

Allora Lee

Theory and Critical Analysis

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### **Richard Dyer's Star Phenomenon & Parasocial Interactions**

#### Richard Dyer: A Brief Background

Richard Dyer, a revered English academic, is known for his work in media studies regarding entertainment and representation. A graduate of St. Andrews University and the University of Birmingham, Dyer has studied language, cultural studies, and philosophy. He interrelates his knowledge of such topics with his knowledge of the entertainment industry to produce works and research in film, music, and gay/lesbian/queer culture.

He has written many texts, including *Stars and Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, which will be the focus of this literature review, as well as *The Culture of Queers*, *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film*, and others. Dyer has taught courses in race, film, stardom, Hollywood, and representation at the University of Warwick, University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Stockholm University, the University of Copenhagen, New York University, the University of Bergamo, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, and St Andrews University. Along with his extensive list of publications, he has appeared on documentaries and is an involved activist for LGBTQ+ rights.

### Stars as a Social Phenomenon

Stars, in reference to fame and infamy, are widely recognized, followed, and critiqued by those not in the spotlight. People create careers out of knowing details about a “star’s” personality, which has led to a major global phenomenon that Richard Dyer has ardently studied and explained in his texts *Stars* and *Heavenly Bodies*. Dyer’s “conditions” for stars and stardom are based upon Francesco Alberoni’s definition in “The Powerless Elite,” which describes them as people ‘whose institutional power is very limited or non-existent, but whose doings and way of life arouse a considerable and sometimes even a maximum degree of interest’ (Alberoni 75). These conditions, which are deeply focused on societal structures, include a state of law, an efficient bureaucracy, a structured social system, a large-scale society, economic development above subsistence, and social mobility. Yet, though these preconditions of stardom were identified, Dyer furthered the investigation into stardom by researching its origins.

In early Hollywood, film stars were not publicly recognized figures as they did not receive any on-screen credit in order for producers to keep their salaries low and notoriety at a minimum. However, in the early 20th century, a false news story about a young film actress being killed by a trolley finally brought actors into the limelight. This was the first instance of deliberately manufactured stories being shared publicly to present an image in response to public demand. As Dyer explains, “it is thus at the point of intersection of public demand (the star as a phenomenon of consumption) and the producer initiative (the star as a phenomenon of production)” (Dyer 10). Born from one false story was the public’s interest in the public and private lives of those we see on screen.

The social phenomenon discussed by Dyer frames stars as either a production tool or an object for consumption, but both aid in the social expansion of the industries they represent. In terms of production, Dyer focuses on film stars and Hollywood. Producers rely on stars as tools in an economically driven industry. In some sense, they are just another cog in the machine of capital success. In fact, Dyer addresses the ways in which stars economically advance Hollywood production, and they include capital, investment, outlay and the market. Capital refers to the stars as assets of Hollywood's monopolized system. Investment describes the reliance on them as a guarantee of profit or protection against loss, depending on how well-taken the audience is by the person. Outlay in the economics of the film industry understands that stars are a major bulk of the film's selling point, meaning everything needs to be precise and perfect when handling such people. And most evidently, stars are used to organize and promote the market in Hollywood through advertisements, and they typified certain forms of entertainment which appealed to the masses (Dyer 11).

A star as a form of consumption considers said masses and how they are influenced by the social phenomenon. Andrew Tudor presents four characteristics, similar to those of production, which determine the success of a star as a mode of consumption by their audience. First is emotional affinity, or the loose attachment of the audience to a protagonist character from which emotion is sometimes shared. Then there is self-identification which refers to the audience putting themselves in the shoes of the star, on screen, and finding similarities. Beyond self identification comes imitation, which labels stars as a model for their audiences. Lastly, and most intensely, comes projection which is when an audience begins to bind their realities with those of

the star (Tudor 80-82). In this case, a fan becomes the projection of the star's life, which embodies the successes of his/her works, films, and other aspects of his/her career.

