The Macedonian*) encapsulated his achievements in life and his legacy since his death in the following, distinguished fashion: 'There are men who sum up an epoch, and men who begin another. Alexander did both' (cited in Cartledge, 2004: 4–5). Consequently, the dominant perception of Alexander the Great is that he is not merely a figure from history, but that he is a *history maker*. Therefore, at one level the answer appears to be quite simple: Alexander achieved his fame via acts of military conquest that saw him leave Macedonia in 335 BCE to initiate his military campaign against Darius III of Persia and continue through Asia to ultimately invade India. Therefore, Alexander was one of the ancient world's greatest military leaders who literally stamped his mark on the world. But there is more to the story than that. History is replete with highly successful conquerors (from Hannibal, Attila, Charlemagne, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane, to Napoleon and Hitler), and while they are all certainly famous (if not often infamous) in a historical sense, nevertheless they are not routinely regarded as being celebrity-like. And yet, Alexander the Great is.

This is because Alexander provides a blueprint for some subsequent rulers who *did* wish to be seen as extraordinary and who *did* wish to actively cultivate their fame in their own lifetimes, and beyond. And this is why, although an oft-told tale within academic accounts of celebrity, Alexander needs to be looked on as a key architect of the 'rules' of celebrity and the acquisition of fame because, as Paul Cartledge notes,

‘Alexander had a clear perception of himself, driven by a desire for recognition by others, to be seen as more than merely mortal, but rather, as in some way superhuman or divine’ (2004: 17). And how he did this is why the history of celebrity *must* begin with Alexander the Great.

In addition to Alexander’s extraordinary military achievements, he ‘was one of the first Greeks . . . to be worshipped as a god in his lifetime’ (Cartledge, 2004: 215). Significantly, though, this perception was the result of deliberate design by Alexander as the early historian Plutarch’s assessment of Alexander’s lineage concludes: ‘It is certain that Alexander was descended from Hercules’ (Plutarch, 1998: 385). Thus, Alexander arguably knew exactly what he was doing with regard to the perception of his image but how was a ‘globally’ recognized name established in a world without a mass communication system or any mechanical means with which to reproduce text and images? To answer this question, we turn again to the work of Giles, because in his view, the conspicuous pursuit of fame by Alexander coincided with both social and psychological developments within human societies of the time to the extent that ‘the history of fame is about nothing less than the history of *Western* civilization. It is also about the history of the *individual*, and therefore it is about the history of human psychology, too’ (2000: 12).

The development of individual consciousness within human society, argues Giles, arose with the practice of naming (argued to have begun in the Mesolithic period), and the emergence of mourning and ceremonial burial and the worship of certain individuals (invariably royalty) as gods. Of the latter, stories of venerated individuals were told orally until more widely facilitated by the development of writing. However, alongside the dissemination of stories concerning particular individuals, writing also established the development of a distinctive form of literature; fictional accounts that not only had a considerable impact on early ‘audiences’, but which also began to actually influence human behaviour and thought. The most influential examples of this early literature (and its distinctive and dramatic social and cultural impact) were Homer’s epic works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, two texts which Giles argues not only communicated the concept of ‘everlasting fame’, but also, most importantly, valorized it. It was these two texts, argues Braudy, which crystallized the idea of the meaning of heroism, and it was Homer’s articulation of the figure of the hero that influenced Alexander the Great’s self-conscious quest for fame.

ANCIENT STRATEGIES FOR GAINING FAME

Within his now-classic and influential study of fame, *The Frenzy of Renown*, Leo Braudy articulates why Alexander the Great deserves to be called the genuinely first famous person in human history, and charts the particular pattern that he followed in his deliberate attempt to achieve this status. In essence, it was in reaction to the heroic exploits found within the pages of the *Iliad*, and most notably in imitation of the epic’s central figure, Achilles. Like Achilles, Alexander sought fame through prowess in battle and through the conquest of armies and territories, and ‘was impelled by an urge to see and do more than any Macedonian or Greek had before’ (1986: 32).

Indeed, while the ancient world had no shortage of rulers who were engaged in the process of accruing wealth and land, waging war, and destroying enemies, Alexander the Great (while engaging in all of those exploits) significantly differed from them. As Braudy states, it would be Alexander who would stay fixed in the world's imagination, and not, crucially, merely for the magnitude of his military achievements, but for something else: for what was 'immaterial' about his achievements. Thus, when Alexander was analysed by early historians, the perception that his drive for conquest was more than simply for the spoils of war was a constant refrain; it was also characterized by the belief that Alexander was driven by something internal and mystical in nature. Therefore Braudy believes that:

