



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
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Women and Screen Cultures

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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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Anke Brouwers

**If it Worked for Mary. . .
Mary Pickford's Daily Talks with the Fans**

ABSTRACT: In the nineteenth century, advice literature (conduct, courtesy or etiquette books) was a popular non-fiction genre in America. In fact, advice literature actively invaded other literary genres, most notably sentimental literature, which used fictional characters and situations to dramatize and illustrate this advice. The popularity of the genre even pervaded the twentieth century phenomenon of the film star. This paper will focus on Mary Pickford's advisory texts and its relationship to nineteenth century advice literature. We will look at examples from Pickford's syndicated column "Daily Talks" published between 1915 and 1917. Pickford's texts contain similar rhetorical strategies to sweeten her didactic intent: metaphors, anecdotes, and aporia are put in the familiar and reassuring voice of the intimate friend mixed with the hortatory or inciting manner of the teacher. In terms of content there is also a striking overlap as the texts contain modernized ideas on female responsibilities, domesticity and love of the home, self-government, religion, education, courtship etc. Working from this familiar and effective literary tradition allowed Pickford to strengthen her star appeal and its consumption as well as to promote a particular "model of living" exemplified by the star's idealized, almost sanctified, embodiment of American womanhood.

Do you remember how you longed to have a party dress and when the dream came true and you were tricked out in ribbons and lace you decided you looked quite common-place and not so ravishing as you had imagined? Perhaps that was because the girl who lived next door came in an ever so much more elaborate gown—real lace and satin- and the dress you had dreamed of and planned for all those years was overshadowed and looked quite uninteresting by comparison. It wasn't the dress—that hadn't changed—but it was you who hadn't taught yourself contentment. And contentment is the key to happiness. (Pickford, "Penny Wise and Pound Foolish")¹

Thus ended Mary Pickford her column in praise of frugality and sensibility and with a key to happiness. This extract from her "Daily Talks with Mary Pickford" a syndicated column which appeared from 1915 until early 1917, is quite characteristic as far as style, tone, and content are concerned. Although Pickford was obviously foremost an iconic figure, "known" and consumed as an image through photographs and silent pictures, a great part of her star persona was sustained through textual rhetoric, adding to, amplifying or strengthening the image of the star as it was suggested by plots and characterizations in her films. Yet, a substantial part of her persona was created in the printed media: like other stars, Pickford was frequently interviewed or was the subject of articles, puff pieces or profiles in

¹ I will refer to the title of the "Daily Talks" cited in brackets. A complete list of all the directly cited "Daily Talks" can be found under the Works Cited section. They were published by McClure Newspapers between 1915 and early 1917. Where possible a complete date is given, otherwise I am only able to indicate the year of publication. The clippings I have been able to collect or consult (at the Margaret Herrick Library and from a private collection) included no reference for page numbers.

newspapers, general interest magazines, trade and fan magazines, but Pickford also wrote and published several articles and columns under her own name, directly speaking for the further positioning of her public self. During the course of her career, she authored a wide variety of texts, ranging from scripts, articles and columns to full-length books.² Like the films, these texts painted a “picture” of Mary Pickford, and offered a way to get closer to the star’s inner world. Read closely (and repeatedly, as most of her true fans did), these texts offered a model on how to live a “good” life. They often included explicit advice, tips or moral lessons, clearly inflected by a sentimental (and Protestant) ethos in stressing domesticity, morality, fellow-feeling, the merits of frugality, the virtue of hard work and devotion, the importance of character over personality and of substance over artifice, and a reliance on God. It is easy to see how the content of the advice was strongly informed by sentimental ideas and ideals but close inspection will show that the whole practice of wrapping advice or etiquette in pleasant forms of entertainment—such as anecdotes, short stories, and the epistolary form—was a common sentimental strategy. Specific to Pickford’s case, was the fact that the advice texts functioned as an efficient marketing tool, which affirmed and strengthened the Pickford persona, in itself the result of a careful balancing act of modern and sentimental suppositions and notions of ideal womanhood.

This paper will look at how these columns were constructed to strengthen the relationship between film star and her fans and how they were instrumental to the refinement of Pickford’s developing star persona. I will argue that both objectives were facilitated through the application of nineteenth century discourses and rhetorical traditions (such as conduct books, sentimental and Victorian literature) associated with predominantly female writers and audiences. Finally, the familiar, intimate and entertaining forms of these literary models facilitated another, additional effect (if not goal) of the columns: the effective dissemination and promotion of a model of living exemplified by the star’s idealized, almost sanctified, embodiment of American womanhood.

Funny Little Thoughts

Pickford’s “Daily Talks” were a series of syndicated columns, which were presented as the publicized result of Pickford’s personal correspondence with her fans. The fans, who wrote to their idol with questions and concerns were promised an answer either in the column itself, in the “answers to correspondence” section, or personally, though it was always stressed that given the heavy load of letters pouring in daily, patience was required. In an early “Daily Talks” from 1915, Pickford ends her column by saying, “[i]f I persist in being so talkative I

² Pickford has received writing credits for the following short films: *The Awakening* (D.W. Griffith, 1909), *Getting Even* (D.W. Griffith, 1909) and *May and December* (D.W. Griffith, Frank Powell, 1910). And for the following features: *A Girl of yesterday* (Allan Dwan, 1915), *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Marshall Neilan, 1919), *Garrison’s Finish* (Arthur Rosson, 1923, starring her brother Jack). (Source AFI) She herself always claimed she also wrote *Lena and The Geese* (D.W. Griffith, 1912).

won't have room for my letters and they are piling up fast" ("Aeroplaning"). Even if she was not exaggerating, she was at the same time underlining her sense of duty toward her fans. In another column she added: "I receive hundreds of letters asking for my advice, so I am giving it, ungarnished and sincere, from me to you, to accept it as you will" ("Borrowing").

