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Letter-Writing Lunacy

Some interesting inside information concerning letters which the stars receive and what it costs them to answer fan mail.

By Charles Carter

THE other day I looked through a batch of letters which admiring fans had written and sent to one of my friends, a well-known star. And as I laid down the last one, I asked myself: "Has the whole world gone mad? Are the people of this country suffering from a plague of letter-writing lunacy?"

Before going any further let me assure you that I know, as do the players, that the reading and answering of letters from the fans are among the most valuable and important features of their work. As a single example of this, it is said that Mary Miles Minter was able to convince the Real-art officials of her popularity by the concrete evidence of her lists of correspondents, which numbered far into the thousands.

The letters which are courteous and intelligent supply the much-appreciated, and the only applause which the player receives. And from these letters the producers have been able to ascertain, in more than one case, the type of play in which a star was most popular. But in view of the tremendous personal expense to which the better-known stars are put by their correspondence, I sometimes wonder whether all of this expense is justified. For I happen to know what it costs some players

to answer fan mail and send photographs. Antonio Moreno is spending not less than two hundred dollars a week. He employs two secretaries. In addition to their salaries he has the expense of stationery, photomailers, postage, and photographs.

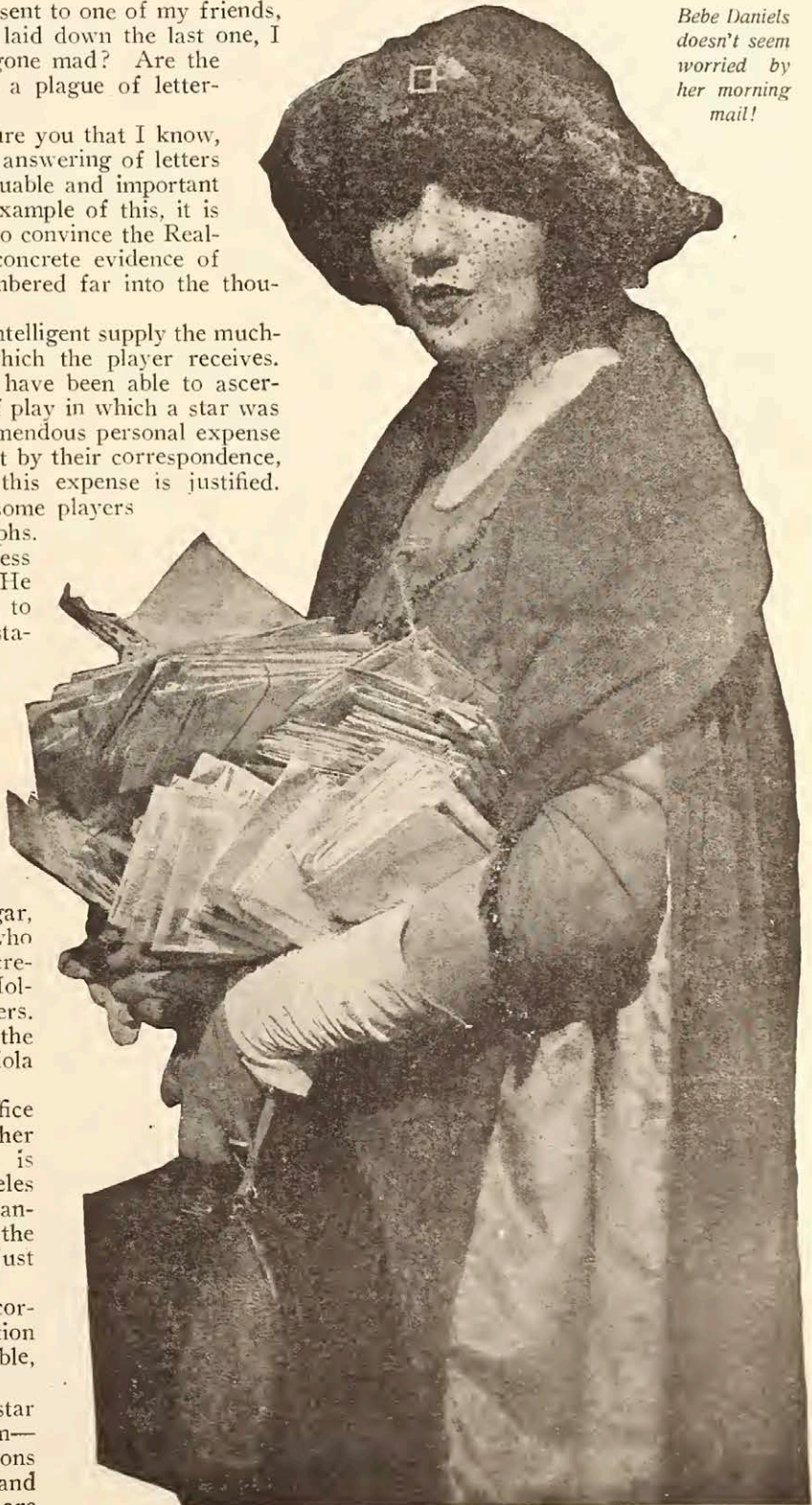
Thomas Meighan and Wallace Reid receive equally as much epistolary affliction. Fortunately for them, the Lasky studio relieves its stars of the task of replying to the effusive barrage. There a staff of secretaries work eight hours a day on stellar mail. There are other stars who depend upon the services of Miss Peggy Hagar, a clever young woman of Hollywood, who has built up a thriving business as secretary. She has an office in the Hotel Hollywood and employs several stenographers. Among the stars whom she relieves of the letter-writing burden are Nazimova, Viola Dana, Alice Lake, and Bert Lytell.

