

“glamour”

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Etymology and Literary Usage

1. Etymology¹

The word *glamour* has its origin only just in the 18th century. Its roots can be found in the Scottish language, with the first meaning of *magic* or *spell*. Through the next centuries this meaning slightly changed. During the 19th century *glamour* meant *magic beauty*. In addition *glamour* got a different meaning as it stood for an alteration of *grammar* with the sense of *grammartye*. For the form with *gl-*, cf. the medieval Latin (from c. 600 A. D. – c. 1500 A. D.) word *glomeria* (e.g. in *magister glomeriae* – title of a former official in the university of Cambridge), the suffix was probably *-an*. An additional hypothetical etymological form of *glamour* is the word *glomerie* for *gramarie* (=grammar).

2. Literary Usage

In this passage the word *glamour* should be looked at in three different literary contexts: First, in Michael Herr's novel "Dispatches"², then as the title of a magazine and at last in the context of a newspaper article.

a) In Michael Herr's novel "Dispatches", dealing with his impression of the Vietnam War, the author and narrator uses *glamour* in the end of his novel³:

*“One day a letter came from a British publisher, asking him
to do a book whose working title would be ‘Through the War’*

¹ Onions, C. T. (ed.) : *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966. p. 400.

² Herr, Michael: *Dispatches*. London: Picador, 1978.

³ Herr, Michael: *Dispatches*. London: Picador, 1978. p. 198.

and whose purpose would be to once and for all 'take the glamour out of war', Page couldn't get over it."

In this context, glamour means a kind of impression this person called Page made during his time in the Vietnam War. There were several soldiers and even correspondents, like Page had been one, who loved their life in the middle of this fighting scenes. And Page even had no problem to admit that he loved the Vietnam War, that he felt good there. For him it was like real glamour, but the majority of the people, who generally had not been to Vietnam in this time, believed, that it had had to be a terrible, brutal and bloody experience you normally get nightmares from.

So, *glamour* in this literary usage has more or less two meanings in it: One that is meant probably ironically, but for Page *glamour* really has its original meaning, even in connection with the War.

b) An American women's magazine is also called "*Glamour*"⁴. To express its content – the world of women, the world of celebrities, the world of beauty – the word *glamour* is a quite good term for the name of such a magazine. It stands for all the female interests and clichés. This magazine contains articles on all the subjects that are interesting for especially young and ambitious women. "Glamour" includes categories like beauty, style, fitness, what is 'in' and what is 'out', news about celebrities, what they do and what they not do.

c) In a newspaper article, written by Brian Viner and published in "The Independent"^{5,6} of February 15th, 2001, the word *glamour* also occurs in a context reporting from the world of celebrities, especially movie stars:

*"We are blinded by the dazzling glamour of the movies,
and by extension the glamour of the Academy Awards."*

Viner obviously reports of his impressions from the party where the nominations for the Academy Awards 2001 were announced. In his article he makes fun of these high society people, about their movies, their work, their behaviour – in general about their

⁴ <http://www.glamour.com>

⁵ Viner, Brian: *And the winner of Worst Original Screenplay is...*. In: *The Independent*. February 15th, 2001.

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/argument/Commentators/2001-02/viner150201.shtml>

glamour. He calls this glamour *dazzling*, but for whom? Dazzling for the rest of the world, for the people who do not belong to this social class? Or dazzling for the actors and celebrities themselves, so that they have no feeling for real life?

The word *glamour* here gets a quite critical connotation. Glamour seems to be not completely fun and something fantastic, but also character trait of celebrities that disguises reality instead of only representing dreams.