As texts, the "Daily Talks" present an interesting amalgam of genres and traditions, and of rhetorical strategies that tie these columns to sentimental fiction, adolescent and girl's fiction, prescriptive literature, and (auto)biography. Sharing knowledge with her audience was an explicit goal, and most of the literary genres the columns show an affiliation to, were didactic to a certain extent. The "Daily Talks" were short daily columns filled with what



The heading for Pickford's Daily Talks

Pickford referred to as "intimate little thoughts" ("What Happened to Mamie Jones I") or as the "pages of her diary" ("Memories from Yesterday"), treating a variety of subjects from the trite to the serious. The columns appeared on the women's pages, as they would often be called, next to advertisements or columns falling under "women's interest."

The knowledge the "Daily Talks" wanted to share with their audience, included domestic advice, presenting a how-to on cooking, cleaning or grooming, but it also included moral or personal advice, referring to the private sphere of character building or spiritual enlightenment. I should stress how unusual it was for an actress, even one of Pickford's stature, to be allowed to give this kind of advice. Traditionally, those deemed fit to give advice on both conduct and matters of the soul, had been mothers, doctors, educators, ministers or their wives, e.g. those conventionally held in high esteem by society. The genre of prescriptive literature had been booming business in the United States throughout the nineteenth century, but the

authors had never before been associated with any form of mass entertainment (Newton 3). Still, Mary Pickford got away with educating and moralizing, and in her “Daily Talks” covered subjects as varied and topical as education, frugality, emancipation, racial prejudice, patriotism, domesticity, and the road to happiness. Pickford not only made it acceptable for an actress to hold such a morally esteemed position, the columns were also instrumental for her own personal image building, as they carefully narrated (introduced, repeated, emphasized) various aspects and qualities of “Mary Pickford,” who was by 1915 both a star and respectable role model. During the mid-1910s, Pickford and her main rival, colleague and business partner Charlie Chaplin, actively reshaped their public personae to appeal to more inclusive audiences. Pickford worked to perfect her balancing act between her sentimental-pathetic and dramatic credentials and a more light-hearted and comic personality, an exercise she undertook in both her writings *and* in her films. In the films she produced under the Artcraft banner (a seal of quality especially created to handle to more prestigious product of Famous Players-Lasky) she mixed pathos with slapstick, conservative ideals with modern ideas and traditional femininity with tomboyish charms and liberties (Salt 113; Brouwers 89-90). Charlie Chaplin on his part, as Charles Maland has shown, used his years at Essanay and Mutual to adjust and refine his originally rather vulgar comic character through an emphasis on his pathetic and “romantic” side (20).

Despite their success, the “Daily Talks” only lasted for two years, probably because their ghostwriter, Frances Marion, had collapsed under the heavy workload and grief over her sister’s suicide and could no longer write at such high tempo (Beauchamp 63). If not for Marion’s collapse, Pickford might have continued to publish these “thoughts” for a long while. After the column’s end, Pickford would irregularly contribute articles or columns in magazines during the 1910s and 1920s about the motion picture business or about the eternal question whether or not to cut off her blessed curls. When she retired from acting in the early thirties, she picked up writing again more seriously, contributing articles on demand for general interest or women’s magazines like *Liberty Magazine*, *Colliers*, *Christian Science Monitor*. In the early 1930s, she even published two short semi-philosophical tracts, titled *Why Not Try God* (1934) and *My Rendez-Vous With Life* (1935), which we would now catalogue as self-help books. In 1935, she published her first novel, *The Demi-Widow*. In 1938, she started another column, this time for the *New York Journal*.

The Question of Voice

Because of the nature of the medium, not many fans had ever heard Pickford’s voice until her first talkie, *Coquette* (Sam Taylor), in 1929, unless they had seen her perform on stage or had attended the Liberty Drive and heard her public speeches in 1917. To make up for this lack of actual voices, intertitles reflecting idiosyncratic speech had been in general use since the mid-1910s; some of them give us a good idea of what Pickford, or at least her characters,

were supposed to “sound” like. There is continuity in the way the titles were phrased in that they often have an insouciant, know-it-all quality to them, with a touch of the vernacular. As Judy Abbot in *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Marshall Neilan, 1919), Pickford pleads rather insolently, “Please Mr. God, we want some food” (in the book by Jean Webster, Judy had actually addressed the deity as “Goddy,” analogous to “daddy”). As Amarilly in *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley* (Marshall Neilan, 1918) she asks the (unintentionally) rhetorical question: “Don’t you know a lady when you sees one?” As Mavis Hawn in *Heart of the Hills* (Joseph De Grasse, Sidney Franklin, 1919) she sounds as follows: “I’ve never knowed who done the shootin’, but I promised pap I’d git him—an’ I’m a-goin to keep my promise” (by the end of the film she has mastered her grammar and has learned to speak like a lady). These kind of lines made the silent film characters “talk.” Of course, in the case of popular material being adapted, they had to sound close to how the public had imagined them, but more importantly, they had to fit the star’s persona. Pickford’s written texts give a good indication of how she wanted to sound. Despite the fact that she did not write this material herself and that she hired different ghostwriters at different stages of her career, there is a striking continuity of tone as well as thematic concern in all these texts “written by” Mary Pickford.

