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2010

Seppälä, J 2010, Lovability and Problematic Gunshots : Mary Pickford, Her Films and Finnish Film Culture. in S Bull & A S Widding (eds), Not so Silent : Women in Cinema Before Sound. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Tukholma.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/344203>

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Lovability and Problematic Gunshots: Mary Pickford, Her Films and Finnish Film Culture

Jaakko Seppälä

Hollywood makes stars because stars sell movies, as Richard Dyer has put it.³⁹⁰ It goes without saying that this function is not restricted to American markets. When Hollywood films were imported to Finland in increasing numbers in the years following the First World War, names and images of Hollywood stars began to appear on the pages of local papers and magazines. Both Finnish film distributors and exhibitors used stars systematically to advertise the latest motion pictures. Various magazines directed the public's interest into the private lives of stars by publishing star-related articles. In the new star discourse, Finnish film culture got amalgamated with Hollywood films and promotional material.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s one of the biggest Hollywood stars in Finland was Mary Pickford—"America's Sweetheart". Lovability was also a major characteristic of her Finnish star image. However, in 1921 her sweetness was momentarily beclouded by the critical reception of one of her major films. Even though Hollywood kept marketing its products as politically free entertainment, foreign audiences made sense of them on their own terms. Hence, even an actress whose star image was as immaculate as that of Pickford could become a political concern.

A Star is Born

In late 1919 *Suomen Kuvalehti*—which at the time was the general interest magazine with the biggest circulation in Finland—published a portrait of Mary Pickford on its front cover. A modest text accompanied this image: "Mary Pickford, one of the most popular and attractive film actresses."³⁹¹ There is nothing more about her in the issue. In the published image, which seems to be a publicity still, Pickford peeks through a chink of a door. She smiles and looks eye-catching but, I would say, slightly shy. Pickford's beauty, which is present both in the image and the caption, was to be an important element of her Finnish star image. To what extent the reading public were familiar with Pickford and her films at the time this image was published is not an easy question to answer. On the basis of film censorship documents it appears that in 1919 her major feature films were still unknown in Finland. None of the Pickford films distributed by Artcraft Pictures had been seen in the country. However, it is likely that some of the Pickford films distributed by Paramount Pictures had been released in the mid 1910s.

³⁹⁰ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 5.

³⁹¹ *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 37, 1919, cover.

Furthermore, a number of Finns must have heard rumours about Pickford's worldwide fame, as many had relatives who had immigrated to the United States. It is also worth pointing out that in 1915 Pickford's high salary had been discussed in a short-lived film magazine *Biograafilehti* and she had even been called a star.³⁹² However, we should not jump to any hasty conclusions. The magazine was not widely read. Furthermore, in Finland such discussions were rare in the late 1910s and so were Pickford films. As Janet Staiger has pointed out, we need to ask whether audiences saw actors as stars.³⁹³ When it comes to Pickford, I do not think they did, not yet. Before the turn of the 1920s star-related publicity material was not widely available in the country.

Considering that Pickford's private life was not discussed in public, I have reached the conclusion that "America's Sweetheart" was still, in the terms of Richard deCordova, a picture personality in Finnish film culture. According to deCordova "the intertextuality that constituted the identity of the picture personality was produced and maintained largely by the cinema itself."³⁹⁴ This was the situation in Finland in the late 1910s. Images and texts, like the article published in *Biograafilehti* and the cover of *Suomen Kuvalehti*, did not much expand this identity as they are related to Pickford's films and her professional identity. In Finland, the private lives of film actors and actresses were not generally, if at all, discussed in public before the turn of the 1920s.

In the spring of 1920 *Suomen Kuvalehti* published yet another Pickford photograph on its front cover.³⁹⁵ This image differs from the earlier one in some significant respects, making it indicative of Pickford's new status in Finnish film culture. In this image, an elegant-looking Pickford poses for the camera. It is a portrait. In other words, it is an image of Pickford instead of being an image of an actress named Pickford playing a character. Furthermore, an inscription is discernible. The published image is a publicity portrait. As such, it is an indicator of American fan culture coming to Finland. A caption saying "Pickford is the highest paid woman in the world" accompanies this portrait. Nothing is said on the cover about her being an actress. A shift of interest is evident. Pickford is now represented as a person—not as a professional actress.

