



RESEARCHING WOMEN IN SILENT CINEMA

NEW FINDINGS AND PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY MONICA DALL'ASTA, VICTORIA DUCKETT, LUCIA TRALLI

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



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Women and Screen Cultures

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Women and Screen Cultures is a series of experimental digital books aimed to promote research and knowledge on the contribution of women to the cultural history of screen media. Published by the Department of the Arts at the University of Bologna, it is issued under the conditions of both open publishing and blind peer review. It will host collections, monographs, translations of open source archive materials, illustrated volumes, transcripts of conferences, and more. Proposals are welcomed for both disciplinary and multi-disciplinary contributions in the fields of film history and theory, television and media studies, visual studies, photography and new media.



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Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives

Edited by: Monica Dall'Asta, Victoria Duckett, Lucia Tralli

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Peer Review Statement

This publication has been edited through a blind peer review process. Papers from the Sixth Women and the Silent Screen Conference (University of Bologna, 2010), a biennial event sponsored by Women and Film History International, were read by the editors and then submitted to at least one anonymous reviewer. When the opinion of the first reader was entirely negative or asked for substantial revision, the essay was submitted to a second anonymous reviewer. In case of a second negative opinion the essay was rejected. When further changes were deemed necessary for publication, the editors worked extensively with the authors to meet the requests advanced by the reviewers.

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Mary Desjardins

**Fading Stars and the Ruined Commodity Form:
Star Discourses of Loss in American Fan Magazines, 1914-1929**

ABSTRACT: While it is a truism of film history that the arrival of sound film in the late 1920s quickly relegated certain stars to the past, fan magazines had been publishing articles since the mid-teens that focused on the careers, fade-outs, and current whereabouts of players of the motion picture industry's early years. These publications resurrect stars from the past in articles and photo displays that also evidence a deep investment in hailing the newest fashion in dress, hairstyle and personality. This investment is compatible with the industry's cycles, but also reminds the reader what or whom was left behind in the rush to newness. Fan magazines negotiated the tensions in giving voice to both fan desires and film industry's needs by recognizing that those desires and needs weren't always in sync. This essay explores how the fan magazine's juxtaposition of star-of-the-past with modernity's rapidly moving present suggests that the social imaginary of past cultures and societies is an affective landscape, as well as a disciplinary framework.

While it is a truism of film history that the arrival of sound film in the late 1920s quickly relegated certain stars to the past, fan magazines had been publishing articles since the mid-teens that focused on the careers, fade-outs, and current whereabouts of players of the motion picture industry's early years. Within a few years after Carl Laemmle's infamous 1910 publicity stunt that launched former "Biograph Girl" Florence Lawrence into stardom, fan magazines were already publishing sob-stories, tributes, and career-summations of stars who had been known to the public by name for only a short time and whose last appearances on screen could sometimes be counted on the fingers of one hand. Perhaps this shouldn't be surprising, as Laemmle's launching of Lawrence into stardom—or "picture personality" as she might have been more accurately understood at this time—had been achieved by reassuring the public that stories of her death were "lies." As Richard deCorova as argued, the Laemmle-Lawrence stunt took place in the context of other publicity stunts of the day, and it cannot be seen as *the* origin of the star system (DeCordova 50–92).¹

Indeed, by 1909-10 other companies had begun publicizing performers, laying the groundwork for a "star system" in a variety of ways. As for performers' potentially short career life-span, many players of the early teens, including Lawrence herself, were off the screen shortly after their ascent to stardom due to various reasons, from injuries and illnesses, to missteps and power struggles in contract negotiations and salary demands in the somewhat vicious boom and bust cycles characterizing the rise and fall of early film companies wanting the drawing power of stars without their salaries eating into profits. Yet the fan magazines' frequent recycling of the Florence Lawrence stunt as an "originary" event in the popular history of stardom should be of interest to historians because as a narrative

¹ See also Staiger and Brown, among others, for discussions of how the events of the IMP stunt have been analyzed or reported.

of origins it suggests that threat of loss was important to the production of affect around stars from early on in the history of film fame. In other words, the association of a star's rise with a threat of her death underscores the degree to which the industry-star-fan matrix was experienced as a kind of fort/da game in the silent film era.