So although we know that Pickford did not write these texts herself, I shall treat them as her own creation and refer to their voice as Pickford’s. In her excellent study of female authorship emerging from an expanded historical archive (including memoirs, cookbooks, scrapbooks etc.), Amelie Hastie notes that this tendency to speak of “Pickford” when talking about her written texts, reveals our easy “consolidation of persons and persona” (160). This is not so surprising, as star personalities are typically the combination of those qualities that the star projects and those which the public assumes to be true of the real actor’s personality (Basinger 161). As fans, we are quite eager to consolidate both, even if we do not actually believe them to be “truly” or “truthfully” congruent. The artificially created background of Fox star Theda Bara, is a good and well-known example of the public’s (press and audience) awareness of the discrepancy between star persona and personal biography and willingness to smooth them over in favor of a unified public and private person (Golden). The “Pickford” we hear in the “Daily Talks” is in fact an amalgam of many different voices: that of the private (biographical) Mary Pickford, of Mary Pickford the movie star, of Mary Pickford as she appears in the texts of her ghost writer Frances Marion, and possibly of other interested parties in the creation of the star image, like “Daddy” Zukor or Mom Charlotte Pickford. If her career was indeed as “planned” as she claimed in retrospect, the written output, especially of the early years when her star image was still forming, should be revealing. If we can be sure of one thing, it is that they were thoroughly quality-checked, ensuring that no inferior Pickford-related product would get out there and possibly harm her reputation or market value. If Pickford was concerned about a purely managerial concern like “block-booking” (giving the exhibitor the rights to the star’s product only if he agreed to show the rest of the studio output in bulk) and the detrimental effects it could have on her career, then surely

she had to be concerned about the words that were supposedly issuing from her typewriter.³

Pickford's biographer Eileen Whitfield suggests that the consolidation of her persona was accelerated by the star's excellent ghostwriters—"apt impersonators," she calls them—who knew and were able to imitate her voice to the extent that sometimes, "Pickford's tartness sparks off the page" (153). Although they were clearly contributing to an elaborate fiction ("sustaining a created self"), some of the stories in the columns ring true, either factually or experientially, even if they were ghostwritten. Amelie Hastie argues convincingly on the matter:

As such texts [advice columns] seek to conjoin the stars' words to their cinematic images, they are at least affected, if not infected, by fiction. At the same time, however, these works are also autobiographical: they tell authentic stories of the women's lives, and the knowledge they inscribe therein is based on the women's lived experiences and beliefs. (161)

So, despite having been inserted into a dramatic framework congruent with the star's image, the stories of life can nonetheless be "true" or "authentic." (Even the genre of autobiography, which at least in principle will try to tell the "real story," is essentially constructed as a coherent narrative with dramatic arches and climaxes and moral lessons learnt). Finally, the importance of Pickford and Frances Marion's close friendship during the column's run should not be underestimated. Cari Beauchamp notes how, from 1916 to early 1917, Pickford and Marion rented houses in Hollywood a street apart, wanting to be in close proximity to create the "Daily Talks" (Beauchamp 53). For the two women friends, the "Daily Talks" were clearly part work, part fun. As someone who would come to write thirteen features for the star, Marion undoubtedly used the "Daily Talks" to get to know her friend and employer, and, in the process, add certain elements to her star persona. To a certain extent, the "Daily Talks" can be seen as "scripts." No doubt because of their intense collaboration on the "Talks," Marion was the one capable of writing the most popular version of the Pickford character.

Sound Advice from a Friend

To get back to Whitfield's comment: whether or not it is actually "tartness" we hear in some of the answers to readers is hard to assess, although Pickford occasionally does sound somewhat curt and impatient—mostly in response to queries that display a high degree of

³ Correspondence between Pickford and the editor of Liberty Magazine, for which she was submitting an article in 1936, on the occasion of Mother's Day, illustrates her nitpicking and perfectionism. Although the magazine cover had already been printed, Pickford could not bring herself to "okay" the intended article. In a wire to editor David Hampton, she wrote: "Could not possibly approve Liberty Story therefore had it entirely rewritten using no part of Collins material of course I wish [sic] to settle with him and leave that to you deeply regret I could not share your enthusiasm stop."

ignorance, or a lack of decorum or tact which was still an issue in the early years of silent film reporting or star profiling. Indeed, the “Daily Talks” corresponded with the discourse about stars in fan magazines. In her study of fan discourse and fan culture, Samantha Barbas notes that the shift from a focus on the films and their plots to a focus on the actors happened gradually throughout the 1910s. *Motion Picture Story* (which had started out printing novelizations of well-known film plots) eventually dropped the “Story” from its title, focusing henceforth on providing personal details about stars’ lives to an inquisitive audience. Marsha Orgeron notes that

[t]his tacit and reciprocal encouragement of publicity stood in direct contrast to the late nineteenth-century belief that curiosity about personal affairs of others—even public figures—was rude and improper. But by the 1920s curiosity had been institutionalized, and in effect normalized, at least in relation to the movie industry, whose studio and fan magazines fed the public information (however fabricated) about stars’ lives. (76)

Of course, as Barbas, Robert Sklar and Richard De Cordova have argued, during the 1910s the fan magazines had already printed personal stories about the lives of actors and actresses; it was the amount of kind of information deemed appropriate to share with the audience that changed. Images of actors (slides, postcards, calendars, posters) were in wide circulation and increased the popularity of the magazines. Shelley Stamp observes that the film camera moving in to ever more closer views during these years, was mirrored by the audience’s desire to come ever closer to these faces and people they were starting to feel increasingly invested in (141). Pickford met her fans’ expectations and desires for (seeming) intimacy and proximity in allowing them to share in her thoughts on a daily basis and thus encouraged this increasing appetite for the private, but the “Daily Talks” were also a powerful tool to control her own star persona’s narrative. Through this direct line with her audience she could respond immediately and with authority to possible unpleasant or dissident stories circulating about her, her films or the film industry in general. By signing her name underneath every new installment, she both authenticated the content of her “talks” and tethered it to her persona.