The shift is also evident in the article on Pickford that is published in this issue titled "The best-paid woman in the world: A description of a visit to

³⁹² Outi Hupaniittu, "Nuori Apollo, vanhan mamsellin ystävä: Helsinkiläisten suosikkinäyttelijä Valdemar Psilander ja 1910-luvun elokuvakulttuuri" in *Elokuva historiassa, historia elokuvassa*, ed. Heta Mulari & Lauri Piispa (Turku: Kulttuurihistoria, 2009), 48.

³⁹³ Janet Staiger, "Seeing Stars," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 10–11.

³⁹⁴ Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 51.

³⁹⁵ *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 12, 1920, cover.

the home of a world famous actress”.³⁹⁶ Thora Holm, who wrote this text and to whom the image published on the front cover is dedicated, was a journalist working for Swedish film magazine *Filmjournalen*. It seems that *Suomen Kuvalehti* had bought this article and translated it into Finnish. The editorial board clearly expected there to be interest for an article on Pickford. Whether this was because she was widely known as an actress or because readers were supposedly interested in the best-paid woman in the world is a tricky question to answer. The latter is likely but at this time she may also have had admirers in Finland.

As the article’s rubric suggests, Holm writes about her meeting with Pickford and her mother at the star’s home. Several aspects of Pickford’s star image that were to persist throughout the 1920s are present in this early article. This makes it a key text in the study of the development of Pickford’s Finnish star image. The article offers readers, in the words of Jon Burrows, an experience of authentic personality.³⁹⁷ Holm stresses how Pickford is both ordinary and extraordinary. In the words of Holm, her persona is small and artless. The author says she found it hard to believe the Pickford she talked with was the distinguished film star. She was so modest and pleasant. Small and artless she might have been, but at the same time she was extraordinary. The most marvellous things about Pickford, according to Holm, are her long golden hair, beautiful brown eyes, fine-looking skin and body of a twelve-year-old. Pickford, Holm stresses, receives invitations to marry and from 2000 to 3000 fan letters a day. Here characteristics of childlikeness and womanliness are represented as indicative of Pickford’s real self, which, according to Gaylyn Studlar, was the state of affairs in the United States as well.³⁹⁸ More intimate revelations concern Pickford’s dreams and hopes. Pickford, for example, had told Holm she wished she could travel to Europe someday for the reason that she received so many letters from there. I suppose there were those who hoped she would also visit Finland. Among the issues mentioned readers learned about Pickford’s career and high salary. Bluntly put, this article was supposed to give the readers an idea of what kind of a person the world famous actress was.

Some of the most persisting myths about Pickford and her career that circulated in the United States were imported to Finland with the publication of Holm’s article. Pickford, just to give an example, had told Holm she had began her acting career when she was only five years old. This, however, is

³⁹⁶ Thora Holm, ”Maailman parhaiten palkattu nainen: Kuvaus käynnistä maailmankuulun näyttelijättären luona.”, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 12, 1920, 290.

³⁹⁷ Jon Burrows, “ ‘Our English Mary Pickford’: Alma Taylor and Ambivalent British Stardom in the 1910s,” in *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, ed. Bruce Babington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 32.

³⁹⁸ Gaylyn Studlar, ”Oh, ’Doll Divine’: Mary Pickford, Masquerade, and the Pedophilic Gaze” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 366.

not true as according to Pickford biographer Eileen Whitfield she was eight years old when she first starred on stage.³⁹⁹ In other words this interview, just like the imported publicity stills and portraits, were building a certain kind of image of Pickford. Pickford's Finnish star image was, in effect, largely controlled by the Hollywood studios. However, whether something is true or not is beside the point. When it comes to star images what really matters is what is *said* to be true. That is what gets discussed.

