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The most famous woman of the twentieth-century? Marilyn Monroe, death and the cult of stardom

Photographer Bert Stern posthumously said of Marilyn Monroe, ‘She is gone but she is everywhere. Stars die but the light goes on forever.’¹ Monroe does seem to be everywhere. In 2009 alone, she has been referenced across a broad spectrum of popular media including: Dolce and Gabbana’s autumn ready-to-wear collection and make-up advertising campaign, Lindsay Lohan’s re-creation as her in *Rolling Stone* magazine, Jade Goody’s appearance as her in a music video and the theatre production *Marilyn* which ran for 11 nights at the Apollo Theatre in London in June 2009. She may have been dead for nearly 47 years but her image and inspiration remains present. As Hallam, Hockey and Howarth would maintain, Monroe may be biologically dead but she is socially alive.²

While commentators and academics have analysed Monroe’s persistent cultural purchase in relation to issues of nostalgia, feminism, and beauty, this paper frames the modern-day consumption of Monroe as a particular form of hero-worship which centres on the cult of personality rather than talent but raises parallels to more traditional notions of ‘the hero’ as someone who embodies ‘ideal ways of behaving.’³ Clarifying the intimate relationship between the star/celebrity and the hero, this paper will consider how Monroe’s heightened stardom, rags-to-riches narrative, and the longevity of her popularity, provides a seemingly heroic and much-needed antidote to the ubiquity and temporality of what Brauer and Rutledge Shields call the ‘modern cult of celebrity’; a phenomenon which has changed the construction of heroism and created a situation reported by *Time* magazine as early as 1990 whereby a lost generation now cling to the past for inspiration because they have ‘few heroes, no

¹ Bert Stern quoted in Robin Muir, *The World’s Most Photographed* (London, National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005), p. 106.

² Elizabeth Hallam et al. *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London, Routledge, 1999) pp. 3 & 8.

³ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of Masculinities* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 105.

anthems' and 'no style to call their own.'⁴

Marilyn Monroe was a popular American actress born in 1926 who died in 1962 from an overdose of sleeping pills. Although officially judged a 'probable' suicide her death has produced countless conspiracy theories and is often considered as shrouded in mystery.⁵ While alive she cultivated a stellar stardom, transcending her early life as an illegitimate child called Norma-Jean Baker who spent most of her youth in foster homes, to become one of the top-grossing stars of the 1950s following her first lead role in the film *Niagara*. Amongst other accolades, she won Golden Globe awards as the 1953 and 1961 World Film Favourite, as well as the Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy for the 1959 film *Some Like It Hot*. Her films earned £70 million at box offices worldwide. Outside her successful acting career she was also a world-wide known personality, extensively recognised by her two initials alone and one of 'the world's most photographed' alongside the likes of Elvis and the Kennedys.⁶ Her well-publicised ambassadorial endeavours which saw her entertain American troops in Korea in 1954 and meet Queen Elizabeth in London in 1956, were transmitted globally and gave credence to W. J. Weatherby's description of her death as probably reaching 'more people than that of anyone for years because she was an international symbol.'⁷ The *Pathé* newsreel 'Tribute to Marilyn Monroe' shows that her private life, which included famous marriages to, and divorces from, baseball player Joe DiMaggio and intellectual playwright Arthur Miller, as well as two reported miscarriages, and a spell in a New York clinic, were as widely reported in the American and British media as developments within her professional career.⁸

When approached to speak about Monroe I realised that nowhere in the thesis I am currently writing on the popular construction and reception of her death in Britain had I described her as a hero. Was this a big error as while Kathryn Benzel has described

⁴ Lydia Brauer and Vickie Rutledge Shields, 'Princess Diana's celebrity in freeze-frame: Reading the constructed image of Diana through photographs', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2:5 (1999), p. 5 and *Time* magazine quoted in Carolyn Kitch, 'Generational identity and memory in American magazines', *Journalism* 4:2 (2003), p. 192.

⁵ "'Probable Suicide" of Miss Monroe', *The Times*, 18 August 1962, p. 5 and 'Marilyn Monroe "probable suicide"', *Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1962, p. 5.

⁶ Robin Muir, *The World's Most Photographed* (London, National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005).