Pickford’s annoyance with the snoopy fan was not out of place in the mid-1910s and it would perhaps be more accurate to say that some of her answers sound like the ennui or slight annoyance of an otherwise patient teacher. For example, to one reader (who had posed an undisclosed question on her marital status) she answers, “Yes, I’m married,” but offers no further information. Another reader assuming Pickford was a little bit older than she claimed to be, is scolded: “Would you have me send you the family Bible to prove it, Miss Inquisitive Maid?” (rpt. in Whitfield 153). To reader M.N.F. she replies practically: “Yes. Mabel Normand once played with the Biograph Company.” To G.W.T. she preaches: “There is no easy way to ‘break into the moving picture game’ that I know of. The only way is to start at the bottom and work yourself up. If you have ability and deserve success, you will

get ahead.” To Helen S. S. she simply replies: “Look in the telephone directory.” A mother writing in about her freckled daughter wanting to go to drama school, fearing the freckles and a career in pictures would be hard to reconcile, get the reply: “This letter would be funny, were it not pathetic. [...] Tell your daughter to forget her freckles and devote herself to her studies” (“Patriotism”; “Old-fashioned Homes”; “We Eat Spaghetti”; “Ghosts of Yesterday’s Mistakes”).

Possible tartness aside, Whitfield further astutely notes that “[m]uch of ‘Daily Talks’ reads like a cross between Louisa May Alcott (as presented in the column, Little Mary bore a striking resemblance to Alcott’s Polly in *An Old-fashioned Girl*) and a fan magazine” (153). Indeed, the “Daily Talks” harmonize with the sound, strategies and some of the content of Alcott’s fiction, blending qualities of the sentimental novel with children’s literature or the adolescent novel and aimed at female socialization. Polly from *An Old-fashioned Girl* (1869) or Marmee from *Little Women* (1868-1869) or the grown Jo March from *Jo’s Boys* (1886) are the rational (and quite pragmatic) but never stern or unfeeling voices of moral authority in stories that were meant to present models for living right. As in the sentimental novel, growing up is here presented as internalizing life lessons. Whitfield’s comment is quite useful but does not fully pursue the interesting notion that sentimental literature and children’s or adolescent novels shared a connection with or indebtedness to the tradition of prescriptive literature, a collective term for all literature intent to advise. Sentimental rhetoric reveals the desire for their works to be more than “ephemeral” and to have readers benefit, morally, personally, from reading (Baym 16-17). Baym notes that the didactic intention always shines through without being “at cross-purposes with entertainment” and that “[t]he lesson itself . . . [becomes] an entertainment in that the heroine’s triumph over so much adversity and so many obstacles is profoundly pleasurable to those readers who identify with her” (17). Pickford’s “Daily Talks” read like sentimental short stories, complete with moral fabulating, didactic intent, author’s asides, pathetic appeals, and the pleasure of reading of “Mary’s” personal trials and successes. Whatever the subject of the column, there is always a lesson to be learned, often by the author herself in the form of a fictionalized “little Mary” from the past, and sometimes by “a friend” of the author, who probably, the text implies, is not unlike the reader herself. The fact that the columns appeared in short, daily installments also parallels the experience of sentimental and Victorian literature, which was likewise consumed serially and counted on the pleasurable experience of accumulating knowledge and a growing familiarity with a fictional heroine and supporting characters and the recognizable rhetorical style of a particular authorial voice.

In her book-length study on conduct books, Sarah Newton subdivides the whole of prescriptive literature into 1) advise literature (including cookbooks and domestic manuals), 2) books on etiquette and 3) conduct literature (providing models of how to be or live). Thematically many of Pickford’s “Daily Talks” fit in these subcategories and even formally they resemble literature’s preferred formal presentation, as “letters” or “talks.” Examples

are Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Young Ladies* (1837), *Letters to Mothers* 1838, Lydia Maria Child and Clara de Chatelain's *The Girl's Own Book* (1834), Madeleine Leslie's novel *Trying to be Useful* (1855), a serial published in 1869 called *The Lady's Friend* and published by Deacon and Petersen or Gail Hamilton's 1872 *Woman's Worth and Worthlessness*. Most of these publications combined fiction or poetry with sermons or straightforward maxims or dictums and they were not ephemeral in their intentions.

