

EGO OF ARTIST RELIC OF PRIMEVAL MAN

Praise of His Characterizations Taken as a Meed, But Criticism of Bad Performance Causes Wailing and Gnashing of Teeth

By J. F. S.

IT IS not until one studies the origin of art that he begins to understand the extremely curious, and, at first sight, absurd discussion of personality and the ego of the actor that has been raging over the stage with such bitterness during the past season.

Mr. Sothern has been decrying the personal note in criticism. "It is possible," says he, "that if an actor's personality ceases to be pleasing to a critic he may allow that to influence him in judging of the actor's work. And our personality is so largely our stock in trade, you know. That is the one regrettable feature."

Now nothing is more dangerous than a discussion of this subject of personality. It has assumed entirely unwarranted importance in the popular judgment. For instance it is easy to think of a dozen or so women players who rely entirely upon their personality to carry them through to success. That is a case where personality is divorced from the player and his art. And on the other hand it is impossible to utterly disregard it. It is that thing which imbues his notions and his words with the semblance of actuality and life. It is the man behind the mask. It softens and lends color and interest and verisimilitude to his work. It is as impossible to divorce the actor from his personality as from his ego.

In the very beginning, say the psychologists, the only function of art was that of attracting attention. It was the idea of commending self to mate, companion and friend and found its sole expression in song. Later on the savage mind conceived the thought of decking out the body with bright feathers and paint. It was the very antithesis of the autotelic or "art for art's sake" thought that the present century has talked of. It was the impulse for self-exhibition. As it developed it produced an exaggerated self-consciousness as well as an aloofness and detachment from real life that has resulted in what we now have to term the ego of the actor.

He can't help it. He can't get away from it. Take for example the child who first learns to speak a nursery rhyme for the delectation of dinner guests. The poor thing is praised out of all proportion to its merits. He is made much of and, if he sticks to it, will soon come to have an even higher opinion of his abilities himself. When he first goes on the stage he is somewhat awed and frightened. His performance, from the viewpoint of the unprejudiced observer, is probably horrible. But he is anxious to believe that he has done well. He looks for sympathy and he gets it. Again he is praised out of all proportion to his deserts.

This sort of thing goes on for awhile and before long he comes to associate his work with himself, irrevocably. It is a case of "Love me, love my dog," only he changes it to "Love me, love my acting." And he doesn't even stop there. He adds the postscript, "Hate my acting, hate me."

Why this should be, heaven only knows. One of the most lovable men I ever knew was a business failure. I never felt tempted to dislike him because I didn't admire his business judgment. I know magazine writers whose work I admire immensely but whom I detest personally. And by the same token I have met and traveled with artists whose paintings were abortive but whose personal characters were admirable.

It seems impossible to disengage the actor from himself. He lives and has his being in his work. And this in time finds its result in giving him an insatiable taste for commendation, not only self-commendation, but public commendation. For instance, supposing you received a half column of praise every night or once every week. You would feel that people were at least appreciating you and were doing their best to make you happy.

But does the actor assume this attitude of gratitude? No, indeed.

You go down to your office, or into your school-room or about your housekeeping, do your work faithfully and reasonably well and expect no effusions of approval. Praise is something out of the ordinary. It is like strawberries in winter—not for everyday diet. But the actor accepts all the commonplaces of commendation you can pile onto him, swallows them as though they were his due and sits up for more. You can rave for half an hour over the excellence of something he has done and he accepts it without a moment's hesitation.

But supposing you break the monotony of this adulation and tell the truth about his work. Heaven defend you. You are a callous, cynical brute. You are trying to ridicule the efforts of an honest man to earn an honest living. You are venting your personal animosity upon the defenceless head of a greatly abused person.

I was told the other day that one actress wept as she read my criticisms. And what, I asked, did she think I did when I saw her act? Of the two I felt that I was by far the greater sufferer. A woman can cry. A man has to bear his grief in stony silence.

The same man informed me that one ambitious young person whom I had failed to appreciate was the support of his mother. You see how hopelessly sentimental it all is! I might be a millionaire in my own right—I am not—but that fact should not count against me. Nor should the question of whom the actor is supporting affect an appreciation of the quality of his work.