Throughout the mid 1910s and into the 1920s, fan magazines published articles, ranging from melancholic to playfully sarcastic, on stars whose popularity was fading or whose careers were taking new turns. Many of these can be seen as examples of the fan magazines' use of star figures to negotiate a discursive terrain that explained major changes in film production. In this paper, I will examine four interrelated negotiations evident in the fan magazines' discursive strategies about dead, fading, or changing stars in the teens and twenties that reveal much about how these publications were negotiating not only broad, organizational changes in the film industry, but also some of the fundamental or constitutive processes of modernity. The fan magazines were negotiating 1) the paradoxes of commodity fetishism in the mass production and reception of star images, 2) their own status as giving voice to fans and being mouthpiece for an industry profiting from the commodification of star images, 3) the increasing "feminization" of movie fandom and movie magazine readership since the teens, and 4) the star body, especially the fashionable female star body, as signifier of the temporality/duration of stardom.

Early twentieth century modernity was dependent on a mature capitalism defined by a money economy, extensive industrialization, highly centralized manufacture, hired labor, organized entrepreneurial investment, and competitive free markets (Singer 20). Players in motion pictures were the exploited, but allegedly "free agents" who sold their labor as a commodity to the film industry, which by the twenties was characterized by vertically integrated organizations and highly centralized manufacture. With the development of the star system, players functioned not only as the seller of the labor-commodity, but also as the star image, which was a commodity contractually owned by the employer/company/capital. This meant star-players were not only subject to the industry's exploitation of labor and to its fluctuations in employment needs, but also subject to the fluctuating value of the commodity image as it was consumed by the public through the circulation of films and promotion (including fan magazines).

The value of the commodified star image fluctuates in a modern society characterized by discontinuity—discontinuity evident in the break with traditional religious and social beliefs and in the expansion of transportation and communication technologies that make the rapid migration of populations, ideas, and commodities possible. The discontinuity and rapidity of modernity fascinated many artists and cultural theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and for some, such as Walter Benjamin, the spectacle and the materiality of fashion and, most of all, its endless cycles were emblematic of the workings of modernity. As fashion's enveloping material form gave it a spatial proximity to the subject itself, its "ephemeral, transient, and futile character" coincides with the subject's experience

of the historical in modernity (Lehmann 201). In the words of Ann Hollander, modern fashionable dress, unlike folk or ethnic dress, has a “built-in contingent factor” (17). In relation to these terms, the film star is an apt emblem/survivor of modernity, both exploited labor and exchangeable commodity image. The star’s relation to fashion is over-determined—like fashion, she is made both possible and rendered obsolete by the rapid dissemination of ideas and products in modernity; furthermore, as a model of identity in capitalist, consumer culture, she performs the display of fashionable consumer items, from clothing to cosmetics and cars.

From the mid-teens onwards, the fan magazines contributed to the construction of stars as emblems of modernity by circulating them *as* fashionable commodities as well as *in* fashionable commodities. A number of film historians have established that by the 1920s the fan magazines were assuming a primarily female readership for their stories about the commodified star image, and they courted advertisers of fashion, cosmetic, and hygiene products for women.

