



There is something that is of great interest to audiences and that little girls, the same ones who write me letters, dream about in private moments. That is to be “a diva.”

I have often heard the word *diva*, and I still do not know what a diva actually is. As I see it, there are two possibilities: either I work and my work is satisfying, or I am resting, in which case I do, as they say in Bavaria, “truly want my peace an’ quiet!” [wirklich mei Ruah ham!] The term *diva* is something totally imaginary. It has never yet played a role in my life, and it never will. There is not a single difference between me and any other woman who works. I do my work to my own satisfaction, to fulfill my artistic ambitions. Every other woman has the same intention, whether she be a doctor or anything else. She also works to her own satisfaction, and neither she nor I have the desire to become a “diva” through this work. A “diva” exists only in the conceptual vocabulary of the naïve audience and certain newspaper writers.

Incidentally, I would like to say a few more things about journalists. In the earliest days of film, there was not yet any such thing as film criticism. Why would there have been? Back then, film was in its fledgling stage and nothing serious could be written about the things that we saw in it. Today, however, this has changed. An extraordinary number of artists are active in film. Well-known and critically acclaimed painters such as Ludwig Kainer, Ernst Stern, and others create set design and decor for film.¹ Writers like Hans Hyan, Felix Philippi, Rudolph Stratz, Hermann Sudermann, Arthur Schnitzler, and Gerhart Hauptmann are or have been engaged with film as a literary product.² Stage artists like Alexander Moissi, Theodor Loos, Ernst Deutsch, Eduard von Winterstein, Paul Wegener, Harry Liedtke,³ and many, many others look to film for a new expressive potential for their art, and audiences marvel at their achievements often and with pleasure.

Even though all these artists work intensely on film, even though film is already a magnet that attracts the creative power of a wide variety of artists, journalists do not think it necessary to engage with film as seriously as they do with theater. This lack of understanding for film is a great injustice, which can surely be blamed on the belief that cinematic art is nothing more than a kitschified, inferior theatrical art. In other countries, the press takes a very different stance toward film, and I am convinced that in due time, it will also receive serious critical appreciation in Germany. We should be able to tell how important film is just from the fact that it consists of something far more enduring, far more abiding than a stage performance. If we had a film of Joseph Kainz today,⁴ what a boon that would be to German actors! What possibilities there would be to learn from the movement and facial expressions of this master of dramatic art. I am utterly convinced that, in years to come, my films as well as those of other artists will have extraordinary historical value for the cultural development of this era. For there is an immense abundance of artistic skill stored in them. In their decor, set design, and costumes, in the actors' movements and facial expressions, as well as in the story's diction, they offer an uncompromising look at the state of culture.

Should this alone not obligate critics to contribute to film's refinement through a full appreciation of its artistic achievements? Today, the large German dailies print almost exclusively short remarks on the films currently running. Some summarize the films from an entire week and simply acknowledge their existence. Other newspapers run short critiques, hidden on the last page of the paper. But they do not address film to the same extent and in the same detail as they do theater. Similarly, if an actress is not well-known from the stage, they look at her with only one half-serious (I would say) critical eye and treat her work extremely superficially. They speak more of "diva gestures" and the like and react to her accomplishments with a frivolous, smug air. I already said at the beginning of this chapter that the concept "diva" is something imaginary, and that there is only one thing: namely, work. In the mouth of the press, however, the word *diva* becomes an insult; for we expect the press always to demonstrate objectivity, critique, and an understanding of professional performance.

I believe that no artist has the right to demand idolization. Only her work should be recognized. If she is no good, by all means, let her be judged. But if she is good, we should admit what we think. Just as I tend to speak my mind honestly and candidly, I would like to be judged by other people with equal honesty and candidness. Nothing is more loathsome and nothing seems more contemptible to me than underhandedness, obstructionism, and slander. Everyone has to make the most complete use of his own value and let what is valuable about him benefit the community. This is the most sacred duty of any person. Just as a doctor uses all his strength and knowledge for his patients, and just as a painter puts the best of his art into his paintings, every dramatic artist,

whether he works on the stage or in film, wants to give us the essence of his art. But to judge it, to point out new paths to the artist, is the critic's task. When quiet times have come again to our country, may the German press too begin to bestow acclaim upon film and to give film artists' achievements the appreciation that film and its artists deserve.

Notes

1. Kainer had worked as a set designer at Messter-Film GmbH beginning in 1916, frequently collaborating with a team that included Porten. Stern designed the sets and costumes for German films between the early 1910s and the early 1930s, including Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Bergkatze* (The Wildcat, 1921) and *Das Weib des Pharaos* (The Loves of Pharaoh, 1922).

2. Many of the German-language writers invoked here had links to films in which Porten herself starred: Hyan had written the screenplay for *Die große Sünderin* (1914); Philippi had written the screenplay for *Die Sieger* (1918, based on his 1914 novel); Stratz's *Die Faust des Riesen* (1910) provided the basis for the two-part film of the same name in 1917; and Hauptmann's drama *Rose Bernd* (1903) was adapted into a 1919 film.

3. Of these stage actors who had turned to film in the 1910s, Porten had costarred with Loos in *Abseits vom Glück* (1916), *Christa Hartungen* (1917), and *Edelsteine* (1918); with Deutsch in *Irrungen* (1919) and *Monica Vogelsang* (1920); with Winterstein in *Märtyrerin der Liebe* (1915), *Die Claudi vom Geiserhof* (1917), and *Die Faust des Riesen* (1917); and with Liedtke in *Eva* (1913), *Der wankende Glaube* (1913), and *Irrungen* (1919).

4. On Kainz, a famous actor in Austrian and German theater, see the text by Landau in chapter 3 (no. 35) of this volume.