In his short life of thirty-three years, Alexander constantly posed, fulfilled, and then went far beyond a series of new roles and new challenges until he himself was the only standard by which he could be measured. At the head of his army, his eyes forever on the horizon, he stood self-sufficient but never self-satisfied. Unlike the time-and-role-bound rulers of the more ancient civilizations, who believed that their greatest achievement was to come into accord with the rhythms of dynastic history, he sought to be beyond time, to be superior to calendars, in essence to be remembered not for his place in an eternal descent but for himself. (1986: 32)

In 334 BCE, Alexander and his army left Macedonia to invade the Persian Empire in order to initiate the first of the challenges that he believed would fix his name in history, and it was within this military campaign that Alexander truly differentiated himself from previous conquerors; this revealed why it is that Alexander is such a central figure in the story of fame, and ultimately, celebrity – because, not only was Alexander influenced by the literary exploits of Achilles, but, via his mother, Olympias of Molossia, Alexander actually considered himself to be a direct genealogical descendant of Achilles, embodying all of Achilles' traits as both a heroic and fearless warrior and a military leader. Consequently, the campaign against Persia was not simply an act of war and a means for territorial conquest, but it assumed a potent *symbolic* character in that Alexander likened it to the Greek siege and ultimate destruction of the city of Troy. Therefore, in the midst of invasion and battle, Alexander began to weave a story of his own, complete with what can only be described as carefully staged 'publicity' events. And the most memorable and significant of these occurred in the city of Gordium. This is because on Alexander's arrival in the city:

Word reached him of a local curiosity, a chariot in the palace of the former kings of Phrygia which was linked by legend to king Midas's accession at Gordium four hundred years before. It had been dedicated to a Phrygian god to whom the officers identified with Zeus the king, Alexander's royal ancestor and guardian, and it was bound to its yoke by a knot of cornel-bark which no man had ever been able to undo. (Lane Fox, 1997: 137)

Expanding on the tale, Braudy notes that the Gordian knot was akin to the Arthurian legend of the sword in the stone: a test that only the true king could succeed in.

The symbolic value was clear: whoever untied the knot would rule Persia. Initially, Alexander attempted to undo the knot by hand, but it would not yield. But rather than admit defeat (and face public humiliation in the eyes of his senior soldiers), Alexander effectively and audaciously ‘rewrote the rules of the game’ by cutting the knot apart with his sword in order to reveal the secret of the knot and thus untie it. The significance of this act was that rather than representing simply a face-saving act (or even being an aggressive fit of kingly pique), the cutting of the Gordian knot represented, arguably, a unique precursor to the modern publicity stunt. This is because what Alexander did in Gordium ostensibly represented what Daniel Boorstin, within his seminal work on fame, *The Image* (first published in the early 1960s), would dub a ‘pseudo-event’.

HISTORICAL PSEUDO-EVENTS

Boorstin’s argument within *The Image* is quintessentially a pessimistic one. His central argument is that since 1900 Western culture has witnessed the transformation of the ‘hero’ into the ‘celebrity’, a process initiated by the ‘Graphic Revolution’, the products of the mass communication system consisting of magazines, television, cinema, radio, and newspapers. The major cultural impact of the Graphic Revolution was its ability to create famous people ‘overnight’, and to effectively fabricate ‘well-knownness’ (1992: 47). From a litany of classical heroes, such as Jesus, Joan of Arc, Shakespeare, George Washington, Napoleon, and Abraham Lincoln – individuals marked by achievements of ‘greatness’ – the prevalence of individuals promoted by the media system constitutes Boorstin’s now-classic definition of the ‘celebrity’ as the individual ‘who is well-known for their well-knownness’ (1992: 57). In Boorstin’s view, the contemporary landscape of fame (Hollywood, for example) is one characterized not so much by genuine achievement, but rather by superficial media-created diversions sustained by a series of ‘pseudo-events’ – purposefully produced publicity-seeking episodes initiated by studios or public relations professionals and representatives. Pseudo-events are deliberately planned and staged ‘for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced’ and arranged ‘for the convenience of the reporting media’ (1992: 40). Although clearly a man of considerable military and material achievement, Alexander nevertheless recognized that to imprint his identity onto the culture of his time (and ultimately beyond it), something else was required: that his image needed to be communicated in a dramatic fashion, and manipulated.

Thus, although the pseudo-event is habitually seen as a comparatively new addition to the celebrity arsenal, the point of events that are purposely designed to be perceived by the wider community is applicable to Alexander, and it is why he is such an important figure within the history of fame – because, as Braudy states, the fact that Alexander cut the Gordian knot meant that he went beyond the traditional stipulations of the puzzle, to solve it by untying it. Instead, Alexander created his own solution, and by doing so, he set himself apart from all others who had failed in the endeavour. So, while there was no media system to report his deed, it still had a similar effect: it became the subject of talk. But the cutting of the knot was also a key

moment in the differentiation of Alexander from his royal and military forerunners and peers because it was a decisive 'act that propelled him once again beyond the usual triumphs of kings and conquerors into the realm of imagination' (Braudy, 1986: 35). This was Alexander's ultimate goal. Accordingly, when the Persian Empire was defeated and Darius put to flight (and subsequently murdered by his own generals as a means with which to appease the unstoppable Alexander), Alexander continued on his quest to effectively conquer the world and pushed out across Asia (establishing at least 18 cities which he named after himself in the process).