In the "Daily Talks" Pickford's voice mimics that of the concerned friend or moral guardian in prescriptive texts, often explicitly taking up the role as mentor without ever becoming distant or impersonal: the advice she wants to give is "from me to you," at one point she proposes to act as a discrete "confidante" for one of her readers ("Our Souls and Our Work"; "Pickanninies"). She adopts the friendly and familiar tone applied in prescriptive literature, which suggests the tone of the personal friend, acquaintance or parent, who is both likely and entitled to gently critique or advise on matters of conduct. Next to the more "dry" tone of straightforward advice, the columns use different literary forms like the anecdote or allegory to style the message, all strategies common for prescriptive literature in general. Newton notes that, "[t]hese more literary modes sweeten the didacticism yet convey conduct lessons effectively and often dramatically" (77). The moral lesson of the day, "don't idle your time away," or "it is as much a mistake to give too much as it is to give too little," for instance, become much more attractive when told by means of an anecdote from Mary's own life or when we are reassured of the fact that Mary too needs to overcome character flaws and work hard to polish her character ("The Girls and I"). Audiences are given the sense they share in Pickford's personal life by reading about her recent and past experiences, and the realization that Pickford's experiences are not so different from their own. Her tone and use of the anecdotal form assumes that her readers are familiar with the type of experiences she describes, or that they will be capable of imagining them. This "recognition of shared knowledge," increases the intimacy between the spectator/reader and star, as well as enable a coalescence of female identity (Stacey). The act of "sharing" itself was just as important as what was being shared, and contemporary female stars have continued sharing similarly intimate knowledge and experiences on the vicissitudes and joys of a woman's life. Like Pickford, this is done to sustain (as well as expand upon) their star image as well as to capitalize on the commodity value of their knowledge. In doing so, contemporary stars still rely on traditional forms and formulas—letters, diaries, columns, and advice books.⁴

The female fans addressed by these prescriptive texts did not only belong to a newly created community of cinemagoers but to the legacy of American "women's culture" from

⁴ In current celebrity self help and advice (in print or online) the form in which the advice is poured and the rhetorical strategies applied have not changed all that much from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, or from Pickford's texts. For example, Gwyneth Paltrow's digital newsletter, *Goop*, has a modern carrier but retains a very traditional form and rhetoric: it is still a "letter" and Paltrow sounds as concerned, intimate and superiorly informed as the writers of advice and conduct literature of earlier days. Other contemporary forms of "sharing" as an important strategy to effect strong affective ties between fan and star are provided by social network applications such as Facebook and Twitter.

the nineteenth century, who had been addressed similarly through explicit prescriptive texts or through sentimental literature. As Lauren Berlant has theorized, American woman's culture is one of many "intimate publics" that exist (and have existed for a long time) in American society. She writes: "An intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (Berlant 5). Celebrity's self-help books or columns or manuals or philosophical guides (like Pickford's later books) encourage participation and identification, the personal tone and address of the texts increase the perceived intimacy, the idea that what the books contain is the knowledge that is somehow what was missing in a woman's life. The books or texts stress the commonality, not just among stars and fans, but among women. Emanating from a shared historical past is the sense that there is a "fundamental likeness" among women, star or layperson alike, and that emotional as well as domestic, moral and spiritual expertise is a marker of femininity. (A decidedly sentimental supposition and a benchmark of nineteenth century feminine ideals.) Through the careful following of stars' prescriptions, suggestions and living examples, in any form they provide it, their lives (all of our lives) can be intimately shared, relived, owned. Additionally, the partakers or consumers of the intimate public "trust the affectionate knowledge and rational assurance more than the truths of any ideology" (Levander 30) or of the impersonal, non-intimate knowledge available through science. When scientific sources are consulted and referred to, its impersonal, alienating language is personalized or feminized through the use of more gentle fictional forms such as anecdote, the imagined conversation ("talks"), or the interview. Pickford occasionally turns to lofty and traditionally trustworthy references such as "scientists" and "philosophers" (especially in her later books *Why Not Try God?* and *My Rendez-Vous With Life*) but ultimately the power and authority of her argumentation rests with the sentimentally accepted validity of her personal experiences and affective judgments. In fact, in the nineteenth century, scientific language of biological evolution was often very sentimental in its descriptions and assumptions (Levander 30) an illustration of the fact that the imbrication of a rational and emotional rhetoric in both scientific and fictional texts was not uncommon.

Another strategy often employed in prescriptive literature as well as in sentimental fiction—as we have already seen—is the dramatic use of "contrasting types." In the "Talks," Pickford constantly compares the good girl with her bad sister, the right kind of behavior with the wrong, "Miss Foolish Maiden" (who gossips, rambles on, exaggerates, lives too fast...) with "Miss Wise Maiden" ("Maidens, Wise and Foolish"). In her talk on the "Moral Conditions of Studios," she concludes her argument by saying, "A good girl who is clever is the only one who stands a chance, while the bad girl who is not clever, soon loses out." According to Lynne Vallone, recounting the story of the bad girl is a strong "impulse" characteristic of texts for girls, where the bad girl becomes the "negative emblem," even a "compulsive addition" (9). Creating ethical significance through contrasting the good and

the bad, the “Talks” also drew upon the contrast narratives or contrasting agents from the progressive cinema of the early 1910s, in which for example the good sister was paired and contrasted with the bad sister (*The Painted Lady* [D.W. Griffith, 1912]; *The Easiest Way* [Albert Capellani, 1917]) in which rich and poor households would be confronted with the same or similar moral dilemmas (e.g. *The One is Business the Other Crime* [D.W. Griffith, 1912] *The Kleptomaniac* [D.W. Griffith, 1905]) or in which the toil of the poor is bitterly contrasted to the debauchery of the rich (*A Corner in Wheat* [D.W. Griffith, 1909]; *Children Who Labor* [director unknown, 1912]).

Questions for Readers

Another direct echo from sentimental fiction and the intrusive authorial voice from conduct literature, is the fact that Pickford often addresses her audience directly through rhetorical questions, semi-philosophical pondering or small asides, like: “I believe in this fairy lore, don’t you?” or “Don’t you think it would be wiser to do that?”; and “To each month of the year and to each epoch of ones life belong separate memories and various flowers. How may one chose a single one?”; “Aren’t mothers darlings?”; “Don’t you always have to control the little stifling yawns behind the palm of your hand when you are forced to listen to some one telling why he cannot accomplish his desires because his ideals are so high it is hopeless ever to try to reach them?” (“When the Robins Nest Again”; “My First Day in Pictures”; “My Favorite Perfume”; “Mr. Tucker’s Secret”; “Chasing Moonbeams”). The questions invite personal reflection and again invite the reader to compare the star’s observations and experiences to one’s own.