Oh, Little Girl, Never Grow Up

In the early 1920s more Pickford related articles were published in Finland. One of these appeared in 1921 in the newly founded film magazine *Filmiaitta* (and in its Swedish language edition *Filmrevyn*). The anonymous author of this article depicts Pickford's beauty and kindness in poetic terms and stresses how these are destined to warm the cockles of one's heart. Interestingly, next to nothing is said about Pickford's career and private life. It is as if the author is not willing to make a distinction between Pickford and the characters she plays. This text, even though presumably written by a journalist working for the magazine, is best interpreted as an expression of fandom. As such, the article largely indicates what the attraction was all about. In the light of this text contemporaries saw Pickford as 'a fairytale princess [...] who is good, simple and a natural soul that does not want to know anything about pretence and hypocrisy'.⁴⁰⁰ Even though Pickford was a talented woman and many contemporaries knew about her long acting career, success and enormous earnings, she was discussed as a benevolent girl, some even referred to her as a doll.⁴⁰¹ The characters she plays in her films are good-hearted girls. In contemporary discussions those characters are always referred to as children and under no circumstances as women. Even though it was possible to think of Pickford as a "child-woman," my argument is that in the Finnish discourse of the early 1920s her girlish attributes somewhat outweighed more mature ones.⁴⁰² It seems that Finns did not pay as much attention to the private lives of Hollywood stars as they did to their screen performances. Hollywood divorces, drug addictions and murders were discussed in Finnish magazines but star scandals were an unknown phenomenon in Finland.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Eileen Whitfield, *Pickford: The Woman Who Made Hollywood* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 22–23.

⁴⁰⁰ Anonymous, "Mary Pickford", *Filmiaitta*, issue 2, 1921, 18.

⁴⁰¹ Anonymous, "Kaksi kaunista ihmistä: Suomen Kuvalehden Pariisin kirjeenvaihtaja haastatellut Douglas Fairbanksia ja Mary Pickfordia". *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 21, 1924, 667.

⁴⁰² Gaylyn Studlar, "Oh, 'Doll Divine': Mary Pickford, Masquerade, and the Pedophilic Gaze" in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 350.

⁴⁰³ Jaakko Seppälä, "Tähtikuume viriää Suomessa: Tähtien ihailu ja omasta tähteydestä haaveilu", *WiderScreen*, no. 3 (2008), <http://www.widerscreen.fi/2008-3/>

According to the article published in *Filmiaitta* Finns now had the pleasure of seeing Pickford in one of her latest roles—that is, as “a young orphaned girl” in *A Romance of the Red Woods*.⁴⁰⁴ This film directed by Cecil B. DeMille had been released in The United States already in 1917—four years earlier. *A Romance of the Red Woods* was in no way one of Pickford’s latest films as claimed. Because new first-rate Hollywood films, like the ones starring Pickford, were expensive, Finnish distributors and exhibitors could afford them only years after their initial release dates. This conclusion can be reached by comparing Finnish and American release dates of prestige productions and star vehicles. Thus, feature films starring Pickford had not yet been screened in Finland in the late 1910s. A peculiar state of affairs resulted from this disparity between the release dates: Finns knew about Pickford’s career, private life and popularity but had not seen her feature films. This created expectations.

One by one, the anticipated Pickford films were imported to Finland in the early 1920s. No box office records survive from the silent days, but the popularity of these new films cannot only be interpreted solely on the basis of the type and amount of advertisements and criticism published in contemporary magazines and newspapers. We must also take into account the discussions that took place around Pickford and her films in the readers’ sections of Finnish film magazines. When United Artists opened its office in Helsinki it advertised coming attractions with major stars like Pickford.⁴⁰⁵ Pickford’s films were also advertised in big magazines like *Suomen Kuvalehti*.⁴⁰⁶ Furthermore, film magazines published a variety of Pickford related questions and answers sent by their readers. One who used the pseudonym “Shimmy”, just to give an example, wanted to know if other readers’ of *Filmiaitta* knew whether Douglas Fairbanks and his wife Pickford were still in Europe.⁴⁰⁷ Other kinds of Pickford related texts were also published in film magazines. One reader who used the pseudonym Pick Landwart had written a poem celebrating Pickford’s role in *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (Maurice Tourneur, 1917) to be published in *Filmrevyn*.⁴⁰⁸ Considering the number of advertisements and the quantity and quality of these discussions it seems that most Finns did not mind watching old films as long as they were as good as those starring Pickford as an adolescent girl. This is an important fact to notice because in 1924 one anonymous reviewer wrote about how old anticipated films had often turned out to be disappointments.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ Anonymous, “Mary Pickford”, *Filmiaitta*, issue 2, 1921, 18.