ALEXANDER'S PUBLICITY-PRODUCING GENIUS

In Braudy's analysis, then, Alexander represents an individual who was never content with the ascribed fame (Rojek, 2001) that was his by dint of his royal lineage as the son of Philip II of Macedon. Alternatively, Alexander also sought a fame that was based upon his own achievement rather than simply resting upon his predetermined royal status; he actively set about creating 'Alexander the Great' from Alexander III of Macedonia, and he did this in two distinctive ways: by attaining a level of achievement far beyond those accomplished in the past, and, most significantly, by performing achievements *unheard of* in the past. These factors were both unquestionably realized through the geographical scope of Alexander's empire, but there was a further crucial layer to Alexander's quest that was the key to perceptions of him in his own lifetime, and also, crucially, in a way that has resonated into the present time and contemporary celebrity culture. This dimension was explicitly linked not to what Alexander's real character was like, but how he wished to be seen by the world.

For Alexander, his image to the outside world, how he was perceived by the culture of his time, was far more important than who he really was as a human being. As such, he actively projected a specific image of himself to his world, an image that consciously and carefully drew upon the heroes and divine figures of his time which he utilized as sources of inspiration and emulation. The most pertinent of these models was that drawn from the works of Homer. On all of his military campaigns it was rumoured that he carried with him a copy of the *Iliad* given to him by his childhood tutor, Aristotle. Therefore, argues Braudy, Alexander was driven by a very specific 'programme': the quest for fame. And here Alexander demonstrated particular genius because he acutely comprehended that he had to *control* the way he was seen within his world. In this manner, not only did he go further militarily than any leader before him, he desired that this drive would ensure that he was an individual to be talked about, to be interpreted in various ways, to mystify those who sought to understand his extraordinary success at so young an age.

One clear tactic in this regard was to deliberately manipulate the extent of his heroic lineage. Hence, he would not merely cite the great Achilles as a direct ancestor, but he also constructed a family tree that included such incredible figures as Dionysus, Perseus, and Hercules: 'all heroic adventurers in whom the line between god and man was uncertainly drawn' (in Marshall, 2006: 44). But heroics needed one

more essential ingredient: to be recorded and immortalized. Therefore, in addition to his military personnel, a further vital member of Alexander's invasion force into Persia was Callisthenes – Alexander's official historian (and the nephew of Aristotle). The motivation for Callisthenes' presence was precise:

Empires have risen through the military and political ability of powerful kings only to vanish, leaving behind crumbling monuments and the dust of a few anecdotes. But Alexander's urge was for cultural and imaginative domination as well. (Marshall, 2006: 46)

Therefore, Callisthenes possessed a very specific role within Alexander's army, but also an especially prescient one. Given that Alexander had left Macedonia behind, he nevertheless wished to transmit accounts of both his empire building and his Homeric status to the Greek city-states. Thus, Callisthenes' function was not simply that of official historian, but as Alexander's 'press agent', or publicist. As such, given that the contemporary nature of the public relations industry is predicated upon the protection and communication of 'reputation' (Franklin et al., 2009), Callisthenes and his precise function effectively made him history's first official PR man. Even more presciently, the contemporary Western public relations industry has increasingly become synonymous with the concept of 'spin' in relation to the conscious, planned process of 'image-polishing', a process of particular relevance to PR company work with politician clients (Miller and Dinan, 2008: 2). As such, Callisthenes's job was to enhance Alexander's public reputation, and one of his primary roles was to record the various indications of divine favour shown to Alexander in his quest, to underline the parallels between Alexander's actions and those of the past (especially Homeric) heroes (for instance, Callisthenes calculated for Alexander that it was exactly a thousand years to the month between the attack on Troy and Alexander's campaign against Persia). In essence, then, Callisthenes was Alexander's political 'spin doctor' as he established Alexander's personal mythology and cemented his 'living god' status. Furthermore, Callisthenes was purportedly fully aware of his importance in the construction of Alexander's public persona as he is said to have pronounced that 'Alexander's fame . . . depends on me and my history' (Lane Fox, 1997: 84). However, unfortunately for Callisthenes, it is alleged that he was ultimately executed by Alexander for not working hard enough to 'sell' his divine nature to the ancient world.

