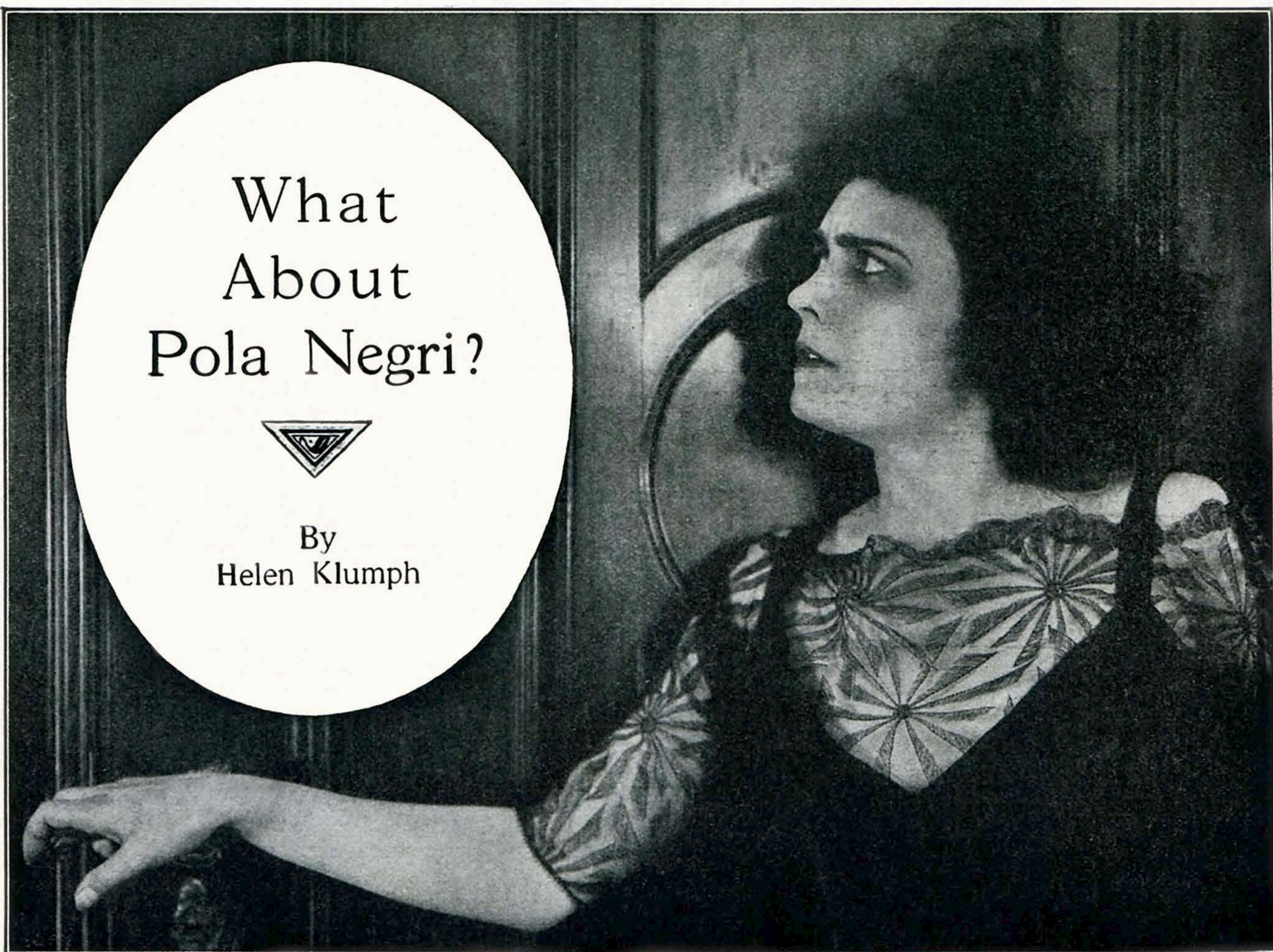




*Fascinating to men, a little bit scornful of other women, that is Pola Negri. Her dynamic personality may not please you, but it grips you. She is one of the most amazing personalities in motion pictures.*

# What About Pola Negri?

By  
Helen Klumph



**A**LMOST as old as the motion picture is the legend that off the screen the vampire is a wholesome character. At the theater the subtitles endow her with almost diabolical power; in real life we read that she has only one husband and several children, that she lives on the right side of Main Street, and that her favorite form of amusement is a taffy pull or reading Elsie Dinsmore aloud to the children. The next time we see her we notice flaws in her work. She doesn't seem so sleek, so serpentine, and we are inclined to think that instead of plotting relentlessly against her next victim, she is thinking up a snappy recipe for a new kind of custard.