⁷ J. Hoberman, 'Korea and a Career', *Artforum International* 35:5, Jan 1994, p. 10 and W. J. Weatherby, 'Marilyn Monroe: An Appreciation', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1962, p. 2.

⁸ 'Tribute to Marilyn Monroe', *Pathé*, 9 August 1962.

her as ‘an American heroine’, Robin Muir has gone so far as to call her ‘a cultural heroine *without parallel*?’⁹ Paul Johnson even included Monroe in his 2007 publication *Heroes: from Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to Churchill and de Gaulle* in a chapter entitled ‘Heroism behind the Greasepaint.’¹⁰ A basic internet search unearthed thousands of sites where Monroe is explicitly a hero, one such being the ‘My Hero’ educational project in which American school children add content relating to their personal heroes.¹¹ Marilyn Monroe is case studied more times than her contemporaries Judy Garland and Audrey Hepburn yet interestingly far fewer than Joan of Arc and that other famous martyr Princess Diana of whom many historians and commentators have drawn parallels. The digitised *Time* magazine feature ‘Heroes and Icons’ dated 4 June 1999 also listed Marilyn Monroe as one of the twenty ‘most important people of the century’ and provided a shorthand guide of the qualities needed to be a hero and icon.¹²

The discrepancy is simply an issue of language. I do not explicitly describe her as a ‘hero’ or ‘heroine’ but she is a ‘star’, an ‘idol’ and even as biographer Anthony Summers and photographer Bert Stern would argue, a ‘goddess.’¹³ In *The Frenzy of Renown*, Leo Braudy theorises the modern phenomenon of celebrity and highlights that throughout history other terms such as ‘heroes’, ‘idols’ and ‘stars’ have had similar connotations. Something which sociologist Chris Rojek agrees when acknowledging that while celebrity is a ‘modern phenomenon’, stardom, like heroism, is a word with a history.¹⁴

Illustrative of this shifting language, the *Daily Mail* coverage of Monroe’s death included a Hollywood exposé by the Golden Globe winning actress Leslie Caron in which she presented Monroe’s colossal stardom as having an ancient lineage to the Greek gods. Highlighting the historical roots of fame as well as the cultural shift in its origin from religion and politics to the entertainment industry, Caron described

⁹ R. Muir, *The World’s Most Photographed*, p. 106.

¹⁰ Paul Johnson, *Heroes: from Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to Churchill and de Gaulle*, (New York, HarperCollins, 2007) pp. 234-252.

¹¹ <http://www.myhero.com>, accessed 20 June 2009.

¹² <http://www.time.com/time/time100/heroes/index.html>, accessed 20 June 2009.

¹³ Anthony Summers, *Goddess: The Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (London, Time Warner, 1991) and Bert Stern quoted in R. Muir, *The World’s Most Photographed*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Leo Braudy quoted in David Giles, *Illusions of Immortality: a psychology of fame and celebrity* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000), p. 12 and Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London, Reaktion, 2001) p. 16.

Monroe as ‘a secular goddess’ and concluded the article by explaining: ‘the subtle and civilised ancient Greeks nevertheless needed Gods and Goddesses. Mankind has not changed. Only the Gods and goddesses no longer live on Olympia and are immortal and indestructible. They are made of flesh and blood...Monroe’s lonely end was one more proof that you cannot make Gods out of human beings without killing them.’¹⁵ Caron’s words certainly hold sway when you consider that many mid-twentieth century stars, like James Deans and Elvis, also confirmed their status’ as legends and generational heroes through untimely demises yet Caron also eloquently highlights the intimate relationship of entertainment stardom with historical forms of fame and the public’s need for identification figures be them stars, politicians or religious icons.