It was not only the written accounts of Callisthenes that projected Alexander's image into the consciousness of his world, however, as the conqueror also astutely recognized the need for people not simply to hear of his exploits and superhuman abilities, but to *see* him. Consequently, as Alexander enjoyed significant military victories across Asia Minor, he also began to employ visual artists to paint, and thus preserve, his visage. As Giles (2000) states, Alexander's appearance in these artworks and mosaics typically portrayed him with a flowing mane of hair and eyes cast towards the sky, a dramatic stance and image imitated by actors and rock stars centuries later (think of the Doors vocalist Jim Morrison's iconic 'Young Lion' photographs shot by Joel Brodsky, as a good example). Therefore, Alexander recognized that a good story needed pictures.

Nevertheless, his genius for self-publicity extended beyond artistic representations to a mode by which his image was guaranteed to be seen on a daily basis by the stamping of his likeness upon coins, and pictorial representations that served not merely to 'advertise' his appearance, but that also cleverly reinforced his 'divine' and superhuman lineage. Thus, in addition to establishing cities, Alexander also created a number of minting centres that stretched across Asia in order to deliberately circulate coins that featured his face merged with mythic figures such as Hercules and Dionysus. And it was a successful venture, as the maintenance of his name and legend was helped by the fact that these coins were circulated years after his death (Braudy, 1986: 104).

THE QUEST FOR FAME GROWS: JULIUS CAESAR AND ANCIENT ROME

Alexander's tactics to ensure his fame worked, as numerous successors similarly driven by the desire for fame adopted his style, from military leaders such as Hannibal, Pompey, and Mark Anthony – who considered themselves to be the 'new Alexander' – to Mithridates, king of Asia Minor, who modelled his image explicitly on the dress and hairstyle of Alexander. Furthermore, Alexander's use of coins as a means by which to broadcast his image throughout the ancient world was enthusiastically and expertly adopted by the Roman Emperor Augustus. And it was within ancient Rome, with its own expanding and seemingly all-conquering military empire, that the means for the securing of fame initiated and mastered by Alexander found fertile ground and blossomed.

In Braudy's view, Alexander's techniques resonated strongly within Rome, as military expansion and personal honour were both connected and public conduct was highly prized, to the extent that 'Rome would infect the world with the desire for personal recognition' (1986: 57). Indeed, it is from Rome that the Latin words 'fama', 'ambitio', and 'celebritas' were created to articulate the centrality of the search for individual recognition from the urban Roman public: words that would resonate down through the ages. Therefore, Roman society created an increasing dynamic for individuals to seek out opportunities to display public distinction, and seek them out in ever grander ways, because 'When all distinction comes from public action, the stakes of fame get higher, the actions more grandiose, and the players look for theatres larger than the normal round of public office' (1986: 58). Within this context of a military-based society, a key successor to Alexander would be Julius Caesar, a historical figure who, like the Macedonian king before him, recognized that acts of very real military achievement also needed to be augmented with a supreme and deliberate process of personal stage management. A key part of this strategy was to project an image to the Roman public that was predicated upon convincing them that he was more than a mortal man. To do this (with a clear homage to Alexander's tactics), Caesar asserted that his family lineage was traceable back to the Julian founders of Rome, therefore establishing a quality of the divine to his nature and his subsequent drive to become the ruler of Rome. But, although he communicated 'intangible' quasi-supernatural elements of his identity

to the Roman public, his main drive towards fame was through successful military achievement, and his platform for this was the Gallic War (58–51 BCE). Hence, Julius Caesar would closely follow the Alexander model, and to the extent that he recognized that his conduct during the Gallic War must be communicated back to Rome, that the people must continue to be apprised of his achievements in his absence.

So, akin to Alexander, his exploits and achievements were recorded and transmitted back to Rome. However, there is a keen distinction from Alexander in that Caesar did not appoint a Callisthenes; instead, he became his own historian and publicist, and by extension, his own propagandist. And he set out his story in a very deliberate style; as Braudy states, the language of his account is ‘in the third person – presented in the spare, plain style of the Roman soldier and good citizen doing his job, without the rhetorical or personal flourishes of the aristocratic oratorical tradition’ (1986: 84).

In what has become known as *The Conquest of Gaul* (1982) Caesar created his own history (in book form), and set it out in thrilling fashion. Thus, the people of Rome would read and hear of Caesar’s marches (and assured military success) against the warlike Helvetii and Belgic tribes, the triumphant invasions of Britain and Germany, and, most significantly, the war against the Gauls and their rebellious leader, Vercingetorix. Although there are accounts of temporary military setbacks, the tone of *The Conquest of Gaul* is one of triumph of Roman courage against often overwhelming odds, and the narrative is characterized by persistent references to the display of superior military strategic acumen by Caesar, a skill which ultimately saw not only Gaul pacified and the reach of Rome extended, but the absolute rout of Vercingetorix, with Caesar at the centre of battle. This is what this extract unambiguously communicates, setting out as it does Caesar dramatically joining his beleaguered legions, and, in quintessential *deus ex machina* style, turning the tide in Rome’s favour:

The enemy knew that he was coming by the scarlet cloak which he always wore in action to mark his identity; and when they saw the cavalry squadrons and cohorts following him down the slopes, which were plainly visible from the heights on which they stand, they joined battle. Both sides raised a cheer, which was answered by the men on the rampart and all along the entrenchments. The Romans dropped their spears and fought with their swords. Suddenly the Gauls saw the cavalry in their rear and fresh cohorts coming up in front. They broke and fled, but found their retreat cut off by the cavalry and were mown down. (Caesar, 1982: 199)

It is clear that *The Conquest of Gaul* is no work of objective history, but an account that constantly emphasizes Caesar’s extraordinary achievements, and it is a text that simultaneously glorifies Rome and its unimpeded sweep across the known world (and Julius Caesar is not reluctant to spell out the ruthless march of his army as evidenced by the total annihilation of the town of Avaricum – an act identical to Alexander’s razing of the rebellious city of Thebes) and which also exalts Caesar himself. At the conclusion of *The Conquest of Gaul*, the reader is in no doubt that it

was *Caesar* who conquered Vercingetorix and his forces. In Garland's view, although Caesar's adopted son, Augustus, would ultimately become more politically successful as Rome's first emperor, and he also instituted a particular means by which public attention was cast upon him, establishing himself as the First Citizen and encouraging the view that he was 'society's benefactor', Julius Caesar's career, by contrast, can be interpreted as 'a very public bid to satisfy a giant-sized, out-of-control ego' (2010: 485). But fame in ancient Rome could be achieved without recourse to military achievement, as demonstrated by Marcus Tullius Cicero.

CICERO

Cicero, who lived from 106 BCE to 43 BC, unlike Julius Caesar did not come from an aristocratic family nor carve out a career with the Roman army, but like Caesar possessed an appetite for fame and recognized the means to get it: oratory and the written word. As Braudy explains, much of Roman history remains unknown because oratory was predominant over written records. However, Cicero, who rose to prominence through the law and politics, comprehended the need to record his words, client defences, and political speeches in order for the world of the future to recognize him, and became 'his own Callisthenes' (1986: 72). But Cicero was not merely an orator, he was an orator of consummate and acerbic skill, the principal factors that elevated him to fame within Roman society, especially with regard to his deft 'ability to attack his enemies, flatter his friends, and magnify himself' (1986: 75). The persistent theme of Cicero's self-magnification was his own achievements and their importance, but, as the historian Plutarch observes, his biting abilities to 'taunt' and 'gird' his political adversaries 'won him the great ill will of many' (1998), not the least of whom was Mark Antony, on whose orders Cicero was murdered.

THE ANCIENT WORLD AND THE RULES OF FAME

Garland's assessment of ancient celebrity distinctly chimes with the critical appraisal of fame mooted by Boorstin, but identifies such characteristics centuries earlier than Boorstin's analysis does. Ancient Rome saw the principles of fame-seeking 'invented' by Alexander become a conspicuous component of society and individual psychology, and a distinctly negative one, too. For instance, at the opposite end of the social spectrum from military leaders, Rome possessed a number of 'celebrities' who held dubious statuses as role models, the most conspicuous of which were the gladiators. Recruited from the convict and slave population, and although coerced into performing acts of combat to the death, many of the successful fighters achieved widespread fame and 'performed' before crowds of up to 50,000. Furthermore, emperors who did not prove themselves in battle (nor have any discernible abilities) nevertheless sought fame, such as Emperor Nero, who had designs upon being equally famous as an entertainer and athlete; so much so that he 'even went so far as to hire claque of supposed fans, who were paid to applaud his musical performances and no doubt as

well boo those of his rivals. Anachronistically speaking, Nero clearly saw himself as antiquity's answer to Michael Jackson' (Garland, 2010: 488). Rome, therefore, was 'a whole society animated by the urge for fame' (Braudy, 1986: 17) – a charge more conventionally levelled at (principally) the Western world and Western culture.