As for Mary Pickford, she has an office full of stenographers, in addition to her personal secretary. So voluminous is Mary's outgoing mail that the Los Angeles post office has requested her to use canceled stamps, thus saving Uncle Sam the expense of hiring several extra clerks just to cancel the Pickford postage!

The unfortunate thing about this correspondence is that so large a proportion of letters contain preposterous, impossible, and often insincere requests.

These include proposals that the star marry or adopt the writer or give him—or her—a job; there are urgent invitations to appear as guest of honor at parties and receptions at far-away places; there are

Bebe Daniels doesn't seem worried by her morning mail!



demands that the star purchase scenarios from the writer, sometimes with dire threats added, in case he should prefer not to do so; there are urgent and tearful appeals for clothing, money, and locks of hair. If Tony or Dick or Tommy attempted to grant these latter requests they'd have to play penitentiary-convict rôles, their heads would be cropped so closely.

Of course, the greatest number of requests are for photographs. It is perfectly natural that admiring fans should want photographs of their favorites. But if the fans had any idea of the way in which their requests—in the aggregate—were cutting down the stars' salaries I think that more of them would inclose enough postage stamps to cover the expense of the photograph and the mailing.

It is also rather discouraging to the players to know—as they do—that so many of their requests for photographs come through no personal interest in the star, but because the writer is simply trying to collect as many photographs as possible, at the players' expense. As proof of this, requests are received every day at the Metro studios for photographs of "Miss Lillian Way." Lillian Way is the name of the street on which the studio is located.

I have not written this in order to discourage the fans from writing to the players. As I emphasized at the outset, intelligent, appreciative, courteous letters, and even those which are honestly critical, are eagerly

looked for, read, and answered, so far as the players' time allows.

The proportion of letters which fall into this class is so small that this is not so large a job as might be imagined.

But certain types of letters should be discouraged, if only to help relieve the overburdened secretarial and post-office forces. In order to point out to the fans some of the things to avoid when writing to a star, Miss Betty Blythe recently had widely circulated the list of "Don'ts" for correspondents. The list, which is worth repeating, is as follows:

"Don't ask a star what she does with her old clothes. She probably wears them.

"Don't ask if she is married. Legal action may be pending, so she can't really tell you.

"Don't ask a star's age. It encourages lying.

"Don't propose marriage to a film actress. She might accept you and destroy your illusions.

"Don't ask advice about entering pictures. It's bound to be discouraging.

"Don't submit a scenario to a star. She's probably trying to sell one of her own.

"Don't forget Uncle Sam demands postage. He's no philanthropist.