Distinguishing Monroe, as Richard Dyer does as a ‘classic’ star with a recognisable talent, ‘star quality’ and longevity, differentiates her from modern celebrities.¹⁶ Braudy has also drawn this distinction, deriding the modern ‘fame of the moment’, to echo Dante’s discrimination between worldly fame that is spread by rumour and true lasting fame.¹⁷ Indeed, as *Daily Mirror* showbiz reporter Donald Zec highlighted describing Monroe as ‘one of the few really great stars’, stardom like heroism, is the exclusive realm of the few which unlike celebrity is not easily acquired or easily lost.¹⁸ Even following Monroe’s, sacking from 20th Century Fox during the filming of *Something’s Got To Give* she still died defined throughout the British and American press as a ‘star’, with the *Daily Mail* reporting that she was very much at the top of her game when they speculated that an ‘open telegram offering her a part in a new Broadway musical’ lay next to her dead body.¹⁹

However, while Monroe has been widely recognised as oozing ‘star quality’ described by Arthur Miller after her death as a natural ‘incandescence’, she was, particularly by her death in 1962, treated similarly to modern-day celebrities who are frequently and candidly photographed and find their privacy invaded.²⁰ Indeed, the *Daily Mail* felt

¹⁵ Leslie Caron quoted in Peter Lewis, ‘Only this way can a woman win...’, *Daily Mail*, 7 August 1962, p. 4.

¹⁶ Richard Dyer, *Stars, 3rd ed.*, (London, BFI, 2001), p. 3.

¹⁷ See R. Dyer, *Stars*, p. 3 for a discussion of how Dante and Braudy relate to Dyer’s work.

¹⁸ Donald Zec, ‘The Marilyn Monroe I remember’, *Daily Mirror*, 6 August 1962, p. 10.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Blyth, ‘Marilyn: Suicide?’, *Daily Mail*, 6 August 1962, p. 1.

²⁰ Quote from Arthur Miller in ‘Monroe: Six films that helped create a legend’, *Daily Express*, 6 August 1962, p. 2.

moved to report that before her death ‘her hands went unmanicured. Her blonde hair was unbrushed and turned brown at the roots.’²¹ Although a globally revered and highly paid actress her private life was tabloid and gossip-column fodder with her divorces, miscarriages, psychiatric illness and fits of temperament publicly dissected. One *Daily Mirror* reader wrote in a 1958 letter that she ‘like millions of other women’ took ‘a great interest through the newspapers in Marilyn Monroe’s family life’, and Donald Zec noted in the post-death coverage how ‘the fears, the frailties and the triumphs of this miracle called Monroe have been sensational headline news for years.’²² Certainly, while David Giles acknowledges that into the new millennium, ‘fame has acquired a vulgarity through the perceived low value of modern celebrity’, it is arguable that wherever there has historically been heroes or stars, a celebrity culture has existed on some level to supply the public’s desire for exclusive information about famous people.²³ In *Soldier Heroes* Graham Dawson exposes the correlation between the construction of traditional military heroes and Dyer’s work on stars as well as the relationship both hold with celebrity culture. Describing Sir Henry Havelock, the nineteenth-century hero of the Relief of Lucknow who died in 1857, as ‘a prototypical media star’ Dawson explains, that the heroic image, like the star one is ‘constantly embellished by any and every scrap of new knowledge...published to cater to the interests of particular public audiences.’²⁴

Dyer and Rojek have both argued that it is through this process of ‘celebrification’ in which the off-screen lifestyle and personalities of the famous begin to equal or surpass their demonstrated talents that their status is elevated.²⁵ Indeed, while the modern celebrity is often considered as lacking the skill or talent of the star or hero, being as Daniel Boorstin describes in *The Image*, ‘a person who is known for her/his well-knownness and not for any talent or specific quality’, celebrity culture has enabled the famously talented to realise star status as the construction of their image involves both professional promotion and access to their private lives.²⁶ However, the evolution from famous to star status involves a constructive process which requires only a certain amount of personal revelation, relying more heavily on the obscuring of

²¹ Jeffrey Blyth, ‘The day Marilyn gave up caring’, *Daily Mail*, 7 August 1962, p. 1.

²² D. Zec, ‘The Marilyn Monroe I remember’, p. 10.

²³ D. Giles, *Illusions of Immortality*, p. 33

²⁴ G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 105.

²⁵ A term used by Chris Rojek in his book, *Celebrity*, (London, Reaktion, 2001).

²⁶ Daniel Boorstin quoted in Dyer, *Stars*, 3rd ed., (London, BFI, 2001), p. 13.

the star's professional and personal life so the fans do not know where the 'real' person stops and the 'professional' persona starts.