### Stars as Images

Regardless of what is presented to the public, stardom is associated with a specific image. It can be seen as a version of the American dream with themes centered around consumption or wealth, success, and ordinariness, facilitated by constants such as sex, love, and marriage (Dyer 39). Dyer analyzes these three themes individually to provide a deeper understanding of the ideas behind the star phenomenon.

Consumption, not *of* but *by* a star, can be examined in three separate ways, according to Dyer: through an anatomy of the lifestyle, conspicuous consumption, and as idols of consumption. The first describes the physical and ideological molds that a star is placed into. From sponsoring and being fitted in *haute couture* to having homes that display the most modern architecture, the lifestyle seems one to envy, and thus, we become fascinated and obsessed. Conspicuous consumption relies heavily on the same idea, but is rather expressed in a more ostentatious way. This describes how the wealthy display their wealth in such ways that avoid work and focus on hobbies and sports. The idea of stars as *idols* of consumption furthers the reasoning behind the public's obsession with stardom more than the other two methods of analysis do. In this sense, stars are a model for consumption rather than just a means of consumption. Dyer cites Lowenthal's model of consumption as one that comes closer to "the social significance of all the consumption" by suggesting that stars become paragons for everyone in a consumer society (Dyer 45).

The second theme Dyer discusses is success and the myth surrounding it. He states, “The myth of success is grounded in the belief that the class system, the old-boy network, does not apply to America” (Dyer 48). In the “star” system, this myth contains many contradictory elements, which leave discussion open about who is and who can become a star. The first cites that ordinariness is the trademark of the star, which contradicts the public’s need to capitalize on their lives. If they are just like us, then we should not need to know or be interested in what they do in every part of their lives. The second is that the system “rewards talent and ‘specialness,’” which contradicts the first statement that they are ordinary people like us. The third is that luck, or a “break,” that can happen to anyone epitomizes the star’s career, which contradicts the fourth, that hard work and perseverance are necessary to make it big. Through their image of success, they, sometimes subconsciously, promote that consumption and wealth is worth having, but Dyer asserts that these images lead us no closer to a reason why the public focuses so much on a star’s image.

This confusion and contradiction leads well into the third theme of the star phenomenon: ordinariness. Dyer dissects Violette Morin’s idea of stars becoming superlatives due to society’s spotlight and labels. They *are* ordinary people with lives outside of Hollywood movies, but they are also always “the most something-or-other” (Dyer 49). Because we place them at such high esteem, stars are given superlatives that become an inescapable part of their identity. These perceptions are what we surmise as the forefront of importance when discussing Hollywood’s finest. This then leads to idolization of ordinary-to-extraordinary-ness, which we start to believe could happen to us (given the contradictions of success). All three themes, along with the carnal

fascinations of sex and love displayed in the private lives of stars, attract us to their images without any concrete knowledge of who they are in reality.

### Stars as Signs

To properly understand Dyer's examination of stars as "signs," it is important to distinguish what exactly the sign is. In this sense, "sign" refers to character and characteristics. Film stars, specifically, are idolized as signs of fiction, as they portray characters that often contradict their personal beliefs and characteristics. They are able to promote themselves through "triumphant individualism" as well as endorse the production they are in through the roles they play. This defines the difference between self and role, which adds to societal fascination (Dyer 102).

Stars are held as interesting because of their ability to represent unique, symbolic characters, as well as successful individuals in Hollywood. The "novelistic" qualities of a character that makes them especially interesting to an audience include particularity, interest, autonomy, roundness, development, interiority, motivation, discrete identity, and consistency (Dyer 104). Each pertains to the multitude of depth and awareness, interest and dynamic that is created in a fictional character. The ways in which these figures are made for entertainment highlight the most powerful or powerless aspects of humanism, and makes them raw and relatable.