The column offered other perks: it shared actual, imitable advice on practical and spiritual matters and held the promise of direct and positive results for the careful reader. Of course, actors sharing tips, especially beauty secrets, with their fans was not a new phenomenon. Broadway actress Lillian Russell, for instance, had shared her beauty secrets with her fans in the *Chicago Tribune*, occasionally also digging a little deeper (Leslie Midkiff Debauche to author, 2010). Movie stars, however, always seemed to link tips on improving your personal appearance with suggestions on how to improve behavior (Barbas 49). Leslie Midkiff Debauche has shown that, next to Pickford, silent movie actresses like Beverly Bayne, Anita Stewart, Ruth Stonehouse and Billie Burke (for example “Billie Burke on Beauty” from 1912, or “Billie Burke in Paris. Tells all about the Coming change in Feminine Hair and Hats” from 1913) had similar columns in newspapers or trade papers, although none reached an audience as large as Pickford’s, whose “funny little thoughts” appeared in over a hundred-fifty newspapers across the country.

Not only the female stars produced these kind of prescriptive texts. The market for the female spectator and magazine reader was the larger one, but there was room for advice columns aimed at for men (or at least a mixed audience). During the 1910s and early 1920s,

Douglas Fairbanks and Wallace Reid had pages in *Photoplay* in which they spoke to their audience on matters of life; several movie stars also appeared as guest editors, contributing articles on subjects they supposedly had something to say about (Valentino published on how his ideal woman would behave on their first dates. He also published a booklet in 1922, *How You Can Keep Fit*, a workout guide with pictures of Valentino's scantily dressed athletic body.) As both Larry May and Gaylyn Studlar have noted, Fairbanks extended his "character



ONE should never, never comb the hair while it is damp. When I am sure my hair is thoroughly dry I comb it lightly to remove any tangles. To curl it I dampen with cold soft water and then twine the locks one by one about my finger, combing the while. I do this with every curl. I do not use Marcelle wavers or curling irons of any kind; hot irons ruin the hair by scorching it. Nor do I use ointments and patent hair tonics. Good health is the best hair tonic I know of.

Beauty Tips from Mary Pickford
(Ladies' Home Journal 1919)

building” persona through these publications in ways noticeably similar to Pickford. His articles appeared in general interest magazines such as *Ladies Home Companion*; he also had a monthly column in *Photoplay* and he wrote several short tracts on “the art of living happily and healthily” published as booklets (May; Studlar). Like Pickford’s, Fairbanks’ texts—including *Live and Let Live* (1917), *Laugh and Live* (1917) and *Youth Points the Way* (1924)—were ghostwritten, in his case by his personal secretary Kenneth Davenport. These self-help manuals are filled with do’s and don’ts and promise the reader a happy, healthy, peppy, dynamic life, much like the one led by Fairbanks himself. The booklets were decorated with promotion stills of Fairbanks’ film successes or glamour photographs to make them all the more appealing to fans. The overwhelming success of Pickford’s and Fairbanks’ conduct columns and self-help books, started what would soon become a national trend (Barbas 52). Midkiff Debauche, however, points out that some time before Pickford and Fairbanks, Billie Burke, who played roles not unlike those of Pickford and who similarly balanced the contrasts of ideal American girlhood, had already published columns on beauty and fashion, with advice explicitly directed at girls in 1912 (150). Like Pickford, Burke packaged opposites in a believable, wholesome whole: she represented youth and maturity, innocence and knowingness, excellence and run of the mill-ness, exclusiveness and neighborliness. On matters of conduct, however, Pickford was clearly much closer to official prescriptive literature. Pickford’s advice was noticeably more out to educate her readership on a more abstract, less concrete ideal of well-being, whereas Burke’s columns were more to the point (e.g. what colors to wear or use in home decoration) and quickly evolved into testimonial advertising such as for Pond’s facial cream (Midkiff Debauche 149-150). Also, when Burke first started writing her columns she was still a stage actress (she made her screen debut in 1916), making Pickford the first movie star to publish public advice in the US.

Categories of Advice

Thematically the “Talks” addressed five broad categories: 1) domestic and practical advice, 2) personal and spiritual advice, 3) political and social causes, 4) public relations (acknowledgment of fans, patriotic messages) and 5) veiled publicity (behind-the-scenes anecdotes to plug the films or defend the industry’s reputation). All of these were presented in often strongly sentimental terms. In the type of “Talk” belonging to the first category, Pickford instructs, sometimes a tad snootily, her reader on how to deal with a particular type of situation, ranging from advice on how and on what to spend money, to beauty tips and tips on etiquette.

In response to A.P.P., Pickford wrote:

“It is all right to carry your slippers in a bag when you go to a dance. A dance card is used to keep track of your engagements for each dance. It is customary for a young lady to permit

her escort to have the first selection; after that she may allot her dances as they are requested, first come, first served. It is all right to reserve one or two dances; you should so mark them on your card.” (“Penny Wise and Pound Foolish”)



Pickford opens up about washing her hair
(*Ladies' Home Journal*, 1919).

