

Historical Analysis of the First Lady of the Silent Screen: Exploring Parallels between Media Portrayals and Fan Letters to Film Star Lillian Gish

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Abstract : This paper examines a collection of four fan letters written by two fans to the early film star, Lillian Gish. The letters were sent to Gish between 1929 and 1962 and were later archived at the New York Library of Performing Arts in Manhattan, New York. This paper also analyzes the media's portrayal of Gish during the time period of these written letters in order to identify parallels between the portrayal of Gish in the media and the perception of Gish by her fans, which is espoused in these fan letters. The media analyzed includes newspapers, fan magazines, Paine's 1932 biography *Life and Lillian Gish*, a film publicity poster for Gish's film *Intolerance*, and the film roles performed by Gish. Several parallels are found and assessed using the four processes of audience involvement with a media persona-transportation, parasocial interaction, identification, and worship.

Keywords : celebrity, congruency, fan, persona

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