A brief breakdown of these traits is necessary to understand their relevance in stars' lives. Particularity refers to the uniqueness of a character, or how identifiable he/she is when compared to others (Dyer 105). Interest, as W. J. Harvey (1965) describes, is the humanism involved in the creation of a character. It is the "acknowledgement of plentitude, diversity, and individuality of

human beings in society” (24). Autonomy plays on the idea of characters having a life of their own, one that the audience does not need to see or read to understand. Roundness is a term used to describe the multiplicity of a character’s traits that fuse together to create a complex individual. Development is the notion of change over time through a novel or a film. A character should, in some sense, go through changes which push the plot forward. Interiority plays a huge part in how a novel/film itself works around a character. It is the ability of the novel to directly reveal the hearts and minds of its major figures. Motivation speaks to the action within the novel/film. Characters should be motivated, rather than stagnant, unchanging, unmoving parts. Discrete identity plays upon the idea that a character should have an identity outside of the roles within the novel. In other words, they are independent from what they specifically say or do, which adds to the shape and density of major players. Finally, and most confusingly, is the idea of consistency. It is debated how consistency should be portrayed, as characters should develop while also having discrete identities. The easiest way to state the importance of consistency is that the audience should be able to recognize the character even though s/he changes (Dyer 104-107).

With film stars, some of these multifaceted characteristics, like particularity and interest, transfer from their film characters into reality. Everyone has individual interests and unique qualities that they represent through their lives. Consistency and development are other relevant traits that can be related to stars. Some stars change their images and develop throughout their time in the spotlight, while others remain very constant, like Dyer’s example, Bette Davis (Dyer 110). In all of these signs, there are distinct separations between role and reality, which gives people more to obsess over. However, sometimes stars construct signs and representations that

encourage fascination more than if these people were their “normal” selves; thus, in a way, they create their own novelistic characters for the industry. For instance, Marion Morrison’s career was encompassed by the public figure ‘John Wayne’ and the nickname ‘Duke.’ These alternative identities made for more of a lasting and fascinating pseudo-reality than Morrison’s real identity did. The same goes for Norma Jean Baker’s ‘Marilyn Monroe’ public personality. The public became entranced in Monroe’s look, talent, and escapades more than they would have if her ‘popular reality’ was the life of Norma Jean (Dyer 110).

#### Donald Horton and Richard Wohl: A Brief Biography

Donald Horton and Richard Wohl are the scholars who coined the parasocial interaction theory. Wohl, 1921-1957, was a revered sociologist who studied at various universities such as New York University, Yale, and Harvard. His work focused on many fields including economics, cultural studies, specific popular culture, and social relationships. Before his death in 1957, he paired up with Donald Horton, another intellectual, to publish *Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction* in 1956. The two described parasocial interactions as “the illusion of face-to-face relationships” between celebrities or performers and the masses (Horton & Wohl 215). This theory was derived from the spread of mass communication and its effects on popular culture.

#### Stars and fans: Parasocial Relationships

The relationships between stars and their fans or followers is profoundly unbalanced. Dyer’s explanation of and reasoning behind the “star phenomenon” allows for an easier understanding



of the relationships between these two disconnected forces, despite being developed after parasocial theory. Para, meaning beyond or abnormal, suggests that the relationship between stars and their fans is not an average social relationship. In the realm of fan culture studies, this refers to the disparities between how much the public knows about a star-- which ranges from the basics to very detailed descriptions of their lives, and how much stars know about their individual fans-- which is next to nothing.

There is a clear disconnect between the audience and the on screen, musical, or theater performers, so why do parasocial relationships occur? Christine Phelps addresses Horton and Wohl's theory, and relates it to modern popular culture. The original idea was to market images, products, and franchises to audiences through direct messages (Horton and Wohl 217). Mass communication aided this process by allowing stars to intimately reach large groups of people at once. These relationships are expanded and strengthened through repetition, especially when they can be planned and expected (Horton and Wohl). Celebrities can enhance these experiences by making the messages personal and conversational while using lavish hand movements so as to mimic a "casual interpersonal interaction" (Horton and Wohl). They might also step away from the stage and let the audience into their personal lives, though scripted and maintained. The more often these faux-interactions occur, the closer the audience will feel to the star. This leads to fascination, obsession, and the social phenomenon described above.