"Don't be angry if a star does not answer your letter. Her intentions may be good, but her right arm weak. And remember sincere, sane letters always are appreciated."

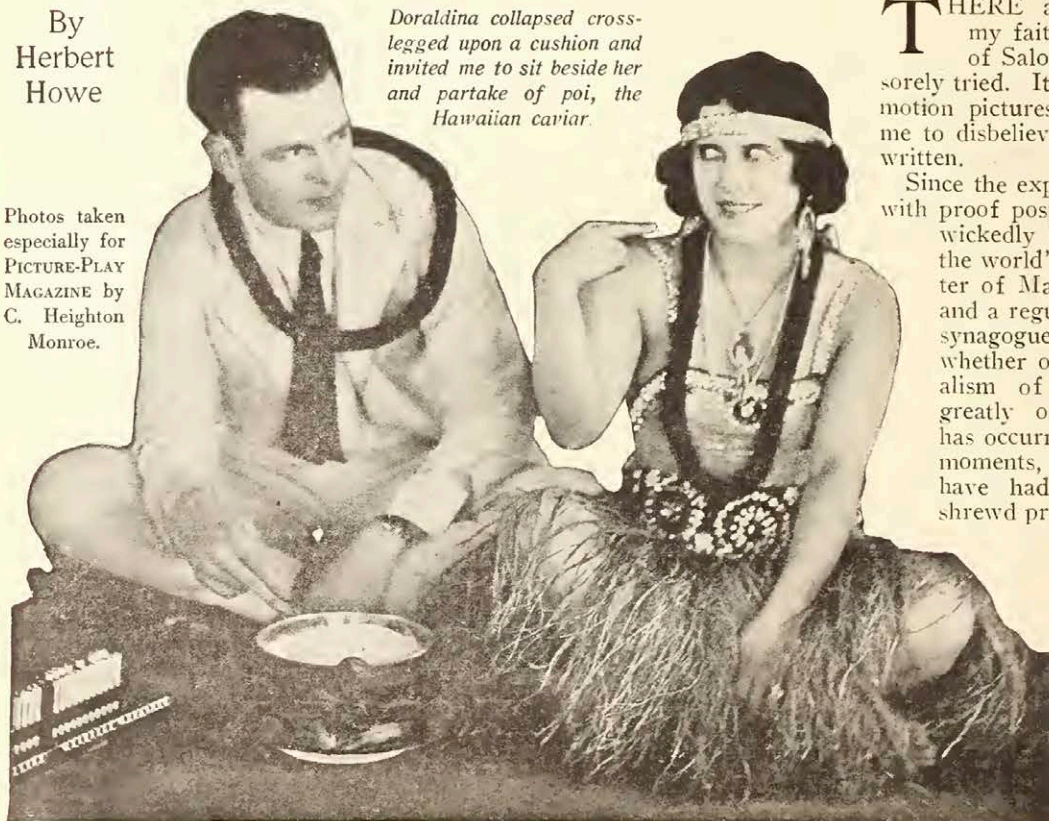
Outstripping Salome

Doraldina, the dancer who sent a succession of thrills up and down the entire length of New York's Great White Way, and who promises soon to make the nation's movie audience gasp, makes a preliminary bow, and tells all about herself.

By
Herbert
Howe

Photos taken
especially for
PICTURE-PLAY
MAGAZINE by
C. Heighton
Monroe.

Doraldina collapsed cross-legged upon a cushion and invited me to sit beside her and partake of poi, the Hawaiian caviar.



THERE are moments when my faith in the wickedness of Salome and Cleopatra is sorely tried. It is my experience in motion pictures which has caused me to disbelieve everything that is written.

Since the exposé of Theda Bara, with proof positive that "the most wickedly beautiful woman in the world" is a dutiful daughter of Ma and Pa Goodman, and a regular attendant at the synagogue, I've wondered whether or not the sensationalism of Cleopatra is not greatly overrated. It even has occurred to me, in heretic moments, that Salome might have had some diabolically shrewd press agent, who managed to corrupt the patriarchal press. I've even gone so far as to fancy Cleopatra a clever little business woman who vamped on week days and on Sundays sang in the choir