⁴⁰⁵ Anonymous, “Näytäntökauden uutuuksia”, *Filmiaitta*, issue 10, 1923, 126–127.

⁴⁰⁶ Anonymous, “Huomattavia filmejä”, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 49, 1923, 1423.

⁴⁰⁷ Shimmy, “Är Doug och Mary ännu i Paris?”, *Filmrevyn*, issue 3, 1922, 57.

⁴⁰⁸ Pick Landwart, “En stackars, liten rik flicka.”, *Filmrevyn*, issue 7, 1922, 128.

⁴⁰⁹ Anonymous, “Filmikronikka”, *Ylioppilaslehti* 21 (1924), s. 334.

Dickensian Atmosphere

A Romance of the Red Woods opened in Finland in late 1921. *Stella Maris* (Marshall Neilan, 1918) soon followed. The anonymous journalist working for *Filmiaitta* stressed in poetic words what a pleasure it was to see the celestial star in *A Romance of the Red Woods*.⁴¹⁰ The film, when it comes to Pickford's role as a brave orphan, seems to have fulfilled all expectations that had been fostered by the press. *Stella Maris*, on the other hand, was not as easily digested. In late 1921 *Filmiaitta* published a review of the film written by an anonymous author.⁴¹¹ In this review Pickford is volubly praised for her dual role in the film. She plays the role of Stella Maris, a young crippled girl, and that of Unity Blake, an insecure orphan who is neither beautiful nor happy like the other character. According to Kevin Brownlow, "for the most beautiful star in the world to play such an ugly character was an act of courage unprecedented in the cinema".⁴¹²

The plot of *Stella Maris*, the reviewer argues, is badly inflated. According to him the climax of the film shows a lack of judgement and exemplifies bad taste. At the time when there was no yellow press in Finland and critics felt it was best to neglect inferior films instead of writing negative reviews, this was harsh criticism.⁴¹³ In the climax under discussion, Unity shoots her former mistress who is a bitter alcoholic released from imprisonment short time ago. She does this partly as a revenge but also because the woman stands in the way of the love affair of Stella Maris and John Risca who is legally married to this spiteful character. After committing the cold-blooded murder, Unity takes her own life. The suicide takes place off-screen. When the mistress and Unity, who has also been in love with John, lie dead, Stella is happily united with her loved one. "A happy ending is achieved at the cost of two lives", as Brownlow has put it.⁴¹⁴

In the review under analysis, the two gunshots are seen as highly problematic. With a different ending, it seems, the film would have been rather good. Just how spectators reacted to this criticised climax is not known. The published review has at the very least directed attention to these awkward aspects. Some, however, seem to have found the film to their liking. One of *Filmiaitta's* readers actually began to use "Stella Maris" as her pseudonym on the readers' section.⁴¹⁵ The review, it seems to me, is best seen as an indirect expression of contemporary attitudes. Many liked *Stella Maris*, that

⁴¹⁰ Anonymous, "Mary Pickford", *Filmiaitta*, issue 2, 1921, 18.

⁴¹¹ Anonymous, "Filmiohjelmistosta.", *Filmiaitta*, issue 4, 1921, 54–55.

⁴¹² Kevin Brownlow, *Mary Pickford Rediscovered: Rare Pictures of a Hollywood Legend* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 145.

⁴¹³ "Toimituksen huomautus", *Filmiaitta*, issue 10, 1923, 134.

⁴¹⁴ Kevin Brownlow, *Mary Pickford Rediscovered: Rare Pictures of a Hollywood Legend* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 144.

⁴¹⁵ Stella Maris, "Mikä näkemistäne saksalaisista historiallisista filmeistä oli suurenmoisin, mikä kaunein?", *Filmiaitta*, issue 7, 1921, 109.

much is likely, but at least some found the conclusion unacceptable. The purpose of the review was to make them think just that.