Dawson echoes this argument when exposing the similarities the star discourse holds for soldier heroes. Describing how Henry Havelock was treated 'like a film star', he explains that similar to entertainment stars he was 'at once both a real person and a character in a story.' His heroic image, like the star one, was mythologized and embellished by both fact and fiction.²⁷ Today celebrity Katie Price and her professional alter-ego Jordan embody this. In the 1950s Norma-Jean Baker, aided by the Hollywood film studios became the larger than life sex goddess Marilyn Monroe whose real-life narrative was considered so 'far-fetched' and 'stark' that the *Daily Mail* concluded that 'as a film script the story of Marilyn Monroe could never have been written.'²⁸ While Norma-Jean had lived a previously mundane existence as a factory worker, teenage bride, and brunette, Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate dumb blonde was the larger-than-life woman whose performance of the female gender was at times knowingly and comically exaggerated. Indeed, comparable with Jordan, Monroe's look was man-made and made-for-men and her persona was sexualised yet sanitised by the innuendo that coloured her humour and comic timing both on-screen and off. It was difficult for the public to distinguish between Monroe the actress and Monroe the person and while I accept that she herself had some agency in this mythical construction, her own remark that 'the truth is I've never fooled anyone. I've let people fool themselves. They didn't bother to find out who and what I was. Instead they would invent a character for me. I wouldn't argue with them. They were obviously loving somebody I wasn't' is very persuasive.²⁹ Especially when you consider as Carolyn Kitch does that the admired figure often represents 'an ideal self-image' and Monroe did become an icon for many women.³⁰

Aside, from the 'double-life' produced by a name change and fashioning a professional persona, which mid-twentieth century stars John Wayne and Judy Garland also undertook, many, including Monroe in the case of *The Misfits*, believed her typecast female characters to be based on her. Indeed, Cecil Wilson of the *Daily*

²⁷ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 105.

²⁸ Cecil Wilson, 'Marilyn', *Daily Mail*, 6 August 1962, p. 4.

²⁹ Marilyn Monroe quoted at <http://www.marilyncollector.com/legend/quotes.html>, accessed 20 June 2009.

³⁰ Carolyn Kitch, "A news of feeling as well as fact": Mourning and memorial in American newsmagazines", *Journalism* 1:2 (2000), p. 175.

Mail highlighted the irony of her film titles which he felt had a way of ‘reflecting her own problems’: *The Misfits* was produced during her marriage to Arthur Miller and *Something’s got to Give* was the title of her last film.³¹ Moreover, when Cecil Wilson famously referred to her as ‘all woman and all child’ he coined a phrase born out of the 1952 film ‘Monkey Business’ in which Monroe’s character Lois Laurel is described by Cary Grant’s character as ‘half infant’ leading Ginger Rogers to exclaim ‘not the half that’s visible!’³²

While we now live in a confessional culture in which celebrity is ubiquitous it is usually the case that those who have reached star or hero status are the most elusive or unreachable personalities and the continued hero-worship and fandom around them is bound by a mission to bring them back down to earth, to find the ‘real’ person behind the image. I would certainly argue that this is why so many biographers have chosen Marilyn Monroe as a subject and why more or less every one of them promises exclusive revelations that will expose the ‘real’ Monroe. Essentially however, they all tell the same narrative relying on snippets of factual information and a lot of hearsay. In attempting to expose the ‘real’ Monroe these biographies have become a testament to the futility of this undertaking with the plethora of post-death features on Monroe ‘all telling and re-telling her story and embellishing further the myths surrounding her brief life.’³³

This strategy has long existed within popular discourse of stars and heroes. In Monroe’s case it was always felt that she was misunderstood and elusive, something which comprised news in much of the British post-death press coverage. While reporters like David Lewin of the *Daily Express* boasted their closeness to Monroe to lend kudos to their reports, others commented that her life was as mysterious as her death and lamented that the ‘real’ Monroe would now never reveal herself. Indeed, while journalist Lewin claimed ‘nobody else in Britain’ knew her ‘secret telephone number’, Wilson of the *Daily Mail* described her as an ‘idol with legions of hangers on but hardly any friends’, acknowledging the vagueness which had left reporter

³¹ C. Wilson, ‘Marilyn’, p. 4.

³² Wilson, ‘Marilyn’, p. 4 and *Monkey Business* theatrical trailer, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWgY-IKUe0A> accessed 20 June 2009.