Social and film historians have also argued that the key demographic for the film industry and fan magazines of the late teens and twenties was specifically young women—the teens and college co-eds that made up one half of the youth culture of the time. Cynthia Felando argues that as the decade wore on, the fan magazines made fewer and fewer references to stars associated with the early film industry. When they did, the articles either pictured them as hopelessly old-fashioned or described them in terms alternating between “reverence and insult” (103). Articles, such as *Photoplay*’s 1927 “Youth,” which rather gleefully proclaims the “complete downfall of the older dynasty in favor of one joyous in quality and bright with promise,” is probably one of the most blatant examples of how the fan magazines considered older stars within less than reverent terms (Waterbury “Youth”). *Silver Screen*’s 1929 “The Price They Pay for Fame,” which blames the stars’ own misguided ambition as the cause of their downfall or death, constructs excessive behavior of stars as inevitably leading to change (Busby rpt. in Levin).² Herbert Cruikshank, in his 1929 article for *Motion Picture* entitled, “Who Owns the Movies Now? The Empire of the Stars Goes Blooey,” goes so far as to announce the death of the star system itself—it is a “Frankenstein monster” with a “rapacious maw” that demands higher salaries and confused stars in “ways more devious than the monolithed mazes of the minotaur” (126). While the piece does not blame older high-priced stars for soaring salaries (instead it is the “rapacious maw” of the system), it does proclaim that as the system starts over with new faces (presumably from Broadway), it will produce better photoplays. In its somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the fading or transformation of older stars, this article and the others mentioned above could serve another transition of the industry of the late 1920s in its desire to curb star misbehavior and high salaries as it transplanted cheaper, stage-trained actors from Broadway.³

² Levin does not give month or year of article—I attribute possible years for the essay based on information in the text of the article.

³ Clark suggests that at the time of actor unionization and the transition to sound in the late 1920s the film

However, while the articles on faded or dead stars or stars trying to make a comeback do evidence an ambivalent attitude towards these figures, they don't use the plight of stars on the downturn merely as strong contrast to younger stars on the rise. In other words, these articles, especially from the teens to mid twenties, are something other than an appeal to a youth culture readership presumed to be interested only in young, "new faces." In fact, many of the articles point to the young chronological age of the faded stars, or ask their readers to "remember when," presuming that the stars of the past are of the same general age or generation of the magazine readers. In the 1921 *Photoplay* article, "The Return of Florence Lawrence" [fig. 1], Adela Rogers St. John discusses Lawrence's plans for a film comeback by reminding readers that Lawrence was "the first screen star, the first movie queen, 'The Biograph Girl.' Do you remember her? After six years, she is going to walk again the path she pioneered." Seemingly surprised, Rogers St. John adds, "She is still a pretty woman. And young—quite young" (33). In a *Photoplay* article from 1924, writer Frederick James Smith tracks down Mary Fuller, one of the early players in Edison films. As Fuller approaches Smith in the foyer of her secluded Washington, D.C. mansion, his first thought is "She was very little changed. I felt that time had passed her by, until I stopped to realize that she is still in her early thirties. . . . Ten years had passed—and yet there she was before me, almost exactly as I had last seen her" ("Photoplay Finds Mary Fuller" 58). In the July 1924 *Photoplay* article, "Unwept, Unhonored, and Unfilmed," Smith recounts his attempts to track down other former film players and stars, noting "most of them are young enough to be at the very crest of their careers." His melodramatically entitled piece begins with Florence Turner, the former "Vitagraph Girl" exclaiming, "I want so to work! . . . my work has been my very life; I have lived for it and for my mother, and it was taken from me before I am thirty years old!" ("Unwept, Unhonored, and Unfilmed" 64).⁴

The writer's surprised realization of the youth of faded stars is not a strategy employed only in the twenties; it is evident in articles from the mid-teens. For example, when Florence Lawrence was making one of her first comebacks, in 1914, *Photoplay* ran a four-part story detailing her career. Allegedly authored by Lawrence, the first installment is prefaced by a lengthy introduction by Monte M. Katterjohn, who, like Smith and Rogers St. John, has to rub his eyes on first meeting Miss Lawrence: "One's first meeting with Florence Lawrence is in the nature of a readjustment, but it is none the less refreshing. One rather expects to find a larger, more mature person than is Miss Lawrence. Yet at the same time you almost imagine her stepping right out of the screen toward you" (38).⁵ And in *Picture Play's* Sept. 1916 article,

industry used the fan magazine to aid in its "re-positioning" of certain highly-paid stars. Crafton has skillfully cataloged and analyzed the fan magazine articles that exemplify the ways the film industry negotiated the coming of sound with fans through attention to its star system. Anderson ("Hollywood Pay Dirt") has examined how fan magazines of the teens participated in the industry's attempts to curb high-salaried stars by positioning them as passé.