Perhaps that is why our home-grown vampires don't continue to thrill us. Perhaps that is one reason for the tremendous impression made in this country by Pola Negri, whom First National introduced to this country in "Passion" about a year ago and who has been seen frequently since.

There is no make-believe about her characterizations. There is no flinching at realism. She vibrates. She is a magnet. Her passion is swift and torrential and relentless, and her gaiety is spontaneous. Crude and coarse she may be at times, but she is always convincing. And the effect of her screen work has never been diluted by reports of her simple home life.

At first when I started to find out all I could about Pola Negri, I was afraid that some one would try to cast an aura of domesticity about her, in the well-intentioned belief that no actress is complete without the home touch nowadays. Thank goodness, no one did. Remember her *Du Barry*, remember her *Carmen*, and

then try to reconcile the woman who interpreted them to one who is devoted to the interests of a little home.

It cannot be done. Pola Negri belongs to the world of affairs, to the pulsating, dynamic world where artistic history is being made. The great cities of the world must be the home of such a woman, brilliant men and women her friends.

## "The Woman Who Never Sleeps."

"What is Pola Negri like?" I asked a young art student who returned from Berlin just at the time that "Passion" made Pola Negri the most-talked-of player in New York. "They call her 'The woman who never sleeps,'" he told me. "That's a tribute to her popularity, not a reproach. Germans don't expect their actors to lead cloistered lives."

"What about Pola Negri?" I asked anxiously of Jeanie Macpherson when she returned from abroad last year. "I was so disappointed," Miss Macpherson told me, "I didn't meet her. She was away, at Nice, on a rest cure when I was in Germany."

## Forecast Her Future for Yourself

**This fascinating Polish actress was the sensation of motion pictures last year. But will she become a real favorite of the American fans?**

**If you are one of the many who delight in sugar-sweet heroines, you will not care for Pola Negri, but if you are one of the few who are fascinated by her rugged work on the screen, you will want to know more of her.**

**In this she is presented—not as she impressed one interviewer—but as many film celebrities have known her. Only a composite picture made up from the varying impressions of many people can give you an adequate idea of the many-sided personality of this remarkable woman. Here is that multiplicity of views of her from every angle.**



*Men find Pola Negri charmingly feminine.*

So you can take that title for what you think it is worth.

#### **A Leader of Fashion.**

Charles Chaplin says that Pola Negri is the loveliest thing he saw in all Europe. He says that she is really beautiful, in a typically Polish way, with jet-black hair, very small white teeth, and warm coloring.

"You never saw any one look so smart," Anna Q. Nilsson told me explosively when I asked her impression of Pola Negri. "She is perfectly groomed and there is a flair to every movement she makes. But—" That "But" was very expressive. "Is she haughty?" I suggested. "I wouldn't say." Miss Nilsson retreated from dangerous ground hastily. It's a mean trick asking one player her opinion of another. "There were five of us who just happened to go into the Berlin office of Famous Players when she was there, and

perhaps she didn't like meeting so many of us at once. Anyway, she rushed off immediately."

"She's striking," Rubye de Remer told me. "I'd have given anything to have a chance to study her closely. But I met her in a big restaurant in Berlin where she was dining with some Famous Players officials and soon after I arrived, she hurried away."

Other players all told the same story. They were very much impressed with the slight glimpses they got of the fiery Pola. But she always hurried away when they joined her party. It may be true that the quickest way to arouse patriotism in American stars is to mention Pola Negri's acting, but also it seems that Pola Negri doesn't care so much for the competition of Americans. It is said she never stays at a party where there is a younger or prettier woman.

#### **What the Men Think.**

Men who have met Pola Negri cannot seem to leave any nice superlatives out of their descriptions of her. James Kirkwood's is a fair example. He met her while he was in Europe making scenes for the George Fitzmaurice-Paramount picture, "The Man From Home" and though that was some months ago, no one has yet supplanted her in his affection.

"A vivid personality—international in its appeal," he sums her up.

"I had an unusual opportunity to study the real Pola Negri," he told me. "When I went to Berlin some German film executives arranged a special dinner at the Hotel Adlon honoring a group of American film people who happened to be there.

"In the party were Mr. and Mrs. Norman Kerry, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kaufman and Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Loew, also Directors Ernst Lubitsch and Wegener, and Pola Negri. So you can see that the stage was well set for observing the reactions of Pola Negri both to Americans and the European film experts with whom she has been associated.

"Pola Negri is perhaps the most amazingly attractive woman I have ever met. She possesses more than a usual share of good looks, but this is backed up by a most powerful personality. She is vivacious, vital, gloriously alive.

