

Film stars: Night after night they rise on the screen horizon and cross the sky in luminous orbit. Their youth cannot age, nor can their beauty fade. Vienna, Heidelberg, Monte Carlo, Paris—all the world's splendors serve the sole purpose of providing them with a backdrop. In the end, they are always blessed with true love and a convertible. And if they ever cry, their tears are dried, and they once again shine as radiantly as ever.

Flickering so high above us, they shine into offices, girls' schools, and factory rooms, fulfilling the dreams of countless typists, salesmen, shopgirls, and apprentices. It would be sheer foolishness to try to drag the stars into the eight-hour day. But for those who take pleasure in the stars' extraterrestrial glory, should it not at least be possible to seize a small piece of heaven for themselves? It is surely possible. And the dreamers can in fact achieve their wishful goal in the magazine *Filmwelt*.¹

This widely read magazine, which is distributed in cinemas alongside programs, contains a rubric that constitutes a kind of observatory for stargazing [Starwarte]. From this observatory, male and female film fans in Dortmund, Bautzen, or Magdeburg can look up toward higher regions and make out details invisible to the naked eye. However, some questions are forbidden from the outset. Stringently, the editors declare, "We do not publish the age of film stars," and they rebuff anyone who tries to sound them out on this point. As consolation, they reassure all those who write in to guess the stars' age on their own that their guess is just about right. Then they share the birthdays and addresses of the artists and promise to forward their readers' greetings.

With a stirring thirst for knowledge, which ought to be directed toward other things, the unknowns in the lowlands approach their heavenly favorites. They burn to find out the stars' favorite *flowers*, and we must hear, for example, that Willi Forst is a fan of roses and carnations, while Brigitte Helm treasures hydrangeas and orchids. Incidentally, I would have expected as much from Brigitte Helm, since there is something exotic about her. To judge by these magazines, a film artist without favorite flowers is nearly impossible. And what about their *external appearance* when they are out and about or at home? "Liane Haid is blonde and brown-eyed," writes *Filmwelt* in response to an admirer, "Forst and Verebes have black hair and brown eyes." The magazine also divulges the main facts of stars' private lives without further ado. "You are right," it confirms, "Henry Stuart's father was Swiss." We hear further that Käthe von Nagy has divorced Constantin David; that Heinz Rühmann is a husband, and Gustav Fröhlich has never even been engaged; that Marlene Dietrich and Hans Albers each own a car. Some questions come from understandable concern for the stars' well-being. "Rest assured," an apparently agitated coffee party in Neukölln is informed, "Dina Gralla has not shot herself." It is true that Dina Gralla has not been seen for a long time, and nobody can know for certain what artists are capable of doing in the heat of passion. But as well informed as *Filmwelt* is, the audience frequently asks more questions than ten issues of *Filmwelt* could possibly answer. "We have not yet been able to ascertain how much the actress weighs," runs one of the negative replies, which nevertheless allows for hope that the *weight of the actress* might one day be known.

The actress in question is Lilian Harvey. She and her partner Willy Fritsch are positively *mythical figures*, with which popular imagination concerns itself time and again.² Since film fans believe them to be inseparable, however, they cannot understand that these two heavenly bodies recently split. "Lilian Harvey and Willy Fritsch will certainly film together again someday"—*Filmwelt* often has to console disappointed readers with future hopes. Or they feel compelled to explain that the two stars, despite their appearances together, are not married and that Lilian Harvey has no plans to poison herself. Just how far this hero worship goes can be seen from the following reply, which tries not

to destroy any illusions: “We do not know whether Willy Fritsch was ‘bright’ in school, but we certainly assume so.”

Needless to say, those who adopt the title “Film Buff Fridel H. Sch.,” “Curious Movie Nut,” “Mickey Mouse from Hamburg,” or “Film-Ruth 9695 from Düsseldorf” cannot be satisfied by mere knowledge of their darlings. If they cannot consume these gleaming paragons down to the last crumb [mit Haut und Haaren],³ they at least want to hold a token in their hands that allows them to participate in the existence of their ideal types. They go after *autographs* like the now-eradicated Indians once hunted for scalps. Luckily, the stars seem to understand that they must not merely shine but also let their signatures trickle down from the sky. “All film stars,” our information bureau writes, “give autographs. You can address yourself directly to them. Naturally, the appropriate picture card and a self-addressed stamped envelope should always be included.”⁴ Sometimes the token of favor fails to appear, but *Filmwelt* admonishes the tardy ones or urges those awaiting reply not to despair. “We are genuinely sorry that Gösta Ekman has not granted your autograph request. But unfortunately, we cannot help you. Perhaps you might try again! After all, as you know, ‘Good things come to those who wait!’” In certain circumstances, the saying “Constant dripping wears away the stone” might also not be out of place.

Some particularly ardent admirers are not even satisfied by possessing the valuable names. They want to live among the holy themselves, sun themselves in the beams of the floodlights, and storm up to the heights where the Fritsch-Harvey constellation is in orbit. But the editorial office of *Filmwelt* stands like the angel with his fiery sword before the gates of *film studio heaven*. “If you want to be in sound films,” it declares time and again, “you must first be trained in elocution.” Or, out of a sense of obligation, they simply snub the various film fans: “In order to save yourself from disappointment, we recommend against a career in film.” Rightly so. I doubt whether the advice makes a lasting impression, for the admonished readers can appeal to the aforementioned saying that in the end, good things come to those who wait . . .

It is absolutely clear from this game of questions and answers, which regularly fills several single-spaced pages of the film magazine, what kinds of dreams haunt so many young people. *Film kitsch* has awoken these dreams within them. It fabricates a marvelous world on high, full of princes and princesses, and from now on the ignorant will mistake appearance for reality and gaze as though intoxicated at the fairy world above. They will thus be made useless and distracted from a struggle that could actually help them achieve better conditions of existence. But the correct task, which film too ought to share, is precisely not to mesmerize them into sleep, but rather to awaken them from their spell. Meanwhile, we still seem to be far from a time when all film fans will be cured of their stargazing.

Notes

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2. Between 1929 and 1939, Fritsch and Harvey costarred in Ufa productions including *Liebeswalzer* (Waltz of love, 1930), *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* (The three from the filling station, 1930), and *Glückskinder* (Lucky kids, 1936). Ufa deployed a marketing strategy suggesting that the two were also a couple offscreen.

3.

4. The “picture card” refers to cards with star photos, which fans collected in cigarette packs and pasted into photo albums. See the final text in the current chapter (no. 157).