⁴ See also, for an earlier "comeback" for Turner, Peltret.

⁵ The byline says written by Florence Lawrence in collaboration with Katterjohn; section quoted is clearly by Katterjohn.



The Return of Florence Lawrence

The amazing story of
a great "come-back"

By
ADELA ROGERS ST. JOHNS

Do you remember the lines of the old English poet—

"There is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies blow."

Were you one of the thousands who loved "The Biograph Girl"? This is a favorite picture of Florence Lawrence, the first motion picture star, as she looked eleven years ago in those famous two-reelers.

FLORENCE LAWRENCE is coming back to the screen. Florence Lawrence, the first screen star, the first movie queen, "The Biograph Girl."

Do you remember her?

After six years, she is going to walk again the path she pioneered.

And now that I have talked to her, I cannot help wondering whether her return is to be a triumph or a tragedy.

She is still a pretty woman. And young—quite young.

I cannot tell you why she struck me instantly as being such a sad little figure. But when I first saw her, I felt my heart stop and sink a little as it did when I first saw the vacant places in the ranks of the returned, marching regiments of Yankees.

She has in her blue eyes the same look I saw in Sarah Bernhardt's the last time she came to America—that look of brave, spiritual struggle against overwhelming odds, the look of a woman who knows what it is to fight a losing fight.

Yet she is quite gay, fluffy, blonde, and given to sweet and rather easy laughter. In no wise a gloomy person. She talks cheerfully, entertainingly, and you must read between the lines to patch together the story of her sorrows, but over and over again I felt a lump in my throat.

It is only that she has that soft, constant gentleness of manner, that unfailing kindness of speech and action that I have never seen except in people who have been hurt so much themselves that they wish above everything in the world never to hurt anyone else.

If there is a garden in Florence Lawrence's face, it is as full of little white crosses as Flanders Fields.

I found her in her room at a small hotel on a side street in Los Angeles. It was rather a shabby little room, but its windows looked out over the gray city roofs upon a western sky that nightly showed the glory of a California sunset.

There were flowers in a white pitcher, and a huge box of chocolates and a sweet, pungent smell of oranges from a big basket on the floor beside a couch-bed. On a chair was a cardboard box that frothed with pink silk and lace and ribbons. So it managed somehow to be quite cheerful and feminine in spite of the handicap of its drab wallpaper, and its ugly furniture.

But it was the last room where you would expect to find a motion picture star. Rather it was the room of a woman who



The comfortable home in Westwood, N. J., where Florence Lawrence still lives and raises asparagus. It was here that she spent her years of retirement from the screen.

33

1. Florence Lawrence's comeback from the country.
"The Return of Florence Lawrence," *Photoplay* 1921.

“Where are the Stars of Yesterday?” Will Rex provides numerous reasons why the fame of some stars has dwindled, but assumes the “stars of yesterday” are of the same generation of his readers today: “Unconsciously players have dropped from our minds to be forgotten, and we have seldom missed them. But just the mention of a name, and we recall immediately many pleasant hours spend in the semi-darkness, with their shadowy forms before us on the silver screen” (Rex n. pag.).⁶

These examples suggest that articles from the teens and twenties about stars rising and/or fading are more likely to be melodramatic, even melancholic meditations on the rapidity of modern life, the acceleration of fashion cycles, and the dramatic transformation of the film industry since the beginning of the star system in the early teens, rather than ridiculing taunts directed at stars who have been unable to adapt to changing fashion. The fan magazines give varying reasons, even sometimes within the same article, for the fading of some stars’ careers. These range from personal reasons (stars marrying and retiring), to professional re-orientation (such as stars switching from acting to directing), to the film companies’ manipulation of star labor and image (such as, companies miscasting them), to the fluctuating fortunes of companies in an aggressive free market environment (such as the rapid boom and bust cycles of early film companies).