"Although I saw her in Teutonic surroundings and she spoke in German she in no way savors of Deutschland. By nationality a Pole, her appeal is not limited by boundary lines. Her quick response to emotions, her use of her hands in conversation, her adaptability to persons and surroundings give her an artistic value equally salable in New York, Kamchatka or the Island of Yap.

"Pola Negri will always be popular with men patrons of motion pictures because she is an unusual combination of two qualities particularly enjoyed by the mas-



*Crude and coarse at times—as in this scene from "The Red Peacock"—Pola Negri is always convincing.*

culine element, vitality and vivacity, these two softened by truly feminine traits which keep her from that air of masculinity which men resent. And at the same time she is not a clinging vine. In other words she steers a splendid middle course which should build and retain for her the admiration of both men and women.

"I can't repeat directly anything Pola Negri said at the Adlon dinner. As I have said she speaks such rapid German that I caught only occasional snatches. My more gifted American friends, however, raved to me for several days afterward over the catholicity of her knowledge. She seemed to be able to talk with intelligence on modern literature, politics, the drama, in fact any of the topics which might come up at such a gathering. My impression was that she was an exceedingly well-read woman.

"She was very curious about America, expecting to come here to make pictures sooner or later. In fact she is studying English assiduously with that end in view. And she is accurate in her information regarding our country, having closely questioned every American player or director with whom she has come into contact. She likes Americans, for they 'play up' to the vivacity which is her greatest characteristic. Her associates in the German film studios are naturally more phlegmatic and as a result Pola Negri fits smoothly into any American gathering she may attend."

### The Center of Attraction.

According to all accounts Pola Negri is accustomed to a great deal of attention wherever she goes. There is always a circle of admiring men about her; she dominates every conversation as high-handedly as a queen. She is a star who lives up to the legends and traditions of artistic temperament. She is not modest; she is not ingratiating; she is not sweet, nor appealing. In fact, one can hardly apply to her any of the adjectives our own stars love to merit. She is made of sterner stuff; pride and confidence and above all the defiant insouciance of a born artist. If she can't have the center of the stage at all times, she won't play. That trait in most actors is detestable; in a Bernhardt, a Duse, it is part of their charm. Pola's classification is left to you and posterity. For my humble part, I like her.

"She is very conspicuous looking," Ralph Kohn, the assistant secretary and treasurer of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, told me. He had just returned from abroad where he had dined and danced and chatted with the intense Pola, and he beamed with pleasure as he told about her.

*She is sparkingly vivacious—often with an undercurrent of defiance. This scene, also from "The Red Peacock" shows how wealth transforms the poor girl below.*



*In the early scenes of "The Red Peacock" Pola Negri does not flinch from making herself unattractive.*



"She would attract attention anywhere. She is very distinctive, always—wears hats trimmed with what-do-you-call-it, like the ones in her photographs."

"Burnt ostrich feathers," I supplied.

"Yes; that's it," he said. "It looks like a barbaric headdress on her, but awfully stunning. The string of pearls she had on when I met her would have made her round shouldered if she wore them all the time, but that kind of thing suits Pola Negri. She looks just like an American girl so far as dress goes, has more style than any one else I saw abroad.

"She is not vivacious, not sparkling, but she is entertaining. She doesn't speak English, you know, but we managed to get along in German, Polish, and a little French. She is studying English."

"Is it true," I asked him. "That she really knows quite a bit of English, but pretends she doesn't, so that she can listen to what visitors from America say about her?"

"How'd I know that?" he asked despairingly and then added, "Well, she's got a wonderful sense of humor," as much as to admit that there

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might be some truth in the story. "She asked me several times if I didn't think she could pass for an American girl. We were dancing to an American jazz band—they have them in all the European restaurants, you know—and they kept playing encore after encore, and we danced on and on. Finally when they stopped we were both breathless but she managed to gasp, 'If I did that in America they'd never know I was a foreigner, would they?' She's an exceptionally fine dancer.

"She never talks about motion pictures as American players do so continually. She is well-informed on all subjects—politics, art, current events. She made a wonderful impression on me," he added enthusiastically and then added with a trace of cynicism, "still you never can judge a player by the way they treat the officers of the corporation they work for."

#### A Matter of History.

Pola Negri was born in a little town in south Poland between twenty-five and thirty years ago. Impressionable men who have met her declare that she is not a day over twenty-two; women stars who survey her popularity in this country with jealous eyes say that she must be thirty-five at least; the estimate that seems most nearly true is that of a fellow countryman who says that she is twenty-seven. Her parents were poor, and when she was very young she went to work in Wertheim's department store in Berlin at about four dollars a week. She seems to have cast adrift from her family for at this time she lived alone, in a rooming house.