In modern culture, social media is a crucial method through which this process occurs. "Following" a star on sites and apps like Instagram and Twitter gives the audience the opportunity to look into the lives of the stars and feel closer to them. Marketing thrives on these relationship methods, as stars can persuade fans to buy products or support their brand through

these casual interactions away from the stage. The consumer plays a very important role in the creation and promotion of a celebrity brand (Phelps 14). Thus, these relationships are bound to continue into the future, as fans are dedicated to brands and images of Hollywood's finest, and the stars rely on their fans to further their careers. This is not a new theory, but parasocial interaction is constantly changing with the modernity of pop culture, technological advancement, and the ever-growing film, music, and theater industries.

### Synopsis

Stars are extreme influencers in contemporary society, and have shaped certain social behaviors in the past. From attracting audiences through glamour and wealth, to creating interest out of ordinariness, stars have undeniably changed the standard of "life in Hollywood" since the public's demand to know more first arose in 1937.

"Ordinary" people see stars as representations of the good life, a prosperous existence full of talent and success. They are mesmerized by the similarities of these people to themselves, but are also aware of their unattainability. Stars are revered in the eyes of the public as the best of the best, and their images are popularized and imitated. These relationships form and develop as the star virtually interacts with his/her fans. Yet in the midst of this social phenomenon, Hollywood sees stars as money-making machines, and can sometimes extort these people to further their wealth and desires. Overall, stars have very specific characteristics and lifestyles that cause a divide from the public. The way we see stars is not the way we see ourselves, but our goals are to become as close to them as we can in order to assimilate into their lifestyle.

### Critical Analysis Abstract

Richard Dyer's *Stars* and general studies analyze the unusual phenomena surrounding influential film stars and their unmitigated power to compel and amaze those outside of the spotlight. His studies separate the theory into three intermingling parts: stars as a social phenomenon, stars as images, and stars as signs. There are many components in Dyer's studies that can be extracted and used in analyses of particular actors and actresses. However, this does not solely revolve around film stars. In this analysis, I will be examining the famous pop music icon and recent actress, Lady Gaga. Through an analysis of her style, consumption, social interaction, and many personas, I will be expanding on Dyer's theory of celebrity/stardom and Horton's and Wohl's theory of parasocial interaction and relationships. My goal is to show, through her experiences and transformations, the inner-workings of stardom, and the pressure it places not only on the stars themselves, but also on the public, who look for advice and attention from those they place on pedestals.

An understanding of this theory is important to the analysis of contemporary fame and influence, as stars have become the focus of various psychological and communicative studies. Lady Gaga is a prime model for interpretation of these star-based "categories" due to the separation of her many public identities from her own personal life, and how they have changed over her time in the spotlight.

## **Stars as Categories: A look into Richard Dyer's star theory through pop icon Lady Gaga**

### An Introduction to a Self-Aware Pop Icon

From her rise to fame in 2007/2008 as an outlandish, extravagant icon, to the “stripped” version of Gaga in recent years, and again to a relaunch of confident, unparalleled creativity with her new album, Stefani Germanotta (Lady Gaga) has branded and rebranded herself according to how she sees fit. Her unique style and seemingly unhinged behaviors have changed with the times, much to the excitement of fans and critics.

Lady Gaga and Stefani Germanotta might share some characteristics- due to the fact that they share psyche and soma- but they are not the same. In this sense, Lady Gaga reinforces Dyer's three main categorical theories, while Germanotta challenges them. However, this distinction does not diminish her relationships with fans, as one might assume; rather, it has feasibly strengthened them.