Sometimes in the same article the fickleness of public—its adherence to fashion and fashionable ideas—will be invoked alongside the loyalty of fans, such as in *Motion Picture* 1929 article, “The Vanguard of the Old Stars” by Dunham Thorp: “In this country time is a moving thing. Yesterday is dead. We live in today and tomorrow. We snicker now at what would have made us weep ten years ago. Where are the bathing suits of yesteryear? . . . But no matter what they’re not wearing no [sic] longer, you can still get any group sentimental by singing old songs at twilight . . . the fact is that American fans are every bit as faithful as those of any other nation” (30).

Thorp describes the public’s response to stars in terms of dramatic reversals—cynical adherence to fashion cycles switching to sentimental fidelity. The article claims that Tearle was let go by his film company employer, which allegedly told the public that Tearle, having “made his pile . . . was quitting, regardless of how . . . [the fans] felt about it.” Thorp argues that this lie was the company’s calculation to “to make anyone who had ever liked him turn away in sheer disgust” (30). His fans couldn’t believe Tearle was capable of such behavior towards them and flooded exhibitors and producers with pleas to bring him back to the screen. The article announces with great pleasure that Tearle was recently called by Warner’s to act in a picture.

While some articles, such as the aforementioned piece on Conway Tearle, *Photoplay*’s 1926 “What Happened to Pauline Frederick?” [fig. 2] or *Photoplay*’s 1926 “Stars Who Came Back,” frankly accuse the film industry of lying to fans about their manipulation of star labor, or of producing bad pictures that ruin star careers, criticisms are rarely, if ever, attributed

⁶ Rex lists over one hundred names of players “forgotten” or voluntarily retired by this date.

What Happened to Pauline Frederick?

Why did this popular star at the very height of her success slip into screen oblivion? A great character sketch of a great actress, by Adela Rogers St. Johns



Pauline Frederick in her most famous film role, "Madame X." "There are too many angles to the motion picture business for a lone woman to combat," says Miss Frederick. "The smallest things turn your whole course one way or the other"

JUST a few years ago, Pauline Frederick was one of the really great and beloved stars of the screen.

Her fame was not founded upon mere beauty, nor upon a dazzling personality, though she had both.

Public and critics considered her one of the finest actresses the silversheet had ever known, many considered her the finest. And with reason. Some of the pictures Pauline Frederick made, directed by Robert Vignola, have never been topped by anybody.

From tremendous popularity and acclaim on the stage, she brought with her into pictures a breadth of training, a poised and distinguished manner, a warm love of acting, that no one else has ever given us.

Then, suddenly, at the very height of her success, in the very prime of her beauty and genius, she slipped into a series of unworthy and inadequate pictures and has practically disappeared from the screen.

The fans still clamor for her. In no way do they forget her. When such a great performance as she gave in that fine picture, "Smouldering Fires," reminds them of her anew, they pour in letters of demand upon us.

When I wrote a story calling Norma Talmadge the screen's one great actress among the stars, I did not consider Pauline Frederick as being any longer a motion picture star. Ninety-nine per cent of the letters I received disagreeing with me, did so in the name of Pauline Frederick.

What happened to Pauline Frederick?

So many people asked me that question that I decided to go

and ask Pauline herself. You can always ask Pauline anything. She is a straight-shooter. And she is too big a woman for any petty vanities. You don't have to fret and worry about what you say for fear it might be wrong and hurt her feelings.

Oh, the charm of that woman, off-screen!

I forget about it, not seeing her for months and maybe years, and it captures me all over again. She is so *real*. She is so *natural*. No posing, no affectation, no languid boredom about her. She sparkles with life. She glows with enthusiasm. Her voice is rich, vibrant, entrancing. And she has the nicest handshake of any woman I have ever known—strong, firm, cordial, sweet.