Having established the pursuit of fame as a pervasive desire that united brutal gladiators with orators such as Cicero, however, the pursuit of celebrity did not intensify, but conversely, it faded away. As Giles (2000) explains, for hundreds of years, fame became an inconsequential factor within Western society. But why should this occur given the avowed desire for fame (and the invention of pre-media mechanisms to achieve it)? How could a social and psychological force that defined an entire empire lose its potency? The answer was within the changing culture of Western society itself, and from the Judeo-Christian religious doctrine that developed from within Roman society and which increasingly attacked the Roman preoccupation with public and private glory. As such, in the wake of the fall of the Roman Empire and the increasing control of the Church throughout Europe, the veneration of the individual was suppressed in place of the adoration and glorification of the divine. Still, during the Middle Ages, a number of cultural and technological factors emerged and combined to steadily undermine religious control, such as the invention of the printing press, the use of engraving, and later, portraiture, to portray the human face rather than religious imagery, and the population explosion leading to migration from rural areas and to increasing urbanization with dense populations. Furthermore, in the Renaissance, the rise of popular theatre also contributed to new forms of fame, and the theatre attracted crowds the size of which had not been apparent since the days of Rome (Giles, 2000: 16–17). As Rojek (2001) points out, although godlike qualities are often attributed to celebrities (and in the case of Alexander, actively encouraged), the contemporary meaning of the word celebrity in fact springs from the 'fall of the gods', and is attributed to the rise of democratic governments and societies that have experienced processes of secularization, that process of the decline of the social influence of religion and levels of religious belief that many societies have experienced (Brown, 2009). The importance of democracy, argues Alberoni (1972), is that a star system requires a society characterized by a clear structure facilitating social mobility for citizens, so that, in theory, anyone can become a 'star' and a famous personality. Therefore, improved technologies for the reproduction of images, secularization (or at least the retreat of total religious authority), democracy, and urbanization were all social factors that would result in the 'return of celebrity', as it were, as a social and cultural presence.

THE RISE OF 'CELEBRITY'

As Fred Inglis (2010) argues in his *A Short History of Celebrity*, the development of urban democracy, increasing individualism, and the development of communication media would, from the mid-eighteenth century, see the specific concept of 'celebrity' replace a more general process of 'renown' – a status typically linked with acts of 'high accomplishment' and civic acts which brought honour not to an individual, but to the

role which they inhabited. Thus, within eighteenth-century London, individuals such as the actor, producer, and theatre owner, David Garrick, emerged as ‘the first late eighteenth-century celebrity’ as he clearly demarcated the theatre as possessing a line between the actor and the public. Furthermore, the actors and actresses in his employ (most famously the marvellously named Colley Cibber and Peg Woffington) inspired the audience to seek out information concerning their off-stage lives, particularly with regard to the fashions they sported and any potentially scandalous sexual transgressions they might be involved in. In other artistic contexts, the Romantic poet George Gordon Byron, or, as he would be more commonly referred to, Lord Byron, would emerge as a celebrity ‘idol’, a poet of genius and a ‘lord of the realm, a well-known libertine, amazingly handsome, darkling curly-haired, dazzling and dashing’ and ultimately ‘that rarest of creature, a celebrity worth celebrating’ (Inglis, 2010: 63–70).

For Inglis, the emergence of celebrities within this period was also strongly related to the visibility of specific individuals within public leisure spaces in major metropolitan areas such as London, Paris, and later New York. Within concert halls, cafes, and gardens designed for promenading, the famous faces of the day would be noted and recognized by the public: a process facilitated by the numerous portraits of famous individuals produced by notable artists such as Joshua Reynolds.

The centrality of visibility, however, brings me to my third and final substantive example of the chapter, Louis XIV, the ‘Sun King’. He was a figure who straddled the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but who, in addition to being directly influenced by both Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, acutely understood the ways in which image would become central to fame, and who fully and expertly comprehended the importance of self-publicity. The relevance of Louis XIV is that, although an absolute monarch who presided over a France that contained no avenue for democratic political expression, his mode of securing and transmitting his fame, and for ensuring its longevity, resonated keenly with the celebrity system that would soon follow in the years after his death in 1715. This is what Peter Burke observed in his book, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*:

As early as 1912, the ‘glory enterprise’ of Louis XIV reminded a French scholar of contemporary publicity. The parallel is even more obvious in the late twentieth century when heads of state from Richard Nixon to Margaret Thatcher have confided their image to advertising agencies. (1992: 4)

Just as Alexander recognized the potency of images to cement his eternal fame, so too did Louis, but on a far grander scale through the production of hundreds of images that charted his life from infancy to old age. So numerous were the portraits and artistic representations of Louis that a visual and continuous narrative of his life and achievements was created. As such, Louis’ history was pictorially established as his reign unfolded (and he reigned for 72 years, having ascended to the French throne at the age of four). However, these images were not confined to single artistic works, but were reproduced in the form of tapestries and engravings for further dissemination and transmission of Louis’ image. In effect, a media system was

established which predates Walter Benjamin's conception of art in what he dubbed the 'age of mechanical reproduction'. Although a process linked back to the Greeks and developing through the Middle Ages and perfected in the 1900s with the widespread development of photography (Benjamin, 2008), the reproductions of Louis' portraits represented an effective earlier example of this process in which artworks were reproduced in numerous ways and in differing media, but the motivation had little to do with art and everything to do with maximizing his public fame. This is Burke's explanation:

Reproductions magnified the king's visibility. Medals, which were relatively expensive, might be struck in hundreds of copies. 'Prints', on the other hand (woodcuts, etchings, copperplates, steel engravings, and even mezzotints), were cheap. They could be reproduced in thousands of copies and could therefore make a major contribution to spreading views of Louis as well as news about him. (1992: 16)

However, it was not only visual means that were employed to circulate Louis' likeness; his royal image was also reliant upon 'oral media' of his day in the form of poetry, prose, and histories dedicated to his divine status and achievements. Even monuments of Louis and medals bearing his image contained inscriptions written by writers of the stature of the dramatist Jean Racine, and the inscriptions were not merely descriptive text, but rather instructions to readers that positioned them to interpret the monuments in a narrowly proscribed way. This strategy was specifically in place because the function of these images and monuments was not to simulate artistically the king's likeness, nor were the manifold texts created to objectively document his history. Instead, the aim of the images was 'to celebrate Louis, to glorify him, in other words to persuade viewers, listeners and readers of his greatness' (1992: 19). And in order to visually convey this desired public perception, the artists who visualized Louis' demands drew upon Roman equestrian statues. Thus, France would ultimately contain numerous statues of the king attired in Roman armour and transfixed in a suitably heroic pose. However, there was nothing accidental about the influence of the past, as it was key heroic figures of antiquity that Louis' public images were based upon, to the extent that Louis was frequently described as being a 'new Alexander', and one of Louis' heroes was indeed the Macedonian conqueror and master of self-publicity.

Given the scale of Louis' publicity machine throughout his reign, Burke also draws attention to the approach of Boorstin, and he identifies France's seventeenth-century 'media' as a distinctive forerunner of the Graphic Revolution that characterized the early twentieth century. Given that the scale of media included professionals such as artists, sculptors, engravers, poets and dramatists, tailors, and even the choreographers who meticulously planned the form of court ballets, a clear and potent precursor to the Graphic Revolution existed and was expertly executed. Furthermore, Louis' 'publicity agents' also staged distinctly Boorstin-like pseudo-events through the organization of seemingly spontaneous events which 'were in fact staged with some care, such as the public rejoicings on the news of

French victories' (Evans, 2004: 21). And Louis's main palace, that of Versailles, was designed to be, as Nancy Mitford describes, 'the outward and visible sign of [France's] ascendancy over surrounding nations' (1966: 32). But Versailles was more than a monument to national achievement; it was, as one would expect, an expression of representations of Louis XIV himself. Consequently:

Versailles could be regarded as a permanent exhibition of images of the King. Louis saw himself everywhere, even on the ceiling. When the clock installed in 1706 struck the hours, a statue of Louis appeared and Fame descended to crown him with laurel. (Burke, 1992: 17–18)

While far from being a subtle enterprise, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century media were pressed into the service of a king intent upon linking himself with the heroes of the past and ensuring that his image (represented in exactly the way he wished to be 'read') and fame were secured for posterity. Yet Boorstin's standpoint is that prior to the Graphic Revolution, the achievement of the status of being publicly well-known was an inexorable and gradual process, even for those who commissioned vast monuments to themselves (the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Roman Emperor Augustus, for example). It would be after 1900 that the technological processes would be substantially developed to facilitate the rapid manufacture of fame. There is little to argue with here as the development of cinema as a popular form of public entertainment within the first two decades of the twentieth century was a driving force in the creation of a celebrity class.

As Giles states, one of the most important features facilitators in the creation of individual fame in early Hollywood was the invention of the close-up shot (pioneered by the director D.W. Griffith in *The Birth of a Nation*). The importance of this technique was that it 'enabled audiences not only to see the facial features of the actors but also their portrayal of emotions, thus intensifying the intimacy between star and spectator. The advent of sound served to further strengthen the star-fan relationship' (2000: 24). As the Hollywood cinematic industry developed, so too did its star system: the establishment, from approximately 1917, of a number of 'studio-fashioned' film 'stars' who resonated with the public and, in addition to constituting economic assets to the studios and serving as audience attractors to specific films featuring them, rapidly served as pathways of escapism for audience members. Consequently, such was the allure of film stars, that cinema admission could 'melt away strain, pain, misery, and desperate tiredness in the delicious dark below the shining silver screen' (Inglis, 2010: 188).