Just how to get away and keep away from this sentimental feeling is, it must be admitted, a serious problem. It becomes a dangerous question this May weather. Everything conspires against the man who tries to be calm and sensible and impartial. I'll go for a Sunday tramp through the countryside. The minute I get beyond hearing of the trolley lines the forces of sentiment begin their attack upon me. The road to repentance stretches off down the quiet hillside and through the firs, offering its succor to hurry, and work, and weariness. The dogwood and the wild plum make of the river bank a glory of yellow and white. The air is sensuously fragrant with sweetbriar, with the earthy smell of the spring woods and here and there in the open places the winds blow an intoxicating fragrance from the orchards.

I follow the noisy little stream up to its source, where it runs through the forest glades, over stones and pebbles and loses itself in a silver ripple of sound. A half day of that sort of thing and I find myself loving my enemies, possessed by a sort of frenzy of good will and bounded by so rainbow a horizon that nothing short of Mr. Alison playing Sherlock Holmes or Miss Kent gambling in a ballet costume can bring me back to my senses.

And yet people bask in this sea of sentiment. They cry for more of it. They are insatiable. The actor thinks that unless you deal in it you hate them individually. Their friends take up the cry and enlarge upon it. Their managers look upon you as one who conceives that he has a mission to ruin their business, to decry their efforts to turn an honest penny—I shan't accuse them of adopting the hypocrisy of art—and who goes to the theatre determined not to find anything good nor anything worth while, but simply to pick flaws in the production that they have spent some time and considerable money upon.

Can't we find some cure for it? Won't some one please invent anti-sentiment capsules that can be handed out with the programs as you enter the theatre door and which taken will be guaranteed to last at least as long as does your vivid impression of the performance? Such a one would be mankind's benefactor and we could all afford to rise up and call him blessed.

WILD WEST INDIANS JOINED THE FRIARS

They Think the Organization Had Something to Do With Cooking Their Food.

New York, May 2.—Chiefs Iron Tail, Lone Bear and Rocky Bear, who are in the Wild West Indian camp at Bridgeport, have been made members of the Friars, the body of theatrical publicists that parade the Great White Way.

Being a Friar in this case only means that these special red men have been charged with looking after the others. The interpreters have also joined the cult.

When it was explained to Iron Tail that he was a Friar, the red man took the news rather gingerly, expecting that he might have to go out and live a life

of loneliness in a big building built in the wilderness. Finally they were told to come and visit the real Friars in this city at one of the Friday night gatherings.

"Will there be plenty eat?" asked Chief Lone Bear in a gruff and rather uncertain tone.

"Plenty of everything" was the answer.

"Make lots noise," grunted the chief.

"Have tom-toms and all the rest."

"No white squaw there?" asked Iron Tail. And when informed that not even the red women would be permitted to take part he grunted his delight.

The ceremony did not take long, and afterward the red men went through a fine sun dance to show they had been elevated above the ordinary term of chief which had become so common in the last 30 years.

DUSE ACCEPTS PLAY OF AN ACCUSED MURDERER

Rome, April 25.—Eleanor Duse, the great Italian actress, has accepted a

play by a writer who is in jail awaiting trial for murder. The captive playwright is Guido Casali, who three years ago was arrested, charged with the murder of a lawyer at Perugia, and who has been awaiting ever since the convenience of Italy's somewhat tardy justice.

Casali has filled up his time with literature and has produced a modern tragedy entitled "Ananke." The plot is founded on his own life-story, particularly the events that resulted in his arrest.



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Amherst, O., April 25.—Just now they're doing a vaudeville turn between sets of views at the Wonderland moving picture show, but they've got ambitions for much higher things. The names they're using are Olga Martingau and Fay Folletta. Both were students in the music conservatory at Oberlin college last week. They ran away.

the girls back. They are eighteen. One is from Pittsburg and one from Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The manager of Wonderland doesn't want his stars to go back to Oberlin, nor to join a company in Cleveland. The young singers are booming his business.

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