Let me say right at the very beginning that I have never seen her look so lovely. Her eyes were as blue as her sweater, and that was as blue as the sea. And the contrast of her hair, which would have been black but for the red threads and the bronze sheen through it, seemed more striking than ever. Her short white skirt and her plaited sandals and her summer tan, result of hours in the saddle, gave her a slim and boyish look, according to the present fashion for women.

We sat in a long, lovely sun-porch, and when I told her what I had come to ask her, and why, she looked [CONTINUED ON PAGE 128]

to systematically unjust labor practices (Rogers St. John, “What’s Happened to Pauline Frederick?”; Waterbury, “Stars Who Came Back”). Instead, these articles tend to resurrect stars from the past who have died, whose careers have faded, or who are making a comeback, within a more generalized resistance or affective response to aspects of modernity, such as rapid turn-over in consumption cycles that have seemingly thrown a wrench into the pleasures and identifications afforded by the public’s cathexis to star figures. Despite what was apparently the belief of the film industry—as well as some theorists of consumerism—that consumers become dissatisfied with the products that don’t deliver the happiness imagined in the daydreams they inspire, fan cathexis with a star as a model of identity doesn’t necessarily terminate in a final transaction of disposability, just as self-identities are not thrown out over night.⁷ These fan magazine articles seem to acknowledge with sadness and some refusal, as Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues about the fashion cycle that pushes us to buy new clothes every season, that discarding teaches us “that the self can expect to lose from living in time—lose selfhood” (36).

Walter Benjamin suggests the commodity operates as both a fetish and a wish image (Buck-Morss, “Dream World of Mass Culture” 315). The commodity as fetish is “the new as always-the-same.” *Photoplay*’s article “Youth” constructs the younger stars taking over Hollywood in 1927 as fetishes who replace the old in a never-ending “progression” of youth. The commodity as wish-image, on the other hand suggests a utopian potential. It is a commodity form that gestures back to industrialization’s utopian promise, but, cast off when it fails “to deliver,” it becomes a ruin. This ruined commodity, now a fossil, operates as a trace of “living history” (Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing* 56). Faded stars making a re-appearance in fan magazines or come-back in films carry with them past histories of how films were made and received, and how fans once found them models of a wished-for identity. Their re-entrance into the present, as exploited by the fan magazines, could certainly contribute to a number of responses from the fan-sadness or anger over loss, bemusement at a star’s anachronistic position, or the construction of the active fan whose skepticism could potentially extend to questions about how films and stars are produced and manipulated by free market forces embodied by the film industry.

Since the fan magazines bring, via stars, past and present into juxtaposition as a way to negotiate industry and fan desires, it is not surprising that utopian dreams carried by the ruined commodity may be invoked. We can see this perhaps most clearly in the magazines’ use of a melodramatic fantasy as a context for imagining faded female stars. Many articles documenting the whereabouts of former stars describe them as now living outside the forces that compel the rapid turnover characterizing commodity exchange. These stars are unearthed from rural or secluded locations. Florence Lawrence, in comebacks announced in 1913, 1914, 1916, and 1921, is supposedly leaving house and rose garden in rural New Jersey for returns to the screen. Former Kalem star Irene Boyle returns to films in 1920,

⁷ See Campbell for a discussion of theories of consumption cycles.

after having been in retreat in a “sheltered life” (Bruce). The old house in which Frederick James Smith found former Edison player Mary Fuller in 1924, “with its big rose trellised porch, was a quaint haven of seclusion” (Smith, “Photoplay Finds Mary Fuller” 58). By 1925, Marguerite Clark [fig. 3], is living a country life in rural Louisiana, complete with “Negro servants” who “need almost as much attention as children” (Washburn 132). Almost all these stars are self-described or described by the magazine authors as tired, exhausted, worn-out.⁸