The important question is: why did the anonymous reviewer, and supposedly many spectators as well, find these gunshots so problematic when Pickford and her films were loved in general? One might assume that answer relates to the Dickensian atmosphere of *Stella Maris*, although Finns at the time were not against melodrama and tragic endings in general. Numerous Tsarist films, which are famous for melodramatic action and unhappy if not even horrifying endings, were popular and appreciated in Finland.⁴¹⁶ Even in the early 1920s after Finland had gained independence Finnish critics wrote positively about them.⁴¹⁷ In other words there must have been something else in *Stella Maris* that related to Finnish culture in a troubling way.

In Finland *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (John S. Robertson, 1920) premiered around the same time with *Stella Maris*. This is another film with a tragic ending where the leading actor, in this case John Barrymore, plays a double role. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was a tremendous success at the box-office and critics vastly praised it. Barrymore's acting skills were especially celebrated.⁴¹⁸ It seems to have been acceptable for him to play the obnoxious role of Mr. Hyde. However, although Pickford's role as Unity showed skill, it was found to be troubling and unattractive. One considerable reason behind this may have been the fact that at the time Barrymore was largely unknown in Finland whereas Pickford had a robust star image as a sweet fairytale princess. Barrymore playing Mr. Hyde gave taste of his considerable acting skills without violating audiences' expectations. The cruel ending of *Stella Maris* was so uneasy to watch because it was the lovely Pickford playing the role of the murderer who ends up taking her own life. Many Finns must have felt that Unity was not the Pickford they had read about and paid to see.

They Both Reached for the Gun

Both *Stella Maris* and *A Romance of the Red Woods* premiered in Finland in late 1921. Pickford handles revolvers in both films, but only *Stella Maris* was criticised for the way in which she does this. Clearly it is worth exploring how Pickford's star image and the comments published in *Filmiaitta* relate to these gunslinging scenes.

A Romance of the Red Woods tells the story of an orphaned girl named Jenny Lawrence who travels to the West to live with her uncle. When preparing for her journey a friend warns her of the dangers lurking in the West by showing her a drawing depicting settlers attacked by Native Americans.

⁴¹⁶ Sven Hirn, *Kuvat elävät: Elokuvatoiminta Suomessa 1908–1918* (Helsinki: VAPK-kustannus ja Suomen Elokuva-arkisto, 1991), 196. Markku Nenonen, *Elokuvatarkastuksen synty Suomessa (1907–1922)* (Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura, 1999), 94.

⁴¹⁷ L. Kki, "Kuvafilmi sivistysvälineenä III", *Filmiaitta*, issue 17, 1925, 298.

⁴¹⁸ Anonymous, "Filmiohjelmistomme", *Filmiaitta*, issue 7, 1922, 116; "Filmiohjelmistosta", *Filmiaitta*, issue 3, 1921, 42.

Jenny pulls out a small revolver and shows it to her friend. This gesture is a statement of her ability to defend herself. However, the gun is so tiny that spectators are hardly impressed. Then she proceeds to demonstrate how the revolver works. At the moment of pulling the trigger she is slightly looking away from her assumed target. In other words Jenny knows how the gun works but she lacks both guts and skill to use it properly. This scene emphasises Jenny's vulnerability even while telling about her determination and courage. Here, attributes of Victorian femininity are mixed with characteristics of the new woman.

Later in the film Jenny faces a situation where she is threatened by an outlaw holding a bullwhip. Jenny takes her revolver and aims to shoot. The gun, however, is not loaded and she is too scared to look at her target. Her threatening does not make much of an impact on the outlaw. Being sure Jenny will not be able to shoot, he gives her his huge long-barrelled revolver. 'Try this one—it's loaded!', the intertitle says.⁴¹⁹ Instead of grabbing the gun Jenny starts to sob. The outlaw—and presumably spectators as well—were right about her: there is no way she is going to be a killer.