³³ Muir, *The World’s Most Photographed*, p. 106.

Donald Zec asking: ‘what was she really like, this magnificent, marvellous, yet unfathomable woman?’³⁴

Exposing the ‘real’ Monroe today is not just about finding the ‘real’, ordinary person within her but also relates to her continued description as a symbol rather than a human being. Astutely Leslie Caron wrote that her death was ‘the one simple and uncomplicated gesture by which she could assert she was a real person after all.’³⁵ Arguably however, in dying as she did Monroe made herself more unreal because as Violette Morin has discussed, mid-twentieth century stars frequently died the most tragic deaths in the most extraordinary ways; drugs, high speed car crash or suicidal shootings becoming literally larger than life and discussed as godlike or too big for even this world.³⁶ While Caron highlighted the tragic aspect of Monroe’s demise as a *human* story, something which Arthur Danto, art critic for *The Nation* acknowledged when he described Monroe as a hero because of the *personal* sacrifices being an idol entailed, it is arguable that Monroe’s death further fostered her symbolism as a tragic hero and aided the creation of what Benzel calls ‘the legend built around Marilyn Monroe.’³⁷ Descriptions of Monroe as a ‘victim’ of the Hollywood glamour machine, and the ‘burden’ of being a sex symbol expose the extent to which her death became a component of her fashioning into an emblematic martyr to the cause of entertainment.³⁸ Similar to Elvis who Christine King describes as a ‘victim and martyr, sacrificed to that very commercialism which now makes more profit from him in death than it did in his lifetime’, Monroe has been transformed from a famous dead star to a character whose face adorns t-shirts.³⁹

In the ‘Big Brother’ age the mission to expose the ‘real’ person behind the image is related to the democratisation process within the realm of fame which has created a rather unprecedented condition by which ‘real’ people become widely well-known

³⁴ David Lewin, ‘How dare they say such things about Monroe’, *Daily Express*, 8 August 1962, p. 4, Wilson, ‘Marilyn’, p. 4 and Zec, ‘The Marilyn Monroe I remember’, p. 11.

³⁵ Leslie Caron quoted in P. Lewis, ‘Only this way’, p. 4

³⁶ Violette Morin quoted in R. Dyer, *Stars*, p. 43.

³⁷ Kathryn. N. Benzel, ‘The Body as Art: Still Photographs of Marilyn Monroe’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 25:2 (1991), p. 1.

³⁸ See Weatherby, ‘Appreciation’, p. 4, Wilson, ‘Marilyn’, p. 4 and Leslie Caron quoted in P. Lewis, ‘Only this way’, p. 4.

³⁹ Christine King, ‘His Truth Goes Marching On: Elvis Presley and the Pilgrimage to Graceland’ in Ian Reader & Tony Walter (eds.) *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1993), p. 98.

and out-of-reach celebrities are brought down to an accessible level. Carolyn Kitch has argued that ‘reporters make heroes, even mythic figures, of well-known people, conflating fame with newsworthiness and public significance; at the same time they explain the famous in terms of the ordinary.’ She adds that ‘in most cases, the celebrity ‘becomes the object of intense admiration’ but also an identification figure ‘typically felt to have qualities that the person senses in himself but desires to develop further.’⁴⁰ Indeed, Leslie Caron precluded Kitch when she said of Monroe’s death: ‘all her life she had been unreal. She was told she was a symbol, not herself but a symbol of something else. A projection of what people would like to be.’⁴¹ Dyer similarly recognised that in the early days of the Hollywood star system ‘stars were gods and goddesses, heroes, models-embodiments of *ideal* ways of behaving but’ in the later period have become ‘identification figures, people like you and me-embodiments of *typical* ways of behaving.’⁴²

While Monroe’s continued popularity is bound by numerous factors it is this concept of the ‘ordinary’ which arguably provides the key to her longevity and her heroic appeal to the ‘Big Brother’ generation. Popular culture is saturated with images of reality stars, footballer’s wives and lottery winners and there are an increasing number of outlets through which to realise ambitions of fame and fortune which do not require talent. What Monroe represents in terms of the ordinary person’s achievement of the star lifestyle, bound in her particular case by the philosophy of the ‘American Dream’ is timeless and has secured her appeal for generations who do not realise how talented and hard working she was, just that she was a global star. The ‘celebrification’ of Monroe’s narrative is one example of Dyer’s belief that ‘star images have histories and histories that outlive the star’s own lifetime.’⁴³ Monroe may have been a *sex* symbol by 1959 but in 2009 she has become a symbol of the possibility that self-belief and self-promotion can bring in terms of wealth and fame.