### Lady Gaga as a Social Phenomenon

As Dyer explains in *Stars*, celebrity status relies on factors of production and consumption. In more words, this means those in the spotlight are the gears, so to speak, of the machine that is an industry. Like film actors are used as tools to “produce” movies, (not in a literal sense as a producer) music icons are used as tools to create music and popular content. They keep the industry alive. This, at a very basic level, can easily be applied to Lady Gaga, as she has had multiple number 1 hits and top 15 appearances on the billboard music charts since 2009 (billboard.com). With 23 million albums and 64 million singles sold, she ranks as one of the

highest grossing artists in the world (Hubba 3). Her most recent song, “Stupid Love,” released earlier in the year on February 28, 2020, reached number 28 on the top 100 chart just 3 days after. Gaga’s production of these hits not only promotes her own talent and creativity, but also reinforces the successes of the music industry- specifically her label/s and producers.

A star as a form of consumption, according to Tudor, implies the consumption of identity to the point of emotional affinity and imitation from fans. Lise Dilling-Hansen studied the relationship between Gaga and her “Little Monsters” fan base more intimately, questioning and interacting with avid Gaga followers. She references Jackie Huba’s *Monster Loyalty: How Lady Gaga Turns Followers into Fanatics*, which states, “the relation between the star and her fans constitutes a sensational case in which Gaga not only is ‘engendering immense loyalty in fans’ through her music but also with ‘the message she inspires and the community she built around it,’” (3) to introduce just how effective the pop star is as an object of consumption.

Dilling-Hansen furthers this by mentioning that Gaga “appears on their CD player, on their cell phones, all over their rooms, and she was described as ‘always there’ and definitely family’... Some saw her as ‘human God’ or an artistic ‘mentor’” (2015). Lady Gaga has entranced her audience enough to inspire personal connection and consumption of values and beliefs, and even imitation, which can be recognized in the fan community.

However, this idea of consumption can also suggest that a star is a form of advertising for the public consumption of products. For instance, as with many public figures, musicians or not, Gaga has branded a perfume called “Fame,” which is sold to promote not only the singer herself, but the industry, too. Another example, though slightly different, would be her David Bowie tribute at the 2016 Grammy awards. (Read about it [here](#). Watch the performance [here](#).) She

teamed up with Intel to create an astonishing display in honor of another very famous musician. This can be looked at a number of ways, including a lens through which she advertises the consumption of Intel products. Not to mention, this was not her only project with the company. Another lens that can be applied to this specific instance revolves around the promotion of the industry through another part of the industry. Gaga is used as a tool to promote another major influence, Bowie, who once was another cog in the machine, essentially a ‘consumption-ception.’

All of these instances, whether they focus on fan interaction or corporate advertisement, are examples of Lady Gaga being used as a form of consumption. Her creativity and talent as a performer construct her as a tool for production within the industry. Combined, these characteristics support Dyer’s theory about stars as social phenomena, even when related to those who do not rely on acting.

### Lady Gaga as an Image

To completely understand Dyer’s concept of a star’s consumption in this particular case-- not to be confused with consumption of the star-- we must address the similarities with the previous section. Stars are revered by the masses for their wealth. Envy and inspiration drive people to respect those with higher statuses than their own, at least in capital-driven economies. Because celebrities make more money than most, Lady Gaga being one of them with a net worth of \$275 million, they are used as “images.” Others see them as goals, and are attentive about the [fashion](#) and lifestyle these stars subscribe to. As mentioned above, if one star promotes or *consumes* a product or a company, there is a chance those products will have increased value and revenue.

It's a cultural imbalance, but one that has roots in feudalistic societies. Capitalism and modern economics then enforced this promotion-consumption method. Though this is not a new concept, new technologies have furthered it. Social media has created a new space for everyday people to follow and analyze their idols. This ties in with the idea of success as part of a star's image, thus something for the public to strive for. Dyer addresses the myth of success and the contradictions that comprise it, but also mentions that the pillars of success give us no further understanding as to why the public so closely monitors stars. Lady Gaga emanates wealth and success through her sold out shows, constant interaction with masses of people, headlines in papers, and top-ranking songs. In turn, we as the hoi polloi want what she has: fame and fortune, regardless of the reason/s for it.