In Jenny's last gun scene in *A Romance of the Red Woods* she rides a stagecoach that gets robbed by the outlaw and his companion. Being determined at the moment of danger she takes her small revolver and loads it. By now Jenny has spent enough time in the West to have gained more gumption and talent for defending herself. When outside the stagecoach she aims properly at the masked outlaw whom she does not recognise. Then she shoots. She hits the outlaw in the arm wounding him. This wound becomes a vital plot device. It is a stigma in the hand of the outlaw with whom Jenny is falling in love. Later in the film he wants to reform and Jenny protects him from villagers who recognise him from this wound and want him hanged—perhaps Jenny even begins to regret she ever shot at him. All things considered Jenny is a brave good-hearted girl, just the kind of beautiful character Finns of the day expected Pickford to play. Even when handling guns Jenny is true to the star image the audience had learned to take pleasure in.

In the climax of *Stella Maris*, Pickford handles a gun in a different way. In the scene in question mistreated Unity Blake is an angry and bitter character that intrudes her former mistress's house while she is asleep. In other words here we have Unity breaking the law. Unity stalks in the dark corridors carrying a pistol in her coat pocket though spectators do not know about the gun just yet. Parallel editing is used to indicate that the former mistress wakes to the noises Unity makes. Gloomy low-key lighting emphasises dark tensions. At one point light falls on the eyes of Unity whose face and body are surrounded by vast shadows. She does not blink. Her staring eyes foreground her determinedness. Unity might not know what she is about to face

⁴¹⁹ *A Romance in the Red Woods* in *The Cecil B. DeMille Classics Collection* (DVD set by Passport International Entertainment, 2007).

but whatever that might be she is ready to go through with it. Looking quietly ahead she opens the door to her former mistress's bedroom and closes it behind her. There is no way out. When the mistress is fully awake and realises who is in her room she mocks the intruder. She makes clear her intention to go on with her wicked deeds until she has broken Stella Maris' heart. Unity's memories of herself being mistreated by this woman are now depicted. Hoping to protect Stella from such sufferings and exacting revenge Unity pulls the trigger of the gun she holds in her pocket. A cloud of smoke bursts in to the room and the former mistress dies. Then Unity shoots herself. This suicide, however, takes place off-screen and spectators learn about it later. The gun in her pocket must be as small as the one seen in *A Romance of the Red Woods*. However, at close range and when properly aimed it is just as deadly as the one that is held by the outlaw in *A Romance in the Red Woods*.

In the United States Pickford was loved for playing angels with "dirty faces". In the early 1920s Finns were eager to see her play such characters. This interest had been fed by material published in magazines. However, Unity was something different—certainly not an angel. Her actions not only violated the audience's expectations but their morals as well.

Contextualising the Case

It seems the actions that Unity takes in the climax of *Stella Maris* steeply contradicted expectations that had been created by the Finnish press and more conventional Pickford films like *A Romance of the Red Woods*. Skillfully narrated melodramatic action where lovability is contrasted with brutality in realistic surroundings—like in *Stella Maris*—truly shocked many Finns of the day. There are interesting cases that prove this. For example, D. W. Griffith's murky London melodrama *Broken Blossoms* was relentlessly cut by national film censorship.⁴²⁰ Explicit sexuality and violent scenes were among issues the film sensors ruled against. Apparently the most violent scenes of *Broken Blossoms* were at least shortened, although it is not known what exactly was cut. However, even in this cut form the film appalled *Filmiaitta's* anonymous reviewer.⁴²¹ Witnessing how a father beats her daughter's love affair to pieces with great enjoyment was, according to this reviewer, so vulgar that audiences would surely detest it. Without these bursts of violence that are contrasted with lovability the reviewer would have liked the film. *Broken Blossoms* was praised for fine acting and Griffith's story telling. This criticism is surprisingly similar to that on *Stella Maris*.

Conversely, the melodramatic scenes in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were acceptable, even pleasing in all their nastiness, because they were not tied to lovability or to realism for that matter. In *Filmiaitta* the film was reviewed

⁴²⁰ Valtion elokuvatarkastamon päätösasiakirja 12169.

⁴²¹ Anonymous, "Katkenneita kukkasia", *Filmiaitta*, issue 12, 1923, 156.

unambiguously as a suspense story based on a well-known novel.⁴²² According to the reviewer the film told a lot about the dual nature of man. The unpleasant scenes where Jekyll is transformed to Hyde were seen as being depicted with horrifying realism. Yet this realism differed from that of *Stella Maris* and *Broken Blossoms*. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a fantasy film whereas *Stella Maris* and *Broken Blossoms* lack fantasy elements altogether. It seems that there was something in the lifelikeness and recognisability of the events and milieus portrayed in these two films that troubled some Finns.