While Violette Morin is correct that ‘stars are always the most something-or-other in the world-the most beautiful, the most expensive, the most sexy’, and Monroe’s renowned beauty and sex appeal are a testament to this, her rags-to-riches narrative

⁴⁰ C. Kitch, ‘A news of feeling’, p. 175, 189-190.

⁴¹ Leslie Caron quoted in Lewis, ‘Only this way’, p. 4

⁴² Dyer, *Stars*, p. 22.

⁴³ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society 2nd ed.*, (London, Routledge, 2004), p. 3.

which she herself publicly promoted in recollections of her poor and loveless childhood, is of huge importance to the construction of her success as a real-life fairytale.⁴⁴ Kitch highlights the importance of rags-to-riches stories to the construction of celebrity stardom and lists, alongside Monroe, the examples of Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and John Lennon. While these men form a classic list of working-class boys ‘done good’, a narrative genre which itself has become associated with a particular brand of masculine heroism, Kitch argues that rags-to-riches narratives are equally as necessary in the construction of female stars as heroines and icons.⁴⁵

Like Monroe, whose childhood was described in *Newsweek* as ‘Dickensian’ and whose ‘sordid early years’ were discussed sympathetically in the *Daily Mail*, *Newsweek*’s post-death coverage of Judy Garland reported that she too ‘never really had a background to call her own.’⁴⁶ The telling of Monroe’s and Garland’s lives through parallel plots highlights the existence of a particular narrative construction which relies on the rags-to-riches aspect but also bemoans the tragedy associated with their achievement of this enviable lifestyle. The story is as such: an unhappy childhood; talent and youthful innocence exploited by Hollywood; marriages that did not fill the emotional void; a cult-like following; and death by an overdose of sleeping pills.⁴⁷ Kitch also shows just how important such rags-to-riches narratives are to the construction of the star image by explaining how even though they had privileged backgrounds, by playing on the poor little rich girl theme and exposing their ‘ordinariness’, the news media even constructed the deaths of Jackie Onassis, Princess Grace and Princess Diana within similar parameters as Monroe and Garland to unite all five as similarly star-like and tragic yet worthy of emulation.

The rags-to-riches narrative is timeless and appeals in its Cinderella like narrative construction to generation after generation. In today’s saturated culture of celebrity, Monroe represents the highest possible level one can reach in terms of fame and although her story is a *tragic* fairytale she embodies what it is to come from obscurity and achieve a global stardom of epic proportions. The most famous woman of the

⁴⁴ Violette Morin quoted in Dyer, *Stars*, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Kitch, ‘A news of feeling’, p. 182.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 183.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 180-181.

twentieth-century could certainly be the most iconic and recognised in the twenty-first. When Cecil Wilson wrote in 1962 that ‘Marilyn Monroe was a myth brought down to earth with a jolt from which she was too frail and frightened to recover’ he underestimated the staying power of her legacy and failed to understand how the personal vulnerabilities that led to her death could actually form part of the Monroe legend.⁴⁸

She is a hero to the ‘Big Brother’ generation who see the possibility for fame and fortune in everything and who arguably more than ever look to the entertainment industry for their heroes and identification figures. Monroe’s rags-to-riches narrative, widely publicised image, and the elusiveness created by her untimely death, mean she is, like a hero, someone to ‘dream into’, a simultaneously unreachable yet ‘well-recognised’ image that the public admire yet project onto.⁴⁹ Of course because in its ubiquity, celebrity is becoming increasingly valueless and few if any heroes are produced from it, it is arguable that more than ever the 2009 generation really does form a generation without living heroes and it is therefore unsurprising that they look to the perpetually smiling and knowing face of Marilyn Monroe for inspiration and collude in the perpetual reproduction of her image, narrative and heroic legend.

⁴⁸ Wilson, ‘Marilyn’, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Kitch, ‘A news of feeling’, p. 176.