FAME AND IMAGE MANIPULATION

Furthermore, the first age of cinema illustrated the speed (and methods) by which anonymous individuals could be catapulted from obscurity to fame in a matter of days, but effectively, as Joshua Gamson argues within *Claims To Fame* (1994), with a tight system of control of name and image. The most often-cited example of the creation of

fame is still one of the most potent to underscore Boorstin's assessment of the power of the Graphic Revolution, and the manipulative means film studios employed to imprint 'stars' unto the public consciousness, that of Florence Lawrence, or the 'Biograph Girl'. Signed to the producer Carl Laemmle's Imp film company in 1909, Laemmle implemented a publicity campaign to publicize the actress in 1910, but in a very innovative form. There was a report in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that Florence Lawrence had been killed in a streetcar accident in New York, complete with a photograph of the then unknown actress. However, days later an advert appeared in *Moving Picture World* that strenuously denied the event and claimed that the story had been perpetrated by 'enemies' of the Imp company, and that Florence Lawrence was alive and well. However, the entire story was the product of the Imp company publicists (deCordova, 2001), and it not only demonstrated the methods by which publicity could be utilized to create almost instant fame, but also that the manipulation of star images and personas (exaggerated 'discovery stories', hints at romance, etc.) would become a central feature of the Hollywood star system as a means via which to connect with audiences (Dyer, 1982). Thus, for Boorstin, since 'the Graphic Revolution much of our thinking about human greatness has changed. Two centuries ago when a great man appeared, people looked for God's purpose in him; today we look for his press agent' (2006: 72).

And yet, although what Boorstin dubs the Graphic Revolution – consisting of cinema, radio, newspapers, magazines, and television, but contemporaneously augmented by celebrity websites, blogs, multiple TV channels, and forums such as YouTube (Lawrence, 2009) – has undeniably enabled the fabrication of fame and celebrity to become culturally widespread, the historical juncture at which this occurred is perhaps more blurred than Boorstin acknowledges. While the contemporary 'celebrity industry' is centrally supported by 'sub-industries' such as the promotional efforts of the publicity industry, which chiefly consists of public relations firms and publicists (Turner, 2004) (although obviously not professionally formalized as it is today), the ethos of PR did exist. Thus, Louis XIV was a figure at the heart of an extensive publicity machine that was focused exclusively upon the creation of a specifically idealized image of him as king and as the divinely-ordained 'Viceroy of God'.

Yet centuries earlier, Julius Caesar recognized the necessity of carefully controlling his image in Rome as he marched across Europe to pacify Gaul and extend Rome's frontiers. In writing *The Conquest of Gaul*, Caesar created his own history to communicate his actions and frame his reputation with the goal of a triumphant return to Rome and the acquisition of sole power (the necessity of civil war against his co-ruler, Pompey, is set out in his records). Indeed, as the Roman historian Suetonius recorded, at the moment of his assassination in the Senate (that saw him stabbed 23 times), 'Caesar fell, arranging his toga so that even in death he would have control over his image' (Braudy, 1986: 89).

Nevertheless, the foundation of fame, within his own time and in contemporary celebrity culture, lies with Alexander the Great. While Alexander's military achievements were extraordinary, his recognition of the need to control public perception of these achievements, to construct and communicate a specific image of him that deftly blurred the lines between fact and fiction, the human and superhuman was also crucial. And of course, to establish his reputation within his lifetime and guarantee his

legacy beyond his death, he employed an expert in image-making. Thus, while political ‘spin’ has been identified as a PR function that fully emerged in the late twentieth century, Alexander employed Callithenes to perform this task in 334 BCE, and established that fame is a status that must, even if built upon achievement of the highest level, be fabricated and manipulated – factors that are key characteristics of contemporary celebrity culture.

CONCLUSION

While the development of a specific ‘celebrity culture’ as we recognize it within contemporary society is, according to Inglis, located some 260 years ago, its foundations are ancient. The individual drive for fame, to stand out from the mass, is a longstanding human drive. That Alexander could achieve this in a society lacking any form of mass communication is all the more extraordinary, and the key reason why any discussion of celebrity must begin with an analysis of his methods. Indeed, while modern celebrity is predicated upon modes of publicity (visual images, publicity stunts, idealized public personas, etc.) that have their roots back in Alexander’s innovations, his fame-seeking attitude resonated and inspired even within the ancient world itself. Earlier in the chapter, I referred to the example of Herostratus, but what was especially significant was that he burnt down the Temple at Ephesus on the day of Alexander the Great’s birth, and as a result secured fame for himself but also aligned himself with one of the great architects of fame-securing itself. Therefore, while the means of attaining celebrity have been transformed extensively throughout human history, some factors seemingly remain the same.

FURTHER READING

To further explore the history of fame, readers should engage with:

- Braudy, L. (1986) *The Frenzy of Renown*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Inglis, F. (2010) *A Short History of Celebrity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

To complement the analysis of fame in direct relation to the historical rise of celebrity and with regard to direct ancient historical examples of the quest for fame and self-publicity, readers should consult:

- Caesar, J. (1982) *The Conquest of Gaul* (translated by S.A. Handford). London: Penguin.
- Cicero, M.T. (2009) *Political Speeches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.