To understand why the realism of the melodramatic events depicted in *Stella Maris* was seen that troubling it is necessary to contextualise the reception of the film a bit further. In 1918, soon after becoming a sovereign state, Finland faced a civil war. Revolutionary elements, inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, took over country's socialist movement and called for a general uprising. It has been estimated that around 36,000 people died during this conflict and many were tortured and mutilated.⁴²³ In the early 1920s when *Stella Maris* and other films discussed in this article were reviewed in *Filmiaitta* the nation was severely traumatized by these events. In my view the Civil War and its aftermath are contextual factors that must have affected the reception of these and other films. However, one needs to be careful in making such assumptions. The events of 1918 were not openly discussed, least of all in film related articles. In other words, arguments that can be made about the relation of these events to the reception of *Stella Maris* remain hypothetical.

So how could *Stella Maris* relate to the Civil War? The answer is straightforward. Unity Blake is a working class character that rises against her former mistress. Furthermore, she uses violence to drive her cause. To Finns, the scene where the armed working class character intrudes into the upper class home must have been a harsh reminder of the violent events that had taken place in 1918. According to psychohistorian Juha Siltala, armed rebellious women were severely hated by the winning side and it treated them accordingly.⁴²⁴ Unity Blake, my argument goes, brought uneasy memories to minds of spectators who were looking for escapist entertainment promised by Pickford's star image. The fact that a happy ending follows Unity's actions is what *Filmiaitta's* reviewer referred to when he argued that the film exemplifies bad taste. In real life the consequences had been anything but happy.⁴²⁵ Here we have an example of a reading created through negotiation of a set of cultural relations that certainly was not predicted by Hollywood studios.

⁴²² Anonymous, "Filmiohjelmistosta.", *Filmiaitta*, issue 3, 1921, 41.

⁴²³ Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Keuruu: Juha Siltala ja Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2009), 16.

⁴²⁴ Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Keuruu: Juha Siltala ja Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2009), 433–460.

⁴²⁵ Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Keuruu: Juha Siltala ja Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2009), passim.

Pickford's Star Image in Finnish Film Culture

At the turn of the 1920s the nature of available information concerning Pickford was transformed. Previously her private life had not been discussed on the pages of Finnish magazines. This transformation brought the star into existence. Richard deCordova argues that “with the emergence of the star the question of the player’s existence outside his or her work in film became the primary focus of discourse.”⁴²⁶ Pickford talked about her life and dreams in the interview that was translated into Finnish. Furthermore, in the early 1920s film magazines published questions and answers concerning her identity outside the medium. Pickford’s private life became an important part of this discourse. Now she was a character in a narrative that was separable from her work in any film and this discourse involved people in the cinema outside the movie theatres.⁴²⁷ However, it seems that the private life of Pickford and other Hollywood stars did not weigh as much in Finland as in the United States. Pickford’s work in films was still the primary focus of discussions rather than her life outside the cinema.

Even though her private life was not the main focus of discussion, Pickford’s Finnish star image was surprisingly similar to her American one. One reason for this state of affairs was the fact that a lot of publicity material was imported to Finland. This material, just like the films, was made in Hollywood. However, if we agree that “audiences create meanings through their negotiation of a set of cultural relations that extend well beyond the boundaries of any individual film”, as Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes have put it, we might want to ask why there was no distinctively Finnish conception of Pickford?⁴²⁸ It seems to me that the values at the heart of Pickford’s star image had a great deal to do with this. Her star image, like star images of other stars, was constructed to elicit particular responses. Ideas and morals Pickford expressed in interviews, publicity portraits and other images of her published in Finnish magazines and the films themselves were found endearing. Finns were eager to discuss her films and they wrote poems about her. The climax of *Stella Maris* excluded, the majority of filmgoers were of the opinion that Pickford was, even when handling guns, just lovable.

⁴²⁶ Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 98.

⁴²⁷ Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 99, 114.

⁴²⁸ Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, introduction to *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (London: BFI, 2004), vii.