To “Business Girl” from York, Pa., she wrote: “It is true that some one has decreed that letters of friendship should not be written on a typewriter, but it must have been some one less busy than yourself. If you haven’t time to write letters any other way, use the typewriter” (“The Relatives I Do Not Have”). In another column she warned “the girls” not to use too much cosmetics, because it merely made one look older and only rarely helped bring out the natural beauty. The same installment also features a detailed description of the star’s newly remodeled dressing room and reads like a piece on interior decorating (“Don’t Use Cosmetics’ Film Star Tells Girls--- ‘Tends to Add on the Years’”). In “Mothering Mother,” Pickford narrates how she learned to be responsible for her family from an early age on (the story of her life she loved to repeat *ad infinitum*): “. . . as my incessant work on the stage left little time for dolls, my maternal instinct, denied a doll, a baby brother, or a baby sister which to sprout and thrive, I turned to mothering my mother.” The texts’ constant warning is that one can never be silly about money and that one is never too young to be responsible. Most of the immediate, practical advice can be found in the answers to letters from the correspondents’ section, and in many cases the column was inspired by a direct query. The questions Pickford received ranged from the professional (where to submit a script or how to become a movie star), to the silly (were her curls real? how did she wash them? what caused them to shine as they did?), to the behavioral (how to respond in such and such an event.)

An example of the second category, is provided by “To-morrow Land.” In this “Talk,” Pickford muses on happiness and how to achieve it. The trick is not to think happiness is always ahead of you, to not lose yourself in fantasies of tomorrow. Dwelling on the past or living for the future makes us forget that happiness is to be found in the here and now. In sum: “The key to happiness...is living in ‘To-Day.’” At the close of “School Days,” in answer to an undisclosed letter, Pickford advises “Blondie” from Chicago, Ill.:

The matter of controlling your temper can only be decided by yourself. If you have the habit of losing your temper very readily you will have to strive unceasingly to overcome this, and it can be done if you lose your will power. Eight hours of sleep is considered the right amount of sleep for an adult.

In another column a (cautionary) anecdote illustrates her advise to always “treat your parents right”: a girl always haughty towards her parents and impatient about their old-fashioned values and beliefs, breaks down when she hears her mother and father have died in a tenement fire. We are warned that our parents and where we came from should always be honoured (“Our Debt to the Living”).⁵ “The Girls and I” promotes female solidarity and friendship; in it Pickford regrets the “petty jealousy” and hopes for more loyalty among women. In general, what is stressed, are the similarities among women, the collective nature of their experiences.

⁵ This sounds a lot like the plot of a Biograph film starring Mabel Normand, *Her Awakening* (D.W. Griffith, 1911).

In the “Talks” concerned with social or political issues, various topical subjects are addressed. On one occasion, Pickford defends working women and insists they are not “abnormal” (since she was after all a working woman herself). Like the homemaker, the working woman works for the home, only she does it by joining the workforce. Pickford ends up re-domesticating the working women by closing with, “in their hearts there is a keen desire to leave furnished rooms, boarding houses and hotels, and to ensconce themselves in their own individual niches in the universal ‘home, sweet home’” (“Homes and Working Women”). In another column, she defends the “nursery movement,” giving working women a place to leave their children with someone who will look after them instead of having to lock them up in the apartment all day (“Day Nurseries”). In the same “Talk,” Pickford makes the case for reading fairy tales to young children. She sees no harm in postponing an introduction to the great literary works of the world and instead supposes that “the imagination of children would be colored and ripened by their mental voyages into fairyland” (“Fairy Stories for Children”). She closes by asking for advice from mothers who have read fairy tales to children. The influence of particular kinds of stories (both in literature and film) on the minds of children was the subject of various sociological and psychological studies in the 1910s and 1920s.⁶ The fact that scholars of different disciplines paid so much attention to the fairy tale, shows that it was a topical subject, and Pickford’s own take of the subject suggests a more popular concern as well. Perhaps Pickford felt the urge to address the matter because in 1914 she had starred in a fairy-tale adaptation herself (*Cinderella* directed by James Kirkwood). The effects of filmgoing on the minds of the young was the subject singled out for moral concern and the topic of several sociological studies. Jane Adams and E. Margery Fox, for example, both wrote essays in which they voiced their concern with the influence of moving pictures on young children especially (Lant and Periz 297–303, 308–312). In “Pickanninies,” Pickford explained that many black women needed to work out of necessity (and as a result seemingly neglecting their children), because in many cases their husbands could not get proper jobs. She asks her readers to consider how they are forced to leave their children behind and face the racism of white people. In her attempt to be progressive and open-minded, Pickford comes across as patronizing and unwittingly racist when she writes:

It seems to me we might remember that this people, the world’s child race, has many virtues and endearing qualities—cheerfulness, the love of music and the ability to interpret it artistically in many cases, loyalty in service—and that no human being can bear continued and unearned hatred or ridicule without becoming embittered and hardened. (“Pickaninnies”)

From this example we can judge that Pickford’s politics were emancipated but not necessarily progressive. Ideologically speaking, the “Daily Talks” are moderately conservative.

⁶ Charlotte Buhler published *Das Märchen und die Phantasie des Kindes* [fairy tales and the child’s fantasy] in 1918. Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* [*Die Traumdeutung*] in 1900, *Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl* [the theme of the three caskets] in 1913, and *Märchenstoffe in Träumen* [the occurrence in dreams of material from fairy tales]—in which he connects the symbolic language of fairy tales to the human subconscious—in 1913.