Yet, Dyer also discusses the contradiction of a star as an image as well as an "ordinary" person. This is where the distinction between Lady Gaga and Stefani Germanotta becomes important. Germanotta is not afraid to let herself be known to the world, unlike stars such as Sia, who keeps her face hidden from the general public. There is a distinction between Germanotta and her stage presence, and she makes sure her personality is not affected by the outlandish projections of her mind when she does not want it to. Her fans express their appreciation for this, saying, "'She is not posing, it's just something she does,' and 'Gaga is there to show you that she is not perfect, that she's a human being'" (Dilling-Hansen). Her "ordinariness" vs. her success plays a huge factor in why fans are so keen on supporting her. She promotes a certain sense of hope as a self-made star. Though it has become a memorable [meme](#), Gaga often encourages the idea that "there could be 100 people in a room and 99 don't believe in you, but all it takes is 1

person to make your dreams come true.” This inspires people to believe that they can be just as successful because they are listening to the ideals of an ordinary person who got lucky.

Ultimately, the image of a star, regardless of their role in entertainment (acting, singing, dancing, etc.) becomes an appealing goal for common folk. Gaga’s ordinariness, though it contradicts her extravagant and luxurious lifestyle, including her fashion, hobbies, and property, compels other “ordinary” people to pursue celebrity and fortune. They consume her consumption, in a sense, which intertwines stars as phenomena and as images.

### Lady Gaga as a Sign

A sign, as referred to by Dyer, describes the character or characteristics portrayed. Obviously, his theory relates this idea to film and the characters presented. There is usually a very clear separation between the actor and the part he plays. For instance, Neil Patrick Harris, an openly gay actor, played the goofy, womanizing part of Barney on *How I Met Your Mother* for nine seasons. The character is an obvious opposite of the actor, which can also be said for some of Gaga’s famous appearances. She is known by her fans, and from what can be gleaned from her documentary, *Gaga: Five Foot Two*, as a much more down-to-earth person than she portrays. Stefani’s thoughts on fame are much different than what an average person would think. We see fame and fortune as the ultimate goal, something to work toward, while she feels isolated in it. Her relationship with popularity is a rocky one. Though she acknowledges how surreal and happy it feels to be a successful musician and pop icon, she also thinks her role as Gaga is “very unnatural... and complicated” (Mandell, 2017).



This parallel can be seen through a character she portrayed in the 2018 remake of *A Star Is Born*, in which Ally, a talented singer, gets her big break when she meets Jackson Maine, a famous musician. The film oversees the journey through stardom, the hardships, and the way the industry can change people. Lady Gaga had to be the perfect person to cast as Ally, as she has had similar experiences during her rise to fame. She has commented on how much control the industry has, and how fame is “not all it’s cracked up to be” (Mandell, 2017), much like Ally learns in the film.

On the other hand, Lady Gaga, the “character” Stefani essentially puts on during performances and appearances, is quite the opposite. Though she exudes love and acceptance, both values that Stefani promotes, herself, she also relies on exuberance and ostentation to attract attention and promote expression. Just take a look at some of her red carpet appearances, all of which she attends as her Gaga persona:



75th Venice Film Festival, 2018



VMAs, 2010



MET Gala, 2015

(Photos from harpersbazaar.com)

Her image, as discussed in the previous section, and her sign seemingly overlap when it comes to the Lady Gaga lifestyle. That is, she spends large amounts of money to look this way, but for the character's sake.