Pola was too ambitious to stay there long. She played the violin fairly well, so with her sublime self-assurance she sought an engagement in the concert halls—and got it. When she reached Russia she joined the Imperial Ballet. She was too old for the regular ballet which takes its recruits as children but in her persuasive way Pola assured the ballet masters that they really needed her in the group of character dancers. Even in that galaxy of stars, Pola was noticed—not so much for her dancing as for the chorus of cavaliers that followed her everywhere. But even the excitements of a career in the ballet palled on the young lady after a while and she decided to go in for drama.

By this time she was pretty well known, even back in Vienna and Berlin where she had been but an obscure musical performer. Her assault on the speaking stage, according to all accounts, was not unlike that of

our own Theda Bara. Every one went to see her, but no one took her very seriously.

About this time she married a count from one of the little kingdoms near Roumania. No one seems to recall his name or the exact location of his native country. In fact, he seems of little importance to Pola Negri and her friends. She is said to have divorced him about two years ago.

Varying accounts of her career on the speaking stage have been told in this country. When I asked Joseph Schildkraut, who plays the *Chevalier* in "Orphans of the Storm," which of them was true, he refused to discuss her at all. I had heard that while he was leading man at Max Reinhardt's theater in Berlin influential friends had gained a part in the company for her, and also that besides the finished performances of the rest of the cast, Pola did not exactly cover herself with glory.

But Mr. Schildkraut was adamant. He would not say a word about Pola Negri, even to tell me the names of the plays she appeared in.

"I told some reporters, months ago, that I knew her, and they went and printed things that I never said," he told me. "And when Pola Negri saw them she wrote me an indignant letter asking me why I told things about her that were not true. I will never mention her name again," he ended vehemently.

So Pola Negri cares very much what we in America think of her! But she should not be ashamed of her humble beginnings. Perhaps she is influenced by some Continental snobbery toward persons of humble birth. I wonder if she knows that here we make national idols of people who work up from unpromising beginnings, that we like her better because she rose by her own efforts?

#### Her Picture Career.

However limited her success on the speaking stage, from the first she proved herself a motion-picture actress of the first rank. It was about 1914 that she began making pictures, and she has made about two a year since then. This is partly due to the fact that until recently motion-picture producers on the Continent took most of their scenes outdoors and could work only during the summer, and partly to the strenuous social life of the star. Some of her early pictures—"The Last Payment" and "The Red Peacock"—which were recently shown here seemed crude, but compared with our pictures which were made at the same time her work in them is finished and masterful.

"Passion"—conceded by most people to be the best of her pictures yet

shown in this country—was completed late in the summer of 1919. "Gypsy Blood" preceded it, and the year before that she made "Vendetta" and "Intrigue." During 1917 she made "The Polish Dancer" and "The Last Payment." All of these have been shown in this country—and it is probable that all but one of the five pictures which preceded them will also appear on American screens. This one is "The Mountain Cat" and though it is considered one of her greatest pictures, it probably will not be shown here as its humor depends on conditions that do not exist in this country and probably would not be understood. It is a broad burlesque of militarism done in modern settings like caricatures.

She has made some pictures since "Passion," but these are tied up in litigation, and it may be some time before they are exhibited here. One of these is "Sappho," which is said to offer her as great opportunities as "Du Barry" did.

#### An Inverted Career.

You may have noticed that Pola Negri's career in this country has been just the opposite of most performers'. Instead of attracting attention in several pictures, and gradually working up a following she was introduced to America in her greatest rôle. She created something of a sensation among people of sophisticated taste immediately. And then her older, and less striking pictures were brought out, reducing her to a lower level. And now unless another "Passion" appears, this potentially great screen artist may prove a flash-in-the-pan success.

I may be unduly pessimistic about the future of this player, but I think the best of her work is already done. She used to work for a small salary, under discouraging conditions, and her finest work was a result of this whole-hearted struggle. Now she receives more in dollars than she formerly did in marks; the figure is set at about one hundred and fifty thousand a year. She works under the domination of an American company and is striving toward their ideals rather than her own. It looks as though Pola will not be able to scale her former heights.

But even if she fails after all her promise I doubt if the regular picturegoer will grieve. For Pola Negri does not grip the hearts of our every-night-in-the-week fans as our sunny native stars do. It is the more sophisticated audience that will grieve for her, because the coming of Pola Negri marked for them the coming of a new era in motion pictures, the power of truth over treacle.