Pickford was always careful not to alienate part of her audience by making unpopular claims or judgments that might even offend. For instance, upon glorifying the sacrifices and skills of the professional homemaker whom she also advises to be truly professional in her domestic duty because “cheap labor” of any kind *always* humiliates, she makes sure to add:

Of course I, who have lived among professional beavers all my life, don't hold that every woman's only place is in the home—that is impossible for the woman with a career or fired by the divine accident of genius. But many of these professional women find time for homemaking and the raising of a beautiful family. (“June Brides”)

Women who feel that a career outside the home is what is best for them, should have this choice. Here the opinion splits between the two halves of Pickford's persona, as ideal of Victorian domesticity and as embodiment of integrated modernity.

A number of the “Talks” were designed to acknowledge the importance of the fans to her career. Pickford published many “thank yous” in which her audience is praised for its unfailing support. This support manifested itself not only through buying tickets to see her films but also through sending the star gifts of every kind. In “Gifts and Letters I Receive,” Pickford thanks her fans for the self-made sketches, poems, embroideries, Kodak photographs, candied fruits, cough syrup, and in particular for the letters and souvenirs from soldiers fighting in the war. She cites one soldier's letter: “My girl back in England wouldn't have got jealous, for she loves you, too” (“Gifts and Letters I Receive”). Elsewhere, in a direct address soliciting more letters from her fans, she professes to rely to a great extent on the ideas of her public. She writes:

As soon as we are ready to start, I will tell you all about our play, for if you follow the pages of my diary, you will have to read often of the activity of my studio days. Do not forget you have promised to write and to tell me the subjects you are interested in—it will be a great help to me. (“Memories from Yesterday”)

The final category concerns those texts that provide a brief look behind the scenes of movie making. They are meant on the one hand to deglamorize the profession, in order to scare away hopefuls who would give up everything to make it in the movies, and on the other to highlight the professional and fundamentally ethical nature of the business. She gently tries to dissuade those who think that, by doing as Pickford did, which they assume is “going on a diet” or “growing a wealth of curls,” they will be able to become big movie stars themselves. Apparently, the letters of hopefuls came in such large numbers that in one case Pickford writes how “refreshing” it is to receive a letter from a girl who does NOT want to become a movie actress or to write photoplays (“School Gardening”). In texts from this category, she also talked about how to best submit scenarios and gave tips (via ghost-

writer Frances Marion's experiences) on how to write them ("Movie Madness"; "Sunlight and Shadow at the Studio"; "Love, Reel and Theatrical"; "Rolling Stones"; "Moving Pictures and the Working Girl"; "For Amateur Scenario Writers").

Certain favorable character traits or moral positions of past or upcoming movie characters were cited by Pickford as coinciding with her own. On occasion, Pickford would even go back into character and addressed her fans as either Tess from *Tess of the Storm Country* (Edwin S. Porter, 1914) or from *Hulda from Holland* (John B. O'Brien, 1916). Of course, the reference to her screen characters was pure publicity, but it once again closed the gap between actress/person and fictional characters. Pickford writes how the audience often seemed to forget that Tess was a fictional character in that they saw her "as a real Tess in which Mary Pickford was submerged" ("When Tess Washed Her Hair"). Sometimes she seemed to be forgetting the distinction herself, taking on the identity of one of the characters and speaking in the voice of Hulda, for instance. She opens her column:

Mine feet's in a muddle, mine head's in a whirl. Ven I starts to dance like a leetle Dutch girl. So I am introducing myself to my friends now as Miss Hulda from Holland – that is what the picture we are working on is called, and, as you can guess, I stumble noisily through my part in large wooden shoes. ("Hulda From Holland")

In their totality, the "Daily Talks" can be read as a synthesis of the most salient and well-liked aspects of the developing Pickford star persona. We have seen that Pickford and Marion cleverly drew on familiar and effective literary models from the nineteenth (and early twentieth) century, continuing a tradition of women writers whose literary legacy was connected to the general emancipation of American women. Pickford and Marion thus implicitly validated this tradition of female self-searching, self-definition and self-improvement, but they also made this literary model and its effects comply with the commercial demands of a quickly professionalizing and increasingly star-oriented film industry. The familiar tone, the anecdotal content, the almost whispered secrets and the presumed integrity of the advice all worked to establish and uphold the sense of a "fundamental likeness," of a "unique" intimacy between the star and her readers, even within widely disseminated, mass-produced and mass-consumed medium like the printed press. As the suggested "likeness" could collect her fans into an intimate public of consumers, there was a commercial advantage to this rhetoric of intimacy and the encouragement of feminine solidarity. Fans themselves could also experience the advantages of this suggested likeness: if they followed the star's prescriptions and suggestions, their lives were likely to improve, a promise which again strengthened their attachment and loyalty to the star.

Amelie Hastie has shown that the repetition or imitation of spiritual, practical, financial advice from a star can lead to a special relationship of advanced identification and prolong the experience of stardom (182–193). "The Daily Talks" definitely facilitated such an advanced

identification but in addition to prolonging the experience stardom, they also intensified and encouraged the experience of a shared spiritual bonding, the experience of an almost ritualistic act of glorious commitment with a sanctified star. Tellingly, from the mid-1910s onwards, Pickford (in a curious oxymoron to her girl-next-door image) would frequently be associated with the sacred and spiritual; she would be described as “divine,” “cherubic,” “angelic,” and “above sin,” as well as exalting “Madonna-like” quality. The “Daily Talks” was the crucial site where the more complex aspects of the Pickford persona—the balance the sweet and approachable “Little Mary” and a more austere and untouchable “Our Mary,” worthy of a shrine—was crafted. Mary Pickford would rely on this this well-scripted persona until the end of her career.

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