Each star is pictured as emerging from, clinging to, or dying into a status of the unchanging, the existence beyond consumption cycles. Marguerite Clark assures the *Photoplay* author that her shingle-bobbed red brown hair is going to stay just that way, as it has for the last six years in her retirement. The only changes they are subjected to are the natural rhythms of life—Florence Lawrence writes in a 1916 *Motion Picture Magazine* article that she, her cat, and her dog “had been playing and hugging Old Mother Nature so tight” that she almost forgot about the world of plodding work (130). Most of the stars express a desire to return to films, to the excitement of picture making. The rural space of the stars’ retreats, as described in these articles, may exist in the present moment, but can only remain utopian to the degree that it seems outside time or reminiscent of some nostalgic past, a “time before.” This time and space “before” suggests the pastoral space of “innocence” that Linda Williams argues is fundamental to the melodramatic mode, or to the “golden age” anthropologist Grant McCracken argues functions as a time in which societies place their cherished ideals to keep them “within reach,” but protect them (106).

In establishing a melodramatic framework for how the past impinges on the present, these fan magazine articles offer a strange admixture of historiographic tendencies. The fading stars gained their first fame in a film industry of the early 1910s that, however exploitive, was not yet characterized by full vertical integration or fully rationalist, hierarchical divisions of labor. They were employed by companies that came and went quickly, many of which did not make the transition from New York or Chicago to Hollywood that took place throughout the decade. However, the fan magazines’ placement of these stars in feminized rural spaces transforms that filmmaking past into an (imagined) “old Hollywood”—not seen as an earlier mode of the aggressive free market capitalism and rationalized labor that characterizes “modern Hollywood” (of the later 1910s and 1920s), but as a lost world. It is a space in which the human events that transpire[d] there, and the temporal experience of them, can be imaginatively segmented off from the flow of time and recreated in wistful nostalgia. This wistful nostalgia, so common to fan magazine articles in from the mid 1910s to the late 1920s, could function to ameliorate the negative effects of modernity, perhaps even obscuring where these negative effects originate, whether in the industry’s profit-driven

⁸ Descriptions of stars’ “exhaustion” suggest that the phenomena I am describing here as part of a popular historiography of modernity, should be considered within multiple theoretical frameworks—not only within the Marxist take on labor exploitation to which I’ve alluded in this essay, but also within the existential terms of play and risk in early film star discourse as discussed in Bean, and within the terms of pathology discussed in Anderson, *Twilight of the idols*.

Mrs. Williams has changed very little since those enchanting days of "The Seven Sisters." She is still tiny and demure and her red brown hair is worn in a shingle bob just as it has been for the last six years. She assures you that it is going to stay that way. "One can't wear curls forever and it is so much more convenient this way," is how she expresses it. Her eyes are just the color of her hair and she still deserves the tribute of being one of America's best dressed women. Also, if she has left the screen it doesn't mean that she has lost interest in it.

"The fans still write me by the hundreds," she confided. "Isn't it adorable? I still get letters from all parts of the country and from people of all ages. Most of them write me charming personal letters saying how glad they are that I am happily married and devoted to my husband. Many of them come from screen aspirants, both young and old, and to all of them I say the same thing—Don't try for the motion pictures unless you have money enough to wait for success and character enough to stand disappointment. To tear off to Hollywood without money and expect to burst into fame is a heartbreaking proposition, and to become famous without experience

"Everybody brings me perfume from all parts of the world. I must have nearly a thousand bottles"



"There really isn't anything picturesque about us. We live a quiet country life," she said, in talking about life with her husband in the little village of Patterson, La.

is almost unheard of. The fans see the honor and glory without realizing the months and sometimes years of hard work that lies behind it."