Another popular example of the dichotomy between Gaga and Germanotta, or the person and the sign, is her recent appearance at the 2019 MET Gala. The theme was “camp” as a term used to describe homosexuals, but relates to exaggerated, theatrical characteristics or behaviors. As Lady Gaga is seemingly a master of this term, she did not disappoint, transforming three times for a total of four outfits in the sixteen minutes it took for her to [walk the red carpet](#). This luxurious behavior is not something that would be *genuinely* expressed by someone who has hard feelings about aspects of popularity. And indeed, it isn't. Rather, her campiness was driven by the facade of her musical persona.

Another iconic character played by Germanotta, outside of the realm of television, was called “Jo Calderone.” He made an appearance at the 2011 VMAs for a speech and performance. Though this character still exemplifies the distinction between the self and the role, it is a bit different than “Lady Gaga” as the line between Germanotta's and Calderone's values are more blurred. It can be said that every persona Germanotta adopts has some qualities of herself, as she alludes to in her documentary, but the purpose of certain characters lends itself to a tougher contrast between the real and the fake. Jo presented himself as Lady Gaga's beau. When he was asked about the “character” he would only reply as if there was no character at all, and that Lady Gaga told him to perform for her (Stransky, 2011). So where does the character end and the self begin in this instance? As I understand it, that was Germanotta/Gaga/Calderone's goal: to make people wonder. It adds to the fascination and allows the real person an escape from harmful publicity. In fact, every persona, including Lady Gaga herself, could be a strategy to keep personal details away from the media. No one will talk about Stefani Germanotta if Lady Gaga does something strange.

Finally, the last parts one needs to understand when applying Dyer's theory to Lady Gaga are the novelistic qualities of a character that make them interesting to the public. There are many that Dyer mentions, which could fill up another ten pages, so I will focus on a few of them: particularity, interest, and development. Particularity pertains to one's uniqueness, or how identifiable they are when compared to others. This is clearly something Gaga has a grasp on, as her style and behaviors almost always baffle the public-- as mentioned previously. Interest is about the humanism involved in creating a character. In this case, Lady Gaga is a great example, as she promotes individuality, encourages cultural difference, and preaches acceptance. The humanism of a character relates them to the diversity of society. Lastly, the development of a character is important when describing a "sign" because people want to know how said character grows, changes, and explores life. Like reading a novel, if the protagonist does not develop in some way, the plot becomes less relatable. Gaga's character has been changing for over a decade, finding new styles and values and promoting new ideas. Fundamentally, Lady Gaga could be a character in a novel, a sign, because of her capability to portray a changing, unique character while living a separate life; it's sort of an author-protagonist relationship.

#### Conclusion: Lady Gaga is a Star

If a star is defined by the criteria Richard Dyer proposes about screen actors, there is no doubt that Lady Gaga fits all three categories and, in turn, can be considered a star through her music career alone. Though she is an actress as well, as many artists are in our contemporary sphere of entertainment, her actions, personas, lifestyle, and interactions with fans make a compelling argument that all stars can be defined similarly. Although, in the same way, an analysis of her

fame can also create an argument that she is an exception to this. In other words, she fits into Dyer's subcategories because of her wild, fantastical behaviors portrayed by the alter ego "Lady Gaga" instead of her genuine self, Stefani Germanotta.

Either way, no one can deny that Lady Gaga is a star. She is a social phenomenon, as people, fans and media, follow, obsess over, and consume what she produces. She is an image, an example of what people should want to be, due to the parasocial relationships between those with fame and fortune and those without, a theory supported and explained by Horton and Wohl. Finally, she is a sign in the form of a character that could be a product of a novel. Her traits as Lady Gaga can be defined by those of a novelistic character, which Dyer suggests is a major part of stardom. Though her facade(s) can fit into these categories, her personality as Stefani Germanotta, one which we do not often see in the media, exudes a sense of triumphant individualism. Therefore, in the broadest sense of the term, and the most detailed sense, Lady Gaga is the perfect example of the "Star" in Richard Dyer's theories.

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