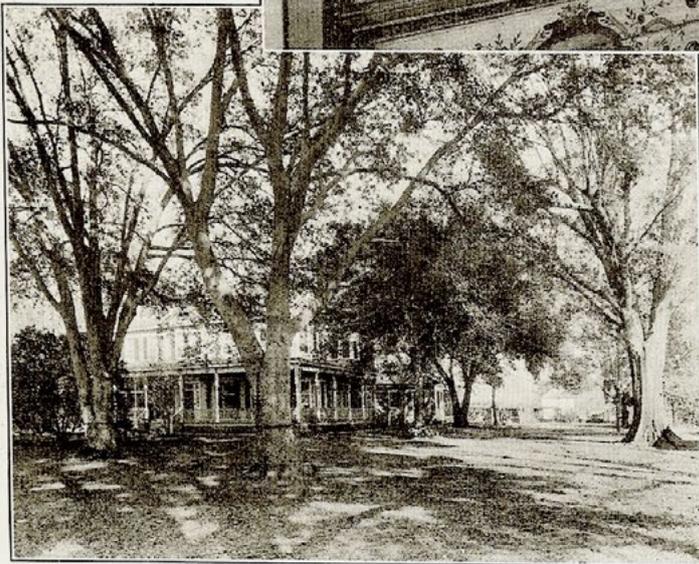
Mrs. Williams admits that she was offered the rôle of *Peter Pan* which Marilyn Miller is now playing in New York, and she also admits that some day she may return to the screen.

"I don't expect to," is all she can be induced to say, "but it is possible that I may."

The directors still send her scenarios and young authors still besiege her with manuscripts in the hope that she may tire of domestic life and return to the screen. To all of them she makes the same answer, either written or oral, that she cannot give her life to her husband and to the public too.

"When I first left the screen I thought it would be possible for me to do two pictures a year," she explained. "But I soon found that it could not be done. You cannot run two jobs at once, and Mr. Williams, like any normal husband, is not anxious to have me work again. Still I do keep up my interest in the pictures and am particularly interested in the strides made by historical pictures in the last few years. Such productions as 'The Sea Hawk,' 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' 'The White Sister,' 'Scaramouche,' 'The Covered Wagon' are of tremendous educational as well as artistic value. Mary [CONTINUED ON PAGE 132]

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The Williams estate covers square miles, but it fronts on the main street. The house contains twenty-five rooms and is a home rather than a show place

3. Marguerite Clark at her rural estate. "Marguerite Clark—Today," *Photoplay* 1925.

power dynamics, or elsewhere.

The emphasis in some of the articles on the surprise that the stars are still relatively young because they are of the same generation as their readers, suggests another understanding of history—one as an uninterrupted, endless flow of time. This approximates a mode of historiography in which time cannot be stopped and segmented. What the fan must realize in this experience of temporality is that the star and fan have *shared* time; what is potentially exposed to the fan via this realization is that the functional temporality of consumption is not age measured in human years, but according to a manipulative “newness” that benefits media and fashion industries to the expense of stars and their fans. However, neither historiographic mode is inimical to the articles’ tributes to dead stars or to the articles’ expressions of fears that some stars, especially female stars, may not be able to come back to the screen. In this way, they create a sense that “it may be too late,” what Williams has identified as the central temporal dimension of many narratives within the mode of melodrama. The fan magazines’ use of former stars to juxtapose the past with modernity’s rapidly moving present does not offer analytical or radical critique so much as the resistance of melodramatic pathos.

Fan magazines negotiated the tensions in giving voice to both fan desires and film industry’s needs by recognizing that those desires and needs weren’t always in sync. These publications, almost exclusively addressing the female reader by the start of the 1920s, resurrect stars from the past in articles and photo displays that also evidence a deep investment in hailing the newest fashion in dress, hairstyle and personality. This is a language of investment that is compatible with the industry’s cycles, but which also reminds the reader what or whom was left behind in the rush to newness. The fan magazine’s juxtaposition of star-of-the-past with modernity’s rapidly moving present should remind historians that the social imaginary of past cultures and societies is an affective landscape, as well as a disciplinary framework (Braidotti 384). What can be seen in these particular fan magazines’ expressions of the social imaginary is a continuing desire for a happiness once experienced, but also an acknowledgment that multiple forces—from transformations in consumer industries and fan tastes, to time’s movement itself—determine that happiness may not make the comeback.

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